

Last week, in examining verses 34-36, I mentioned that the unbelief of the Jews, was a constant source of sorrow for our Savior—"He came to His own, and His own received Him not"—while there were exceptions, the nation as a whole, rejected Him...

In verses 37-40, John pauses to specifically deal with this unbelief—he describes it (v37), then he says it was foretold (v38), and then he says it is judged (vv39-41)—thus I want to consider this passage under these three headings—Their Unbelief Described, Foretold, and Judged...

- I. Their Unbelief Described—v37
- II. Their Unbelief Foretold—v38
- III. Their Unbelief Judged—vv39-41

I. Their Unbelief Described—v37

1. V37—"But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him"—now, remember, by "signs" is meant miracles...
2. The miracles of our Savior were "signs" in that, they pointed to His identity as God's Son, and illustrated salvation...
3. First, signs pointed to His person—that is, they revealed His as God's Son, and the promised Messiah of the OT...
4. Secondly, signs illustrated His work—by this I mean, each miracle was a picture of our redemption through His cross...
5. [1] His signs were numerous—"He had done so many signs"—while John only records 7, He did many more...
6. Jn.21:30—"And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book..."
7. [2] His signs were public—"But although He had done so many signs before them"—that is, publically and openly...
8. In other words—the miracles that Christ performed, were obvious and verifiable—they were not done in secret...
9. Let me simply say in passing—this is one reason, of many, that these supposed faith healers of our day are fakes...
10. The miracles of our Lord, and the miracles later performed by His disciples, were undeniable, numerous, and public...
11. And yet, for all that—"they did not believe in Him"—even though they witnessed numerous and public miracles...
12. [a] Unbelief is a willful sin—by this I mean, man's problem isn't lack of evidence, but it's moral and ethical...
13. It's a wilful and intentional blindness—as Calvin says—"Man takes his eyes out of his head, so that he can not see..."
14. These Jews saw the lame walk, the blind see, the deaf hear—they witnessed Him multiply the fish and loaves...
15. Each one of these miracles were not only displays of divine power, but were mini sermons about spiritual truth...
16. Duet.29:2-6—"Now Moses called all Israel and said to them: You have seen all that the LORD did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land—the great trials which your eyes have seen, the signs, and those great wonders. Yet the LORD has not given you a heart to perceive and eyes to see and ears to hear, to this very day..."
17. In addition to these miracles, He preserved their clothing and sandals (v5), and He provided food and water (v6)...
18. The purpose of these miracles is given at the end of v6—"that you may know that I am the LORD your God..."

19. And though God is no longer performing sign miracles, this doesn't mean He hasn't left man with sufficient evidence...
20. All around him and within him, God has given man clear evidence, of His existence and various attributes...
21. The sun, moon, stars, oceans, and man himself, all testify of God, and yet for all this—"man still does not believe..."
22. Furthermore, God provides for man every day, through regular means, and yet—"man still does not believe..."
23. [b] Unbelief is a dishonoring sin—that is, unbelief dishonors God because it disbelieves Him, it disobeys Him...
24. Rom.10:16—"But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, LORD, who has believed our report..."
25. 1Jn.5:10—"He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son..."
26. The "testimony" is God's "report" or "message" about Himself and His Son—about His loving provision of a Savior...
27. God says in the gospel, This is My beloved Son—the sinner says, That's not true—in the gospel God says, I have given Him as a Savior for you—the sinner says, That's not true—in the gospel God says—I will be a God and Father to you—the sinner says, That's not true...
28. [c] Unbelief is a destroying sin—by this I mean, it's a soul destroying sin, as it separates you from God for all eternity...
29. Man doesn't have to become a drug addict, or bank-robber to destroy himself, all he needs to do is disbelieve...

## II. Their Unbelief Foretold—v38

1. V38—"that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke: Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?..."
2. This, as many of will know, is a quotation of Isaiah 53:1—it is a prophecy of the Jews rejection of the Messiah...
3. Now—before I go any further, let me make a necessary clarification—their unbelief wasn't the result of the prophecy, it fulfilled the prophecy...
4. In other words, the cause of their unbelief wasn't the prophecy, the cause of their unbelief was their stubborn hearts...
5. This is very important to understand, because as we shall soon see, they will be judged for their own unbelief...
6. If we say their unbelief was caused by the prophecy, then the final blame for their unbelief would be God, not them...
7. Thus—in explaining this prophecy, I want to briefly explain it's two parts—[1] Lord, who has believed our report...
8. If we compared Isaiah 52 and John 12, we would find that John added the word "Lord"—"Lord, who has believed our report..."
9. In other words, John is telling us to whom this complaint is made—Isaiah was originally complaining to God...
10. Isaiah uses the plural pronoun—"who has believed OUR report"—because every minister has the same message...
11. It was the message that Isaiah preached, it was the message that Christ preached, it was the message His apostles preached—and it's the message we are to preach...
12. There is one great message God has revealed to man—and it's His report or message, about Christ and His cross...
13. In Isaiah's day, very few people believed the message, as it was also true in our Savior's day, few believed...
14. Of course in the case of our Savior, it's not that no one believed, but generally speaking, the nation rejected Him...

