
JOHN: THAT YOU MAY BELIEVE

OH LORD, HELP US SEE & BELIEVE

A message presented by Pastor Marc Minter
to First Baptist Church of Diana, TX on April 29, 2017

INTRODUCTION

God has revealed Himself profoundly and compellingly in His word, and this is sometimes overwhelming to us. This is as we should expect. Wouldn't it be surprising to learn about an infinite, omnipotent, and holy God that never surprised or confounded us? God, by definition, will regularly surprise and confound those who seek to know Him better. In this message, we learn God's explanation for the reason we encounter unbelief in relation to Christ and the Gospel. With God's help, we will delve into the mysteries of God's gracious grace.

MESSAGE MADE SIMPLE

“[God] has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them.’ Isaiah said these things because he saw [Christ’s] glory and spoke of him.” (Jn. 12:40-41).

The reasons for our self-confidence may be less clear, but the fact that we are quite sure of ourselves is obvious. Some may not readily admit to this, citing low self-esteem studies, epidemic reports of psychological depression, or personal feelings of doubt and fear. But many people are actually very confident about their spiritual well-being and understanding.

It seems that Western culture has produced a panorama of spiritual beliefs that is more eclectic than any other in human history. Simultaneously, people seem more confident than ever that their beliefs are valid and trustworthy. One can believe virtually anything, and most people will affirm the validity and truthfulness of that belief.

While our confidence may be high, the Bible gives us good reason to distrust our spiritual eyes. In fact, the Bible teaches that fallen humans are naturally blind to spiritual realities. As John (the Gospel writer) records the rampant unbelief he saw, he also explained the reason for it.

Only God can open blind eyes, and we pray that He will help us to see and believe the glorious Savior – Jesus Christ.

JOHN 12:34-43 (ESV)

34 So the crowd answered him, “We have heard from the Law that the Christ remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?”

35 So Jesus said to them, “The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. 36 While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.”

When Jesus had said these things, he departed and hid himself from them.

37 Though he had done so many signs before them, **they still did not believe in him**, 38 so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: “Lord, who has believed what he heard from us, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?”

39 Therefore they could not believe.

For again Isaiah said, 40 “He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them.”

41 Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him.

42 Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; 43 for **they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.**

THE POINT I'M AIMING AT TODAY

Unbelief is spiritual blindness to Christ's glory; therefore, let us praise and plead with God for spiritual sight.

MESSAGE OUTLINE

(1) JOHN EXPLAINS THE SHOCKING UNBELIEF

(2) THEY CANNOT BELIEVE BECAUSE THEY WILL NOT BELIEVE

(3) WHO, THEN, CAN BELIEVE?

(4) APPLICATION: OH LORD, HELP US SEE & BELIEVE!

MESSAGE

(1) JOHN EXPLAINS THE SHOCKING UNBELIEF

- *The Unbelief is Shocking*

- This Jerusalem crowd was full of people who had seen (or at least heard about) all sorts of signs Jesus had done...
 - Jesus even told many of them on a previous occasion, “**Even though you do not believe me [that is “my words”], believe my works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father**” (Jn. 10:38).
- This Jerusalem crowd had seen and/or heard that Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead (Jn. 12:9, 17-18).
- In anticipation of Jesus’ arrival in Jerusalem, a “**large crowd**” welcomed Him with the song of “**Hosanna**,” proclaiming Him as “**the King of Israel**” (Jn. 12:13).
- And yet, John tells us, “**Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him**” (v37).

- *John thinks it is necessary to explain unbelief*

- After all of this, how could anyone disbelieve Jesus?!
 - **Remember John’s goal: “These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (Jn. 20:31).**

- **Why, then, did so many people not believe?**
 - John explains, “37 Though he had done so many signs before them, **they still did not believe in him, 38 so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:**
 - *‘Lord, who has believed what he heard from us, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?’*”
 - “39 **Therefore they could not believe.**”
 - “For again Isaiah said, 40 **‘He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them.’**”
 - “41 **Isaiah said these things** because he saw his glory and **spoke of him.**”
 - **2 Things are clear: (1)** John says Isaiah was speaking about Jesus; and **(2)** God planned for His Messiah to be rejected.

- **Isaiah’s call to prophetic ministry**
 - “8 And I [Isaiah] heard the voice of the Lord saying, “*Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?*”
Then I said, “*Here I am! Send me.*”

9 And he [God] said, “*Go, and say to this people: “ ‘**Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.**’ 10 Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; **lest they see** with their eyes, and **hear** with their ears, and **understand** with their hearts, and **turn** and be healed.”*” (Isaiah 6:8–10)
 - In summary, **Isaiah’s preaching is for judgment** against an obstinate people... **God would make His words** through Isaiah **harden the hearer** and not soften them.

