

## Hardhearted or Heaven Bound?

John 12:37-50

Turn in your Bibles today to the Gospel of John.

John 12:37-50

Would you stand in honoring God's Word as I read this passage?

Our passage takes us to an undisclosed time during the week leading up to the Passover. Jesus has already made His triumphal entry into the city of Jerusalem at the chorus of hosannas as Jews gathered from all over the region for this annual celebration. This celebration was in remembrance of the occasion in which the Hebrews exited the land of Egypt after one final plague unleashed by God on the Egyptians that culminated in the release of the Hebrews after 400 years of slavery.

On that first Passover night, every Hebrew was to slaughter a lamb, roast and eat it after having spread its blood on the door posts so that when the angel of death swept through the land it would pass over those homes on which the blood sealed their protection. Any home, including Egyptian, that did not have the blood of a lamb sprinkled on its doorpost, would be stricken with the death of the first born. This act would be a picture of the Lamb of God who would in time come and shed His blood. The person who figuratively applies the blood of Christ to his life would be forever sealed from spiritual death – the judgment of and eternal separation from God. But we are getting ahead of ourselves. The sacrifice of God's Lamb won't happen until Friday, the day of His crucifixion.

Jerusalem was a swelling sea of humanity. Many had already arrived on this day, the day they welcomed Christ into Jerusalem as their expected Messiah, whom they thought would lead them to victory over Roman oppression. The king had finally come forward and now they were ready for Him to take His rightful place on the throne.

But the events of the week leading up to the Passover celebration were not the events of someone taking on the role of a king. He speaks to some Greeks about His impending death. He cleanses the Temple from those who would use it for financial gain. He spends time in the Temple teaching about such things as paying taxes to Caesar, instead of rising up to overthrow him. He talks about marriage, the identity of the Son of God and signs of the end times. He taught against the religious leaders and the importance of being ready for when the Son of Man would return.

It is also during this week that we see the dark side of the human heart. The religious leaders who have been plotting the death of Jesus, hope to take Him secretly so as not to incite a riot by the throng that had so eagerly welcomed Him as the Messiah. Judas would make the decision to betray Christ and agree with the Pharisees on their plan to eliminate Him. He had had enough of this preachers talk about loving one's enemies and helping the poor.

In fitting fashion John summarizes the thoughts of the Jews about Jesus and concludes with a summary of Jesus' ministry. His public ministry is now ended and He awaits the time of the Passover meal, His betrayal, trial and crucifixion. Our text is in two parts.

An ensuing problem

An enduring principle

I will close with a final thought An eternal promise

#### I. AN ENSUING PROBLEM – v. 37-43

Suppose I were to tell you that I am the world's fastest runner – at any distance. You might be very skeptical about my ability, so one day we go out and I run the 100 meter dash in 8 seconds flat. Then I run the 200 meter dash in 18 seconds flat. Then I run the 400 meter dash in 40 seconds.

Then I run the 800 meter dash in 80 seconds.  
 Then I run the mile in 3 minutes and 40 seconds.  
 Every distance I run, no matter how far or how difficult the terrain, I prove to you that I am the fastest. Some of you will be amazed and believe. You follow me and want me to show you how fast I run. But many of you would still remain skeptical. You won't believe because you choose not to. You will conclude that I cheated. I took short cuts or used a rigged measuring stick to mark off the course or that I used performance enhancing drugs. No matter what the evidence to the contrary you just won't believe that I am the world's fastest person.

Our text points out that among those who followed Him there was constant disbelief.

#### A. There Was Constant Disbelief – v. 37- 41

In the three and half years of His ministry, Jesus had taught with authority and had performed a variety of miracles. He made the lame to walk, the blind to see, the deaf to hear, the mute to speak, lepers were cleansed, those possessed by demons were set free, thousands were fed by a small sack lunch, and there were some dead raised to life.

Recorded in the Gospels are a sampling of the miracles Jesus performed, 36 of them. Scripture also tells us that He did many more miracles and He did them day after day after day. Here's how John concludes his gospel – “Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.” (John 21:25)

In our text John says that even though Jesus performed many miracles, they, the Jews, would still not believe. They remained unconvinced and in disbelief. I want to suggest that it was purposeful.

#### 1. Their disbelief was purposeful – v. 37

Let's read it again – “Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in Him.”

