

The Power of Unbelief, Part 1

Matthew 13:53-54

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This morning, we come again in our study to Matthew 13. We have concluded looking at the seven parables of this chapter and now come to the final section of the chapter from verses 53-58. I want to read that and then really introduce the passage to you this morning and complete it next Lord's Day. I think you'll find some fascinating things as we share together in the Word of God.

"Now it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these parables, that He departed from there. When He had come to His own country, He taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished and said, 'Where did this Man get this wisdom and these mighty works? Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this Man get all these things?' So they were offended at Him. But Jesus said to them, 'A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house.' Now He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief."

We get the theme of the section from that last statement, "Because of their unbelief." I want us to look at this passage under the title 'The Power of Unbelief.' I think we all know the power of faith, or of belief. In fact, our Lord said that if a man had faith the size of a mustard seed, he could remove mountains, do the impossible. We all know the power of believing, the power of faith in God.

David believed God and was enabled to slay Goliath. Martha believed God and her brother was raised from the dead. Abraham believed God and became the father of a great nation. A lame man believed God and was healed. A nobleman believed God and his son was raised. The leper believed and was made whole.

The centurion believed and his servant was made well. The people in Numbers 21 believed, looked at a brazen serpent, and were healed of their disease. A father believed and his child was healed. Two blind men believed and were instantly able to see. Daniel believed God, and the lions could not harm him. Israel believed God and walked across the Red Sea on dry land. The Philippian jailer believed God and was saved, and his whole household. A sick woman believed, touched the hem of Christ's robe, and was made whole. Naaman, the leper, believed, and was healed of his leprosy.

A palsied man believed, picked up his bed, and walked away. Jairus believed God, and his daughter was raised from the dead. The children of Israel believed God and the walls of Jericho fell flat. Peter believed the Lord and walked on water. Paul believed the Lord and was able to face his own death with joy. Three Hebrew young men believed God and stood in the midst of a flaming furnace, unharmed. People believe God and are passed from death unto life. This is the power of believing, of faith.

On the other hand, we need to understand the power of unbelief. As believing saves the soul and

enables the power of God to be released on behalf of the person in its fullness, so unbelief halts the full release of the power of God. Unbelief dams up the flood of God's blessing. Verse 58 says it so well. "He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief." The power of unbelief could stop God from doing what He could do.

As we approach this subject, we're basically going to introduce it today. I'm going to go off into all kinds of things; you know it says we're to go into all the world and preach the Gospel, so we'll do that today. We'll pick up all kinds of thoughts that will make this passage rich.

First of all, this section fits marvelously into Matthew's layout. Matthew has designed to present Jesus as King, and he's done everything he can to do that, from the genealogy of Christ, His birth, the circumstances of the Oriental king-makers, the magi coming to affirm that He was indeed the King, the announcement of John the Baptist, the credentials of the King through His miracles and message.

He has presented not only the King, but the King has presented His Kingdom; all the characteristics and principles of His Kingdom in the Sermon on the Mount, the demonstration of the power of His Kingdom in His miracles. At the end of all of that, as we move through Matthew's gospel, we've seen that people have basically rejected Him. So we have been looking particularly at the rejected King. As the Lord looks out over the people in chapter 9, He sees them as a mass of people who will not hear His message, who are on their way to judgment, and He cries for God to send forth laborers. Those laborers turn out to be the disciples. So, beginning in chapter 10, we have come to a training time. We have seen the mounting rejection, and at the same time, the training of the Twelve.

The summation of their training has come in this chapter as the Lord has taught them, through seven parables, what to expect. In chapter 10, He basically told them how to carry on their end of it. In chapter 13, He says how the world is going to react to them, what it is going to be like out there as they labor and minister in the harvest. So He is really through with this element of their training, and it is time now to move out. We read, then, in verse 53, that He departed from there.

I believe, in a sense, this is the time when they move out into the harvest to warn men of the judgment. In a sense, I see them coming back for a debriefing in chapter 16. From this passage at the end of 13 to the beginning of 16, we find Jesus out in the harvest, proclaiming the message as the rejected King, still calling men to come to His Kingdom.

