

GOSPEL OF JOHN
BELIEF OR UNBELIEF?
JOHN 7:40-53

Introduction

Read the Scripture—*John 7:40-53*

It is obvious that we are in an election year...don't you just hate it?

we can tell by the volume of rhetoric we hear (from all sides),
we can tell by the barrage of political ads we are bombarded with,
we can tell by the relentless social media posts,
we can tell by the signs littering our roadways!

Is it just me or does it seem as though these days we don't even get through with one election before the posturing for the next election begins! Let me just say that I for one hate political ads and think they should ALL be subject to the truth in advertising laws! (I'm talking BOTH sides!)

There are those who try to persuade us what to think about both sides! I, for one, don't want to hear the rhetoric, I don't want to hear the political ads (I mute them!), I don't want to view the social media posts!

There are many folks who are ardent believers in their man on both sides of the political spectrum! And then there are those that try to remain neutral and not get pulled into the fight even though they may have a favorite!

I just compare the stances on the issues with where the Bible says that God is on the issues and I vote in line with a Biblical world view or the closest to it!

Now, though Jesus wasn't a politician, we have seen a **polarization of beliefs!** **On the positive side, there were those who ardently followed and believed in the Lord Jesus Christ—specifically 11 of His 12 disciples.** (Even in those who followed Jesus closely, there was a traitor!)

Then there was **the negative side—the seventy members of “the council” along with the great high priest who ruled the Jews, (a/k/a the Sanhedrin).** They were, by and large, polar opposites from the disciples! (Although what we just read indicates that Nicodemus was not in agreement with them!) **They wanted to destroy Jesus!**

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So there was a positive charge and a negative charge which brought forth this highly charged atmosphere surrounding Jesus—sparks were flying!

Remember how we have seen in the previous Chapter those who at one time began to follow Jesus for a little while, but after Jesus taught some things that they said were “*hard to hear*”, they were offended at His words and “*they went back and walked no more with Him.*” (*John 6:60, 66*)

Then, as we've seen in these verses we just read, there was ***division among the people because of Jesus.*** (*Vs. 43*) **They were arguing and debating over who this Jesus character was! They were hearing Jesus and His disciples, they were hearing the Pharisees, they were hearing from those who were participating in this charged debate and trying to figure it out for themselves!**

Listen, there may be some things in life that you can be neutral about and it be OK, but Jesus is not one of them! Many in this world are still trying to be **neutral** about Jesus! They may go along with the claim that **Jesus was a good man**, or maybe even that **Jesus was a great man**, but they won't go so far as to say that **Jesus was the perfect, sinless, Son of God in the flesh!** (*e.g. Just this past week Don Lemon on CNN said “Jesus Christ, admittedly was not perfect!”* — That comes from a lost man with a wrong world view!)

Many people are not willing to admit the Truth of Who Jesus is, because if they do, then there comes with it **a responsibility that they are not willing to bear!** So they will just continue to view Jesus as just a man Who lived long ago and in another time and has nothing to do with how they live their lives!

But listen to the words of Jesus in *Matthew 12:30*—“***He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.***”

Jesus says that **neutrality** to Him is really **opposition** to Him. To decide for God, one must decide for Jesus! Everyone, whether they like it or not, lines up on one side or the other. **Be careful which how you choose because it will affect your eternity!**

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Faith in Jesus always has been and will continue to be a dividing line in this world. In countries where Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam are the predominant religions, for one to come to faith in Christ often means not only being disowned by your family, but can even be a death sentence!

In *John 7*, we've seen how Jesus has been teaching at the temple during the Feast of Tabernacles. It made a big impression on some of the people, but certainly the opinions were not the same as *"there was a division among the people because of Him"* (7:43).

