

# For Judgement I Came Into This World

by John Piper

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*John Piper's sermon explores the complexities of church leadership transitions and the interplay between God's sovereignty and human accountability as illustrated in the Gospel of John.*

**Duration:** 39:20

**Scripture:** John 3:3-6, 1 Corinthians 13:12

**Topics:** "Spiritual Blindness", "Gods Sovereignty"

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## Description

This sermon addresses the crucial decisions facing a church, including succession, church structure, and funding. It emphasizes the need for clarity and seeking God's guidance through prayer. The message delves into the concept of spiritual blindness and accountability in relation to God's sovereignty, highlighting the importance of recognizing our need for spiritual sight and the danger of willful rebellion. Ultimately, it calls for a humble acknowledgment of our spiritual condition and a desire for God to open our eyes to His truth.

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## Transcript

Before I pray, I thought it would be helpful to take three or four minutes to give you an update on the Antioch moment. You may remember that on April 9, I spoke about this moment in the 140 year history of our church as an Antioch moment taken from Acts 13, where we have some really crucial decisions to make. And the three that I mentioned were succession, that is, when do I move over from this pulpit to say, BCS teaching and writing and mentoring and speaking full time and somebody else becomes the pastor for preaching and vision, that's one issue.

Our second one would be, what would the structure of the church be longer term? Do we go to three churches instead of one church on three campuses? That was the second issue. And the third was funding. We have a South site waiting, Lord willing, to be purchased and built upon and some debt left over from building the North campus.

How do we move forward there? Those are the three things. And so we call the elders to pray every Thursday morning for six weeks. And what happened was interesting, or let's say what is happening is interesting.

We sought clarity on those three things and the Lord brought us clarity on three different things. It's very like the Lord that when you get on your face before him asking for what you think you need most. So let

me tell you what those new things are that we think we got clarity on and say what I can say about what's left to be decided in regard to the other three.

He gave us clarity with regard to two processes for moving toward greater staff harmony, personal flourishing and ministry fruitfulness among the staff. One of those processes is relational and one of those processes is organizational. So one has to do with the pastoral staff and wives and their relational personal interconnectedness.

And the other has to do with pastoral understanding of their place in the organization and lines of accountability. This is a very complex organization with three campuses and 125 plus staff and layers of managerial ministry and so on. So we have work to do.

And what's so encouraging is that we believe and this has now been confirmed by these people that he's led us to engage Paul Tripp to help us with the first process, the relational piece and Tom Lutz, one of our elders to help us with the organizational leadership structural piece. And so I am very excited about that. Feels like burden lifting to me as the one who's sort of the buck stopper here and sees things that need to be worked on.

That feels very good. If God would lead us through those two processes in the rest of this year to sweet outcomes, more important things would have happened probably than the three that we thought were needed. The third one that we got clarity on was don't stop praying elders.

Don't stop this effort. So we're shifting to the first Thursday of every month where the elders will gather to do nothing but pray for an hour. We'll do that through the rest of the year then we'll take stock and see what more he might want us to do.

So those three things came clear and they feel hopeful and life-giving to me. Bud Burke, by the way, can put a name of each of those three. So Paul Tripp, Tom Lutz and Bud Burke will lead that prayer effort.

He's one of our pastors here. Now with regard to the other three issues, succession, structure, funding, not only have we prayed and prayed and prayed, but we have talked and talked and conversed and debated. And here's what I can say.

Listening to all of this for several months, I, when I say I, I mean Noel and me, came up with a proposal to put before the elders. And I gathered seven staff and elders at Maria's today for lunch because I wanted to say something tonight. And so, because I'm going on writingly.

And I put it on the table, actually I emailed it to them and then we talked about it for an hour and a half or so. And it doesn't have any elder approval yet so I can't give it to you as the plan. But I'll just tell you what I'm proposing, at least a piece of it.

