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***John 12:37-43***

But despite all the miraculous signs Jesus had done, most of the people still did not believe in him. This is exactly what Isaiah the prophet had predicted: "Lord, who has believed our message? To whom has the Lord revealed his powerful arm?" But the people couldn't believe, for as Isaiah also said, "The Lord has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts—so that their eyes cannot see, and their hearts cannot understand, and they cannot turn to me and have me heal them."

Isaiah was referring to Jesus when he said this, because he saw the future and spoke of the Messiah's glory. Many people did believe in him, however, including some of the Jewish leaders. But they wouldn't admit it for fear that the Pharisees would expel them from the synagogue. For they loved human praise more than the praise of God.

Now as we get started tonight, I have to warn you that this is a very complicated set of scriptures but don't worry, the subject matter is dealt with across the Bible. As such, we are going to have to look at some key passages in Isaiah, Romans, and Psalms in order to fully understand this passage. As difficult as it may be, this is actually a good passage for us to learn how important it is to let what is easy in the Bible always interpret what is difficult and not the other way around. This is one of the key principles of Biblical interpretation that if you stray from it you will easily be confused.

On its own this is a difficult passage and evokes some very strong emotion and even judgment toward God. A lot of people's first reaction when they finish a

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surface level read of this text is something as follows: how could God hold the Jews accountable for their unbelief when He is the one who is actively hardening their hearts and blinding their eyes? How can a “loving” God do that; that’s not fair! We knew it all along; God just plays games with people and that’s why I don’t want to believe in Him or become one of those “Christians.”

People often say such things as if they are really in a position to know what is or is not fair and what is or is not just and loving. In so doing they arrogantly position themselves in such a way that they attempt to sit in judgment over God—the creator of all things. Can you imagine the audacity?

In order to understand a difficult passage like this, and not fall into the trap of climbing up on the proverbial throne making errant judgments about God, it is good to know something about God’s character and His nature. This should be the first filter through which we attempt to interpret this passage. *Psalm 9:8; 67:4; 96:10, 13; 98:9* all say that in His faithfulness, the Lord will judge all people fairly and with righteousness. And according to *Psalm 97:2* righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne. If that’s the case, then we know that this passage is not dealing with an indiscriminate act on the part of God to keep people from believing in Him. We know that whatever “hardening their hearts and blinding their eyes” means it is not an arbitrary reaction of anger or hostility on the part of God; rather, it is all perfectly in alignment with His righteousness, justice and innate fairness.

With that as our first filter, the main clue for understanding this passage is in *verses 37-38*: “But despite all the miraculous signs Jesus had done, most of the people still did not believe in him. This is exactly what Isaiah the prophet had predicted: “Lord, who has believed our message? To whom has the Lord revealed his powerful arm?”” No one had done more supernatural signs in the presence of

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so many, including resurrecting a man who had been dead for 4-days; yet, they still refused to believe that Jesus was the Christ. In the Greek the verb tense is emphatic—they actively chose on their own (no one made them choose) to not only not believe but to continue in their unbelief. God did not make them choose and neither did any man; they made the choice on their own and they were not going to repent of their choice. The path they had chosen and would continue to choose is the pathway that leads to the darkness of unbelief.

John tells us that their behavior was actually a fulfillment of a prophecy in the book of Isaiah. Let's turn to Isaiah 6.

***Isaiah 6:1-4; 8-13***

It was in the year King Uzziah died that I saw the Lord. He was sitting on a lofty throne, and the train of his robe filled the Temple. Attending him were mighty seraphim, each having six wings. With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. They were calling out to each other, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Heaven's Armies! The whole earth is filled with his glory! Their voices shook the Temple to its foundations, and the entire building was filled with smoke."...

Then I heard the Lord asking, "Whom should I send as a messenger to this people? Who will go for us?" I said, "Here I am. Send me." And he said, "Yes, go, and say to this people, 'Listen carefully, but do not understand. Watch closely, but learn nothing.' Harden the hearts of these people. Plug their ears and shut their eyes. That way, they will not see with their eyes, nor hear with their ears, nor understand with their hearts and turn to me for healing."

