

## INTRODUCTION

There is a common problem in our time and it is the problem of listening. I know you have never experienced it with your spouse, or with your children unless there is something else going on. And when is there not anything else going on? The moral of the story is: We all have a problem with listening and we have a problem with others not listening. If I am watching the Mavs game I have a hard time hearing anything else around me.

It seems as if everything that has happened up to this point in the Gospel of John, there is a group of people that just will not hear the truth and will not believe.

John 12:37-50 (CSB). "Even though he had performed so many signs in their presence, they did not believe in him. This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet, who said: Lord, who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? This is why they were unable to believe, because Isaiah also said: He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, so that they would not see with their eyes or understand with their hearts, and turn, and I would heal them. Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke about him. Nevertheless, many did believe in him even among the rulers, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, so that they would not be banned from the synagogue. For they loved human praise more than praise from God. Jesus cried out, "The one who believes in me believes not in me, but in him who sent me. And the one who sees me sees him who sent me. I have come as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me would not remain in darkness. If anyone hears my words and doesn't keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. The one who rejects me and doesn't receive my sayings has this as his judge: The word I have spoken will judge him on the last day. For I have not spoken on my own, but the Father himself who sent me has given me a command to say everything I have said. I know that his command is eternal life. So the things that I speak, I speak just as the Father has told me."

It might help to realize that with the end of chapter 12 here in verse 50, the public ministry of Jesus is over. Starting with chapter 13 Jesus is talking only to his disciples in the last night of his life, and then comes his death and resurrection. So think of these final verses of John 12 as the last thing Jesus says as part of his three-year public ministry. There is something strange about the way John sets up these closing verses. Back in John 12:36 Jesus was talking to the crowds about being the light. He said, "Believe in the light, that you may become sons of light." And then it says, "When Jesus had said these things, he departed and hid himself from them." Because of this, we see three distinct crises that take place.

### 1. THE CRISIS OF FAITH

There is a crisis of faith that is seen in the hearts of the people John is referring to. This faith crisis is a belief crisis.

Cynicism under the purview of mistrust has been amplified with the use of technology. To a degree, we have been ruined in our ability to trust an image or video because we assume it is using some sort of filter or has been manipulated. This is why Facebook now has a filtering app that veils images and stories as non-credible sources because of the fake news that continues to populate our news feeds. Here is a recent poll about mistrust:

55% of Americans believe social media does more to spread lies and falsehoods than news and information. So every other story you see, people think is fake.

60% don't trust Facebook at all.

61% think social media does more to spread unfair attacks and rumors against public figures and corporations.

John 12:37 says, "Even though he had performed so many signs in their presence, they did not believe in him." We read this and wonder how this can be possible. How can it be that Jesus did all of these miracles. They saw them, they knew it was not some illusion on social media they can't trust. They were eyewitnesses—yet they did not believe. John gives two unique reasons why belief did not take place.

### **A. The people chose not to believe. (v.37)**

Verse 37 says, "They did not believe in him." It is indicative that they could have, but they did not. In verses 44-50 of our passage today, John reiterates the message of Jesus and what we have seen up to this point. The point of this is to remind the reader that they have the truth, they know the truth, and Jesus is saying over and over, "If you refuse me then you are refusing the Father." To believe in Jesus is to believe in God. (v. 44) To see Jesus is to see God. (v. 45) To listen to Jesus is to listen to God. (v. 49) They had the opportunity to believe but they did not take the opportunity.

Many times when we think about unbelief, we equate it to indecision. I know because this happens often in our home. We have four little humans in our home. Often, a mistake takes place that leads to something being broken or something like that. Or it could be as simple as an argument that breaks out and leads to tears and it is always interesting to know the reason why from one of the kids. We ask: "What happened?" Kid A: We get the story. Kid B: What happened? We receive an entirely different narrative. Kid C: Different Narrative. Then we go to our child who couldn't lie even if she tried. And we say, "Okay, tell me really what happened." It is at this point the truthful child spills the beans and then we are able to investigate with the other rebels more clearly. In this case, our unbelief is indecision because we are still unsure of the truth. However, verse 37 says they knew the truth, it was not because of a lack of information, they simply **CHOSE** not to believe. With this understanding, we can see the definition of unbelief as the conscious dismissal of the truth of Jesus. And this is exactly what we see here.

## **B. The Lord did not allow them to believe. (v. 40)**

The second reason belief did not take place is the opportunity for belief seems to have been ceased by the ruling of God. "This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet, who said: Lord, who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? This is why they were unable to believe, because Isaiah also said: He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, so that they would not see with their eyes or understand with their hearts, and turn, and I would heal them. Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke about him." (John 12:38-41 CSB) So in one sense we see that the crisis of faith is because of the rebellious heart of man, which we can agree with and affirm and then we see as the Lord withholding the ability for the people to have belief or to have faith. And the reason we are given is so that the prophecy may be fulfilled. God did this by blinding their eyes so they could not see and hardened their hearts so they could not understand. But this is not the first time we have seen the hardening of hearts in scripture. Deuteronomy 29:2-4 says, "Moses summoned all Israel and said to them, "You have seen with your own eyes everything the Lord did in Egypt to Pharaoh, to all his officials, and to his entire land. You saw with your own eyes the great trials and those great signs and wonders. Yet to this day the Lord has not given you a mind to understand, eyes to see, or ears to hear."

This same language is seen in Isaiah 6:9-10, "And he replied: Go! Say to these people: Keep listening, but do not understand; keep looking, but do not perceive. Make the minds of these people dull; deafen their ears and blind their eyes; otherwise they might see with their eyes and hear with their ears, understand with their minds, turn back, and be healed."

