

The Power of Unbelief, Part 2

Scripture: Matthew 13:53-58

Code: 2306

This morning, we are going to walk where Jesus walked when He walked to Nazareth. Our text is Matthew 13:53-58. We are really completing a study which we began last Lord's Day of this often overlooked text. I want to read the text as we begin.

"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."

In these two Sundays, as we've been finishing up Matthew 13, we are discussing the power of unbelief. He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief. History chronicles for us the power of unbelief to stop the blessing of God.

Eve failed to believe God, and the whole world was cursed. The world itself failed to believe God's word through Noah, and was destroyed in the flood. Israel refused to believe God and wandered 40 years in the desert. They again refused to believe God, and were ultimately scattered throughout the earth to suffer for centuries. Pharaoh refused to believe God's word through Moses and lost his slaves, his son, and his army. Aaron refused to believe the word of God about worship, led the people into idolatry, and as a result, lost 3,000 lives. Moses refused to believe God, and it cost him the long-awaited Promised Land. Achan refused to believe God and was killed along with his whole family. Nebuchadnezzar rejected God's word and became a raving maniac. Sennacherib blasphemed God's word, and an angel of the Lord slew 185,000 of his soldiers, and he himself was slain by his own sons.

The rich young ruler refused to believe in the words of Jesus Christ and was damned to Hell. The Pharisees refused to believe Jesus Christ and died in their sins, and went to a place where they would never know anything but pain and suffering. Many would-be disciples refused to believe Jesus when He talked about eating His flesh and drinking His blood, and they walked no more with Him, and stepped into eternity without God. Felix, Festus, Agrippa wouldn't believe when Paul presented to them the Gospel of the grace of God. They were lost forever. Maybe the greatest illustration of

unbelief, because of his proximity to the truth, was Judas, who after living three years in the presence of the Living Truth never did believe, and was damned to go to his own place.

We talk a lot about the power of faith. Faith has the power to bring blessing, to bring eternal life, to bring Heaven. Conversely, unbelief brings pain, sorrow, remorse, and eternal Hell. This is the fearful power of unbelief. Our Lord says, "He that believes is redeemed. But he who does not believe is condemned."

This is the final element in our Lord's instruction to the disciples in chapter 13. He has given them the parables of the Kingdom which describe the age which they will confront. The parables have warned them that when they go out into the world to preach the Kingdom, as we must do today as well, they and we will be confronted with unbelief. There will be that hard soil, that shallow soil, that thorny and weedy soil. There will be plenty of people who will not see the Kingdom as a pearl of great price, who will not see salvation as a treasure hidden in a field, to be purchased by the trading of all that they possess. There will be unbelief out there; that is the character of this form of the Kingdom. Our Lord is telling His disciples that as they go into the harvest field to proclaim the Kingdom, as they go to call men to repentance and salvation, they must be aware that they will face unbelief.

In fact, beginning in Matthew 13:53 and extending to Matthew 16:12, the Lord gives eight little incidents where people are confronted with the message of the Kingdom. In only two of the eight is there belief. In six of the eight, there is not. It is the same ratio as the soils - one to four. One good soil, and three that are not receptive to the Gospel. So having said that it will be this way, the Lord then illustrates it in Matthew's gospel with eight responses to the message of the Kingdom. The first response is given to us in the end of this chapter. It is an incident where our Lord leaves Capernaum and enters the village where He was raised, the village of Nazareth. Verse 54 calls it His own country; the parallel passage in Mark affirms the same. It is Nazareth, the little village where our Lord lived until His ministry began.

Here is the real fulfillment of John 1:11, "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." For 30 years, in their presence, He had lived a perfect life. When He comes back to present to them the message of the Kingdom, their unbelief stares Him in the face and He is thwarted from doing mighty works in their presence. The power of unbelief.

