

**Responding to Unbelief**  
**Pastor Ty Blackburn**  
**John 12:37-41**  
**May 4, 2014**

...the Lord bless you all, and may you grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ this morning. Turn with me in your Bibles to the 12th chapter of John, please. We're moving to a new verse today, a new passage. I mean, part of that same larger passage, but a new section. We'll be looking at Verses 37-41 of John 12.

I was reading about a woman, a Serbian economist named Bojana Danilovic. She is a person who though her life is normal in every way other than one condition that she has. She is a woman who sees everything in the world as upside down. She is doing well, I mean, she's an economist, she's raising a family, but when she reads a book, she has to turn it completely upside down. She reads not only bottom to top, she reads right to left, which is what you would have to do if you turned your book upside down. There is something wrong in her brain, she has a brain deficiency that does not correct the input that comes through the optic nerve. Scientists have posited for a number of years, and it seems to be apparently irrefutable, that in reality what every one of us who has eyesight, when we look at something as it goes through the lens of our eye, and our cornea, it is the law of physics, basically it goes to the brain upside down. The brain compensates and flips it around. You don't even feel it. But imagine what it must be like to live where your brain didn't do that. I mean, just think about that for a moment and it kind of can make you a little dizzy. If you are looking at the world, you are hanging from the ceiling. If I had that condition, how disorienting, and how different would it be to have it suddenly flipped around. I mean, she's almost 30 years old. If they were able to do something to her brain, which they are not able to at least right now, to flip it around, what a jarring impact that would have. Or if you or I suddenly had what she has now happen to us. I think in some ways that is a good analogy for what happens to us when we come to Christ. The unbeliever really sees everything upside down. Their brain just doesn't work right and it can't process things. Then when you come to Christ, everything is flipped around right side up, and then as you grow in grace, you find that there are still pockets in your visual field where things are still upside down. It is the word of God that flips it around and puts it right. Sometimes those things have a jarring impact on you.



We come to a passage this morning which is one of those passages, and one of those doctrines that has more of a jarring impact on even the Christian. Some of us probably have never considered the doctrine of sovereignty to the level that John is going to lay it out before us, but basically what we are going to see in this passage is John tells us the way God sees it, and though that may seem upside down to us, we can know it is not upside down. If it is the way that God sees it, it must be right side up. Our job as Christians is to humble ourselves, and to assimilate ourselves to the way God sees things, not to tell Him how we want things to be. It is actually a very simple truth, but it has profound impact, and it is amazing how much we, if we really search our hearts, we don't want to do that in areas of our lives. We want to continue to see things the way we want to see them. This passage sets before us the sovereignty of God because John is wrestling with the problem of widespread Jewish unbelief.

Remember we've noted a number of times that John is the last of the four Gospel-writers to write his Gospel. Matthew, and Mark, and Luke have written all of their Gospels at least 20 years before. Probably Matthew and Mark were written in the late 40's, and Luke was written in the early 60's A.D. Remember Jesus' ministry was around 30 A.D. and it came to the conclusion with the cross and the resurrection some think 30 A.D., some think 33 A.D., one of those two years. So the Gospels were written in the first 20 or 30 years, the first three Gospels, but John writes his Gospel somewhere between 85 and 90 A.D. So if Jesus ascended to Heaven in 30 A.D., he is writing at least 55 years after the events, 55 to 60 years. I mean, think about how long ago that is. If you put that in perspective today, 55 years ago was 1959. That's a long time ago, a lot has changed, a lot has happened since 1959. So John is writing his Gospel that far removed, but of course the Spirit of God inspiring him like every other Gospel-writer, every other writer of Scripture, he records God's word perfectly for us, but he is writing it to a different audience, in a sense, than the early Gospel-writers.

