

May 25, 2025 by Steve Brandon



Seeing Isn't Always Believing

John 12:37-43

1. They did not believe (verses 37-38)
2. They could not believe (verses 39-41)
3. Many authorities “believed” (verses 42-43)
4. Do you believe? (verse 36)

I want to tell you about Galileo Galilei (1564-1642). He was a great scientist in the 16th and 17th centuries. He was an engineer and physicist. Perhaps what made him most famous was his work in astronomy, as he has been called, “The Father of Observational Astronomy.”

Galileo made some major improvements on the quality of telescopes in his day. On November 30, 1609, Galileo aimed his new telescope at the Moon. With the increased magnification, he deduced that the uneven waning of the shadows were caused by lunar mountains and craters. Until Galileo, many thought that the moon was a translucent and perfect sphere. Galileo’s observations proved otherwise.^[1]

A few months later (on January 7, 1610), he aimed his telescope at Jupiter. In viewing Jupiter, he thought that he was viewing Jupiter and three stars. Over the next few nights, he noticed that these “stars” were moving, one of them even disappearing behind Jupiter. Over the next few days as he thought about this, he concluded (rightly) that they weren’t “stars” at all, but were moons that orbited Jupiter.^[2] Such a discovery brought with it a controversy, as Aristotelian cosmology held that all heavenly bodies should circle the Earth. There shouldn’t be any that circle Jupiter.

Many astronomers and philosophers were not convinced of Galileo’s claims. Some scientists even came to look through Galileo’s telescope. Some of them were still not convinced, claiming that some of the stars in the sky appeared double in the telescope, and that his observations of Jupiter were, therefore, flawed. But Galileo kept at it.

By the next fall, Galileo had enough time to observe all of the phases of Venus, which were similar to the Moon.^[3] With all of these observations, in hand, Galileo proposed a model of our solar system that put the sun in the center, not the earth. This was contrary to the belief of the many of his time, especially of those of the Roman Catholic Church in his day. With his declarations, a commission of cardinals began to investigate Galileo, claiming that his beliefs were “attempting to reinterpret the Bible, which was seen as a violation of the Council of Trent and looked dangerously like Protestantism.”^[4]

Galileo even went to Rome, the heart of the Catholic Church, to defend his views. In February 1616, the church commission declared that Galileo’s view of heliocentrism (which puts the sun in the center of the solar system) is “foolish and absurd in philosophy, and formally heretical since it explicitly contradicts in many places the sense of Holy Scripture.”^[5] On February 26, 1616, Galileo was called to the residence of Cardinal Bellarmine, who ordered him “to abandon completely the opinion that the sun stands still at the center of the world and the Earth moves, and henceforth not to hold, teach, or defend it any way whatever, either orally or in writing.”^[6]

Galileo essentially remained quiet for more than a decade. But he was working on a book, which he published 14 years later (in 1632). The book was entitled, “Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems,” in which two characters debate the issue of whether the earth or the sun is at the center of our solar system. Of course Galileo’s beliefs came out as the heliocentric argument won the day in the book.

Galileo was summoned to Rome. He came in February of 1633, and was put on trial. The sentence was pronounced in three parts: He was found to be “suspect of heresy” (though not formally called a “heretic”). He was sentenced to prison, which was commuted the next day to house arrest, under which he remained for the rest of his life. His book was banned, along with all other future publications, although years later, he did manage to get other works published.^[7]

I bring up the unbelief of Galileo’s day because it so perfectly pictures what is happening in our text this morning. Because, you had people in Galileo’s day presented with scientific observations and rational arguments that the sun was in the center of the solar system, and they didn’t believe. Instead, they used their authority structures to punish him and to silence him.

In the days of Jesus, there were many who saw the signs that he had done, but they didn’t believe. They ended up killing him upon the cross. Look at how our text begins:

John 12:37

Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him,

The title of my message this morning is, “Seeing Isn’t Always Believing.” This is what we see in our text. We see unbelief, even though the people saw the signs that Jesus did.

I believe that this message should comfort your soul, that as you have opportunity to speak with others about Jesus, you may present the

gospel perfectly, you may give all of the correct answers, you may share with others from a life of integrity, and those you speak with may still not believe. If people saw the signs of Jesus and still didn't believe, please know that there will be plenty of people who will hear about Jesus from your lips, who will not believe, because "Seeing Isn't Always Believing."