My heart's desire and what I think would be good for the church all things considered, long-term and short-term, is that I be done with this role and move over to another role on June 30th, 2014. That's three years from now. And there are reasons for that kind of timeframe and all kinds of things that are charted out what would be happening for each of those years to bring us to a well-ordered, thought through, well-planned, congregationally involved succession plan.

So at least you can hear the timeframe I put on the table today. And now the elders, they go to the succession committee, then they're gonna gather with organizational elders next Tuesday, then they get

all the elders together. And on the 24th of July, you'll get a more full where are we now organizationally update.

So that's my best shot at keeping you up to speed in what God, I believe, is doing. We really did feel, there was one elder meeting in particular near the end of our six weeks of praying that felt unusually anointed as those first three things. Almost just, they just almost fell out of our mouths with unusual unanimity.

And so you can pray in that direction. And if you have any questions, feel free to contact any of your elders. They're usually often posted on the back of the bulletin.

But that's my update. And now I'm gonna pray and preach. Father in heaven, I love this church.

In the summer of 2014, if I'm still alive, I will have been here half my life, 34 years. And I'm not in any way regretful of that investment. It has been awesomely sweet.

And we wanna make a good transition here. And I pray that you would engage all your people to be a part of that in prayer and thinking and planning, dreaming. We don't wanna let up, Lord.

We wanna see this church advance remarkably over these next three years and then the next 140. So come now and meet us in this worship service and speak to us out of this fairly important and very difficult text. I pray this in Jesus' name, amen.

It continually amazes me that the gospel of John, which by reputation is the simplest of the gospels, again and again tackles the hardest and most complex issues at levels. I don't wanna in any way put the other gospels in a lesser position, but feels to me like a deeper way than Matthew, Mark, or Luke often do. It's a paradoxical gospel in its surface simplicity for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whoever believes on him will not perish but have eternal life.

That's the sweetest kinds of verses on the planet and in the Bible come from the gospel of John. And yet in this message, you're gonna run into an issue that is not only complex in itself, but is dealt with in such a subtle and ironic way. You wonder, did you expect us to get this? One of the issues that troubles us when we start to take, for example, the sovereignty of God seriously, especially his sovereignty in our salvation, one of the things that troubles us is that the more you embrace the sovereignty of God and the bigger it feels and the more all-inclusive it becomes, the less you wonder or the more you wonder, do I have any responsibility? Do I have any accountability? That's an issue, right? Sovereignty of God, human accountability, age-old issue.

The more complete, the more extensive the sovereignty of God in our lives, the more we wonder, well, can I be held accountable for anything? That's what these verses are about, 39 to 41, at a level that is very remarkable. Let me give you a glimpse of what I mean by the sovereignty of God in the Gospel of John. The Gospel of John, I would say, probably, maybe after the book of Romans and Ephesians, stresses the sovereignty of God in salvation more than any other book in the Bible.

But let me give you a taste of what I mean. John 3.3, Jesus says, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Then verse eight, the wind blows where it wills.

You hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit. The Spirit gives life and the Spirit gives sight where He wills, when He wills, in ways we don't know that He's gonna do it.

When we are aware of being awake spiritually, we've already been wakened. God did it before we did it. John 6.37, all that the Father gives me will come to me.

Verse 44, no one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. Verse 65, no one can come to me unless it is granted to him by the Father. So, coming to Jesus is a gift of God.

We don't do it on our own and then get a gift. We don't come to Jesus and then get a gift. The coming is the gift.

Or John 10.26, you do not believe because you're not part of my flock. Not the other way around. You're not part of my flock because you don't believe.

The reason you don't believe is because you're not part of my flock. Chapter 8, verse 47, the reason why you do not hear my words is that you're not of God. Chapter 18, verse 37, everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.

So, our listening to his voice, our hearing his words, our believing on him, our owing to something that went before, something God did. That's what I mean by the sovereignty of God in the Gospel of John. And the more you see it and the more seriously you take it, the more urgent becomes the issue of, well, am I responsible for anything? I mean, can I be held accountable for anything? That's what verses 39 to 41 are about.