In some sense there is continuity—sinners are sinners across the ages, but the setting John is writing in is one in which he, as a Gospel-writer, a Jew himself, is more profoundly aware of the widespread Jewish rejection of Christ. He sees it much more clearly than he did 20 years before because as the Gospel has gone out, though it went out upon the lips of Jewish apostles, all of the apostles are Jewish brothers. I mean, men physically descended from Abraham that take the Gospel out, but what happens as they go throughout the Mediterranean world is that over time more and more Gentiles are making up the church, less and less Jews, and how heartbreaking it was for those apostles like John. In fact, the passage we're going to look at is kind of a companion passage to Romans 9. Romans 9, the



apostle Paul, who himself also of course a Jew, of the tribe of Benjamin, wrestling with the unbelief of his Jewish brothers, says there in those chapters, Romans 9-11, he wrestles with the question, *Why is there so much Jewish unbelief?* He says his heart breaks for the Jews and he says at one point, “I wish that I could be a accursed for the sake of my brethren, the Jews.” He’s saying, “If me going to hell would save the Jewish people, I’m willing to do it.” He loved his brothers so much he wanted them to come to salvation, and John is feeling something of that same perplexity. “How can it be that people who have had the word of God, have had the oracles of God, have had the sacrificial system, the temple system, preaching to them year after year, the calendar of events, all of the festivals preaching Christ to them, the Scriptures pointing to Jesus, how can they have all of that and miss Christ?” This is the weight upon his heart.

This passage has continuing and abiding relevance as all of Scripture, but it has relevance to us as we think probably most clearly about our own desire to see people raised in the church, raised in Christian homes, come to faith. The most near application for us would be when our children, if one of our children were to reject Christ. You say, “But I can understand that the friends that you run with, they are walking in darkness. It makes sense, they were raised in darkness, but you were raised in the light. How can it be?” How a parent’s heart breaks over that. The greatest of all heartbreaks, just as John himself, John the apostle that we are reading today in 3 John 4 says, “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.” He’s speaking of spiritual children, but the reality is that principle applies to parenting too. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth. What would you want more than that? And yet, what would break your heart more than to not have that come true? Well the Scripture makes clear we have the responsibility to do everything we can to pray fervently, to contend earnestly, to share clearly the Gospel, and to set it before our children, and to set it before all that we love, all the people around us, every creature. And so that is one application.

This also has application in just witnessing, when you are sharing Christ with people. You know a wonderful way to try to share Christ with somebody is you are talking to them, sometimes you have those just brief opportunities, and you sow a seed, and that’s wonderful. But if you can sow a seed and then follow up and say, “Let’s get together and study the Bible together. Would you like to study the Gospel of John together? The Gospel of Mark? And let’s read it and meet for coffee.” So you have that opportunity, and you sow into someone’s life, and God blesses you, and youe halting faltering words. Still you feel that the clarity of the Gospel has gone forth, and as you share it your heart rejoices in the beauty of the

Gospel. Haven't you thought, "How could anybody reject this?" and yet more often than not, they do just that. How do you deal with that? I mean, how do you respond to unbelief? How do you respond to it in your own heart? How do you cope with it in some sense? Then how do you respond to it directly, interpersonally. Not just personally in your own heart, but interpersonally in what you say to the unbeliever, the one who is hardened, the one who will not repent and believe the Gospel. What do you say? How do you deal with it? This is the passage, this passage is dealing with just that issue, John 12:37-41. Let's read those verses together. This is sort of a summation of Jesus' ministry. We are coming to the end of His earthly ministry, and John is wrapping things up. Chapter 13 to the end of the book is all about the last supper of Jesus, the cross, and the resurrection, and the private things He says to His disciples. This is the end of His public ministry.

***John 12:37-41 ~ But though He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him. 38 This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet which he spoke: "LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT? AND TO WHOM HAS THE ARM OF THE LORD BEEN REVEALED?" 39 For this reason they could not believe, for Isaiah said again, 40 "HE HAS BLINDED THEIR EYES AND HE HARDENED THEIR HEART, SO THAT THEY WOULD NOT SEE WITH THEIR EYES AND PERCEIVE WITH THEIR HEART, AND BE CONVERTED AND I HEAL THEM." 41 These things Isaiah said because he saw His glory, and he spoke of Him.***

Let's pray together.

