

# Jesus Came to Save the World

God Gives the Ability to See and Believe

John 12:37-50

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# Epigraph

*The grace of God enables us to see sin as our greatest problem  
and Christ as our only solution. – Hanley Liu*

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# Introduction

This is the last sermon I will preach to the high school seniors. This might be the last time that you hear from me. I want to tell you that life is full of surprises. Life is full of surprises. For example, I was recently thinking about how there are some people that I thought would never become Christians. I couldn't believe that they would believe.

## Context

Today in the book of John, we're going to talk about belief and unbelief. We're at the end of Jesus' ministry to the Jewish crowds. Before Jesus focuses his attention on his disciples, John will deliver a final word on Jesus and the Jews. Jesus has been ministering to them this entire time, and this is what it comes down to. These are Jesus' last words to the Jewish leaders.

## Hearts

What John does is that he compares and contrasts the hearts of the Jews with the heart of Jesus. Now when I say heart, I mean the innermost core of the person. Who they really are. We're going to see two hearts, the Jews and Jesus, and how they're disturbingly different.



# 1. The Hardened Hearts of the Jews

*When Jesus had said these things, he departed and hid himself from them. Though he had done so many signs before them, **they still did not believe** in him, so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: “Lord, who has believed what he heard from us, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?” Therefore **they could not believe**. For again Isaiah said, “He has blinded their eyes and **hardened their heart**, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them.” Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him. (John 12:36-41)*

## Disobedience and Unbelief

John begins with an ominous tone, saying that Jesus departed and hid himself from the Jews. Jesus was hiding himself physically, but it also means on a spiritual level he was not allowing the Jews to see him. And John shows us the hearts of the Jews by sharing what Isaiah had prophesied back in the Old Testament. He does this to show that we should not be surprised by what has taken place. God is sovereign over salvation, all the way down to the heart level.

*Lord, who has **believed** what he heard from us, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been **revealed**? (John 12:38)*

Interestingly, this statement appears in Romans and Isaiah. Let's look at Romans:

*But they have not all **obeyed** the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has **believed** what he has heard from us?” (Romans 10:16)*

The context of Romans is in regards to the obedience of the Jewish people. Romans links obedience with belief. Even though they heard the Gospel, they did not obey it. And they did not obey it because they did not believe it. So hearing the Gospel, but not obeying it, actually means that you do not believe it. Now let's look at Isaiah:

*Who has **believed** what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been **revealed**? (Isaiah 53:1)*

The context of Isaiah 53 is that of the Suffering Servant, and how God would send a Savior. Isaiah furthers that the arm of the LORD is God's power. God's glorious strength and might in action. This points to Jesus and his many miracles. Remember, the Jews had seen Jesus do it all, even raising Lazarus from the dead, and they still did not believe. Glory was before them, but they were unable to believe.

## Blind Eyes and Hardened Hearts

Back to our main text, John gives us another passage to show us the hearts of the Jews:

*“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 12:40)*

John gives us another passage in Isaiah. The prophet Isaiah, when he was preaching, had a peculiar effect on his people. God was purposefully hardening hearts. Here is the reference:

***Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.” (Isaiah 6:10)***

John makes it clear that the Jews could not believe. Did you notice that John's word choice changed from did not to could not believe? Why is that? Because of their hard hearts, the Jews were unable to see Jesus as God. They were unable to see his glory. Now this is interesting because Isaiah 6 is the famous passage of the prophet's vision of the Lord. It's one of the most glorious visions of God in the Bible. The Jews could not grasp this glory. Jesus already knew this, that it takes an act of God to change the hearts of man: *No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day (John 6:44).* And just like the Jews, we too are unable to save ourselves. God alone is sovereign over salvation.

## The Fear and Praise of Man

John adds something else at the end of this section, talking about how the Jews feared the Pharisees and how they loved the glory of man more than the glory that comes from God:

*Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for **fear of the Pharisees** they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; for **they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.** (John 12:42-43)*

Isaiah saw God's glory. The Jews couldn't see it. They were staring right at the face of Jesus, and they couldn't see God's glory. Why? This is their heart: the fear of man and craving man's praise.

## Application

This is where we need to pause and really consider John's words. These Jews believed in Jesus. At least, they did on a head level. But they did not believe at a heart level. They revealed themselves to be unsaved because their lives were not changed. Remember, belief is tied to obedience. The fear of man and craving man's praise tells a lot about our heart. Do we aspire to appear as popular and cool in the eyes of the world? Do we hide or back down from our convictions when it comes to the truth of God's Word? Are we afraid of cancel-culture and what will happen to our reputation if people find out that we love Jesus? The Savior of the world, the one who suffered for us, the one who sanctifies us – he is not ashamed to call us his brothers. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes (Romans 1:16). So confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, then you will be saved (Romans 10:9).

