

WHY MANY DO NOT BELIEVE

TEXT: JOHN 12:35-50

INTRODUCTION:

1. One of the great mysteries in life is the mystery of why some individuals respond to the message of salvation and why some do not.
2. In his well-known hymn, Major Daniel Whittle wrote,
*I know not how the Spirit moves,
Convincing men of sin,
Revealing Jesus through the Word,
Creating faith in Him.*
3. The Holy Spirit convicts sinners (John 16:7, 8). Some respond to this conviction but others do not. In Acts 2:37 we read, "Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?"
4. But in Acts 7:54 we read, "When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him (Stephen) with their teeth."
5. So it is a mystery in one sense, and yet in another sense the Scriptures do provide us with a great deal of information on this subject.

I. THERE IS A TEMPERAMENT WHICH MAKES IT IMPOSSIBLE TO BELIEVE (12:37-39).

1. "But though he had done so many miracles (literally, "signs") before them, yet they believed not on him" (John 12:37).
2. The book of John records many of these miracles -- signs designed to show the people that Jesus was the Messiah. "Yet they believed not on him" (John 12:37).
3. In John 2, our Lord turned the water into wine. In John 4, He healed the nobleman's son, and in John 5 He healed the impotent man.
4. In John 6, our Lord fed the five thousand with five barley loaves, and two small fishes. And also in John 6, our Lord walked on the water.
5. In John 9, our Lord healed the blind man; and in John 11 He raised Lazarus from the dead. These are only a few that John recorded. John concludes his Gospel by saying, "And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen" (John 21:25).
6. John 12:37 says, "But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him..."

7. That is why Abraham told the rich man in hell, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets (the Word of God), neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."
8. There are certain stubborn sinners who are determined to go on in their sins and they refuse to repent. They become hardened in their sins, and signs, and wonders, and miracles will not convince them (John 12:37).
9. "Yet they believed not on him: That the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled..." (12:38). The Jews fulfilled's Isaiah prophecy ignorantly and unwittingly.
10. John quoted Isaiah 53:1, "Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed?" (John 12:38).
11. Then John goes on to say, "Therefore they could not believe..." (12:39). Now we know the Bible often says sinners will not believe, but here it says, "they could not believe."
12. For example, our Lord said in Matthew 23:37, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"
13. In John 5:40, our Lord said to the Jews who opposed Him, "And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life."
14. So we know there are many Scriptures which teach that sinners will not come to Christ, but John 13:39 says, "Therefore they could not believe..."
15. "Because that Esaias said again (Isa. 6:9, 10), He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart..." (John 12:39, 40).
16. In Isaiah 6, the Lord told the prophet Isaiah to go and proclaim the Word of God to people who will not want to listen.
17. The result will be a hard heart, heavy ears, and blinded eyes (Isa. 6:10; cf. Matthew 13:10-16; Acts 28:25-28).
18. There are times when God judicially blinds sinners because of their inveterate unbelief. In John 12:37 they would not believe; and then in John 12:39, they could not believe.
19. C.H. Spurgeon preached on this text back in 1887. He said, "It is an awful thing to resist the Spirit of God, for if His softening influences are withdrawn, the heart grows hard! If His enlightening influences are taken away, the eyes of the understanding are darkened! I believe there are many who have so long trifled with conscience and violated

- the best instincts of their nature that they are given up as those who are past hope. I pray God that it may not be so with any here."
20. God is patient and longsuffering, but sometimes sinners exhaust His patience.
 21. In Genesis 6:3, the LORD said, "My spirit shall not always strive with man," and then He sent the flood.
 22. There is no indication in John 12 or Isaiah 6, or anywhere else in Scripture, that God was unwilling that sinners should believe and be saved.
 23. First Timothy 2:4 says, God "will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth."
 24. Second Peter 3:9 says, "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."
 25. So the problem isn't God's will; it is man's stubborn unbelief (John 12:37). And after a while, God gives up on stubborn sinners.
 26. Hosea 4:17 says, "Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone."
 27. The argumentativeness and the stubbornness of certain unbelievers is not only annoying, it is very, very dangerous (12:34). This stubborn, argumentative disposition blocks the glorious light of the Gospel, and then sinners get to the place where they cannot believe (John 12:34-39, 46).
 28. First they will not believe -- then they can not believe.
 29. There are certain individuals who are praised as freethinkers or intellectuals, etc. But according to our Lord they are walking in darkness (John 12:35-37).
 30. "While ye have light" (12:36) means the light will not always be available. In the Bible, darkness represents religious error as well as sin. John 3:19 says, "Men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."
 31. Our Lord said in Matthew 6:23, "But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!"
 32. America has been descending into darkness for many years. We can recognize it on every hand -- the rise in occultism, the increase in vulgarity and immorality and lewdness, the fascination with spooks and vampires and zombies, etc.
 33. Walking around and looking at all the tattoos and piercings and strange attire, one thinks he is visiting some strange pagan country!
 34. Isaiah 8:22 says, sinners "shall be driven to darkness."

35. Unsaved friend -- now is the time to accept the Lord Jesus Christ. He said, "Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you..." (John 12:35, 36; cf. vs. 46).

