

## Growing in Unbelief John 8:19-27

It is amazing how John chronicles the rise of opposition among the religious leaders and in particular the Pharisees to the ministry of Jesus. It all began in chapter 5 when Jesus healed the paralytic on the Sabbath day. And we have seen the rise in opposition in the last couple of chapters, to them trying to arrest Jesus in the last chapter, to them trying to disqualify him with a legal technicality in the text we looked at last week that there needed to be at least two witnesses to verify his message and that he was from God. They essentially put him on trial.

The incredible thing about unbelief is that it isn't that there are not answers to people's question, but when someone refuses to believe in Christ no matter what the evidence or how many of their questions are answered they actually become more hardened in their unbelief. They actually grow in their unbelief and hatred of Jesus Christ. Listen to what Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:12-13, **"Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived."** We realized the godly will suffer for their faith from those hardened in unbelief, but those who are in that state, and refuse to believe no matter what the evidence, Paul says go from bad to worse. They go from deceiving others to actually believing the lies they tell themselves.

And you see this in this chapter where you see the rising and growing unbelief and opposition to Jesus, not because his miracles were spurious, or he was unable to answer their questions, but because of their settled hatred against Jesus as the Messiah. They did not want him as their Lord and Messiah and Saviour. And what we have in this passage is three questions that are asked of Jesus. And they are no longer trying to trap Jesus as they did in the beginning of the chapter with the woman trapped in adultery or no longer trying to come up with a biblical and logical argument to reject him as they did demanding witnesses. In this passage they turn to ridicule and mockery in the questions that they ask Jesus.

And you can see that downward spiral even today. Someone might have honest questions about Christianity and Jesus, and might ask you, and you answer them. Then instead of responding they go away and begin to harden their hearts, and they think of other questions, but they are no longer searching for answers but seeking to disprove your faith. And even if you answer those questions, many times people then will turn to ridicule. And what you see in so many many is not a growing belief but a growing unbelief, a hardening and growing rebellion against God and his servants. This is where we find the Pharisees in their opposition to Jesus. But what is also very instructive is to see the words and response of Jesus in this passage. These are some of the most volatile words that Jesus' uses in this gospel. It is a wake-up call and it is a call to repent and for the Pharisees to realize their need but they will harden their hearts even further.

And so the challenge in this passage is two-fold. One is: are we hardening our hearts? It is so easy to think that sometime in the future we will respond, but as we look at this passage there is a down-ward trend with these staunch opponents to Jesus Christ that will end with them putting him in a cross. Today is the day of salvation. Don't harden your hearts. The other is that there is opposition for faithful

believers and in the midst of that opposition to the message we must keep preaching and making known Jesus Christ. We must like Jesus and never change the message. People will not like the message but this is what they need most. It is an act of love when we faithfully give the message. So let's look at these three questions and responses of Jesus in this passage.

1. First, there is the question of his Father. Vv. 19-20.

We should love to ask questions and to seek for truth. God commends us when we ask questions seeking to understand God and understand our faith. We want to grow in the knowledge and understanding of Christ. But the questions that are asked here are disingenuous. They are not looking for truth but mocking the message already given and ministry of Jesus Christ. They really are not looking for truth or an answer but Jesus is willing at least for now to give them an answer.

Look at verse 19, **"They said to him therefore, 'Where is your Father?'"** I think when we hear this question because many times we think that a question that is asked is asked in honesty or someone is seeking clarity. Jesus had just talked about the witness of the Father to the truth of who he is. And certainly on one level they might not know that he is talking about God the Father, but it would not have been too difficult for them to deduce that fact, especially with the conversation that he had back in chapter 5 about his relationship with the Father. No, this question is a dig. Look at what they said in verse 41, **"We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father— even God."** It is mockery. They are bringing up the virgin birth and that Joseph was not his physical father. There is no way that Jesus could be Messiah because he was born in sin, and he should be rejected on that ground alone. It is a slur against him.

