

HIS COMMAND LEADS TO ETERNAL LIFE

John 12:37-50

Key Verse: 12:50

“I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say.”

This passage is the conclusion of Jesus’ public ministry as recorded in John’s gospel. The first part is about unbelief. In fact, the NIV subtitle reads, “The Jews Continue in Their Unbelief.” This unbelief may seem surprising. Yet God was not surprised by it. In fact, Isaiah foretold it. We find that God is glorified even in man’s unbelief. This passage ends with Jesus’ invitation to accept him and the word of eternal life. Jesus never gives up. Jesus ever offers us the gift of eternal life. So we have titled this message, “His Command Leads to Eternal Life.” As we study this part, let’s accept Jesus’ word of life.

First, they would not, then could not believe—glory to God (37-41).

Look at verse 37. “Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him.” John records seven miraculous signs. One was the healing of a man who had been paralyzed for 38 years. Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked. The Pharisees in Jerusalem knew what had happened. However, ignoring the miracle, they accused him of sinning by carrying his mat on the Sabbath (5:1-15). Once, Jesus saw a man blind from birth. Jesus spit on the ground, made some mud, and put it on the man’s eyes. Then he told him to go and wash in the pool of Siloam. The man went and washed and he could see.

Jesus gave him sight. When the Pharisees found out about this, they held an inquisition, branded the man as a criminal, and threw him out of the synagogue (9:1-34). Jesus' last miraculous sign was the raising of Lazarus. He had been in a tomb for four days. Jesus said, "Lazarus, come out!" Then Lazarus came out of the tomb, alive. Jesus raised him from the dead. When the Pharisees learned about this, they made plans to kill Jesus, and Lazarus as well (11:43-44; 12:10). Jesus had done miraculous signs that only the Messiah could do. Yet the more clearly Jesus revealed himself to be the Messiah, the more fiercely the Pharisees reacted. They deliberately suppressed the truth. They were hostile, violent, even murderous.

Why were they unbelieving? Jesus said in John 3:19, "This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil." Simply, they wanted to sin without being exposed. Unbelief is a moral problem, not an intellectual one. Unbelief is a deliberate decision to reject the light and remain evil.

However, John does not rail against the Jews for their unbelief. Nor does he regard it as surprising. Look at verse 38. "This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet: 'Lord, who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?'" John quotes from Isaiah 53:1. This is where Isaiah describes most clearly and poignantly that the Messiah would suffer and die for our sins. This is not what the Israelites expected. Isaiah 53:3-4 says, "He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted." When Jesus was suffering so terribly during his passion, it was for our sins. This is why John the Baptist cried, "Look, the

Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (Jn 1:29) Yet fallen men thought that Jesus was being stricken by God. They thought Jesus was a sinner. They did not understand that Jesus was dying for their sins. The love of God and the humbleness of the Messiah were beyond understanding. Ultimately, unbelief is rooted in pride. When God approaches us in his humbleness, we must acknowledge our need and accept him.

When John quoted Isaiah, it was to put the unbelief of the Jews in perspective. Throughout God’s redemptive history unbelief has been a common response. Isaiah experienced it. Jesus also experienced it. We experience it when only one out of 100 people accept our Bible study invitation. Still, even though unbelief may be a common response, we must realize that it is not static. Unbelief spirals downward. Verse 39 begins, “For this reason they could not believe....” In verse 37 they “would not” believe. In verse 39 they “could not” believe. When men reject God, God gives them over to their unbelief. It becomes harder for them to turn to God. Moreover, they must face the wrath of God. Verses 39b-40 say, “...because, as Isaiah says elsewhere: ‘He has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor turn—and I would heal them.’” Here, the Bible says that God punishes unbelief in two ways.