What happened in the days of Jesus also happened in the days of Galileo. Lest you think that we are beyond that sort of thing, please know that it is still happening today. There are those today who believe that the earth is flat. Despite all scientific evidence to the contrary, they don't believe. It's not about evidence. It's about a persuasion of the heart that people will simply refuse to believe.

With that as an introduction, let's read our text:

John 12:37-43

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.

Anyway, let's look at our first point this morning.

1. They did not believe (verses 37-38)

I'm simply grabbing this from verse 37.

John 12:37

Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him,

The emphasis in this verses comes in those three words, "so many signs." The demonstration of the power and authority and deity of Jesus was there for all to see. Jesus did these signs, "before them," for all to see. And yet, they did not believe.

Can you imagine, seeing the water turned into wine (chapter 2), seeing the royal official's son being healed with a word (chapter 4), seeing the lame man walk again (chapter 5), seeing Jesus feed the 5,000 (chapter 6), seeing Jesus walk on the water (chapter 6), seeing Jesus give sight to the blind man (chapter 9), seeing Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead (chapter 11), and still not believing in Jesus?

These signs were only the signs that John writes about in his gospel. Jesus performed other signs before them, which are not written in the gospel of John. John says as much: "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book" (John 20:30). And all of these signs were not enough to convince people.

These are only the signs that we read about in the gospel of John. But there are plenty of other miracles that Jesus did in the other gospels that the people of Jesus' day saw. They saw lepers being healed (Matthew 8:1-4; Mark 1:40-45; Luke 5:12-16; 17:11-19). They saw withered hands restored (Matthew 12:9-14; Mark 3:1-6; Luke 6:6-11). They saw mute men come to speak (Mark 7:31-37). They saw demons being cast out (Matthew 8:23-34; Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:26-39). They saw storms calmed (Matthew 8:23-27; Mark 4:35-41; Luke 8:22-25). They saw fig trees withered (Matthew 21:18-22; Mark 11:12-14, 20-25), just to name a few. And yet, even with all of these displays of the power of Jesus, they still did not believe.

As we have read in the gospel, the hardness of the hearts of people are amazing. Do you remember when the blind man was healed? When the Jewish leaders heard about it, they investigated what happened, even interviewing this man and his parents to understand what happened. It was verified beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus had indeed been the one who gave sight to this man who was born blind. Yet, their hearts were so hard, that they cast the man out of the synagogue, even when they saw this sign right before their eyes.

The same happened when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. There were plenty of witnesses who saw Jesus summon Lazarus out of the tomb. Yet, when the Jews saw that so many were believing in Jesus, they sought to kill Lazarus, the very one who was dead and Jesus brought to life! Even witnessing someone risen from the dead was not enough for them to believe! Instead, they wanted to kill this man who was risen, because many were believing in Jesus because of him! I trust that you see the hardness of the hearts of these people who did not believe, despite all that they saw and heard what Jesus did.

And you will encounter similar hard hearts as you interact with people and tell them of Jesus. It matters not how much you tell them. It matters not how many times you tell them. It matters not how much you model the blessings of a god-honoring life before them. Sometimes the heart of people are such that they simply will not believe. But don't be discouraged at this. This is in the plan and purpose of God. Look at the next verse, verse 38.

John 12:38

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?"

In other words, the people of Jesus' day didn't believe "so that the Scripture might be fulfilled." Now, I ask you, what Scripture is here? If you have footnotes in your Bible, you should see that this comes from Isaiah 53. Now, if you hear "Isaiah 53," what do you think about? You think

about the suffering servant. You think about the suffering of Jesus.

Isaiah 53 contains words like these:

Isaiah 53:3-9

He was despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;
and as one from whom men hide their faces
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.
But he was 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.
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.

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.
By oppression and judgment he was taken away;
and as for his generation, who considered
that he was cut off out of the land of the living,
stricken for the transgression of my people?
And they made his grave with the wicked
and with a rich man in his death,
although he had done no violence,
and there was no deceit in his mouth.

Spoken some 700 years before the coming of Jesus, these words described perfectly the suffering life of Jesus. how he was despised and rejected (verse 3). how he was oppressed and afflicted (verse 7). Yet, his suffering was for us. He was pierced for our transgressions (verse 5). He was crushed for our iniquities (verse 5), so that we could be forgiven. Isaiah 53:6 sums it up best, "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."

This is the good news of the Bible, that we have strayed from the Lord. We have sinned and followed our own path in this life. Our sin has brought with it the judgment of God. "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). But God laid on Jesus the punishment that we deserved. Jesus died in our place! We simply need to believe it, that we can experience forgiveness.