If God must act first and decisively to give me life, to give me sight, to give me faith, how can I be accountable to act? So, let's read these verses again. 39, Jesus said, For judgment I came into the world that those who do not see may see. That's good news.

And those who see may become blind. Verse 40, some of the Pharisees near him heard these things and said, are we also blind? What do you think the answer to that is? Jesus said to them, if you were blind, you'd have no guilt. You wouldn't be accountable.

You wouldn't have sinned. Oh, interesting principle. But, now that you say we see, your guilt remains.

This chapter began with a physical miracle, a miracle of physical healing. A blind man was made to see physically. A miracle happened.

A conflict was unleashed because Jesus did it with mud on the Sabbath, and according to the Pharisees, to make mud, to knead this lump of mud, and stick it into his eyes was breaking the Sabbath, and so this conflict, this controversy is unleashed, and the effect of the controversy, as we saw last week, is that this beggar becomes increasingly clear-sighted about Jesus, moving from he's a man, to he's a prophet, to I worship him, and these Pharisees become increasingly blind, moving from this man is not from God, verse 16, to verse 22, if anyone would confess Jesus to be the Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue, to verse 24, this man is a sinner, and then verse 34, you were born in utter sin. Would you teach us? They're becoming harder and harder, blinder and blinder. Or am I jumping the gun by calling them blind? Because Jesus said they weren't blind.

And it becomes plain, doesn't it? I think you've seen this, that this physical miracle is becoming a spiritual picture of spiritual seeing. Physical sight is merging, or displaying something else is going on. That's why 41 verses is devoted to this miracle, because it has to do with the kind of seeing this beggar was ultimately given, which is way more important than the other kind, and the terrible thing that was happening to the

Pharisees.

And it raises the question, if it is a spiritual reality, it raises the question, well, if they are spiritually blind, these Pharisees, how can they be responsible? How can they have any sin? If they're blind, spiritual, can't see Jesus for who He is. He's a sinner. Is that blindness or not? And if it's blindness, are they responsible? Verse 39, Jesus said, for judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.

Now, the first thing that we see in that verse is it's very jarring for Jesus to say, for judgment I came into this world, because many of you know that twice in this gospel, He said He did not come for judgment. Chapter three, verse 17, God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world through Him would be saved. Chapter 12, verse 47, I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world.

And here He says, for judgment I have come into the world. So it's jarring. It should be.

John jars us over and over again. Jesus jars us. If you haven't been jarred and read the Bible, you're not reading it.

The Bible is a jarring book. We're meant to be kept off balance when we read the Bible. It's a very superficial contradiction, not a real one.

When Jesus says that He did not come to judge, He means condemnation is not His first and direct purpose. He's coming to save. He's coming to die for sinners and rescue sinners.

He's not coming for condemnation. That's not His aim. And when He says, for judgment I came into the world, He means it inevitably happens when I save people by truth, by love, by righteousness.

Division happens. Rebellion is revealed and unbelief is confirmed. It happens.

And I came knowing it would happen. So I came for that too, but not the way I came to save. Here's an analogy that helps me, might help you.

Picture a doctor and he's called urgently to come, maybe on the battlefield or in some terrible time a century ago, and a man has an arm that is just eaten up with gangrene. There's only one, one way forward, take that arm off. And so the doctor prepares and before they put the man out or sock him with whiskey or whatever they did, the man says, did you come to cut off my arm? And the doctor says, I came to save your life, not to cut off your arm, but I will cut off your arm.

That's the way Jesus is talking. I didn't become a doctor to cut off people's arms. I came a doctor to save lives, which in some cases means you take off arms, but you don't say I became a doctor to cut off arms.

That's the way Jesus, or here's another analogy. If you like military analogies, here's a military special forces team. They're being airlifted behind enemy lines and their job is rescue this POW who is facing certain and imminent death.

They have grenades, they have guns, they have knives. These are deadly weapons and they mean to get their buddy out. And their commander, as they're getting in the helicopters, says, your mission is not to kill, your mission is to get the prisoner out, so do what you have to do.