*Our Father, we ask that as we come to Your word, to deal with these infinite truths, that You might illuminate our darkened minds. Thank You for the gift of the Holy Spirit that is in the believer, but we pray that You would illuminate the darkened corners, and in Your light might we see light. We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.*

'Responding to Unbelief' is the title of the message. How is it that we respond? What we see that John does, and I think he is basically encouraging the believers and the unbelievers with this message. I think it is a reflection of what he is doing in his own heart. How do you respond to the wholesale rejection of Christ? Imagine, it's like this, he's looking at the spiritual state of all those who are rejecting Christ. He is looking at them, his heart is broken. What does he do? The way that you respond, the only way that you can bear up is you must take your eyes off of them and look at God. That is what he does. Because if you keep looking at the unbelief, and you keep looking at the appalling, willful rejection of

God, you will be prone to despair. What you must do is look at God, and what John does when he looks at God is he sees the glory of God. He sees the glory of God's sovereignty particularly, but he looks from the unbelief of man to the glory of God. He goes to Scripture. How do you look at God in a moment, any time in your life? How do you look at God? You go to the word.

He quotes for us two Old Testament passages because he is wrestling with this issue, and he brings two Old Testament passages in before our eyes so that we can see how we cope. How do we cope? What he basically says is, "Look, the reason that we can bear up is because in the unbelief of the masses of the Jews," and it applies today, doesn't it? Here we are in a Christian nation supposedly, where the Gospel, I mean, until 50 years ago, was it 1963 that they took the Bible out of the schools? I think that was the year. Until 50 years ago, the Bible was taught in our public schools, and yet how far we are from God as a nation. How many people have heard the name of Jesus, how many people have Bibles in their homes, and yet they are rejecting Christ. They may be members of churches, they may be religiously zealous in some ways, but they are rejecting the Jesus of the Bible. How can that be? The same thing is happening today as it was then. When we see that, and as we share Christ, we are going to find that again, most of the time... I mean, don't you at times almost get discouraged to... this is Satan working on us in our own despair. As you start to talk with somebody and you get your hopes up that maybe they are really going to listen, and they just shut you down. And you do it again, and you do it again, and finally you are thinking, "I know I have an opportunity, there is an opening, but it seems pointless." Well, of course that is wrong thinking, but we are prone to be discouraged, and despondent, and disillusioned. What's the problem? We're looking at people rather than looking at God. It doesn't really matter whether the person believes or not, God's glory is untarnished. And if you keep looking at His glory, you are going to keep wanting to talk about Him because He is so wonderful, and He deserves to be praised. So that is what John is encouraging us to do, and he sets before us some difficult teachings, that in a sense are flipping the world right side up. Because he sets before us, in a clear, a striking, stunning way, the sovereignty of God. He basically says in this passage that the reason they don't believe is because God is not letting them believe. I'm going to show you that as we, and let me say as I say that, please understand, we're reminded of our message last week, *How do you approach the word of God?* Be reverent, this is the word of God, not man's word. Be humble, be teachable, it doesn't matter whether we like it, it just matters if it is what God says. So as we look at this, let's see if this is what God says.

We're going to see, I believe, it is set before you that it clearly is what he says, and he doesn't just say it here, he says it a number of different places, and you have set before you in Scripture the absolute sovereignty of God in grace. That He is absolutely sovereign over who is saved. That is a teaching of the Bible. At the same time, the Bible teaches that every single person on the face of the earth is responsible for whether or not they believe. The teaching of the Bible is God's message, it has gone out throughout all the earth, in natural revelation. He is speaking, He is speaking, He is speaking. Look at the kindness of God. There He is proclaiming who He is, inviting people to look to Him. Scripture makes this clear, Romans 1:19-21, all men have the knowledge of God in them, for God made it evident within them. It is evident in creation, it is evident in them, in their own conscience so that they are without excuse. God sends the Gospel out to every tribe, and tongue, and kindred, and the call of the Gospel is repent and believe or perish. The reality is, people are in hell because they choose to be in hell.

Now what we have before us is something that Christian philosophers have sometimes called an '*antinomy*'. There are certain things that appear to be contradictory that are not contradictory because God maintains both of them. Actually, when you think about it, it makes perfect sense that we would be confronted with antinomies when you and I, who are made out of dust, and who live a breath, contemplate the infinite, omnipotent, eternal God. Surely His ways are higher than our ways, His thoughts are higher than our thoughts, and we see that again, and again, and again. We see antinomy. Now the antinomy is this: God is absolutely sovereign in election, and man is completely responsible. As Charles Spurgeon, a Calvinist, prince of preachers, was asked one time, an English preacher in the 19th Century was asked one time, "Dr. Spurgeon, how do you reconcile divine sovereignty and divine responsibility? And Spurgeon said, "Reconcile them? Why would I reconcile them? You don't reconcile friends. Enemies need to be reconciled, but sovereignty and responsibility are not enemies, they are friends. The Bible teaches both." We just can't see into the eternal counsel of God and understand it. What are we supposed to do? Affirm both.

