

The Belief Paradox

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[0 : 0 0] Well let's pray and ask God to give us insight and clarity in his word this morning. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, thank you that you've given us your life-giving word and we ask as we grapple with it this morning that you might help us to understand it well, that we might live lives to please you in this world as we wait for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray it in his name, Amen. Well there is a problem isn't there? If God's all-powerful and all-knowing and all-wise and all-loving, if that's true, it seems strange that God would prevent people from coming to faith in him. I thought God wanted people to believe in him.

But as we look at this passage here this morning, we hear that reason why the people don't believe in Jesus is because God doesn't want them to believe in Jesus. And that sounds strange to me.

If it doesn't sound strange to you, well I think we should think it's strange to hear it. Why doesn't God want people to be saved? Why would God prevent people from coming to faith in him?

Yet that's what we're told as John quotes Isaiah chapter 6. And as we read it here in John chapter 12.

It's what we read in verse 39 and verse 40. Look at it with me. Verse 39. Lord, who's believed what he heard from us and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?

[1 : 5 6] Therefore, they could not believe. For again Isaiah said, he has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, lest they see.

God is preventing people from believing in him. And that's what Isaiah would say in Isaiah 28 is God's strange work.

A very strange work. His alien work. It's his work of determined judgment. Right?

Which seems to go against his desire, his heart. His righteous heart to save people.

But his righteousness to bring about his... Well, what's going on here? Let's have a look at it.

[2 : 5 6] See, there's unbelief in verses 36 to 43. And it's despite the signs. See, in verse 37. When Jesus had said these things, he departed to hid himself from them.

Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him. What signs has he done? Well, cast your mind back over the first 12 chapters of John.

Remind yourself with me. He's turned water to wine in chapter 2, revealing his glory. He's healed the official's son in chapter 4. The lame man's been healed in chapter 5.

He's fed 5,000 people in chapter 6. Jesus has walked on water in chapter 6 as well. He's cured a man born blind in the blind man's seeing in chapter 9.

And just recently in chapter 11, he's brought a dead man back to life again. That's some pretty impressive signs. And John tells us he's done even more than these. But these particular ones are written down that we might believe.

- [4 : 02] We humans are stubborn people. We would rather reject the worker of these kinds of wonders than accept the implications that come with them.
- We would rather reject God revealing himself in the world than accept the implications of his existence. That's the nature of mankind. It's the unbelief here in John 12 that actually fulfills Isaiah 53.
- And gives more weight to the impressive wisdom and omnipotence of God. So I want you to come back to Isaiah chapter 53 with me.
- See Isaiah, back in the first half of the Bible, Isaiah 53. Please come back to Isaiah 53 with me. Isaiah was a prophet who was sent to Israel at the time of the rise of the Assyrian nation, empire.
- And he speaks God's words to them and lives through the destruction of the ten northern tribes as they are wiped out by the Assyrians in about 722 BC. And Isaiah 53 is written around 700 years then before Jesus.
- [5 : 09] That's when it's written. And Jesus' reference to Isaiah 53 verse 1 is actually a reference to this servant passage which starts at Isaiah 52 verse 12, 13.
- So have a look at it with me. Isaiah 52 verse 13. Behold, my servant shall act wisely. He shall be high and lifted up and shall be exalted.
- As many were astonished at you, his appearance was so marred beyond human semblance and his form beyond that of the children of mankind. So shall he sprinkle many nations.
- Kings shall shut their mouths because of him. For that which has not been told them they see and that which they have not heard they understand. Who has believed what is heard from us?
- And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? God spoke to his people time after time after time through the Old Testament.
- [6 : 14] Up until this point they still would not listen. They still would not repent from their wicked ways. And God demonstrates his power time after time through the Old Testament.
- Notably in Exodus when he rescued his people. Restored them with a strong arm. Exodus chapter 6 verse 6. And Exodus chapter 15. But God had so far in this passage here not allowed them to understand with their heart.
- In Isaiah 53. In the book of Isaiah here. Not allowed them to understand with their heart and see with their eyes and believe with their ears the great wonders of God.
- They were prevented from understanding it and believing it. And this passage talks of the suffering servant doesn't it? The suffering servant.
- The one who is lifted up and exalted. Now this suffering servant is one who is going to die so that people might be forgiven.
- [7 : 18] That's why. Have a look at chapter 53 with me. Verse 4.
- Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. Yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions.
- He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was a chastisement that brought us peace. And with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray.
- We have turned every one to his own way. And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. It speaks about the death of the Lord's servant who would suffer and die so that people could be forgiven.
- And who could believe that God would do things? Who could believe that God would do things this way? It seems so strange. Jesus has just told them that his hour has come in John chapter 12.