Yet, there are many who don't believe this. And it should come as no surprise, because Isaiah prophesied that few would believe. John points this out by quoting Isaiah 53:1, the first verse in this chapter that puts for the gospel so clearly in the Old Testament.

Isaiah 53:1

"Lord, who has believed what he heard from us, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?"

It was no surprise to God that Jesus was not believed. In fact, it was in the plan of God, for if they had believed in Jesus, then, they would not have put him to death.

Paul understood this. In 1 Corinthians 2:7-8 he wrote, "But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." The rejection of Jesus was God's plan all along. In fact, the people of Jesus' day had to be unbelieving for him to be sentenced to death on the cross for our sins! Glory be to God!

But it's more than that. Look at verse 39.

John 12:39

Therefore they could not believe.

This is my second point. Not only did (1) they did not believe (verses 37-38). But also

2. They could not believe (verses 39-41)

That's what verse 39 says, "Therefore they could not believe." In was not possible for them to believe.

Now, I know that there are many who be surprised by this. They say "What do you mean, 'they could not believe'? Everyone has the opportunity to believe! Doesn't John 3:16 say, 'Whosoever believe in him'?" And John 3:16 is quoted as a proof that it is possible for all to believe. Yet, what does verse 39 say? "Therefore they could not believe."

Remember Galileo? He put forth his observations of the moving "stars" around Jupiter, and tracked them over time. He discerned that they weren't stars at all, but were moons that orbited Jupiter, much like our moon orbits the earth. Those of his day denied it, because they knew better. They knew that everything revolved around the earth. Nothing revolved around Jupiter! And they knew that the earth certainly doesn't revolve around the sun.

In the same way, there are some who know better, and say that "Everyone has the opportunity to believe." And when presented with verses like verse 39, which states clearly, "Therefore they could not believe," they deny the clear words of this verse, because it doesn't fit what they think to be true.

For some of you here this morning, this may seem strange to you. I get it.

Remember those in Galileo's day didn't reject what Galileo was saying because they had no proof on their side. They saw the sun rise every morning. They saw the sun set every evening. They knew the Scriptures. like Psalm 104:5, "He set the earth on its foundations, so that it should never be moved." They knew Psalm 19:6, "[The sun's] rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them, and there is nothing hidden from its heat." Likewise, they saw the moon rotating around the earth. They saw the planets rotating along the ecliptic. And they saw the stars. Coupling their observations and Scriptures in hand, they couldn't accept what Galileo was saying.

Now, Galileo wasn't denying their observations. He simply had other observations that gave a bigger, better picture of how the universe worked. And that's what I think we see in verse 40. We see a bigger and better picture of how belief works.

In the gospel of John, there are free offers for people to believe. Verse 39 doesn't deny this. Look at verse 36, "While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light." Here's the call of Jesus. He says, "Believe in the light!" He offers the light to all who would believe! And those who believe will become "sons of light!"

Jesus is saying, "Yes, the sun rises and sets." But John says, but this doesn't mean that the earth is in the center of our solar system. There are those who cannot believe. "Therefore they could not believe" (verse 39).

The bigger and greater reality is this: it's not simply up to people and their own power to believe. Lest you think that this is just John who says this, let me point out that John gives some Old Testament proof to back what he said.

John 12:39-40

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."

So again, I ask you, where does John pull this quote from? It comes from Isaiah again (just like verse 38). This time it comes from chapter 6. This chapter is so crucial to our Biblical understanding of salvation, that I want for us to turn back to Isaiah, chapter 6.

I don't know if you have heard this story before or not, but I remember hearing it for the first time when I was in college, and being overwhelmed by the character of God. Let's walk through it.

Isaiah 6:1

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple.

We may pass this by as a mere footnote of human history, but King Uzziah reigned for 52 years in Judah (2 Chronicles 26:3). His death marked the end of a long and stable reign over Judah. The people of Judah were experiencing a time of great uncertainty. But in the midst of the uncertainty, we have a God who is reigning on his throne. Isaiah "saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up;" In verse 2, Isaiah looks above the throne.

Isaiah 6:2-3

Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!"

Of all the things that these creatures could say, they spoke of the holiness of God! how the LORD is pure and righteous and different than we are. In verse 4, Isaiah tells what it sounded like.

Isaiah 6:4

And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke.

The LORD is so great that when he speaks, the foundations shake! What a vision Isaiah saw of the greatness of God! He responded appropriately.

