

# UNBELIEF AND THE PRAISES OF MAN

John 5:40-47 (No. 33)

Treasuring Christ Church – Pastor Boyd Johnson

April 30, 2017

## INTRODUCTION

As we study through the Gospel of John, one of the things we'll notice is Jesus' penetrating analysis of human nature. If you want to major in the human condition, study what Jesus teaches. Jesus diagnoses the human condition in a way far beyond anything you could read in a psychology textbook or a book from the self-help aisle. He tells us the reason for why we are the way we are. If we pay attention, we'll better understand why we sin, why many do not believe in Jesus, how people are enslaved to sin, and a host of other maladies in the human soul.

In our passage this morning, Jesus' words pierce the soul and diagnose the root cause of unbelief.

John 5:40–47: "yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. I do not receive glory from people. But I know that you do not have the love of God within you. I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him. How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God? Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?"

I, again, remind you of the context. Jesus has been accused of committing two moral crimes. First, they say he is a Sabbath-breaker because he healed a man on the Sabbath and told him to pick up his mat and walk. Second, they say he is a blasphemer because he claims equality with God and that he is God.

In response, Jesus proves that he is God—and therefore neither a Sabbath-breaker nor a blasphemer—by revealing that he does the works of God (5:19-29). Then he calls forward four witnesses that all agree that Jesus is who he claims to be—the true God (5:30-40).

As Jesus closes his argument, he shifts from defending himself to indicting his critics. His critics treat him as if he were on trial. Jesus turns the tables and puts them on trial. He turns from defending his equality with God to indicting the Jews for their unwillingness to believe. To close this chapter (5:40-47), Jesus indicts them on four counts. His indictment, though, isn't just for them. What Jesus says here of the Jews is true of all who do not believe in him. He indicts all unbelievers in these four counts.

All who do not trust in Christ are charged with guilt before God for these four reasons.

## I. COUNT ONE: REFUSAL TO COME TO JESUS

That's found in verse 40. Let's begin reading in verse 39 for context:

John 5:39–40: "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life."

These Jewish religious authorities who persecuted Jesus refused to come to Jesus and in doing so forfeited life—life abundant and eternal. The NASB translates it similarly: “you are *unwilling* to come to Me so that you may have life.”

Why did the Jews not come and believe in Jesus? Because they were unwilling. They didn’t want to. They lacked the desire to come to Jesus.

In other words, this is not mainly an intellectual issue. Their rejection of Jesus was a heart issue. This is true for everyone who rejects Jesus. Yes, their minds must be changed in order for them to be saved. But it isn’t enough to convince someone that Jesus is God. The Jews had plenty of evidence of that.

But also the heart must be changed in order to be saved. That’s the problem: they don’t want to be saved on Jesus’ terms. They don’t want to repent of their sins. They don’t want to deny self, take up their cross, and follow Jesus.

Look at John 3:19: "And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil." They love their darkness. They love sin over righteousness. They prefer the darkness over the light.

Since everyone is born this way and there’s no hope of changing our hearts on our own, Jesus teaches that all who would be saved must be born again. That is, given a new nature and new affections and a new will that does desire to come to Jesus.

God will hold man responsible for his sin because he willingly sins. No one sins out of duty. We sin because we prefer sin to what’s right in God’s sight.

So the first charge of guilt that Jesus issues is refusal to come to him.

## **II. COUNT TWO: ABSENCE OF LOVE FOR GOD**

The second indictment against all who do not trust in Christ is absence of love for God.

John 5:41–42: "I do not receive glory from people. But I know that you do not have the love of God within you."

Jesus doesn’t receive glory from people. Glory, here, has the idea of praise. Jesus didn’t receive or accept the praise of men. He wasn’t motivated by becoming accepted. He didn’t set out to please people.

What was he motivated by? He has told us: verse 19: "So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.” Jesus was motivated by doing the will of the Father.

If you will live as Jesus lived, you will be free from many sins and entanglements that others suffer. If you live single-minded—to live with the intention of doing the revealed will of God—you will be free from people-pleasing.

Had Jesus lived the way they wanted him to, they wouldn't have killed him. Had he lived for their approval, they would have celebrated him and not crucified him. But his aim was to do God's will—he wouldn't receive man's praises.

Why not? Because he knew them. "I know," Jesus says. The NASB translates this: "I know you. . ." He did.

John 2:24: "But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people"

He knew his critics' hearts. They did not love God. "But I know that you do not have the love of God within you." They didn't love God.

These Jews used to put little boxes on their heads and arms and inside was a tiny scroll with sections of God's law. One of the passages was Deuteronomy 6:4–5: "'Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.'" And the passage goes on to say: "You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes" (v. 8) They took that to mean that they should literally strap the passage to their hand and forehead. But that's not what God meant. It was a way of saying, keep these truths in mind as you think (forehead) and work (arm).