In the first place, God blinds their eyes. There is an interesting example in the Old Testament. In Numbers 22, God warned Balaam not to go to the king of Moab who wanted him to put a curse on the Israelites. At first, Balaam obeyed God. But when the Moabite king increased his pressure and his reward, Balaam faltered in his resolve and inquired of God again. Outwardly God said he could go, but inwardly God was very angry with Balaam. Then God blinded Balaam’s spiritual eyes. Even though an angel of the Lord appeared three times, Balaam could not see him.

Balaam's donkey saw the angels, but Balaam could not. When a man knows God's will, yet insists on his own desire, he becomes spiritually blind. People never fool God. Rather, they become foolish.

In the second place, God deadens their hearts. Proverbs 4:23 says, "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life." When our hearts are alive, we can be real human beings. A parent whose heart is alive loves his children and cares for them. A student whose heart is alive studies hard with a bright future hope. But when a person's heart is deadened, they no longer have proper human emotions or desires. Their hearts become cold and evil. Then they can do terrible things. These days, we hear many bizarre stories of evildoing. These are mere symptoms. The root problem is the unbelieving atmosphere in our nation. As long as godless evolution is taught in the classrooms, we can expect young people to do awful things. We should not be surprised and blame them after the fact. We must pray that God's name may be honored in our schools and in our nation, and our humanity restored.

The Jewish leaders had repeatedly rejected Jesus' miracles and his teachings. As they did so, they got progressively worse. At last, they would commit the most heinous crime of crucifying the Son of God. We must know that unbelief is a serious sin. And yet, God uses even man's unbelief for his own glory.

Look at verse 41. "Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him." Jesus' glory is his suffering and death on the cross. It happened through Israel's unbelief. Isaiah saw this and wrote about it. Isaiah 53:10 says, "Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will

of the Lord will prosper in his hand.” Jesus’ glory is revealed through his humble obedience to the will of God. In this way, Jesus saves all people who believe in him. This glory is magnified all the more because of who Jesus really is. This same Jesus who humbly died for our sins is the holy God Almighty who appeared to Isaiah, surrounded by cherubim. The Lord was high and exalted, seated on a throne. Above him were seraphs, calling to one another: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory’” (Isa 6:2-3). Jesus reveals the glory of God through his divine majesty clothed in divine meekness. When we see Jesus as he truly is, we see God ruling the world and the whole earth is full of his glory. He is glorified even in the unbelief of his people.

Second, Jesus helps fearful people believe in God Almighty (42-46).

Look at verses 42-43. “Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved praise from men more than praise from God.” These people were different than those of willful unbelief. These people, including some Jewish leaders, believed that Jesus was the Messiah in their hearts. But they were afraid to take a public stand because they knew it would offend the Pharisees. So they did not confess Jesus with their mouths. In a word, they were cowardly. There are many people like this. They want to be part of a system and to affirm themselves with the approval of others. They are more sensitive to peer pressure than to their own consciences. They are influenced more by what others say than by what the word of God says.

Jesus did not leave men alone in their cowardice. Jesus cried out. It was with a broken shepherd heart to help fearful people have faith in God. Look at verses 44-

45. “Then Jesus cried out, ‘When a man believes in me, he does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. When he looks at me, he sees the one who sent me.’” Jesus repeats two times the words “the one who sent me.” Jesus urges us to believe in and see the one who sent Jesus, that is God Almighty. When we see God Almighty through Jesus all fear is gone and we can boldly confess our faith in Jesus no matter the danger.

In the Old Testament, there was Moses. God called Moses from a shepherd life in the wilderness to be the deliverer of his people from bondage in Egypt. It meant that Moses had to stand before the most powerful ruler on earth, Pharaoh. Moses’ mission was to demand again and again that Pharaoh let the Israelites go. Pharaoh thought of the Israelites as his own possession, and a good source of free labor. But Moses had to demand their immediate release with no compensation. Humanly it seemed impossible. Yet Moses confronted Pharaoh courageously. How could he do this? Hebrews 11:27 says, “By faith he (Moses) left Egypt, not fearing the king’s anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible.” Moses saw God Almighty. When Moses saw God he could challenge the power of darkness without fear.