As I told you last time, this is the Lord's second visit to Nazareth. He had been there about a year earlier, at which time they had tried to throw Him off a cliff and kill Him because they were so upset that He claimed to be the Messiah. His wisdom they couldn't deny, His miracles they couldn't deny; they had benefited from both. He promised them that He was the Messiah, showed them that He was the fulfillment of Isaiah 61, but instead of embracing their Messiah and His Kingdom with joy, they endeavored to kill him. Now, about a year later, He comes back. He follows basically the same format as the first time. He taught them in their synagogue. He again went into the synagogue, sat

down, and taught. And you know well what He taught - He taught them the wisdom of God, that He was the fulfillment of the promise of God, and they were astonished. It sounds like a great beginning.

At the end of verse 54, they said, "Where did this Man get this wisdom and these mighty works?" They couldn't deny His wisdom; it was undeniable. When He opened His mouth, everything that came out was so profound that it staggered them. It was so clear and simple, but equally hard to believe. His speech was that which was unique to Himself, and that is why they said on another occasion, "No one has ever spoken like this man." They couldn't deny His mighty deeds or miracles, either; they were everywhere. So in hearing Him teach, they were astonished, astounded, amazed, in wonder. It was hard for them to comprehend the depth and clarity of His wisdom, and the obvious power that He had to do miracles.

Yet, in verse 58, it says, "Now He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief." How is it that you can be unbelieving in the face of such an astounding individual? How is it that you can reject Jesus Christ when His wisdom and power are inexplicable in human terms? How is it that you cannot believe that He is from God when there is only one explanation for what He says and does, and that is God is with Him? Even Nicodemus came to Him and said in John 3, "We know you are a teacher from God, for no man can do the things You do unless God is with Him."

Again and again, Jesus said to the people, "Believe My words and believe Me for the sake of My works." The amazing thing is, as I pointed out to you last time, one of the greatest apologetics for the deity of Christ is that His enemies always affirmed His power. His enemies never denied His miracles or His wisdom; it is only His contemporary enemies who are foolish enough to do that. The ones who were alive when He lived never tried that; it was too obvious that He had wisdom and power beyond human explanation. They never denied that. But they never made the logical connection between that power and wisdom and God. It wasn't because the connection wasn't apparent, but because they were willfully unbelieving. That is one of the responses that we will see to the proclamation of the Gospel in this age. That is the stony ground, the hard soil. The seed never even penetrates because there is a hard heart of bitter unbelief.

We saw last time why it is that men's hearts are hardened in unbelief. In John 3:18, it says, "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." The reason that he is condemned for his unbelief is that, "Light has come 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."

It was not a lack of evidence that caused them to be unbelieving, it was a love of evil. There is a big difference. It was not a lack of proof, but a love of their sin. They did not want to abandon themselves to what was obvious, or be exposed as sinners, or turn from their sin. I submit to you that

that is still the problem. It isn't a lack of evidence that causes people to be hard and unbelieving today, it is a love of evil. They do not wish to come to the truth, lest their deeds should be exposed.

With that in mind as a sense of what was happening in Nazareth, let me remind you of the four lessons that we learn about unbelief in this incident. The first one, we looked at last week: unbelief blurs the obvious. They asked the most ridiculous question imaginable at the end of verse 54, "Where did this Man get this wisdom and these mighty works?" There was only one answer to that, and it was obvious what it was - it was from God. Only God could do what He did: banish disease from Palestine, speak with such astounding clarity, wisdom, depth, and profound truth. That could only come from God, but because they would not accept Jesus as from God, they blurred out what is obvious with a question that only shows their stupidity, "Where did this Man get this wisdom and these mighty works?" They blurred out the obvious.

Remember this, that when you propagate the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and have done it with clarity, and people are hard and unbelieving, it is not that they need more proof, even though they may demand it. It is that they need to be broken in their love of their sin.

That leads us to a second point that is connected closely to the first one. Unbelief also builds up the irrelevant. If you have ever had the occasion to witness to someone who is resistant and unbelieving, inevitably, after they have blocked out what is patently obvious in the presentation of the Gospel message, and willingly refused to see what is clear, they will then attach themselves to something that is totally irrelevant and press that to divert you from the real issue.