Let me give you an example of another trinity, I tipped my, I already gave the punchline. Another example of an antinomy, the Trinity. God is three persons, yet He is one God. Is He three? Is He one? Yes. He's three and He's one. "That can't be." Yes, it can be. It is the only way that you can understand the Bible if you are really carefully reading it. What happens is, the reason people like Jehovah's Witnesses exist is because they put their reason over God's word. They think, "It doesn't make sense to me, therefore I reject it," and so they make Jesus a lesser God, or a lesser being. But the Bible doesn't do that, the Bible says that Jesus is



equal with the Father in power and glory. The Bible teaches that everywhere. It was through Him that the worlds were made. He is the Word of God, the one who in the beginning was with God, and was God. The two natures of Christ, an antinomy. You have God the Father, is Jesus Father? He has no earthly father. Mary is His earthly mother and so you might think, well He would be half God and half man like mythology would posit it. That would be the way we would think, but the Bible makes clear that He's fully God, and He's fully man. "It doesn't make sense to me." It doesn't matter! Are you going to measure God by your foolish, limited mind? How utterly stupid that would be. Let God be God and let Him be true, and let every man be found a liar.

So here we have, John is going to set before us without apology, one side of that antinomy, the sovereignty of God. What you have as you walk through this is that he is clearly teaching that God is sovereign over who is saved, and that is why so many are lost. Now other places are going to say the reason you are lost is because you won't believe, and both are true, but here let's hear this passage. The outline this morning is basically two points—*'The Unbelievable Unbelief of Man'* and *'The Unassailable Glory of God'*.

#### 1) The Unbelievable Unbelief of Man:

That is what John does here. Look at Verse 37:

***John 12:37 ~ But though He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him.***

That is the unbelievable unbelief. Unbelief is unbelievable. "You've got to be kidding me!" That is the force of this verse. "You have to be insane not to believe!" He says, *...though He had performed so many signs...* Let's look at some of the words here. The word '*signs*', keyword in John, it means '*sign, mark, token, attesting, miracle*'. You find it first in John 2:11 where remember John organizes the first half of his book around seven signs, seven great miracles? And in Verse 11 he begins to unpack his outline as it were when he says in Chapter 2, Verse 11, right after Jesus turned the water into wine in Cana.

***John 2:11 ~ This beginning of His signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him.***

The signs are not so much about the miracle itself, or the blessing that the miracle brings, but rather the miracle, the significance is supremely in the reality to which the miracle testifies. I mean it is wonderful for the man at the Pool of Bethesda to be healed after 38 years of being lame, but that is not the glory of the miracle. That is only the outside cover. The glory of it is what it says about Jesus, and so with every miracle. That is what he is saying, '*signs*', and that is why John uses that word. It means that which testifies to something greater than itself. It's an attesting sign, mark, or token.

Nicodemus in John 3:2 comes to Jesus and says, "We know that You couldn't do the signs You were doing unless God was with You." He's even interpreting it at some level rightly. I mean, he's still way off, we see as you read that Chapter 3. Praise God he comes to get saved here we see later in John's Gospel, but he says, "We see the signs You're doing. These miracles You're doing testify to something, that You're sent from God." But back to John 12:37, he doesn't say: *...though He had performed signs...* He says: *...though He had performed so many signs...* This word *so many* is an emphatic adjective which means so great, so numerous. The picture is He's done so many things before then. It's not like He just did a couple. He's done sign, after sign, after sign, after sign.

In fact, there's a debate. I think there's kind of a double meaning in the word. It's like a lot of adjectives. Great can mean quantity, a great number, or it can mean quality, greatness of that one sign. I think the word is ambiguous here for a good reason. It means so many, so great signs. He's done so many of these things, and each of them are so incredibly great. So here they are. They're trying to decide if Jesus is the Messiah. Here they have evidence, after evidence, after evidence, after evidence, after evidence. There's one more thing I want to point out in that verse: *...had performed...*

*John 12:37 ~ ...though He had performed so many signs...*

The NAS renders it *had performed*. That's a good translation. It's a perfect tense verb, and the perfect tense in Greek means past action with abiding, ongoing results. There's great specificity in the tenses of the Greek language. You can have things happen in the past. That's the aorist tense. It happened and it's done. But perfect is like a ray. Aorist tense is like a point, and perfect tense is like a ray. There's a point and then a line goes out from it. It means it happened in the past, but here it is continuing to impact the present.