Did you notice that John was very clear to inform us that these miracles had been done in their presence? It wasn't something they heard from a neighbor or a traveling salesman who happened into town after having either witnessed or heard about something Jesus had done somewhere else. They didn't read about it in the local gazette or scan it on a tabloid in the checkout aisle of the grocery store. They had seen the miracles firsthand. They were eye witnesses. But they still chose not to believe. It was a purposeful, intentional, deliberate act of disbelief. It does not mean that they didn't have a choice. It's not because they didn't have all the facts or didn't understand, they decided not to believe. It was an act of the will.

I have purposely chosen the word disbelief. Your Bible may have a heading that speaks of their unbelief. That's fine. I like to think of it as disbelief and here's why. Webster's dictionary defines unbelief as a lack of belief because of insufficient evidence where disbelief suggests a refusal to believe. They refused to believe. They saw all the clear evidence. A girl is pronounced dead, she has stopped breathing, there is no pulse, she has turned the pale, ashen color. All the mourners outside know the girl is dead, even the crowd that had followed Him to the home of Jairus knew she was dead. There is no life in her little body and Jesus comes to her side, touches her, and speaks to her to get up and she does. She hadn't fainted. She wasn't in a coma. She wasn't pretending to be dead. She was dead and Jesus raised her back to life.

When Jesus fed the multitudes, some scholars estimate there were as many as 15-20 thousand people, He had only a small lunch with which He fed them all, with 12 large baskets left over. If I take a biscuit and break it in half and give this half

of the church ½ and give the other ½ of you the other ½, and tell you to break off some and give it to the next person and so on down the rows, guess what, most of you will go hungry because there won't be enough.

God's people should have responded to the message of Jesus because of His miracles. They should have recognized His true identity as the Messiah through His authenticating miracles that what He said was true. They should have believed, but in spite of witnessing the miracles they made a conscious decision not to believe. It didn't matter how convincing the proof, they would not believe. Why? I'm glad you asked.

Their disbelief was not only purposeful, it was prophesied.

## 2. Their disbelief was prophesied – v. 38-41

So if it was prophesied does that mean they didn't have a choice? It's not a self-fulfilling prophecy where it says we won't believe so we might as well go along and not believe. Isaiah was given a prophecy by God about how Israel would respond to the Messiah when He came. John records two quotes from the pen of Isaiah that show why there was disbelief. The first is from Isaiah 53:1 and the second from Isaiah 6:10.

Isaiah predicts their disbelief. How could he predict that when the Messiah would come there would be national disbelief? First, it came from God. Second, He could predict it because there was rampant disbelief in his day and unless something happened, he didn't see it changing in the future. John even states in the beginning of His gospel that when Jesus came to His own they didn't receive Him. Then he wrote that anyone who would believe in the name of Jesus would be granted the power to become the sons of God. So when the Messiah came how many believed in what He had to say, how many believed in the miracles He did?

The arm of the Lord refers to the power of God in the miracles Jesus performed. And the answer to the question about how many believed is that very few did. It wasn't that they denied the miracles were ever done (like some who deny that the holocaust ever took place in spite of overwhelming documentation and the witness of survivors), they denied that the Messiah was deity.

It was for that very reason that John records that they could not believe. It was an act of the will. They rejected Christ with their eyes wide open. The result of this disbelief is seen in the second prophecy from Isaiah 6:10.

Their refusal to believe was part of God's judgment. God blinded their eyes. They believed the Messiah was coming but rejected that Jesus was the Messiah even with all the miracles to substantiate it. It's like believing in gravity, but then denying that same gravity exists when you step off a cliff.

God hardened the heart of those who would not believe so that they could not believe. A great example of this is in the Old Testament when God hardened the heart of Pharaoh. He had opportunity to release the Hebrews from slavery even after the various miracles, but because he would not believe God hardened his heart so he could not believe. He brought judgment on himself as did the Jews in Jesus' day who would not believe. They were punished with judicial blindness and hard hearts. Romans 1:24 explains it this way: "God gave them over in the sinful desires of their heart..."

Paul speaks of something similar that will occur in the end times when people will choose not to believe in the Lord when he writes "For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness." (II Thessalonians 2:11-12)

John Phillips writes that “a time comes in the lives of those who will not repent when at last they cannot repent.”

Have you heard the truth about Christ as Savior but denied His saving power so much that you are close to God casting judgment on you because you will not believe so that you can no longer believe?

Constant disbelief is an ensuing problem. But notice that John speaks about another ensuing problem.