The major mark of this period of time of the King's rejection, from His rejection to His return, when He will be received in power and glory, is that it is a time of mixed good and evil. That is the main message of the parables. It is a time of good and evil, of faith and unbelief, believing and not believing. So He is saying, in effect, to His own and to us, "As you go out into the world, expect that some will believe and some will not."

So, to illustrate this, Matthew gives us, beginning in this text, eight incidents in the life of our Lord which illustrate the kind of response that there will be to the King. They are masterfully presented. I've never seen this in my study before, and it just seemed to become clear as I went through this section so that I would know what to anticipate, and I began to see what the Holy Spirit was really doing here.

Having said in chapter 13, "Expect rejection, unbelief, and that, here and there, some will believe, good and evil growing together," the Lord now illustrates that as they move out. First, they go to Nazareth, and we see at the end of chapter 13 the incident there. What was their response? Look at verse 57. In Nazareth, it says, "They were offended." They were not at all interested in the message, or the messenger. They would have nothing to do with Him; they were offended. If you compare this with the most important of the parables, which is the parable of the four soils, we could say they were stony ground, hard soil, not responsive.

As we move to chapter 14, we see the second of these eight responses. This is Herod the Tetrarch. You'll remember that he lived in that area and had a particular dwelling place in Tiberias, so he was very close. He had heard about the fame of Jesus, and his reaction was fear. Verse 2 says he thought it was John the Baptist risen from the dead, and he sure didn't want that, because he had beheaded John the Baptist. He wouldn't get near Jesus; he was afraid because of his guilt.

Throughout all of history, there will be people like that - there will be those who are offended at the whole, like the Jews to whom Christ is a stumbling block. They are offended over the whole thing. And then there are those who are afraid, and won't get near it because of the overwhelming sense of guilt. That's the way Herod was, and he's more of that hard, stony ground.

Then, as we move along in chapter 14, in verse 13 we see a crowd. Verse 14 says it was a great multitude of Jews, and at the end of verse 13, it says that they followed Him, and He fed them. But there is no statement made about the fact that they believed or were taking part in His Kingdom. We could say that they were curious. They would be like the shallow or weedy soil, where there is life for a little while, but eventually, it dies away.

The fourth incident is with the disciples, and it comes in verses 22-33. All we need to do is look at 33 to see their response. "Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, 'Truly You are the Son of God.'" What was the response of the disciples? One word: worship. That is good soil.

In Nazareth, there is hard ground; in Herod's case, there is hard ground. In the case of the curious Jews, there is a mixture of shallow and thorny, weedy soil. In the disciples, there is good soil. In chapter 15, we see the next incident, one with the Pharisees and scribes. It runs all the way through verse 20, but we can look at verses 1-2 and get the picture.

They came to Jesus and said, "Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus, saying, 'Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.'" Their approach to Jesus was one of condemnation; they came to condemn Him. They didn't want to hear anything, but came to blast Him. That is hard ground, there is no penetration.

In verses 21-22, we see a Canaanite woman. She cried to the Lord, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David!" In verse 28, "Then Jesus answered and said to her, 'O woman, great is your faith!'" There is good soil, good ground, great faith. She said, "O Lord, Son of David, have mercy." They were all the right terms, and she had faith in her heart; that is good soil.

Then we come to the Galileans in the next section. Verse 30. "Then great multitudes came to Him,

having with them the lame, blind, mute, maimed, and many others; and they laid them down at Jesus' feet, and He healed them. So the multitude marveled when they saw the mute speaking, the maimed made whole, the lame walking, and the blind seeing; and they glorified the God of Israel."

Here, we have amazement. They even glorified the God of Israel. They weren't too sure about Christ, but they believed that God was in this. Here again, we have the shallow and weedy soil, where there seems to be a response of amazement. This is like the curious Jews in the earlier verses; they are interested to a point, but short of worship of Christ and great faith, like the Canaanite woman.

The last of the eight comes in chapter 16. Here, we see the Pharisees and the Sadducees, who came to tempt, or test. Their approach is to attack Jesus, they are against Him, and we see the hard ground.

