

- Though the hour was upon Him, Jesus and John testify that many did not and could not believe. Even after sight or word of Jesus resurrecting Lazarus, there was a majority of disbelief among the Jews.
 - Eternal life is a supernatural experience and thus John testifies that it takes a supernatural source (cf. Jn. 3:3, 5) for one to receive it. Salvation is a mystery and following Christ is a paradoxical life. For example, one must surrender to be free. One must die to live. One must be lowest to be the greatest. And one must see the glory of the cruel, obscene, shameful Cross of Christ to profess His glory in the face of real threats by those who bask in the glory of the world.
 - Here in this passage (Jn. 12:37-50), we see a summary of Jesus' ministry and its immediate results (overwhelming disbelief) and His final public pronouncement of His ministry's objective and authority. His objective was to teach truth and offer signs (miracles) so that some would believe and not be judged and thus experience eternal life. And His authority was that of the Father in heaven and thus all His claims, teaching, and judgments are absolutely true. Such an ultimatum of trusting or refusing Jesus' person and work has proven to induce much opposition. But such was no surprise to Him or the Father. In fact, it was foretold and thus John pointed out that such happened just as prophesied by Isaiah.
 - Though John had just wrote (v. 36) that Jesus departed, he included a summary of what Jesus cried out at the end of His public ministry.
1. Hardened Disbelief & Shunned Glory (37-43)
 - a. More of a refusal to believe rather than a lack of convincing evidence, I use "disbelief" rather than "unbelief."
 - b. Isa. 53:1. Prediction of refusal to believe the "report" (Jesus' words/teachings) and "revealed arm" (miraculous signs which demonstrated Jesus power and authority).
 - c. John goes further that an acknowledgement of their disbelief in that he wrote "Therefore, they *could* not believe" (v. 39) because, God "blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts" (Isa. 6:9-10).
 - i. Isaiah saw the King's glory just before being commissioned to bring forth God's Word.
 - ii. God sent Isaiah to a people who would not listen. In Isa. 6:9-10 it seems to say that by virtue of proclaiming the Word of truth, people will be hardened by it. Jesus will confirm something of this sort in vv. 47-48 in our text.
 - iii. But John clearly wrote that the Jews "could" not believe.
 1. It is clear by the context of Jesus' ministry (as seen in John and the other accounts) that He came to seek and save the lost and John emphasized that the reason for Jesus' message and miracles was so they would repent and not be judged. Jesus Himself repeated His purpose for coming (the first time) was not for judgment but for eternal life for those who believe in Him.
 2. So why the "could" not rather than "would" not believe?
 3. It is written that when Moses presented God's requirements of Pharaoh that Pharaoh's heart was repeatedly hardened. But before Pharaoh was presented with Moses' command, God had already warned Moses that He would harden his heart.
 4. Such is a case, not of God playing cruel games of commanding Pharaoh but not allowing Pharaoh to comply, but of giving repeat opportunities for Pharaoh which were met with disdain and thus God would allow no escape for such defiance nor the indefinite abuse of His people. My humble suggestion

of such logistics is that this is a way of communicating a warning against the presumption of waiting till the eleventh hour to ‘repent’ and escape judgment. Many have said that man can continually refuse the truth of the Gospel till he has reached the point of no return. William Hendrickson wrote, “He even *urges* them to walk in the light. But when people, of their own accord and after repeated threats and promises, reject him and spurn his messages, then—and not until then—he hardens them, *in order that* those who were *not willing* to repent may *not be able* to repent.”¹ Paul seemed to have had such a concern of such presumption (2 Cor. 6:2).

