

October 19, 2003 by Steve Brandon



# What Unbelief Does

## Matthew 12:38-45

Unbelief...

1. Wants more proof (verses 38-39a)
2. Neglects real proof (verses 39b-40)
3. Awaits condemning testimony (verses 41-42)
4. Experiences increasing sin (verses 43-46)

I would like to begin by reading a poem,

The doctor said I was too fat; The weight would have to go.  
I said to him 'Dear Doctor,' There is something you should know.

A second opinion is required To give me peace of mind,  
So I checked the yellow pages To see what I could find.

If my weight will be discussed, Experts should be consulted,  
So I gave the matter serious thought, And this is what resulted.

The second opinion will be done By the most qualified contestant;  
One who would not betray my trust, The chef from my favorite restaurant.

Unbelief will often seek to gain support from every possible source. This is how life works. When we want something bad enough, we will plead and plead and plead, looking for support. Last night, while I was working on my sermon, my wife, Yvonne, and daughter, Hanna, came in to visit me. Hanna was enjoying my file cabinet, climbing up and down, and jumping off of it. Well my heater is above the file cabinet and it has sharp edges. Yvonne noticed the danger and said, "Hanna, you can't play up there; you might hurt your head." She replied, "No, I won't." The reply came, "Yes, you will." We ensued upon a brief discussion about the potential danger of her playing on the filing cabinet. She appealed strongly to both of us, because she didn't believe there was any danger. She wanted something (to play on the file cabinet) so bad that she refused to believe the danger. That is typical of unbelief. In a similar fashion, someone who is diagnosed with terminal cancer will often seek the counsel of another doctor, hoping for the first to be wrong.

In Matthew 12, Jesus confronts the Pharisees who couldn't believe that Jesus was the Messiah. This entire chapter describes the mounting hatred that the religious leaders had against Jesus. These Pharisees were hard-hearted legalists who thought that Jesus was a Satanic Sabbath-breaker. Jesus is saying some very hard things to these people. Several weeks ago we studied the text where Jesus called the Pharisees an evil "brood of vipers" (verse 34). In today's text, Jesus calls them "an evil and adulterous generation" (verse 39). Some would say that Jesus wasn't being too Christ-like in His response to these people. Jesus was hard with them, because hard hearts need hard truth.

Jesus reserved His hardest words for those who had been exposed to the most evidence and yet had refused to believe in Him. Jesus was gentle, loving, and kind towards those people who knew little of God's truth such as the sinning tax-collector or harlots. These people loved Jesus for His compassion. But Jesus dealt very harshly with the Pharisees who knew much but remained unrepentant. The worst of all these was Judas of whom Jesus spoke very condemningly. Judas had walked with Jesus and ate with Jesus and learned one-on-one from Jesus. But Jesus said, "It would have been good for that man if he had not been born" (Matt. 26:24). Why? Because despite all the light that Judas experienced, he ultimately ended in unbelief and betrayal.

This morning we will see Jesus address the issue of unbelief with these Pharisees. We will see four things that unbelief does.

Unbelief...

1. Wants more proof (verses 38-39a)

Look at verse 38,

Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered Him, saying, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You." (Matt. 12:38)

As I have pondered this statement, I've thought about what they are asking and how astonishing it is that they ask it. They ask Jesus for a sign. It is as though casting out demons from a blind and dumb man was not enough (Matt. 12:22). Healing a man with a withered hand was not enough (Matt. 12:13). Healing two blind men was not enough (Matt. 9:30). Raising Jairus' daughter from the dead was not enough (Matt. 9:25). Healing a paralyzed man was not enough (Matt. 9:2). Cleansing a leper was not enough (Matt. 8:3). Casting a legion of angels from uncontrollable men was not enough (Matt. 8:28-34). Calming the sea was not enough (Matt. 8:27). This is typical of unbelief. **Unbelief always wants more proof.** When something happens that you don't really believe could happen, you pinch yourself to make sure it's real.

You want more proof. When a miracle is done in the sight of an unbeliever, it is never enough. Those who don't believe are blind to the miraculous. They will continually seek for more and more proof. And when the proof comes, it is re-interpreted in accordance with their desires.