15. [2] To whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed—this is the reason why they failed to believe the report...
16. By "the arm of the LORD" is meant His power—thus the phrase could be stated—"to whom has God's power been made known..."
17. In other words, the prophet understood that sinners believing the report, was due the powerful arm of the LORD...
18. Here I want to suggest that this verse provides very helpful instruction to evangelists, or those who share the gospel...
19. Thus, by "evangelist" I mean—parents, pastors, missionaries, and everyday Christians, who share God's report...
20. There is a sense in which every Christian is to be an evangelist, charged with Christ, to share God's report of Him...
21. [a] Not every evangelist will see great results—this was true of Isaiah, Jeremiah, our Savior, and Noah (who was a preacher of righteousness)...
22. It's here we must marvel at God's ways—for sometimes when he saves a sinner he saves many if not most of their family members...
23. I am sure we have all heard about people, who after they become Christian, they share the gospel to their family members with great success...
24. Furthermore, we have all heard of the 1st and 2nd Great Awakenings, and the fruitful ministries of George Whitfield and Jonathan Edwards...
25. In addition, there are people today who also have fruitful ministries—men such as John MacArthur and many others...
26. But surely brethren, you understand that these men are not the norm, they are in many ways blessedly abnormal...
27. The average church has 65 people in it, and the average minister will baptize, 20-40 people in his ministry...
28. Now, surely brethren, I don't mean this to justify our lack of zeal and fervour in sharing the gospel with others...
29. But at times, we can really beat ourselves up, if we have an unconverted child, family member, or neighbor (that we've shared the gospel with many years)...
30. We can begin to wonder—is the problem with me—am I to blame for their lack of interest or evident unbelief...
31. And brethren, there is a sense in which we need to search our hearts to be sure there is nothing obviously wrong...
32. But at the end of the day—if people refuse to believe our report, we are in the same boat with many good Christians...
33. My friends, many (most) people, failed to believe the preaching of our Savior—the greatest preacher who ever lived...
34. You know what—it is very possible for Christian parents, to have a child or children, who are unbelieving...
35. And it does NOT mean you were a bad parent—any more than our Savior, was at fault for the Jews unbelief...
36. [b] Every evangelist should direct his complaints to God—the fact that few believe our report, breaks our heart...
37. Though it's true faith is a gift from God, no evangelist is content without seeing sinners saved under their ministry...
38. Isaiah was told in chapter 6, that few if any would believe, and yet, in chapter 53, he complains to God—"O Lord, who has believed our report..."
39. In other words, the fact that few believe our report, remains an ongoing and constant source of sorrow to us...
40. Isa.53:1—"Who has believed our report?" v3—"He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief..."

41. Rom.10:1—"Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved" v16—"But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, Lord, who has believed our report (9:1 – I have great sorrow and continued grief in my heart)..."
42. Brethren, I have never fully understood a pastor who said—Yea, no one is being saved but that's God's work...
43. Yes, it is God's work, and no not every pastor is going to see great results, but surely this causes great sorrow...
44. I was talking to a friend in another church the other day, and he was confessing how discouraged he was over one of his children...
45. Apparently, at least from his perspective, the child has grown indifferent, towards spiritual and eternal things...
46. What would you think of the parent if he merely said—My child doesn't believe, but that's not my business...
47. [c] Every evangelist should be encouraged for God's arm is neither short nor weak—this phrase is laden with encouragement...
48. Regardless how far your son or daughter has gone—the arm of the LORD is long enough to bring them to Himself...
49. No person can wonder too far away from God, that His long arm cannot find him, and bring him to Himself...
50. No person can go too deep down in sin, that God's strong arm cannot bring him from the pit, to stand upon a Rock...