Essentially the Lord is saying go and preach and continue to harden their hearts over and over again. But in Deuteronomy and in Isaiah, we read those texts and we begin to breed a misunderstanding of injustice. However, God has a purpose and a plan for why hearts are hardened and why they are softened. We have some insight, because Acts 28:28 says, "Therefore, let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen."

## **2. THE CRISIS OF FEAR**

This is the picture that Jesus is saying is the disciples' calling. He says, "Nevertheless, many did believe in him even among the rulers, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, so that they would not be banned from the synagogue. For they loved human praise more than praise from God." John 12:42-43 (CSB)

John gives an adequate understanding for the disciples of Jesus. Essentially, John starts with the understanding of what faith really is: It is the embrace and acceptance of the Gospel of Jesus which causes an obedience to Jesus.

### **A. True disciples of Jesus do not disguise their faith in Jesus. (v.42)**

There is a group of followers here that seem to be under the radar. “because of the Pharisees they did not confess him.” (v. 42) There is something to be said here. They believe in Jesus, but they are unwilling to confess that belief before others. I am not sure about you, but I know for certain there is no such thing as a private or secret follower of Jesus. According to John, this does not and cannot exist. The person who disguises their faith is the self-proclaimed believer who has an intellectual faith but not one that has taken root in their heart. They chose to fear the Pharisees instead of following the Savior. This is true of so many but there is a difference in the belief that is from the Lord and the belief that is from our mind. God calls those who believe to be baptized, to join their local church, participate in the Lord’s supper—all of which are external public expressions of a new internal reality. People ask me all the time why it is important to be baptized, and the truth is simply: We want to publically express our devotion to Jesus. This is what happens when your life is transformed by the truth of Jesus you want to live a life that expresses the truth of Jesus. Fear led to another reason the group followed the pharisees.

### **B. True disciples of Jesus do not desire the praise of Man. (v. 43)**

“For they loved human praise more than praise from God.” v. 43. This is the follower who is confessing belief but only for the purpose of alliance with people. They were confessing whatever it took so others would think well of them. On one hand, you have someone who believes but will NOT confess because of fear of people and the other hand, someone who confesses BECAUSE of a fear of people. In both circumstances, there is a fear of people. You fear you will not get their approval if you do not disguise your faith. The latter is that you fear people if you do not confess Christ because of their approval. In both instances their fear for man was greater than their fear for God. The fear of the Lord is a good fear. It stands up to all our other fears. It brings wisdom, joy, rest, and life. It is a holy fear—the fear of God. This is all over scripture. The Psalmist says, “Hallelujah! Happy is the person who fears the Lord, taking great delight in his commands.” Psalm 112:1 (CSB)

Philippians 2:12–13 says, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you.” This is seemingly the root of Israel’s unbelief. They were seeking the approval of man over their approval with the Lord. Now put that together with verse 41: “Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke about him.” We must understand that all other approvals are fleeting and will not last in the final days. And to be honest, this fear is amplified in light of the last crisis we see, the crisis of finality.

## **3. THE CRISIS OF FINALITY**

The third crisis serves as a warning. This is what John says and how he ends this passage: “The one who rejects me and doesn’t receive my sayings has this as his judge: The word I have spoken will judge him on the last day.” John 12:48 (CSB)

There is coming a time when the opportunity to believe will come to an end and the judgment will be final. There will be a last day for all of us everywhere. No one will stand with an excuse or a justification that is gained by any other means than Christ. Acts 17:31 says, "because he has set a day when he is going to judge the world in righteousness by the man he has appointed. He has provided proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead." Hebrews 9:27 says, "And just as it is appointed for people to die once—and after this, judgment."

The promise of judgment has been seen throughout the Old Testament but specifically with the story of Noah. Noah preached to deaf ears over and over. "Repent because the judgment of the Lord is coming. Repent because the wrath of God is coming." He continued to warn day after day after day. And this is the essence of Jesus' message in John today. Noah gave a warning for the people to get into the refuge of the ark and they would be saved from the judgment of God. All those who did not get into the ark with Noah and his family were swept away—and the same message applies to you and I today.

On Judgment Day, those who do not believe will realize their fate and their end—the crisis of finality. But for those of you that believed, those of you that placed your faith in Jesus, the final day does not have to be a crisis. If you put your faith in Jesus, God the Judge will reach into the file with your name on it and take out a sealed envelope that says, "ETERNAL LIFE" and He will extend this to you because on that day of judgment as a follower of Jesus you will not see death, you will see life. All of your past failures and sins will be held up and then he will declare, "The life of Jesus bears witness on your behalf." And this summation arrives on the tails of everything we have been discussing up to this point: True faith, true belief, true disciples and these things will be tested on the final day of Judgment. But remember that this speaking on unbelief comes right after Jesus pleads with the crowds, "believe in the light." (v. 36) Jesus is pleading with you maybe even today. Believe in Him. Choose to believe. Do not delay so that your final day is not a crisis.

"You cannot repent too soon because you do not know how soon it may be too late."  
—Sir Thomas Fuller

## OUTLINE

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"They did not believe in him." v. 37

#### B. The Lord did not allow them to believe.

"He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, so that they would not see with their eyes or understand with their hearts, and turn, and I would heal them." v. 40

"This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet, who said: Lord, who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? This is why they were unable to believe, because Isaiah also said: He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, so that they would not see with their eyes or understand with their hearts, and turn, and I would heal them. Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke about him." *John 12:38-41 (CSB)*

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"And he replied: Go! Say to these people: Keep listening, but do not understand; keep looking, but do not perceive. Make the minds of these people dull; deafen their ears and blind their eyes; otherwise they might see with their eyes and hear with their ears, understand with their minds, turn back, and be healed." *Isaiah 6:9-10 (CSB)*

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