The mission of Jesus was not to condemn, it was to save. But he saves by being the truth, he saves by speaking the truth, he saves by doing the truth, and those who are not of the truth refuse to embrace him as Savior and therefore they are condemned. The ministry of Jesus aims to save and inevitably reveals and confirms rebellion and blindness.

Second half of verse 39 explains how he came for judgment specifically. That those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind. On the one hand, the sword, the scalpel, cuts away blinding calluses.

Just, this is what I pray for myself over and over again. Do whatever you have to do, I don't care, well, I do care, but do it anyway. How painful it is, cut on me in order that I might see.

Just do whatever you have to do, do it relationally, do it with my body, do it with my job, do it with this church, do whatever you have to do. Don't leave me in calloused, grown over, proud blindness. And he does it.

That's one of the things his sword does. It cuts another way. It has blinding effects.

There's second half of verse 39. And those who see may become blind. What does that mean? What does that mean? He came to judge, that is, he came so that those who see may become blind.

Now that's what the next two verses, the last two verses explain. So I'm gonna deal with those and then end by coming back to 39 at the end. Verse 40, some of the Pharisees near him heard these things and said to him, are we also blind? Now that is one of the most important questions in this chapter because I've been saying for three weeks, they're blind, they're getting blinder and blinder and Jesus is gonna give a different answer, it seems.

Or does he? I mean, if I thought he did, I wouldn't have been saying that but it looks like he does. Are we blind? Now, I wish I could make this simple. Oh God, help me.

If I make it more complicated than it is, shame on me but this is tough. Understanding these two verses is tough. So I'm gonna do my best to take you with me on my effort to understand 40 and 41 and Jesus just chooses to talk in a very subtle and ironic way here that makes understanding a challenge and I think I've got it.

I think I know what the text means but you're gonna have to really help me by not thinking about what you're gonna do an hour from now because that won't work. You will be lost totally if you give yourself to five minutes of that. Okay, now let's hope I don't get lost.

The Pharisees, when they say, are we blind? Jesus sees right through where they're going. Now I don't at verse 40 yet but when I get into verse 41 and I see what Jesus does, then I can go back and say, aha, now I know what Jesus saw and here's what he saw. He saw in that question, are we blind? He saw if we're blind, we're not accountable.

We're not responsible and you can't blame us. That's what he saw. He saw them going there.

If we're blind, then we don't have any guilt or any sin. That's where Jesus is gonna go. He's gonna talk about that.

You can't judge us because if we're blind, we don't have any guilt. So they are raising my objection from 20 minutes ago when I started this message. The issue of accountability in relationship to my blindness and God's sovereignty overcoming it.

If I'm blind, then I'm not responsible for my condition and what I'm supposed to see. You still tell me I'm supposed to see you as God and I don't see you as God because I'm blind? Then I'm not responsible to see you as God and you can't get on my case anymore about that. That's what's going on, Jesus sees in that question.

And shamefully, I'm afraid it's our question too often. So when Jesus moves in verse 41 to answer their question, he uses their definition of blindness. That's the key to understanding verse 41.

Their definition. And what is their definition of blindness? Their definition of blindness is, blindness is a condition of the mind or the heart which if you have it, you're not responsible. That's their definition.

Blindness is a condition of the mind or the heart which if I have it, you can't blame me for anything. That Jesus goes with. He takes that definition and uses it in verse 41.

Verse 41, Jesus said to them, if you were blind, you would have no guilt. You would have no sin. And they say, that's what we thought.

That's what we meant. So he's using their definition and on their definition of blindness, they're right. If blindness is a condition that removes your responsibility, you don't have any sin.

You don't have any guilt. We know Jesus did not believe that they didn't have any guilt. He did not believe that.

Because he goes on to say, your guilt remains. Your guilt remains. So their definition, blindness is a condition of the mind that if you have it, you don't have any guilt.