### III. Their Unbelief Judged—vv39-40

1. V39—"Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again: He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, lest they should see with their eyes, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them..."
2. Again, the first thing I must do is clarify what John means in v39—"Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again (quoting this time from Isaiah 6)..."
3. When John says "therefore" he means—because the Jews refused to believe, God gave them over to their unbelief...
4. Verse 39 does not mean—the reason they did not believe in the first place was because God blinded their eyes...
5. It must be remembered, v 40 follows v37—that is—because they would not believe, God blinds their eyes and hardens their hearts...
6. A.W. Pink—"In consequence of their rejection of Christ, the nation as a whole was judicially blinded of God, that is, they were left to the darkness and hardness of their own evil hearts. But it is important to mark the order of these two statements: in v37 they *did not* believe; here in v39 they *could not* believe. They most attractive appeals had been made: the most concrete evidence had been presented: yet they despised and rejected the Redeemer. They *would not* believe; in consequence, God gave them up, and now they *could not* believe..."
7. Here I want to suggest four things about this blinding work of God—its judicial, passive, permanent, and not without exception...
8. [1] It's JUDICIAL—that is, it's justly deserved—God blinds people as a judicial punishment against their willful unbelief...
9. Thus, we mustn't think as if God blinds people who are wanting to see—these are people who refuse to believe...
10. 2Thess.2:9-12—"The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness..."
11. I don't think I need to tell you that the meaning of this passage is hotly debated—who is "the man of sin" (v3), "the lawless one" (v8)...

12. Some say it was fulfilled in AD 70 (Roman leader), others say it's being fulfilled in the Pope, other say it will be fulfilled in a personal anti-Christ...
13. Either way, the point is the same—because people refuse to believe the truth, God will give them over to a lie...
14. [2] It's PASSIVE—by this I mean, God does NOT infuse unbelief into the heart, He merely leaves it alone...
15. For God to take His hands off someone, leaving them to themselves, is the same thing as blinding or hardening them...
16. In other words—God's Judicial Blinding, is simply His just choice, to leave sinners to their blind and hard hearts...
17. This is what Paul meant in Romans 1, when he spoke of God—"given man up"—to his own native depravity...
18. God doesn't have to do anything to blind man, all He does is leave him to himself—He removes His hand from him...
19. Thus—in once sense we could say—God is active in blinding men, in that, He actively leaves man to himself...
20. Or else, put another way—we could say man blinds himself, or we could say, God blinds them—both is true...
21. Matt.13:15—"For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them (Acts 28:27)..."
22. Matthew Poole—"The Jews first shut their own eyes, and hardened their own hearts. Thus behaving themselves, God judicially gave them up to their own lusts, permitted their hearts to harden, and allowed them to close their own eyes, so that they could not repent, believe, or return. God did not infuse any malice into their hearts, but withdrew His grace from them..."
23. [3] It's PERMANENT—by this I mean, those who are judicially blinded are permanently blinding—for all eternity...
24. Because they are left to themselves, they will never desire salvation, they will remain in darkness until death...
25. When v40 says—He has blinded and hardened—"lest they should see with their eyes, lest they should understand with their heart and turn"—it doesn't mean that man by nature can see and believe...
26. It's simply stating what they could have had—it graphically describes what they have forfeited because of unbelief...
27. Because they refused to believe and be healed—God will now leave them to themselves, and they will never see, believe, or be healed...
28. Thus, v40 graphically identifies what these Jews could of had—if they believed they would have been healed...
29. But now, because of their unbelief, God is removing this healing from them—it has been eternally forfeited...
30. [4] It's NOT WITHOUT EXCEPTION, v41—"These things Isaiah said when he saw his glory and spoke of Him..."
31. John adds this statement for an important reason—there was within the nation a remnant, that saw, understood, turned, and was healed...
32. Though the majority of the nation was blinded, there were some, in the OT and NT, that saw the true glory of Christ...
33. Not every person within the nation was blinded—there were some who had their eyes opened to Christ's glory...
34. Thus, in closing—I want to suggest that verses 39-40 teach us three things about God—His patience, wisdom, and justice...
35. [a] Behold the patience of God—of all of God's attributes, I fear His patience often gets overlooked or slighted...
36. For more than three years, our Savior taught the Jews, almost every day, even though they continued in unbelief...

37. Lk.13:6-9—"He also spoke this parable: A certain *man* had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. Then he said to the keeper of his vineyard, 'Look, for three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none. Cut it down; why does it use up the ground?' But he answered and said to him, 'Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize *it*. And if it bears fruit, *well*. But if not, after that you can cut it down'..."
38. [i] The voice of justice, v7—"Cut it down; why does it use up the ground," [ii] the voice of patience, v8—"Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize it..."
39. [b] Behold the wisdom of God—at first it may seem strange that I've placed a floodlight on God's wisdom...
40. But here I want to remind you—it was God's sovereign purpose to use the Jews' unbelief to save the Gentiles...
41. Rom.11:12—"There fall is riches for the Gentiles"—in other words, their unbelief in no way upset God's plan...
42. Acts 28:27—"For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them..."
43. Acts 28:28—"Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will it..."
44. [c] Behold the justice of God—by this I mean, eventually, God's patience ends and His justice is made known..