

The Crisis of Unbelief

John 12:37-50

The apostle John wrote his gospel with the express purpose of persuading people to believe that “Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (20:31). Some people, however, refuse to be convinced, and harden their hearts against the truth.

John describes three crises of unbelief where people resist the fact that Jesus is “the way, the truth, and the life” (14:6).

- First crisis (6:66) – many disciples walked away, even though Jesus is “the way.”
- Second crisis (12:37-50) – Many would not believe even though Jesus is “the truth.”
- Third crisis (19) – Jesus is crucified even though he is “the life.”

In 12:37-50, John describes four phases of unbelief and issues a climactic appeal to believe on Jesus. The central crisis is one of belief and faith. **We must choose to put our faith in the Scriptures, in the Father, and in the message of Jesus. Faith leads to eternal life.**

The phases of Israel’s unbelief (37-43)

- They did not believe (37-38)

Despite the many miracles Jesus performed, the majority of the Jews did not believe on him. John had sounded this theme of national unbelief from the beginning of the book (1:11).

John viewed Isaiah 53:1 as predicting Israel’s rejection of her Messiah. The “report” people rejected was Jesus’ teaching and the evidence of the “arm of the Lord” was Jesus’ miracles.

- They could not believe (39)

Because the nation of Israel had constantly rejected God and Jesus, God judicially hardened their hearts. God punished them with judicial blindness and deadened hearts.

- They should not believe (40-41)

Isaiah saw a vision of God’s glory and was sent to proclaim a message to Israel (Isaiah 6:1-8). God told Isaiah, however, that the people would not welcome his ministry, because God would harden their hearts (Isaiah 6:9-10). John saw this prophecy fulfilled in the ministry of Jesus.

- They would not confess their faith (42-43)

While many of the Jews rejected Jesus, some believed on him, including some of the rulers. However, they would not admit their belief because they were afraid of the consequences. They valued the praise of people more than the praise of God.

Choose to Believe! (44-50)

John added Jesus' words as a climactic appeal to his readers to believe on Jesus. When and where he spoke these words is not indicated. This exhortation summarizes and restates some of the major points that John recorded of Jesus' earlier teaching. These themes include faith, Jesus as the One sent by the Father, light and darkness, judgment now and later, and eternal life.

The fact that Jesus shouted these words shows their importance (44).

- Jesus is one with the Father; to believe in one is to believe in the other (44-45).
- Jesus is the embodiment of truth and light. Rather than accept a certain set of facts, we are to believe in a person named Jesus (46).
- Jesus did not come into the world to condemn anyone. He came to save those who believe his message. If we choose not to believe and reject the message, we condemn ourselves (47-48).
- Rather than pursue his own agenda, everything Jesus does is the will of the Father (49).
- The reason the Father sent the Son to earth was to provide humanity with the ability to receive eternal life (50).

Put your faith in the Scriptures, in the Father, and in the message of Jesus.