The Reason for Jesus

John 12:37-50

Key Verse: 12:41 “Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus’ glory and spoke about him.

12:50 “I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father told me to say.”

There is an interesting story in Aesop’s Fables. Demosthenes, a renowned orator, was allowed to speak only a few words in Athens. He began to tell a tale to his audience. “A young man had hired a donkey to take him from Athens to Megara. At midday, when the sun was blazing hot, the young man and the donkey’s driver both wanted to sit in the donkey’s shade. They began to jostle one another, fighting for the spot in the shade. The driver maintained that the man had rented the donkey but not his shadow, while the young man claimed that he had rented both the donkey and all the rights thereto.’ Having told this much of the story, Demosthenes then turned his back on the audience and began to walk away. The audience shouted at him to stop and begged him to finish the story. “Indeed” said Demosthenes. “You want to hear all about the donkey’s shadow, but you refuse to pay attention when someone talks to you about serious matter!”

Like the Athenian audience, people like to hear some interesting stories about politics, economics, sports, celebrities, trending goods, and so on. But there are not many who pay attention when we talk about serious matters such as salvation, eternal life, God, and so on. There are many reasons for us to believe in Jesus as the Son of God. But people will not listen to us or pay attention to what Jesus said. In today’s passage we will study three reasons why we have to believe in Jesus and what the result of our faith is in him.

First, Jesus performed many signs (37) Look at verse 37. “***Even after Jesus had performed so many signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him***.” Here signs mean miraculous signs which Jesus had performed as the Son of God. Jesus changed water into wine (2:1-11). He healed a royal official’s son (4:43-54). He raised an invalid man who had been paralyzed for 38 years. (5:1-15) He fed five thousand with five loaves of bread and two fish (6:1-15). Jesus walked on the water (6:16-24) Jesus healed a man born blind (9:1-12) Finally, he raised the dead Lazarus and brought him back to his sisters alive. (11:1-44) There was division among the crowd when Jesus was in the Festival of Tabernacles (Jn 7). Some believed in Jesus as the Messiah. But others didn’t, saying, “*We know where this man is from; when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from.*” (Jn 7:27) They had reason for their unbelief in Jesus because they heard that Jesus was born in Nazareth, not in Bethlehem, the town of David. Still, the believers among them had reasons for their faith in him. They said, “*When the Messiah comes, will he perform more signs than this man*?” (7:31) They were not sure of the origin of Jesus’ birth, but were confident in the miraculous signs which Jesus had performed. They had a reason for them to believe in Jesus because of these miracles.

Who could perform more miracles than Jesus did? Who could walk on water but the Lord of creation alone? Who could raise the dead but God alone? Who could change the murderous Saul into the gentle Paul but Jesus alone? These days we cannot see Jesus walk on water or feed five thousand with five loaves and two fish. But Jesus is working for us through the Holy Spirit by changing sinners into saints and from poverty to prosperity, and by making the impossible possible. We don’t have to look around to find examples from others. When we find small miracles which Jesus performs in our lives, we will have reasons for us to believe in Jesus as the Son of God.

Second, Isaiah spoke about Jesus. (38-41) John the author did not lose heart when people would not believe in Jesus. Instead, John turned his eyes on the Scripture and found the answer in it. He believed that their unbelief was also to fulfill the words of Isaiah. Look at verses 38-40. “***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?” For this reason they could not believe, because, as Isaiah says elsewhere: “He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor turn---and I would heal them.***” John quoted Isaiah 53:1 and 6:10. The prophet Isaiah, who had lived around BC 700, filled with the Holy Spirit, spoke about the suffering and glory of a servant. In Isaiah 53:2-7 Isaiah prophesied about the coming Messiah, “*He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquities of us all.*” When the prophet Isaiah said this, he did not know whom he was talking about. He was just a voice of God’s message. John the author testified that Isaiah was talking about Jesus. Look at verse 41. “***Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus’ glory and spoke about him.***” What Isaiah had said about the suffering servant was fulfilled thoroughly through Jesus Christ. Jesus was despised and rejected by people. He was pierced for our sins on the cross. His two hands and feet were nailed to the cross and his blood gushed out from his side. His blood washed away our sins and his death brought peace between God and us. By his wounds on the cross we have been healed. All those who were lost, broken, and wounded are healed by Jesus when they came to him. There is one senior missionary in Chicago UBF. Her second son has been ill since he was born. She also suffered from a stroke. But she didn’t complain about her situation. She was full of thanks, joy, and peace in her mind. So she wrote many psalms, poems, and praises about God’s love. All her wounds and pains were comforted and healed by Jesus who had been wounded and died on the cross.