The perfect illustration of this is in verse 10 when the Pharisees themselves brought the man with the withered hand before Jesus to have him healed. There was no doubt that Jesus could do the miraculous. But, rather than believing, they attributed the miracle to Satan. They said, "This man casts out demons only by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons" (Matt. 12:24). Another illustration of this is recorded in John 12, when Jesus prayed, "Father, glorify Thy name" (verse 28). Then, "there came ... a voice out of heaven: 'I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.'" Do you know how the multitude responded? They said, "it thundered!" (John 12:29). Rather than seeing the miracle, they attributed it to natural causes. This happens all of the time today. There are untold numbers of people today who witness the evidence in the world that a Creator exists. Yet, they take the evidence of the world and explain it away by natural causes. For example, I read this week of the bombardier beetle that protects itself by blasting irritating gases at 212 degrees Fahrenheit into the face of the animal that may eat it. It creates this hot gas by mixing two very dangerous chemicals (hydroquinone and hydrogen peroxide) together. However, the beetle also produces another chemical known as an inhibitor, which prevents the chemicals from blowing up and allows for the storage of such explosive chemicals in its body. When the beetle is attacked, he squirts the chemicals toward the attacker, adding a fourth chemical (an anti-inhibitor, which allows the chemicals to react) at the right time. Thus, the explosion and high temperatures help to defend the beetle. According to evolutionary theory, this would never happen. Suppose that the process of spitting these chemicals evolved. Then, the mixture of these chemicals would kill off (or severely weaken) those beetles exhibiting this trait. It would not be helpful for their survival process. Furthermore, it is illogical to assume that the inhibitor (and anti-inhibitor) evolved independently of the poison, as neither of them would serve any purpose. Thus, the trait would disappear, through the evolution process (for more details, see *The Collapse of Evolution*, by Scott M. Huse). I have several books on my shelf that abound in these types of examples. They expose the absurdity of believing that the world "evolved by chance." But this is what unbelief does. Unbelief is blind to the miraculous and will continue to want more and more proof.

These Pharisees wanted more proof. They wanted another sign. Let's look at how Jesus responded to this request. Verse 39 says,

An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign. (Matt. 12:39)

With this statement, Jesus wasn't trying to win friends and influence people. Jesus was strong in His evaluation of the generation of His day. He said that they were evil and adulterous. The generation of Jesus' day was unfaithful to God and to His word. They were evil and wicked.

Don't misunderstand. God isn't down on miraculous signs. The Bible is filled with examples of God doing wondrous things to display His power and might. When Hezekiah was mortally ill, he prayed to God (Isaiah 38:1). God gave him 15 years to his life and gave him a sign to prove that He would do it (Isaiah 38:8). God said, "I will cause the shadow on the stairway, which had gone down with the sun on the stairway of Ahaz, to go back ten steps." And it did! It was proof that Hezekiah would live another 15 years.

On Mount Carmel, Elijah set up the altar and drenched it with water. Then, he prayed, "Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that You, O LORD are God" (1 Kings 18:37). God brought fire down upon Elijah's altar in answer to his prayer. It was a clear sign from God that He was the Lord of Lords. God has even demonstrated Himself to be true in the midst of unbelief. When God told Moses to go speak with Pharaoh, Moses was filled with unbelief and said, "Behold, I am unskilled in speech; how then will Pharaoh listen to me?" (Ex. 6:30)? God instructed him how to throw his staff down and it will become a serpent (Ex. 7:8-13). This was a sign for him. Do you remember when the angel of the Lord came to Gideon and told him, "The LORD is with you" (Judges 6:12)? Gideon responded in unbelief and said, "show me a sign that it is You who speak with me" (Judges 6:17). Gideon put out his fleece of wool, and God causes the wool to be wet or dry, in accordance with Gideon's request (Judges 6:39-40).

So, God isn't against all signs. However, those who crave for signs are evil and adulterous. These are people who are centered and focused on signs, and they continually pursue signs. There is a brand of Christianity that is always seeking for signs. They are always looking for the miraculous healing. They are always looking for the cancer to be cured, the headaches to go away, the money to pour in to their bank account, their church to grow larger and larger and to receive more popularity from the world. Some of us in this room have seen a church so interested in signs and wonders, that they tried to raise their child from the dead! That is how far this brand of Christianity will go in its quest for signs. On the one hand, this type of Christianity would seek to claim that they have real faith. But, realize that this faith is dreadfully unfounded. It's not faith in Christ. It's faith in the idea that your faith will make things better for you. With respect to those who attempted to raise a child from the dead, they would profess faith, but demonstrate their lack of faith in the unspeakable glories of heaven. Why call a child back to this sin-sick world in the child is enjoying the glories of God? This isn't faith. This is unbelief.