Now, think about that. Though they had so many signs, I mean, to see bread, we're all hungry, and to see 5,000 men plus women and children get fed from five loaves and two fishes, that ought to leave a mark on you. I mean, I remember a lot of meals. In fact, if we stop for a moment, I'm not going to do that—it's dangerous and I'm already getting distracted as I think about that, but the best meals in your life, you can remember some of them. Okay, let's move on from that, but how could you not remember getting fed bread and fish in a miraculous display of God's power? You can remember what it tasted like. *That was the best bread I ever ate.*

In Jerusalem itself, I mean, as Jesus is teaching, it's likely, it's very likely, that among the crowd is that man from the pool of Bethesda. If you had been healed after 38 years and Jesus is back in town, where would you be? There he is. He used to be lame. For 38 years, his whole life he's been lame, and now he's up and walking. There it is testifying Jesus is the Christ. Or how about that man who was born blind? I bet he's on the front row. "I want to hear what Jesus has to say. I was blind and now I see." Remember when we looked at that? We saw that nowhere in the Old Testament of all the miracles that are done by Moses, and Elijah, and Elisha, and all the other miracles in the Old Testament, no one has ever given sight to the blind. But Jesus didn't just give sight to the blind. He did that a number of times, but this man was born blind in Jerusalem just a couple of months before this.

They see so many signs, and let's not forget when Jesus went into Jerusalem on Sunday—whichever day this is, we're not sure. It's in holy week, but on Sunday when He came in, one of the reasons for the great crowd was not only was Jesus coming, but there was Lazarus walking beside Him. His miracles are continuing to testify, and in spite of all of that clarity, in spite of all of that power, there are the people in utter unbelief. How can that be? Unbelief is completely irrational. This is what we have to come to. It doesn't make sense. I mean, if people see correctly, like I said, the world is not only upside down for the unbeliever, but they're darkened. They can't see. And so when you present the Gospel, part of what John is saying here is don't be surprised. Unbelief is utterly irrational and it's also completely willful.

The idea that it says *...they were not believing in Him*. The other translations, the King James, and the ESV, and the NIV don't hit this as well as the New American Standard does. The force of the verb is this is an imperfect verb, and it means past action that it was ongoing, continuous. So John, looking back, says, "They were not believing in Him." And the idea is that they did not believe in Him, but what he says is they were not believing. They were in a state of ongoing unbelief.

The word for *believe* in the New Testament, πιστεύω (pisteuō), comes from a word which means to be persuaded. The idea is they were in an ongoing way resisting being persuaded. So they're willfully rejecting this avalanche of evidence. Unbelief is truly unbelievable and it remains so today. Though we don't have the luxury of some of the things that they would have had, they saw some of those miracles themselves with their own eyes, yet the reality is the power of the word of God is so real, and the glory of God is made known everywhere. The beauty of this Book that hangs together with such incredible glory, is when it's set forth, there is no way that a rational person should reject the teachings of the Bible, and yet they do it again and again. Unbelief is unbelievable. The unbelievable unbelief of man is the first point.

## 2) His Glory is Unassailable:

The second point, John says, after he exposes that, is he says, "Let's consider the unassailable glory of God. So you look at the unbelievable unbelief of man, and if you look at it long enough, you're going to be despairing. What do you do? You turn and you look at God, and you see that His glory is unassailable. His glory is not in any way tarnished or diminished by their unbelief. Now, that's important to remember that. Sometimes we think, we start acting like in the back of our minds, maybe some of our American democracy sort of thing, the majority wins. I think that affects us a lot more than we think. This is why people get so excited about Hollywood doing movies about the Bible. They're doing all these movies, and I haven't seen or heard of a good one yet of this recent batch. Maybe the one *God is Dead*, I've heard a little better things about, but I haven't seen any of them.

