

“Jesus Came to Save”

December 1, 2019

I often enjoy the Christmas season and all the “trappings” of Christmas. I like seeing Christmas lights. I enjoy presents, eating cookies, spending time with family, the food and desserts! I could do without the travel, but in many ways, I love the season and the traditions. But, I’ve also experienced times where I’m extremely excited about Christmas, celebrated with people, and walked away feeling empty. I’ve thought to myself, “What was the point of what we did?” I can’t help but think that my Savior was missing. Have you ever had that experience? I know at least some of you have because you’ve communicated with me the difficulty of gathering with family who don’t follow Jesus, and you miss the emphasis of Jesus at the very point in time when Jesus should be central.

But I think even those who don’t trust Jesus confess a need for something greater than these “trappings.” Did you know that there’s a term for the post-Christmas season? It’s called the “Christmas blues.” There’s all this hype and then there’s a downer that follows for many people. Why? I suggest because none of the trappings can fully satisfy. While they can be enjoyable in and of themselves, they make horrible saviors. And, what many people seem to do is look to the trappings as a Savior, and what happens when they do that? They’re trapped? And, when those things go away, their joy goes away.

So, as we enter this Christmas season and this Christmas series, let’s ensure that we keep the main thing the main thing. What is the point of Christmas? The advent of Christ. The word advent refers to Jesus leaving Heaven’s glories and coming to this world in human flesh. During this season, we celebrate, rejoice, remind our hearts of the glorious truth that Jesus came.

As I say this, though, I’m reminded of when I was a child and I thought about Christmas. I’d hear people talk about Jesus coming to the earth and how amazing that was, but in my heart, I really thought presents were better. And, if I’m honest (which I should be), my heart can still be drawn to the presents over Jesus – even though I know the presents don’t fully satisfy. And so, I think it’s good to have a series during this Advent time where we remind our hearts that Jesus is greater than the trappings – and actually, if we savor the Savior above all, the trappings won’t trap us. We’ll see them in their rightful place and we’ll have greater hope and rest in our God. No Christmas blues.

The Christmas series this year is entitled “Jesus Came.” Most of the weeks, we aren’t going to be preaching from texts that focus on the Christmas story, but instead we’ll be focusing on texts that tell us *why* Jesus came. In knowing *why* he came, I pray our hearts are reoriented in praising and resting in Jesus.

Today’s text is John 12:44-50. If you have your Bibles, please turn there, and before I read, I’m going to pray [Mart Novak/New Life; Dennis & Jan Horn].

⁴⁴ And Jesus cried out and said, “Whoever believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. ⁴⁵ And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. ⁴⁶ I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness. ⁴⁷ 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. ⁴⁸ 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. ⁴⁹ 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. ⁵⁰ And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me.”¹

These verses could sound somewhat confusing. What’s Jesus’ point? Some things he says makes sense. Other things he says doesn’t make sense. And, there’s a reason for that. Have you ever overheard a conversation, jumped in thinking you knew what the person was saying and then you realize you didn’t really get the context? Well, that’s what I just did this morning. We jumped 12 chapters into the book of John and read 7 verses without any context. What’s Jesus saying here?

Well, this falls at the end of a large section of John that focuses on the miracles of Jesus. These verses actually serve as a transition into the next large section on the mission of Jesus in focusing on his death. So, these verses serve as a hinge between two sections. Chapter 12 is really an intriguing chapter. You have Mary anointing Jesus’ feet. You have Lazarus, her brother, who was raised from the dead, and we’re told the Pharisees wanted Lazarus dead because people are following Jesus because of Lazarus.