Maybe you have brought someone to church, and as you're going home or as you spend time with them, you present Christ to them. You may get comments like this, "They weren't very friendly. I didn't like the seat; the guy in front of me kept moving his head, and I was distracted. The preacher is too loud, or long." That last one is a sure mark of carnality. Or maybe your friend was offended by something that was said, and they build up this big smokescreen of that which is irrelevant, and the real issue is their eternal soul, the claims of Jesus Christ, the Gospel of the Kingdom, not the pew or the length of the sermon or the looks of the preacher or whatever.

Invariably, unbelief diverts from the main issue and settles on self-justification, and moves to that which is irrelevant. You can tell a true seeker from one that isn't. Just present the Gospel, and they'll say, "Tell me more about that. How does that happen? How do I make that my own? How do I appropriate the Gospel? How do I really know the resurrection is valid?" Then you present the evidence, and they say, "How wonderful! It is true." You can tell that from the person who just doesn't believe any of it and wants to divert you from that which is the real issue at hand and get you off onto all kinds of other stuff. In their self-justification, that's what they do.

They were the ultimate kind of egotists, believing that they had already attained the Kingdom of God through their legalism. They weren't willing to back up and confess their sinfulness and accept Jesus Christ. They were also totally blown away by the fact that anyone from their town could have arisen to such power. They just wouldn't accept that anyone from their community could have gone higher than they did; it was a pride issue, a jealousy issue, an envy issue, a pettiness issue. It was all bound up in their evil, unbelieving hearts, so they come up with all of this totally irrelevant stuff in verses 55-56.

"Is this not the carpenter's son?" I can't think of anything more irrelevant than that; what does that have to do with the truth of what He said? The fact that His father was a carpenter has nothing to do with it. Then it says, "Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas?" James is the one who later became the head of the Jerusalem church and presided at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. Joseph was obviously named for his father; Simon is not to be confused with Peter, and Judas is not to be confused with the apostle.

Verse 56. "And His sisters, are they not all with us?" They're saying, "This is just Jesus, the son of the carpenter." The word is tekton, and it means 'one who works with hard material,' and some believe that it could indicate Joseph was a mason, because homes were built out of brick. If he was a homebuilder, he would have built out of brick, and would have made door frames and window frames out of wood, so he would have worked with both hard materials. It may well have been that he was a carpenter who made plows, yokes, and other wood implements. But he was a common laborer, and it's wonderful how God dignifies common labor by bringing the Messiah into such a family. No doubt, when his father died (and he is unnamed here, which may mean that he was dead by this time), Jesus had taken over the business, perhaps, before He began His ministry.

So they are saying, "This can't be anyone special; we know His family!" What an irrelevant thought. What does that have to do with His message? How does that impact in any way, shape, or form the fact that He did miracles? How can you use that to explain away the fact that He raised the dead? It is irrelevant. That is not the issue, but that is so typical of unbelief. It will find something that doesn't matter, attach itself to that, and make it an issue to divert you. Now, they want to get into a discussion of whether He has the 'family credentials.' How silly! What a betrayal.

Mark adds that they said, "Is He not also a carpenter?" Not only did He not have the right family, but also He didn't have the right kind of trade; He was just a common person. His brothers were just His brothers, and His sisters, "We know them. This can't be anyone special!" It is hard for us to understand, as Christians, how they could ignore this mass of miracles and tremendous teaching, and get stuck on this issue. But that is the character of unbelief.

In John 7:15, the same approach is used again, this time in Jerusalem. He comes there, and verse 14 tells us that He went into the temple and taught, just as He had done in Nazareth. And there is the

same reaction; the Jews marveled, and were literally amazed at His teaching. But this is their reaction. "How does this Man know letters, having never studied?" They're saying, "This guy can't be who He obviously is because He hasn't been to the right school, or have a degree." They had all this false criteria. They ignore His words and works, and disqualify Him because of a lack of credentials.