In our first section, we see the hearts of the Jews. They reveal the reasons they reject Christ. As prophesied by Isaiah in the Old Testament, God has hardened their hearts and blinded their eyes. Their fear of man and craving man's praise shows their pride. Only God is sovereign over salvation. Only he can open blind eyes and soften hardened hearts.





## 2. The Heavenly Heart of Jesus

*And Jesus cried out and said, “Whoever believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness. If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for **I did not come to judge the world but to save the world.** The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day. (John 12:44-48)*

We now compare the hearts of the Jews to the heart of Jesus. Jesus comes back to the big ideas of his ministry. He talks about believing and seeing, stating that belief in him is belief in God. Seeing Jesus is seeing God. He’s making himself one with the Father, something that he’s been doing this entire time with the Jews. He uses his famous theme of light, saying that he is the light of the world and that whoever believes in him will not remain in darkness. He talks about the importance of his words, and how his words bring light and life. And he then says something interesting, something a bit puzzling: he says that he did not come to judge the world but to save the world. He appeals to his hearers with heavenly authority, inviting them but also showing them the consequences of rejecting his invitation. How does this work?

### Jesus Came to Save the World

This works when you realize that God the Father sent Jesus the Son. This was not forced. It was agreed upon before the foundation of the world that Jesus would save sinners. It’s our sin that condemns us. We’re under a death sentence. We’re destined for destruction. But God is sovereign over salvation. He knew we needed to be rescued. Not from Caesar, but from sin. John 3:16 is a famous passage, but let’s look at what John goes on to say in verse 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. (John 3:17)*

This is the heart of Jesus: that he would come into the world to save sinners. God entered the cosmos, put on flesh, to bring you safe passage. To bring you back to health. Jesus remains gentle and lowly. And he says that if you reject him, if you do not receive his words, you have a judge: God the Father. God will say, did I not send Jesus? Did he not speak the truth to you in love? Jesus was not speaking for himself. He came on God’s authority. A lot of people say they believe in God, but they won’t say anything about Jesus. You say you know God – but you don’t know Jesus. This is a contradiction. It doesn’t make sense. Jesus and God go together.



## The Love and Praise of God

If you would listen to Jesus' words, you would recognize that they're not his words, they're God's words, and they come with God's authority. What God says, his commandments, it's a matter of eternal life and death. Jesus is simply saying what God the Father has told him to say. Do you see the difference between the heart of Jesus and the heart of the Jews? On one hand, you have the Jews who are only looking out for themselves. They crave the praise of man, so they fear what man has to think. But Jesus, on the other hand, Jesus cares about commendation from God. He lives to please his Father. He humbled himself by becoming obedient, all the way to the point of death on a cross (Philippians 2:8). Unlike the Jewish people, Jesus is a true son of God – wanting to do the will of his Father. And he does not do this begrudgingly – he does it with joy. He is happy to obey his Father. As Jesus' disciples, we can do the same, humbly submitting to God in joyful obedience. Look at how Jesus lives for God:

*For I have not spoken on my own authority, but **the Father who sent me** has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, **I say as the Father has told me.**” (John 12:44-50)*

## Application

Where have you found it hard to obey God? Is there a sin you need to confess and repent of? Are you angry or bitter? Jealous or envious? Is there someone you need to forgive? Is God calling you to be kind or caring to someone in need? Obeying Jesus when it's hard takes a change of heart. It feels like a burden. It's going to humble you. The world will tell you that you're weak. But when you submit to the will of God, you'll find that the work Jesus has for you is not heavy, but light. See how Jesus was secure in his identity as the Son of God. In the same way, find rest from chasing popularity, fame, and fortune. Consider the cross. See your salvation. Remember the riches you have of grace in Christ. By the strength of the Holy Spirit, you can obey God with joy because of what we have in Jesus. It's not too late to trust and obey.

In our second section, we see the heart of Jesus. He lives to do his Father's will. He focuses on both those who believe in him and those who reject him. But his love for the Father, the desire to do God's will, and wanting to give God glory shows his humble heart. And he knows that only God is sovereign over salvation. Only God can open blind eyes and soften hardened hearts. Those who believe receive salvation. Those who reject him receive judgment.



## Big Idea

When we weigh the hearts of the Jews against the heart of Jesus, we see where they fall short. Their hard hearts hated their Messiah. They would not see their Savior. They could not see their King. God had blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts. They would crucify the Son of God. And through this, Jesus would save the world. God would prove to be totally sovereign over salvation. All glory goes to God. This is our big idea: God gives the ability to see and believe in Jesus — who came to save the world.