- [8 : 41] His time to come to be exalted and lifted up. Clearly a reference to being lifted up on the cross. And his time has come to be glorified by his cross work, by his dying for sin and rising to rule.
- And his ascension to the right hand of God from where he returned to judge. People, they can't believe what they've heard from God. People would not recognise the arm.
- What is the arm of God? See in Isaiah 53. Who has believed what he's heard from us and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? Well the arm of the Lord is the way the Lord works.
- Who or what is the arm of the Lord? It is, he is the suffering servant. Back in verse 13 of chapter 12, of 52. Behold, my servant will act wisely.
- He shall be lifted up and shall be high and lifted up and he shall be exalted. The arm of the Lord is nothing less than, no one less than the suffering servant of the Lord.
- [9 : 49] That's who the arm of the Lord is. He is the servant of the Lord. You know, like you talk about your right hand man. It is the Lord's servant.
- It is his arm. And what does the Lord have him do? Well, he has him to save people.
- But what does God do? He stops people from believing in him. They could not believe. They could not believe.
- That's what Jesus says. That's what John quotes in John chapter 12, verse 40. They could not believe.
- Which comes back to Isaiah chapter 6. Come back to Isaiah chapter 6, please. Just a few pages, or a few pages before. Isaiah chapter 6. So, the nation is a rebellious nation, we're told, back in Isaiah chapter 1.
- [10 : 55] A rebellious and wicked nation, rejecting God. But have a look at Isaiah chapter 6, verses 1 to 10. In the year that King Isaiah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up.
- And the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings. With two he covered his face. With two he covered his feet. And two he flew. And one called to another and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts.
- The whole earth is full of his glory. And the foundations of the threshold shook at the voice of him who called. And the house was filled with smoke. And he said, Woe is me, for I am lost. For I am a man of unclean lips.
- And I dwell in the midst of people of unclean lips. For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having his hand a burning coal.
- And he's shaken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and said, behold, this has touched your lips. Your guilt is taken away. And your sin is atoned for. So here is Isaiah dwelling amongst a nation of unclean, rebellious, hard-hearted people.
- [11 : 59] Right? And then he says in verse 8, I heard a voice of the Lord saying, Whom shall I send and whom will go for us?
- Then I said, here I am, send me. And he said, go. And said to his people, listen to this. Keep on hearing but do not understand. Keep on seeing but do not perceive. Verse 10.
- Make the heart of his people dull and their ears heavy and blind their eyes. Why? Lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their hearts and turn and be healed.
- The judgment of God, right, is that they will hear the word of God and not hear them.
- They will see what is happening. Get an idea of what's right before their very eyes. God's making it incomprehensible for them to understand.

[13 : 07] Else they would repent and be forgiven. God is intent on bringing about his punishment upon a rebellious nation.

Even when he sends his messenger to them to call them to repent. And pronounce God's judgment upon them. Isaiah knew they wouldn't believe because that in itself was the judgment of God.

I'll say it again. Isaiah knew they wouldn't believe because that in itself was God's judgment upon them.

Now given this information, they will know in hindsight that they had not listened to God when they are carried off into exile.

Which will make it all the more painful, won't it? We heard, we saw, we didn't believe, we were judged. That's God's strange work.

[14 : 16] Have you ever received advice that you rejected only to have suffered for not taking it, having taken it? And then lamented your actions?

It might have been a study tip or two. What might be in the exams? Practice the exams and you'll do better. Might have been a fishing tip but you thought you knew better where to go and caught nothing.

Well the other person did. Might have been some faithful instruction from the scriptures. Yeah? Like being aware of the love of money. And so the warning not to get caught up in borrowing to invest.

And thinking you'll get rich quick that way and look back and regret it. Might have been any number of things. Well here in Isaiah and also in John chapter 12, right?

