

Why Don't People Believe?

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[0 : 00] Please be seated. We're looking at John 12, the verses that I've read to us, verses 37 to 15, and it's page 875.

Well, why don't people believe in Jesus? There are a multitude of reasons, I think, for them, and I want to just expound a few of them at this moment.

First of all, they think that the story is too old, so there's no point in believing. They think that Jesus is irrelevant in our modern world. And many people, when you say Jesus, they think, well, they associate that with church, and church is boring and outdated.

People up the front wear sunny clothes and so on. They've had nothing to do or nothing to say about contemporary society. To just follow and believe Jesus is uncool.

Jesus does nothing for me today. And I think one of the strongest reasons that people don't believe in Jesus, that I've seen in years, has been because they say there's so much hypocrisy from those who do believe in Jesus.

[1 : 15] And they're not going to become hypocrites, so they're not going to become believers. Well, they're the sorts of typical responses you get from people today as we ask the questions about why they don't believe in Jesus Christ.

But we shouldn't be surprised at the lack of response to people's belief in Jesus and subsequently not following him because it has been an age-old problem.

It's not something that's new in the 80s or in the 90s or in this new millennium, depending on when you think the new millennium is. It's an age-old problem. It's been an age-old problem ever since God's Son, the Saviour of this world, walked on this earth, and even before that, really.

And in the passage that was read to us by Joyce this morning, we see the response of some of the religious authorities of the day who had witnessed and seen Jesus' public ministry.

For around three years now, Jesus has been teaching and proclaiming God's kingdom, pointing to who he is by his words and actions.

[2 : 26] Now his public ministry at the end of this chapter is really about to come to a close so that he can continue on to do his Father's will and indeed, as we'll see in weeks to come, bring glory to God.

Well, this passage starts off in verse 37 by telling us that although he, that is Jesus, had performed so many signs in their presence, they did not believe in him.

They did not believe in him. Now John, in the Gospel of John, it records for us seven of these signs. There are so many signs that have been performed, but John's Gospel records seven of them.

And I think the greatest of them is chapter 11 where we see the raising of Lazarus, the dead man raised from the tomb. It's a foretaste of what's to come.

Now these signs, or miracles if you want to call them that, were there for a reason. And the reason they are there is that they are a way of pointing to Jesus as the Son of God.

[3 : 33] It is identifying Jesus as God's chosen one. It is bringing to fulfillment all these things that have been spoken about the Messiah. And that is the reason they are there.

So you would have thought that these signs and these miracles that we read about, and there's so many more of them as well, that these miracles that were performed by Jesus would have caused many to believe and to follow with a deep sincerity and with a certain assurance and trust in Jesus.

Well, in some cases it did. And in many cases it didn't. In some regards it alienated the people even further. These people had hardened their hearts just as Pharaoh hardened his heart to God when Moses asked that he let God's people go.

Well, why wouldn't these religious authorities believe in Jesus after all these signs were performed in front of their very, very eyes?

I want to offer you two reasons that John puts forward in this passage this morning. The first reason they don't believe in Jesus is because God has so willed it.

[4 : 53] God has willed it. We're told in verse 38 that people did not believe in Jesus to fulfil the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah.

Now John goes on to quote two passages, well-known passages from Isaiah. The first one comes from Isaiah chapter 53, verse 1, and it says, Lord, who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?

Jesus is experiencing rejection now as the prophet Isaiah had predicted centuries, hundreds of years before. And if you were to read around this verse from Isaiah 53, you also see the nature of God's servant, and that is to be a suffering servant, and that is fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

But from this verse, 53, verse 1, we see neither the message of God, which in the context of John's gospel, referring to Jesus' teaching, nor the arm of the Lord, which refers to his miraculous signs, the changing the water to wine, the healings that he did, the walking on water, the feeding of 5,000, the raising of Lazarus, and so on.

We don't see the arm of the Lord resulting in faith on the part of the people that were following and watching Jesus.

[6 : 24] But scripture is indeed being fulfilled as that happens. Now sure, there is a remnant who believe in Jesus while he is alive, just as there is a remnant who believed God's word through the prophet Isaiah so many centuries before.

But there were many who did not believe despite all that they have seen. And it's because God has willed it that way. And verse 39, we see that they could not believe because Isaiah also said, he goes on and he quotes another verse, he, that is God, has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart so that they may not look with their eyes and understand with their heart and turn and I would heal them.

Now this second verse that John quotes is from Isaiah chapter 6, verse 10, which is a passage that Leroy read to us. And it's taken at a time when Isaiah saw the vision of glory in the temple.

And it's referring to God's call to the prophet Isaiah to proclaim his word. Even though the result, God knows what's going to happen, the result will be the hardening of the hearts of the people against his message.

Despite all that, Isaiah is called to proclaim. Now this same verse, Isaiah 6, verse 10, is also used elsewhere in the other Gospels to account for the failure of Jesus' listeners to understand the parables of the kingdom.

[7 : 59] And the Apostle Paul also refers to Isaiah 53, the first Isaiah passage we read, along with others of similar implication, as he wrestles with the identical issue of Jewish unbelief in the book of Romans.

