

Unbelief: Its Cause and Cure - Matthew 13:53-58

by Jon Courson

Jon Courson's sermon addresses the dangers of unbelief and offers practical solutions to strengthen faith in God.

Scripture: 2 Kings 6:17, Psalm 14:1, Psalm 78:41, Matthew 13:58, Matthew 17:20, Romans 10:8, 2 Corinthians 5:16, Hebrews 11:3, Hebrews 11:6

Topics: "Faith And Unbelief", "Spiritual Blindness"

Description

Jon Courson preaches about the dangers of unbelief, using the example of Jesus being limited in performing miracles in Nazareth due to the people's lack of faith. Unbelief blinds our eyes to the obvious works of God, poisons our hearts with cynicism towards believers, and robs us of the joy that comes from experiencing God's miracles. The antidotes for unbelief include prayer for enlightenment, seeing people through God's eyes to combat bitterness, and speaking God's promises to release faith and witness His mighty works.

Transcript

After presenting a powerful teaching to His disciples concerning the Kingdom, Jesus left Galilee and traveled 20 miles west -- home to Nazareth. In Nazareth, unbelief filled the hearts of His countrymen. Matthew ends this chapter saying of Jesus, 'He did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief.'

In recording the same incident, Mark takes it a step further when he writes, 'He could do no mighty works there because of their unbelief.' It is not simply that Jesus would do no mighty works in Nazareth. Mark tells us He could do no mighty works there. He was limited by their unbelief, even as the Old Testament declares that the people of Israel limited the Holy One of Israel through their unbelief (Psalm 78:41).

Unbelief is hazardous to your health. In this passage, we see it affecting people in three ways:

Unbelief Blinds Your Eyes

'And when he was come into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works?' Matthew 13:54

Miracles were happening -- the dead were raised, the lame were walking, the blind were seeing, the deaf were hearing. It was obvious God was working. But unbelief blinds eyes to the obvious. People are still blinded today, even though it is obvious God is real.

Just look up . . . On a clear night, you can see the Milky Way galaxy, consisting of 400 billion stars. Traveling at tremendous speed, the Milky Way swirls within itself as it is hurled across the universe -- all 400 billion stars. Astronomers tell us there are at least 100 billion more galaxies each containing at least 100 billion stars.

If you compute that out, it comes to 10 billion billion stars spinning around and moving through the universe. 10 billion billion -- that's more Big Macs than McDonalds serves in a year! And when you add the planets which circle many of these stars, the figures get even more astronomical.

'My, it must be crowded up there,' you say. Well, state your coordinates and choose a point. Even though there are 10 billion billion stars with billions of planets around them, what are the chances of your point landing on a star, a planet, a comet, or an asteroid? The chances are 1 in 10 to the 38th power, or one in a billion trillion trillion -- not very good odds. Space is huge, gang -- enormous beyond our comprehension.

And yet people have the audacity, the stupidity, the idiocy to say, 'Well it just sort of all happened.' Truly, 'the fool hath said in his heart, there is no God,' (Psalm 14:1).

I recently talked with an atheist who said, 'Jon, I hear all of your statistics on space and I hear all of your illustrations on creation, but it still doesn't prove God exists. I would believe in God if He would prove His existence.' 'Well, we have a problem here,' I said, 'because if God proved His existence, you couldn't be a believer. You might be a follower, but you couldn't be a believer, for if God proved Himself, there would be no faith required.'

God is interested in developing your faith because faith is what is going to move on with you in the ages to come. He has given you evidence and indications, but He has not given you proof because if He gave you proof, you could never be a believer.

Unbelief Poisons Our Hearts

Unbelief not only the blinds our eyes, which resulted in skepticism, but poisons our hearts, which resulted in cynicism . . .

Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things? And they were offended in Him . . . Matthew 13:55-57

'When a person will not believe, his heart will inevitably become poisoned towards the family of God . . . 'Isn't his dad a carpenter -- just an ordinary carpenter? He's not a scholar nor a rabbi, a mystic nor a miracle worker. We know his dad, he's the carpenter. And Mary? We've heard about her problem. She was pregnant before she got married.'

You see, the unbeliever will always attack the family of God. His heart will become poisoned as he points out the problems of the Jim Bakkers or the Jimmy Swaggerts or the Christian neighbor. He will point out problems in the family, even though, like those in Nazareth, his facts may be wrong. Since no one -- not even the most avowed atheist or skeptical cynic -- has ever been able to find one single fault with Christ,

they'll attack His family . . .

'Can you believe what a joke that minister on TV is?'

'Look at those hypocrites at church.' 'Some Christian she is . . .'

And their hearts become cynical, hardened, and bitter.