It's like a Cub fan who attended the seventh game of the recent playoff series with the Cubs at Wrigley field. The Cubs were one game away from winning the series, but then lost two straight games. The seventh and final game of the series went back and forth between the teams. First, the Cubs were three runs down. Then, the Cubs took a two run lead. Then, the Cubs were losing by three runs. Finally, it was the bottom of the ninth, and the Cubs were losing by three. This Cubs fan, full of faith, was clapping and saying, "All right now, we've got 'em right where we want 'em!" That is faith! But it is faith in something simply because you want it badly enough.

The type of faith that craves signs is like the "faith" found in a large part of the Christian church today. Rather than trusting in the righteousness of Christ, they trust in signs and wonders that they experience. Jesus calls those who crave for signs like this to be evil and adulterous. The reason why centers around Jesus' next words.

Unbelief...

2. Neglects real proof (verses 39b-40)

Look at the last half of verse 39,

no sign shall be given to [this evil and adulterous generation] but the sign of Jonah the prophet; for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth (Matthew 12:39b-40).

The real proof of Christianity comes in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This was the sign of signs. Jesus was dead and buried and in the tomb. Yet, "on the third day" (Matt. 16:21; 17:23; 20:19), Jesus was raised from the dead. That is the sign that all Christians look to. Those who are constantly looking for more and more proof in more and more signs from God have missed it! What God did in raising up His Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord from the dead is the sign that ought to stop all of our sign-seeking for eternity. The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the real proof that we need.

In Men's Equippers, we have been going through the book of Acts, looking at the evangelistic sermons that the apostles preached. I have been refreshed once again to see the centrality of the resurrection in the gospel message. Time after time, the apostles brought up the resurrection. In Acts 2, Peter proclaimed to those in Jerusalem that "you nailed [this Man] to a cross ... and put Him to death ... And God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power" (Acts 2:23-24). He spent much time explaining how Psalm 16 had prophesied of the resurrection of Jesus. In Acts 3, Peter again said, "[you] put to death the Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses" (Acts 3:15). Peter said, "You killed Him, but we later saw Him alive!" (See also Acts 3:26). In Acts 4, Peter and John were standing before the Sanhedrin and said, that a man had been healed by the name of "Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead" (Acts 4:10). This is in accordance with the fulfillment of Psalm 118:22, which had prophesied of the rejected stone becoming the cornerstone. In Acts 5, Peter and John were again standing before the Sanhedrin and said, "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross" (Acts 5:30). Later he would say, "We are witnesses of these things" (Acts 5:32). Once the church scattered from Jerusalem, the same message was proclaimed. Peter said to the household of Cornelius, "They also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross. God raised Him up on the third day, and granted that He should become visible [to us]" (Acts 10:39-40). Peter said, "We have seen Him. He is alive. He ordered us to preach this message of His death, burial and resurrection, that everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins" (cf. Acts 10:41-43). This was the same message that Paul preached. On his first missionary journey, Paul preached in the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch and referred to the resurrection on four different occasions (Acts 13:30, 33, 34, 37). Psalm 16 again became a central text in the Old Testament that anticipated His resurrection. When Paul preached to the intellectual elite of the Areopagus, he said that God "has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, **having furnished proof** to all men by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:31). Those who seek for signs today neglect the real proof that God has given.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the real proof of Christianity. David prophesied of it. Jesus predicted it. The apostles witnessed it. The apostles preached it, and we are to do the same. This ought to be the goal of your evangelism. The abounding examples of the apostles is that they took the circumstances of the moment and addressed them first. Then, they turned the focus of their message to Jesus, the crucified and resurrected one. In your evangelism, seek to steer conversations to the cross of Jesus. Jesus' message to these unbelieving Pharisees was this: "You have had enough proof that I am the Messiah. But I will give you one more sign: My resurrection from the dead."

To us, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is everything! It is the resurrection that demonstrates, without a shadow of a doubt, that Jesus was indeed the Son of God. Listen to Romans 1:4, "[Christ Jesus] was declared to Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead." It is by His resurrection, that death was defeated. It no longer has a sting! Through the resurrection, death has become like a killer bee without a stinger. It is powerless. Death has become like a scorpion without a tail. Death has become like a snake without fangs. Death has become like a soldier without a gun. He's powerless.

