

## Marvel: What Did Jesus Do?

Lifted up and Unbelief

John 12:27-50

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*“Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven: “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die. So the crowd answered him, “We have heard from the Law that the Christ remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?” So Jesus said to them, “The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.” 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. 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. 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. 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 12:27–50, ESV).*

If there was a “sunset scene” for Jesus’s public ministry, it would be the text we are studying today. The gospel of John takes a significant turn, beginning in Chapter 13. It focuses not only on the last week of Jesus’s life but also on his instructions to his disciples. The words that follow in chapter 12 are some of Jesus’s most intimate and personal words to his disciples.

We’ll begin to look at those chapters during November. Over the next two weeks, we’ll take a short break from our journey through John to focus our hearts on unreached peoples around the world. We

call this two-week spotlight REACH, and it is time for us to recast the vision for reaching the three billion people who are the least likely to even hear the name of Jesus. Additionally, this is a time for us to care for our overseas staff and missionaries who are on the front lines of ministry.

### **A Final Word**

Hopefully, you will remember that the dominant theme in John's gospel is the word **believe**. The purpose for John's labor in recording the words and deeds of Jesus is so that you "might believe that Jesus is the Christ . . . and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31).

And before John takes us into the upper room, before Jesus washes the disciples' feet, and before he tells us about the brutality of the crucifixion, John records this final and important summary of Jesus's ministry.

It's a closing word about Jesus's mission, another warning about unbelief, and a summary of Jesus's message. You could think of this passage as an exclamation point on the message of John's Gospel. And these verses beg us to consider, yet again, if we really understand what Jesus was saying and doing. They invite us to consider what it means to believe in Jesus.

### **Mission**

After Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead in chapter eleven and after Mary anointed Jesus's feet, we read about and the triumphal entry of Jesus in chapter twelve—where everyone misunderstood him. Then, last week, our text concluded with the Greeks seeking Jesus (12:20). The scope of Jesus' ministry is getting wider, and the intensity of opposition is getting increasingly more intense.

Jesus made this defining statement in 12:24 – "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."

Verse 27 shows us the humanity of Jesus in full color. Jesus tells his disciples that his soul is "troubled." The word carries strong emotion with it. To be troubled can mean revulsion, horror, anxiety, and agitation.<sup>1</sup> In other words, Jesus understands what his mission requires, and there is deep internal tension with what it requires of him.

Last week, I said that the mission of Jesus is counter-cultural. He wasn't what the world expected or wanted. Well, here we see that Jesus is also counter-intuitive. Human beings are not naturally inclined to embrace the kind of path that is in front of Jesus. And John wants you to see the struggle.

We know that in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed for the removal of the cup of suffering while affirming his commitment to follow the Father's will (Luke 22:39-46). John does not record the Garden prayer. Yet, he inserts something similar here.

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<sup>1</sup> D. A. Carson, [\*The Gospel According to John\*](#), *The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 440.

It's fascinating and deeply comforting to me that we see this here. Jesus considers the path before him, and he laments. He talks to God about the struggle while committing himself to follow the Father's will faithfully. Jesus reaffirms his trust in the Father's plan—even saying "Father, glorify your name" (v. 27).

I'm thankful that this is in the Bible as it is in the lament Psalms. The mission of Jesus doesn't mean the absence of struggle, emotional weariness, or strong emotions. The mission of Jesus involves living through the struggle with a view toward something greater—the glory of God!

I've hardly even started my sermon, but this is a significant application point for us to consider. Jesus's mission involved the real tension of the horror of death and the commitment to obedience. Both are equally true in Jesus's life and in the lives of those who follow him. "This is hard, but I'm going to trust God" is central to the mission of Jesus.

To demonstrate that Jesus was spot on, the Father speaks. Gospel writers only recorded the Father speaking three times. The other two times were Jesus's baptism and his transfiguration, neither of which are recorded by John. This is the only time in John's gospel where we see this, which means it is really important.

According to John's account, the Father said, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again" (v. 28). The Father promises that he can be counted on to continue to glorify his name through the Son—even as he approaches the final hours of his life.<sup>2</sup> So, Jesus's mission involves the glorification of the Father. It's a core theme. But there's more.

Jesus's mission also involves the creation of a dividing line. That's what verse 31 means. Jesus is not coming with a judgmental, condemning attitude. He's coming as a Savior. Jesus is coming as the Light—to show people both who they are and the path to be reconciled with God. This creates a division between believers and unbelievers. In other words, the judgment of the world is that people need to decide which side they are on.

That's why Jesus talks about the ruler of this world being cast out (v. 31). The mission of Jesus will result in the announcement of the devil's defeat. The death and resurrection of Jesus will declare the lordship of Christ and the heavenly verdict over Satan. The countdown for Satan's final defeat has started. The Accuser's days are numbered.

Jesus's statement about his mission reaches its apex in verse 32. This is both what Jesus will do and for whom he will do it: "*And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself*" (John 12:32). Then, John adds this commentary to be sure that every reader knows exactly what Jesus is talking about: "He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die" (12:33).

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<sup>2</sup> D. A. Carson, [\*The Gospel According to John\*](#), *The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 441.

Jesus is not saying that everyone will be saved. Rather, in light of the previous text, where the Greeks seek him, Jesus is signaling that his death will be applied beyond the ethnic boundaries of Israel. Jesus's mission is to create a "new people" made from all the people groups of the world.

Later in John's life, he will see this image of what is yet to come:

*"After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'"* (Rev. 7:9–10).

The mission of Jesus is to rescue people to make them part of this choir of people. And this mission became our church's mission. Igniting a passion to follow Jesus means you love this mission!