#### B. There Were Covert Disciples – v. 42-43

We see in these two verses their convictions, their cowardice, and their compromise.

##### 1. Their convictions – v. 42a

Even though there were many of the Jewish laity who chose not to believe in Christ as the Messiah there were some among the Jewish religious leaders who did. They believed in Jesus. Two of them we know for sure. One is introduced to us back in John 3 and the other is revealed at the crucifixion. Their names are Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea.

It wasn't just an intellectual belief that Jesus was who He claimed to be. There was a real belief in Him as the true Messiah. Yet we notice also their cowardice. They were afraid.

##### 2. Their cowardice – v. 42b

Verse 42 says for fear of the “Pharisees they would not confess their faith.” Nicodemus was one of those religious leaders. We read about him in chapter three that he came to Jesus by night to talk with Jesus. Some suggest that he went at night because he was afraid of what the others would say about him seeking Jesus. Others suggest that there isn't anything to read into his going at night because they both had busy lives during the day. I'm not

going to side with either position other than to say that he was a closet follower, although he did speak up in defense of Jesus among the Sanhedrin who wanted to put Jesus to death. But at the cross he stepped out and along with Joseph of Arimathea claimed the body of Jesus openly admitting in that action their devotion to Him as Messiah.

Why, might you ask, did they choose to remain quiet when they could have possibly had influence over the other religious leaders to perhaps open their eyes to the truth? The answer is in the verse as we see their compromise.

##### C. Their compromise – v. 43

The verse is very clear as to why. They feared being put out of the synagogue. It was the same fear that gripped the parents of the man born blind who had been healed by Jesus. Fear of man was greater than fear of God. At the time, the cost was too great to go public with their faith. They would have been cast out of the synagogue. It would have cost them respect in the community.

I wonder how many of us who claim Christ as Savior try to be secret about our faith whether it's within our family, or in the neighborhood or at school or work. We fear what others will say. We fear that we will be made fun of. We fear that we won't get accepted in “the” group. So when we go out to eat we either don't pray or pray quickly with our eyes open. When we're asked what we did over the weekend we conveniently forget to mention that we were in church for fear that they might brand us as a Bible thumper or spread the word that we're one of those kinds of people.

Let the redeemed of the Lord say so.

Someone rightly asked this penetrating question for us to ponder: *would you rather stand with God and be judged by the world, or stand with the world and be judged by God?*

Paul asked “Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.” (Galatians 1:10)

We sing it so let's live it.

I'll tell the world that I'm a Christian;  
I'm not ashamed His name to bear.  
I'll tell the world that I'm a Christian;  
I'll take Him with me anywhere.  
I'll tell the world how Jesus saved me,  
And how He gave me a life brand new;  
And I know that if you trust Him  
That all He gave me He'll give to you.  
I'll tell the world that He's my Savior;  
No other one could love me so.  
My life, my all is His forever,  
And where He leads me I will go.  
(Hymn # 448)

There are two ensuing problems.  
Constant disbelief  
Covert disciples  
Are either of these your problems?

We switch now and come to the conclusion of Jesus' public ministry. It's in verses 44-50 where we discover an enduring principle.

## II. AN ENDURING PRINCIPLE – v. 44-50

This summarizes Jesus' entire public teaching. He speaks of a guaranteed fact and a grim future.

### A. A Guaranteed Fact – v. 44-46

The public ministry of Jesus ends with an appeal to believe in Jesus. Whether or not Jesus spoke these words at this time is unclear. It is clear that Jesus spoke these words. He is about to go to the cross and pay the penalty for our sin and John wants us to be sure we understand the relationship between Jesus and the Father, the One who sent Him – why – because He had to die. It confirms His deity.

Jesus is saying that if you believe in Him you also believe in the Father. It is impossible to believe in the Father apart from the Son. You cannot separate them. There are lots of folks today who claim that they believe in God, but don't believe in Jesus or they don't believe that Jesus was the Son of God. He was a good man, a great teacher, a gifted individual, but not deity, He lived, He died – end of story, He was not deity. Jesus said that He and the Father were one. He said that if a person saw Him, they had seen the Father (14:9). He said that no one has seen God, but that He has made God known and so to believe in Him, you would also believe in God (1:18).

To believe in who Jesus is because of what Scripture teaches us about Him, is to believe that He is the light of the world and that we have been delivered from darkness.

