

Matthew 13:53-58 “The Tragic Deception of Unbelief”

3.19.17

If I were to ask you the question this morning: Do you believe in Jesus? How would you answer? I dare say that most in the room would say: “Yes.” But, what if I asked you: “How do you know that you believe?” What would you say? What answer would you offer to that question?

I've often used the analogy of the footbridge.



What if I told you that footbridge would hold you. Would you go across that footbridge? If you trusted me perhaps you would, but even then you'd probably do so VERY CAREFULLY, right?

Belief. The line between belief and unbelief can be a very thin line. Yes we can **say** that we believe, but “saying and doing” are two different things entirely.

I want you to understand something this morning that will be critical to grasping this message today...and it's this: **we can limit the power of God because we don't believe!** It's not that God is unable to do things in our lives...NO...His power is limitless...He's omnipotent...All-Powerful... But, if we choose not to believe God and walk across the footbridge that He has placed before us, then we will never get to the other side...we will be stuck because we didn't believe and we limited the release of God's power in our lives.

So perhaps the better question to ask this morning is: Are you and I potentially limiting the power of God because we simply won't believe? If that's the case...unbelief can cripple a life. Even the life of a believer and we'll be left standing on the other side of that which God desires for us.

Sadly, I believe this happened in the first century in Jesus' hometown of Nazareth. Follow along with me in...

Matthew 13:53-58

53 And when Jesus had finished these parables, he went away from there, **54** and coming to his hometown he taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, “Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works? **55** Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? **56** And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?” **57** And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household.” **58** And he did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief.

That last verse is the key to today's message: “And He (Jesus) did not do many mighty works there, because of their what_____? UNBELIEF.

Think with me a moment about unbelief:

Adam and Eve failed to believe God, and because of it...the whole world was cursed. 1,100 years later the entire world, all the people on the face of the earth, failed to believe the preaching of Noah, and that unbelief led to a flood that destroyed the earth and all who lived on it...except for 8 people. But God saved those who believed and two of each kind of animal on Noah's ark. 1,500 years later, the people of God...the children of Israel refused to trust God after Moses delivered them from the bondage of Egypt and, they wandered in the desert for 40 years costing an entire generation the joy of seeing the Promised Land.

Perhaps the greatest illustration of unbelief, because of his proximity to the truth, was Judas Iscariot, who after living three years in the presence of the Living Truth...the Lord Jesus Christ, he showed by his actions that he never believed. He never crossed the footbridge in faith.

Think about it, BELIEF has the power to bring a human being's soul into the presence of God in Heaven. That's power is it not...?? That a human being can have belief in Jesus Christ and that belief can cause the transfer of their soul from this life on earth...that's temporary...to eternal life in Heaven! Talk about power! Yet, unbelief brings the opposite. It brings pain, sorrow, remorse, and ultimately, (as we saw last week from Jesus' own words), unbelief leads to an eternity in Hell, once that dragnet...like a wall...pulls in all the fish to the shoreline of eternity...but, then it's too late for the unbeliever. They waited too long! Oh...the power of unbelief is damning to a soul and THAT my dear church family, is the fearful power of unbelief. It is truly the TRAGIC DECEPTION OF UNBELIEF.

Church family, we all know John 3:16, but do you know John 3:17 and 18.

John 3:16-18

16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. **17** For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. **18** Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

Do you believe? Have you been across the footbridge?

Romans 1:16-17

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. **17** For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

Do you want to know if you believe? Here's how you can know: **You will live by faith**... You WILL walk across that footbridge. Because Jesus is the footbridge. See it...Jesus said...



Listen, it takes faith to walk across that footbridge... It takes faith to give your life to Christ. The Bible is clear:

Ephesians 2:8

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.

God gives you the faith...but, you've got to use it. He will literally walk you across that footbridge, with the Holy Spirit holding your hand...but, He won't make you... You have to choose to activate the faith by believing.

Today we're going to see Jesus return to His hometown and we're going to watch the tragedy of the very people on the earth who knew Him the best...turn their backs on Him and reject Him because they refused to believe. Yes, today we will see: "The Tragic Deception of Unbelief."