5. Richard Phillips summed it up well: “There are three ways in which we should understand God’s hardening of the Jews. First, we should realize that the Jews’ rejection of Jesus was part of God’s sovereign plan for our salvation. God purposed for the Jews to reject Jesus so that he might be crucified for our sins. This rejection involved both the will of the unbelieving Jews and the will of God. As Peter later preached, Jesus was “delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God,” yet he said to his Jewish hearers, “you crucified and killed [him] by the hands of lawless men” (Acts 2:23). Peter accuses his hearers of their culpable guilt and also ascribes what happened to God’s sovereign plan. →
6. Do we object to this? If we do, we are objecting to the very plan of God that achieved redemption through the crucifixion of Jesus. Moreover, the Jews’ rejection of the gospel brought salvation to the Gentiles, which includes most Christians today. So if we object to God’s will in hardening Jesus’ Jewish hearers, we object to God’s plan for our salvation. We would do better to follow Isaiah’s example when he accepted God’s commission for his own ministry of hardening: Isaiah had seen the Lord’s sovereign majesty and knew better than to pit his puny wisdom against the Lord’s holy will. →
7. Second, John’s teaching reminds us that the gospel is a “two-edged sword” (Heb. 4:12; Rev. 1:16), giving eternal life to those who believe but conveying judgment to those who are hardened in unbelief. This is why Jesus warned, “Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you” (John 12:35). Gordon Keddie explains: “Those unwilling to believe become progressively unable to believe.”⁴ Leon Morris writes, “They have rejected the gracious invitation of God, and it is God, none less, who has decreed that those who act in this way have their eyes blinded and their hearts hardened.”⁵ →
8. Third, it is clear in this passage that the hardening effect of unbelief is not merely a natural cause and effect but God’s judicial response. J. C. Ryle comments, “God had given over the Jews to judicial blindness, as a

¹ Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953–2001). *Exposition of the Gospel According to John* (Vol. 2, p. 212). Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

⁴ Gordon J. Keddie, *A Study Commentary on John*, 2 vols. (Darlington, UK: Evangelical Press, 2001), 1:485.

⁵ Leon Morris, *Reflections on the Gospel of John* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1986), 460.

punishment for their long continued and obstinate rejection of His warnings.”⁶
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9. This presents us with a sober reality, since God has not changed over the years. People think they can wait to commit themselves to Jesus. They want a few more years to enjoy their sin, and they think that at the time of their own choosing they can become Christians and start living as they know they should. But they do not realize the hardening effect of unbelief on their hearts, so that it will be increasingly difficult for them to believe. They might come to a time when it is impossible for them to believe. Moreover, since God is offended by their disdain for his Son, it is quite possible for God to give such people over to ultimate reprobation. The time came when God gave over the Jews to a judicial hardening, so that, John says, “therefore they could not believe” (John 12:39).²
10. “To be or not to be?” Ability or Inability?
 - a. Are we able to believe in Jesus?
 - b. Does God harden hearts so that they cannot believe in Jesus?
 - c. Would Jesus tell them to believe Him for His works if they could not?
 - d. Was Jesus disingenuous when He told the Pharisees, that He longed for them to come to Him but they would not?
 - i. Only via the Spirit’s conviction and God’s revelation.
 - ii. Our hearts are already inclined to evil (Jer. 17:9) and God is not willing (desirous) that anyone perish but that all come to repent (2 Pet. 3:9; Ezek. 18:23).
 - iii. Acknowledging revelation is natural and thus we have the ability for it. Responding positively to revelation leads to further revelation, in my understanding.
 - iv. Jesus could not be disingenuous!
 - e. So then, are we able to believe? Verse 42 appears to answer in the affirmative.
 - f. We see a belief w/o faith. Knowledge does not = trust. James 2:19 and Mk. 8:38!
- d. When we consider the foreknowledge of God, the question of why the Jews would desire to believe in a Messiah who would be ignored, disdained, mocked, opposed by His own, schemed against, brutally tortured, and executed is answered. They should have referred back to the Scriptures which not only predicted such but necessitated it.
- e. What is paradoxical is that Isaiah prophesied of Messiah’s exaltation in the midst of His suffering and that his message directly from God would be met with disdain. Both are ironically sad and both indicate Jesus’ person and message.
- f. Furthermore, after quoting Isaiah’s prophecies, John noted that such was written after Isaiah had seen “His glory” (41). Once again, we have the irony of Jesus’ glory associated with unpleasant and undesired experiences. His hour of passion would be His greatest hour of

⁶ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: John*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1999), 2:416.

² Phillips, R. D. (2014). *John*. (R. D. Phillips, P. G. Ryken, & D. M. Doriani, Eds.) (1st ed., Vol. 2, pp. 116–117). Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing.

glory. The cruel instrument of execution became the beautiful symbol for God's unspeakable sacrifice.

2. A Plea for Belief & Sacrificial Glory (44-50)

- a. "Cried Out" = outcry or shouting plea of declaration. Cf. Mat. 23:37.
- b. 44-45 = heavenly authority
- c. 46 = light of truth. Refusing truth's light = de facto stay in darkness
- d. 47 = objective of Jesus' plea is to save not condemn. It stands to reason that if He came to judge, He'd obviously not contend with death and endure the cross.
- e. 48 = what we do with His Word = how our judgment will go.
- f. 49 = reaffirmation of authority
- g. 50 = command to everlasting life.