Do you know what I find interesting about this? The curiosity of the majesty of the intricate mind of the Holy Spirit. There are eight accounts. Out of those eight, only two are good soil. That is the same ratio exactly as the one good soil in the four. So the mind of the Spirit illustrates beautifully what that parable is saying.

As we go into the world, we can expect the same kinds of things. Now and then, there will be that good soil. Very often, there will be that hard, resistant soil. Sometimes there will be that curious, amazed, sort of temporary-response kind of soil.

After these eight incidents, we see the disciples gathered with Jesus in a debriefing in Matthew 16:13. Now they are coming to the borders of Caesarea Philippi, which is very far in the north. He calls them together and says, "We have been out doing this, seeing all these responses. Let me ask the basic question: who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" Oh, what a question that is. "What is it that they are saying?"

"So they said, 'Some say John the Baptist,'" and that was Herod. "Some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." There were all kinds of things going on. And He asked them what they thought. Peter became not only the spokesman of the Twelve, but the spokesman of God, and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." In effect, Jesus said, "You said it, you got it."

So these incidents demonstrate what Jesus taught in the parables about how men would respond in this age. Let's go back, with that in mind, and look at incident number one: Jesus coming to Nazareth. In verse 53 we read, "Now it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these parables, that He departed from there."

'There' is Capernaum. He had been ministering with Capernaum as a base for about a year, and now He left, departed after the giving of these parables. Remember that at the very beginning, early in chapter 13, that the parables were hidden from the people and revealed only to the disciples because the people were not willing to believe. In fact, back in Matthew 11:23, Jesus said, "And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you."

In other words, Jesus had pronounced a curse on Capernaum, and when it says that very simple little statement at the end of verse 53, "He departed from there," Capernaum's history ended and God's damning judgment began. It was the beginning of the end. He never went back, except in passing, and never reestablished a base there. Capernaum had its opportunity. He had come into that city, demonstrated power that could only be interpreted as from God, and now it was over. It marked a crisis in the town's history from which it never recovered. If you go today to Capernaum, no one lives there; it is utter ruin. It is one of the most beautiful places on the earth, but no one is there. It has felt the hot breath of the curse of Jesus Christ for its unbelief.

He left Capernaum, and went back to Nazareth in verse 54. "He came into His own country." That was walking distance from Capernaum. All of this is so close; you could walk it all in just a day. He went back to Nazareth where He had been raised, where He was since childhood. The comparative account in Mark feeds in interesting insights, and you can compare them in your own reading. But we know without doubt that it was Nazareth, His own country.

It says He went into the synagogue and taught them. This is not the first time He'd done that. At the very beginning of His Galilean ministry, He went to His own hometown. I want you to see what happened, because it is very important in understanding this passage. Look at Luke 4:14.

This is approximately one year earlier, when He had just begun His ministry in Galilee. "Then Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and news of Him went out through all the surrounding region. And He taught in their synagogues," and this is very likely the first synagogue He taught in, Nazareth. "So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day." That is very normal.

Every little town had its synagogue, and on the Sabbath day, everything stopped and everyone went. They sat in a very prescribed manner in a very prescribed place; it was very routine, with familiar faces, activities, and events. You can imagine that it had only been a brief time since He had been there as a citizen of Nazareth. Now, He's beginning His public ministry, so He goes to Nazareth and does as He always did.

In fact, were He there on the Friday night, just as the sun was setting, He would have heard a very familiar sound - two trumpet blasts. Those blasts would have come from the trumpet in the hands of the minister of the synagogue, who climbed up onto the roof of his house and just as the sun was beginning to set on Shabbat, Friday evening, he would blow two blasts to warn of the beginning of the Sabbath. A little time would intervene, and he would blow a second time, this time one blast. At that blast, all work halted. Then there would be a little space of time, and he would blow another single blast, and instantly put his trumpet down, lest he should defame and dishonor the Sabbath now that the third blast indicated it had begun. He would not defile the Sabbath.