It is by faith in Jesus, that we can know of sins forgiven and of death defeated. It is by faith in Him that we will experience the victory over death (1 Cor. 15:57) and will reign with Him forever and ever (Rev. 20:6; 22:5). In Acts 17, we already read that the resurrection is the proof that Jesus will come and judge the world. There is sufficient proof of the resurrection. There is no denying that the tomb was empty on Easter. There is no denying the sheer number of witnesses that saw Jesus alive after the resurrection. And the New Testament doesn't give any hint that the apostles were deceivers, who lied about the resurrection. But rather, they were honest men. There is no denying that Jesus' disciples were utterly transformed when they saw Jesus resurrected from the dead. Paul's vision of Jesus, alive and well, transformed Him entirely. For you, it comes down to this: Is the sign of the resurrection of Jesus Christ sufficient for you? Or do you want more than this? Is there something more that you are seeking? If so, you have missed the proof. You have selective hearing; you hear only what you want to hear.

When we close our service this morning, we will sing the hymn, "My Faith Has Found a Resting Place."

My faith has found a resting place -- not in device nor creed:  
I trust the Ever living One -- His wounds for me shall plead.

I need no other argument, I need no other plea;  
It is enough that Jesus died, and that He died for me.

My heart is leaning on the Word -- the written Word of God:  
Salvation by my Savior's name, Salvation through His blood.

Is this your heart? Have you found the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus to be sufficient for you? It should be sufficient. Or, do you say, "God, if you are real, show yourself by letting me win the lottery." Or maybe, "God, if you are there, heal my mother." Or, "God, if you are there, give me the job that I have always wanted." Such requests are not faith. Such requests are unbelief, which craves for signs instead.

It is appropriate for us to consider 1 Corinthians 1:22. Paul wrote, "indeed Jews ask for signs, and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified." In Matthew 12, we see the Pharisees seeking for signs. They were never content with His miracles, even when the miracles

of Jesus were undeniable. They weren't content even when the miracles of Jesus were the fulfillment of prophecy. They were asking for signs, just like many do today.

There is also another danger of seeking more and more. The "Greeks search for wisdom." There are many today, who think that they need to figure out all of life. When they do, then they will believe. So they go off and read their books on philosophies. And they end up getting buried in their philosophies. They dig and dig and dig and dig and never find the end to their proverbial hole. There is always more to read. There is always more to learn. They never come to faith, because they aren't interested in faith. They are interested in learning.

This isn't only a phenomenon of secular philosophy. This can happen to those who study the Bible. Paul warned Timothy of those people who hold to a "form of godliness, although they have denied its power." They look godly. They look righteous. But they are actually arrogant, ungrateful, and unloving. These people are "always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2 Tim. 3:7). They miss the truth of trusting in Christ's righteousness as the true path to holiness.

Jesus said that those who come to me need to come as a child comes, with simple, believing faith in Him (Matt. 18:3-4).

This past Friday night, we had one of our Oratorios where children memorize and present Bible passages, poems or other worthy material. I want to read for you a poem that one of our children, Jessie Plowman (age 13), wrote and recited for us. It illustrates the heart of a child, dependent upon God for all things.

The Guarding Power  
by Jessica Plowman

When I was young and small, My world was little too.  
Nothing complex was in my world That I cared to say I knew.

But now my world has grown, And my wisdom grown with it.  
And I think I finally realize That there's more to it than this.

There is a mighty Power, That's more than I can explain;  
It's detail is so intricate, It's simplicity is plain.

The Power is God Almighty In control of all things, good and bad.  
Omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, O'er sea and land.

He sees me while at rest and play; He guards me day and night.  
He's the Father, and He cares for me. He's there at every plight.

And ne'r again I'll be afraid, For I know He's by my side.  
Nothing out of His plan will happen to me. I rest easy, for He keeps my life.

And with such a Power on my side, Who will dare oppose?  
The Lord of all the universe Can protect me, that I know.

Greeks search for wisdom, but the child of God says, "God, you are so vast and so big, I cannot possibly understand or comprehend. I simply entrust my life to you." It's not about who experiences the greatest signs! It's not about who has the greatest knowledge! It's about believing and trusting in Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

Indeed "Jews ask for signs, and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified" (1 Cor. 1:22). It is Christ crucified that finds our faith satisfied. A song we often sing goes like this,

When Satan tempts me to despair, and tells me of the guilt within,  
Upward I look and see Him there who made an end to all my sin.  
Because the sinless Saviour died, my sinful soul is counted free;  
For God the Just is satisfied to look on Him and pardon me.

