

# John 12:37-50 “The Pain of Unbelief”

Preached @ Harambee Church by Pastor Michael Gunn on July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2007

*“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.”*

**Matthew 23:37**

## Intro

Last week we saw Jesus struggle mightily with similar struggles that we have in the face of death and destruction. Though His struggle had infinite consequences causing Him great anguish, He, in His humanness still struggled with the unnaturalness of death caused by sin (which He was to endure for our sakes). It is important to remember though, that Christ did not face death without hope as those who have no hope do (see **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**). He did what we are called to do in the face of stress and anxiety in our lives, turn to our Father to see that His will is being accomplished in the midst of our pain.

This week we turn from Christ's pain to the cause of His pain, our unbelief. He understood that pain, because He literally became our unbelief so that we could believe (**2 Corinthians 5:21**). Here we do not see God's pleasure, but His lament. There is no doubt that our unbelief causes God much pain (**Matthew 23:37**). This Matthew verse reminds us that in spite of God's ultimate will, our will can create dire consequences in this world, and in our own personal lives. In our passage today, we see that it is God who hardens a heart bent on rejecting Him.

## From the Head...

### The Hardening of Unbelief (John 12:37-41)

Does God harden your heart, or does your unbelief harden your heart? This appears to be the question of the ages, and one that is a bit of a paradox, since they both appear true in scripture. **This hardening is the result of their unbelief, not the cause** (See **Exodus 7:13; 9:12** cf. **8:15, 32; 9:34**)! Our choices bear responsibility and have grim consequences, but God in His sovereignty uses our choices to accomplish His will (**Genesis 50:20**). Our will/choices are proximate, while God's remains ultimate (see **John 1:12** cf. **1:13; John 6:35** cf. **6:44**). God does not violate our will, but He is in complete control of the results. This is hard for us to understand, but we can take hope that God is in control of everything, including man's evil choices. Our rejection of God results in a hardening brought on by God. There are four things however that we must bear in mind when we think of the sovereignty of God. First, God's sovereignty does not negate human responsibility. Secondly, this sovereign hardening is not a manipulation of morally neutral or good people, but a condemnation of their own choices (See **Romans 1:24**). Thirdly, God's sovereignty is a reason for hope, since there is nothing outside of His ultimate control. Lastly, God's hardening of the Jews ultimately brings forth His redemptive purposes to the world (see too **Romans 9:22-33**).

John makes sure his readers understand that this was to take place to the glory of the Messiah, which Isaiah had seen (See **Isaiah 6:1-4**). It shows that Isaiah was reporting what He saw would happen, and not in any way were his words making it happen.

### The Justification of Unbelief (John 12: 42-43)

Our unbelief in the face of the evidence is often a result of our own desires and insecurities. We crave the affections of men more than the affections of God. It is the heart of our problem, and the reason why God has to invade our souls before we can freely choose Him.

### The Painful Consequences of Unbelief (John 12:44-50)

Jesus' words here remind us of the authority Jesus has, and the reality that our judgment will result because of our choices, not because of a malevolent and capricious god. Jesus reminds us that we are under judgment, and that rejecting Him doesn't bring forth judgment, it declares a judgment that already exists. A heart that rejects Him causes our outward rejection of God. This is what we are capable of doing apart from God's gracious intervention in our lives.

## ...to the Heart

Verse 46 tells us that everyone who believes in Christ will not remain in the darkness (judgment). God has sent salvation in the person of His Son Jesus Christ pure and simple. It isn't the heart of a loving God to condemn. It may be a grand mystery of how this all works, but it is the heart of a loving God to save, which He has done to His glory through His Son Jesus Christ. We can argue theology while we remain shackled to our personal affections, forever separated from knowing the love of Christ in this life, and the life to come. Do you believe that Jesus is THE Light that comes into the world to enlighten every man? Do you love Him? If not, why not?

**For Further Reading:** *“The New Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of John”* William Barclay; *“The Gospel of John,”* F.F. Bruce; *“The New Testament Commentary: The Gospel of John,”* William Hendriksen; *“Preaching the Word; John: That You May Believe,”* R. Kent Hughes; *“The NIV Application Commentary: John,”* Gary M. Burge; *“The Pillar NT Commentary: The Gospel According to John,”* D.A. Carson

**Next Weeks Verses: John 13:1-38**

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