Jesus would have heard the trumpet blasts and with the people, and gone to a place to partake in the Sabbath activity. In the dawn of the Sabbath morning, He would have found His way into the synagogue, which had been so much a part of His life in the years in Nazareth. He would have taken His seat and seen many familiar faces, people He knew so very well, even from the human viewpoint. They were the same, but He wasn't, because in the intervening time since He had been gone, He had become famous. He was a hometown boy no more, but a famous man now. There is a curiosity about Him because of all that has been said.

It was so in those days that if you were a famous person in a synagogue, you were recognized as a famous teacher and given the right to speak. So He became the speaker. He went, as was His custom, but He did something He had never done in that synagogue before. It says that He stood up to read.

They always stood up to read, by the way. The standing posture was indicative of the authority of the Word of God. By the way, they sat down to teach, lest the people think that man's teaching had the same authority as God's Word. They stood to read, and sat to teach. You see, even when they read the Hebrew and an interpreter interpreted it into the Aramaic, which they spoke, the interpreter was not permitted to read his interpretation, lest the people think that it had the same authority as the written Word of God. So they gave a very high place to the reading, and He stood to read.

He would have read, at this particular point, the haftorah, the prophets, as was the custom in all synagogues. They gave Him the book in verse 17, and it was to be read from Isaiah 61. "He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: 'The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.'"

That is a very important text, a Messianic text that describes the ministry of the Messiah and, to the very letter, the ministry of Jesus Christ. He was saying, "The Messiah is here in your midst; this is fulfilled." This is a monumental claim, this is a banner day above all days in the history of Israel, the day when the promise is fulfilled! It is the greatest day in all history."

Verse 20. "Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, 'Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.'" Now, He probably said a lot more than that, and no doubt became specific. He was saying, "I am the fulfillment of this prophecy."

Verse 22. "So all bore witness to Him, and marveled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. And they said, 'Is this not Joseph's son?'" How did He get so erudite? How did He get so famous? This is Joseph's son. And Jesus replied to them, and boy did He ever go for the throat, "You will surely say this proverb to Me, 'Physician, heal yourself!'" Do you know what that means? It means if you're such a good physician, and heal so many people, let's see you do it on the spot. In other words, don't tell us stories about what you have done; do something right here. "Whatever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in Your country." Charity begins at home, don't forget. Do it here.

There was really no need for that; He had done miracle upon miracle upon miracle. He said, "Assuredly, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own country." They had already given evidence of that when they said, "Isn't this Joseph's son? He can't be anything too special."

So He tells them a truth. "Many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a great famine throughout all the land; but to none of them was Elijah sent except to Zarephath, in the region of Sidon, to a woman who was a

widow."

In other words, He says, "There were a lot of Jewish widows and God never sent a prophet to any of them, but He did to a non-Jew." You just don't say that in a synagogue. He was defending the right that He had to minister as the light to the nations. In Matthew 4, He said that He had come to be a light to the nations. He was reaching out to the nations, those who were not God's people. So He says, in effect, "God is not going to do anything special for you." Why? Because of their resistant, hard-hearted unbelief. God does not cast His pearls before swine.

Verse 27. "And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian." Here is another Gentile, and some people call Naaman the Hitler of his time; he was the worst. But God cleansed his leprosy. Jesus is saying, "I haven't come to bend to your provincial hardheartedness. I have come to be the Savior of the world to those who will hear and listen."

Verse 28 says, "So all those in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath." To claim to be the Messiah, and say that you have come like Elijah and Elisha, to others and not to your own hometown, and to ignore them, was the height of indifference! It was intolerable, so they threw Him out of the city. They would have thrown Him over the cliff, but He passed through their midst and went away. They tried to kill Him; that is how it is in a prophet's hometown. It was such hard soil.

He left there, and made His home in Capernaum. One year passes, and now we are back in Matthew 13. His desire is to return with a second chance, another opportunity for Nazareth, that narrow, prejudiced, proud, conceited, cliquish town. He went back fearlessly, boldly, courageously, graciously, lovingly, to those people who had tried to kill Him.

Verse 54 says, "He taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished." He went right back into the teeth of the storm, right back into the synagogue, and taught them. As a teacher, I have so often wished that I could have heard how Jesus taught. I know we have the words in the Bible, but there is so much in technique. I have always wished that there were tape recorders. You can have the Shroud of Turin, I'll take a cassette, you know? How wonderful it would be to hear Him, and how was it when He taught? How He must have been able to bind people in the spell of His magnetism. Well, let me see if I can paint the picture for you.