Matthew 13:53-54

53 And when Jesus had finished these parables, he went away from there, **54** and coming to his hometown he taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, "Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works?"

Matthew records that He came into his "hometown." Now that was Nazareth. See the map...



He left Capernaum (about 11 o'clock there on the Sea of Galilee) and made His way about 20 miles west, southwest to Nazareth. You could typically travel this distance on foot in one day (if you booked it).

Now, I guess my inquiring mind wonders: Why did He leave Capernaum and go back to His hometown? He's already been there once (about a year ago), at the very beginning of His ministry...and that didn't go well. So, did His mom invite Him to come back? Did someone in the synagogue invite Him to come back? Why did He go back?

Well, we'll never know for sure...but, in my mind I believe He went because He wanted to give His own people one last chance to accept His message and accept Him. After all, He's known these people all of His life. They've watched Him grow up. He played with many of them when they were kids. They went to the synagogue together. They travelled to Jerusalem each year in caravans for Passover. He helped build many of their homes and made the yokes for their farm animals. He knows this community like the back of His hand and I believe He wanted to give them one last chance to believe. But would they? Or would it turn out like His first visit?

Luke describes what happened after Jesus came back from being baptized by John the Baptist in

the Jordan and enduring the Wilderness Temptation of Satan for 40 days in the desert of Judea. He's come back to Nazareth and Jesus always went to the synagogue AND because He's from there and is known by the synagogue rulers...so, they asked Him to read the Scripture for that day.

Luke 4:16-20

16 And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. **17** And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, **18** "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, **19** to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." **20** And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.

Everyone is looking at Him and do you know what Jesus said: (This is my paraphrase)... "It's me! What you just heard...it's me! I'm the Messiah!" Oh boy! This is where it went south in a hurry.

Luke 4:28-30

28 When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. **29** And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. **30** But passing through their midst, he went away.

Do you understand what they tried to do? They were so incensed (filled with wrath) at His proclamation that He was the long-awaited Messiah that they tried to kill Him! They took Him by force to a hill and tried to throw Him off. Here's a picture of that site scholars believe it to be.



But, here's what I want you to really see. I want you to see what's on the other side of that little wall of the monument site.



That's pretty dangerous to be honest. These folks have their backs to the south, which is toward the little town- Nain, where Jesus would raise a widow's son who was from there.

They tried to kill this hometown boy. He grew up there and they turned on Him but, verse 30 says that "He slipped out of their midst." What does that mean? We aren't told... But, with a mob like

that...it had to be a miracle...they ended up wrestling with the air... He had to have just disappeared. Why? Because it wasn't His time to die. He had just started His three-year ministry.

BTW...Listen church family, nothing can happen to you or to me outside of God's sovereign will. He is in control of our lives and He will get accomplished what He desires and **NO** amount of evil can stop that. You can rest easy as a follower of Christ, because you are in His protection and He will sustain you no matter what you are going through and He will provide a way of escape if it be His will. That's why Jesus would say that we could come unto Him when we are burdened and heavy laden, because we can trust Him to give us rest. No, nothing can happen to us unless it's approved by God first. And then, whatever those circumstances might be...the Lord will sustain us in those circumstances.

So I'll ask again: What in the world is Jesus doing going back there? Doesn't He remember they tried to kill Him? Oh...I'm sure He remembered...but, this is the love of Jesus in action. He was willing to go back one more time. Look at verse 54 again...

Matthew 13:54

54 and coming to his hometown he taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, "Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works?"

Honestly, this is absolutely a ridiculous question. Truly, it's a dumb question. It's obvious that the "mighty works" of Jesus (which is another way of saying: miracles) are of God. No human being can heal the sick like He's been doing. No ordinary man can raise the dead and make the lame walk and the blind see. But LISTEN, that's what unbelief does...**it rejects the obvious!**

I see this all the time and you do too. People who have every evidence of God's existence and yet they deny it...even though it's as plain as the nose on their face. Come on! These people of Nazareth had seen the miracles and the healings, and they're denying the obvious! I mean even the Pharisee Nicodemus recognized Jesus' works were not of man. See the screens...