Wait a second, are they following Jesus because of Lazarus? Is it Lazarus’ fault that he was raised from the dead? No. But that leads us to the response of the Pharisees and religious leaders towards Jesus. Where we have miracles leading people like Mary and Lazarus to believe on Jesus, we have people like the Pharisees who resolutely resist Jesus. Chapter 12 shows us their insanity against Jesus. Even in the face of resurrection from the dead, they will choose to try to kill Lazarus. But then we have others who believe on Jesus, but they’re not making it known. In verses 42-43, we read this of these people: ⁴² 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; ⁴³ for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God. ²

We have people who believe and are public in their expression of belief. We have people who are against Jesus, and their adamant in their resistance. Then we have people who believe who Jesus is, but they feel the pull of the culture and therefore, they love man more than God. Of course, since I’m thinking of this chapter in light of Jesus coming to this earth, I thought about the Christmas season and how we have all three of these types of people. Some celebrate Christmas, and will trees, lights and traditions, they point their families and friends to Jesus. The lights on a tree represent Jesus being the light of the world. The tree reminds them that the lights hang on a tree. And the tree reminds us of the life we have in the midst of whatever weather we endure. Then we have people who are nominal about Christmas. They say they’re Christians, but they really just love the presents, family get-togethers and all the other stuff. They love the cultural pulls. And, if Jesus is mentioned, he’s like the “icing on the cake” or maybe the side-note to Christmas. Then there are those who reject Jesus. They minimize Jesus and emphasize Santa and presents.

Therefore, the words stated about the people in the 1st century apply to us even today. John writes in verses 37-38, **“³⁷ Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him, ³⁸ so**

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jn 12:44–50.

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jn 12:42–43.

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?”³

Isaiah prophesied of One who was going to come. He spoke of God’s justice and also of God’s grace and mercy – and yet people did not believe Isaiah. Then Isaiah prophesies that his situation was going to be the situation of the Messiah himself. In the Messiah’s day (and in ours as well), there will be many who reject him. So, we read the miracle section of John and we see how many people still reject Jesus. And their rejection reveals just how much they need Jesus. The same is true today. Whether people outright reject Jesus or they treat him as a side-note, we see how desperately people need Jesus and how foolish it is for them to love trinkets and toys above the Savior and King of all Creation!

As I think about this, and even think about my life, I can see that in my past, I’ve had all three of the opinions of Jesus. And today, as we look at these 7 verses, I hope that you and I will be drawn more to the reality of the superior glory in Christ. Learning *why* he came, I pray that our hearts will be drawn to worship and adore Jesus. So, today, I want you to see that **Jesus came to save sinners**. Every single word in that statement matters. Jesus, not Allah, not Krishna, not Buddha, not our own selves; Jesus is the point. And Jesus *came*. Oh, can you even fathom the glories of this statement? I know I’ve mentioned this before, but one of my favorite children’s storybook Bibles is the *Jesus Storybook Bible* by Sally Lloyd-Jones. This storybook Bible emphasizes how each story in the Scripture yearns for the Savior. When I used to read this to my children, I would go in order – beginning at Creation. But then, I arrived to the birth of Jesus. Up to this point, every story ended with something like, “And there will be a greater prophet or a greater king or a greater rescuer or a greater hope.” As I turned the page to the birth of Jesus, I saw the artwork. A black page with earth. The perspective was that God was coming to the earth. The anticipation I felt in my heart matched the words on the page. The story starts saying, “He’s here! Everything was ready. The moment God had been waiting for is here at last. God was coming to help his people just as he promised in the beginning. But how would he come? What would he be like? What would he do? Mountains would have bowed down. Seas would have roared. Trees would have clapped their hands. But the earth held its breath. As silent as snow falling, he came in, and when no one was looking, in the darkness, he came.” (to watch a video on this, visit: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E2y2FJqsv_8).

The earth held its breath. In relative silence, Jesus came. The One whose throne-room was filled with incessant praises of him – the seraphim constantly crying out “Holy, Holy, Holy!” The One who, at his presence, Heaven’s pillars would shake and the room would fill with smoke. The One who is limitless took on the limits of human flesh. He *came* to this earth. And, he came to save.

Now, what does “save” mean. I remember the first time I was confronted with the definition of that word. It was when I was a kid and I was sharing the gospel with a friend of mine. I asked if he wanted to be saved, and he said, “Saved from what?” What a good question, right?! To be saved means that there is some type of difficulty or peril. And, instead of answering this right now, I’m going to answer that question as we work through the text. Jesus *came* to save sinners. We see this as Jesus describes why he came. So, let’s look at the reasons Jesus gives as to why he came.