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Then I said, "Lord, how long will this go on?" And he replied, "Until their towns are empty, their houses are deserted, and the whole country is a wasteland; until the Lord has sent everyone away, and the entire land of Israel lies deserted. If even a tenth—a remnant—survive, it will be invaded again and burned. But as a terebinth or oak tree leaves a stump when it is cut down, so Israel's stump will be a holy seed."

Isaiah was given a rare view of the glory of Jehovah. The angels of heaven are around His throne declaring His holiness. This is important for we must understand that this next proclamation regarding the nation of Israel, given to Isaiah in the form of a prophecy, stems from His holiness and therefore this declaration is perfect and founded in righteousness. There is no unfairness, injustice, or questionable indictment that could ever be levied against the holiness of God—it is perfect!

Standing alone however these words do seem so harsh but they don't stand alone. We have to understand the words in this passage in light of the people that are being spoken about all that has been going on in their relationship with God. We must understand that the Jews were a people who continued to willingly harden their hearts against the Lord no matter how much He reached out to them. They just refused to let Him be their God.

### ***Isaiah 65:1-5***

"I was ready to respond, but no one asked for help. I was ready to be found, but *no one was looking for me*. I said, 'Here I am, here I am!' to a nation that did not

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call on my name. *All day long I opened my arms to a rebellious people.* But they follow their own evil paths and their own crooked schemes.

All day long they insult me to my face by worshiping idols in their sacred gardens. They burn incense on pagan altars. At night they go out among the graves, worshiping the dead. They eat the flesh of pigs and make stews with other forbidden foods. Yet they say to each other, Don't come too close or you will defile me! I am holier than you!' These people are a stench in my nostrils, an acrid smell that never goes away.

If you can imagine, God always called to the Jews to come to Him and find their life in Him. And no matter how much they refused to even listen to His voice, He was always there with open arms. They did not care that He wanted to give them His life, they just spit on His love indulging themselves in all manner of evil and wickedness; of course, all the while cloaking themselves in religious pretense. Yet, notwithstanding the fact that He was ready to be found no one was looking for Him; no one answered His call. They just followed their own wicked paths. So what I believe that we see happening in the prophecy in *Isaiah 6* is just that God finally decided to let the Jews walk the path they had continually chosen and would continually choose—the path of darkness and personal destruction.

In a lot of ways, this prophecy mirrors the message Jesus spoke in *John 12 verses 25-28* “Those who love their life in this world will lose it” and that “all those who want to be my disciples must come and follow me, because my servants must be where I am.” If you remember that study, Jesus made it clear that if you walk down any other path than the one the Father has established for your life, you will be actively choosing to destroy your life—and eventually you will lose it.

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In other words, the Jews continued to reject God's provision for their life, they continued to refuse to tune their ear to His cry, and they absolutely despised the path that He had established for them. And, because in His foresight He knew that is the choice they would continue to make, He said: "ok, that is the path you want to walk then go ahead walk it, I won't try and stop you any longer." Basically, the Lord just decided to confirm the decision they had already made and seal their fate in the choice that He knew they would continue to make. He was not going to force them to accept Him and He knew that no matter how long He held His arms open they would never come to Him. After all, look at the track record. There were 19 kings over Israel and all but one was absolutely evil. There were 20 kings over Judah (not including David and Solomon) and only 8 were good and even then only partly good. Only 2 (Hezekiah and Josiah) were really good.

Further, when you are studying the Bible it is important to never forget that God is not limited by human parameters such as time; rather, He exists within time and outside of time all at the same time. So sometimes He is talking to us from within our perspective of time and sometimes He is talking to us from His perfect view outside of time and His ability to see and know all things from the beginning to end. And being El Roi—the God who sees—He knows each and every choice that we are going to make and how we will respond to Him—absolutely nothing surprises God!

A perfect example of all this in action is found in the book of Exodus in the story of Pharaoh and Moses. As you know the Lord used Moses to predict 10 catastrophic disasters which the Lord would bring on Egypt as a way to convince Pharaoh to let the Israelites, who were enslaved in Egypt, go free. If you read the text of this story very carefully you will find an amazing pattern. When Moses first came to Pharaoh he told Him that the Lord God of Israel says, "Let my people go."

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Pharaoh responded by saying: “I don’t know the Lord, and I will not let Israel go” (*Exodus 5:2*). Then during Moses’ next visit he did a supernatural feat in the presence of Pharaoh. He threw his staff on the ground and it turned into a snake. Pharaoh was not too impressed since his own magicians did the same thing. But all of a sudden Moses’ snake swallowed all the others. This was definitely freaky but we are told that Pharaoh’s heart remained hard and stubborn and he refused to listen, just as the Lord predicted (*Exodus 7:13*).

Then God unleashed the first 5 plagues: the plague of blood, the plague of frogs, the plagues of gnats, the plague of flies, and the plague which killed all the livestock of Egypt but left the livestock of the Israelites untouched. Prior to each plague Moses would come and talk to Pharaoh and each and every time he refused to listen to the voice of the Lord and stubbornly hardened his own heart. Pharaoh’s pride was so huge that he could never even contemplate relenting to this so called god of the slaves. He did not care if his own people suffered and even died, he was not going to bend, period! Pharaoh ruled Egypt; he was their god and that’s the way it was going to be.

But then something interesting happened. Beginning with the 6<sup>th</sup> plague through the 10<sup>th</sup> we see a very unique shift in the text and we are told that it was the Lord who hardened Pharaoh’s heart (*Exodus 9-11*). The Lord had given Pharaoh 7 opportunities to repent, 6 supernatural acts, 5 of which were intense plagues and still he was not going to budge. So the Lord said fine, have it your way; if you want to reject me that badly your rejection is accepted and now sealed—so let it be written so let it be done.

This is exactly the same spiritual principle we see at work in Isaiah 6. If a person or a people group chooses to harden their heart to the Lord, refuses to listen to His voice, and over and over again, rejects His provision for their freedom and their

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life, eventually He will let them walk in the decision they have made and essentially release them to the darkness of their hearts such that they cannot see and they cannot hear (for no one can see or hear without the help of God). Simply said, there is a point where the Lord will indulge men and their choices, He will no longer restrain the work of the enemy in their life, and He will no longer remove the stumbling blocks to ones faith.

Let's consider for a moment what God does do in His attempts to call us to be in relationship with Him. This will help us understand with a little more clarity this phrase: "The Lord has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts—so their eyes cannot see, and their hearts cannot understand."

*Psalm 53:2-3* says: "God looks down from heaven on the entire human race; he looks to see if there is even one with real understanding, one who seeks for God. But no, all have turned away from God; all have become corrupt. No one does good, not even one!" This is our natural spiritual condition—dark, empty, and void of any light (we see a picture of this in *Genesis 1:2*). The Lord's Spirit then comes along side our darkness to reveal to us the light of Jesus, the light of creation, the glory of Jehovah. He brings us illumination to not only see Him but He even gives us the will and the power to seek Him, to find Him, and to follow Him, if we were to so choose.

In the Bible we see that from beginning to end the work of salvation in our life (both our knowing and experiencing God) is attributed to the work of the Spirit. You might want to study the following scriptures: *Philippians 1:11; 2:13; 1 Kings 8:58; Ezra 1:5; Isaiah 26:12; 2 Chronicles 30:12; James 4:6; 2 Corinthians 3:5-6; Jeremiah 32:38-42; Galatians 5:5, 16, 22, 25; Ephesians 5:18*. These are just a few examples of how by God's mercy and grace He provides us even the very desire to turn to Him and acknowledge Him in the first place.



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Therefore, when God chooses to finally indulge our rejection of Him, He literally just stops this work and leaves a person to their own devices—to the total darkness that naturally lurks within their hearts; thus, they cannot see and they cannot hear. In fact, they have no clue of how to turn to the Lord for healing. Do you understand how this works? It's not so much that the Lord is causing the blindness or the deafness; He just stops bringing the light and He stops speaking leaving people to their own natural condition of being unable to spiritually see or hear the truth.

Just thinking of our natural condition without God should help you understand how great God's mercy and grace is toward those of you who do believe. If it was not for the ongoing *active* work of the Holy Spirit bringing illumination into your life, you would have never even been able to see the Lord or hear His voice calling you to be in relationship with Him. That is why, like the angels in heaven, we should be crying out: "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of Hosts—the whole earth is filled with His glory." On our own we are capable of nothing; it all comes from Him—every bit of it. And every time you look in the mirror, or every time you meet another believer, you should think of the fact that the glory, the mercy, the compassion, and the love of the Lord is demonstrated on this earth merely by the fact that you (and them) have a relationship with the living God.

Now ***Romans 10:16-18*** tell us that "The message of God's creation has gone out to everyone, and its words to all the world." "But not everyone welcomes the Good news, for Isaiah the prophet said, "Lord, who has believed our message?" So God has made Himself known to everyone. His Spirit has made the presence and power of God known to all of humanity, but there are those who refuse to believe God and continue to reject His Word no matter how many times God calls to them and says: "Here I am, here I am." After a point, however, God says fine, if that is the

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way you want it, you can go your own way. He then pulls back and let's them experience the full weight of their own decision; a decision that He knows they will continually make regardless of any further attempts on His part to call them to His side.

So this is the condition in which we find the Jews in Jesus' day. A condition that the New Testament tells us will exist until the end of the age when we will finally see a holy remnant of Jews who grow from the "stump," referred to in *Isaiah 6:13*, and follow the Lamb (Jesus) wherever He goes. *Revelation 14:4* tells us that this remnant will be purchased from among the people on the earth as a special offering to God and to the Lamb. This remnant was prophesied about in *Isaiah 1:9* and explained in *Romans 9-12*.

In addition, just to show us the great extent of God's mercy, *Romans 11* tells us definitively that God has not rejected His people, the Jews. Even during the time of this spiritual darkness where God has withdrawn from illuminating the hearts of the Jewish people, in His kindness, God is still saving a few who have been chosen to be recipients of His free mercy and undeserved grace. God always knows those who will be willing and He always draws them to Himself—or as Jesus said: "I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me" (*John 10:14*).

The entire way God is handling the Jews is even more beautiful and precious than you can imagine. God is actually using the fact that He is illuminating the hearts of the Gentiles as a way to make the Jews jealous—to provoke their desire to not be left out of what God is doing. He knows exactly what their hearts are like and what they will need to once again turn to Him. He knows that ultimately they will be fed up with God blessing the Gentiles and they will once again want to have His blessing in their lives. At that point of time, they will turn to Him and this holy remnant will be redeemed unto the Lord. See *Romans 11*.

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God is so compassionate, so loving, merciful and just. When I read about His amazing plan I just want to fall on my knees in awe and wonder. Especially when I look at my own life and how I have behaved; I am amazed that He even puts up with me much less pursues me. But God's love is unfathomable and His intentions toward our life are nothing but perfect; and, yet, we still refuse His wisdom and refuse to follow His path. We harden our heart and stubbornly choose our own path that leads only to darkness and destruction. We are absolutely ridiculous; and, yet, God's love is so ridiculously patient and kind.

Remember, He will respect your choice. Please don't harden your heart any further. Relent and come to His loving arms. He wants you; all of you! He wants to pour His love into your life so that you can experience Him now and forever.

Now let's get back to the prophecy in Isaiah 6 and John 12.

### ***John 12:41***

Isaiah was referring to Jesus when he said this, because he saw the future and spoke of the Messiah's glory.

Do you understand what John is saying? This is radical. John declares definitively that Jesus is Jehovah. Remember the first part of the vision in **verses 1-4**: "I saw the Lord. He was sitting on a lofty throne, and the train of his robe filled the Temple. Attending him were mighty seraphim, each having six wings. With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. They were calling out to each other, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Heaven's Armies! The whole earth is filled with his glory! Their voices shook the Temple to its foundations, and the entire building was filled with smoke."

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This is an amazing vision of glory and power and is a sight which is incomparable. And, yet, John tells us that Isaiah was seeing Jesus in His glory and he was not seeing the Father. John's interpretation is not only inspired by the Spirit of God but is also consistent with the whole of scripture. In *John 1:18* we are told that: no one has ever seen God except for his only Son, who is himself God. *John 6:46* says that no one has seen the Father except the Son. *1st Timothy 6:16* says that God dwells in unapproachable light and no man has seen Him. *1 John 4:12* says that (specifically in reference to the Father) no one has seen God at any time. And finally, *Exodus 33:20* says that no one can see His face and live. And since Isaiah did not die when He saw this vision, and no man has seen the Father, we know that this vision of Jehovah's glory is a vision of none other than the Messiah's glory; a vision of Jesus our Lord. I don't know about you, but I think that totally rocks.

### ***John 12:42-43***

Many people did believe in him, however, including some of the Jewish leaders. But they wouldn't admit it for fear that the Pharisees would expel them from the synagogue. For they loved human praise more than the praise of God.

These 2 verses confirm what I was saying before. Even though most did not believe (actually refused to believe), God still faithfully preserved, even during that day, a remnant who did. Now it is sad that they were crippled by their fear of the religious leaders and having their social and religious life disrupted, but it just again shows us the depth of God's mercy and grace. He does not ask you to have it all together before you come to Him or even after you come to Him. He says come

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as you are and I will begin my work from that point. So although this statement is horribly sad in that they loved human praise more than the praise of God, it is also a testament to God's gentle and merciful love.

***John 12:44-50***

Jesus shouted to the crowds, "If you trust me, you are trusting not only me, but also God who sent me. For when you see me, you are seeing the one who sent me. I have come as a light to shine in this dark world, so that all who put their trust in me will no longer remain in the dark. I will not judge those who hear me but don't obey me, for I have come to save the world and not to judge it. But all who reject me and my message will be judged on the day of judgment by the truth I have spoken. I don't speak on my own authority. The Father who sent me has commanded me what to say and how to say it. And I know his commands lead to eternal life; so I say whatever the Father tells me to say."

As we move into the last days of Jesus' life, we find that He starts to lay it all out and leaves little to the imagination. Here He is makes it clear, as He said in ***John 10:30***, that He and the Father are one. "For God in all His fullness was pleased to live in Christ" (***Colossians 1:19***). Moreover, the Father not only lived in Jesus but gave Jesus the words He was to say. And more than that, He told Jesus how He was to express those words. So even in tone and inflection, Jesus was guided by the Father so that His Words would be heard exactly as the Father wanted them to be heard. Notice, however, that Jesus says that because He knows the Father's words lead to eternal life He chooses to say what the Father wants Him to say. This tells us that Jesus was not an automaton, the Father did not force

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Him to obey, but like every man, woman, and child, He had choice and He *always* chose to submit to the Father's wisdom and His will.

This is very interesting to me because this is to be ultimately what we our lives in the Spirit are to be like. True Christianity is not about our behaving like a Christian but Christ living in us. When someone meets you, yes, they are having an encounter with you, but they are also to be having an unmistakable encounter with Jesus living in you. This is what Paul was communicating to us when He wrote: "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me" (*Galatians 2:20*). Thus, in the same way that Jesus lived in relationship to the Father, we are to live in relationship to Him. In *John 6:57* He said: "I live by the power of the living Father who sent me; in the same way, those who partake of me will live because of me." It is His desire for our lives and it is possible!

Notice also that Jesus says that those who reject the light and remain in darkness will be judged by the truth—the Word of the Lord to which they have been exposed. The idea here is that they *volitionally* bring judgment on themselves. The Messiah is not going to need to judge; rather, their rejection of His Word will be the deciding factor of their eternity. Jesus came as a light to shine in this dark world and His light has been manifest to all (remember the passage we read in *Romans 10:16-18* which tells us that "The message of God's creation has gone out to everyone, and its words to all the world"); thus, everyone has a choice to not "remain" in darkness. But if they continue to choose to reject the light of the Lord, God will eventually let them go and let them walk the path of their choice and they will be judged by the very truth that they rejected.

This is very powerful. God will not force His love on you but He is calling you with open arms to come to Him and receive His life—an eternal life that begins here and now. The Spirit is bringing illumination. It's for you, but it's for you to choose.

Tonight, you have heard the Words of truth so I encourage you to no longer harden your hearts and I implore you to relent of your stubborn control over your own life. The Words that you have heard tonight can either lead you to eternal life or they will act as your judge. Please open yourself up to His free mercy and grace; turn to Him and let Him heal you.

Let's Pray