The great sadness of this division is the same as it is in our day! It means that **there were those who chose not to believe in Jesus and by that decision rejected their only means of being saved from their sin.**

What I want us to see here today is that there can be **various levels of BELIEF ABOUT JESUS...I'M TITLING THE MESSAGE BELIEF OR UNBELIEF:**

I. WE SEE THERE WERE SOME WHO CHOSE TO BELIEVE SOME OF JESUS CLAIMS. (Vs. 40)

Some of the listeners were sure that Jesus was *"the prophet"*!
This is *the prophet* predicted by Moses in *Deuteronomy 18:15, 18-19.*

The people spoken of in *vs. 40* are like many folks today who *believe Jesus to be a great prophet but not the Son of God!* An interesting perspective is to understand that even the Muslims believe that Jesus Christ was *"a" prophet.*

However, **understand that a partial faith is not a saving faith!**

II. WE SEE THERE WERE SOME WHO CHOSE TO BELIEVE INTELLECTUALLY! (Vs. 41a) "Others said, This is the Christ."

These are folks who went a step further and although that may sound like true faith, **it is not necessarily a saving faith!**

Just a knowledge of certain facts about Jesus and even believing them to be true does not save a person!

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There are many folks who have grown up in Christian homes, attended good sound Bible believing Churches for years and in fact had every spiritual advantage you can think of, and **yet have never come to saving faith and trust in Christ!**

Paul speaks in *2 Timothy 3:7* of some who are *"Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth."*

Folks can have a knowledge of the Bible and Christ and the things of God and yet still be lost in their sin! They may can even quote Scripture verses and believe them be true and still be lost! I know what I'm talking about because I was one of those at one time myself!

Just because someone does not question the factualness of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ and may even know the meaning of Christ's death on Cross doesn't make them born again!

One can believe all of this to be true, but if they have not at some point personally repented of their sin of unbelief and trusted on Christ alone for their salvation, they are still lost in sin!

Listen, I am not trying to get anyone to doubt their salvation! What I am doing is what Paul did with the Corinthian Church when he said: *2 Corinthians 13:5* – *"Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?"*

Here is a key point: Intellectual acceptance of facts is not saving faith! Understand that Salvation is NOT a head transaction, but rather a heart transaction!

Romans 10:9-10– *"9 That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. 10 For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."*

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WE SEE THERE WERE SOME WHO CHOSE TO BELIEVE SOME OF JESUS CLAIMS...SOME WHO CHOSE TO BELIEVE INTELLECTUALLY!

III. WE SEE THERE WERE SOME WHO CHOSE TO REJECT CHRIST ENTIRELY! (Vs. 41b-53)

- A. Some Of The Crowd Questioned Whether Jesus Could Be The Christ Because He Was A Galilean! (Vs 41b - 43; 52)**
They obviously knew that Jesus had grown up in Nazareth of Galilee! But had they cared enough to **check out the facts** they would have found that **He was actually born in Bethlehem and that He was indeed of the tribe of Judah and of the house and lineage of David!**

Sadly, sometimes people make up their minds on assumptions before they have all the facts. *Verse 43* tells us that there was a division of opinion concerning Christ, yet it was a division that came mostly out of ignorance!

- B. Most Of The Pharisees Flat Out Rejected Jesus Because He Interfered With Their Own Ideas About Themselves, The Bible, The Christ, And Even Their Religious Tradition! (Vs 32; 44-53)**

By and large, the Pharisees had already made up their minds and NOTHING was going to change that! Jesus had to be disposed of, killed, executed, ever how you want to put it!

The council (Pharisees) sent officers to arrest Jesus! (Vs 32)
These that were sent to arrest Jesus were probably the equivalent of Temple policeman. They basically were the bouncers of the Temple and did the Pharisees dirty work!

But as these officers stood around waiting for an opportune time, to take Jesus, **they listened in to what Jesus had to say and were astonished by what they heard! (Vs 44-45)**

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They did not accomplish what they were sent to do and returned to the chief priests and the Pharisees empty handed.

When asked to give an explanation of their failure, they gave a clear and yet very unexpected testimony.

They said, *“Never man spake like this man.” (Vs 46)*
What. A. Testimony! Amen?