They did the same thing to the apostles in Acts 4. Peter and John say, "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.' Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled." They're thinking, "How can these hayseeds from northern Galilee know all this?" That isn't the issue. The fact is, they do. So they divert to that which is totally extraneous to the issue.

Just a note, "Is not this the carpenter's son?" and as Mark indicates, "Is he not a carpenter Himself?" indicate that Joseph was probably dead. "Is not His mother called Mary?" indicates that they perceived Mary as an ordinary person, certainly far less than some perceive her under the term 'The Queen of Heaven.' She was very common. "And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas?" and He certainly is being connected to them in the family.

There are some who would like us to believe that Mary never had any other children; the Roman Church calls it perpetual virginity, but that is against the obvious indication of this text. They would say that perhaps they are using the word 'brothers' in a religious sense, but that is hardly the case, since these are the enemies of Jesus who are trying to debunk Him and discredit Him, and they're trying to do it by showing that He comes from a common family. That is the intent of their criticism.

That is why in Luke, it says that Jesus was her firstborn, and the implication is that there were others that followed. Here, they are even named, and we met them in Matthew 12:46-47. They are indicated in John 2:12, John 7, Acts 1, and so forth. So Mary was a very ordinary woman, albeit a woman of great godliness, but not supernatural. The brothers and sisters were very ordinary people. The question is, "With this kind of family, from where did He get all these things?" He didn't have the heredity to pull this off, or the training, or the education, He isn't from the elite.

This says something very interesting. When we think about the period of time from the Lord's birth to His ministry, that 30-year period, most Bible teachers think that Luke 2 is the only insight we get into that whole period. There, the Lord was 12, and went to the temple with His parents. He was asking questions of the doctors in the temple, and his parents went back to get Him, and the text says He was, "Growing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man." Many believe this is the only insight we have into that gap of time, when He was growing. But I believe this is also one of those kinds of passages, and we don't always see it that way. This, to me, is a tremendous insight.

There are many fanciful, wishful dreams about the time of our Lord from His childhood to the beginning of His ministry, and some have tried to tell us that He was manifesting His deity in many ways. There are stories that, as a little boy, walking down the road, He found a bird with a broken wing, and He would stroke its wing and it would fly away. Or He would find a calf with a broken leg and heal its leg, or would find a little child that was ill, and heal the child. They sort of have Jesus going through these 30 years and doing all kinds of miracles here and there. But this text militates directly against that.

You see, the problem the people in Nazareth have is very simply that they cannot relate the Jesus they're seeing now to the Jesus they had known in prior years, which indicates that there was nothing about Him that went beyond that which was human, in the sense of overt acts of deity. Oh yes, He was perfect and sinless, but there are no indications that He demonstrated divine power during that time. I believe that when Jesus became man, as it tells us in Philippians 2, He humbled Himself and took on the form of a servant, a human form. I believe that in every sense, those years were lived in the confines of His humanness. Sinless, yes, but not with manifestation of divine power.

That is why they didn't make the connection; this was the carpenter's son, the one we knew as a common laborer, the son of Mary, the brother of these men and women. This isn't any special person. I think that rises from the fact that there were no indications during that period of the manifestation of His deity. Their initial confusion was based on His commonness. Oh, how humble and obscure did God become that He might be a sympathetic High Priest for us!

So they drag out the commonness of His life as if it were the issue. They say at the end of verse 56, "Where then did this Man get all these things?" They asked the right question, but they will not believe the right answer. They are unbelieving in spite of the right question. The one thing they can't believe is that it is from God, because He is too common, and they can't live with the fact that one of their own should be so anointed above His fellows. It is hard for people to handle that.

Unbelief blurs the obvious, builds up the irrelevant, and thirdly, it blinds to the truth. Now we see how blind they are. In verse 57, it says they were offended by Him. The word 'offense' is skandalizo, which means 'scandalized.' They stumbled, and it simply means there was a wall. They couldn't handle it, this couldn't be the Messiah; they were offended at Him. "It can't be Him!"