I've read some stuff about some that they're just appalling, and of course I've read the book *Heaven is for Real*, and it's just sad that people would be so excited about hearing from a little boy who went to Heaven when he's 4 years old, where there are all kinds of psychological issues about what he could even remember, and the bigger issue is 2 Corinthians 12, in that if he went to Heaven, why is he talking about it? Paul said when he was caught up into the third Heaven, he heard things that it's unlawful for a man to utter, so why is a little boy uttering it? I don't believe he went to Heaven. I think he had some kind of experience, and there are all kinds of people who have had experiences. I mean, you can go find Hindus and Buddhists that will talk about their out of body experience when they went to Heaven, but we have the more sure prophetic word which you'd do well to pay attention to as a light shining in a dark place.

That's a great way to transition a conversation. *Have you seen the movie Heaven is for Real? Yeah. Well, how did you like it? What did you like about it? Well, do you believe there's a Heaven? Why do you believe there's a Heaven? Well, I believe there's a Heaven because this Book tells me, and it has so many wonderful things to say about Heaven. Let's study the Bible and talk about it. Let's read Revelation 21 together. Let's talk about how you get to Heaven, from this Book.* The unassailable glory of God means that we don't have to have a number count for us to feel good about who God is. The fact that more people are interested in these things shouldn't really affect how we feel about our faith. The fact that Hollywood's interested, in reality most times they're interested, I think the enemy's at work trying to diminish and obscure and eclipse the glory of God. So be sceptical about anything Hollywood's going to do. But we don't need that. We don't need the support of unbelievers coming around and being interested. We have the glory of God set forth in His word, and it doesn't matter if all of them reject Him. It does not diminish His glory one iota. That's what he's basically saying here. Look what he says. "They were not believing in Him," that is, their unbelief was unbelievable, and it was willful, but then he says:

***John 12:38 ~ This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet which he spoke: ...***

Actually, it would be translated, I think, if it said, "...in order that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled," the force of the conjunction here which they translate: ***This was to fulfill...*** the ESV gets it best here. It says: ***...so that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled.*** That's really the force of the conjunction. Now, this conjunction has a range of meaning, so it could mean their unbelief resulted in the fact that God's prophecy was fulfilled. Do you follow what I'm saying? They didn't believe, and that resulted then in the prophecy being fulfilled, but it could also mean their unbelief was occasioned by God's purpose that He fulfill His prophecy in Isaiah. It can mean either one, and if you just had Verse 38, you wouldn't know for sure. But when you add in Verses 39 and 40, you know for sure which one it is. Context is always the best interpreter, and the context tells you that what he's saying is the reason they don't believe is because the word of God said they would not, and the word of God isn't just predicting, it's producing the unbelief. That's powerful stuff, but that's what's really being said. Look at the logic. Verse 38:

***John 12:38 ~ This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet which he spoke: "Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?"***

That is, when Isaiah said in Isaiah 53:1, which we read earlier, “As the servant of the Lord is lifted up,” Isaiah says, “who is going to believe the report? Who has believed? Who’s listening?” The idea is the Jews aren’t listening. It was true in Isaiah’s day even as he ministered. He could say that with personal experience, “Lord, I’ve been preaching, I’ve been preaching, I’ve been preaching, and they’re not believing,” and then how much more it was true when Jesus came. Jesus is preaching, Jesus is displaying His glory, and they’re not believing. And then he says, though, in Verse 39:

***John 12:39 ~ For this reason they could not believe,...***

This is what settles it.

***John 12:39 ~ For this reason they could not believe, for Isaiah said again, 40 “He (the Lord) has blinded their eyes and He (the Lord) hardened their heart, so that they would not see with their eyes and perceive with their heart, and be converted and I heal them.”***

This is one of those passages that sets the sovereignty of God before you so plainly that we either submit to it and trust God, or you reject it and you try to edit the Bible. But John is making this just painstakingly clear. What he’s saying is, listen, when they don’t believe, what it does is really it confirms two things about the unassailable glory of God. There are two sub-points. Unbelief, when people reject the Gospel, what it does first of all is it shows forth the glory of His word, and secondly, it shows forth the glory of His election or His electing grace. Both things are shown forth when someone rejects Christ. This is what John is saying.