John 3:1-2

1 Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. 2 This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him."

Listen very carefully. If a person says they need more evidence or proof, understand that's most likely not the issue. The proof even in creation is there (Romans 1)...it's all there...they just need to make the connection. They just need to WALK ACROSS THE FOOTBRIDGE. You see, for the citizens of Nazareth, Jesus' hometown, it wasn't a question of evidence...it was a question of belief.

It reminds me of what we studied a few weeks ago in Matthew chapter 12 when the scribes came and wanted Jesus to perform a sign in the sky. ...Do some sort of fireworks in the heavens and He refused. He said: "I'll give you no sign because you are an evil and adulterous generation."

You want to know the truth Church family... People don't need more evidence...why? Because people simply don't want to believe because they will have to give up their sin. The problem isn't proof, the problem is surrender...giving up their sin! Jesus called people to repentance and people didn't want to hear that and they still don't today. And so...they will almost always try to focus on

that which is totally irrelevant. Watch... verses 55-56...

Matthew 13:55-56

55 Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? **56** And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?"

In essence the people of Nazareth said: "This is crazy...He's a nobody... Wasn't this the carpenter's son?" You see, folks, THIS IS A SLAM on His family. What good can come from a carpenter's family? To them...He had no pedigree and because of that...it didn't matter how many miracles He performed... He's a nobody carpenter from a nobody family. And I want to park on that for a second.

Again, it's likely Joseph is dead. He's not mentioned again after Jesus is 12 and they lost Jesus in the Temple. They couldn't even remember his name. But, they could remember Mary's. They said: **"Is not His mother called Mary?"**

Now notice they didn't call her "Mary the Magnificent" or "Mary the Great" or "Mary the Mother of God" or "Queen Mary" or "Mother Mary." They just called her Mary. A common name for a common lady! The people of Nazareth didn't elevate Mary to sainthood like the Roman Catholic Church. They didn't worship Mary as the RCC. No... She was just a common lady of that day. And so were Jesus' brothers and sisters. Matthew names them. He's got four brothers: James, who would become the head of the church in Jerusalem and author of the NT Epistle of James, Joseph (likely named after his father) and Simon (whom we know nothing about) and Judas...nicknamed Jude...from whom we get the NT Epistle of Jude. And then His sisters...at least two and we're not given their names.

But, prior to the resurrection...this was just a common family. No fanfare... No accolades... No ritzy credentials...just common people. So, in the minds of the people of Nazareth: How could this Jesus do anything great with this NOBODY type of pedigree? After all, He's nothing but a **tekton, a carpenter.**

Tekton: 1. a worker in wood, a carpenter, joiner, builder 2. a ship's carpenter or builder 3. any craftsman, or workman.

It may well have been that Jesus helped build NOT ONLY many of their homes, but ALSO many of the fishermen's boats and the farmers yokes and plows and other wood implements. Jesus was a talented man with His hands. But, that didn't seem to impress the people. But, it impresses me. Any man who can work with His hands falls in line with Jesus Christ! It's wonderful how God dignified the common labor of a man by bringing His Son into such a family. But, it wasn't good enough for the people of Nazareth. They were offended. See it in verse 57...

Matthew 13:57

57 And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household."

Sadly, because Jesus was standing in His own hometown, and because of the fact that He didn't come from a wealthy, noble family, nor did He have a job in the Roman government, or as an elite aristocrat...they said He was a nobody. Yet, He was God in the flesh who chose to become a

servant to humankind, by doing the common, the good and the decent work of a tekton...a carpenter.

Listen, don't ever let anyone look down on you because of what you do or because they don't think you have a job of nobility or worth as they might ascribe it. Every job that's done for the glory and for the sake of the kingdom is nobility. When you see what you do as "unto the Lord," you can wash dishes like nobility and you can sweep floors like nobility and you can dig ditches like nobility. Jesus had sawdust and dirt under His fingernails from the time He could hold a hammer and drive a nail until He was 33 years old, and then, He'd have nails hammered into His hands and feet and it wouldn't be sawdust under His fingernails...it would be His own blood.

