

**The Nature of Unbelief**  
**Pastor Ty Blackburn**  
**John 11:44-53**  
**October 6, 2013**

Please turn with me in your Bibles to John 11. We've looked for a number of weeks at the climactic miracle in Jesus' ministry, the raising of Lazarus from the dead. Today we're going to look at the aftermath of that miracle. What we're going to see is that what God spotlights for us after the miracle of the raising of Lazarus is the horror of unbelief. It is really one of those things where you need to stop from time to time and reflect on the order of events that the Scripture records for us.

When we talked about the miracle of Lazarus' resurrection, you have this incredible miracle. We talked about it last week, the power that was manifested in Jesus' word, as He spoke those three words: "Lazarus, come forth." He not only raised a man from the dead, but He recreated the cells in his body. Lazarus had been dead for four days, decay had set in, the cells were breaking down, the veins no longer held together, the blood had drained to the back of his body. He was in a wretched, decomposing condition, and he is instantly restored. When you see a miracle like that, the wonder of it, ask yourself, "What would you like to know about next?"

The text ends with Jesus' words, "Unbind him and let him go," and I'd like to hear from Lazarus. Why did God not choose to let us go with Lazarus after they've unwound him, into the house, and hear the joyful conversation of Lazarus with his sisters? To hear them rejoicing in Jesus' presence? That's what I would have voted for, but that's not what God gives us. What He gives us instead is a contrast between the people that saw the glory of this miracle. We see on the one hand, those who believe, and on the other hand, those who do not believe. That is the thing God wants us to see. So what we're going to look at this morning, in Verses 45-53, the aftermath of the miracle of Lazarus' resurrection, is the horror of unbelief, the destructive power of unbelief. Look with me at those verses. I just mentioned that Jesus' last words at the tomb are, "Unbind him and let him go," in Verse 44, and then it says:

***John 11:45-53 ~ Therefore many of the Jews who came to Mary, and saw what He had done, believed in Him. 46 But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them the things which Jesus had done.***

***47 Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, “What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs. 48 If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.” 49 But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, “You know nothing at all, 50 nor do you take into account that it is expedient for you that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation not perish.” 51 Now he did not say this on his own initiative, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation, 52 and not for the nation only, but in order that He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. 53 So from that day on they planned together to kill Him.***

Let's pray together.

*Our Father, we come to You this morning asking that You might open our minds and our hearts. That You might break our wills, and You might lead us into a fuller understanding of the glory of Your Son, and the rightness of His claims. We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.*

We see here the horror of unbelief. He doesn't allow for us to go into the room there in Bethany, into the house, for a feast that surely happened, for the joy, and the celebration, and the singing, and the praise. He doesn't allow us to see that because He wants us to instead marvel that in the wake of a miracle of this magnitude, that the effect was the death sentence of Jesus Christ. That the religious leaders were not moved by the eye-witness testimony that was conclusive, that was compelling, that was overwhelming to believe. They were moved by that same evidence to resist, and to kill the Son of God. In that we see the ugly nature of unbelief.

John is giving this, remember he is ordering his description of what happened. He is recounting to us in a chronological way, but selectively. He is not telling us everything that happened in Jesus' life. None of the Gospel-writers are. They are telling us exactly what they want us to see to complete the portrait of Jesus. There are so many miracles that they could talk about. John tells us at the end of his Gospel, the last words in his Gospel, John 21, that many more things did Jesus in the presence of His disciples that if they were all written down, I don't suppose there would be books to hold them all. The world would not be able to hold all of the books, so it is a selective description.

He is writing to 1st Century, predominantly a Jewish audience. The Jews are spread out throughout the Roman world, around the Mediterranean, and John is writing this Gospel around 85 or 90 A.D., 55 or 60 years after the events described, when Jesus raises Lazarus, and just weeks before the cross. John writes these words 55 or 60 years later to convince a Jewish audience, and Jewish proselytes, those who were in the synagogues but who have rejected Christ, that Jesus truly is the Christ, and that they should not be swayed by the numbers of unbelievers, nor the intensity of the unbelievers. But they should see that those who are not believing are not in any way acting rationally, but are acting irrationally.

This is a very applicable thing for us today as well. When you live in a world where the majority, the overwhelming majority rejects Christ, and then within the minority of those who affirm Christ, a number only pretend to follow Christ, but deny aspects of His teaching. They deny the reality of the atonement, deny His authority over all of life, deny His word. When you live in a sea of unbelief around you, and unbelief presents such a good picture. The unbelievers present themselves as rational unbelievers. “We’re rational people. We’re open. If there were more evidence I would be a believer.” The cacophony, the loudness of all those voices saying that. I’m not saying they are always saying that, but when you talk to people, they want to present themselves as rational unbelievers. “If it weren’t for the facts, I might want to believe what you, foolish person, believe.” But the reality is that is not true at all. They are self-deceived. Unbelief is a power in the heart, the essence of sin is resistance to God, and it doesn’t matter how much evidence you give, if the will is not bound and broken they will not believe.