We see that God intends that they do not believe. Their sin has reached its limit again. Time after time he's called his people to repent but they wouldn't.

[15 : 24] And now he would continue to speak his word to them so that they will not repent. And yet they have no excuse for not repenting.

He'll speak his word to them in John 12 with the very living word of God and they will condemn themselves by rejecting him which is the very judgment of God.

We'll come back to John chapter 12 now. At one level that's the perversity of human nature. We harden ourselves to the truth.

Not even wanting to hear it. Thinking that I know better. I wish it was not true of myself but it is. It's built into our DNA.

We hear the warnings but we fail to heed them. Be careful of the sun. Put on your sunscreen and you'll get cancer but we're happy to go out and get sunburnt.

[16 : 28] Beware the crocodiles but swim in the rivers. Don't drink dry but people still do. Smoking kills but people still do. Don't walk on the grass and every fibre of my being wants to walk on the grass.

And don't put your hand on the hot plate. Which I did as a two-year-old when mum said don't do it. But this is not the final word right.

The final word is until. The final word is until. So that's back in Isaiah chapter. Back in Isaiah 53.

Come back to Isaiah 53. The key word is until. Isaiah 53. How long will this continue on?

How long will they continue to suffer? How long will they continue to reject me? Isaiah 53 verse 11.

[17 : 34] I think. Isaiah 6, sorry. Isaiah 6. Sorry, thank you. Isaiah 6. Isaiah 6.

Verse 11. Then I said, How long, O Lord? And he said, Until cities lie in waste without inhabitation and houses without people. And the land is a desolate waste.

And the Lord removes people far away. And the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land. And though a tenth remain in it will be burned again. Like a terebinth or an oak. Whose stump remains when it's filled.

The holy seed is its stump. How long will they continue to be hardened? How long will their ears not hear? How long will their eyes not see?

Until the judgment happens. Until Israel is destroyed. Until the cities are destroyed. Until Jerusalem is destroyed. Until the temple is destroyed. Until it's only the holy seed left.

[18 : 39] One seed that dies and falls to the ground. And bears a great crop. It's all in God's perfect, holy, righteous plan.

His people must harden their hearts in unbelief. Else they wouldn't crucify their king, Jesus. They are blind to his identity.

Blind to his deity. Hardened to his word. And darkened in their understanding. Why? So that in the incredible wisdom of God, they will crucify their Christ.

And so, at one and the same time, he will become their judge and become their saviour, depending upon your attitude towards him. Which they are totally responsible for and which we are totally responsible for.

And which God is in total control of. We'll come back to John 12 now. Sorry, let's go back to John 12 now.

[19 : 55] So he's blind their eyes, hardened their hearts, lest they see with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn, and I will heal them. And how long for? Until, right? Isaiah said these things, verse 41.

Because he saw his glory and spoke of him. What did Isaiah see? Isaiah saw his glory, right?

Well, we saw his glory when the cherubim and those guys came. But Isaiah saw his glory. What is the glory that Isaiah saw? Israel might have been rebellious, not able to see what God was doing.

But God in his mercy allowed Isaiah to see his glory. And what did he see? It seems in my mind that Isaiah saw the glory of God. That is, his judgment was right and just.

That he would not let his people go on rebelling against his word forever. And that he would act.

[20 : 59] But his action was not a knee-jerk reaction, like mine often is. His action came with warning, with reluctance, but ultimately with patient deliberance.

Deliberateness. Not only that, at the same time, Isaiah saw the glory of God in sending a servant who would be his strong arm, who would save.

A servant, as you get the picture of Isaiah, he's writing down stuff he can't quite get a picture of, but he saw his glory and he's writing it down.

How could this bloke be so marred and disfigured and wounded and beaten and disfigured that we... Isaiah saw the cross and sees the glory of God in the righteous judgment and justice of God coming together on the servant on the cross.

That's what Isaiah saw, the glory of God. A king who was a servant, who would save his people in a very strange way, in undergoing the judgment of God to rescue a people for himself, Isaiah sees the hour for the servant to be glorified, which gives glory to the Father.

[22 : 34] The hour of the servant to be glorified is by him being lifted up on the cross and to draw all people, all nations to himself, all cultures to himself.