1. Jesus came as light (vv. 44-46).

³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jn 12:37–38.

Let's read verses 44-46 again: ⁴⁴ And Jesus cried out and said, "Whoever believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. ⁴⁵ And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. ⁴⁶ I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.⁴

Verses 44-45 confront the people around him. The word "cried out" means that Jesus was speaking loudly enough for the people around him to hear. There are people in the crowd who believe him, but they won't go public with the belief because they're fearful of the Pharisees. You see, we're told in John that the Pharisees had a practice of kicking people out of the synagogue if individuals followed Jesus. The synagogue was the center of Jewish culture and worship. If you couldn't go to the synagogue, you're cut off from the community and cut off from God himself. The Pharisees seem to think they can wield the power of giving people access to God and fellowship with one another. And, some people seem to still think that the religious leaders have that authority.

So, what does Jesus say to these people? If you believe in Jesus, who do you believe in? You believe in God the Father! Who gives us access to God then? Jesus does! Then Jesus says that if they see Jesus, they've seen God. This is a profound statement from multiple angles. Jesus is not only saying that he reflects God's glory, but he's saying that he is God himself. If you look at Jesus, you have seen God. Why? Because Jesus is God!

Why then are people afraid to stand up and believe in Jesus? In following the Pharisees they actually are rejecting God. Sure, they can feel comfortable in their society and culture having the religious leaders and the community support them, but if they live this way, they're living apart from God himself! Maybe this is too trite of an illustration, but I think it works. It's like people who celebrate Christmas, but they "x" Jesus out of everything. People go through the traditions that go back to certain Christian meanings, but they ignore the meanings and they choose to embrace other things. This makes for comfortable culture, but it doesn't point to Jesus.

And, their rejection of him speaks to their greater need. And, this is where Jesus goes in verse 46. Jesus says "I have come into the world." Jesus *came* into the world, which means that he is pre-existent. He existed before and then came into this world from another realm. And Jesus says that he came as light so that who ever believes in him won't remain in darkness. What does this mean? If we go all the way back to Genesis, the first mentioning of light and darkness are emphasized in the Creation account. There is darkness, but the first thing that comes is *light*. Light then permeates *everything*. But darkness enters the world in just a couple chapters. Adam and Eve rebel against the King by wanting themselves to be at his level. They eat from the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. And, as a result, they forfeit being able to eat from the Tree of Life. Keep this in mind because it matters to understanding Jesus saying he's the light.

Earlier in John 8, Jesus says, "I AM the light of the world." And, this statement is a statement of Jesus being God and Life himself, bringing a *new creation*. Moving on in the Scripture, in the temple, there's a lampstand and it's to represent the Tree of Life. Light and life go hand-in-hand, and you cannot come into God's presence without his light and life. As we enter further into the Old Testament, we begin to realize the spiritual light that we need. Psalm 27:1 says, "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?"⁵ Then, in Isaiah, there's a

⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jn 12:44-46.

⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 27:1.

prophecy. In chapter 9, we read in verse 2: **The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.** ⁶

This is the passage that goes on and says, “For unto us a child is born. Unto us a Son is given. He is called “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” If you simply think through Psalm 27:1, which says the LORD, Yahweh, is his light and salvation, and then move to Isaiah 9 which says the light is this Son who is the Mighty God – you ought to see that the light of the world, which will save us and bring us back into the presence of God is somehow a Man who is also God himself. This Light will bring us back to the Garden of God. He will remove the barrier from eating from the Tree of Life.