Isaiah 6:5

And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost;"

I love the what the other translations say. The King James says, "Woe is me! For I am undone." The New American Standard says, "I am

ruined.” The New Living Translation says, “It’s all over! I am doomed.” That’s the sense that Isaiah had when he stood in the presence of God, because God is holy and we are not! When we see God, the first thing that comes into our mind is how out of place we are because of our sin!

Isaiah goes on to explain:

Isaiah 6:5

“Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”

Note who is saying this. He isn’t some worker in the trades, spewing out four letter words. This is the prophet of God! This is the one whose lips speak the words of God! This is the one whose mouth is purer than all in the land. But before the LORD, all of are trapped in our sin.

In the next scene, we see his sin being dealt with in a most unusual way.

Isaiah 6:6-7

Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.”

These verses are not to teach us the way that sin is always atoned. We don’t need burning coals to cure our sin. It’s a picture, however, of the purity of God, coming upon sinful man, who receives forgiveness of sins.

The response of Isaiah is the response of anyone who truly experiences the forgiveness that God gives, a desire to follow the LORD wherever he leads.

Isaiah 6:8

And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here I am! Send me.”

What a great response! If the Lord is looking for someone to send, “Send me!” “Let me go and tell others of you!” is the proper response.

These verses are often used in the context of missions. “In light of the holiness and greatness of God, and in light of the forgiveness that we have received, let us be like Isaiah, willing to go! let us be like Isaiah, and say, ‘Send me!’” And young people are summoned to the mission field with a sense of mission, coming with a message from the holy one on the throne! And they have high hopes of the wonderful things that they will see the Lord do on the mission field, as they bring the gospel to a foreign people! What hope! What joy awaits.

And unfortunately, the preacher stops there. But let us not stop. Look at Isaiah’s commission:

Isaiah 6:9-10

And he said, “Go, and say to this people: “Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.’ Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.”

This was God’s call upon Isaiah. He was to go out to a fruitless ministry! He was to go out and speak in such a way that people would see, but not believe. What missionary would be excited about this? To go out with the mission of making hearts dull and ears heavy and eyes blind.

Isaiah understood God’s call to a fruitless ministry.

Isaiah 6:11-13

Then I said, “How long, O Lord?” And he said: “Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is a desolate waste, and the LORD removes people far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land. And though a tenth remain in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak, whose stump remains when it is felled.” The holy seed is its stump.

The Lord said, “Go out until all is laid waste.” Yet, there still is a promise of a remnant. some will believe. But the exception will be rare.

So, let’s look again at verses 9 and 10, as this is what John quotes in our text this morning: “Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.” This is a missionary text. Isaiah was to go out and proclaim the good news. But this mission was a mission of hardening. “Not all seeing is believing.” And this is the very mission that Jesus was sent on as well.

Let’s return to John 12 and the ministry of Jesus. Regarding the ministry of Jesus, there were those who “could not believe” (verse 39). Just as 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.” Then we read,

John 12:41

Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him.

What an amazing thing, that when Isaiah was seeing the glory of the Lord, he was looking at the glory of Jesus! What a great picture this is of two things being true at the same time. Who is on the throne? The Lord God! Who is on the throne? Jesus! It’s the mystery of the Trinity.

We don't throw out the truth of the deity of Jesus, but because God is one. Likewise, we don't throw out the free offer of the gospel, just because John says that there were some who "could not believe."

You may object to this because you see it as unfair. You may object to this because you Jesus offers the light to all who believe. Yet, the greater reality is the ministry of Jesus was (in part) a hardening ministry. He showed signs that put forth his deity. He taught the truth. He gave opportunity for people to believe. Some did. But there were others who "could not believe."

Know that this isn't merely John's interpretation upon the ministry of Jesus. Jesus himself said that this was his ministry calling. Jesus quoted from Isaiah 6 referring to the sovereign hardening work in the hearts of the hearers. All four gospels refer to this (Matthew 13:14-15; Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10; John 12:39-40). Consider Matthew's statement in context:

Matthew 13:10-17

Then the disciples came and said to him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" And he answered them, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says:

"You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive." For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.'

But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it."

If you are a believer today, know that you are blessed, because you have seen the glories of Christ in the gospel. You have embraced Jesus. You have come to know Jesus. It's all the grace of God in your life. But if you are not a believer today, I call you to believe in the Lord Jesus.

Paul saw that these verses were true of his ministry as well. Paul had a great evangelistic ministry, but near the end of his life he experienced a similar ministry of hardening. In the very last chapter of the book of Acts, we find Paul in Rome, as he had appealed his sentence to Caesar. To Rome he had been sent by the authorities.