In his obedience, in his faithfulness, we see the true faithful, one and only true faithful Israelite. As opposed to the faithless Israelites all around about him.

Isaiah saw this 700 years before the cross. Why couldn't people believe? Why wouldn't God let the people believe just yet?

So that he would be glorified in bringing about his strange work of judgment and salvation, two sides of the same coin.

If they had have believed, they wouldn't have crucified the Lord Jesus Christ. So they could not believe because of their sin.

[23 : 46] They could not believe because it's God's righteous judgment upon them. But they could not believe because it's God's ultimate glory and the way he will bring about the salvation for the world.

Okay. But there's some frail belief here we see in verses 42 to 43. There's some frail belief.

Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees, they would not confess it so that they would not be put out of the synagogue.

For they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God. They wouldn't confess their faith in God, in the Lord Jesus, because they feared men.

Some of the authorities, some of the rulers did believe. People like Nicodemus, who came to Jesus by night. We remember about him so far in John chapter 3, and John chapter 7, and John chapter 19. He's part of the...

[24 : 53] Him and Joseph of Arimathea end up going and putting Jesus in the tomb. So some believe despite, but even then, their faith is dismissed.

John dismisses their faith as weak and faulty at the same time. And why does he do that? Because they love the praise of men greater than the praise of God.

They preferred the glory of man than the glory of God. If they were to confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Pharisees would have kicked them out of the synagogue, excommunicated them from the family of faith, cut them off from their heritage and their culture, and the way that they were thinking they'd be right with God.

The way they thought salvation comes through the institution. Well, then you don't want to be cut out from the institution, do you? If that's the way that salvation comes. But if the institution is going to hell, then Jesus would say to hell with the institution.

Let me say nothing much has changed. The danger still exists to self-censor out of fear of what others might think.

[26 : 14] Being afraid of what someone might do if you do align yourself with the truth of God's word.

That's a terrible situation to be in, to self-censor for fear of men. The fear of men and not fearing God.

Honouring man and not honouring God. And it leads to a shriveling of self and a shriveling of society if we're going to be self-censoring. There is a time, right, for speaking the truth and honouring God and not fearing men.

For by fear and the authorities, we're not siding with Jesus. They could stay in the synagogue, yes.

But they'd be no different then, would they, to Judas in selling out on Jesus. We must never self-censor what we believe because we fear the consequences.

[27 : 24] That is a fail, frail and faulty faith. Our society is going to be pushing us to do so more and more and more and more.

Case in point, the saga in Victoria recently when Andrew Thorburn was forced to resign because he was known to be on the board of a Christian church in the past which stood for and upheld, without compromise, the truth of the scriptures.

Well done for him. Leaders of many denominations have so compromised themselves to stay in step with society and to win the approval of the world that they no longer represent the Lord Jesus Christ.

They are unwilling to bear the cost of being hated by the world as Jesus was. Now I know a pastor who has had enough of the bishops, double speak and their faithfulness to Jesus here in Brisbane who's been willing now to seek the glory of Jesus rather than to stay in the glory and the game of playing in the synagogue which at one level is now just the synagogue of Satan in Brisbane.

Not talking about the Jews. And we can self-censor ourselves in our day-to-day lives as well.

[28 : 48] I mean, let's just push it home to ourselves. What do you do with the conversation you're in that uses Jesus' name as a swear word?

What do you do in that conversation? Do you say nothing? Do you say, you know, Jesus is someone that I submit to as Lord?

What do you say in that situation? It would be a good conversation to have over morning tea this morning. Or what do you do about the conversation you're in which endorses a morality you know that Jesus doesn't?

What do you do if you're in a company that insists that you celebrate same-sex marriage when you know that Jesus doesn't? What do you do in a company that's like that?

What will you say? How will you... What will you put in the footer of your email now that you're signing off in your company?

[29 : 58] Are you going to go with that footer? On the email. What are we going to teach our children to prepare them to survive the pressures of life at school and teenage dating and sexuality and finances and all that comes with it in the society that we're in right now?

Self-censorship when it comes to matters of faith in Jesus in the end is nothing short of cowardice and selling out on Jesus.

Far be it that that be the case of us. Jesus is not after fair weather fickle faith.