We are going to see that the nature of unbelief is not rational, but irrational. It is not a function of the reason, it is a function of the will. It is not that they can’t believe, looking at the facts, it is that they *won’t* believe. We need to understand that because we don’t need to be swayed when the tide of unbelief grows around us. We shouldn’t be surprised, and we certainly shouldn’t be shaken. We should be confirmed in the fact this was what we know the nature of sin to be, and we should marvel that God has granted that we could see. His grace has touched us and opened our eyes, so we should be patient even, and have pity rather than anger. So the nature of unbelief is really our subject, and I want to consider this under two headings this morning as we look at the text. I think two things jump out at us. We’re going to look first at the foolishness of unbelief, and secondly, the futility of unbelief.

## 1) The Foolishness of Unbelief:

So first, the foolishness of unbelief. That unbelief, as I said, is really irrational. I mean, Psalm 14:1 tells us, *The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God."* It is not the reasonable thing to say, it is ridiculous, it is just couched. I remember being a young believer going off to college, to a Baptist college no less, which is doing much better than it was then, Shorter College is where I went to school in Rome, Georgia. When Patti and I got there we expected it was going to be a place where we would grow in our faith. Well we did grow in our faith, but it wasn't through the help of the teachers at the school. I don't know if there were any Christians on the faculty. I mean, there may have been a few, a couple that seemed to profess faith, but many were just open, avowed atheists. They had that aura about them. "You know we are just too reasonable to believe the mythologies of the Bible. Evolution is clearly a proven fact." You know when you hear that, with the right air of authority, you should be cowed into silence. It shakes the foundations a little bit, but the reality is, when you really look under the rock, there is nothing of substance in their arguments. There is only irrational, willful resistance to the kingship of God.

It is foolish, we see it here illustrated in such a powerful way in the people that John sets before our eyes. In fact, under this first point, 'The Foolishness of Unbelief', what I want us to do is look at the people and then consider a principle. So there are two sub-points under the first point, 'The Foolishness of Unbelief'. Let's look at the people who illustrate really for us a principle that we'll consider. So first of all, looking at the people.

### A) Looking at the People:

When we look at the people, we see first of all, the eyewitnesses, and secondly, the Pharisees and the High Priests. But first, the eye witnesses. He tells us in Verse 45-46 that many of the Jews that came to Mary, and saw what He had done, believed in Him, but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them the things which Jesus had done. We are encouraged by the fact that many believed. We're not told about the nature of the belief. We know that from previous passages, sometimes there is a shallow belief among those who at first affirm faith. It doesn't last because it really is a heart change. We've seen that in particular in John 2:23 through the third chapter. When you read that carefully, that is what he is saying, that true belief continues to believe. Those who fall away never really knew. So to be truly saved is to always be saved, but it will be evident in the fact that you continue.

He doesn't tell us about those folks. He says, "Many, who saw what He had done, believed in Him, but some (and the implication is some) who saw what He had done, some who had seen what He had done went to the Pharisees and told them the things which Jesus had done." We might have at first hoped that they were going to tell the Pharisees so the Pharisees might believe as evangelists. "Let me tell you what Jesus did today. You need to believe in Him." That is not the case because of the contrast, but some of them went. There were people who saw the miracle, who were there when Jesus spoke into that tomb, after the stone was rolled away, and said those three words, "Lazarus, come forth," over the protest of Lazarus' sister who said, "By now he stinks," they saw the dead body come to life and walk out of the grave, and yet they would not believe.

In fact, the word, when it talks about '*they saw*', who came to Mary and *saw* what He had done, in Verse 45. An interesting word, translated '*see*' or '*saw*', in older translations of the New American Standard, older versions of the New American Standard, it used to say '*beheld*'. I think it is a better word, "Those who *beheld* what He had done," because the word means, the different words in Greek that translate into '*seeing*'. This word means '*to see with wonder, to see and consider*'. It doesn't mean just, "Oh, I saw that." No, it means, "I saw it, I considered it, I thought about it, I reflected on it." That is what this word means. So it means a knowing seeing. "We saw what He did," and yet they are not changed. They go to tell on Him, to tell the Pharisees the danger of what is happening. They then called the chief priest, and the chief priest and Pharisees convene a council. They gather the Sanhedrin, the rulers of Israel, the spiritual leadership.

So we see in the first group, they were eye witnesses. They had actually seen what He did, and yet they would not believe. They saw that miracle and they did not give Him honor, and follow Him, they rejected Him. So that is unbelief in the face of overwhelming evidence. How do you see that and not bow before that? That is the first contrast as we look at the people.