In the New Testament, there was Stephen. He was a deacon in the early church, full of the Holy Spirit. Because of his testimony about Jesus he was dragged before the Sanhedrin to be tried. It was dangerous; his life was hanging in the balance. Still, Stephen testified to Jesus clearly. Then the hardhearted Sanhedrin members were so angry that they took him out to kill him. At the moment, stones were cutting into Stephen’s flesh. He was surrounded by men of fury; they had hatred in their hearts and devil faces. Yet Stephen was full of courage. Stephen had the peace of God in his soul. He said, “Look, I see heaven open and the Son of Man

standing at the right hand of God” (Ac 7:56). When we see God in Jesus we can be courageous witnesses of Christ.

Look at verse 46. “I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.” Here the darkness refers to separation from God. It is caused by unbelief and its symptom is fear. Jesus sets us free from the darkness. Jesus enlightens our hearts with the presence of God. In Jesus we can see that God is ruling the world and our situation. We can find the courage to boldly testify about Jesus even in an unbelieving atmosphere. We can be one-to-one Bible teachers and even missionaries to Muslim countries.

Third, Jesus’ word is God’s word and it gives eternal life (47-50).

Look at verse 47. “As for the person who hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge him. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save it.” Here Jesus comforts those who believe his word in their hearts, but are still weak to confess his name before people. It is easy to criticize such people even though most of us have been like that at one time. But Jesus did not to judge the first time. If Jesus judged there would be no one who could stand. Someday Jesus will come as Judge. But at his first coming, Jesus puts aside his duty as Judge. Jesus only works to save weak sinners. For example, there was Nicodemus. Jesus gave him a clear teaching that he must be born again by the work of the Holy Spirit to see and enter the kingdom of God. After hearing Jesus’ words, Nicodemus struggled a lot in his inner man. Very gradually he began to stand on the side of Jesus. At last, at the cross, Nicodemus identified himself publicly as Jesus’ follower. If Jesus had judged him from the beginning he would have failed. But Jesus was patient. Jesus taught him the word and waited until Nicodemus overcame the world. Jesus knows

our weakness. So he is patient with us. Therefore we should not judge ourselves or others. Instead we must continually come to Jesus and bring others to Jesus to be saved.

Look at verse 48. “There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day.” Here Jesus refers to people of willful unbelief. They reject Jesus’ words. It is a big mistake. They will be judged by Jesus’ words at the last day. When they stand before God’s throne, only the words of Jesus will remain. All of their human philosophies and clever arguments will disappear. Only the truth of Jesus’ word will remain. Those who received Jesus’ grace but abused it intentionally will hear the words, “Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.” Those who spent all their time making money will hear, “Do not work for food that spoils but for food that endures to eternal life.”

Look at verse 49. “For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it.” Even though Jesus is the Son of God, he did not speak what he felt like saying. He spoke only what God told him to say. To Jesus, God’s word was a command. It was to be spoken as it was, and in the way God wanted it spoken, with all authority. God is eternal. God’s word is eternal and absolute. Jesus spoke only God’s word that remains forever.

Look at verse 50. “I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say.” The word of Jesus leads those who believe to eternal life. This is what we all need. When we have eternal life we overcome the fear of death. We can overcome the power of the devil. We can live as God’s servants and boldly carry out the Father’s will. Our attitude toward the

word of God is so important. When we study the Bible and listen to the message and write testimonies, we must do so in the presence of God. As his word comes into our hearts we must honor it more than anything else. And we must share his word with others so that they may have life.

In this passage we learn that the world is sick with unbelief. Sometimes this unbelief raises its ugly head in surprising ways. But with the word of God in our hearts, we can see that God rules the world. God uses even man's unbelief to reveal his own glory. Today Jesus urges us to have faith in God Almighty. His command leads to eternal life. Let's accept his command and confess the name of Jesus, even among the unbelieving people. May God be glorified.