But look at Jesus' response, **"Jesus answered, 'You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also.'"** It is just like Jesus is saying that the reason why you are asking this particular question is because of unbelief. It is because you neither know me nor God the Father. John Philips writes, **"The problem, as is always the case with hardened unbelief, was not the quality of the evidence for Jesus, but the hearts of proud unbelief that scorned both his truth and the truth of God the Father."**

You hear questions of this nature all the time: you don't really believe that stuff? Or: you really believe all humanity came from two humans - Adam and Eve, or God made the world in six days? You really believe that Jesus rose from the grave? People are not looking for truth. And you can even hear these questions in the church or in preaching: Who really is God? Or - how should we believe in Jesus today? What are some different ways that we can view his cross? None of those questions are seeking the truth of Jesus. They are asked in unbelief, and when they are asked in such unbelief, and here is scorn and ridicule it gives clear evidence that person does not know Christ. Had they known him they would know both Father and Son and would not be asking those questions.

Now look at verse 20, **"These words he spoke in the treasury, as he taught in the temple; but no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come."** This is still in Jerusalem and in the Temple. This would have been the Court of the Women, and it is so named not because there was just women there but that is as far as women

could go. The same as the court of the Gentiles was as far as Gentiles could go. This is one court further and where the Jews brought their offerings. The amazing thing here, and I hope we do not miss it is that this was very contentious situation that Jesus found himself in. He had just stood up in the Temple and announced that he is the Light of the World, in other words, that he is God in human flesh. And this was done where the religious leaders had authority and jurisdiction. They did not need to go to Pilate to arrest Jesus, and after this contentious debate we read, **“but no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come.”** His hour had not come so they could not take him. When his hour came, they would take him and Jesus would offer himself up as the Lamb of God. It shows none other than the sovereign control of God. And when you see all the opposition to Jesus and of the gospel throughout the last two thousand years, and how often individuals try to stamp it out of existence, we see there is another that is controlling history and that his message goes out. It should encourage our hearts to keep spreading the seed even in the midst of such opposition.

## 2. Second, there is the question about his death. Vv. 21-24

It is amazing to think of how little people think about death, and if they think about it they come to very vague and comfortable conclusions. All people go to heaven or if there is a hell it is not that bad, or we all go in the ground and rot. But what if you are wrong in your assumptions. What if the God of all eternity entered the world to answer the most important question about eternity and provide the means of coming into Gods' presence. Jesus is the God man who came to answer honest and legitimate questions about death and life - and provide for the need of the sinner. But there are those who will just mock any thought that they might fall under the judgment of God.

Look at verse 21, **“So he said to them again, ‘I am going away, and you will seek me, and you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come.’”** There are several things we need. One is that Jesus is going away, and no doubt this is an allusion to his sacrificial death on Calvary and ascension. And when Jesus goes away, look at the truth for many that happen to be among the Pharisees, “you will seek me,” but here is the truth - they will not find Him. It is a truth where we think we control salvation. And who they are seeking is the Messiah, but they have rejected Jesus. It is amazing that other so-called Messiahs came on the scene after Jesus, and the religious leaders aligned with some of them because those counterfeits aligned to their philosophy and their theology and their own pride of who they thought they were.

And then he gives them this warning that is so hard to swallow but fearful words for those who are proud, and staunch in their unbelief, **“you will die in your sins.”** They have rejected the only hope that any can have and that is Jesus Christ - the Light and the Saviour of the world. He says the same thing in verse 24 when he rounds out his answer to their question - **“I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins.”** I don't think there is anymore sobering words that could ever be spoken to anyone - you will die in your sins. Hebrews 9:27 says, **“And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment.”** Now think of the logic and love of Christ here, because why would anyone say to another person, “you will die in your sins?” And the answer is that every single person will one day come before a holy God and face his judgment. And it is not

that some will die and others will not. But there are two ways or two states to die in either believing in Christ or by yourself. You either die in your sin or you die in Christ.

I cannot think of anything more sobering and fearful as that thought. And Jesus, even in the Pharisees hardened unbelief and mocking, holds out hope - **“unless you believe on me.”** But let’s be clear if you reject Jesus then there is no other avenue open to you. You will die in your sins. Peter says in Acts 4:12, **“And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”** Have you trusted Jesus? Have you bowed the knee to him in humble faith for glorious and full pardon? There is no other way.