- Like Isaiah, Jesus' ministry was to an obstinate people
 - *(1) John sees this prophecy ultimately fulfilled in Jesus*
 - “**Isaiah said these things** because he saw his [Jesus] glory and **spoke of him**” (v41)
 - John told us at the beginning of his Gospel that Jesus would be rejected by an obstinate people
 - “**The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him**” (Jn. 1:9-11).
 - Indeed, Jesus Himself said that His words and deeds would serve as judgment against obstinate people...
 - Jesus said, “**For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind**” (Jn. 9:39).
- The obstinance in both cases is planned by God
 - God planned for Isaiah to be rejected as a prophet
 - God said to Isaiah, “**Go, and say to this people: “Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive**” (Is. 6:9).
 - *(2) God planned for His Messiah to be rejected*
 - John applies the same passage (Isaiah 6) to Jesus' ministry: “**He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them**” (v40).
 - John says, “**Therefore they could not believe**” (v39).
- Friends, **what do you think about this passage?**
 - I am going to tell you what I believe we should do with this passage, but **before I do...** I just want you to **think a second** about **what you would do with it.**

- **Who blinded people’s eyes** in Isaiah’s day and in Jesus’ earthly ministry? **God clearly did.**
 - **Who hardened people’s hearts** in Isaiah’s day and in Jesus’ earthly ministry? **God clearly did.**
 - **Who did not want people to turn** and be healed in Isaiah’s day and in Jesus’ earthly ministry? **God clearly did.**

- **What do you think of that?!**
 - Do you want to **pretend like we never read this?**
 - Do you want to imagine that **God is schizophrenic?** Do you want to **point to another passage** that seems to **contradict** this one and **pick the passage you like?**

- Isn’t **all of Scripture** meant to teach, to correct, to comfort, and to grow you into the **spiritually mature Christian** God wants you to be?

- **This passage is in your Bible... What will you do with it?**

- **Unbelief as Spiritual Blindness is not unique to this crowd**
 - **Seeing vs Blindness** is all over John’s Gospel (so too is Light vs Dark, Life vs Death, Belief vs Unbelief...)
 - Jesus said elsewhere, “**Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God**” (Jn. 3:3).
 - Jesus said that Abraham was able to “**see [His] day and rejoice,**” but the unbelieving crowd wanted to kill Jesus because they did not see Him as Abraham did (Jn. 8:56-59).
 - Jesus healed a man blind from birth who testified, “**One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see**” (Jn. 9:25). But the Jewish leaders were “**blind**” (Jn. 9:39).

- The Apostle Paul explains **spiritual blindness** like this:
 - “Our gospel... is veiled to those who are perishing [i.e. dead in unbelief]. In their case the god of this world has **blinded the minds** of the unbelievers, to keep them from **seeing** the light of the gospel of **the glory of Christ**, who is the image of God” (2 Corinthians 4:3–4).
 - Paul summarizes fallen humanity by saying, “**None** is righteous... **no one** understands; **no one** seeks for God... **no one** does good, not even one...
there is no fear of God before their eyes” (Rom. 3:10-18).
 - Or to use the analogy of **spiritual death** rather than **blindness**, we may read Eph. 2:1-2:
 - “**you were dead** in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, **following** the course of this **world**, **following** the **prince** of the **power** of the **air**, the **spirit** that is now at work in the **sons of disobedience**...”
- So then, **spiritual blindness** is not something **God must actively impose** on this sinner or that one...
- It is **already present** – a present effect of the fall (Gen. 3).

(Segue) **So, what do we do with the statement “they could not believe” (v39)!**

(2) THEY CANNOT BELIEVE BECAUSE THEY WILL NOT BELIEVE

- **At least one kind of unbelief is explained as “love for glory”**
 - “many even of the authorities **believed in him**, but for fear of the Pharisees **they did not confess** it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; **for they loved the glory that comes from man** more than the glory that comes from God” (v42-43)
 - Jesus said elsewhere, “**How can you believe**, when you receive **glory** from one another and **do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?**” (Jn. 5:44).

