



THE GOSPEL OF
JOHN

SO THAT YOU MAY BELIEVE

JOHN 1:1-9:41

John

John 1:1-9:41

Anchor Church | Fall 2018

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Introduction

We don't have to wonder why John wrote his gospel. He explicitly tells us, "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:30-21). Jesus' identity is of utmost importance, for John's message, and the hope for humanity, stands on it.

As is true of anything we read, we must understand the author's assumptions about the world and the way it works. John's world is defined by the Old Testament Scriptures. These tell us the story of how a world that was created good was broken. They tell us why we long for justice and goodness while simultaneously putting our needs above the needs of others, contributing to the injustices we see all around us. They tell us of a good God who has provided all we need and of how we have doubted and rejected him. They tell us why death looms over all of us. But they also tell us of a promised hope for deliverance. This promise is progressively developed in the Old Testament through statements of God's intentions (like those found in Genesis 3:15, Isaiah 53, and Jeremiah 31:31-34) and through repeated symbols and patterns (like the temple, the feasts, the Davidic King, or the Exodus). This promised hope for deliverance centers on a coming Messiah (or Christ) who will rule forevermore with righteousness and justice. He will triumph over sin and death.

But the history of Israel gives little hope for a Messiah who can live up to the billing. The greatest heroes are broken just like us. It is very easy to read the Old Testament and come away feeling despair. What man could ever undo the tangled knot of sin in his own life, much less that of the world? This is why the identity of Jesus is so important.

John begins his gospel by stating, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:1-5). John is showing how Jesus is the answer to the problem of sin and death put forth in the Old Testament and experienced by us today. He is no ordinary man. He has eternally existed with God the Father. As John states, in the beginning Jesus was both with God, and he was God. This is mind-boggling to our finite minds, and yet as the gospel unfolds and helps us to understand the Old Testament promises, we see that it must be true (see, for example, John 3:1-15). Creation was made through him, and yet he humbles himself and takes on flesh to dwell among his people. He came to live the righteous life we couldn't, to die in our place for our sins, and to give us new life through belief in his name.

John shows us that God has revealed his glory to the world through his son Jesus. He is the fulfillment of God's promises, and God is saving a people for himself through his life, death, and resurrection.

Week 1

John 1:1-18 – The Word Became Flesh

By Harvey Edwards IV

Introduction

Have you ever been told a riddle that you couldn't figure out? You turn the problem over and over in your head. There are moments of excitement as you trace what seems to be a promising train of thought and moments of disappointment as that train of thought fails as a solution. Eventually, you give up hope of ever solving the riddle and beg your friend for the answer. Now think of the first thought you have as they share the answer: *How could I have missed that?*

This is similar to what we experience when we come to see the true identity of Jesus. We wonder how we did not know him before. And this is similar to what the Jews who knew the Old Testament experienced when they saw the true identity of Jesus. The Old Testament sets expectations for a Messiah who will defeat the serpent (Genesis 3:15) and who will be the blessing to the nations (Genesis 12). It tells of one like a Son of Man who will be given glory and an everlasting kingdom (Daniel 7:13-14). It tells of one like a lamb slain to take away the sins of the world (Isaiah 53). These promises are only fully understood with the coming of Jesus. John writes his gospel so we too can see God and his salvific plan accomplished in Jesus. John gives his reasoning for writing the gospel explicitly in John 20:30-31, which states, “³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” He begins this task with identifying Jesus as the second person of the Trinity.

Read John 1:1-18 together

Study Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I've read?

Passage-Specific Questions

1. What difficulties do you have understanding the Trinity?
2. Why is it important that Jesus is God? Why is it important that he is distinct from the Father?
3. What does it mean that Jesus is the light of the world? How does that knowledge affect your life?

Commentary

1:1-5 – *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*

John's introduction is foundational to understanding the truth of who Jesus is. The language “In the beginning” reminds us of the first words in Genesis 1. John is connecting his gospel to the creation story and what follows thereafter. He wants us to know that the claim he is making in his gospel is the natural outpouring of the work God has always been about. The Word of God is not something new or created, but rather a further revelation of the character and nature of God. The Word has eternally existed with God. The Word is personal (notice that the pronoun used for the Word is *he* not *it*) and distinct from God, but also is God. You are not alone if you need to stop and read back over John's claim here. The Word was with God *and* the Word was God. What are we to make of this?

Part of what God has revealed about himself in the Old Testament is that he alone is God; he alone is outside of creation; he alone is holy. This is one of the fundamental tenets of the Jewish faith, stated clearly in Deuteronomy 6:4, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.” John begins his gospel by immediately laying the groundwork for understanding that Jesus is both God and also distinct from the Father. Throughout the book, he will show that this is consistent with the revealed truth that there is only one God. John will record interactions that demonstrate the truth: there