## B) The Pharisees:

The second thing though is the Pharisees, and the chief priests. Verse 47:

***John 11:47 ~ Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, "What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs.***

Now they are going to conclude that because He is performing many signs, “We need to kill Him.” That is what they are going to do, they are going to set their hearts on killing Him. From that day on, they’ve planned together to kill Him, Verse 53. Caiaphas is going to say, in a moment of audacity, “We need to kill Him so that we can protect the nation.” What I want you to note though, is why they are killing Him. The reason is not because He is a false teacher. It is not stated, it is not because He is a charlatan who is pulling the wool over people’s eyes. He’s got an act that He is pulling off, to make it look like He is healing people. No, they say, “This man is performing many signs.” He is not just performing signs, He is performing many signs. In fact, the NAS translates it well, it is *‘is performing’*. It is a continuous present. The idea is, “This man is continually performing signs, therefore we’ve got to stop Him.”

Now what is ironic about that is that these are the people who are to lead the nation spiritually. They are the people who should be best informed about the Old Testament, and one of the things the Old Testament makes clear is that when God sends somebody, a prophet, or eventually the Messiah, that they will always be confirmed by signs. This is the way God confirmed Moses’ leadership, or the prophets leadership. What they said would happen, and they often would do miracles. You see it in little bunches, particularly around Moses’ ministry, Elijah and Elisha, and then Jesus. The sense of which these new moments in history, God authenticates His messenger with miracle-working power. They said, the Jews realized, “He is doing many signs.” That is, He is performing *many* miracles.

Now turn back over to Matthew 4, let’s just think about the magnitude of the miracles that they are talking about. Matthew 4:23-25. So many Old Testament passages spoke about the fact that when the Messiah comes, He will do certain things. Certain things will authenticate that He is the Messiah.

***Matthew 4:23-25 ~ Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people.***

***24 The news about Him spread throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all who were ill, those suffering with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics; and He healed them. 25 Large crowds followed Him from Galilee and the Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan.***

Everybody knows, this is early in Jesus' ministry, that He is healing everybody. It is not like He just did a couple of cool miracles. I mean, that would have been something if you just had the resurrection of Lazarus, but He is healing everywhere He goes. Someone had said, "It is almost as if Jesus banished, during His three year ministry, He banished disease, and illness, and death from Galilee and parts of Judea." He just removed it. Can you imagine that? Everybody who is being treated for cancer at the various hospitals. If Jesus were here today, suddenly, no more chemo, no more radiation, you are well. Think about what that would be like, to hear those kinds of testimonies. People that were born with various birth defects, inability to think clearly because their minds were compromised in the womb, they were born with deficiencies. Jesus touches them and they are well. The people that you can think about right now, that you know like that, imagine that all of them are well because of this teacher that is there. Such is the magnitude of Jesus' impact and His ministry.

The Gospel writers are straining to tell us. As John said, I mentioned earlier, he said that if all the things that He had done were written down, the books that would describe all that He had done, the world wouldn't be able to hold them. Matthew 9:35, follow Matthew's picture of Jesus. He says in Matthew 9:35, this is later on in the ministry:

***Matthew 9:35 ~ Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness.***

He didn't just do it for a few months, a year later, this is what He is doing. On His forays into Jerusalem, though He doesn't do as many miracles in Jerusalem because of the hardness of their heart, and unbelief, He does some extraordinary miracles. We've seen in Jerusalem, in John's Gospel, he records for us the healing of the man at the Pool of Bethesda who was sick for 38 years. He heals him, and the Pharisees, because He healed on the Sabbath, want to kill Him. The Messiah will be the one who makes lame to walk, according to Isaiah.

Then the next time, the next miracle we see in Jerusalem, Jesus heals a man born blind. He puts clay on His eyes and tells him to go wash, and the man who was born blind sees. The Pharisees launch an investigation into it, and the investigation should authenticate the miracle. It does. They called the parents, "Yes, we know he was born blind. We don't know how he sees, but he sees. He was born blind. Yes, he sees." That man is telling them, "I've been telling you. Jesus, He's the one that healed me." That miracle itself sent shock waves throughout Jerusalem, they are

talking about it all over town. And Isaiah three times tells us that there is no record in the Old Testament of someone being healed from blindness. They were healed from other things when Elisha or Elijah were healing, but nobody was healed from blindness. Three times in the prophecy of Isaiah it said that the Messiah will open the eyes of the blind.

Now the men who know the Bible, who were teaching the Scriptures, ought to know that, and they do know that. Then they hear about this miracle from eyewitnesses who have hurried from Bethany, a two-hour walk to Jerusalem. Some of those who saw the man come out of the grave go to Jerusalem, tell the Pharisees. The Pharisees convene a council, they consider the fact, and they say in their own words, “This man is performing many signs,” their testimony itself, a Jew reading that. They confirm, the enemies of Christ are confirming He performed many signs. They can’t deny it, it is undeniable, yet the question is: Why won’t they believe? They don’t reject Christ based on a reasonable consideration of the facts. You see that? It is an irrational rejection and repudiation of the facts right before their eyes. That is the nature of unbelief. As people look at the facts right before their eyes, it is not that they cannot believe, they will not believe.