He is after uncompromising firm true belief no matter what the cost. And so then Jesus goes to speak about it in verses 44 to 50.

We're not going to deal deeply with it this morning for lack of time. But those who truly believe in him are saved and rescued from the darkness. You see verse 44 to 50. Jesus cried out and said whoever believes in me believes not in me but in him who sent me and whoever sees me and sees him who sent me I have come into the world as light so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.

[31 : 30] If anyone hears my words and does not keep them I do not judge him for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge.

The word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day. The world's Jesus didn't come to judge the world. Strange isn't it?

But that's the way he came to save it. Why didn't Jesus come to judge the world? You thought about that one for a second. Why didn't Jesus come to judge the world? Well the world's already been condemned already been judged since Genesis chapter 3 kicked out of the kingdom of God.

The wrath of God is already on the world. That's why Jesus came to save people from the world because it had already been judged as evil. In John's Gospel we read about that.

Already been judged as evil. Jesus come to rescue us from this evil world this present evil age an age that's condemned by God and judged by God as worthy of his wrath.

[32 : 39] Jesus come to save us from that. And the way to be saved is true belief in the Lord Jesus Christ. And so we want his approval.

True belief in Jesus means having seen the one who sent him the Father. You've seen Jesus you've seen the Father. We'll perceive that Jesus does the very things that the Father has commanded him to do sent him to die and to rise again.

Which seems a very strange work doesn't it? A very weak work. An unbelievable work. But nonetheless the very wisdom and power of God.

True belief means coming in out of the darkness. The darkness in living opposed to God. The darkness of rejecting God's life giving word.

The darkness of rejecting the one who came into the world to give life. Eternal life. True belief is recognising that God and his ways are right even when they don't understand him.

[33 : 45] True belief would mean wanting the praise of God and not wanting the praise of men. True belief would mean not being ashamed of Jesus and being known as one of his disciples.

True belief is not belief in belief either. true belief is relying trusting depending upon what God says that his ways are higher than ours.

True belief is saying no to ungodliness and yes to righteousness. Know that it pleases God and it's so much better to do that than what everybody else is doing and everybody else is saying.

Even if it costs us being cast out of the in crowd. True belief is seeking the glory of God not the glory of man.

Well let's consider for a moment the nature of our belief. It might be that this is new to you today. The Jesus you'd heard about is nothing like the Jesus you're learning from here in the scriptures.

[35 : 07] If so can I encourage you to keep coming keep investigating what the Bible says about him. Many of us would love to do that with you. it may be that God is showing that your faith is frail and faulty this morning.

That until now you said that you believe in Jesus that you are following him but when the kids at school say are you a Christian you're part of the CIA. Christians Christians in Australia the secret society.

You feared men more than God. If so can I encourage you to repent of that and come into true faith knowing that to keep on living that way is actually to lose life.

But to lose your life in this world and the eyes of this world is to gain life now and a certain hope of eternal life in the future.

It might be that you can tell someone that you're going to make that move today. Tell someone after church and then pray that God will give you the courage to this week to live in a way which is unashamed of the Lord Jesus when the pressure comes on.

[36 : 33] It may be that your faith is genuine, that you are sick in the glory of God and not men. If so, well done good and faithful servant, keep pressing on the first 50 years are the hardest, if so God is pleased with you.

And so we will live with Jesus forever. But the temptation is always there, I know it is to do otherwise, to want the praise of men rather than the praise of God.

We need to continually ask God to help me to live for his glory and not my own. And so God is still speaking his word today, he continues to speak his word into his world this day and we can rightly ask Isaiah's question, who's believed it?

Who has recognised the power of God? God. May it be that God will give us grace to truly believe his word and to recognise the power and the wisdom of God.

The power of God that took Jesus to the cross and raised him again as Lord and Saviour and seated him in glory one day to return as judge.

[37 : 52] let's pray. Our Father in Heaven, help us to understand your strange ways, your great wisdom and your great power.

We ask in your mercy to help us not to be ashamed of the Lord Jesus or you, his Father, that we might be willing to follow him and we thank you for your great mercy in opening our eyes and opening our ears and opening our hearts to see the great wisdom and your great power in the foolishness of the cross to bring about your plans and purposes to save the world.

And we ask and praise you for these things in Jesus' name. Amen.