#### A) The Glory of His Word:

His word has prophesied this. His word has told us this from the beginning, and His word continues to tell you that through the whole New Testament. And so when as you’re sharing the Gospel with people, not many come, why would you be disheartened or disillusioned by that? Have you not read? Have you not heard? Broad is the way that leads to destruction. Many there are that go that way. Narrow is the gate that leads to life, and few there are that find it. Have you not read? Many are called; few are chosen. This is the purpose of God. This is what God has said is that it would always be this way.

As you watch the development of the Old Testament, do you see in Isaiah and Jeremiah this remnant theology? That is that the whole nation of Israel, God's not going to save the whole nation of Israel. He's going to save an elect group within that, a stump, as it were, a small stream, not a large river. That is God's purpose. When you see unbelief, doesn't the word of God assess correctly what you see again and again? I mean, when you lay a Gospel presentation out and you feel like the Lord's blessed you and it's been especially clear, and I don't know how I thought of that particular verse to give, but it seemed just like the right verse, and you lay it before them, you're thinking, "Look how wonderful that God would come down, that Jesus would leave the glory of Heaven, and He would come down and live a perfect life, that He would live a fully human life, tempted in every way and yet without sin, that He would do that so that He could be an adequate and a perfect Savior, that He would be able to offer you not only a sacrifice that takes away your sins, but a righteousness that allows you to stand in the presence of God, that the Lord left glory to do that, how can you not come?" You've had that presentation and God's blessed it, and you lay it out there, and they just say, "That's interesting..." How do you deal with that?

Well, we're supposed to continue to be patient. You're supposed to not just wash your hands of them the first time. No, you keep contending, you keep praying, and you do what Paul says in 2 Timothy 2:24-26. With patience and endurance, you keep presenting the faith, hoping that God might grant them repentance. There again is the sovereignty of God. If they're going to repent, God's got to grant it to them. But you trust in the fact that He's at work in this, and He told me it was going to be like this. He said in John 3:3, "Except you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God." So when you hold forth the word of life, don't be surprised when people don't see it. And it makes you pray harder as you're sharing, doesn't it, when you realize that?

It's not about how clever you are or I am. It's not about that. I mean, we're supposed to do our best to persuade men, but it's all ultimately up to His grace. It's Him bringing forth life. The natural man does not understand the things of God. They are foolishness to him. The Lord has told us that. So don't be surprised. And not only don't be surprised, but give God glory that His word is true. *Lord, Your word is true. Everything that You've said is true.* You could be saying that even as your heart is breaking for the person apart from you. And you ought to be brokenhearted. You don't just forget them, because you want to be like Jesus who wept over Jerusalem.

This is the other side of the antinomy, by the way. Jesus weeps over Jerusalem and says, “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how I long to bring you to Myself as a hen would bring her chicks to Me, but you were not willing.” Both are true and so we ought to be brokenhearted, but yet we ought not be despairing, because even as we’re brokenhearted, it’s not about them rejecting us. It’s about them rejecting God and it’s about them rejecting a God who is so glorious and so worthy of worship. That’s the tragedy. It’s a tragedy that someone’s going to hell. It is an absolute tragedy, but the greater tragedy is that God’s glory is not being acknowledged. But even then, their unbelief will still redound to His glory. The glory of His word, you see the glory of His word, and then you also see the glory of His electing grace.

### B) The Glory of His Electing Grace:

He says, “They could not believe, for Isaiah said again, ‘He has blinded their eyes and He hardened their heart.’” This is judicial hardening, a judicial act of God where He’s expressing His wrath. Now, when you put it all together, what He’s doing is we see that the Lord is continually speaking, the Lord is continually inviting, the Lord is continually beckoning people to repentance, and Scripture is indignant that they won’t come, and that is right. That is reality. That’s the right side up view. Man wants to blame God, saying, “You should have done more.” No, He shouldn’t have. He should not have done anything except send us all to hell. The fact that He saves anyone is grace, and is reason to praise Him forever and ever.