The Apostle Paul recorded how so many people saw Jesus...just as a commoner... But, after the resurrection, everything changed.

1 Corinthians 5:16

16 From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer.

You see the people in Nazareth regarded Jesus according to the flesh and the same thing happened to the Apostles. Remember when Peter and John were brought before the distinguished and well-educated Sanhedrin? The highest court in the Jewish religious system! (Think of the Supreme Court.) See the artist's depiction...



According to Acts chapter 4, Peter, acting as the spokesperson for the two, would speak with the Spirit of God and it astounded the Sanhedrin and it was recorded in Acts 4:13:

Acts 4:13

13 Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.

The Sanhedrin thought Peter and John were nothing but hayseeds from Galilee, nobodies, common fishermen. But, when Peter spoke...and spoke with power and authority of God that there is **no other name under heaven by which man can be saved than Jesus!!**, they took notice!

Please listen, when you've been with Jesus, you are royalty... Why? Because you are part of His Kingdom and there's no higher position of nobility in all the universe than that. Because Jesus is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords!

Yes, unbelief focuses on the irrelevant. Understand that when you are sharing the truth about Jesus with someone and they are resistant to the point that they refuse to see that which is clear,

and then try to divert you away from the real issue to something irrelevant, that's a copout. They don't want to walk across the bridge and any excuse will do.

Let me give you an example...for instance, maybe you've brought someone to church, and you try to talk with them on Monday about the message...about the Gospel and all they want to talk about is how the guy in the seat in front of them kept moving his head, and how they were distracted. The preacher was too loud, or too long. (Could that be possible here? ☺)

Maybe they complained about the crowded parking lot or the style of music, or there were no paper towels in the bathroom. Well, all of those things may be legitimate...but they are irrelevant in that you are seeking to talk to them about the message of the Gospel. Do you see? It's just a big smokescreen of that which is irrelevant, and the real issue is their eternal soul, and the claims that Jesus Christ makes on the human heart to receive Him, so that they might be saved. The length of the sermon...the hardness of the chairs, the fact that the coffee ran out is irrelevant!

So, what did Jesus do? He left. He didn't argue or fight with them. He just left. BTW...That should teach us something about making everything an argument. It wasn't worth it. He tried one more time and then He left.

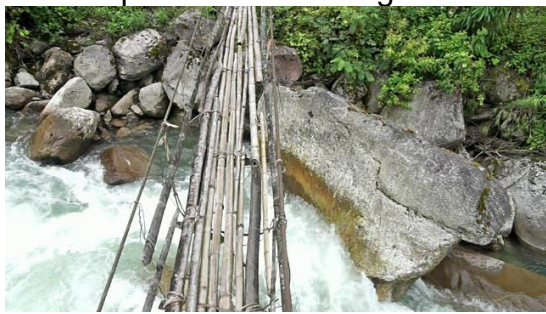
Matthew 13:58

58 And he did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief.

I love what John MacArthur says about this verse. It's rich. See on the screens:

“This statement does not mean that His power was somehow diminished by their unbelief... Christ limited His ministry both as an act of mercy, so that the exposure to greater light would not result in a worse hardening that would subject them to greater condemnation and a judgment on their unbelief. He had the power to do more miracles, but not the will, because they rejected Him.” John MacArthur

What a shame for those people of Nazareth! But listen AND I'M DONE...I'm convinced it happens in here almost every week too. People who aren't in Nazareth rejecting Jesus, but people in Wilkesboro... NO...not in the first century, but the 21st century, who are confronted with the truth and the proverbial footbridge of belief... See it one last time...



And they chose to remain on the other side.

Oh...the tragedy of unbelief. Hebrews 3:12 says it this way:

Hebrews 3:12

12 Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.

Oh...Take heed today, take heed...because the living God sent His one and only son for you. He performed miracles and He raised the dead and He, Himself would even rise from the dead, so

that you might believe and be saved. I pray that you will take that walk across that footbridge of faith and that you might believe. Otherwise...you will be just another example of the tragic deception of unbelief. Let us pray.