They were offended by His background, His commonness, the fact that He came from their town, and believe me, they were offended by what He taught, because He must have unmasked their hypocrisy and spoken to them in true terms of entrance into the Kingdom. He must have talked to them of their sinfulness, and the need to repent, and the whole thing offended and scandalized them. They were not neutral, but were adamantly antagonistic and bitter toward Him. Just as Isaiah had said, and as our Lord had reiterated in the beginning of chapter 13, their eyes would not see, their ears would not

hear, their minds would not understand; they were blinded.

Paul tells about it in I Corinthians 1:23-28. He says that the Jews look at Christ and stumble, but we who believe see Him as the power and wisdom of God. His words and works reveal God to us. His words and works cause them to stumble, because they wouldn't believe. Why wouldn't they believe? Because they weren't ready to have the sin revealed.

When you go out to present the Gospel, that is the bottom line. It is not more proof that people need, it is a willingness to abandon their sinfulness, and that demands a plowing of the hard soil that is the preparation work of the Spirit of God. Sometimes God will use us a tools to help in that plowing process, but until that is done and they are willing to break with their sinfulness, there can be no believing, seeing, understanding.

Paul says, "The natural man does not understand the things of God." When he talks about why God set Israel aside, he says in one sentence, "They were broken off by unbelief." A refusal to believe, not because the facts aren't there, but because there is not a willingness to deal with sin.

Our Lord is giving us a beautiful illustration, and to the disciples as well, that when you go out into the world in this era of the Kingdom, in this mystery form, you will hit unbelief, and this is how you can recognize it. Only those who believe will understand. In John 8, the Lord said, "If you continue in My word, you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." It is only those who show a willingness who will understand; the heart has to be open. Remember the story of Lydia, in Acts, whose heart the Lord opened, and the Gospel message came? That's the pattern.

The Lord responds with a statement He used on several occasions in verse 57. "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house." That was a proverb. He was saying, in a sense, "I am fulfilling a proverb. All the experts aren't from out of town." They were saying, "No one from our town could be an expert. This is just Him, no one special." But He is saying, "You have fulfilled the proverb, you have rejected Me."

Even more tragic, in John 7:5, it says, "For even His brothers did not believe in Him." Even in His own house, they didn't believe in Him, which again demonstrates to me that there was a tremendous amount of obscurity in those years. It also demonstrates to me the typical human envy and jealousy, even within His own family. You can imagine how it would be to live 30 years with a brother who was perfect and never sinned once; that would get to you, constantly being the perfect standard by which you saw your own imperfection. So there was no honor in His own town; He was nobody. There was no honor in His own house; He was just the older brother. There was a lot of jealousy and envy.

Their unbelief blinded them; as it says in Deuteronomy 32:20, they were, "Children in whom there is no faith." And what happened? The fourth lesson is that unbelief blocks the supernatural. As a

result, verse 58 says, "He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief."

Listen, and I'll try to explain that verse to you simply. God did, through Christ, many mighty works. Many of them were done in response to a person's faith, and some were done where there was no faith exercised. Many of Jesus' miracles were done where there was no faith. For example, when He raised the dead, you can believe there was no faith on the part of the corpse. You can also believe that when He cast demons out of demoniacs, there was no faith on the part of the demoniac.

There are times when He acted in response to faith, and times when He acted where there was no faith. But He acted sovereignly, with or without faith, in terms of His healings and dealing with people. While faith, then, is not necessary for miracles in the gospels, unbelief that is willing, hard, and overt will always stop miracles. He may heal someone who is neutral or somewhat open, or the man who says, "I believe, help my unbelief," where there is a mixture. But where there is hardhearted unbelief, that blocks the supernatural.

I think of it in reference to Luke 17 where the ten lepers met Jesus, and Jesus said, "Go to the priest and show Him you are clean, and pass the test he gives." They did that so that they could put lepers back into society, because they were outcasts. Jesus healed all ten of them, but only one came back. The one came back to give glory to God, and Jesus asked, "Where are the other nine? Only one has come back to glorify Me." And He said to him, "Your faith has made you whole."

What did He mean? He didn't mean the man was cleansed from leprosy; he already had that, and so did the other nine. What He meant was, "I healed them physically by My sovereign choice. Their unbelief ended the process at that point. You came back, and receive not only physical healing, but your faith has made you whole," and wholeness is not just physical. It is physical and spiritual, and that man received the salvation of his soul. So while God will heal with or without faith by His sovereign choice, when it comes to the unbelief of the heart, that will stop the divine and supernatural intervention.

It goes right back to Matthew 7, where it says, "Do not give that which is holy to the dogs, and do not cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet." In Matthew 12, the Jews came and said, "We want a sign; do a miracle, do a mighty work." He responded, "I will give no such sign to this evil, adulterous, unbelieving nation." So here it is, folks. Find a person who is willfully hardhearted and unbelieving, and they can run around all they want demanding miracles, and God is not going to give them any, because that is not the issue at all. The issue is their sinfulness.

Unbelief is powerful. It blurs the obvious, builds up the irrelevant, blinds to the truth, and blocks out the supernatural. I want to illustrate this with an incident in John 9. We'll pull it all together with this wonderful story. I confess to you that the man in John 9 is one of my favorite people; I am so anxious to meet him in Heaven.

"Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?'" They are holding on to the tradition that the sins of the parents are borne by the children. So was it his fault that he got punished, or did his parents sin and he got punished for their sin? The Lord said, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him." He's saying, "He is blind for the glory of God. It is no sin issue at all; he is blind for today, that he may be given his sight and God may be glorified. He was created, and made blind, for a miracle."

Verse 6. "When He had said these things, He spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva; and He anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay. And He said to him, 'Go, wash in the pool of Siloam,'" and you'll notice it didn't say anything about the faith of the man. "So he went and washed, and came back seeing. Therefore the neighbors and those who previously had seen that he was blind said, 'Is not this he who sat and begged?' Some said, 'This is he.' Others said, 'He is like him.' He said, 'I am he.'" I like this guy; he's in there, giving his testimony.

"Therefore they said to him, 'How were your eyes opened?' He answered and said, 'A Man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and said to me, "Go to the pool of Siloam and wash." So I went and washed, and I received sight.' Then they said to him, 'Where is He?'" You know why they said that? Because they had problems too - aches, pains, diseases, and whatever. And they wanted to see Him. "He said, 'I do not know.'" So they get the guy, and scoop him up to bring him to the theological experts for an investigation. I call this part of the chapter 'Unbelief Investigates a Miracle.'

You know what happens when unbelief investigates a miracle? Nothing really, and we'll see that. "They brought him who formerly was blind to the Pharisees." Now these blind beggars sat at the gate every day; everyone knew who they were. "Now it was a Sabbath when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also asked him again how he had received his sight. He said to them, 'He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and I see.' Therefore," and that is a great logical, legal, sequential word, "Some of the Pharisees said, 'This Man is not from God.'" This was a brilliant conclusion, astounding.

They bring the guy in, he has been blind all his life, he can now see, Jesus did it, therefore Jesus could not be of God; great reasoning. But you see, that is what happens when unbelief investigates a miracle. It sets up false standards, does biased research. You say, "How in the world could they say that? How could they be so stupid as to say He was not of God?"

Verse 16. "Because He doesn't keep the Sabbath day." What a false standard; that is blurring the obvious and building up the irrelevant. That doesn't answer the question, "How can he see?" You can't just say, "He's not of God because He didn't keep our tradition on the Sabbath." In the first place, their tradition was ridiculous, and secondly, it wasn't even the issue. So they blur the obvious,

build up the irrelevant; it is so typical.