Unbelief Robs You of Your Joy

And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief. Matthew 13:58

When Jesus went to His home town, He would have healed many if they would have believed. Great joy would have filled that little hamlet of Nazareth. But God will not work outside the arena of faith. God has chosen to limit Himself in certain ways. And because they didn't believe, He couldn't work. As a result, miracles were missing. Healings weren't happening. Joy wasn't exploding. Unbelief is hazardous to your health. It blinds your eyes; it poisons your heart; it steals your joy.

What is the antidote for unbelief? What would the Great Physician prescribe to you and to me who, although we are believers in Jesus, are also guilty of limiting Him?

First, the antidote for the unbelief which results in blinded eyes is simply to offer prayer to God.

Paul did this when, in Ephesians 1, he prayed for the believers at Ephesus -- that their eyes might be enlightened. You see, faith is not blind. Faith sees what unbelief never will.

I am reminded of the story of Elisha in 2 Kings 6 . . . As the Syrians waged war against the Jews, the King of Syria set an ambush for the Israelites. Elisha sent word to the King of Israel saying, 'Don't go through that pass. You'll walk into a Syrian ambush.' The King of Syria then set a second ambush and again the Lord spoke to Elisha the prophet, who, in turn, warned the king to avoid the area.

After the third time, the king of Syria said, 'Someone is spying and I want his head.' One of his advisers said, 'King, there's no spy in our midst. There's a prophet in their land. His name is Elisha. He knows everything you say -- even what you say in your bedchamber.' 'Where is this man Elisha?' barked the King. 'In Dothan,' answered his advisers.

That same night, the Syrians surrounded the city of Dothan with soldiers, chariots, and armaments. The next morning, when Elisha's servant, Gehazi, woke up, he ran to his master, shouting, 'Master! We're surrounded! We're through! We're history!' Elisha answered him, 'Gehazi, they that are with us are more than they that are with them. Lord, open his eyes that he might see.'

And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw; and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha. 2 Kings 6:17

Elisha wasn't worried because faith sees what unbelief never will.

Secondly, the antidote for the unbelief which results in a bitter heart is to see people in God.

Paul said, 'I know no man after the flesh,' (2 Corinthians 5:16). In other words, 'I see people in Christ -- washed in His blood, robed in His righteousness. That's the way I choose to see people.' When you see people in God, suddenly you're not so cynical. You can just embrace, love, and enjoy them.

Thirdly, for the unbelief which robs you of joy -- speak the promises of God.

But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. Hebrews 11:6

There are many ways to please God -- but not one apart from faith.

'The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach: That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.' Romans 10:8-9

Faith is worked into our lives by God's Word. It is released from our lives by our spoken word. It's not enough to have a quiet, internal faith. Faith is released via the mouth.

Jesus said, 'When you see an obstacle in front of you, a mountain looming before you, a problem facing you, say to the mountain, 'Be removed' and it shall be removed,' (Matthew 17:20). Speak the praises of God. Scripture is packed with promises -- over 3,000 in number -- a promise for every situation.

Perhaps you have a difficulty in your life, a problem in your family, a hardship financially or vocationally, tough times in school or in friendship. Jesus desires to work in those situations. He really does. But we limit Him by unbelief.

God wants us to speak His promises because it's too easy for us to say, 'Well, I've got some ideas and thoughts, some hopes and dreams, but I'm not going to go on record verbally lest I seem foolish.' Once you have the promise of God in your heart, you need to release it via your mouth. Speak out that which has been worked in.

You will either venture out in faith, or you will vegetate. Your Christian life will either grow in faith as you see wonderful things happen in your family, in your ministry, in your life personally -- or you will shrink into a churchianity. God forbid.

Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear. Hebrews 11:3

Hebrews says the worlds were framed by the word of God. When we construct a house, we don't just put up one wall and say, 'Let's move in.' No, we put up all the walls in order that there might be protection, symmetry, and balance. So too with God. When He framed the world, it was framed in totality.

Therefore, we need to be students of His Word so we don't just put up one wall in our house of faith and say, 'Well, now, this is the way it has to be. I'm claiming the promise.'

No, solid faith, real faith, balanced faith comes by hearing the Word -- not simply an isolated verse here or there.

As I study the Word, my focus changes. It's no longer me clenching my fists and gritting my teeth, saying, 'I'm gonna trust or bust.'

No, my focus shifts from my faith to the Faithful One -- Jesus Christ.

I don't know what struggle you might have, what difficulty you might face -- but I know where the answer lies. It lies in the Faithful One, Jesus Christ.

Begin to venture out radically and watch what the Lord does joyfully. He wants to come into your Nazareth and do a mighty work.

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