Jesus came to fulfill Isaiah. When the world was hushed and dark, Jesus entered, and he didn’t simply *bring* light. He *is* the light of the world. He himself is light and life! Therefore, just like in the first creation, light is in the first day of creation; so Jesus is the light that begins the new creation, and he drives out darkness. Now, what does that mean, though. Colossians 1:13-14 answers this. Paul writes, **“¹³ [God] has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”⁷**

The domain of darkness is referencing being born as sinners. Jesus, and the entirety of Scriptures, teaches us that we are born morally sinful. We all know that we are bent towards sin. We don’t have to be taught to sin. But sin isn’t simply doing bad things, and righteousness is doing things that society says is good. Sin is “falling short of the glory of God.” Meaning, we don’t give God the honor he deserves in our words, thoughts, actions. To not glory in God supremely is sin. Therefore, you can be very religious (like the Pharisees) and be sinful. The only way we can be rescued from this innate sinfulness is if God himself transfers you to the Kingdom of his Son, Jesus. And, in Jesus, we find redemption and forgiveness of sins. Redemption refers to being set free. It often referred to the process of setting a slave free. Through Jesus, we find freedom from our sin *and* forgiveness of our sins.

You know, human beings often walk around with weights of shame and guilt. And, we look to many things to lessen the loads. We may look to Christmas celebrations to silence the noise of our guilt or we can look to people or various pleasures, but we also discover none of these things really do bring *forgiveness*. Jesus, the Light and the Life, gives freedom and forgiveness.

He came as the Light. Now, notice it doesn’t say he came to give light. While he did do that, the emphasis is on HIM! His character. He is our hope. This is important for us to remember. Salvation isn’t simply a gift of stuff that God gives us. Salvation is the gift of Jesus himself. And, if you have been rescued by God, you confess that the greatest gift of all truly is Jesus himself. Therefore, in him coming to *save* means that in him is our freedom and forgiveness. Think of this. In being brought to Jesus we find such relief, encouragement, strength. He himself free us. He himself forgive us, and doesn’t shame us. Come as you are, sinner. Lay yourself before Jesus. And, Christians, as we think about Christmas, Jesus’ Advent, ponder daily why Jesus came. He came to be our freedom and hope for forgiveness.

This two-fold aspect should then compel you. Jesus didn’t come to forgive and then leave you bound in your sins. He came to forgive you and then to give you the freedom so that you can grow in glorying in

⁶ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Is 9:2.

⁷ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Col 1:13–14.

God. If you are here today and you say, "I'm forgiven, but I don't have to obey God," then you've living against Jesus' purpose in coming to the earth! He came as the Light, freedom and forgiveness.

So, how are you going to respond? Will you accept him like Mary and Lazarus? Will you continue to reject him? Or, are you still thinking the trinkets of this world is best? Will you believe on him? Well, let's continue to read from John 12.

2. Jesus came to save (vv. 47-48).

Read verses 47-48 again with me: ⁴⁷If 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. ⁴⁸The 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.⁸

Think of the audience listening. We have the people who are living in silence, while believing who Jesus is. We have the people adamantly against him. We have the believers. Jesus says if you hear and don't keep the words, Jesus doesn't judge. Why? Because he came to save the world. The term "the world" refers to all who need rescuing – which is everyone who is a sinner.

Now, why is Jesus saying this? Because Jesus is drawing a line in the sand. In John 5:44, Jesus speaks to the religious people, **"⁴⁴How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God? ⁴⁵Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope."**⁹ Moses condemns the religious people. But then we have this chapter, and Jesus' statement comes to those who are living in silence about Jesus. They're wanting to straddle the fence. Jesus is confronting them.

But, I know that some here could read these words and misinterpret them and force them into a 21st century mindset. They'll say, "Look, Jesus says that if we don't keep Jesus' words, he won't condemn us! He accepts us." Isn't Jesus so nice? He doesn't care how we act or behave. He's always our friend and support. So, let's just live however we feel we want to live, right? Wrong!

Even John 5, Jesus says that he doesn't accuse, but he doesn't say there's no accusation. Moses accuses them! Then here, Jesus says he doesn't "judge," but then he says there is a Judge. Who's the Judge? Jesus' words, in the last day. Wait a second. What? If Jesus didn't come to judge, then how can his words judge someday? Because Jesus is talking about his purpose in coming the first time! The world is condemned. We're told that in John 3. Therefore, because we condemned to live forever away from God's grace. Because of our own sinfulness, we deserve to be punished in a place called Hell and the Lake of Fire. Yet Jesus entered this world. He *came* into this world not to condemn. That's already been done. He came to save from the condemnation.