They knew the command to love God, but, as one commentator said, "They did not love God; they loved their own ideas about God" (Barclay). They were putting God in a box. They had their ideas about who God should be and Jesus didn't fit. But they didn't love God. If they loved God, they would keep his commandments.

1 John 5:3: "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments."

Had they loved God, they would have loved the one God sent. Jesus, on the other hand, loved the Father and proved it by following his Father's will. So the second charge against them was absence of love for God.

### **III. COUNT THREE: LOVE FOR MAN'S PRAISES**

With each of these, Jesus goes deeper into the soul of man. Why didn't they want to come to Jesus? Why didn't they love God? Jesus tells us in these next two verses:

John 5:43–44: "I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him. How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?"

He came in his Father's name—he came sent from the Father. They claimed to know God, yet they didn't receive God's Son. But if someone came in his own name, the Jews would receive that person. In other words, if someone of the world came and spoke the words of the world, they would accept that person. That is, they accepted the ones who were like them. They received people in their own image. D.A. Carson makes the observation that even those who reject the true Messiah cling to false messiahs. It isn't that people who reject Jesus don't have a Messiah; it's that they follow false messiahs.

The political landscape of our day is filled with pseudo-messiahs—people whom certain groups of people cast all their hope upon—that their lives and America would somehow be different and that this man or woman will be the one to usher in change. Of course, people do the same thing spiritually. They find someone or some force that they put their hope in. That becomes their functional messiah.

And then Jesus gets to the root issue of why they would reject Jesus and accept false hope: (v. 44) "How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?"

He asks a rhetorical question: how can you believe? The expected right answer is: you can't. It's a question that is meant as a statement: You can't believe when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God. Again, glory has the idea of praise.

You can't believe if you live for man's praises rather than God's praises. Paul says this is the difference between a true Jew and a false one:

Romans 2:29: "A Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God."

So what was at the root of why they were not willing to come and believe in Jesus? What was the root of their lack of love for God? Answer: they loved the praise of man. They didn't want Jesus because they themselves wanted to be exalted. And Jesus says, you can't believe in that condition. John Calvin wrote: "the door of faith is shut against all whose minds are filled with a vain desire for earthly glory." The root of unbelief, here, is a desire for the praises of men. The root is the desire to be somebody and to be made much of. What an indictment of our culture!

Receiving glory from one another goes by other names—people-pleasing—and it comes in many forms—an insatiable desire for likes, the craving for your piety and service and knowledge to be on display, an obsession with being noticed and standing out. "How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?"

If a man doesn't desire to seek God's pleasure, but instead wants to be esteemed by others, he isn't saved. So this charge against them—against all who do not trust in Christ—is that they live for man's praises.

#### **IV. COUNT FOUR: REJECTION OF GOD'S WORD**

John 5:45–47: "Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?"

Jesus had no need to accuse them before the Father. They stood condemned already—by their hero. "There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope." They studied the Scriptures and they set their hope on doing what Moses commanded—proving their moral superiority. But they really didn't believe Moses. They didn't follow after what he wrote. The proof is that they rejected the one whom Moses wrote of.

“For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me.”

Jesus doesn't list any specific passages that Moses wrote about him, so he probably means that the whole of the Scriptures pointed to him. Moses, in a sense, stands for the whole of the Old Testament. If you came to know God in the Old Testament and trust in him and purpose to live as he would have you, then when Jesus came, you would know him because he bears the marks of God. The Jews' rejection of Jesus proves they didn't really believe God's word in the Old Testament, despite their study of it.

Jesus concludes: “But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?” That is, if you reject Moses' writings, which is the word of God, then you won't believe my words either, which is also the word of God. So they have rejected the word of God. This is the final indictment against unbelief. They reject the very means God has given to grant them eternal life.

## **CONCLUSION**

So here, again, are the four indictments:

Count One: Refusal to Come to Jesus

Count Two: Absence of Love for God

Count Three: Love for Man's Praises

Count Four: Rejection of God's Word

In our court system, indictments against a man are not proof of his guilt. A trial is necessary to prove guilt. But that's not so here. Jesus' indictments are proof of guilt. They are more like verdicts of judgment. The verdict against all those who do not trust in Christ is guilty.

But if you look into your life and you desire to come and keep on coming to Jesus, a willingness to lay down your life, a love for God (imperfect as it is), a desire to reject man's praises, and a full acceptance of God's word, then know that that is the Spirit at work in your life and that God has done something new in your heart.

If that's true, then move forward in confidence that because of your faith, you are not condemned, but will have eternal life with him.