

THE BLIGHT OF UNBELIEF

"And He did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief." Matthew 13:58.

What a marvelous opportunity was presented to Nazareth that day when Jesus returned to the little town nestling among the hills! The citizens should have brought the sick, the lame, the halt and the blind to be healed and blessed. But because of their unbelief that marvelous door was closed and never again opened to them.

On His return to His little home town, Jesus was greeted with a gloomy atmosphere of doubt and unbelief. Those who heard Him were astonished at His teachings, which were clear, arresting and gripping. They wondered where He received His wisdom as they considered Him one of them. So Jesus did not perform mighty works among them because of unbelief of His former neighbors and friends. He had done mighty works elsewhere. He had healed a man of loathsome leprosy. He had spoken the word and the believing centurion's son was cured instantly. He had stilled the sea, as it was tossed and churned by the storm, by saying, "Peace be still." He spoke to the demons in the raving Gadarene demoniac and immediately the demoniac was clothed and in his right mind. He had turned pale water into red wine at the marriage in Cana of Galilee. Yes, elsewhere He had healed the sick, opened blind eyes, loosed dumb tongues, unstopped deaf ears, and raised the dead to life, but in Nazareth He did not do any mighty works because of their lack of faith.

In every man's life there are two factors that make it what it is. There is first the inner life of man, his powers and qualities, his gifts and tastes, his hopes and fears, all his mental and moral and spiritual equipment, all that the man is in himself. Secondly, there is the atmosphere that surrounds him -- the age to which he belongs, the circumstances in which he is placed, all the world outside his inner life which we call environment. None can resist external influences altogether regardless of how strong or independent they may be. The artist, however sure his touch or lofty his inspiration, is limited by the material on which he works. The teacher however true his thoughts or powerful his utterance, is limited by the audience to which he speaks. The sermon is preached by the congregation as well as by the minister. If the listeners are reverently responsive, really desirous to get a glimpse of new ideas and spiritual inspiration, then this same note will be sounded in what they hear. If the members of the congregation go in a cold, indifferent, unsympathetic, unresponsive and critical spirit, then they create an atmosphere in which great thoughts and utterances find it hard to breathe.

It was so with our Lord Himself. There was a strange limitation upon His energies. He was hemmed in, held back and chained to the rock of human unworthiness. Men did not believe in Him or recognize His claims or perceive His greatness. He was unappreciated and misunderstood. This story of Christ's rejection by His townspeople emphasizes the power of spiritual environment. There is something alarming in the thought that you can prevent another man from being his best, from becoming what God wants him to be. Not merely by deliberate intention but simply by being what you are, you can depress or encourage thoughts and virtues, you can blight the sensitive hope or help some frail desire for goodness to blossom as the rose. Every man creates an atmosphere or has an influence whether or not he knows it. He cannot stand alone. He is a part of the social order. He is a link in the chain of passing days. He is a force for good or for evil. The main stream of his life must flow in one direction or another.

I. The Certainty of Unbelief.

I need not tell you that unbelief is very common today. You find it in our homes, in our schools, and in our offices. There are people who refuse to acknowledge the reality

and the value of anything except that which can be seen and felt and handled. While they strive for the good things that this world has to offer, they repudiate all faith in God. Many others, who would not distinctly make any such profession of their unbelief, live and act in accordance with this dreary and deplorable creed of unbelief.

Some men are honest in their unbelief; they are lost in a fog of doubt. There is hope for them, because a seeking Saviour and a seeking sinner soon get together. Others are unbelievers by choice. They love sin and the Word says, "No man can serve two masters." Still others call themselves unbelievers because they associate with a group of people who profane the name of Christ, who sneer and make fun of things that are high and holy, and who drag the name of God in the dirt. It doesn't take much to knock such unbelief out of them -- just the approach of danger, the prospect of death perhaps, and their unbelief is thrown into the discord, and they call upon God to save them.

II. The Causes of Unbelief.

1. The neglected training of children by their parents.

The Bible says, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." Proverbs 22:6. Just think of how many indifferent and careless parents we have today. When children hear their parents cursing and dragging the name of God in the dirt, what can we expect from the children? Remember, example is more powerful than creed. Many children have never heard their parents pray. Such parents are certainly rearing unbelievers.

