

Truly Knowing Jesus [Hearts To Receive]

Summary

This sermon wraps up a series on truly knowing Jesus, moving beyond surface-level faith into genuine, transformative relationship with Him. Using the image of a dried-up riverbed, Jonathan illustrates how hearts that were once soft and open can become hardened over time through disappointment, pride, and shallow familiarity with the gospel. Just as a hardened riverbed cannot absorb water even when it flows again, a hardened heart cannot receive the living water of God's presence, even when His truth is being spoken. It has to be allowed to be made soft again.

Drawing from Acts 28, Zechariah 7, Ezekiel 11 and 36, Hebrews 3, and Jeremiah 24, the sermon traces the recurring pattern of God's people hardening their hearts throughout history and contrasts that with God's radical promise: to give us a new, tender, and responsive heart as a gift of grace. Jonathan emphasizes that true relationship with Jesus is not about religious performance or rule-following, but about receiving God's transforming love and allowing it to change our desires from the inside out. The call to action is clear: stop the defensive posturing, invite God to change you specifically, practice receiving in small daily ways, and remember that the goal is presence with God, not performance for God.

Intro Prayer

Lord, we come before You today with open hands and honest hearts. We admit that sometimes we know a lot about You without truly knowing You. We ask that You do what only You can do: soften the places in us that have grown hard, quiet the noise of our defenses, and make us ready to receive whatever You want to speak to us today. We don't want to just go through the motions. We want to truly know You. So meet us here, Holy Spirit. Open our ears, our eyes, and our hearts. Have Your way with us today. In Jesus' name, amen.

Ice Breaker

What is one thing you have gotten better at over time simply by practicing it consistently, and how did that growth happen?

Key Verses

- Acts 28:17-27
- Zechariah 7:11-12
- Ezekiel 11:19-20
- Ezekiel 36:26-27
- Hebrews 3:7-15
- Jeremiah 24:7

Questions

- Jonathan used the image of a dried-up riverbed to describe a hardened heart. In what ways does that image resonate with you personally, and have you ever noticed your own heart becoming harder toward God over a season of life?

- Acts 28:24 says that some people were persuaded by Paul's message but others did not believe. What do you think makes the difference between a heart that receives truth and a heart that resists it?
- The sermon described how Israel repeatedly hardened their hearts even after witnessing God's miracles. Why do you think seeing God work does not automatically produce a soft and open heart toward Him?
- Ezekiel 36:26-27 says God will give us a new heart and put His Spirit in us so that we will follow His ways. How does understanding this as a gift of grace rather than something we earn change the way you approach your relationship with God?
- Jonathan drew a distinction between religion and relationship, saying religion is doing things because you have to, while relationship means you get to and you want to. Where do you see yourself on that spectrum right now, and what has shaped that?
- Hebrews 3:13 says to warn each other every day while it is still called today, so that none of you will be deceived by sin and hardened against God. What role do you think Christian community plays in keeping our hearts soft and accountable?
- Jonathan suggested getting specific in prayer about where your heart has hardened, rather than just praying a general prayer for softness. What is one specific area of your life where you sense your heart may be closed off to God right now?
- The sermon closed with the question: God is already offering you a new heart, so will you receive it today? What does receiving that gift actually look like in a practical, everyday sense for you?

Life Application

This week, choose one specific area where you sense your heart has grown hard toward God, whether it is a fear about the future, a habit you are holding onto, a wound you have not let Him touch, or a part of your life you have kept behind a locked door. Write it down. Then pray over it specifically every day this week, asking God to give you a tender and responsive heart in that area. Also, practice one small act of receiving each day: when Scripture challenges you, sit with it instead of explaining it away. When someone speaks truth to you, confirm it with God's Word and receive it. When you sense the Holy Spirit nudging you, say yes instead of not yet. Keep a simple journal of what you notice as the week goes on.

Key Takeaways

- Hearts can harden gradually over time through disappointment, pride, and shallow familiarity with the gospel, often without us even noticing it is happening.
- God's response to our hardened hearts is not condemnation but a radical gift: a new, tender, and responsive heart that He promises to give us by His grace (Ezekiel 36:26-27).
- Truly knowing Jesus is different from knowing facts about Him. Genuine relationship requires vulnerability, openness, and allowing God to transform our desires from the inside out.
- The call to receive God's gift of a soft heart is urgent and immediate. Hebrews 3:15 reminds us that today, when we hear His voice, we must not harden our hearts.
- The goal of the Christian life is not religious performance or earning God's love through obedience. It

is presence with God, being known by Him completely and receiving His transforming love in return.

Ending Prayer

Father, thank You for this time together and for the truth that You are not waiting for us to get it all together before You offer us a new heart. You are offering it right now, as a gift, because of Your grace and because of what Jesus did on the cross. We ask that You take the things we have talked about today and let them sink deep, not just into our minds but into our hearts. Where we have hardened ourselves, soften us. Where we have kept You at a distance, draw us close. Where we have settled for knowing about You, give us the courage to truly know You. Put Your Spirit in us so that we will want to follow You, not because we have to, but because we love You. May we leave here today a little more open, a little more tender, and a little more ready to receive everything You have for us. In the precious and holy name of Jesus, amen.