People would all be sitting there. Synagogue worship was very much like a boring church service today. I mean, don't read anything great into it; it was just like many boring experiences people have today in many ways. They did it out of routine. One of the ways they decided to try and alleviate some of their boredom, over the years, was to have the teacher, the one with all the information, whisper it in the ear of someone else who was the speaker.

Teachers can be boring; all of us who have been through seminary have experienced some. Some say, "The content was good, but it's hard to stay awake when they guy is talking." So their solution was to get the guy with all the information, and he tells it to some hotshot who can really do the job as the speaker. This one was called the amora, and he stood beside the teacher, who whispered into his ear, and he gave it pizazz. That's not a bad idea, in some places.

Edersheim, the great Jewish scholar and historian, describes the amora in these terms. "He was mostly characterized by vanity, self-conceit, and silliness." Isn't that interesting? Vanity, self-conceit, and silliness; he was trying to be funny all the time! "As he stood beside the Rabbi, he thought far more of attracting attention and applause to himself, than of befitting his hearers." He was putting on a show.

Here are the qualifications for him: he had to have a good figure and form, a pleasant expression, a melodious voice, his words were to come like those of a bride to a bridegroom. He had to have fluency, speech as sweet as honey and as pleasant as milk and honey. His diction was to be richly adorned, like a bride on her wedding day. He was to have sufficient confidence never to be disoriented. Above all, he had to be conciliatory and avoid being too personal. That's what they usually had - vanity, self-conceit, and silliness.

They were trying to keep people's attention in the meaningless routine which was so much a part of their religious life. But Jesus sat down and did it Himself; He didn't need any hotshots. He overthrew the normal procedure, and taught, and they were astonished. Have you ever wondered why His speech was so amazing?

Basically, it was characterized by five things. If you want to know why He was an effective speaker, here are the five keys. Number one, He was authoritative. In Matthew 7, it says the people marveled at His teaching because He spoke as one having authority. He was authoritative, and authority means to speak with conviction. I think that is so important. It just bothers me when people say great things as if they were indifferent. Speak with authority!

A guy told me he came to Grace Church not because he believes what I say, but because he liked the way I said it; it pumped him up for his sales job. When I was doing a graduation ceremony for the Police Academy, one of the men told me that they had to flunk one of the students because of his voice. He said he didn't have enough authority in his voice.

Whenever Jesus spoke, He spoke with the conviction that carries authority. The second thing is in John 7:15, and tells us something else about His speech. It says that the Jews marveled when He taught, and they said, "How does this man know letters," or have an education, "Never having gone to school?" The second thing about Him was that He had knowledge. There is nothing worse than a guy talking who has absolutely no knowledge. But He had it, an incredible, vast knowledge of all the truth of God. Here is a man with authority and knowledge.

Thirdly, there was grace in His speech, warmth, gentleness, love, sensitivity. Your speech is to always be gracious, seasoned with salt, Paul says. In Luke 4:22, we read that He spoke and they marveled at the graciousness of His words.

Fourthly, His speaking was powerful. In Luke 4:32, it says, "They were astonished at His teaching, for His word was with power." Authority speaks of the speaking itself, coming with authority. Power speaks of its effect. You know how you can listen to a speaker, and the whole time he's speaking, you're arguing with him? You couldn't do that with Christ; you couldn't fight Him off. The power was so great and consistent that you were knocked over with it. You couldn't fight it off, duck the shots. He spoke with such devastating impact that He penetrated the mind and heart, and there were no loopholes in His logic, there was no way out.

The fifth characteristic of His speech is in John 7:46, where they said, "There was never a man who spoke like this man." I think this is an absolutely essential element for one who is an effective speaker. His speech was unique; He didn't get up and say what everyone else said, He said what no one else said; He was unique. He didn't say what was obvious, but what wasn't obvious. He cut through the traditions to the stuff they had never seen or heard.