John has made this point clear, what they should see. Let me just show you this too. The word ‘*signs*’ I’ve talked about, it is an important word in John’s Gospel. The word used there when they say, “He performed many *signs*,” Verse 47. It occurs 19 times in the Gospel of John, and John has organized his whole Gospel around this, he says, “Many other things did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, but these *signs*, these things are written that you may believe that He is the Christ, the Son of the living God,” John 20:30. Then also John 21:25, I mentioned earlier. If all of them were told, the world wouldn’t be able to hold the books.

But you go back to, just a few chapters back, look with me at how the regular Jew, not the educated Jew, just the Jew that had gone to Sunday school so to speak. It would have been Saturday school, of course, back then at the synagogue, but you know what I’m saying. Just the church-going Jew, the synagogue-going Jew, when they saw the miracles of Jesus, look how they connected the sign with what it signifies. Remember the word ‘*sign*’ does mean that which it signifies something. It is a work, an act, a miracle that signifies something beyond the miracle itself. It authenticates, it verifies.

John 6:14, right after He has fed the 5,000, and they pick up 12 baskets of fragments from five barley loaves and two fish. Probably a total of 20,000 people,

5,000 men along with women and children. Twenty thousand people were fed with five little barley loaves. It was like five rolls, not loaves of bread. This is one guy's lunch. It is five little rolls and two little fish, and He feeds 20,000 people, 5,000 men. Look at Verse 14:

***John 6:14 ~ Therefore when the people saw the sign (same word) which He had performed, they said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world."***

"This miracle means that this man is somebody. No doubt about it. At least He must be the prophet spoken of by Moses when he said, 'After me the Lord will raise up for you another prophet from among your own countrymen,'" Deuteronomy 18, Verse 15 and following, "'and you will listen to Him.' Surely this is the great prophet." Turn a chapter over to John 7:31, there is not a miracle in John 7 told to us, but it shows again how the news of so many miracles has infiltrated the whole society. In John 7, you have the Pharisees openly seeking to kill Jesus. Jesus comes to the feast and He basically accuses them of wanting to kill Him, and the crowd says, "Nobody is trying to kill You," and later they do acknowledge that, "Yeah, really, the Pharisees are." He says, in Verse 31, you have one of these statements again.

***John 7:31 ~ But many of the crowd believed in Him; and they were saying, "When the Christ comes, He will not perform more signs than those which this man has, will He?"***

Do you see that? "The magnitude of this man's ministry means that He must be the Christ. Surely there could not be someone who would perform more signs than this one." They know when the Christ comes, He is going to perform signs, Jesus has performed them. So the question is: Why don't they believe? The evidence is compelling. In fact, John 2:11, let me just mention that too. When Jesus turns the water into wine, John describes it, he says, "This was the first sign which Jesus did among His disciples, and revealed His glory." These signs are revealing the glory of Christ. They are revealing the greatness, the supremacy, the uniqueness of Christ, and a rational observer, if someone could be objective and rational, they would bow the knee and worship Christ.

But they don't, and this brings up again the principle. Why is it that people don't believe? It is not for a lack of knowledge, it's not for a lack of proof. The principle is this: Unbelief is not rooted in reason, but it is grounded in the will. Objections to the truthfulness of God's word, or to the truthfulness and reality of the person

and work of Christ, when people reject Him, they are not rejecting Him on the basis of open, honest evaluation of the facts, they are rejecting Him because of prejudice and an unwillingness to examine the evidence because they have a moral determination to protect themselves, and their will. Because man instinctively knows in his sin nature, that if I accept Christ, that means I lose everything. You see this in the passage. You see this principle illustrated in the discussion that they have back in John 11. What did they say?

***John 11:47-48 ~ ... For this man is performing many signs. 48 If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him,...***

Isn't that astonishing that they said that? They can see the way that He is performing these miracles, if He keeps doing what He is doing, everybody will be forced to believe, "So we've got to stop it," and why do they stop it? Look:

***John 11:48 ~ ... all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation."***

Their concern is for their place and their nation. In fact, the word order of this in the Greek is emphatic on the fact that it basically says, "The Romans will come and take away from us the place in the nation." In Greek, there's complete flexibility of word order. Word order in English follows more of a certain pattern. You have to say things in a certain order or at least it's more rigid than other languages. So the word order emphasizes they're protecting themselves. They're protecting their place. They want to remain in a position of power. They want to keep their lives the way they are. That's what they're thinking about.