This is our satisfaction and our delight! We think of Jesus Christ, crucified, buried, risen, exalted, and we rejoice. We rejoice because it isn't our merit that puts us in heaven. Our sin won't keep us out of heaven. His righteousness is ours. Our sin in His. "God is satisfied to look on Him and pardon me." This is the gospel of Christ. In this we rejoice. This is the sign that Jesus would give to these unbelieving Pharisees.

As a footnote, let me mention that there is much discussion in the commentaries about the meaning of "three days and three nights." The discussion arises because the crucifixion is generally believed to have taken place on Friday, with a Sunday resurrection. However, from Friday to Sunday isn't "three days and three nights." At best, it is "three days and two nights." Now, there are two different possibilities for understanding these things. Some say that the Jewish mind would have no difficulty in understanding "three days and three nights" with a Friday crucifixion and a Sunday resurrection. Others say that Jesus was actually crucified on Thursday, so that He can be in the tomb for three nights and rise "on the third day," which is Sunday morning. In this discussion, you need to realize that it's a problem in our mind. It wasn't a difficulty for Matthew. He recorded what Jesus said here. He recorded the fact that Jesus rose "on the third day" on several occasions (Matt. 16:21; 17:23; 20:19). And here Matthew records it as three days and three nights. The problem is with us, not with the first century Jew, who was reading this gospel account. If you search for wisdom, you might easily get caught up in this matter.

Yet, there is no doubt that Jesus was referring to His resurrection, which was the one big sign that Jesus would do for these Pharisees. Jesus continues in our text to speak about those who don't believe.

Unbelief...

3. Awaits condemning testimony (verses 41-42)

Let's read verses 41-42,

The men of Nineveh shall stand up with this generation at the judgment, and shall condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. The Queen of the South shall rise up with this generation at the judgment and shall condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here. (Matt. 12:41-42)

Jesus brings up two historical events: Jonah's preaching to the Ninevites, and the Queen of Sheba's visit to Solomon. These are actual events with actual people in history. There are many today who deny that Jonah really existed. Jesus believed them to be actual people in history. They will give testimony in the final day, and it will be condemning testimony. They're star witnesses. Jesus believed that Jonah was swallowed by a big fish and spent several days in the fish. This ought to settle in your mind with absolute certainty that Jonah was an actual person. It wasn't fiction as some teach. It really happened. The book of Jonah isn't an allegory. The book of Jonah is history with an important lesson for us.

Let's think about Jonah. He was a prophet, who was called by God to cry out against the wickedness of Nineveh. Jonah wasn't too thrilled at this call of God upon his life. He knew that Nineveh was a wicked city. He knew that Nineveh didn't deserve the compassion of God (like any of us really deserve God's compassion!). So, he jumped on a boat heading the opposite direction. God knew everything that Jonah did, and God caused a great storm upon the sea. Jonah confessed to those in the ship that he was the one responsible for the storm. He told the sailors to throw him overboard, and then the storm would stop. As soon as he was thrown overboard, the storm stopped and Jonah was swallowed by a big fish. Three days and three nights later, the fish vomited Jonah up onto the dry land. Jonah finally got the message and came to the great city of Nineveh. It was a city of 120,000 and took him an entire day to walk through it. As he walked through it, he proclaimed, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown" (Jonah 3:4). At that simple message, the entire city repented. "The people of Nineveh believed in God" (Jonah 3:5). The people proclaimed a fast. Everyone from the king to the goat who gave milk to those who lived in the slums of Nineveh were prohibited from eating or drinking anything. The king issued a proclamation and told everybody to "call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands. Who knows, God may turn and relent, and withdraw His burning anger so that we shall not perish?" (Jonah 3:8-9). God didn't promise anything to the Ninevites if they repented. The king proclaimed the fast in hopes of God being merciful to them.

They heard one obscure man speak a message of judgment coming to the city. And the entire city repented! And what did Jesus do with the Pharisees? He healed all who were brought to Him from all of their diseases. Never did a man leave Jesus' presence unhealed. Jesus preached authoritative sermons that pierced the heart. He demonstrated God's compassion toward those who were lost. And how did the Pharisees respond? In unbelief. And so, what awaits the generation of Jesus' day? It is condemning testimony from the Ninevites. Those who had been given so much had responded so little. But those who had been given little responded so much. This is what Jesus said, "Behold, something greater than Jonah is here." The Pharisees were spoiled rich kids who had everything but squandered their wealth. The Ninevites were born in poverty, but went from rags to riches.