When Isaiah wrote his book, his personal and national situation was not favorable. He was severely persecuted and rejected by his own people because he delivered the message of God’s divine judgment on Israel. He was not welcomed in public. But he did not lose his heart. He saw Jesus’ glory behind his sufferings. He did not know whom he was talking about, but the Holy Spirit spoke about the coming Messiah Jesus through Isaiah. There are 353 prophesies about Jesus Christ in the Old Testament. Jesus fulfilled all these during his lifetime. According to the statistics, the probability of fulfilling 48 prophecies for one person is one chance in a trillion, trillion, trillion, trillion, trillion, trillion, trillion, trillion, trillion, trillion, trillion, trillion, and trillion. Jesus fulfilled 353 prophesies all at a time. We have no reason and no excuses not to believe in Jesus as the Promised Messiah.

Third, the very word Jesus spoke. (42-50) Among the crowd even the leaders there were many who believed in Jesus in secret. (42) They must be Nicodemus, who had visited Jesus at night (Jn 3) and Joseph of Arimathea, who put Jesus’ body in his tomb (Jn 19:38). But they would not openly acknowledge their faith for fear they would be excommunicated from their society. (42) In verses 44-46 Jesus cried out testifying that he had come from the Father God and that we can see the Father God through him. Jesus came to this world as a light so that we can see God and the world through him. Those who don’t believe in Jesus stay in darkness because they have no light in them. Look at verses 44-46. “***Then Jesus cried out***, “***Whoever believes in me does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. The one who looks at me is seeing the one who sent me. I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness***.” Jesus often compared himself to light. He said in John 8:12, “*I am the light of the world, whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.*” He also said, “*You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you*.” (Jn 12:38) Here the light indicates the presence of Jesus and darkness is the absence of Jesus. Do you have light in your heart? Are you still walking in darkness? Jesus said, “*Whoever walks in the dark does not know where they are going. Believe in the light while you have the light, so that you may become children of light*.” (12:35b-36a) A week ago, twelve children and one soccer coach in Thailand were reported missing. They were found alive 400 meters under a cave entrance 10 days after they were missing. The rescue work for them is still going on in the midst of the dark and rainy jungle. Please pray for their safe return. In the darkness they couldn’t find the entrance and kept going deeper into the cave, away from the entrance. When we have no light in our life, we don’t know where we are going. Some may keep going in the opposite direction from the gate of heaven. Jesus said, *“I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness*.” (46)

Jesus continued. Look at verses 47-50. “***If anyone hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge that person. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words, the very words I have spoken will condemn them at the last day. For I did not speak on my own, but the Father who sent me commanded me to say all that I have spoken. I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say***.” Even though people rejected Jesus and would not accept his words, Jesus would not judge them. This was because Jesus came to this world to save them, not to judge or condemn them. (Jn 3:17) But when Jesus comes again, he will judge the world. At that time those who heard Jesus’ words and didn’t believe in him will be judged. Jesus said that the very words he had spoken will judge them. Jesus provided many reasons for us to believe in him, so we have no excuse for our unbelief. He said, “*Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged, but has crossed over from death to life.*” (Jn 5:24)

An American young man was missing in the Sahara Desert. When his father heard the news, he immediately flew to the Sahara and joined the rescue team. On a plane the father scattered fliers with the written words, “Son, I love you!” A few days later the son was rescued. He was holding the flier in his hand and said, “I didn’t give up on my life in the desert because of my father who was waiting for me to return even today.” The very words which the father wrote enabled him to come back alive. Jesus said, “*The very words I have spoken will condemn you at the last day. …I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say.”* (50) Here is the reason why we have to believe in Jesus’ words. Jesus didn’t speak on his own, but the words which God wanted to tell. Some may have reasons for them not to believe in Jesus. But at the last day there will be no reasons which they can make to excuse their unbelief.

Today’s passage is Jesus’ last message in public about himself in John’s gospel. From chapter 13 Jesus will teach his disciples an upper room lecture just before his arrest and death. Today Jesus taught us three reasons why we have to believe in Jesus as the Son of God and the Messiah. He performed many signs and wonders so that we could believe him as the Son of God. The prophet Isaiah in the Old Testament spoke about Jesus, his suffering and death on the cross. All Jesus’ teaching and his words testify that he came from God the Father to save us from eternal death. I pray that we may all believe in Jesus from our hearts as Lord and Savior so that we may have eternal life in his name. We may not pay attention to the donkey’s shadow, but to the word of eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.