The power that He had when He taught in Nazareth was the same that He had when He taught anywhere - it was the power of a tremendous conviction that came through His authoritative speaking. It was that great wealth of knowledge, that when He opened His mouth, the truth of God came flooding out. Truth has its own impact, and it was the graciousness of the way He said it, the tremendous, irresistible power when it was said, and the very uniqueness of the message itself.

If you want to study to be an effective teacher, those are the things you need to have. What was their response? To one who was authoritative, knowledgeable, gracious, powerful, and unique, they were astonished. They were blown away by Him, astounded, amazed. Do you know what it led to? Look at verse 58.

"Now He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief." It didn't lead to anything. You can be amazed at Jesus, astounded at Him, astonished, but it doesn't mean anything if your heart is filled with unbelief. How can you explain that? How can you be unbelieving when you have just heard this? How can you not believe when the mass of the things that He has done is so obvious? Because unbelieving is a choice, an act of the will. Unbelief is something you determine. You will not believe; it is the hard, stony ground. It is not like the man who said, "Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief. I am trying to believe, but help me the rest of the way." Theirs was that hard unbelief. It didn't matter what the evidence was, they weren't going to believe.

I want to show you the power of unbelief. I'll only give you the first point of these four, and I want you to see how absolutely devastating this is. How in the world can you hear Jesus teach, see Him grow up for 30 years in your midst in a little town, know that He has preformed miracle upon miracle upon miracle that could never be refuted, and not believe? Let me show you how it works.

Number one, unbelief blurs the obvious. It is the nature of unbelief to blot out what is obvious. Look at verse 54. He teaches, and they are astonished, and look at their question. "Where did He get this wisdom and these mighty works?" That is an absolutely stupid question. That is a dumb question. If that isn't obvious, nothing is obvious. I mean, where do you think supernatural miracles come from? Where do you think divine wisdom comes from? A child knows the answer to that! But it is the nature of unbelief to make the choice to reject, and then blur out what is obvious.

Every time I read a liberal commentator on the Scripture or a liberal theologian, I see them do this all over the place. They eliminate the truth, then begin to concoct some impossible scheme to explain everything away, then stand back and pat themselves on the back and commend their own intellectualism. It's stupid.

They had seen the miracles and healings, and heard these words, and now they're saying, "Where did He get this information? Where did He get this power?" They are denying what is obvious. The connection is obvious; Nicodemus knew it. He came to Jesus in John 3 and said, "We know that you

are a teacher that came from God, for no man can do what you do unless God is with Him." That was obvious. He did miracles all over the place, and these people had seen some of them.

It says, "He did not do many mighty works." I don't know whether He did just a few, but if He didn't even do any in Nazareth, He had done them in that area, and you could walk in less than a day or maybe even an afternoon from Nazareth to Capernaum. And the word was all over everywhere, and the lame were walking, the blind were seeing, and the deaf were hearing, and believe me, they were telling about it. There was no question. In fact, they even said in the question that He had wisdom and mighty works; they don't deny either.

Let me add a footnote for those of you who are into apologetics. This is one of the greatest apologetics or defenses of the deity of Christ on the pages of Scripture. It is the fact that it isn't His friends or disciples or the Christian church that affirm that He did these miracles, it is His enemies. Over and over and over in the Bible, it is His enemies who never tried to refute that He did these things. You can read through the whole gospel record, and you will not find them denying that He did them. How could they? There were thousands upon thousands of miracles, so much so that John 21:25 says, "The books of the world could not contain them." John 20:30 says, "And many other signs which are not written in this book."

He banished disease from the land of Palestine, taught profoundly on every conceivable subject related to life, death, time, eternity, God, man, Heaven, and Hell. Over and over again in the gospel of John, Jesus said, "My works and words are sufficient to prove to you who I am." John 5:36 says, "But I have a greater witness than John's; for the works which the Father has given Me to finish -- the very works that I do -- bear witness of Me," how can you deny that? You have to make the obvious connection between supernatural manifestation and God.