They're not thinking about the fact that, "Wait a minute, the Messiah is here. All the promises of God have come true. Because of what He has done, we need to listen to Him. We need to worship Him." That's what a rational, thoughtful person would do, but you see that sin is not rational. It's true we're all irrational. We're born irrational, and we are bent on our own self in every turn. Self-realization, self-fulfillment, self-actualization, self, self, self, self, that's the nature of unbelief. It's the desire to exalt self, and that is the great commitment of every person, every child of Adam. You see it in the baby's crib. I mean, think about it. Think about the rage and anger you can hear. A baby wakes up in the middle of the night and it's just a few months old, or maybe just weeks, or days old, or hours old, and, "AAAAHHH!!" There's no thought to, "Mom's probably had a rough night." There's not only no thought to that, but rage that if you don't get there, I'm going

to punish you. My little mind doesn't even understand what's going on, but I know this—it's all about me.

As we get older what we do is we get more clever. We realize that we can't act like that overtly because it doesn't work. We learn along the way somewhere that it doesn't work. Even if we don't have parents that are very disciplinarian, you still learn that it doesn't work to act like that. So we become manipulative and we learn how to even deceive ourselves. But the reality is unbelief is a desire to protect the citadel of our own autonomy. We want to be in charge, and if we acknowledge who God is, we won't be in charge. If we really acknowledge it, we will not be in charge anymore, and that is the commitment. It is a suicidal commitment of every fallen person. This is why the Bible says there is none who seeks for God. There is no one who understands. Even when we think we're seeking God, we're not unless God changes our hearts.

That's what John is telling us. That's what Jesus told Nicodemus. Remember when Nicodemus came to Jesus way back in John 3? Do you remember what he said to Him? He was a Pharisee and he said, "We know God is with You." How? "Because no one could do the works, the signs You're doing unless God was with Him. It's clear. It's irrefutable. God is with you." Why won't they believe? Because they don't want to lose their place, and Jesus said, "Nicodemus, you have a lot of religious knowledge..." I'm translating what He basically said to him when He said this. "You have a lot of religious knowledge. You're the teacher of Israel, and you don't understand that you must be born again, or you will not see the kingdom of God. You can't even see it when it's right before your eyes, unless God gives you a new heart." That is what we're seeing here.

We need new hearts because our heart determines what we will accept or not. We will not receive that which does not agree with our heart, and it is utterly ridiculous. I mean, these guys have not just compelling evidence, but they're buried under an avalanche of evidence. Really it's like they're lying under a pile of miracles. Think about an avalanche falls on you. An avalanche is snow. Work with me for a moment here. Unplanned illustrations are always dangerous. But an avalanche of snow, you walk outside and we can't imagine this, but snow slides off your roof and just knocks you down to the ground, and you roll over and say, "I don't think it's going to snow." But that's exactly what unbelievers do. The evidence is overwhelming, and they will not believe, and to help themselves continue as they're buried in snow, other people all around them come up with clever ways to talk about the fact that there is no snow, and they sound so intelligent about it.

From time to time, the veneer's pulled off, and you see it really obviously. One of the things I think is helpful when you talk to an unbeliever who is one of these prideful, I'm too intelligent to believe this, is as you just talk, you keep your level calm. You know what you're dealing with. You're dealing with someone who needs to be born again. You can't reason them into the kingdom. It's not a picture of your failure if you don't reason them into the kingdom. God didn't save them, or not yet. You just talk to them calmly and you watch them become emotional and angry. If you're so rational and objective about this, why can you not even entertain—let's take creation and evolution for a moment. Why is it that the evolutionists are so bent out of shape? If they think that we are the numbskulls who can't think, why is it that when we try to just talk about the possibility, they go haywire? Why is it they won't allow it to be taught in the schools as a possibility? You can't even get them to even entertain that discussion.

Let's look at the facts, guys. We see the world as it is. We all observe this world. We see facts about light. We see facts about the way things exist. I won't use the word 'created' yet. Just look at the animals that exist. Look at how things operate. Look at the universe. Let's just look at that, and now there are a couple of possibilities that come to mind. One is your possibility that it just happened and it's a process of chance and time—lots of time and chance. Can we postulate that it's also the possibility that God created... "NO, you cannot!" We're just trying to throw up a hypothesis and they go nuts, and they won't deal with it honestly.

I remember the movie a few years back, Ben Stein's *Expelled—No Intelligence Allowed*. It was an excellent little movie that he did about this, and basically he went around pointing out that there are more and more scientists who are becoming Creationists, Theists, because as they look at the evidence, and they're seeing it doesn't make sense to believe that there's not a Designer. You've probably heard the term intelligent design. Things are just made with too much complexity. The individual animals, all of the different ecosystems, there's so much complexity that when people look at it, it could not just happen. So these guys are getting fired from all of these open-minded universities. *We want to be open. We want to investigate everything... except that.* Why? Why do they get so emotional? It's because when we talk about this, they hear the echo of God's voice saying, "I have created you and I own you," and they will not have it. So don't be discouraged by their high-sounding arguments. And when the multitude is saying that, don't be discouraged. It's not surprising. And when it comes to the gospel, the very fact of the gospel, the fact that Jesus Christ is the Son of God is the most compelling evidence in history for that reality.