Let's think a moment about the Queen of the South. Surely, this refers to the queen of Sheba, whose story is told in 1 Kings 10. Sheba is south of Israel, in what is known today as Yemen, in Arabia. Somehow, she heard something about Solomon. So, she planned a trip to talk with this "Solomon" and test this man's wisdom with some difficult questions. She came with many camels who carried spices, much gold and precious stones. This wasn't a quick trip. It was 1,200 miles from Jerusalem to Sheba. When she got there, she asked Solomon all of the difficult questions that were on her mind (1 Kings 10:3). While the queen was there with Solomon, she was noticing his house, his food, his servants and the outfits worn by Solomon's waiters. When it was all done, she said, "I did not believe the reports [about Solomon] until I came and my eyes had seen it. And behold, the half was not told me. You exceed in wisdom and prosperity the report which I heard" (1 Kings 10:7). She then gave him 120 talents of gold, along with a great amount of spices and precious stones. She gave more spices to Solomon than anyone else ever gave to Solomon. Think about this. This queen hears this report about Solomon. But, doesn't really believe it. So, packs up and takes a trip that would have taken more than 4 months (at 20 miles per day). She rides this entire trip on a camel, crossing a hot desert. She gets there and finds out that the wisdom and wealth of Solomon exceed her wildest dream. So, she lavishes him with gifts and returns home. And Jesus says to these Pharisees, "something greater than Solomon is here." The queen heard a rumor about a king in a far away place, that she didn't believe. Yet, she made great efforts to see him. But, these Pharisees, who had the king of the universe outside their own door refused to believe in one who was greater than Solomon. The Queen of Sheba will rise and condemn the generation of Jesus' day. She made great efforts to see Solomon; she came "from the ends of the earth" (Matt. 12:42). The Pharisees refuse to receive Jesus who was at their doorsteps!

The point to both of these stories is the same: There are people who have seen far less than these Pharisees saw and yet, they believed God. The entire city of Nineveh repented. The Queen of Sheba made a long trip, based upon a scanty rumor. These people will rise up to judge the generation of Jesus' day. I also believe these people will rise up to judge the generation of our day.

We have a foreign exchange student that we have hosted from Rockford College, who is from Bulgaria. As an outreach to him, we invite him over every month or two, sharing our lives and the gospel with him. He is absolutely stunned at the number of churches in Rockford. I counted them up. There are about 150 churches in Rockford alone, not including Cherry Valley or Roscoe or Belvidere or Winnebago. Christian radio is freely available to all in Rockford. All who live in Rockford can get a Christian television station. Yet, by in large, we are an unbelieving city with great opportunity to learn of and believe in the gospel. What is true of our city is true of our nation. Despite having great opportunities to know God, as a nation, we have rebelled against God. There is no greater sin than being exposed to much light, but choosing to live in darkness. That's the tragedy of the rich, young kid who spoils his opportunity. He has everything, and he chooses a life of

waste and drugs. John Owen said it this way,

"No sin whereof men can be guilty in this world is of so horrible a nature, and so dreadful an aspect, as is this unbelief, where a clear view of it is obtained in evangelical light" (The Glory of Christ, Part II, chapter 1).

For those who don't believe, they can only anticipate condemning testimony. You will all stand before your Judge someday. He is the Lord, Jesus Christ. You will either be clothed in His righteousness by faith. Or, you will be condemned to hell forever as an unbeliever. If you are condemned, know that you may see the king of Nineveh on the witness stand at your trial. The king will sit in the witness stand and will testify of how he heard this prophet from Israel come and preach to his city a message of coming doom. He will testify of how he and all of Nineveh repented in the hopes that God would be merciful to them. He will testify of how he received no promise from God that He would be merciful, yet, knew that was his only hope.

The Queen of Sheba will be the next witness to take the witness stand. She will testify of this rumor she heard. She will testify of the vast expense and effort of her trip. "We had 200 camels, and 100 of us walked the desert path to Jerusalem to see if this rumor was true. It took us two months to get there. But, oh, it was worth it! We saw Solomon!"