## Gospel

Jesus came to save the world, and he does this by his sacrifice on the cross. He saves the world by his suffering. And just like what Isaiah saw, this is a glorious thing. For Christians, the cross is not humiliating, but exalting. The cross of Christ is the power of God.

*For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (1 Corinthians 1:18)*

Unlike Israel, if you see and believe, you become the real and true children of God (John 1:12-13). Honestly, this is the real application of the text: Believe!

## Faith is the Gift of God

But now we have a problem. Because we just saw that it is God who opens eyes and softens hearts to see the glory of Jesus. So how can we say that we must believe if it is God who gives this ability in the first place? Let's hear what the Apostle Paul has to say:

*For by grace you have been saved through **faith**. And this is not of ourselves; it is the **gift** of God. (Ephesians 2:8-9)*

Faith is a gift of God. What do you do with a gift? You receive it. You take it. You show some sort of response. These words are just a way to illustrate a spiritual reality. God gives, or gifts, the ability. Trust. Accept. Believe. To put it another way, you must be born again (John 3:3). You contribute nothing to your spiritual birth, but you come out. You come forth. And you live.

# Applications

I do want to make two very specific applications for those of us who believe. Generally, they are to check for a hardened heart and watch the reasons why you serve. I'm going to personalize them for youth ministry at FCBC Walnut, but you can take the principles and apply them to other areas of your life. You can think about them as looking back and looking forward in time.

## Check for a Hardened Heart

Let's look back at youth retreat and missions trips. It's easy for our hearts to become like the Jews who were looking for God in all the wrong ways. You might live your life chasing the same spiritual highs you sensed at retreat. Life is lived not in the mountains, but in the valleys. Not in the highs, but in the lows. Don't allow your heart to be hardened when the world comes at you, when school starts up again. There are times when you feel like you can't see Jesus anymore. Find him in the fellowship that we have on Friday nights. Gaze at his glories when we meet on Sunday mornings. Learn to see him seven days a week, seeking him in prayer and searching his Word. Be tenderhearted and humble. See Jesus now, and check for a hardened heart.

## Watch the Reasons Why You Serve

Let's look forward to Summer Spark and Vacation Bible School. It's easy for our hearts to become like that of the Pharisees. To serve because we want to look good and receive the praise of man. Or we serve because we're scared to miss out, or we want to get the extracurricular credit on our college apps. It's all serving for the wrong reasons. The heart of Jesus is to please God the Father, and we can do this by serving to show the children Jesus. To let the children come to him. To share the Gospel with them. You've seen his glory. Give them the good news. Watch the reasons why you serve. Don't serve for selfish reasons, but serve for the glory of God and the good of others.



# Conclusion

Jesus came to save the world, and God gives the ability to see and believe. Seniors, and all of my brothers and sisters here today: Life is full of surprises. There are some people that I thought would never become Christians. I couldn't believe that they would believe.

But the more I think about it, the more I see that I shouldn't be surprised. It's God who is sovereign over salvation, to open eyes and soften hearts. Jesus came to save the world, after all. And maybe more importantly, I should humble myself with gratitude before God, that he would cause a sinner like me to see and believe. That he would free me from my spiritual slavery. And I pray for those who remain in unbelief. That God would give the ability to see and believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and he came to save us from our sin.

## Our Suffering Servant

If the Jews really knew what Isaiah was talking about, they could have caught a glimpse of the glory of Jesus back in Isaiah. They were looking for the type of glory in Isaiah 6. They wanted to see God on the throne, sovereignly overthrowing the Roman government, leading a political revolution and a powerful uprising for God's people.

But on this side of the cross, we can clearly see Jesus – and it's not what the Jews expected. The Jews were looking for Isaiah 6, but they should have kept looking for Isaiah 53. You need a broken, contrite heart to see him. He is sovereign in sorrow. His strength comes in weakness. He is a Suffering Servant:

*He was **despised and rejected by men**; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely **he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows**; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and **with his wounds we are healed.** (Isaiah 53:3-5)*

This is my last sermon to the seniors, so this might be the last time that you hear from me – but this does not have to be the last time you hear from Jesus. Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). And you will see his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14).



# The World You Came to Save

Lord, help us to be grateful  
The world you came to save  
By Jesus Christ, the love of God,  
It's all by grace through faith

Please soften stony hearts  
And open blinded eyes  
To Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God,  
Our sinless sacrifice

And as we fight the battle  
We share and shine the light  
Of Jesus Christ, the Truth of God,  
Our hope – eternal life

There's glory to be seen  
There's glory to be heard  
In Jesus Christ, the Son of God,  
The true and living Word

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