Praise God that history is littered with men who were skeptics and who set out to objectively look at the evidence. It's still happening in our century. Lee Stobel wrote a book *The Case for Christ*. He was a journalist who set out to prove that Jesus was not who He said He was, and he in the process opened his mind enough, and God gave him a new heart to see it, and he became a Christian. Josh McDowell, if you go back to the 19th century, the 20th century, person, after person, after person who looks at the evidence objectively, looks at the eyewitness testimony, considers is this just people trying to prop up some kind of false doctrine, look at it with the canons of history, and what they conclude is Jesus Christ not only lived, but He clearly did miracles, He was crucified on a Roman cross, and apparently when you look at the evidence, He rose from the dead. That's the objective when you look at it clearly, and this is why we can have great confidence when we say, "I just encourage you to open you mind, and read the Bible, and ask God that if it's true, tell Him that you're willing to obey it, because your biggest problem (and we can tell them this kindly) your biggest problem is my biggest problem too. It's not that we can't, it's that we won't." So that's the foolishness of unbelief. Then you see not only the foolishness of unbelief but also:

## 2) The Futility of Unbelief:

We see this illustrated in the unbelief of the chief priests and the Pharisees. Let's think about this. Futility, it does not come to what they hope it will come to. Unbelief is aimed at protecting what? It's aimed at protecting their place and their nation. They are so determined to protect their place and their nation that they will not bow the knee to Christ so that they can protect their place and their nation. It's incredible irony, and if you think about this, I mentioned earlier the timing. Remember Jesus heals Lazarus, and this counsel is happening around probably 30 A.D.. They determine to kill Him, and they're going to kill Him in just weeks on the cross. Fifty-five or sixty years later John's going to write this Gospel. So his readers know, "We know the time it happened." It's like 60 years ago.

That's like you and me talking about 1952-1953, the Korean War. We know the Korean War happened. I mean, we've all heard about it, right? We know people that fought there. So, it's that time lapse, and a lot of things have happened in between now and the Korean War. So these people know as they read this story, these guys wanted to kill Jesus because of what He did, so they could protect their place and their nation. They're people who are reading this 15 or 20 years after the most momentous event in Jewish history other than the coming of Christ.

Attached to it, really, is the destruction of Jerusalem. They were trying to protect their place and their nation, but what happened in 70 A.D. was their place and their nation were utterly wiped off the face of the earth. They were straining against God to protect their place and they lost it. Titus comes in 67 in a three and a half year siege of Jerusalem. Josephus the Jewish historian said blood ran literally in the streets because of the violence of the Romans, their rage and anger, merciless killing of thousands and thousands of Jews. They razed the temple to the ground. The place they were probably referring to was the temple, and their place in it, the priests, and that temple has been destroyed now for almost 2,000 years.

So even the intentions of man in his unbelief are completely futile. Now think about this. All unbelief really does aim at keeping one's place, one's position of authority just like theirs. They wanted their position of authority. We want our position of authority in our own life, our own affairs, and the unbeliever will not believe, because he wants his own authority. He wants to be the master of his fate, the captain of his soul. He wants to do it his way. You see how society celebrates all of that, don't they? But the reality is that they are living in a mirage.

Turn back over to John 8:44. Even as unbelievers proclaim their freedom, "We won't believe that stuff because we are free," they say. "We're free to fulfill our desires, our passions. You're the ones who are bound up," they tell us, but they're wrong. We're the ones that are free, and they're the ones that are bound up, and they're not free at all. Look what it says in John 8:44. Jesus, speaking to these Jews, said:

***John 8:44 ~ You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him.***

He's told them right before this, "You'll know the truth and the truth will make you free," and they said, "We've never been slaves to anyone." He says, "Everyone who sins is the slave of sin." He says, "You, as you think you're free, are in reality a slave." So that's the futility of unbelief. They reject God so that they can be free, but in reality they are in the greatest imaginable bondage, and it's not only futile because what they fear comes upon them, and it's already happening to them, but what they fear leads the unbeliever, and the spirit of unbelief is the desire to keep our place, and to keep our place, we have to push God out of His.

So what we see modeled for us is how Caiaphas illustrates for us this principle. He wants to pull Christ down so that he can stay on top, and the Jewish leadership is determined to destroy Christ, to tear Him down from His exalted position. His words are spoken in arrogance and malice, hatred. You see the hatred coming out.

***John 11:49 ~ ...“You know nothing at all,...”***

He’s talking to his friends. “You know nothing at all. You guys know nothing. You can’t even reason this out.” That’s what he says after that.

