

AND WE BEHELD HIS GLORY - Studies in John's Gospel

Part forty-five - Sunday, May 26th, 2024, 10 a.m.

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“NEITHER WILL THEY BE CONVINCED IF SOMEONE SHOULD RISE FROM THE DEAD”

John 11:45-57 - “Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him, [46] but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. [47] So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, “What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. [48] If we let him go on like this, everyone 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 understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish.” [51] He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, [52] and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. [53] So from that day on they made plans to put him to death. [54] Jesus therefore no longer walked openly among the Jews, but went from there to the region near the wilderness, to a town called Ephraim, and there he stayed with the disciples. [55] Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and many went up from the country to Jerusalem before the Passover to purify themselves. [56] They were looking for Jesus and saying to one another as they stood in the temple, “What do you think? That he will not come to the feast at all?” [57] Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where he was, he should let them know, so that they might arrest him.”

One of the advantages of studying an entire book of the Bible is *patterns* become more observable. Events that would appear isolated in meaning take on a whole new teaching status when linked up with similar events in the flow of the entire story.

This holds vividly true in John's gospel. After each of the **signs** John records we have seen a mixture of **belief** and **unbelief** in the response of the crowd. Some are convinced and others are not. And, as we trek through account after account, we get to see this mixed response is a consistently repeated **pattern**. We can learn much from this.

The issue - the **important** issue - these repeated responses bring to light is **the same evidence produced different effects**. And what **that** means is unbelief must be rooted in some other region of our being than merely the intellect. After all, **others** - John sometimes says "**many**" - found the works of Jesus compelling their belief. Why not the others?

This is the central investigation of the apostle John. His whole gospel is an in-depth analysis of belief and unbelief. He's very up front about his subject. He tells us plainly his whole account is an effort to pull people into **belief** - **John 20:30-31** - "**Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; [31] but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.**" - **IPAD TEXT**

Given that purpose, John has a keen interest in pursuing the nature of **unbelief**. He wants to strip away any glamor from it. He wants unbelief exposed for what it is. He wants to **de-romanticize** scepticism and doubt. He doesn't want anyone confusing **unbelief** with some kind of **intellectual**

honesty.

This is very common. Unbelief is always masquerading as something else. So religious belief is often associated with *gullibility*. We like to think we're not easily taken in. We look beneath the surface. We don't just follow the religious crowd. Since the fall it has become common to be *proud* of wickedness and unbelief. Unbelievers back each other up - **Romans 1:32 - "Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them."** - IPAD TEXT

The title of this message - **"Neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead,"** comes from Jesus' account of the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man dies and experiences torment. Lazarus goes to be by **"Abraham's side."** The rich man doesn't want his living family to experience torment after *they* die so he begs Abraham to have Lazarus **rise from the dead** and go back and warn the rich man's five brothers. This is where we pick up the account:

Luke 16:27-31 - "And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house— [28] for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.' [29] But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' [30] And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' [31] He said to him, 'If they do

not hear Moses and the Prophets, *neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.*” - IPAD TEXT

Luke’s account makes the same point as today’s text in John. Even a resurrection from the grave won’t convince the unbelieving mind. The point? Unbelief doesn’t ultimately stem from insufficient evidence. There’s another source, and John wants us to consider it.

1) UNBELIEF GROWS

IPAD TEXT - John 11:45-47, 53 - “Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, *believed in him*, [46] but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. [47] So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, “What are we to do? For this man *performs many signs*....[53]....So from that day on they made plans to put him to death.”

We’ll look at those intervening verses in just a minute. The emphasis here is simply the direct line between the admission that Jesus “*performs many signs*”(47), and the seemingly illogical response - “*So from that day on they made plans to put him to death*”(53).

Forget the signs. Kill Jesus. This is the kind of hold unbelief reaches. This is the kind of knot it can tie. And we're meant to sense unbelief's dark progression in John's account. At first these leaders were content merely to trip Jesus up with clever words. They would try to trap him with questions like whether or not His disciples should pay taxes. They would make up strange cases where a wife buries 7 husbands and to whom would she be married in the resurrection. They would ask Him for more and more and more signs, ignoring the ones they had already witnessed. Then they'd try to turn the testimony of those Jesus healed to pin Him with the crime of Sabbath breaking. Next it was the sin of blasphemy, after telling Jesus all they wanted to know was if He really was the Messiah.

We've studied all of these cases in this series. Unbelief cannot remain *static*. It always metastasises. Now there are no more subtleties. No more clever wit and stealth - **“So from that day on they made plans to put him to death.”** John means for us to see how unbelief always *asphyxiates* the one who clings to it. It cuts off outside air. It takes away sight. We're meant to harken back to Jesus' haunting words in **John 9:39 - “Jesus said, “For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.” - IPAD TEXT**

Make no mistake. Unbelievers always find **good reasons** to resist belief. Unbelievers will always find ways to make their unbelief look honest, thought-through, and right. That's a part of the **blindness** of unbelief. That's what Jesus meant when He told unbelievers if they **saw** - if they only **took note** - of their unbelief, they wouldn't be blind anymore - **John 9:41 - "Jesus said to them, 'If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains.'"** - IPAD TEXT

Admitting blindness is the first step into the light.