36. First John 1:7 says, "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."

*Come to the light, 'tis shining for thee,
Sweetly the light has dawned upon me;
Once I was blind, but now I can see,
The light of the world is Jesus! -- P.P. Bliss*

II. THERE IS A TIMIDITY WHICH MAKES IT DIFFICULT TO BELIEVE (12:42, 43).

1. It is very likely that two of these "chief rulers" (12:42) eventually got saved -- Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus.
2. Our Lord requires public confession, but there are certain people who will not confess Christ publicly for fear of what others may say or do (12:42, 43).
3. H.A. Ironside said, "I remember when I was a little boy how my mother would draw me to her knee and speak to me so solemnly of the importance of trusting the Lord Jesus Christ as my Savior. I would say, 'Well, mamma, I would like to do it, but the boys will all laugh at me.' Mother used to say, '**Harry, remember, they may laugh you into hell, but they can never laugh you out of it.**' And oh, how that used to go home to me, and it stayed with me all through the years!"
4. Our Lord said in Matthew 10:32 and 33, "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven."
5. Our Lord said in Matthew 12:30, "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad."
6. Romans 10:9 says, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."
7. David said, "I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation: I have not concealed thy lovingkindness and thy truth from the great congregation" (Psalm 40:10).
8. There are terrible consequences of timidity. Revelation 21:8 gives us a list of the various types of sinners who will be cast into the lake of

- fire -- the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, etc. but at the top of the list are "the fearful, and unbelieving."
9. "For they loved the praise of men" (12:43). It is pitiful the way people love the praise of men. They crave their approval and their admiration, etc.
 10. The context in John 12 indicates that these Jews did not have a genuine, living faith. They were merely convinced in their understanding that Jesus was the Messiah, but they did not believe.
 11. A few years ago a Jewish woman acknowledged to one of our members that Isaiah 53 referred to Jesus. But she said she could not accept Jesus as her Saviour because her family would be very upset.
 12. The "belief" described in John 12:42 and 43 is very popular in America today. Most people claim to "believe in Jesus." Worldly couples want a church wedding, even if they have been living together for years and already have kids.
 13. Worldlings like to sing "God Bless America," etc. There is a weak, anemic type of Christendom that is not genuine Christianity.
 14. Years ago, I read a Gospel tract entitled, "Missing Heaven by 18 Inches." That is the distance from the head to the heart. The tract explains that many people have a so-called "head knowledge" of Jesus Christ (an intellectual-acceptance of the Word of God). They give mental assent to the plan of salvation, but they are without the "heart" acceptance that the Bible demands.
 15. That is why our Lord warned in Matthew 7:22 and 23, "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name?... And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."
 16. Our Lord said in Luke 6:46, "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?"
 17. This mere "head knowledge," a mere acknowledgment of the truths of the Bible. It does not lead to self-denial. It shrinks from the active duties of the Christian life. And it fears man more than God (12:43).

III. THERE IS A FOOLISHNESS WHICH IGNORES THE JUDGMENT OF GOD (12:47, 48).

1. "He that rejecteth me..." (12:48) -- what awful words! The word "reject" means, "to set aside, to disregard, to refuse."
2. This same Greek word is sometimes translated "despise." Sinners despise the Lord Jesus Christ -- how wicked!

3. Our Lord said in Luke 10:16, "He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me."
4. First Thessalonians 4:8 says, "He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit."
5. Our Lord said, "The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (John 12:48). The words of the Lord Jesus Christ, which sinners have rejected, will be remembered by them throughout all eternity.
6. Abraham said to the rich man in hell, "Son, remember..." (Luke 16:25).
7. This will be the source of their condemnation. This will make them most miserable. And there is absolutely no possibility of any change or improvement.
8. People talk about a "second chance" after death, but the Bible doesn't teach it. The Bible says, "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27).
9. Albert Barnes said, "The conscience of the sinner will concur with the sentence of Christ in the great day, and that he will go to eternity self-condemned. It is this which will make the pains of hell so intolerable to the sinner...and the sinner will be punished according to the frequency and clearness with which the rejected message has been presented to his mind."
10. The Bible teaches that there will be different degrees of punishment in hell. Our Lord said the hypocritical Pharisees would "receive the greater damnation" (Matthew 23:14).
11. Our Lord said some will be beaten with many stripes, and some with few stripes (Luke 12:47, 48).
12. Our Lord said, "Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee" (Matt. 11:21-24).

CONCLUSION:

From H.A. Ironside: Years ago, I was talking to a little group of boys and girls in a Sunday school in San Francisco. I was trying to illustrate like this, "How sad to know, dear girls and boys, each time you say 'No' to the Lord Jesus, your heart gets a little harder. If you keep on saying 'No,' the heart gets harder and harder and harder until by-and-by God calls it a heart of stone. You no longer care about the things of God, but persist in spurning His grace. You will, therefore, die in your sins." So I was pleading with those boys and girls to give their hearts to Jesus in their early days.

There was one dear little tot there, only five years old (and we sometimes think these little folk take nothing in), whose *eyes* were fastened on me as I spoke. Her mother brought her to Sunday school and then took her home, and on the way home she had not a word to say. She was thinking of her own dear father who never went to church or Sunday school, who never went to hear the Word of God. When she got to the house, there sat the father smoking his cigar with the Sunday paper spread around him. The little girl darted in ahead of her mother and up into her father's arms she leapt, and said, "Daddy, Daddy, feel your heart! Is it getting like stone?" He said, "What are you talking about?" She said, "Well, the man at Sunday school said if you say 'No' to Jesus, you are going to get a stone in your stomach! Have you got a stone there? Oh, Daddy, I hope you haven't, for if you have, you can't be saved." The father turned to her mother and said angrily, "What have they been telling this child, anyway?" Then the mother explained a little more fully. When he saw the tears in the wife's *eyes* and felt the arms of his little girl about his neck, and heard her saying, "Oh, Daddy, don't go on saying 'No' to Jesus," he looked up and said, "Well, I think I had better settle this thing." He got down on his knees and yielded his life to Christ. What a mercy he came in time! What a solemn thing it is to say "No" to the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ.