

GROUP LEADER GUIDE

Advent: Scripture in Hand but Savior not in Heart

John 5:37-40

ANNOUNCEMENTS:



Announcements:

- November 30- Family Integrated Worship
- December 13- 2nd Saturday
- December 17- A Banyard Carol

Check out the TJC Weekend Recap podcast for a more in-depth look at our sermons each week!

The podcast is available on all streaming platforms!

SERMON NOTES

Intro:

As a father with 4 boys and one more on the way next month, I know from first hand experience nothing lights up their world more than when I come down on their level and be a kid with them. When I become a kid like them and we play superheroes. When I get on their level and build forts, castles, sword fights, imaginary zombees, monsters, holding them on the wall and they crawl up like they are spiderman. In many ways our young kids want to be grown and big so bad. But what they really want is their grown and big parents to become little and childlike as they are. Take on their imagination. Take on their silliness. Take on their made up realities of dragons, super powers, and karate moves we learned in the latest action movie. Isn't that a great parenting tip? Parents work really hard to grow them, mature them, equip them so they will be ready when it's time to be big boys and girls. But as you are trying to get them to become big boys and girls just like you, don't forget to be childlike, and silly just like them. Take on their silliness. Take on their imagination.

As we are entering the advent season, we are celebrating one of the greatest moments of all history. The God of the universe taking on flesh. The word Advent means the arrival of something or someone. All throughout the Scriptures God has been present with His people. He arrived with Adam and Eve as He walked in the garden with them. He arrived with Abraham in his covenant with him. He arrived with Moses in the burning bush. He arrived at Jacob when they wrestled. But becoming flesh, spending 9 months in the womb of a woman, this was an arrival that triumphs every other time God has physically manifested Himself on this earth. God has sent angels to this earth to reveal His presence. He has sent Prophets to perform mighty miracles that revealed His presence. But His presence with us in the arrival of Jesus Christ is superior.

This is what separates us from every other religion. Every other religion has stories of man talking to God, experiencing God, watching their god perform miracles, but we say our religion is much more. Our faith is God becoming like us. God taking on our flesh, taking on our mind, and ultimately taking on our sin. As a father takes on the imagination of his kids to play with them, be like them, experience their joy, in a more concrete way, our God takes on the flesh of His creatures, to be like them, to live as they should, and experience the punishment they should have received.

Advent, the arrival of the long awaited Savior. The God of the Universe stepping out of Heaven becomes like us, mankind. There is a lot of glory in this story. But there is also a lot of tragedy in the advent account. When

Jesus walked this earth, became man, shared our experiences, and performed signs and miracles that declared His deity, His own people rejected Him. and what makes it worse, the very people who had the OT Scriptures in their hands which pointed to God's coming, God's arrival, are the very people who rejected Him. There are a lot of sinful and tragic things in this world. Here's a tragedy we don't often talk about. Not being able to recognize the very God who created you. Especially when the God who created you stepped out of Heaven to become like you. Here's what makes this tragedy even worse. When you have the Holy Scriptures in your presence, read it daily, hear it preached weekly, sing about it in worship services, talk about how much you love and know God, and then God walks right in front of you and you can't recognize Him.

I was reading proverbs 19 a few weeks ago and a verse made me laugh:

"The sluggard buries his hand in the dish and will not even bring it back to his mouth."

Proverbs 19:24

This proverb is using humor to paint the picture of how foolish it is to be lazy. It is saying this, look at the tragedy of a lazy person, he is so lazy that he has his hand in the dish, the bowl or plate is filled with food to nourish his body and give him strength. But he is so lazy he won't take his hand out the dish and feed himself so suffers from starvation. The person has everything he needs to feed himself, his hand is touching the food, he has access to food but he is too lazy to feed himself.

What's so crazy is God's people in the Gospel accounts had their hands on the OT Scriptures. They had everything they needed for their souls to be fed and nourished. Just like the lazy person in this proverb has access to food but doesn't eat. God's people had access to Him but never embraced Him. They never received nourishment from Him. Even when He was standing right in their faces, looking them right in the eye and saying, you search the Scriptures because you think it gives you eternal life, but it is I whom the Scriptures speak of. The Title of this message to kick off our Advent Series is this:

The Tragedy of holding the Scriptures in your Hand, but not Beholding the Savior in your Heart.

Here is the question we are going to be asking this morning. If Advent is the long awaited Savior, why were God's people not waiting for Him? If God's people had access to His Word, why didn't God have access in their hearts? If God's people could tell you from memory what happened from a span of thousands of years from Adam, to Abraham, to Moses, to David, to Isaiah to now, why could they not recognize His work when He performed miracles right in their face? And as we walk through God's people in the Gospel account and focus on how they missed the long awaited Savior while He was standing in their face, I pray we also look in the mirror and ask ourselves this question, is God standing right in front of my face and I am missing Him. Am I walking right passed God with my Bible in my hand looking for Him, waiting on Him, when in all reality, the true problem is not us waiting on God to appear, the true issue is God waiting on us to embrace the things He has already revealed to us.

It's a tragedy when we don't recognize God. It's even a greater tragedy when we have access to God's Word and it is in our hands and we still don't recognize Him. Sometimes we don't recognize Him because let's just face it, we are dumb and distracted, and He is right here and we are yelling, God, where are you, I'm waiting on you, and He's right here among us. But sometimes we don't recognize Him even though we have His Scriptures, right here in our presence, on our phones, on our book shelves, in our hands, and it's simply because it's not about holding God's Word, but it's about beholding the One God's Word speaks about. God's people had God's Word memorized. But there was never a moment the ones who rejected Christ cherished and adored God. So here's what some of God's people did: they looked Jesus right in the face, they saw His

miracles and teachings and instead of bowing down and worshiping Him, some accused Him of having a demon.

What we are going to do for the rest of our time is walk through three reasons why the Israelites who rejected Jesus were not prepared for the Advent of their Savior and as we walk through those reasons, we are going to see if we are falling into the same traps as them. Is God standing right in front of you trying to declare His glory and you are missing it? And even worse, is God standing right in front of you, and you are doing more than just missing Him, you are rejecting Him.

So here is the question, why did God's people who had the Old Testament Scripture that predicted the Messiah's arrival, miss and reject Him when He actually arrived?

1-They focused on what was not in Scripture, and in doing so, they missed the One who is the heart of Scripture.

Think about how much time was wasted for the religious leaders. To be a Pharisee, you had to have the law memorized. You know how difficult that would be to do? The Scribes and religious leaders rewrote the law thousands of times to preserve it. Every Jewish holiday the word was read and taught. And they still missed the heart of Scripture. And here's one main reason why they missed Jesus:

Their traditions overshadowed God's Revelation. When God revealed Himself they missed it because they were focused on the traditions they added in the law, instead of focusing on the law itself. In other words, they missed it because their true focus was not the Scripture, it was their traditions. John 7 is a perfect example of this. A few chapters earlier Jesus healed a man who was unable to walk and He did so on the Sabbath. We know that upset the leaders because they accused Him of working on the sabbath He told the man to pick up his mat and walk and the Law of Moses never said he couldn't pick up his mat and walk but the extra rules of the religious leaders said he couldn't.

Many of us know about the fences the leaders put around the law that caused burdens. Many believe the religious leaders did not start off the bad guys even though when Jesus walked this earth, it is obvious they were the bad guys in the gospel narratives. Their motives at first scholars believed were pure, they cared so much about not breaking God's laws that they put fences around it to make sure they were never broken

Here is a modern day example of a fence. My wife and I are the exact opposite when it comes to time. She gets anxious if she is not at least 15 minutes early to appointments. Not me, I don't know if anyone else is like this but I get anxious if I'm early. I hate just sitting twiddling my thumbs waiting. Of course this created many discussions in our marriage and here was a fence she created. If we were supposed to be somewhere at 10 am. What time do you think she would tell me we were really supposed to be there? Come on, we are supposed to be there at 9:45. This is a fence to protect us from not being late. Be there at 9:45 when we are really supposed to be there at 10.

The Jewish leaders did the same thing. They would add rules and instructions that God's Word never said but they did it with the intention to provide extra protection from breaking God's laws. Fences. But once again, many of you are familiar with these fences so when Jesus told the lame man to pick up his mat and walk, the law that he broke in that story was not laws from God concerning the Sabbath, but the laws their traditions added as fences.

But I want to point our direction to a tradition many of you may not be familiar with. John records this story of the healing on sabbath and then a few chapters later the Jewish feast of the booths led Jesus to go back to Jerusalem where He healed the man and He started teaching in the Temple. As Jesus is teaching, He is saying things that are upsetting the crowd and the crowds are going back and forth with Him, accusing Him of having a demon and you obviously can't go back and forth with Jesus and think you are going to win. Like you are not going to be able to get the last word from the one who created the universe using only His words. So Jesus is given it to the Jewish leaders and the crowd is looking around like, can this actually be Christ? Like last time someone talked like this to the leaders they immediately got arrested. So since Jesus did not get arrested at that time, they started to think, maybe He really is the awaited Savior. Look, even the leaders are afraid to arrest them. Maybe this is Him.

And watch this, watch what someone in the crowd yells

John 7:26-27

“And here he is, speaking openly, and they say nothing to him! Can it be that the authorities really know that this is the Christ? But we know where this man comes from, and when the Christ appears, no one will know where he comes from.””

Basically they say, wait a minute, this can't be the Messiah, this Jesus guy is from Nazareth and remember, we aren't supposed to know where the Messiah comes from. Since we know He was born in Nazareth, case closed, not the Messiah. So here's the question, where did they get that idea from? Why did they think no one was supposed to know where the Messiah comes from? Is that in the Scriptures? The answer is no. Here is where many NT scholars believe this thought came from. There is a verse in the writings of Enoch which is not considered inspired or written by God that contained historical accounts and traditions about demons and angels and other supernatural topics. So these writings were written many many years after the OT Prophets who had the authority to actually write Scripture which is why it should never be looked at as authoritative. It's okay to have written tradition and historical accounts that help you shape how you see the world. But it is not okay for these traditions to shape how you see God, because the only thing that should shape how you view God is His Word. So in the writings of Enoch they heard this:

For from the beginning the Son of Man was hidden and the Most High preserved him in the presence of His might. They took that idea that is not authoritative and looked at Jesus, the Son of Man and said, no, this can't be the Messiah, remember our traditions say His beginning is supposed to be hidden, we know His beginning. Nazareth, the son of Joseph.

The question is never what does our traditions say about God, the question is what does the Holy Scriptures say about our God. Micah 5:2 gives us this answer

“But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. 3 Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel. 4 And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth.”

Church, if we get our theology from the local news, it doesn't matter if we have God's Word in our hands and here it preached regularly. If we get our doctrine from the progressive leaders of this world, who cares if we have had Scripture memorized since childhood. If we let the traditions of our society dictate how we view our savior we won't be able to recognize our Savior if He is standing right in front us. It's not about the Truth you hold in your hand, it's about the Truth you behold in your heart. Micah tells us the ruler of Israel will be born in Bethlehem and church, where was Jesus born? Bethlehem.

Not only did they let tradition overshadow Scripture. They didn't even properly investigate Jesus. Jesus was raised in Nazareth, but He was born in Bethlehem. Let's move to the second point.

2 They wanted God's power to work for them, but not God's grace to work in them.

They craved miracles, but resisted repentance and transformation. Anyone will say yes to blessings. But not everyone will say yes to repentance. They wanted to be blessed by God but were not willing to turn to God. They wanted to be blessed by miracles that came from God but couldn't even recognize that it was in fact God who performed the miracles. They wanted food that filled their stomachs but not food that filled their souls. They wanted to see bread increased but they did not want to see their sins decreased. They heard about Jesus turning water into wine but they were not interested in how to turn from their sins. The blind could see, the deaf could hear, the lame could walk but they could not spiritually see, hear, or walk with God. Think about how they respond to Jesus in John chapter 8. Jesus says the truth will set you free. They answered Him like this, set free, what you mean get set free, we aren't slaves, our father is Abraham. We are not enslaved into anyone.

What they were telling Jesus was this, we don't need truth, we don't need freedom because we are already holy and made right. And what does Jesus say in return? Your father is the Devil, and you are from him and enslaved to sin. See, when you don't feel like you need saving from God, you won't ask for it. **Church, when the long awaited Savior arrived, it didn't mean anything to them because they thought they already arrived at their holiness.** They were the Jews, they held the teachings of Moses, they were born from the loins of Abraham. They had the torah memorized and attended all the festivals and they fasted and abstained from pork and they tithed and sacrificed. Freedom, we don't need freedom. But water into wine, multiplying bread and fish, sign me up for that.

Once again, anyone will say yes to blessings, not everyone will say yes to repentance. Blessings, signs, and wonders, that's fun, supernatural, intriguing. Repentance, that's hard, requires humility and discipline, and by the way, why repent when I have already arrived at holiness. But watch this, this is crazy important. But even them experiencing God's power got old to them. Jesus healed the lame and gave sight to the blind. But He did it on the sabbath which broke their traditions so they developed a plan to get rid of Him.

This is a really important church. It's a very dangerous place to be when you want God's power in your life to do signs, but don't want God's grace in your life to be transformed. Because if your life is not transformed by God, you will eventually be sick at watching God's transforming work in the lives of others. When you watch God work externally in the world, it is supposed to lead you to want God to do work internally inside you. If you reject the work He wants to do inside you, you will also find yourself rejecting the work He does outside you. Which is why Jesus heals a man who was born blind in John chapter 9, but since He did it on a Sabbath, they accused Him of being a sinner. God's work outside of you is supposed to encourage you to submit to the work He can do inside of you. Reject what He wants to do inside, you will be bitter and hate the work He does in the lives of others.

Which leads us to our final point

3. They were waiting for a Messiah of their own making, not the Messiah who made them.

They desired a conqueror, not a Savior; a throne, not a cross. You want to know what is a 100% success rate to look at God right in the face and not recognize Him? It's to have your own version of who God is that doesn't match the version He has given for Himself. Show me a man who has their own idea of who God is and I will show you a man who won't be able to recognize God even when He is standing right in front of Him. You know this church, one of the main reasons why we have different versions of who God is because we accept the parts of God that resonate most with us, and reject the parts of God that make us uncomfortable. This is progressive theology at its finest. This is the modern Christian at its finest.

And if we were to be honest, there are some parts about God that we often don't like too. The parts that strip us from control. The parts of God that tell us when we are weak, His strengths shine in us. We hate the idea that our God actually prefers us to be weak and crippled. The Jews in the Gospel also don't like this. Why do you think some of the Jews they wanted to crown Jesus as King but did not like the idea of Jesus dying on the Cross? They tried to make Him their king multiple times. Why? Kingship declares strength, might, glory, power. But the cross declares weakness, crippling, death, shame. They liked the idea of a Messiah who is King to free them from the Roman government, let's make Israel Great again like it was with David. Now that's a Messiah I can get behind. His strength means we are strong.

But our Messiah is more than the Son of Man who rules and has authority over all. Our Messiah is the Son of suffering. The one who took on the cross and died. The one who was stripped naked and was beaten. The one who was forced to walk to carry His own cross stumbling, broken, and bleeding. This is what they missed.

They understood the Messiah and His connection to Daniel 7. But they did not understand the Messiah and His connection to Isaiah 53. **Listen to Daniel 7:**

“I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. 14 And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.”

Now also listen to Isaiah 53

“3 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. 4 Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. 5 But he was pierced 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. 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. 7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.”

Isaiah 53:4-7 ESV

They had enough room in their understanding for the Messiah to have dominion like Daniel 7, but they didn't have room for the Messiah to also be the son of suffering. Do you have enough room in your mind to accept

God for who He is? All of it. Not just some of it, all of it. All of Him. can you behold all of Him, not just some of Him?

Our God is a mighty warrior, the Lord of Host that will command armies to fight for His people, never let anything happen to His people. But He is also a God that will let His people experience affliction, pain, and suffering. Our God is the giver of life and taker of life. He's both. He blesses dreams and crushes dreams. He opens doors and closes doors. Are we willing to behold all of Him? He lets some relationships crumble and restores others. There are some things He will redeem on this side of eternity and there are other things He will let stay broken until we enter into the new heavens and new earth. Can we still be like Job and say blessed be the name of the Lord? If we can't, when the name of the Lord is made manifest in our lives, we may miss Him. we may even reject Him.

God is the maker of man, man is not the maker of God. Show me an atheist and I will show you a person whose idea of what God should be, doesn't fit the reality of God. show me a person who used to be a Christian but is no longer a Christian. I will show you a person whose idea of Jesus does not match the reality of Jesus. Show me a person who disbelieves the Bible is true, and I will show you a person who thinks their logic is greater than the logic of Scripture. Show me a person who believes some of God but not all of God, and I will show you a person who would rather look up into the Heavens and see a mirror, instead of look up into the Heavens and see their Maker.

The reason why many of God's people were not prepared for Advent, the long awaited Savior, was because they wanted the Messiah to look like them, instead of them repenting and transforming into looking like the Messiah. But once again, the tragedy of Advent. Jesus took the form of a servant in order to become us, look like us, take on our flesh and sin. And even though we are supposed to look like Him, He chose to look like us. And they still missed Him. But once again, the glory of Advent. God knew we can't truly become like Him until He first became like us. Lived the life we could not live, and died the death we should have deserved. The tragedy of Advent actually makes it more glorious. I pray we can rejoice in this glory that comes from our Triune God. And I pray we are prepared for the second coming, the second Advent of Christ. And until He comes again, I pray we behold Him in such a way that we are able to see Him now. Of course we won't be able to experience Him fully, but through the Holy Spirit, He has given us access to experience Him enough to live an abundant life in this broken world.

For the Christians in the room, don't be lazy like Proverbs who have access to the bread of life but too lazy to go to Him.

If you have never experienced saving faith in Jesus Christ, I pray today you do for the first time and surrender everything to Him and accept everything that comes from Him.

PRAY



- How was your week? What is one thing you're grateful for and one thing that challenged you?
- How did you grow in obedience to Christ over the last week?
- Where did you go to share the gospel or have a spiritual conversation with someone?
- What is a sin you have been struggling with that you need to repent of?



- **REVIEW**
 - Read John 5: 37-40.
 - Additional Reading:
 - John 7:26-27
 - Micah 5:2-4
 - Daniel 7:13-14
 - Isaiah 53:4-7

- **DISCUSS**

1. **God getting on our level in the incarnation:**

How does this picture of Advent deepen your gratitude for Jesus becoming like us?

2. **Holding Scripture but missing the Savior:**

Where do you see the danger in your own life of reading, hearing, or even teaching Scripture—yet missing the Person it points to, and how can you guard your heart against that drift? (John 5:39; Gospel accounts)

3. **Access to spiritual nourishment but refusing to eat:**

In what practical ways can believers today resemble the sluggard of Proverbs 19:24—surrounded by spiritual resources yet not truly feeding on Christ—and what rhythms help you move from access to actual nourishment? (Proverbs 19:24)

4. **Traditions overshadowing God's revelation:**

Where do you see Christians (or yourself) tempted to let traditions, culture, news, or spiritual assumptions shape views of Jesus more than Scripture, and what helps us return to the authority of God's Word alone? (John 7:26–27; Micah 5:2–4)

5. **Surface conclusions instead of Scriptural investigation:**

Like the crowd who dismissed Jesus because they thought they knew His origins, where are you tempted to make quick judgments about Jesus' work in your life without slowing down to examine it through Scripture, prayer, and community? (John 7:26–27; Micah 5:2–4)

6. **Wanting God's power without wanting His transformation:**

Where do you notice a desire for God's blessings, protection, or miracles but resistance to repentance, obedience, or surrender—and how does this tension show up in daily life? (John 8; John 9)

7. Religious pride blinding us to our true condition:

How can religious activity, family background, or moral behavior create a false sense of security—like those in John 8—and what helps us stay needy, humble, and dependent before Christ? (John 8)

8. Loving the glory of Daniel 7 but resisting the suffering of Isaiah 53:

Where do you find it hardest to embrace the suffering, weakness, and humility of Jesus, and how might welcoming that side of Christ transform the way you face trials or disappointments? (Daniel 7:13–14; Isaiah 53:3–7)

9. Being surrounded by Scripture yet missing Jesus in front of us:

As you enter Advent, where might Jesus already be present or at work in your life—through conviction, opportunities, relationships, or His Word—that you’ve been overlooking or resisting, and what would it look like to behold Him afresh? (John 5:39)

LOOK AHEAD



- **BUILD UP | SEND OUT**

- How are you making yourself known at church this week?
- How are you growing to know Christ better this week?
- How are you making Christ known this week?

- **PRAYER**

- **Pray over any request from your group members.**
- **Pray for our team:** Scott Marlow- Directional Elder
- **Pray for our replanters:** Christ's Fellowship
- **Pray for our short-term teams:**
 - Rome Team departing on November 14, 2025
- **Pray for our long-term units on the mission field:**
 - The Wilsons
 - The Grays
 - The Browns
- **Pray for the unreached.** Want to keep up with Unreached People Groups? Download the Unreached of the Day App <https://joshuaproject.net/pray/unreachedoftheday/app>