2. The shortcomings of professing Christians.

We know that hypocrites are numerous. Some people join a church just to get the good will of the people of the church so that they can make more money. You know some such folks and you know their type of Christianity is only sham and pretense. The Lord spoke of such when He said, "Many shall say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name have cast out demons? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you! depart from me, ye that work iniquity." Matthew 7:22-23. Then, there are the superficial Christians. They have a form of Christianity, but there is no power in their lives. Many belong to the church who do not read their Bibles, do not pray, and do not obey Christ. They are like the disciples we read about in Matthew 17, who tried to cast the demon out of the lad but who were unable to do so because of their lack of faith.

3. Sin in the life.

Many are unbelievers today simply because they want to live sinful lives. They reject the claims of Christ because they cannot continue in sin if they become Christians. Therefore, they are not willing to give Christ a chance to demonstrate His power. Remember, "The wages of sin is death."

III. The Consequences of Unbelief.

What does unbelief do for people? There are many ways in which it robs them of the blessing Christ is waiting to bestow. In its grosser, more pronounced aspects it makes those who yield themselves to its domination blind to the beauty of goodness. It makes them cynical, suspicious, and distrustful.

The Word of God has much to say regarding the results of unbelief. A striking example is seen in the history of the Children of Israel. They could have made the trip from Egypt to Canaan in eleven days, but because of their unbelief they were forty years in entering Canaan. Only two of the original number ever saw the land; the rest died in the wilderness.

When the angel Gabriel told Zacharias, the high priest, that he was to be the father of a son, Zacharias doubted. Because of his unbelief he was stricken dumb for six months.

Matthew seventeen contains the record of a man who came to Christ with a son who was possessed by a demon. The disciples tried to cast it out, but the Word says that they could not. When Jesus came upon the scene He cast out the demon, and the child was cured that very hour. Then the disciples asked Christ, "Why could not we cast him out?" Jesus answered, "Because of your unbelief." Their unbelief hindered the working power of God.

Unbelief always limits the power of God and cheats us out of rich and rare blessings. If one does not have faith, he will not try. If he does not believe there is gold in the mountains, he will never crack rocks and dig in mines. If he does not believe that things can be made better, he will not put forth any effort to better conditions.

In contrast with unbelief, faith achieves. Wherever Christ found faith, He honored it. When the four friends brought the paralytic and let him down through the roof, Jesus saw their faith and said, "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven thee." He was not concerned about their wealth, their social position, nor their knowledge, all of which are good, but their faith. Faith is the key to the great storehouse of God's treasures. It will unlock the door to every store of mercy.

Faith is a great builder. It has built every bridge that spans a chasm; every city that stands on the wide extended plains; every institution of learning whose doors are flung wide open to hungry minds. Faith discovers. This great continent of ours, which seems to have been held in reserve for a new civilization, was discovered by a man of undaunted faith. You are familiar with the story of the trials and tribulations of the man who believed that by sailing west he could find a new route to the East Indies. When Columbus set sail on the uncharted and trackless sea, he revealed faith such as is known by few men of history. His crew mutinied and put him in chains and sailed westward day after day without the sight of land. Worried, they asked, "What shall we do?" He replied, "Sail on, sail on, sail on." Faith never turns back. It opens doors and enters into opportunities when reason and human ingenuity utterly fail. In every phase of life, faith is a most essential and fundamental factor.

IV. The Cure of Unbelief.

Thank God, there is a cure. If you will take the following steps, it will not be very long until you will be free from the fog of unbelief, and will be led out into the glorious light and liberty of the gospel.

1. Be honest with yourself.

Remember this, unbelief never helped anyone. It never brought happiness or peace to a troubled soul. For many today there is nothing but darkness in the soul, and all because of unbelief.

But, on the other hand, see what Christ has done. There are multitudes who can tell how they were delivered from the curse of drunkenness by the mighty power of Christ. I rejoice in the freedom that Christ has given to sinners in every walk of life.

2. Follow the light that you have.

Don't blind yourselves to the truth. Pay no attention to what others say or do. Just because others may talk, sneer, laugh, mock and ridicule Christ is no reason why you should. Be man enough to give Christ a chance to demonstrate His power in your life. He will clear up your doubts if you will let Him, but you must follow the light that you have.

3. Come to Christ just as you are.

The most common sense thing you can do is admit that you are a lost sinner. Then come to Christ just as you are and acknowledge Him as your Saviour. Christ is the real cure for unbelief. "He that cometh to God, must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him."