John 8:37 says, "You seek to kill Me because My word has no place in you. I keep teaching and speaking the truth, but because you won't receive it, you turn Me off." In verse 43, He says, "You can't hear My word because you are of your father, the Devil, so when I tell you My truth, you won't believe me." In John 10:37, there is a tremendous statement. "If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me." He's saying, "Even if you don't want to believe Me, you have to believe the works." In John 14 and 15, He says the same thing.

The interesting thing is that His enemies didn't deny His wisdom; they asked where His wisdom came from. Let me ask you, if you know a little about the Bible. What is the one thing of all things that a Jew came from God? Wisdom. If they knew anything, they knew that. They were weaned on that. They knew that wisdom comes from God, and the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and they say, "Where does He get all this wisdom?"

He taught about regeneration, worship, salvation, sin, evangelism, judgment, Heaven, Hell, rejection, fasting, praying, giving, marriage, divorce, murder, hate, anger, love, stealing, retaliation, adultery, lying, swearing, loving God, loving their friends, loving their families and enemies, about money, possessions, false doctrine and teachers, Sabbath, the law, obedience, discipleship, grace, blasphemy, signs, miracles, wonders, life, death, tradition, humility, pride, persecution, the church, light, freedom, bondage, faith, unbelief, evil, Satan, hypocrisy, repentance, election, service, children, the beginning of the world and the end of the world, rewards, damnation. He taught about anything and everything they needed to know.

They knew it was wisdom; no one could ever catch Him in His words. When the Pharisees came to Him, they always went away scratching their heads. These stupid people are asking where He got His wisdom. Did they think He had taken an advanced course at the Rabbinical Training Institute? Hardly. They knew where it came from: God. They knew that. "And where does He get this power to do these mighty works - healing the sick, raising the dead, giving sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, and healing the lame? Where does it come from?" That is the stupidity of unbelief.

Listen very carefully. If a person says they need more evidence and proof, that is not the issue. You see, they had all they needed, they just wouldn't make the connection. It wasn't a question of evidence. For example, if you're witnessing to an uncle or nephew or brother, and they keep saying, "Prove it to me." If they're saying, "Prove the Bible is true. How do I know Jesus Christ is really the Messiah?" If they keep wanting more and more evidence, that is not the issue. It is not a lack of evidence. The issue is in John 3:18. This is really critical, and you need to get it, because it will help you in your evangelism.

Here is where they were in Nazareth, not believing. "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." Here is someone who has not believed, and here is the reason he is condemned. "This is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world." Is light visible? You have to know that. Yes, very good class. Light is visible. So light comes into the world, "And men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed."

Do you know why they don't believe? It isn't lack of evidence, it's love of evil. Keep that in mind when you witness to people, and they keep asking for more proof. That is not the issue in most cases. There are some who truly seek and want to see the evidence, and they will respond to the evidence. But basically, when Jesus did His signs, John 20:30 says He did them in the presence of His disciples.

You see, evidence affirms the faith of those who already believe. Like, "Lord I believe, help my unbelief." But those who are hardhearted and resistant, for those who are continually demanding more and more of that kind of evidence, that is not the issue. People run back and ask me how they can prove to their friend that Jesus is God, or that the Bible is true. That isn't the issue; it's not a lack of evidence, but a love of evil.

Nazareth's problem was that they loved their sin, and didn't want Christ at all. That is why, when they came to Jesus, they said, "We want a sign," and He said, "I will give no sign to this evil, adulterous generation. Your problem isn't that you need proof, but that you love sin." That is the issue. Unbelief blurs the obvious. Unbelief also does three more things, and we'll see them next time.

Lord, we are grateful again for the time that we've shared in Your precious Word. We pray for any who might be in our midst who are unbelieving and condemned already because they don't believe in the Son of God, and are condemned because they don't believe for the love of their sin and darkness. Father, we pray that the light of the glorious Gospel would shine to them, and that they would see the truth in Jesus Christ. Help us to be faithful to go into the world, even though it is much like Nazareth - hard, and in many places unbelieving. May we, with the same fearlessness and

boldness of our blessed Lord, confront even those places that if they don't repent, they will be judged with greater judgment, for You are glorified in Your judgment as well as in Your salvation. In Christ's name, Amen.

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