But there will be a day when Jesus comes again, and he will judge then. Where will you stand? Will you be like the Pharisees, the silent individuals or like Mary and Lazarus? Do you know your sinfulness and your need for the Lord? I know that some are angered at this. We don't like to admit that we're as sinful as we are, but I know of so many in this room who rejoice in the God who has saved them. There's been freedom found in opening ourselves up to the Lord and finding his healing, his forgiveness, his freedom!

⁸ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jn 12:47–48.

⁹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jn 5:43–45.

Jesus says here that he came as Light, and as Light, he came to save. Meaning, he came to remove condemnation. And, how did he do this? The book of John is going to move on to detail Jesus' suffering in the place of sinners. Ventura, Jesus came to take the suffering sinners deserved. There is no religious story like this. There's no other belief system that has God taking the place of humans and enduring wrath. In fact, there are religions that reject that God would ever be cursed. Yet, Jesus (who is God the Son) became cursed by God the Father on the cross. Jesus took the condemnation on himself so that all who would turn to Jesus for forgiveness would be set free and declared righteous and forgiven!

This is what it means for Jesus coming to save. Therefore, there is now no condemnation if you have turned from your sinfulness and gone to the Lord for salvation through Jesus alone! And, if you have trusted Jesus, then you will not hear words of condemnation in the future. You'll hear the welcome of God himself! This is why Jesus came! Whoa! Praise the Lord for *Christmas!*

Finally, we come to the last reason that Jesus gives in this text:

3. Jesus was sent to speak eternal life (vv. 49-50).

We have Jesus say he came as light. Then he says he came to save. Now, we read that Jesus was sent. Again, to be sent means that he was pre-existent. This, by the way, is what John says in verse 41 – that Isaiah saw Jesus' glory! He saw Jesus in the throne-room scene of Isaiah 6.

So, here in John 12, we have people concerned that they won't be able to be in the synagogue, but Jesus isn't concerned about whether or not they can be in the synagogue. He's concerned that they won't be able to enter his throne room. This should wake us up, too. What matters most – a nice house, a new car, the presents you want? What does it matter if you get those things from a cultural perspective and yet you're barred from God's presence forever?

Jesus came to speak the words that the Father had given to him. Let's read verses 49-50 for more insight: ⁴⁹ 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. ⁵⁰ And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me.” ¹⁰

Jesus speaks on the authority of the Father. Whatever the Father has told him to speak, he has spoken. The NIV says, “I know that his commandment leads to eternal life.” But I'm not sure that's a correct translation. God's commandment *is* eternal life might be more correct, even though it may be more confusing.

Listen to John 6:40. Jesus speaks here saying, **“For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”**

¹¹ God's commandment to people is to look to Jesus and believe in him. Anyone who believes in him will have eternal life. Therefore, God's commandment is *eternal life* because when you believe on Jesus, you are united with Jesus. As a result, you will have eternal resurrection.

¹⁰ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jn 12:49–50.

¹¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jn 6:40.

This is *why* Jesus was sent. Which means, Ventura, our Triune God had a purpose in Jesus coming. The Father wasn't hesitant in sending, but let Jesus go because Jesus was more willing. No. Our God desired to save sinners and bring them to wholeness in him!

But you could still ask, "What does it mean to believe in Jesus?" It's such an interesting phrase in the Greek. It's a unique phrase that many believe the 1st century Christians writers made up. But it means to take yourself and essentially place your entire hope *in* Jesus. You don't trust yourself for meaning, identity, life, hope. Your everything is now *in* Jesus. Jesus is saying to these people that he was sent to be our eternal life! Our never-ending, infinitely deep stream of life!

So, as we ponder Christmas, ponder these realities. Are you like Mary and Lazarus? The religious leaders? Those who hid their "belief"? Do you love the trappings and gifts more than the True Gift, Jesus? Let the realities of Jesus' purpose in coming to save fill your heart in the knowledge of God's infinite love! And now, as we move to communion, let's continue to celebrate the purpose of Jesus in coming to this world.