

John 12-37-50

Not believing the believable!

Preamble-

Honor SS teachers

Prayer-

Sermon intro-

George Whitefield was one of the greatest preachers in church history. He was one of the primary catalysts for the revival known as the Great Awakening, which transpired in England and America during the 1740s. He preached to massive crowds (up to 30,000) without a microphone. Historian Thomas Kidd argues that he was the most well-known man in the colonies in the middle of the 18th century.

Whitefield was good friends with Benjamin Franklin. Forty-five times Whitefield's sermons were reprinted in Franklin's newspaper, *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, and eight times the sermon filled the entire front page. Franklin published ten editions of Whitefield's journals and sold thousands of reprints of Whitefield's sermons.

On more than one occasion Whitefield stayed in Franklin's home. When some of the religious elite criticized Whitefield in a local paper, Franklin wrote a rebuttal. His support for Whitefield, including regular correspondence, continued for the next thirty years.

Despite all of this, Franklin never believed the gospel.

How do we explain Franklin's rejection of the gospel? He heard and read hundreds of sermons from America's greatest evangelist. He spent hours discussing the gospel with Whitefield. He received dozens of evangelistic letters from Whitefield, yet he was unmoved. Why didn't Benjamin Franklin believe, when he ample evidence to believe?

This raises the question—why don't some people believe the gospel? More specifically, why don't our friends, family, and neighbors believe the gospel?

This brings us to John 12:37-50. We are at the very end of Christ's public ministry. Throughout his public ministry, Christ performed numerous miracles, yet many refused to believe. Why???

Our text answers this question. In fact, one scholar described our text as a "theology of unbelief."

In our passage we learn four things about unbelief...

Unbelief is prophesied
Unbelief is respectable
Unbelief is perilous
Unbelief is optional

First, unbelief is prophesied

Again, given all that Jesus did—feeding the hungry, healing the sick, walking on water, and raising the dead—why do some not believe?

John turns to the book of Isaiah, written 700 years before Christ, to answer this question.

Why don't some believe? Unbelief was prophesied!

John 12:37–39 (ESV) — 37 Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him, **38** so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: “Lord, who has believed what he heard from us, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?” **39** Therefore they could not believe.

John cites Isa. 53:1. Isa. 53 predicts that the coming Messiah will be a suffering, sin-bearing, servant. In 53:1, Isaiah is asking a rhetorical question—who has believed in the messiah? Answer—no one.

Isaiah prophesied that Israel would not believe. Then verse 39 says, “therefore they could not believe.” in other words, they could not believe because it was prophesied.

To make sure we get the point. John quotes another passage from Isaiah.

John 12:39–41 (ESV) — 39 Therefore they could not believe. For again Isaiah said, **40** “He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them.” **41** Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him.

Now John cites Isa. 6:10. Isaiah says that they could not believe because it was prophesied that God has “blinded their eyes and hardened their heart.”

Again, John is asking the question—why did the Jews reject Jesus, despite all the miracles? Answer, Isaiah prophesied that the Jews would reject Jesus, therefore they rejected him.

Unbelief was prophesied!

Objection....

That is not fair!!! If it was prophesied that they would not believe, how could they believe? Furthermore, if God hardened their hearts, how can God hold them accountable for something they could not do?

Response....

God has hardened hearts before.

Romans 9:16–18 (ESV) — 16 So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. **17** For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” **18** So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.

Here is the mystery...

In Ex. 8:32 we clearly read that Pharaoh hardened his own heart.

Then in Ex. 9:12 we read that God hardened Pharaoh's heart.

So, did Pharaoh harden his heart or did God harden Pharaoh's heart? Answer—yes! Somehow, both statements are true.

Somehow...

God's sovereignty is compatible with human responsibility.

We see this in John 12.

John 12:37 presumes that humans are responsible to believe.

John 12:37 (ESV) — 37 Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him,

All the signs that they saw should have caused them to believe. But they chose not to believe. But then...

John 12:39 presumes that they can't believe.

John 12:39–40 (ESV) — 39 Therefore they could not believe. For again Isaiah said, **40** "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them."

Somehow, God's sovereignty is compatible with human responsibility.

The best example of this is in Acts 2 and 4, yet God is not the author of evil.

Acts 2:23 (ESV) — 23 this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

Acts 4:27–28 (ESV) — 27 for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, **28** to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.

We need to be comfortable with deep and profound mystery. God is sovereign over salvation, yet we are all required to believe.

Application:

John is answering the question, why don't some believe? Answer—Their unbelief, due to their hardness of heart, was prophesied!