"Others said, 'How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?'" There were a few rational people in the group. "And there was a division among them. They said to the blind man again, 'What do you say about Him because He opened your eyes?' He said, 'He is a prophet.'" You didn't have to be Phi Beta Kappa to figure that out. "But the Jews did not believe concerning him, that he had been blind and received his sight, until they called the parents of him who had received his sight."

They are so hard that they get his parents, and say, "'Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?' His parents answered them and said, 'We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but by what means he now sees we do not know, or who opened his eyes we do not know. He is of age; ask him. He will speak for himself.'" He's a big boy, he can talk for himself. You see, they don't even want to get in on this; they are afraid.

Verse 22. "His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had agreed already that if anyone confessed that He was Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue," which is excommunication from the Jewish society, so anyone who said Jesus was the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue, and they wanted nothing to do with this, "Therefore his parents said, 'He is of age; ask him.'"

So they come back to this man again, and this is ridiculous. "So they again called the man who was blind, and said to him, 'Give God the glory! We know that this Man is a sinner.'" So they told him, "We've already reached a conclusion about Jesus, so just praise God because He must have done it." It's unbelievable unbelief, isn't it? It flies in the face of all the evidence, rejecting the facts, blurring the obvious, building up the irrelevant, blind to the truth, blinded because of unbelief.

"He answered and said, 'Whether He is a sinner or not I do not know. One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see.' Then they said to him again, 'What did He do to you? How did He open your eyes?'" This time, the guy is getting irritated, because they keep asking him the same question. I like his boldness. "He answered them, 'I told you already, and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become His disciples?'" I love that! He's sarcastic, isn't he?

"Then they reviled him and said, 'You are His disciple, but we are Moses' disciples. We know that God spoke to Moses; as for this fellow, we do not know where He is from.'" But they should have known, shouldn't they? It was obvious.

"The man answered and said to them, 'Why, this is a marvelous thing, that you do not know where He is from; yet He has opened my eyes! Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him. Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind. If this Man were not from God, He could do

nothing." Now he is preaching; he's a better theologian than all of them put together. He was ready to believe, wasn't he? And they weren't. Both had the same facts, but one had a heart that was open, and the other, a heart that was closed.

"They answered and said to him, 'You were completely born in sins, and are you teaching us?' And they cast him out." They shouted profanity at him. They were name-calling. "Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when He had found him, He said to him, 'Do you believe in the Son of God?' He answered and said, 'Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?' And Jesus said to him, 'You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you.' Then he said, 'Lord, I believe!' And he worshiped Him."

That man will spend forever in Christ's presence, but the others, because of unbelief, blocked the supernatural. In verse 39, Jesus says, "For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind." He's talking about the Pharisees, who think they see everything. "Then some of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these words, and said to Him, 'Are we blind also?' Jesus said to them, 'If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, "We see." Therefore your sin remains.'" He's saying, "You are sinners."

Unbelief is tragic. Be warned, would you? Be warned with the words of Hebrews 3:12. The writer says, "Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God." Take heed, lest there be in you an evil heart of unbelief. Let's bow in prayer.

Father, we see in this text the power of unbelief. God, we pray two things this morning, that there would not be any here who are living in unbelief, blurring the obvious, building up the irrelevant, blind to the truth, blocking the supernatural in self-justifying, loving sin, investigating Jesus Christ with such bias that they could never see the truth though it were as obvious as it was to the Pharisees when they saw the blind man who could see.

Father, plow up the hard soil by Your Spirit, that there might be a receptive heart. Father, beyond those who need You here, give us a vision to reach a lost and unbelieving world, realizing that we can't convince against the will, but need to be available when Your Spirit is softening the will and plowing the soil. We need to be there to sow the seed. Help us not to be discouraged when we see unbelief, but to know it as a fulfillment of Your own prophecies. Help us to continue faithfully with that good soil, to sow the seed, that we may come rejoicing, bringing our sheaves with us. In Christ's name, Amen.

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