

Thirty Days with Jesus
The Controversial Jesus #2
Why People Did Not Believe in Him

Intro: John wrote his gospel to make believers; yet he candidly reports that the God who came into His world was not welcomed by the majority of His people.

He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. (John 1:10-11)

Jesus in his own time was a controversial figure. Though some believed on Him, most did not! Why did some not believe?

Those who did not believe and why

Religious leaders (Jews) did not believe in Jesus because of:
Prejudice

At first they seemed curious and open to Jesus (the testimony of Nicodemus)

Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; this man came to Him by night, and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." (John 3:1-2)

But then all that was to change when Jesus acted contrary to their understanding of the Law. For some, their openness turned to an antipathy

The man went away, and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. And for this reason the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because He was doing these things on the Sabbath. But He answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working." For this cause therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God. (John 5:15-18)

Reasonable heads like Nicodemus and Joseph urged for more careful thinking before rejecting Jesus.

"Our Law does not judge a man, unless it first hears from him and knows what he is doing, does it?" (John 7:51)

Yet disagreement and division persisted.

Therefore some of the Pharisees were saying, "This man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath." But others were saying, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And there was a division among them. (John 9:16)

There arose a division again among the Jews because of these words. And many of them were saying, "He has a demon and is

insane. Why do you listen to Him?" Others were saying, "These are not the sayings of one demon-possessed. A demon cannot open the eyes of the blind, can he?" (John 10:19-21) Finally those in opposition to Jesus won the day and the Jews as a whole became hardened in their unbelief. *But though He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him; (John 12:37)* *But the chief priests took counsel that they might put Lazarus to death also; because on account of him many of the Jews were going away, and were believing in Jesus. (John 12:10-11)* At things considered, one of the chief factors in their unbelief was their prejudice. Jesus' practices did not line up with their understanding of the Law; rather than change their doctrines, they rejected Jesus!

Fear and desire for acceptance by others

The religious establishment had become a religious club where everyone sought the glory and approval of one another.

I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another shall come in his own name, you will receive him.

How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another, and you do not seek the glory that is from the one and only God? (John 5:43-44)

Many could not take a stand for Jesus because they loved this approval of their peers more than the approval of God.

Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God. (John 12:42-43)

"I do not receive glory from men; but I know you, that you do not have the love of God in yourselves. (John 5:41-42)

Pride and self-interest

In the end the Jewish leaders seemed more motivated by self-interest than by truth. They were worried about their position with Rome and the people.

Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, "What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs. "If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." (John 11:47-48)

They had high views of their own judgment, though they were influencing each other. On one occasion they showed their collective pride while manifesting contempt for the common man.

No one of the rulers or Pharisees has believed in Him, has he? But this multitude which does not know the Law is accursed.” (John 7:48-49)

The multitudes did not believe in Jesus because of:

Misplaced priorities

The masses seemed eager to have a Messiah who like Moses would offer “bread from heaven”. They wanted a political deliverer instead of a spiritual savior

As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew, and were not walking with Him anymore. (John 6:66)

Misinformation

Some thought that Jesus was from Galilee and thus could not be the Christ.

Some of the multitude therefore, when they heard these words, were saying, “This certainly is the Prophet.” Others were saying, “This is the Christ.” Still others were saying, “Surely the Christ is not going to come from Galilee, is He? Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the offspring of David, and from Bethlehem, the village where David was?” So there arose a division in the multitude because of Him. (John 7:40-43)

Overly-influenced by leaders

It would be hard for the multitudes to hear some of the things that the Jews said about Jesus without being influenced in part by their opinions

And there was much grumbling among the multitudes concerning Him; some were saying, “He is a good man”; others were saying, “No, on the contrary, He leads the multitude astray.” (John 7:12)

Some were afraid to even talk about Jesus because of the repercussions from the religious leaders.

Yet no one was speaking openly of Him for fear of the Jews. (John 7:13)

John’s honest revelation of the Jews’ unbelief is an important part of the gospel message. Though Jesus came that all might see and believe, many remained then, as now, blind and unconvinced.

Two reasons for persistent unbelief

People saw the same evidence; so unbelief cannot be explained by the lack of clarity. Unbelief is rooted in the character of the unbeliever. There seem to be two key barriers to belief.

A preference for personal autonomy over divine control

Why do some people look at the same evidence you and I see and say, “Jesus was not god!” when the evidence shouts to us, “Jesus is God!”? I submit that unbelief is rooted in a preference for personal autonomy over divine control. Many people want to live a life contrary to what

God's word teaches. It becomes necessary to disbelieve in Jesus in order to justify the preferred lifestyle.

Intellectual arrogance

Many of the prejudicial presuppositions that keep people from faith are rooted in intellectual pride.

In the aftermath of "the Enlightenment" people came to believe that science could answer all man's questions. Many intellectuals think we have figured out how we came into being and that a creator and savior are no longer needed.

Unbelievers are often guilty of "chronological snobbery", presuming that people in the past were ignorant and incapable of thinking rationally, that they were overcome with the superstitions that grew out of their ignorance of the world about them.

Conclusion: I see no easy resolution to the growing problem of unbelief in our society. There is no argument that will "make" people believe. If we knew such a one, the entire world would believe; for we would "make" them do so. But this is not the nature of the world God created. Each person's state of heart determines his response to the evidence of the gospel. And the issue really turns out to be very simple one: Are you willing to acknowledge God? Or do you want to be your own god!?