

The Problem of Unbelief

Gospel of John, Part XLIII

John 12:37-50

Stuart W. Bryan

I. Pride & Prejudice

II. John's Analysis of Unbelief

A. Unbelief is inexcusable (37, 42-43)

First, John insists that unbelief is inexcusable. He writes that *although Jesus had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him*. He further notes that while many rulers “believed” in Jesus, they refused to “confess” Him openly. For John both these types of “unbelief” are inexcusable and, therefore, _____ or blameworthy.

B. Unbelief fulfills God's plan and purpose (38 cf. Is 53:1)

While unbelief is inexcusable, unbelief does not surprise or alarm God. God is absolutely _____. The unbelief of the Jews was in fulfillment of God's sovereign plans. The prophet Isaiah anticipated that though God's Servant would act by the power of God to save Israel and all the nations, very few would acknowledge Him during His lifetime (53:1). Only after His death would the tents of the righteous be enlarged in order to accommodate all the children of God (Is 54). The Jews' unbelief *fulfilled the plan and purpose of God*.

C. Unbelief is a result of God's just judgment on sin (39-41)

John wants us to understand a deep and sober truth: unbelief is a result of God's just judgment on sin. *Therefore*, John tells us (39), *they could not believe* – in other words, they *were not _____ to believe*. During Jesus' ministry, God was acting in judgment against Israel for their stubborn sin, handing them over to their sin, so that they could not escape their sin. Their unbelief was a result of God's just judgment.

“Go, and tell this people: Keep on hearing, but do not understand; Keep on seeing, but do not perceive.” “Make the heart of this people dull, And their ears heavy, And shut their eyes; Lest they see with their eyes, And hear with their ears, And understand with their heart, And return and be healed.”

God sent Isaiah and, finally, Jesus to increase Israel's guilt for their stubborn refusal to worship Him. He used Jesus' ministry to *blind their eyes and harden their hearts lest they turn and believe*. God was leaving the Israelites in their sin. In justice, He was handing them over to their sin.

- I. Prologue: The Identity of the Son of God (1:1-18)
- II. Jesus Proven to be the Christ & the Son of God in His Public Ministry (1:19-12:50)
 - A. The Son of God Revealed (1:19-4:54)
 - B. The Son of God Rejected (5:1-12:36)
 - 1. Opposition in Jerusalem (5:1-47)
 - 2. Opposition in Galilee (6:1-71)
 - 3. Settled Opposition in Jerusalem (7:1-10:39)
 - 4. Belief across the Jordan (10:40-42)
 - 5. Hardened Opposition in Jerusalem (11:1-12:36)
 - 6. The hour has come (12:20-36)
 - C. Conclusion (12:37-50)
- III. Jesus Proven to be the Christ & the Son of God in His Passion and Resurrection (13:1-20:31)
- IV. Epilogue: The Future Mission of the Son of God (21)

III. The Problem of Unbelief

A. Human Responsibility (37, 42-43 cf. Rom 3:10-12)

First, unbelief is inexcusable and, therefore, culpable. We are responsible for our unbelief. God's revelation of Himself makes our unbelief inexcusable.

So deep is our sin, so total our depravity, so corrupt our hearts, that *left to ourselves* we will not hear God's word, we will not give heed to His warnings, we will not embrace His promise of forgiveness for those who repent.

"There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one."

When God _____ sinners, it is not as though God creates evil in their hearts. When God _____, He hands us over to our sin, He gives us more "freedom".

B. Divine Sovereignty (38-40 cf. Is 53:17; Ps 85:4-7)

Our culpability does not compromise God's sovereign control. We are where we are because He is the Lord and He rules human history. Unbelief fulfills His plans and purposes; He is the One who has justly handed us over to our sin. He is the Lord.

So deep is our sin, so total our depravity, that *left to ourselves* we will not hear God's word, we will not give heed to His warnings, we will not embrace His promise of forgiveness for those who repent. There is no hope *in us*. But there is hope in God's grace and mercy.:

O LORD, why have You made us stray from Your ways, And hardened our heart from Your fear? Return for Your servants' sake, The tribes of Your inheritance.

IV. Application

A. Today, if you hear His voice (cf. Ps 95; Heb 3:12-15)

B. Express regular thanksgiving to God (cf. Mt 11:25-27)

"I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight. All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him."

C. Cultivate an ear for correction (cf. Prov 9:7-12; 22:17-19; 29:1)

V. Conclusion