And you just have a look at some of the chapters at the end of Romans, chapters 9 to 11, to see that. People don't believe because God has so willed it so that his purposes may be carried out.

Now isn't it ironic that as these people hardened their hearts toward Jesus, they were in fact bringing about his glory.

And that glory is seen as we look through this Gospel at the cross. Jesus' glory is fulfilled there at the cross. These people think that they are doing the best thing by getting rid of him, by putting him to death on the cross, and getting rid of this popular leader so that they can get on with their own life.

But as they do so, they are fulfilling the work of the Lord. They are indeed fulfilling Scripture. For it is at the cross that Jesus is fully glorified.

[9 : 25] Now similarly, in the story of Exodus, as Pharaoh hardened his heart towards God's people, again, God's glory was brought about in a most amazing way.

God's people were freed. We know the story well, don't they? Moses goes and he says, let my people go, and Pharaoh hardens his heart. And he continues to harden his heart against God. But God's glory is brought about in an amazing way in the exodus of his people from Egypt and finally across the Red Sea and so on.

God's people were freed. But on the cross, on the cross, God's glory was filled in an even more spectacular way. You see, the price of sin and rebellion against God was paid for by Jesus, God's Son, his very blood.

So the first reason for the Jews' unbelief in Jesus, despite the compelling evidence from Scripture, was because God willed it that way. Isaiah was able to see God's glory and speak about it as we see in verse 41 because God inspired him to write the things that he wrote, just as all Scripture is inspired by God.

But these religious authorities who supposedly know the Scriptures very well and were face-to-face with Jesus were unable to believe because of God's eternal purposes.

[11 : 06] Now the second reason for the lack of belief in Jesus by the religious authorities is seen in verses 42 and 43. Nevertheless, many, even of the authorities, believed in him.

But because of the Pharisees, they did not confess it for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue. For they loved human glory more than the glory that comes from God.

There were many there who believed in Jesus. It says it, doesn't it? But their private, this private inward belief is flawed. The reason that they will not believe outwardly or express it is because of fear.

It's because of the fear of what will happen to them if they do. And in their case, in their time, if they expressed their outward belief, they would be thrown out of the synagogue.

Now if you go back to chapter 9, we learn there that the Jewish authorities had decided that if anyone confessed Jesus to be the Messiah, that is the one chosen by God, the one who will establish God's kingdom here on this earth and so on, if anyone confessed Jesus to be the Messiah, they would be put out of the synagogue.

[12 : 23] And for them, that meant that they would then lose their status in the society and perhaps also their livelihood. The cost, the price of believing in Jesus outwardly was just too high.

And the reason it was too high is because they loved human glory more than the glory that comes from God. They did not believe because they loved human glory more than the glory that comes from God.

Let me ask you a rhetorical question. Were these leaders who had this private, unexpressed belief considered to be true believers at this time?

Now there are no doubt those who believe that we are saved when we come to recognize a certain body of truth. In other words, when we are persuaded that Jesus was God in human form and came to give his life for us.

That's faith in a purely academic or intellectual sense. It's kind of like someone coming to church week in, week out and Leroy says, friends, what do we believe?

[13 : 40] We just mumble off the creed. But not living out what we believe in the creed at home, at work or wherever we may be. And those people who have this sort of intellectual belief would say these leaders were genuine followers but were not following Christ as Lord.

So that's what one group of people might say. Then there's another group of people who would say, and I happen to agree with this, that salvation, that believe that salvation comes to us when we not only recognise the truth of the gospel message of grace but also commit ourselves to the one who saves, Jesus.

And that is done outwardly, expressed outwardly, in following him, by following him, outwardly expressing our belief or our faith in words and in action.

I don't think that these religious leaders, authorities, were true believers. Some may have become true believers later on and we see that with Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus perhaps and so on.

But at this point in time they weren't there yet, they weren't true believers. These leaders, they talked a good game but they had no commitment to Christ.

[15 : 05] They may have liked him but when it came to the crunch, when the pressure was put upon them, they were not willing to be publicly counted among his followers.

And don't we know people like that today? People are willing to be Christians on Sunday but unwilling to follow him Monday through to Saturday.

If your belief in Jesus is like that, then friends, it's merely academic. It doesn't put you on the road which leads to eternal life.

rather you are headed on a road which leads to destruction. To believe in Jesus means to give your whole self to him.

Not just those bits that you are comfortable with. Oh yes, I can give this bit to you today, God. I can give you this bit. It means giving your whole self. It means handing yourself over and letting God's spirit transform you into his likeness.

[16 : 14] things. And more often than not, that comes at a cost. In our society, it may mean turning away from the lifestyle that you are leading at the time.

It may mean being honest with your money. It may mean even giving up your job because of what your job stands for. It may also mean having to be honest about your relationship with someone.

To believe in Jesus means to give up your whole self to him. So believing and trusting in Jesus does come at a cost.

But look at the cost that he paid for us so that we might live with him forever. It's eminently worth giving up these temporary things in life that we have so that we may live forever with him with Jesus in eternity.