***John 11:49 ~ ...“You know nothing at all, 50 nor do you take into account that it is expedient for you that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation not perish.”***

He says, “I want to kill Christ. I want to pull Him down from His exalted position and destroy Him,” and the irony is that even as he says these words, he’s intending to bring Christ down, but do you know what he does? He lifts Christ up. This is what the unbeliever does. In their unbelief, they are so irrational that as they try to strike a blow against Christ, they really lift Him up, because that’s what John points out. Look what he says. I mean look at the words of this high priest. “You don’t take into account that it is expedient, it is better, for you that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation not perish.” Isn’t that amazing? Caiaphas is not becoming a follower of God. He is doing the opposite. He is hating God, and yet in his position as high priest, such is the sovereignty of our great God that his words are prophetic and are a 100% accurate description of what Jesus has come to do, and that’s what John says.

Now, he did not say this on his own initiative. In fact, the word order, the first word in verse 51 is *this*. John’s saying, “Look at this, what he said,” and the next thing is *on his own*. “This is not on his own.” Then it says, “He did not say.” John’s marveling, “Can you believe that the high priest said this in the presence of the Sanhedrin?” some of whom, according to the grace of God, came to believe. Nicodemus might have been at this meeting. He probably was. He might have been John’s source. His words spoken in arrogance to lift himself up and to bring Christ down, what he really does is he puts himself down and he lifts Christ up. This is the nature of sin and unbelief. Sin and unbelief seek to exalt self, but they really destroy self. I mean, just look at this man. Look how arrogant, and angry, and malicious he is even to his friends.

Why does he have to say, “You know nothing at all, nor do you take into account...”? He’s basically saying, “You guys are a bunch of ignoramuses.” You see his attitude and his arrogance. Josephus, the Jewish historian I mentioned earlier, spoke of the Sadducees. The Sadducees tended to be the chief priests. Priests were the Sadducean theological group of the first century. He says, “The Sadducees were barbaric and wild even in their dealings with one another. It was known that they would just rail at each other.” Now think about that. These unbelievers, what are they like? What are unbelievers like? They get more and more ugly. They get more and more obnoxious. They get more and more arrogant. They get more and more hard to live with. They become less and less what man was created to be in their unbelief. As they try to exalt man, they become more and more animal-like. They exalt their freedom and they follow every whim and passion, and live like wild animals, creatures of instinct, all the while proclaiming how wise they are, how noble they are. You see how deceptive sin is.

So he seeks to exalt himself, but in reality he makes himself to be the buffoon. Here is this man trying to destroy Christ, and God turns it around, and it’s like Balaam’s donkey. Balaam’s donkey did better than Caiaphas. Balaam’s donkey said what he meant to say. I don’t know how that happened, but God spoke through Balaam’s donkey and said, “Hey, why are you giving me such a hard time?” Remember that story? Balaam’s beating his donkey because the donkey won’t go, because there’s an angel ahead who’s going to kill Balaam. He beats him, and he beats him, and he beats him, and the donkey finally says, “Why are you beating me? Have I ever been unfaithful to you?” That’s perfectly reasonable.

Caiaphas isn’t worthy of Balaam’s donkey description here. He think he’s come up with this clever plan to defeat the kingdom of God, and in reality all he’s doing is lifting up the glory of the kingdom of God, and God’s magnifying His glory. This willful unbeliever, this ungodly, unrepentant, proud and arrogant man, the glory of Christ is standing over all of that. And think about it. What do they do? They put Him on a cross. They lift Him up. Their determination to destroy Christ, lifted Christ up and brought salvation to the whole world, and it was all according to plan, not before the time. They want to kill Him right now. Jesus is going to remove Himself from Jerusalem because man will not determine when it’s going to happen, but they are just instruments in the hand of God. So what we need to see is unbelief is futile. It’s not going to come to anything. It sounds impressive and it looks impressive, because the multitude are always going to be unbelievers.

Jesus said, “Broad is the way and wide is the road that leads to destruction. Many there are that go that way. Narrow is the road and narrow is the gate that leads to life, and few there are that find it.” So don’t be surprised that there are many who are trumpeting the “glory” and “rightness” of unbelief. But not only does he lift up Christ, look how precise he is. He basically unwittingly gives us two glorious pictures of doctrine. He teaches us the substitutionary nature of the atonement, here, unwittingly. He’s like the most unintentional evangelist, the most unintentional theologian.