John 1:1-9; 8:12; 12:35-36

Colossians 1:13-14

Jesus is the light of the world, so that by believing in Him we can be taken out of the darkness that was caused by sin. That is a guaranteed fact. But notice that to deny this, to reject it as many of the Jews had, there is a grim future.

### B. A Grim Future – v. 47-50

Jesus summarizes what will happen to the person who chooses not to believe. There is a judge, One who justly opens the record books, and brings condemnation on those who did not believe in the one He sent to save them. Those who do not believe in Christ who was sent by God deserve the punishment that God, the righteous Judge will give them.

John 3:16-21 John 5:28-29

I John 5:11-12 Revelation 20:11-15

The future of those who reject Christ is grim. “There is a judge for the one who rejects Me and does not accept My words; that very word which



I spoke will condemn him at the last day.” v. 48

Anyone who rejects what Jesus taught about Himself brings judgment on themselves. What Jesus said will determine a man’s destiny and Jesus made it clear here and in 14:24 that what He said came directly from the Father. “He who does not love Me will not obey My teaching. These words you hear are not My own; they belong to the Father who sent Me.”

The guaranteed fact is that if you have the Son, you have life.

The grim future is that if you don’t have the Son, you don’t have life.

I want to close this morning with an eternal promise. It’s revealed in our passage.

### III. AN ETERNAL PROMISE – v. 46, 47

#### A. The Promise of Salvation

When Jesus came to earth it was for the purpose of saving the lost. He came to take us out of the darkness of sin and He did so when He died on the cross, so that by faith His finished work of being our sacrifice for sin we are brought into His light.

The first promise is this: it is the promise of salvation. We see it plainly in both the Old and New Testaments.

Habakkuk 2:4 “The just (righteous) shall live by faith.”

John 3:16 “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

John 5:24 “Verily, verily I say unto you, He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into

judgment (condemnation), but is passed from death unto life.”

Acts 16:31 “And they said, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved...’”

Romans 6:23 “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord.”

Romans 10:9-10 “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the death, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”

I John 5:11-13 “And this is the record, that God hath given unto us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son, hath life; and He that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.”

Salvation is a promise for those who believe that Christ is the Savior. The promise comes with eternal life, a place in the presence of God. But there is also something else that comes with the promise of salvation. The second promise the promise of sealing.

#### B. The Promise of Sealing

Only to believers in Christ and to all believers in Christ the moment we are saved, the Holy Spirit indwells us and permanently sets the seal of God’s ownership on us. The Spirit Himself becomes that seal. Every believer is sealed and I believe every believer is sealed so that you cannot lose your salvation. I want to be clear about that.

II Corinthians 1:20-22

The Holy Spirit is God's guarantee that what He has promised regarding eternal life will come to pass. He won't go back on His word. The word deposit assures us that we will receive everything promised. He guarantees what is to come. The seal shows ownership and protects what belongs to the owner. The Holy Spirit, who is our seal, confirms that we are identified with Christ and belong to God. I Corinthians 6:20 reminds us that we were bought with a price and I Peter 1:18-19 (2:24; 3:18) explains that the price was the shed blood of Christ. His blood saves us and the Holy Spirit seals us.

Romans 8:9-11

Ephesians 1:13-14

Ephesians 4:30

According to the truth of Scripture, this sealing by and through the Holy Spirit is until the day of redemption. "This sealing guarantees the complete fulfillment of God's promises to us" writes Charles Ryrie.

The promise of this sealing is that it is tamper proof.

There is the promise of salvation and the promise of sealing. There is one final promise I want to mention. There is the promise of security.

### C. The Promise of Security

Because we have been saved through the shed blood of Christ, sealed by the Holy Spirit, there is security.

Romans 8:31-39

Nothing will be able to take us from the love God has for us through His Son who died for us. There isn't anything in the world that we can see. There isn't anything in the unseen world. There isn't anything now, there is nothing in the future that can separate us from God's eternal, abiding and never changing love.

John 10:27-29 "My sheep listen to me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of My Father's hand."

In this week of Easter, let us remember that Christ came to save us, and with that salvation there is the promise of being sealed and the promise of security.

On this day in history, Jesus marched into Jerusalem to present Himself as the rightful King. Many rejected Him, refusing to believe that He was the Messiah spoken of in the Old Testament, the promised Redeemer who would give us eternal life. But some believed. Let's remind others that we belong to Christ. He gave us a promise.