Here is the takeaway... Don't let your heart grow hard.

Some people think they can wait a little longer before they commit themselves to Jesus.

They want a few more years to enjoy sin, and then later on (after college, after kids, after career advancement) they will decide to follow Jesus.

But they don't realize that the longer they ignore Jesus the harder their hearts get, so that it will be increasingly difficult for them to believe. They might come to a time when it is impossible to believe. (Romans 1)

Commenting on John 12:37-41, one scholar writes,

"When people, of their own accord and after repeated threats and promises, reject him and spurn his messages, then—and not until then—he hardens them, in order that those who were not willing to repent may not be able to repent." (William Hendriksen, NTC)

Jesus is pleading with you...

Don't let your heart grow cold! Turn to Jesus now. The harder your heart gets, the more you will crave respectability. Which brings us to the second point.

First, unbelief is prophesied.

Second, unbelief is respectable

What do I mean? Unbelief is often more respectable than belief.

John 12:42–43 (ESV) — 42 Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; **43** for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.

Fortunately, some religious leaders saw the evidence that Jesus was the Messiah and they believed. But they kept their faith secret. Why?

John 12:43 (ESV) — 43 for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.

In other words, they did not want to lose respectability.

In that moment, they craved the praise of men and the respect of their peers more than the praise of God! Which makes them guilty of idolatry. They loved something more than God (i.e., respect).

Application:

One of the main reasons that we don't make our faith known is fear of man. We want other people to respect us, like us, or think well of us. We crave this so much that it becomes an idol.

When we tell them that they will go to hell if they don't trust Jesus, they may not respect us.

When we tell people that Jesus is the only way to God...

When we tell people about the Bible's teaching on gender and sexuality...

Christianity is becoming increasingly unrespectable, and unbelief is becoming increasingly respectable.

What are you going to do when your boss asks you to wear a rainbow sticker on your shirt, affirm transgenderism, or fill in the blank?

Story at Camp Meriweather (talking with a bunch of the non-Christian dads about church). One of the guys said, "You are not one of those churches that thinks that woman can't be pastors are you."

Craving respectability keeps us quiet....

Fear of man keeps us quiet..

Illustration:

The religious leaders were ashamed of Christ, Hugh Latimer was not.

Hugh Latimer was one of the infamous "five English Reformers" of the sixteenth century. They are infamous because they were all martyred. He was also one of the greatest preachers of his day. As a result, he was asked to preach before the King Henry VIII of England (describe his character).

As he thought about his great responsibility to bring a message before the king, he realized that the message that God laid on his heart was not the message that the king wanted to hear.

As he began his sermon he said,

"Latimer! Latimer! Do you remember that you are speaking before the high and mighty King Henry VIII; who has power to command you to be sent to prison, and who can have your head cut off, if it please him? Will you not take care to say nothing that will offend royal ears?"

He then paused and continued,

"Latimer! Latimer! Do you not remember that you are speaking before the King of kings and Lord of lords; before Him, at whose throne Henry VIII will stand; before Him, to whom one day you will have to give account yourself? Latimer! Latimer! Be faithful to your Master, and declare all of God's Word."

Eventually he was burned at the stake by Henry's daughter Queen Mary—also known as bloody Mary.

Why was he able to speak so boldly about Jesus Christ? He respected God almighty more than King Henry VIII.

Furthermore, he understood the gospel. He understood that he did not need the approval, acceptance, respect, or safety of the king. He had all the acceptance, approval, and safety he ever needed in Jesus Christ. If we have the acceptance of Christ, we don't have to look for it elsewhere.

Someone who continually fears man or craves respect indicates that the gospel has not taken deep root in their soul.

When we cave into fear of man, we must repent, and then look to Jesus for grace and forgiveness. He forgives...

Fear of man is a gospel issue...

Unbelief may seem more respectable at times. But unbelief will be perilous when Christ returns. Which brings us to the third point.

Unbelief is prophesied
Unbelief is respectable

Third, unbelief is perilous

Why? Unbelief is perilous because it ends in judgment.

John 12:47-48 (ESV) — 47 If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. **48** The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day.

These verses have confused some because other passages teach that Jesus will judge the world on the last day. For instance...

Paul says that Jesus will

"judge the living and the dead" (**2 Tim. 4:1**).

Jesus taught,

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats" (**Matt. 25:31-32**).

In John 12:47-48, Jesus is saying that he did not come the first time to judge the world. **But**, make no mistake, when he returns, he will judge every unbeliever, and his judgment will be based on the words he spoke during his earthly life (i.e., the Bible).