***John 11:50 ~ ...it is expedient for you that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation not perish.”***

That is a picture that Jesus must die in our place at Calvary. God must punish Him in our place at Calvary so that you will not perish, and not only that, John said as he said that, he uses two words, the word *people* and the word *nation*, two different Greek words that are here, *people* meaning a social gathering of people under one king, kind of idea, and then the word *nation* actually is *ethnos*, which means more of a race. So he uses these two words, and John sees in that, even the choice of the two words, the word *nation* normally means Gentile. He didn’t mean Gentile when he said it. That wasn’t what he was thinking, but he used the word that in double meaning meant this, and this is what God meant as the Spirit of God working through this unbelieving—I almost used the word for Balaam’s donkey, but I didn’t, the pejorative word. As God speaks through this unbelieving, resistant man, he also teaches us the universality of salvation. That’s what John says in verse 51:

***John 11:51 ~ ... he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation, 52 and not for the nation only, but in order that He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.***

Caiaphas prophesies all of that, and so unbelief is completely irrational and it is completely futile, and so the question is: Why do you persist in it? Why do you know about Jesus, but have you not truly bowed the knee to Jesus? Why would you continue in a state of consideration about who Christ is? The proof is overwhelming. Stop resisting, stop fighting it, bow the knee, and receive Him.

We saw in Psalm 2 that Stephen read earlier, “The nations rage, the people are in an uproar. Why?” It’s not because they don’t think Jesus is the Messiah, but because they *know* He’s the Messiah and they will not bow to Him. There’s a threat in that passage: “He will break them with a rod of iron. He will rule over them. He’ll dash His enemies to pieces,” and yet the offer of the Gospel is there:

“Worship the Lord with reverence. Kiss the Son. Do homage to the Son, lest He become angry.” The idea is there is still time. He is a refuge for all who run to Him, so bow the knee and run to Christ. Realize that all of the imaginations of your mind are futile. You’re not really free. You will be free when you seek Christ. And then as a believer, let me just say this as an application for us. We have to be aware that as Christians, once we come to know the Lord, we still have this old man, this residual resistance to God, and we need to be aware of that. There’s this tendency of irrationality still in the heart, and so as believers, sometimes we don’t want to humble ourselves and listen to certain things. Why? It’s because we don’t want to. We need to humble ourselves and realize that we need to come to the word of God, when people share the word of God with this disposition. “I’m not going to resist this because of my will. I want to see with my mind clearly what the text says, and I will surrender to whatever it says. It doesn’t matter what I want to do. It matters what God says.”

You say, “Well, I’ve gone through this situation in my marriage and I can’t do it anymore. I know God wants me to be happy.” Do you really or do you just *want* to want that God wants you to be happy? In reality, God does want you to be happy, but He doesn’t want you to be happy without being holy first, and His word is really clear about when you can leave a marriage. His word is really clear about everything that we need to be clear about. Sometimes the reason we’re not getting it is you say, “I keep asking God and He won’t answer me,” when in reality you keep asking Him to confirm what you want to do, and He’s not going to do that. He doesn’t come to offer suggestions. He comes to take charge. And so as Christians, we forget that sometimes. That’s the only way you come to Christ is you come accepting Him as Lord, but then once you come, you have to keep remembering that He is Lord. His word is not up for debate. His word is up for study and obedience, and that’s the way of life. That’s the reality. Just like this, resistance is futile. You keep on resisting, but all you’re doing is making yourself miserable. When we do that, we’re just making ourselves miserable. We just need to bow the knee and trust Him. He is worthy. He has proven His worthiness, He’s proven His trustworthiness, and He has proven His love and His goodness.

Let’s go to Him in prayer...

*Father, we rejoice in the truthfulness of Your word. We rejoice that You are so incredibly perfect in all that You have revealed, all that You have done. Even though the nations rage, the peoples plot in vain, Satan rages, the armies of hell are seeking to attack You, they only accomplish Your will. They lie about You, sin in us lies about You, and entices us to believe that You are not good, that You are*

*not out for our good, but Your word tells us, and creation itself shows us that everything that You have done is good, and supremely the Gospel, the revelation of Your glory in Your Son show us that You are infinitely merciful and gracious and kind. There is life nowhere else but in Jesus Christ.*

*Father I pray that You would help those in this room who need to truly yield from the depth of their being to Christ. Because they have not been willing to do that, they're not yet Your children. It's those who believe, those who evidence their new heart by faith and surrender in repentance. Open their eyes. Open their hearts. Save them by Your mighty power.*

*Father, help those who are Yours, those who are Your sheep. Help us to stop resisting, to purge every evidence of unbelief that crops up in our lives on a daily basis. Help us to die to it and to trust more fully in our Savior. Help us to bow before Your word, to be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger. Make us more and more like the glorious Savior that we love. We pray this in His Name, Amen.*

This audio presentation, description, and transcription by Providence Church in Duluth, Georgia, USA, is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 License.

 Except where otherwise noted, this work is licensed under <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>

Attribution:

Based on work at Providence Church, Duluth, GA, USA and found online at <http://www.providenceduluth.org>. Permission for use beyond the scope of this license may be requested by contacting Providence Church, Duluth, GA through their website.