Jesus says, if you were blind like that, you wouldn't have any guilt, just like you say. And of course, you do have guilt. Now, we would then wonder, what is he gonna say next? Is he gonna say, but now, this is what he did not say, but I would have expected him to say, but now that you see, your guilt remains.

He didn't say that. He didn't say, now that you are blind, or that you're not blind, your guilt remains. Here's what he said.

Very important, crucial little words. He said, but now that you say, we see, your guilt remains. You're getting lost.

Maybe not. Now that you say, we see, your guilt remains. Why did he say, you say? Why didn't he just say, now that you see, just like you said you see, now that you see, your guilt remains.

Nice. He didn't. He said, now that you say, you see, your guilt remains.

What did he mean by that? He meant, you don't see, and your guilt still remains. That's what he meant, which is why I've said for two weeks, they are blind. Not with the blindness they think.

Like if you have this blindness, you're not responsible. Your guilt doesn't remain. That's their definition of blindness.

The only blindness that we might have is one that would exonerate us. And Jesus says, you're right, you don't have that kind of blindness. But since you say that you see, you see, your guilt remains.

And the reason I say, you say you see, is because you don't see. And your guilt remains. Which means this, there is a kind of blindness rooted in willful rebellion against God that does not remove guilt.

There is a moral, spiritual blindness that is not a physical one. We are blind by birth because we love the darkness. John 3.19. We are blind because we don't want to see the light or be guided by the light.

We are blind because we don't want to confess that our works are works of darkness. John 3.20. And this blindness does not diminish our guilt. It is our guilt.

It doesn't remove accountability. It's part of our guilt. So now back to verse 39.

Jesus said, for judgment I came into this world for those that those who do not see may see. That's precious. None of us would be Christian if that weren't true.

None of us would see the glory of God, the face of Christ, if that weren't true. And then he adds, and those who see may become blind. I'm almost done.

We have a few more minutes. And at this point in the message, a fork has just occurred in the road, in this room. Everybody's on a road.

And a fork has just occurred in this road. And it's the two paths of verse 39. You're either gonna be one who is blind and Jesus makes to see, or one who is seeing and becomes blind.

Those are the two roads. You're gonna be on one of those roads when you leave here. He came that those who see may become blind.

Here's what I take him to mean based on verse 41. I take him to mean those who have perfectly good eyes in their heads. Those who can think and reason.

Those who see evidences for God's truth and Christ's reality all over the place. Those who hear sermons and construe meaning like you're doing right now. Those who read the Bible.

Those who can get acquainted with Jesus through what is written, but do not admit that they are blind and need to be born again to have spiritual sight. They become blind through the ministry of Jesus. Their blindness is revealed.

And the more light they receive, I hope, I pray you're not in this number. The more light you receive, the more it's resisted and the harder and the deeper becomes the blindness. That's what become blind means.

Your rebellion is revealed, resistance begins, and hardening and deepening of blindness grows. Let it not be so of you. Let it not be so of any of you.

Rather, lay hold on verse 39, the first half of it. Lay hold on the first half of verse 39. Believe in Jesus.

For judgment I came into this world that those who do not see may see. Jesus did not come to condemn you. He came to do that for you.

That's his aim. He came that those who do not see might see. And the first glimmer of light in the soul is to know, I'm blind.

So Father, I pray now that we would not be like the Pharisees who argued, if I'm blind, I'm not guilty. And I'm not blind. And Jesus says, well, since you say you're not blind, your guilt remains, even though it's just what you say and not what's true.

Lord, there is a blindness that's rooted in my rebellion. It's rooted in my hatred of the light and therefore I'm guilty for it. It doesn't remove my guilt, it is part of my guilt.

And I pray, oh God, that everyone in the hearing of my voice would tremble at the measures of blindness remaining in us, because every one of us has a beclouded soul. As Jesus, as Paul said, we see through a glass darkly, then face to face when you blow it all away. So hasten the day of our increased sight and grant that we would humbly call upon you for eyes to see, for the new birth and for ongoing illumination by the spirit.

I pray this in Jesus' powerful name, amen.

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