Here is the point... Unbelief is perilous because it ends in judgment.

John 12:48 (ESV) — 48 The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day.

The last day is coming, and no one can escape it.

Illustration:

Adolf Eichmann was one of Hitler's deadliest Lieutenant's during WWII. During the war, Eichmann did horrible things for the German war machine.

After WWII the world wanted justice. They began to round up as many war criminals as possible. They searched high and low on every corner of the globe. As a result, many of Hitler's top general's committed suicide to avoid trial.

Instead of Suicide Adolf Eichmann fled to Buenos Aires Argentina where hundreds of Germans hid from justice. He worked at a factory, changed his name, lived in a small modest house, and tried to stay off the world's radar screen to avoid judgment.

Most of the world thought that Eichmann died at the end of the war. So, no one was looking for him. He remained hidden for 15 years.

But through a series of bizarre and serendipitous circumstances the Israeli government discovered that he was hiding in Buenos Aires.

They put together a covert team, tracked him down, and smuggled him to Israel for a historic and very public eight-month trial.

Eichmann thought that he could escape judgment. He thought that he could avoid a trial. Justice eventually found him out.

Many of us think that we can avoid judgment. We think that we can escape God's wrath. But no one can avoid the day of final judgment—no one.

Although we can't avoid or escape judgment, we can survive judgment. Which brings us to the last point.

*Unbelief is prophesied.
Unbelief is respectable.
Unbelief is perilous.*

Fourth, unbelief is optional

In other words, we have the option to believe or not believe. And Christ is pleading with all of us to believe.

What must we believe? We must believe that Jesus is God.

John 12:44-45 (ESV) — 44 And Jesus cried out and said, "Whoever believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. **45** And whoever sees me sees him who sent me.

The close relationship of Jesus with the Father (cf. 17:21-23) is stressed often in the gospels.

To believe in Christ is to believe in the Father (44);

To see Christ is to see the Father (v. 45);

To hear Christ is to hear the Father (v. 50).

To love Christ is to love the father.

On the other hand, rejection of Christ and His words is also a rejection of the Father and His words (Luke 10:16).

Application:

It is not enough to believe in a generic God.

It is not enough to trust a higher power or the man upstairs.

The Muslim God is not the Christian God.

The Mormon God is not the Christian God.

How do we know? Because Mormon and Muslims reject the Christ of the Scriptures.

We must believe in Jesus Christ.

He is one with the father and the Spirit.

They are equal in power and glory.

Three distinct persons in one essence.

Do you believe in Jesus Christ? What does it mean to believe? Knowledge, assent, and trust.... All three are crucial.

What must we believe? Jesus is God!

Why should we believe? To escape darkness.

John 12:45–46 (ESV) — 45 And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. **46** I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.

Those who believe can escape the darkness.

This includes...

The darkness of sin

The darkness of demonic oppression

The darkness of brokenness caused by sin

The darkness of hell and wrath

But it also includes the darkness of meaninglessness and despair.

Illustration:

Increasingly people all around us, live meaningless lives. We are told that God is a myth. If there is no God, life has no meaning or purpose. Which helps explain the rising suicide rates.

The atheistic worldview of Richard Dawkins causes him to write,

“There is at bottom no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but pointless indifference. . . . We are machines for propagating DNA.” (Craig, 80-81, RF)

Another philosopher writes,

Without God the universe is the result of a cosmic accident, a chance explosion. There is no reason for which it exists. As for man, he is a freak of nature—a blind product of matter plus time plus chance. Man is just a lump of slime that evolved rationality. There is no more purpose in life for the human race than for a species of insect; for both are the result of the blind interaction of chance and necessity. (Craig, 76, RF)

We see this world view in the arts-

In a Samuel Beckett play, the curtain opens revealing a stage littered with junk. A few seconds later, they hear a baby crying. Then the audience stares in silence at the junk for 30 seconds. Then they hear an old man dying. Then the curtain closes. That’s all. (Craig, 74, RF)

The point—life is short and meaningless.

Without Christ, there is the darkness of meaninglessness and despair.

But, Christ has come to bring glorious gospel light.

Because of Christ we have

The light of purpose
The light of meaning
The light of forgiveness
The light of hope
And most importantly the light of relationship with the triune God.

Christ helps us escape the darkness of this world.

To escape the darkness, we must believe. Do you believe?

We also have the privilege of helping others escape the darkness. People all around us are shrouded in darkness, you Christian, have the answers that this dark world so desperately needs.

We will you tell someone?

Lets pray...