While in Rome, he was under house arrest. There was a day when the Jews were going to come in and speak with him about this Jesus, of whom they had never heard. This is where we pick up the story:

Acts 28:23

When they had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers. From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets.

What a meeting this would have been! Here is the mighty Paul, the experienced missionary and pastor and expert in the Scripture, explaining, morning until evening, of how Jesus fulfilled the Jewish Scripture as the Messiah. I don't believe that a more clear explanation could have been given to these Jews.

Then we read of their response:

Acts 28:24-28

And some were convinced by what he said, but others disbelieved. And disagreeing among themselves, they departed after Paul had made one statement: "The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet:

"Go to this people, and say, "You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive." For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed; lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.'

Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen."

This should come as an encouragement to you as well. As you have opportunities to speak with others about Jesus, know that God will accomplish his purpose with your words.

This is the first parable that Jesus told in Mark's gospel. It's the parable of the sower and the seeds. The seeds fall on four types of soils: the hard soil, the rocky soil, the weedy soil, and the good soil. The seed never penetrates the hard soil. The seeds grow up, but don't endure the rocky and weedy soil. It's only on the good soil that the seed brings forth fruit. This is like the word falling on the hearts of people. Some will reject the word. Some will receive the word.

When the disciples were alone with Jesus, they asked about this parable. Jesus said, "Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?" (Mark 4:13). In other words, this is the key parable to all of the parables. It explains how the gospel works. The word is spread and some reject it and other receive it. It all depends upon the heart of the hearer, not the seed.

Both Jesus and Paul shared the gospel freely. Both Jesus and Paul encountered people who had hard hearts. So, as you speak with others, know that God will accomplish his purpose through your words. Your words may work to harden people. Your words may become the means of salvation. You are not responsible to soften the hearts of your hearers.

We move on.

3. Many authorities “believed” (verses 42-43)

John 12:42-43

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.

I'm not quite sure what to think about these authorities. On the one hand, they "believed," but then their actions later demonstrate that their faith wasn't very strong (if genuine at all).

This is encouraging that some of them believed. Yet, it is also discouraging that some of them disbelieved. Throughout the gospel of John, we see this phenomenon before in the gospel of John, when people "believe," but later turn away.

When Jesus fed the 5,000, you had multitudes of people believing in Jesus, saying "This is the Prophet!" (John 6:14). They wanted to make him king by force (John 6:15). But later, many abandoned Jesus (John 6:66). Why did they abandon him? Because he spoke some "hard" words to them (John 6:60). Jesus spoke words such as "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him" (John 6:44). He said, "I am the living bread of heaven that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever" (John 6:51). Jesus was talking about the sovereignty of God and how he was the source of eternal life. And they "grumbled" at these words (John 6:61).

Jesus then said, "Do you take offense at this? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe. ... This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father" (John 6:61-65).

Jesus said that there are some who can't believe and there are others who will believe. It all depends upon the Father granting a soft heart. And the Jews hated to hear these things. "Many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him" (John 6:66).

Here are "believers" until they hear something hard, then they turn away.

It is in this context when Jesus asks the disciple if they want to go away as well (John 6:67). Peter, speaking for the twelve says, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God" (John 6:68-69).

Getting back to our text in John 12, I don't know the end result of these men. On the one hand, we can be encouraged by their belief in Jesus. Yet, on the other hand, they didn't follow up faith with action. They feared man. "they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God" (verse 43). Jesus was the glory that comes from God. This is what John writes in verse 41! Jesus was the Lord sitting in the temple (Isaiah 6:1).

Getting back to the point of our message, "seeing isn't always believing." People in Galileo's day didn't believe in him. They didn't believe Jesus in his day. They probably won't believe you in your day. Just know that it's all in the hand of God.

Know that it's all in the hand of God. You are the mailman who needs to deliver the package. You are the cook who prepares the meal. It is up to others to receive the package or eat the meal. But we know that the greater reality is that the Son is in the center and knows what's going on.

Finally,

4. Do you believe? (verse 36)

John 12:36

While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light."

You have heard the word, believe in Jesus! Believe that he is the Son of God!

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on May 25, 2025 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org.

[1] You can see his drawings here: <http://www.exo.net/~pauld/workshops/Galileoscope/Galileo.html>.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Galileo_Galilei.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Many of my other comments about Galileo were found on the wikipedia article mentioned above.