It really is true that the people who are in hell, they want to be there. They don’t want God. They may want to go to Heaven. Let me clarify. They would like to go to a place of bliss and joy, certainly. Everybody would like that. People aren’t that stupid. Well... But if it means being in the presence of God and giving Him glory and the supreme place in their life, they’d rather be in hell than do that. And so we need to see this the way God sees it, and God sees it that even as we’re sharing, even as we’re brokenhearted over those who we love—and it’s so hard when it’s somebody we really love, our own dear flesh and blood, but when that’s the case, you continue, you keep praying. You don’t stop praying. You keep sharing and you keep sharing. As long as there’s life, there’s hope. And God in His amazing grace, He shows glory, and so many times some of those that depart from the faith, some of those even of our young people that are in this room today, they might depart from the faith and go away, and they might be lost, but some of them might go and depart from the faith and be lost for years, and then by His grace and His glory, He might save them at the end. And no matter which way He does it, He’s worthy of praise, and He has been good, and He has been merciful.

And what this does, now think again, He's writing this to the Jewish people who are rejecting Him. He's sending it basically out to the churches, but he wants the Jews and the Jewish proselytes to hear these words. He wants them to think about the fact you're rejecting Jesus because you think all the Jews in Jesus' day rejected Jesus. You're thinking well how could they be wrong? If so many people don't believe, how could so many people be wrong? It seems like a pretty good argument when you look at it on the surface of it, but it's not a good argument at all, is it? That's upside down thinking. He basically says, "Look, they were just like the people in Isaiah's day." When God called Isaiah to go preach, He said, "Go preach, but they're not going to listen. They're not going to hear. They're not going to obey. They're not going to repent. But you go preach. Why? Because I said to, and because My glory will be made known even in their rejection of you and of Me."

There's nothing that humbles pride more, and I think this is actually another example of God's mercy, because when you tell an unbeliever—and this is why I say it's not just for us in our hearts, but there's also a place where this needs to be said to the unbeliever. It wouldn't be in the Scripture and it wouldn't be here if it weren't so. He is saying to the Jews who were rejecting Christ at that moment, "Look, you think that you are saying, 'I choose not to believe in Jesus.' In reality, the reason that you're saying, 'I choose not to believe in Jesus,' is because God has chosen not to save you." What that does is humble pride, and that is the one thing that the hardened recalcitrant heart needs more than anything is to be broken before God.

So you don't hide these things away. You proclaim them. A lot of people say you should hide these things away. Well, they don't know better than God. God put it in His word so that we could proclaim it, and He put it in the Gospel of John, of all places, right there in the Gospel of John, so that we could proclaim it. At the right time, in the right condition, in the right place, we say, "Listen, I want you to understand something. God's glory is not diminished by your rejection of Him. In fact, He prophesied that more often than not, people would not believe, and it saddens me, and I'm praying that you come to faith. I'm praying that you come around and come to believe He is such a wonderful Savior. But if you don't, you can know this, you've heard the Gospel, you heard it clearly, and your rejection will one day be made right, and God's glory will be vindicated, and you will know, and you even know now." There's a place for that kind of comment. I mean, I'm not saying we start off there. You beseech people. "Be reconciled to God, the glory of Christ." You set Him forth but you don't hide from the fact that His glory is the supreme issue, and that's what they need more than anything else is to have their world turned right side up.



Man is everything; God is nothing in the life of the unbeliever. It needs to be turned 180 degrees. God is everything. We are nothing, and once you see that, then you see that Him being everything means He's your all in all, and now you who are nothing have everything. That's the glory of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And so this means even though we will find ourselves in times where we are despondent, we're hurting, and we should be—We should be like Jesus. We should be weeping over unbelievers, and when it's in our own family, certainly, but when you find yourself in despair, when you find yourself not understanding, what we have to do is stop looking at our circumstances, stop looking at the person in front of us, and start looking at God and His glory and start worshiping Him, trusting Him. That's the way to life and that's the way to continue to be filled with joy, and to continue to have a joy that is attractive.

Let's pray together...

*Father, we worship You. We praise You. We thank You for giving us Your word, for confronting us, confronting our thought processes, confronting our pride, confronting our sin. We thank You for doing that and then for making a remedy by giving Jesus Christ as a perfect sacrifice to deliver us from darkness of our own minds, and from the darkness of the evil one, and liberating us into the freedom of the sons of God. Help us to be more and more joyful, more and more awed, and amazed, and overcome by the riches, the surpassing riches, of Your grace which You have lavished on us. And may the joy of abiding in Your love make us shine as lights in the midst of this dark world. We pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.*

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