But look at the response of the Pharisees in verse 22, **“So the Jews said, ‘Will he kill himself, since he says, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come’?”** Remember the Jews here is talking about the religious leaders. And they know that Jesus is talking about his death, and rather than bow the knee they continue to mock him. If someone committed suicide in Jewish theology that person was consigned the lowest place in judgment or Sheol. There was no hope for that person. Here Jesus says, “Where I am going, you cannot come.” and they were so sure that they were citizens of heaven, that God would accepted them that there was no way that Jesus was talking about heaven or coming into God’s presence because they had earned that position and it was assured.

Look at the response of Jesus in verse 23, **“He said to them, ‘You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world.’** He speaks of two fundamental different realms. And when he says they are from below and of the world, he is not speaking of the material realm but the base nature of sinfulness that rejects God. Listen to 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.”** And people are so hardened in their disposition that nothing but the grace of God can remove that willful blindness from them.

All of us will die. we might try to ignore that fact, but it is there. There are so many individuals that are terrified by death, and will do everything they can to elongate this life. And they are fearful of what lives on the other side, but instead of seeking Jesus they try to suppress any thought that one day they will come in the presence of God. But for those who believe in Jesus there is such a confidence as we come closer to that hour. In fact the famous hymn writer Isaac Watts wrote, **“It is a great mercy that I have no manner of fear or dread of death. I could, if God please, lay my head back and die without terror this afternoon.”** Individuals might mock and scorn, but that mocking and scorning will come to an end, and for those in Christ there is so much comfort.

### 3. The question of Jesus’ authority. Vv. 25-27.

In this third question, like the first two they were not looking for an answer, but look at verse 25, **“So they said to him, ‘Who are you?’ Jesus said to them, ‘Just what I have been telling you from the beginning.’”** You have to realize that at this point they are not looking for information. They are not trying to discern if Jesus is a prophet or Messiah or someone else. The question is basically - “Who do you think you are?! What gives you they right to say the things that you are saying?” It is basically

say - "Jesus, stop preaching and know your place." And there are many individuals like that who have the same response to truth. When you hear the word "preaching," we might have a fondness to it as the people of God, but when many people use that word it is something that they detest. So the objection - stop preaching at me. Again, the world scorns those who would preach the truth of the word.

And Jesus never softens any edges or contours of the message. He says, "**Just what I have been telling you from the beginning.**" I have every right because of who I am. And the reader of the gospel knows the full extent of Jesus' meaning even though most of the meaning is lost to the Pharisees who do not want to believe. "From the beginning," is the way the gospel begins and announces that the Word, God took on human flesh, and Jesus didn't shy away from that truth as we saw in verse 12.

And look at what he says in verse 26, "**I have much to say about you and much to judge, but he who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him.**" I love the answer of Jesus here. Because they are basically saying stop preaching! And Jesus' answer is, "I have much to say about you." And that is a great motto for preachers and teachers and Christians alike. Usually when we face opposition or people want us to clam up we do exactly what they want. Many churches want preachers that will tickle their ears and say easy and pleasant things. Not - you will die in your sins without Christ. But we as believers to this lost and dying world have much more to say, because in Christ there is so much hope and he is the only hope. And he also brings out the truth taught earlier in this epistle that he will be the end time judge whom these very men will meet and have to give an account for their scorn, ridicule and rejection of Him. Jesus has come to declare the message of the Father and accomplish the mission of the Father. There is hope in him.

But this message because they did not want to find or look or seek the truth went right over their heads. Look at verse 27, "**They did not understand that he had been speaking to them about the Father.**" They did not understand because their hearts were hardened to Jesus, and were becoming more cold and callous, the more they heard truth and the more they truly didn't listen to it or seek to understand.

And how about you tonight? Have you been thinking about death? Have you been thinking about God and this thing called eternity and where you will spend it? If you haven't- why not? I cannot think of a more important question to ponder. It is built into each one of us that there is more than this life. After we accept that truth that something lies on the other side of death the only question then becomes how will we die? Will we die in our sins, or will we die in Christ? Trust in him tonight, believe on him for full and free salvation. There is no other place where salvation can be found. And the second challenge is for believers. God has given us a commission but it is so easy to be silent. The church and believers are so silent that it is just like we have nothing to say. But just like Christ says here, "I have much more to say." Let us intentionally share the blessed truth of Jesus Christ that there is hope in death. Praise Jesus for his glory and his grace.