- This “glory exchange” is also not unique to this crowd
 - ***Unbelief or Spiritual Blindness is natural to fallen humans***
 - Paul diagnoses fallen humanity in the opening chapter of his letter to the church in Rome: “**18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth** [i.e. actively resist belief]. **19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse** [their unbelief is willful]. **21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things”** (Romans 1:18–23).
 - ***Spiritual blindness is the theological statement***, though sinners usually do not understand or admit their condition
 - Jesus said, “**you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked”** (Rev. 3:17).
 - Friends, do you understand that **the Bible is not going to mostly affirm what you already believe** about **God**, about **yourself**, about **life**, about **goodness**, about **love**, about **justice**, and about a whole host of other things?
 - Did you notice that the Bible **diagnosed** you with a **self-deception problem**?
 - Do you know what that means?
 - The Bible is going to tell you things... **not just** things you don’t yet know... but **things you don’t really want to know!**

- I think **today's passage is a perfect example** of something we **not only** don't naturally know... **we naturally resist** the idea, even when it is plainly put before us.
 - I think this concept – all humans are naturally blind to Christ's beauty – is so **scary** and **repulsive** to us because it begs the **question...**

(Segue) *Who, then, can believe?!*

(3) WHO, THEN, CAN BELIEVE?

- ***God can and does do the impossible!***
 - Upon hearing just how hard it would be for a sinner to turn from unbelief, Jesus' disciples asked, "**Who then can be saved**" (Matt. 19:25).
 - Jesus replied, "**With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible**" (v26).
 - John, himself, testified, "**We have seen his glory, glory as the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth**" (Jn. 1:14).
 - But, how is it that blind sinners see?!

- ***God gives light and sight to those in blinding darkness!***
 - Let's return to one of the passages we have looked at already.
 - Paul said, "**Our gospel... is veiled to those who are perishing [i.e. dead in unbelief]. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. [but] ...God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ**" (2 Cor. 4:3–6).
 - And, how is it that sight comes to unbelieving sinners?!

- **God makes faith alive by the power of His word!**
 - **“everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved”** (Rom. 10:13).
 - **“How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?”** (v14-15).

“As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!’” (v15)

“But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?’” (v16)... sound familiar? Isaiah 6 again!

“So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:13–17).
 - Peter tells Christians, **“you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God”** (1 Peter 1:23).
 - So then, **spiritual blindness** is something **God overcomes** Himself...

(1) through His **word...**

and **(2)** by the life-giving power of His Holy **Spirit!**

(4) APPLICATION: OH LORD, HELP US SEE & BELIEVE!

1. Do you have sight and belief today?

- a. Do you see Christ as glorious?
 - i. Or are you waiting for a time in life that isn't so busy or so complicated or so full of opportunity?
- b. Most people in East Texas don't come right out and reject Jesus, but I wonder if you are like those we meet in v43...
 - i. They loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.
- c. Do you see Christ as most desirable, most precious...? Is He your greatest treasure?
 - i. Or do you plan to treasure Jesus later?

I'll treasure Jesus later; life's too busy now.

There are jobs and friends and things to do,
I will fit Him in at some point... somehow.

I'll treasure Jesus later; He has time to spare.

My days are full of work and play,
and surely, He knows that I really care.

I'll treasure Jesus later; there is no urgent need.

I remember hearing Jesus loves sinners,
and I'm sure He will wait for me.

2. Do you praise God for what you see and believe?

- a. If you do see Christ as glorious, do you praise God for that?
 - i. Or do you think you are better, or more sincere, or more humble, or more spiritually sensitive than those poor sinners who do not see Jesus as glorious?

- b. If you do see Christ as glorious, does today's topic drive you toward worship?
 - i. Are you filled with wonder and gratitude that God would open your wretched eyes?
 - ii. Does your mouth long to praise Him, do your arms long to serve Him, do your feet long to follow Him?

3. Do you pray that God would grant sight and belief?

- a. If sinners are naturally blind to the glory of Christ, and God is the one who gives sinners new eyes...
 - i. Then why don't we desperately plead with God to do what only He can?
 - ii. Why don't we courageously talk about the one and only thing that God uses to bring about spiritual sight – His word?

Major Point: Unbelief is spiritual blindness to Christ's glory; therefore, let us praise and plead with God for spiritual sight.

Oh Lord, Help Us See and Believe!

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

Why Don't People Believe? by Mark Dever (sermon audio)

<http://www.capitolhillbaptist.org/sermon/why-dont-people-believe/>

Belief in Jesus: Its Barriers and Blessings by John Piper

<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/belief-in-jesus-its-barriers-and-blessings>

When God's Patience Runs Out by John MacArthur

<https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/43-65/when-gods-patience-runs-out-part-1>

The One Who Sent Me by RC Sproul

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/sermons/one-sent-me/>