

Teaching Points

In these verses we see some profound comments from John about the nature of belief and unbelief. Up to this point, we've read about powerful miraculous signs performed by Jesus. These have been clear demonstrations of His divine nature as well as the truthfulness of His message. And yet, we continue to see many rejecting Him and even plotting to kill Him.

Discussion Question: How is this possible? How can many remain in unbelief in the face of such bright and clear light?

Thoughts: *As sad as this is - it's exactly what Isaiah prophesied would happen. John explains the unbelief of many as an act of hardening done by God. Verse 40 says that God blinded their eyes, hardened their hearts, and prevented them from being healed. But who are the "they"? Clearly there were some among them who DID in fact believe - see verse 42. God is free to harden or save. It's a righteous judgment from God when He hardens a sinner's heart. It's a gracious mercy from God when He changes a sinner's heart and saves them. Either way - God is free and sovereign and good! This explains the unbelief of the crowds as a righteous act of God - not a failure in Christ's ministry.*

This sad reality has always been the case. Even going back to Isaiah 6 Yahweh was sitting on His throne high and exalted. And yet, Israel was hard-hearted, stiff-necked, and disobedient. The same thing is happening here. Christ is the glorious king of Israel - and yet the crowds are unbelieving. His glory is not diminished by their unbelief. Rather, God's plan is being fulfilled in every regard. This connection is even stronger when we read in verse 41 that Isaiah saw Christ's glory when he originally delivered his prophesy. The disparity between Yahweh's glory and Israel's unbelief is the same as the disparity between Christ's glory and the crowd's unbelief here in John 12.

Verses 42-43 speak of an interesting group of men. They are described as some of the rulers in Israel and they are said to believe in Christ. And yet, they were unwilling to openly confess their belief in Him because they were too afraid of being excommunicated by the Pharisees. Verse 43 gives this scathing assessment of their cowardice, **"...they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God."**

Discussion Question: What do we make of these men? Are they cowardly believers? Is their belief genuine or is it insincere? How can they be said to believe and yet be unwilling to confess?

Thoughts: *No matter how we understand these verses - this is not a pretty picture. The fear of man is an ugly sin that leads us to dishonor God. Unwillingness to confess Christ openly is a frightening indicator of unbelief. Perhaps these men held a "belief" in Christ that fell short of saving faith. On the other hand, there is such a thing as a weak and immature believer. Perhaps they*

were trusting Christ but their faith was weak and shallow since it was only in its infancy.

*We saw something similar back in John 8 when a crowd that was said to believe in Christ then went on to argue against Him and call Him a demon-possessed Samaritan. His words from chapter 8 are helpful here. **“Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, ‘If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.’”** (John 8:31-32). Jesus told a crowd that “believed” in Him that true faith ABIDES in His word and REMAINS in the truth. The same is true for these men who believe here in chapter 12. If their belief is genuine saving faith then it will abide in Christ’s word and grow into a bold profession. If their belief is not genuine then it will die out quickly like the soil in Matthew 13:20-21.*

With that in mind, take a look at verses 44-50. See how Christ speaks of the marks of true faith in these verses.

- True faith is belief in the Father and Christ’s relationship with Him (v. 44-45)
- True faith is abiding and walking in the light of Christ (46)
- True faith is hearing and believing the word of Christ (v. 47)

Lastly, see the benefits of true faith. Those who believe will receive everlasting life with God. They will not be condemned by the words Christ has spoken - because they have been loved by the Father and saved by the Son.

Prayer Focus

Thank God that the eyes of our hearts have been opened. Pray for more and more light as we grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ.