

# The Danger of Stubborn Unbelief

John 12:37-43

**Introduction:** John makes it abundantly clear throughout his gospel that “Seeing is NOT believing!” Not when it comes to faith in Christ. The things that Jesus did were startling. Every single person who came to Him for healing was healed. He not only healed disease but birth defects like blindness. Something which no other practitioner of any kind had ever done. Jesus brought this to a climax just weeks before His crucifixion by doing the ultimate healing. He raised Lazarus from the dead right in front of a crowd of people who did not even believe in Him. BUT...their unbelief was not a surprise to God. In fact, the prophet Isaiah was told at the beginning of His ministry that His message would render the people insensitive.

**Isaiah 6:9-10** <sup>9</sup> He said, "Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on listening, but do not perceive; Keep on looking, but do not understand.' <sup>10</sup> "Render the hearts of this people insensitive, Their ears dull, And their eyes dim, Otherwise they might see with their eyes, Hear with their ears, Understand with their hearts, And return and be healed."

After years of preaching and demonstrating the Glory of God the Jews still did not believe what God said and paid no attention to His mighty miracles and power.

**Isaiah 53:1** Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

Our text today applies these prophecies directly to the Jews of Jesus day. Let's read it.

**John 12:37-43** <sup>37</sup> But though He had performed so many signs before them, *yet* they were not believing in Him. <sup>38</sup> *This was* to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet which he spoke: "LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT? AND TO WHOM HAS THE ARM OF THE LORD BEEN REVEALED?" <sup>39</sup> For this reason they could not believe, for Isaiah said again, <sup>40</sup> "HE HAS BLINDED THEIR EYES AND HE HARDENED THEIR HEART, SO THAT THEY WOULD NOT SEE WITH THEIR EYES AND PERCEIVE WITH THEIR HEART, AND BE CONVERTED AND I HEAL THEM." <sup>41</sup> These things Isaiah said because he saw His glory, and he spoke of Him. <sup>42</sup> Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing *Him*, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; <sup>43</sup> for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God.

**Why am I preaching this sermon:** John says that the reason the Jews could not believe in Jerusalem was because it was prophesied that they would not believe. But if God blinds them and hardens their hearts how can they also be held accountable for what they have done? In other words, if God makes it impossible for them to believe how can they be blamed? We want to consider this carefully this morning in the light of everything else that God reveals about the unbelieving heart of men.

**No one should have to guess what I plan to talk about:** As we examine this very harsh assertion we need to keep some things in mind. Let me give them to you:

- The Bible never excuses the guilt and unbelief of men. The fact that men cannot believe does not change the fact that they stubbornly sin against God and one another and steadfastly do not want to repent or believe.

**John 12:37** Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him.

- This “hardening of their hearts” is not done to people who are morally pure or even neutral. It is done to those who have willingly chosen rebellion and unbelief.

**Isaiah 3:9-11** <sup>9</sup> The expression of their faces bears witness against them, And they display their sin like Sodom; They do not *even* conceal *it*. Woe to them! For they have brought evil on themselves. <sup>10</sup> Say to the righteous that *it will go well with them*, For they will eat the fruit of their actions. <sup>11</sup> Woe to the wicked! *It will go badly with him*, For what he deserves will be done to him.

- Because God is Sovereign over the hearts and belief of men there is great cause for hope and motivation to pray for our loved ones who are lost. If He is not Sovereign then all men are hopeless for they are dead to God and cannot see His Glory. There is Hope in our Gracious Sovereign God.

**Ephesians 2:4-5** <sup>4</sup> But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

- God’s hardening of certain people is used to bring to pass His redemptive plan.

**Isaiah 28:24-25** <sup>24</sup> Does the farmer plow continually to plant seed? Does he *continually* turn and harrow the ground? <sup>25</sup> Does he not level its surface And sow dill and scatter cummin And plant wheat in rows, Barley in its place and rye within its area?

**Romans 9:22-24** <sup>22</sup> What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? <sup>23</sup> And *He did so* to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, <sup>24</sup> *even* us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.

**But though He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him [37]:** This event takes place after three and a half years of God revealing Himself to Israel through His Son Jesus. This is really important because it goes to the second major point above. Men can so stubbornly and rebelliously resist God that their judgment begins in this life when God so hardens them that they cannot any longer believe. It is important to notice that this is said at the very end of Christ’s revelation of Himself to Israel.

**This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet which he spoke: "LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT? AND TO WHOM HAS THE ARM OF THE LORD BEEN REVEALED?" [38]:** John explains that this was predicted by Isaiah who was speaking of the revealing of Messiah to Israel. The Jews heard His preaching and teaching [His Report] and they saw His mighty power [the arm of the Lord] and yet they remained unmoved. Listen to what God told Isaiah they would see when His Son Jesus Christ appeared in their midst.

