

The Anatomy of Unbelief

Livin' the Life

John 7:1-13

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We have been looking at the life of Jesus and the life he offers in our series in the Gospel of John, Livin' the Life. We are starting chapter seven this week, 7:1-13. Jesus is on a mission to reveal the glory of the Father and redeem humanity. Yet humanity continues to reject him. Today we look at three examples of unbelief in our message, Anatomy of Unbelief. Let's listen to the passage as we read 7:1-13.

There is a six month gap in the ministry of Jesus that John has excluded. Remember, John's purpose in writing is so we believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and by believing we may have life in his name. We know that this life is eternal life because John wrote, for God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (3:16). And eternal life is described as, whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him (Jn. 3:36). There are only two groups of people, those who do not believe and face the wrath of God, eternal misery, and those who do believe, persevere in believing, and face eternal life and joy. So, knowing what it means to believe is critical, the difference between eternal torment and eternal life; wrath and joy.

We read that Jesus limited himself to ministry in Galilee during these months because the Jewish leaders wanted to kill him (1). But it is the time of the Feast of Booths (2), one of three major Jewish feasts in which all Jewish adult males were required to attend so Jerusalem is filled with faithful Jews. Jesus' brothers were encouraging him to go to the feast so he could gather more disciples from among the large crowd that was there (3-4). But it is not his teaching they are excited about, it is the miracles he was doing. And they know others get excited when Jesus does miracles. Jesus' miracles are impressive and his brothers think that this is a good way to gain more disciples or regain those who stopped following him (6:66). John tells us that his brothers wanted him to perform miracles because they did not believe in him (5). They are excited about him doing miracles, who doesn't get excited about miracles? I have never seen anyone who is not excited about miracles. But this excitement is rooted in unbelief. They believe in his miracles but they do not believe in him. They are amazed by his miracles and they want him to win more followers and John tells us that this is unbelief. Religious excitement does not mean someone embraces Jesus for who he is. So, the first example of unbelief is Jesus' brothers. Their excitement about the miracles of Jesus that is rooted in unbelief. They did not see Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God.

I think that they did not want Jesus to teach because they knew his teaching was offensive and Jesus had recently lost a large contingent of disciples because of it. I think the brothers were looking for Jesus to regain momentum and looking to gain from it for themselves. As brothers, they would gain from Jesus' popularity. But Jesus' miracles are a means to a greater end, to reveal his glory as the one of a kind Son (1:14) and to make God his Father known (1:18). Remember when the disciples saw his first miracle, turning water into wine, they saw his glory and believed. His brothers did not see his glory in his miracles; they only saw miracles.

So instead of promoting himself or letting others push him, Jesus does not go. He tells them, my time has not yet come but your time is always here (6). In other words, I will not be manipulated nor coerced by your unbelief. Jesus goes on, the world cannot hate you but it hates me because I testify about it, that it is evil. You go up to the feast. I am not going, for my time has not yet fully come (7-8). The world cannot hate them because they are of the world, motivated by same things the world lives for. The world is never indicted by them but it is by Jesus because he tells them that to seek your own glory is a mark of unbelief and evil. Evil is doing things in unbelief, seeking your own glory and not God's glory. When Jesus calls humanity evil, he means that we are separated from God by our sin and under his condemnation for that sin. Every inclination of our hearts is sinful, done out of unbelief, for our own glory. Our sin demands justice so God, in love, God sent his Son to vindicate

his justice by Jesus paying for our sin on the cross. God sent his Son to reveal the Father to us and redeem us by his death. The whole world is at odds with God, enemies of God, yet still the object of God's love (3:16-21).

So, let's look at the second example of unbelief, the response of the Jewish leaders. After Jesus' brothers left, Jesus went to Jerusalem privately (10). Jesus did not go with his brothers because he was not going to go up to do miracles but to teach as we will see later in the chapter. The Jews were looking for him (11). The Jewish leader's unbelief is seen in their wanting to kill him (5:8, 18; 7:1,19, 20). They are not excited about Jesus but the opposite, they are threatened by Jesus' miracles and they want to stop him, even kill him (5:5-9). So, secondly, we see the unbelief of the Jewish leaders, which is not much different that the brothers, really. Both reject who Jesus is despite his message and his miracles. They do not see his glory.

The last example of unbelief is seen in the crowd grumbling and arguing whether Jesus is a good man or deceiving the crowds (12). There is that word again, grumbling. When God graciously saved Israel from the Egyptians and provided food for them they grumbled against God, ungrateful for God's deliverance and provision in the dessert. Then John says that no one spoke openly about Jesus because they were afraid of the Jews or human approval. The root of their unbelief was not excitement over his miracles nor were they threatened by his miracles. This unbelief stems from the crowd's desire to be accepted and approved by others. They do not see his glory.

Why does John include this section on unbelief right after the bread of life sermon? I think it is to reinforce the fact that we come to Jesus, we believe in Jesus, because the Father has drawn us. John wants to reinforce the fact that Jesus did not just come to offer salvation but to secure our salvation.

Questions for Life Groups:

1. Why are the Jews seeking to kill Jesus?
2. Why did the brothers want Jesus to go to the feast?
3. What was motivating the brothers to encourage Jesus to go to the feast?
4. Do you ever try to manipulate Jesus to get him to do what you want?
5. Why did the brothers focus on Jesus doing miracles rather than teaching?
6. Why did Jesus say the world cannot hate the brothers but hate him?
7. In what ways does the world hate Jesus?
8. Why did Jesus go to the feast privately?
9. What is the nature of unbelief?
10. How do we overcome unbelief in our own hearts?