But this excuse was not well received. In fact, in the Pharisees’ response we see **some of the tactics of those who choose to boldly reject Christ!**

These are tactics that have been used in the past and they continue to be used in the present by individuals who adamantly choose to reject Christ.

Notice how those who reject Christ behave.

Did they ask these officers, *“What is it about Christ that makes Him so compelling?”* No! (They didn’t care!)

Did they debate the merits of His claims? No! (The Pharisees were NOT interested in hearing about any merits!)

Did they say, *“We will hear Him for ourselves?”* No! (They had heard ALL they intended to hear of Christ until they had Him before them **to try Him for blasphemy and breaking the Law of the Sabbath!**)

- 1. Note How They Used Ridicule! (Vs. 47)**

It is apparent by this question that the Pharisees were afraid that these officers had become so thoroughly convinced that they had become followers of Jesus!

They equated a belief in Jesus with having been deceived!

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2. Note How They Appeal To The Educated And Those In Authority! (Vs. 48)

The implication of their question is that no educated or intelligent person would believe in this Jesus!

i.e. If the educated religious leaders did NOT believe in Jesus, then anyone with one eye and half sense would NOT believe in Him either!

That is still a tactic used by the enemy today to make it appear that education and intelligence cannot be found in the same person as the one who expresses faith in Christ!

3. Note How They Call Those Who Believe Cursed! (Vs. 49)

This is an insult directed at any and all Believers! They refer to those who believe as *“this people”* literally viewing them as *“this riff-raff, this mob.”*

They are saying that the common people not knowing the Scriptures were both ignorant and confused.

Yet when they said that these people were unfamiliar with the law, they were indicting themselves, for they were the teachers of the law!

It is a terrible thing when one thinks themselves either too intelligent or too good to need Jesus – and it is still happening today!

In the middle of all this unbelief, we find only one person that came to Jesus’ defense! (Vs. 50-51)

There is a double irony here.

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First, the Pharisees had implied with their question in *verse 49* that **no important person had believed on Jesus!** Yet, in *Verses 50-51* we have Nicodemus, one of their own, who spoke up in defense of Jesus!

Remember when Nicodemus came to Jesus by night in *John 3:1*? There he was identified as both *“a man of the Pharisees”* and *“a ruler of the Jews.”* (i.e. He is one of the 70 members of the council!)

John 3:2 “...Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.”

Now, whether or not Nicodemus was a true Believer at this time, **he at least attempted to make the council follow the law!**

And that is the second irony here! They spoke of those who did not know the law as being *“cursed” (Vs. 49)* and yet Nicodemus had to remind them that **they were not acting in accordance with the Law!**

The law demanded that a man could not be condemned outright, based solely upon what a man’s opponents thought about him. Everyone had to be given an opportunity to defend themselves!

The Pharisees responded to Nicodemus in *Verses 52-53* by taunting him with the same thing that we heard from the crowd regarding Jesus being a Galilean! But even **they had not done their homework to know that Jesus was born in Bethlehem and that He was of the house and lineage of David!**

Nicodemus went silent, which is what the other Pharisees wanted. And then they all went home!

Sadly, in this whole discussion of Jesus there is not even a hint that they ever got down to the real issue of *“Who is Jesus?”* or *“What do the Old testament Scriptures say about the Messiah that we need to be looking for?”*

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Conclusion

So basically we end where we began with the acknowledgment that **one cannot be neutral about Jesus.**

We may speak politely about Him.

We even speak fondly of Him at Christmas and Easter.

We may even have good thoughts about Who Jesus is.

But the truth that we must face is that **we cannot just casually brush aside His claims and treat Him any way we want to!**

So let me ask you.

What have you decided about Jesus?

Do you believe that He is He Who He says that He is?

You are either for Him or Against Him, for He will not allow anyone to be neutral.

You either receive Him as your personal Lord and Savior or by failing to do so, you are flat out rejecting Him!