**Isaiah 53:1-12** Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? <sup>2</sup> For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, And like a root out of parched ground; He has no *stately* form or majesty That we should look upon Him, Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. <sup>3</sup> He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. <sup>4</sup> Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. <sup>5</sup> But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being *fell* upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. <sup>6</sup> All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him. <sup>7</sup> He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth. <sup>8</sup> By oppression and judgment He was taken away; And as for His generation, who considered That He was cut off out of the land of the living For the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke *was due*? <sup>9</sup> His grave was assigned with wicked men, Yet He was with a rich man in His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was there any deceit in His mouth. <sup>10</sup> But the LORD was pleased To crush Him, putting *Him* to grief; If He would render Himself *as* a guilt offering, He will see *His* offspring, He will prolong *His* days, And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand. <sup>11</sup> As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see *it and* be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities. <sup>12</sup> Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, And He will divide the booty with the strong; Because He poured out Himself to death, And was numbered with the transgressors; Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, And interceded for the transgressors.

**For this reason they could not believe, for Isaiah said again, <sup>40</sup> "HE HAS BLINDED THEIR EYES AND HE HARDENED THEIR HEART, SO THAT THEY WOULD NOT SEE WITH THEIR EYES AND PERCEIVE WITH THEIR HEART, AND BE CONVERTED AND I HEAL THEM." [39-40]:** They could not believe because after a direct encounter with their own God that was indisputable they plotted to kill Him rather than love and embrace Him. This is the reason that God blinded their eyes and hardened their heart. There is a warning here to people in our day. God is not obliged to forgive you. He is not obligated to show grace and He can be offended to the point of cutting off the possibility to repent and believe. Jesus told a parable about just such a circumstance.

**Luke 20:9-19** <sup>9</sup> And He began to tell the people this parable: "A man planted a vineyard [The Land of Israel] and rented it out to vine-growers, [The Jews] and went on a journey for a long time. <sup>10</sup> "At the *harvest* time he sent a slave [A Prophet] to the vine-

growers, so that they would give him *some* of the produce of the vineyard; but the vine-growers beat him and sent him away empty-handed. <sup>11</sup> "And he proceeded to send another slave; [Another Prophet] and they beat him also and treated him shamefully and sent him away empty-handed. <sup>12</sup> "And he proceeded to send a third; and this one also they wounded and cast out. [A Third Prophet] <sup>13</sup> "The owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; [Jesus Christ] perhaps they will respect him.' <sup>14</sup> "But when the vine-growers saw him, they reasoned with one another, saying, 'This is the heir; let us kill him so that the inheritance will be ours.' <sup>15</sup> "So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What, then, will the owner of the vineyard do to them? <sup>16</sup> "He will come and destroy these vine-growers [The Jews] and will give the vineyard [The Land of Israel] to others." When they heard it, they said, "May it never be!" <sup>17</sup> But Jesus looked at them and said, "What then is this that is written: 'THE STONE [Jesus] WHICH THE BUILDERS [Israel] REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER *stone*'? <sup>18</sup> "Everyone who falls on that stone [Christ] will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls,[The Judgment of God] it will scatter him like dust." <sup>19</sup> The scribes and the chief priests tried to lay hands on Him that very hour, and they feared the people; for they understood that He spoke this parable against them.

**These things Isaiah said because he saw His glory, and he spoke of Him. [41]:** In Isaiah's day and with other prophets as well, God was revealing Himself to the people.

**Isaiah 6:1-3** In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. <sup>2</sup> Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. <sup>3</sup> And one called out to another and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory."

Isaiah began to preach the Glory of God which He had seen....but God warned Him at the outset that the people would not tolerate it. That the proclamation of the Glory and Righteousness of God would

**Isaiah 6:10** <sup>10</sup> "Render the hearts of this people insensitive, Their ears dull, And their eyes dim, Otherwise they might see with their eyes, Hear with their ears, Understand with their hearts, And return and be healed."

To see God is to see His Glory. But there is more said in this verse. Isaiah saw whose Glory? And of whom did Isaiah speak? The most grammatical reading has it to be Jesus Christ. John starts out quoting Isaiah's lament that the Jews would not believe the report or the miracles of the Messiah when He is revealed. [38] In verse 41....still speaking of Messiah.....John says that Isaiah saw His glory and He spoke of Him. There is a reason why Isaiah is called the "Gospel of the Old Testament." It is about Christ. Jesus quoted it more than almost any other book of the Bible.

John himself tells us that Jesus is the revealer of the Glory of God.

**John 1:14** And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

**John 1:18** No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

When men saw God in the Old Testament they actually saw His Son who entered humanity as Jesus the son of Mary. The Glory that Isaiah saw and proclaimed was perfectly seen and perfectly proclaimed in Jesus Christ.....AND YET....."they were not believing in Him." God's response to such stubborn resistance was to judge them unable to repent and believe.

Pharaoh witnessed the glory of God at the hand of Moses but was unmoved. God judged him unable to repent and be moved and then showed His mighty power to save His people from the evil of men.

Here in John 12, the religious leaders of Israel have stood next to Jesus while He preached and they have watched Him perform miracles that only the Messiah could do and when they saw the ultimate miracle of raising Lazarus they decided to kill Jesus and Lazarus. God judged them unable to repent and unable to believe and unable to be healed of their broken sinful hearts.

**Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing *Him*, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God.[40-41]:** There is one other group of men mentioned here. They had an emaciated faith that was actually a cause of their condemnation. They were unable to act on it. They actually did believe that Jesus was the Messiah, but went along with killing Him anyway.

If you really believed the roof of the church building would collapse in the next 3 minutes would you act on that belief? Yes....otherwise it would be bogus belief. If you told me you believed that but just sat here I would not believe that you believed. Now here is a surprise....God does not believe in faith that is not acted upon. It is mental assent and even that is doubtful.

John describes rulers who tell themselves they believe, but will not confess that belief when it really matters because it would not be in their perceived best interests to do so. They would rather have this murderous nest of snakes approve of them than the Son of the Living God. They would rather call down judgment on themselves than call out in repentance to Jesus the Christ. Such men were in the crowd just three days later when ....

**Matthew 27:20-26** <sup>20</sup> .....the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to put Jesus to death. <sup>21</sup> But the governor said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas." <sup>22</sup> Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said, "Crucify Him!" <sup>23</sup> And he said, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they kept shouting all the more, saying, "Crucify Him!" <sup>24</sup> When Pilate saw that he was accomplishing nothing, but rather that a riot was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this Man's blood; see *to that* yourselves." <sup>25</sup> And all the people said, "**His blood** shall be on us and on our children!" <sup>26</sup> Then he released Barabbas for them; but after having Jesus scourged, he handed Him over to be crucified.

## CONCLUSION

**Give a sense of finality:** Not all judgment for sin takes place after death. Men can play with fire when they think they can turn to God at anytime and He will be obliged to forgive. This is a dangerous game that many play in our day. No one knows the hour of their own death and what they state of their own heart will be when that hour comes.

**2 Corinthians 5:20 - 6:2** <sup>20</sup> We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup> God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. **6:1** As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. <sup>2</sup> For he says, "In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.

**Answer this Questions:** Never, ever say to yourself...."someday I will decide to trust Christ fully with my life." God will forgive me whenever I want Him to, but you may not want him to when the time of reckoning comes.

All men are lost and in need of salvation. The preaching of the cross calls all men to repent, but only the Holy Spirit can open their eyes to see the glory of Christ.

Conversely, some men are so hatefully opposed to Christ that they bring upon themselves a hardening judgment in this life. They prefer any lie to the truth. They insist that their own lies are the truth and that what clearly is wrong is right. Isaiah saw them in his day.

**Isaiah 5:20-21** <sup>20</sup> Woe to those who call **evil good** and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. <sup>21</sup> Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight.

We see them in ours....in fact....they are proliferating now. The more they suppress the truth of Creation and the image of God in man the closer they draw to that eternal cliff. In the end....like the men of Jesus day.....

**2 Thessalonians 2:10-14** ....They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. <sup>11</sup> For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie <sup>12</sup> and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.

**Ask for a verdict:** So....God has every right to judge men in their rebellious unbelief. We say that as long as there is breath a man can repent and that is generally true....but....when God shows men His glory...The Glory of His Christ and they respond with hatred toward Him, He has every right and does judge them unable to repent and believe.

Now..... what should be our response to such things? Satan would like you to think of God as somehow unfair because He has shown mercy to some but not to all. Do not fall

for this. We too are condemned by our nature and our behavior. We were dead in our trespasses and sins when God made us alive by grace.

**Titus 3:3-7** <sup>3</sup> At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. <sup>4</sup> But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, <sup>5</sup> he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, <sup>6</sup> whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, <sup>7</sup> so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

Joyous Gratitude is the proper response to the realization that God is justified in hardening the hearts of those who stubbornly resist Him and hate Him. That could have been us, but it was not. By the Spirit.....Paul expressed it perfectly.....

**2 Thessalonians 2:13-17** <sup>13</sup> But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. <sup>14</sup> It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>15</sup> So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word *of mouth* or by letter from us. <sup>16</sup> Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace, <sup>17</sup> comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word.