### **Warning**

Once again John wants you to see the contrast between this amazing mission and the tragedy of unbelief. So, he picks up that theme immediately. Jesus shifts to a warning.

In verse 34, the crowd asks a clarifying question. The Messiah, according to their understanding of the Law, will rule forever. Maybe at Christmas time you've heard the text in Isaiah 9, where it says that *"the increase of his government and of peace will be unending"* (Is. 9:7). If Jesus is the Messiah, that is what they expect. They don't have a category for the Son of Man to be "lifted up."

Jesus doesn't really answer their question. Instead, he warns them about the urgency of the moment (vv. 35-36). Jesus contrasts light and darkness—a theme we've seen frequently in John. And he calls upon them to believe in the light. The crowds have enough to believe in Jesus. They don't need anything more. It should be obvious by now who he is.

The problem is not an absence of information but the hardness of their hearts. They don't want to listen. They aren't interested in believing. Jesus retreats from them as a physical parable of their unbelief.

John wants the reader to fully understand what is happening here. The fact is simply that people didn't believe, even though Jesus performed many miracles or signs. John quotes two passages from Isaiah to help you grasp the significance and to be warned yourself.

Remember in John 3 when Jesus was talking to Nicodemus? It seemed like he kept moving things further away from Nicodemus. I told you that Jesus did this so that Nicodemus's trust in himself could be broken. Well, I think John is doing the same thing here, but he intends for it to happen to everyone who reads this book.

He wants you to be stunned at the impossibility of belief unless God intervenes. Or to say it another way, he wants you to feel the weight of our spiritual powerlessness. He chooses some texts that are designed to be a bit shocking.

First, he quotes Isaiah 53:1. The text identifies that the suffering servant was rejected. The rejection of Jesus fits into a long and predictable pattern. But it is the second passage in Isaiah that is really pointed to in verses 39-41:

*“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 12:39–41).*

Now, it’s important to recognize that Jesus doesn’t quote this verse. He calls them to believe. But John explains their unbelief through the lens of a hardened heart. A religious blindness has fallen upon Israel. It is both a judgment and a means by which the gospel will be spread to non-Jewish people.

Why does John put this in here? I think it’s because he wants you to feel the weight of your brokenness so that you’ll look entirely to Jesus. It’s similar to what Paul said in Romans 3:10-11 – *“None is righteous, no not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God.”*

Rather than this being a verse that makes you throw up your hands, it is designed to make you run to God for help. The warning is meant to lead you to wholehearted belief. John intends to show you, yet again, the contradiction of believing in Jesus. You must come to understand and feel the weight of your helplessness without Jesus.

But John isn’t done here. In verses 42-43, he also identifies that merely saying “I believe in Jesus” isn’t enough. John applies this warning to people in positions of authority who believed that Jesus really was the son of God but who were not willing to openly acknowledge him.

While John uses the word “believe,” he doesn’t mean saving belief. It’s similar to how James uses the word in James 2:19 – “even the demons believe and shudder!” These people in powerful positions didn’t want to “die” with Jesus, so they kept their beliefs private. According to John, they loved the glory of man more than the glory that comes from God.

John records a strong warning here. People do not come to Jesus unless they are broken. They don’t really believe in Jesus until they are done with themselves. And they don’t come to Jesus without talking about him. In other words, if people don’t know that you are a Christian, you probably aren’t one. I don’t say that judgmentally. I say it with the warning that John intends.

Following Jesus means you side with him. It means you trust in him. It means you rest in him.

### **Message**

We come to Jesus’s final sermon to the crowds in the final week of his life. At some point, he must have emerged from hiding. This short address is a summary of previous sermons. There are four important themes:

#### **1. Believe Through Jesus**

Jesus restates his direct connection to the Father. He affirms his own deity again (v. 45). And he reinforces his mission as being from the Father. Jesus has come to bring reconciliation between human beings and God. “For God so love the world that he gave his only son . . .” John 3:16.

Jesus is the only way for people to be right with God.

## **2. Jesus Saves**

John wants you to see that there is an offering of deliverance out of darkness. Verse 46 says that Jesus came into the world as light in order to save people. But what does Jesus save people from? Well, Paul tells us in Ephesians 4 and Colossians 3:

*“They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity”* (Eph. 4:18–19).

*“Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth”* (Col. 3:5–8).

Jesus saves from the darkness within you right now. He saves you from the pursuit of things that destroy you and from things around you.

But he also saves you from the horror of being on the wrong side of God’s judgment. Verses 47-48 speak to the hope of deliverance that comes from Jesus, but they also address the warning that the time for deliverance is now.

## **3. Offering Eternal Life**

The final word is connected to the theme verse of John. “. . . that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31). In John 12:49, Jesus emphasizes that he is speaking on behalf of the Father. And the words that he says—his commandments—are pointing the way toward eternal life.

The mission of Jesus involved a strong warning and a hopeful message.

*“He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God . . .”* (John 1:11–12)

“Jesus has lived in unqualified obedience to his Father; he is now about to die in the same unqualified obedience, for he who is the Word-made-flesh is also the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”<sup>3</sup>

This is the final public message Jesus gives, and it’s during the last week of his life.

His mission is to redeem people from every ethnicity and walk of life from every struggle with sin. You are never too far gone to **not** come to Jesus.

But you need to know that there are only two paths: light and darkness, belief and unbelief, Jesus and Satan, forgiven and condemned, and Heaven and Hell. Which side are you on?

Jesus’s message is one of grace and mercy. He offers forgiveness through receiving him as your Savior. He offers you a reconciled relationship with the Father and eternal life with him forever.

But it only comes to those who stop trusting in themselves and who look to Jesus as their only hope. Jesus was lifted up on the cross, and he invites you to believe!

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<sup>3</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 453.