God glorifies us when we seek to glorify him by believing in him fully. Now as we move on through these verses we see the benefits of following Jesus in verses 44 to 46.

[17 : 33] What are they? First of all in verse 44 we say that belief in Jesus means that we also believe in the one who sent him that is God the father and we enter into a relationship with him when we put our trust in Jesus you want to know how to have a relationship with the creator of this world the one who has made everything that we see around us the one who is the lord of the harvest look to Jesus not to Krishna not to Allah not to Buddha not to Joseph Smith not to the horoscope that you see in those silly magazines not to crystals look to Jesus look in verse 45 it says whoever sees me that is Jesus sees him that is God the one who sent him and we often wonder what God is like how can we know God when he doesn't make himself visible Jesus said plainly that those who see him see

God because he is God if you want to know what God is like then study the person of Jesus in verse 46 again the mission of Jesus is reasserted he is the light of the world now light is a metaphor that is used throughout John's gospel and before Jesus walked on this earth it was covered in darkness look at what chapter 1 says about that and given that Jesus is the light everyone who believes in him should not remain in the darkness because in Jesus there is a clear path to follow the path has been lit up and we walk in his light by reading the scriptures by letting it impact on our lives by letting God's spirit show us the darkness and the waywardness of this world and so on and as we let Jesus the light of the world light our path we can be confident of a road that leads to eternal life to an eternity with God to reject

Jesus though means that we are living in darkness and again on a road that leads to destruction he goes on to say in verses 47 and 48 I do not judge anyone who hears my word and does not keep them for I came not to judge the world but to save the world the one who rejects me and does not receive my word has a judge on the last day the word that I have spoken will serve as judge the purpose of Jesus first mission on earth was not to judge people but to show them the way to find salvation and subsequently eternal life and when he comes again which he promises that he will do one of his main purposes will be to judge people for how they lived on this earth his words that we would not accept now and obey will condemn us on the day of judgment or as he says here on the last day but those who accept

Jesus and live his way will be raised to eternal life as the New Testament scriptures in Corinthians and Thessalonians and Revelations so speak about so boldly and those who reject Jesus and live any way they please they will face eternal punishment so then those who expect Jesus to own their names to have their names written in the book of life on the day of judgment Jesus expects to own his name now before a watching world we cannot hide our faith we cannot we are to be lights and beacons for his glory now we can dismiss Jesus words and reject him just as many of these religious authorities did as many people do today but to do so is to reject the one who sent him commanding him to say and do all that he did and friends to do that is certain condemnation now

I'm conscious very conscious that I have said some fairly strong words words that many people do not like to hear for a variety of reasons one of those reasons is that many people hate it when a preacher gets up and decides to talk about judgment well it happens to have come in this chapter this week and I'm preaching about it it makes people feel uncomfortable when we speak about judgment but it is clear to me from this passage and many others throughout the Bible that if we don't have the right belief then we are only fooling ourselves we're kidding ourselves we're headed on a road that leads to destruction it's my job as a minister when I was ordained I had to make those sorts of vows to preach the scriptures as God would have me preach them not as people would have me preach them and things like that it's part of our job as Christian leaders it's part of our job as all

[23 : 19] Christians to preach the scriptures faithfully secondly I think that people get uncomfortable because I know that people do not like to hear these words because they have family and friends who just do not have a right belief in Jesus or none or no belief whatsoever it doesn't take much to work out from the Bible where these people if you know people like this where they are headed if they continue in this unbelief of Jesus I want to say to you this don't despair remember that God is sovereign and that God is a just judge let me offer to you some practical and perhaps partial advice that you can implement if you haven't already begun and that is this to pray pray for unbelievers pray that pray asking that God will soften their hearts form prayer triplets

I know it sounds I've carried that banner before and said to pray in a prayer triplet but it's an eminently worthwhile thing to pray for your unconverted friends because we want to let people know about eternity and how they can enter into that so pray for your unbelievers known to you pray for your unbelieving children and your unbelieving spouse if you have one pray for boldness to be agents of God in the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ pray pray pray pray that God will soften their hearts to look beyond the praise of humans in this world which we all seem to go for pray that God will soften their hearts to bring honour and glory to his name and as you pray acknowledge that this is not easy God this is not easy I can't continue on with it but be honest about it tell him that you're struggling with this be honest about your feelings and your woes before him God can handle it he built the world he can handle our prayers I think but don't turn your woes into complaints to share with whoever you want I don't think that's very helpful rather give

God the glory in whatever circumstances you might be faced with whether it be sickness whether it's in financial difficulty whether it's grieving over a lost one whether you have marriage hassles whatever it is give God the glory seek to bring honour and glory to his name our continued belief in Jesus and obedience to him is not going to be smooth sailing all the time there will be persecution from time to time from the most unexpected source but hold fast to the promises that he has made to those who truly believe in him and that promise for those who truly believe is eternal life isn't it it's a promise that he has made to all who believe and trust in him and the seal of that promise is not something he just made up it's a promise that is seen and is visibly seen at the cross where his son

Jesus our saviour laid down his life in order that we may enter into his glory through him
Amen