- 2) **UNBELIEF IS ALWAYS ROOTED IN SOME FORM OF SELFISHNESS**

IPAD TEXT - John 11:47-53 - “So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, “What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. [48] *If we let him go on like this, everyone 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 understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish.” [51] He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, [52] and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. [53] So from that day on they made plans to put him to death.”

Question: Why can't these religious rulers find belief in any corner of their hearts? Others did. Why couldn't they? John tells us. They strangled in their own unbelief because all they saw was what they would *lose* if Jesus was allowed to be right.

Verse 48 says it all - **“If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.”** Forget just for a minute that they totally missed the *kind* of kingdom Jesus came to establish. They can only see what they will *lose* by falling in with Jesus.

Unbelief is always the fruit of some kind of selfishness. But it never plays its hand openly. Unbelief always wears another mask. Unbelief is always the way we push back against the fear of not being accepted by a certain crowd. It's the push back against the fear of not being popular. It's the push back against the fear of not being respected intellectually. It's the push back against the fear of loss of control or power. Perhaps more than anything, unbelief is the push back of not fitting in with the more tolerant values of the surrounding culture. Unbelief is the way *self-centered* people avoid what Jesus might call them to.

In one form or another it's the same fear in our text - **“If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.”** These rulers couldn't afford to believe in Jesus. They only had eyes for what they could *lose*. And no sign Jesus performed could undo that blindness.

3) **THE MIGHT AND WISDOM AND GRACE OF GOD IN THE FACE OF UNBELIEF**

IPAD TEXT - John 11:49-55 - “But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, “You know nothing at all. [50] Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish.” [51] *He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, [52] and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. [53] So from that day on they made plans to put him to death. [54] Jesus therefore no longer walked openly among the Jews, but went from there to the region near the wilderness, to a town called Ephraim, and there he stayed with the disciples. [55] Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and many went up from the country to Jerusalem before the Passover to purify themselves.”*

Don't get confused at the amazing events in these verses. There are two story lines unfolding at once. And they look like they're going in two completely opposite directions.

Our text says Caiaphas speaks words that he thinks are out of his own mind. When he tells the leaders Jesus must die so the whole nation (Israel) won't perish (50) he means to address the group's concern as expressed in **verse 48 - “If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.”** IPAD TEXT

Caiaphas is enforcing their idea that it's Jesus or the nation. One will have to go. And it's better to kill Jesus right away before it's too late.

But there's the **other** story line **behind** this one. Caiaphas isn't the originator of his thoughts (51). God is behind them, and John wants desperately for us to be aware of this. And **God's** intended meaning in Caiaphas' words is yes, it's better for Jesus to die than the whole nation (Israel) to perish and also even better "**to gather into one the children of God** (Gentiles) **who are scattered abroad**"(52).

Caiaphas doesn't even **know** the full weight of what God is putting into his words. It will be better for Jesus to die, all right. But not in the way Caiaphas thinks, just saving the Temple from Roman soldiers. Jesus will die to **save in a much deeper sense both Jews and Gentiles**. His death will be a much bigger **saving event** than any of His killers imagine.

Stop and let this moment in history sink in. There is nothing accidental about the details. Imagine the way God orchestrates having these prophetic, Christ-exalting, redemption predicting words come from the living **high priest** at that time. This is the man who was the only one to enter into the holy of holies and offer the atoning sacrifice for that whole year. God uses **this** man to announce the atoning death of Jesus Christ, the Messiah.

Then remember the *timing* of these words. The city was packed with people who were preparing to “*purify themselves*” for the coming Passover - **John 11:55 - “Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and many went up from the country to Jerusalem before the Passover to purify themselves.” - IPAD TEXT**

Look long and hard at the way God registers the significance of Jesus’ coming death. It’s all linked up with the high priest, the temple sacrifices, the purifying of the people, and the Passover. And it’s actually predicted by that very high priest that it is good that Jesus die for the Jewish nation and the Gentiles scattered throughout the nations. Our God knows what He’s doing. He is sovereign when He doesn’t *look* sovereign.

Do you ever struggle with wicked, Christ-ignoring leaders the Bible says are placed where they are *by God Himself*? Never doubt His ability to fulfill His plans through all types of people. Such is the incredible wisdom and saving love of our Heavenly Father.

The take home lesson from this text is unbelief is a deceptive beast. There are factors other than intellect at work in the dark corners of our hearts. It is always worth the price to come into the light. Be honest with your heart before God. The healthy walk with Jesus always requires ongoing repentance. And if you have never acknowledged Jesus Christ as your Lord, there will never be an easier time than right now. Don't let stubborn unbelief strangle your soul.