Then, you will be placed on the witness stand. You will be asked, "So, what did you know about Me?" You will be forced to tell the truth. Your religious experience will come to haunt you, rather than help you. "My mother and father read the Bible to me. I attended Rock Valley Bible Church and heard the gospel clearly proclaimed. I read the Bible all the way through a couple of times. I listened to Christian music. I liked going to church." Then, you will be asked, "So, why didn't you repent if you knew so much? Did you make any effort to believe like the Queen of Sheba? She went to see Solomon, but you saw Jesus!" The answer, "I didn't see a big enough sign!" will not be good enough because you heard about the resurrection. The answer, "I didn't know enough!" will not be good enough because you have all of the knowledge that you need. It will be a pitiful scene. He has promised forgiveness of sins to those who repent and believe. The Scripture clearly testifies to His death, burial, and resurrection. You had all of the proof to need. You simply loved this present world, rather than loving Jesus Christ and believing in Him. Your condemnation will be just. This morning, Jesus is set before you. You don't have to go on a big journey. You simply need to embrace him.

Unbelief...

#### 4. Experiences increasing sin (verses 43-46)

Jesus tells this strange sounding story in verses 43-45.

Now when the unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places, seeking rest, and does not find it. Then it says, "I will return to my house from which I came"; and when it comes, it finds it unoccupied, swept, and put in order. Then it goes, and takes along with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. That is the way it will also be with this evil generation. (Matt. 12:43-45)

I believe that this story illustrates what was often the reality when Jesus healed those who were demon possessed. Jesus cast out many, many demons from those who were demon possessed. Yet, there were certainly many who were healed who never repented of their sin. Remember when Jesus cleansed the 10 lepers? (Luke 17:11-19). Only one of those who were cleansed came back to Jesus to give glory to God! Likewise, I believe that there were many who were healed of their demon possession who never gave glory to God by trusting in the name of Jesus to save them from their sins.

What happened in the case of the demon who was cast out? It wandered aimlessly, looking for a place of rest, but never quite found it. Since the demon's original home was still empty and since he liked it there, and since it was ready for "immediate occupancy," the demon returned with seven of his buddies who were all worse, and they all dwelt in the one who had been healed by Jesus. I believe that the reason why this demon returns with his seven demon buddies is because the one who was healed was just like the generation of Jesus' day: unbelieving. If one demon is bad, think about what it would be like if seven more wicked demons were added to the mix. Certainly, life would be worse than it was before. If one demon made life terrible, then seven more would be far worse. Remember what a "legion of demons" did to the men in Gadera? These men were so wild and crazy that no one went near them!

Unbelief experiences increasing sin (verses 43-45). When the gospel of Jesus Christ is seen clearly, but rejected, there can be no hope, but that life of an individual will get worse. It's not just future condemnation that will be worse (i.e. point #3 of my sermon). It is also present experience that will be filled with all of the results that sin can bring. For the Jews, there was every advantage in the world of living in the times of Jesus' day. These people were able to (1) see Jesus, (2) talk with Jesus, (3) learn from Jesus, and (4) be free from all of their sicknesses. But, when the generation rejected Jesus, it was far worse than it had been for them before. Jesus said of Jerusalem, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. Behold, your house is being left to you desolate!" (Matt. 23:37-38). I don't believe that it was an accident that Jerusalem was totally destroyed in A. D. 70. The generation that rejected Jesus lived to see its city burned to the ground and its people scattered from it. It all happened because of their unbelief. They were not willing to repent and submit themselves to Jesus.

For us today, there is an advantage of growing up in the church. The extent of sin experienced around us is far less than for those in the world. A moral life is beneficial. The constant teaching of the gospel is great. The examples of godly Christians helps foster a godliness in the younger generation. But when you turn your back on the Lord and you forsake your Christian roots, I guarantee you that your life will disintegrate. Oh, your fall may go slowly. You begin by reducing your Bible reading and prayer. Then, you decrease your church attendance. Then, you drop your Christian friends in favor of some ungodly ones. Then, you start participating in the unfruitful deeds of darkness. Your life is a mess. Oh, you may do well to keep the appearance that all is well, but you will know the devastating results of unbelief. Whatever seeds

of reform took place in your life will all be neglected. You will live like the world. You will be miserable.

So, church family, I exhort you: believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ. You don't need more proof. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is all you will ever need. You don't need more knowledge. This sermon has been sufficient. Trust Him and Him alone!

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on October 19, 2003 by Steve Brandon.  
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