is plurality in the Godhead (the Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit); AND there is only one God. In fact, he will show that this truth is evident in the Old Testament. For instance, in John 3, Jesus hints that he (as both one with and distinct from the Father) is the answer to some of the Jews’ most wrestled with questions. John 3:13 says, “No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.” Here Jesus refers to Proverbs 30:4 and Daniel 7:13-14, both of which posed riddles to Jewish readers. Proverbs leaves the reader with the question, “Who could ascend to Heaven and come down?” Jesus hints that he is the answer—God taken on flesh. Daniel 7:13-14 leaves the reader with two questions, “Who is the Son of Man (one who is like a man) that rides on the clouds (something only God, the Ancient of Days can do)?”, and “Who is the Christ who is given glory and an everlasting kingdom?” No mere man can do these things, but there is one who is obviously other than Father and yet like the Father. Again, the answer to this riddle is God taken on flesh. The Trinitarian nature of God is being revealed, that there is one God who eternally exists in three persons. Jesus’ identity as God will allow him to be the light in the darkness, revealing the truth of the Father to a dying world. Jesus is the source of light and life in creation and in salvation. John is introducing a question every reader of his gospel must answer: Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God? Our answer to this question is of ultimate importance, for it is only through believing in him that we can have life.

1:6-8 – *There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.*

John the apostle introduces John the Baptist whose role is to be a witness to the light—a witness to the identity of Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah, the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.

1:9-13 – *The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹²But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*

John introduces not only Jesus’ identity, but also his mission. The true light which gives light to everyone (his identity and work as God) was coming into the world (taking on flesh). The creator has come among his creation, but they do not recognize him. This is the sad state that we exist in apart from the Holy Spirit’s work in our lives. Because of our hard and sinful hearts, we are unable to recognize our creator even when he stands before us. In fact, we have rejected relationship with him. But the good news is that for those who receive him, who believe in his name, he gives the right to become children of God, something that is only possible through divine action on our behalf.

1:14-18 – *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵(John bore witness about him, and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.’ ”) ¹⁶For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.*

Jesus, the Word of God, has become flesh and dwelt among us. He has revealed the Father to us. Before Jesus, even though God’s people had the law of Moses, none were able to be in relationship with God based on their performance. Jesus brings grace and truth, revealing the Father and making a way for us to know and be in relationship with him through his life, death, and resurrection.

The Main Point

Jesus is the revelation of the Father, the Son of God taken on flesh. Through believing in him, we are restored to right relationship with the Father.

A Few Relevant Scriptures

- Genesis 1
- Daniel 7:13-14

- The Father as God – Philippians 1:2
- Jesus as God – Titus 2:13
- The Holy Spirit as God – Acts 5:3-4

Week 2

John 1:19-34 – Behold the Lamb of God

By Harvey Edwards IV

Introduction

Have you ever had to turn over some sort of responsibility or leadership role? Very often these positions become part of our identity. Maybe you left a job or a volunteer position, maybe you were replaced on a sports team, maybe you filled an interim spot at work until someone else was hired for that position. Regardless of the situation, think about how you felt when you turned your position over. You may have felt some relief that you no longer carried that burden, but I'm sure it was also hard to no longer be the person others looked to for answers. Whenever we lose some authority, either by giving it away or having it taken away, it is hard. We have a tendency to feel less important, like we are no longer respected or valued. This is what John the Baptist is dealing with in this passage. Jesus has come, and it is now time to point to him as the one people should follow. A question being asked in the passage is whether or not John will submit to Jesus and perform his role as witness to the Messiah. People give him ample opportunity to usurp the honor reserved for Jesus.

Anyone who contemplates following Jesus will face a similar decision. Will we allow him to become the center of our lives? Will we be a subject to the true king? John demonstrates what it means to follow Jesus.

Read John 1:19-34 together

Study Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I've read?

Passage-Specific Questions

1. Those questioning John ask him why he is baptizing people if he is not the Christ, Elijah, or the Prophet. What is the significance of the baptisms that John is performing?
2. What does it mean for us personally that Jesus is the "Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world"?
3. How does this knowledge change how we think and live?

Commentary

1:19-23 – *And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?"* ²⁰ *He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ."* ²¹ *And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?"* *He said, "I am not."* *"Are you the Prophet?"* *And he answered, "No."* ²² *So they said to him, "Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"* ²³ *He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said."*

²⁴ *(Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.)* ²⁵ *They asked him, "Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?"* ²⁶ *John answered them, "I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know,* ²⁷ *even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie."* ²⁸ *These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.*

John the Baptist plays an important role in the revelation of Jesus. Earlier, we saw that he is sent from God as a witness to Jesus (John 1:6-8). John has grown quite a following baptizing people and preaching the repentance of sins. As a result, priests and Levites from Jerusalem are sent to ask him who he is. John immediately confesses that he is not the Christ. As we read this, we should understand that John has no illusions about his proper place in God's story. He is not the expected savior, but rather one who points to him. When the priests and Levites ask him if he is Elijah, they are referencing a belief that the Prophet Elijah would return before the Day of the Lord. He replies that he is not (although we will see that he fulfills this expectation). They then ask if he is the Prophet. This is another perhaps less understood

reference to a messianic expectation. The Jews were looking for a prophet like Moses (Deuteronomy 18:18) who would represent them before the Lord. Again, John tells them he is not. When they ask who he is, he references Isaiah 40:3 and says he is “the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord’” (John 1:23). God chooses him to bear witness to Jesus, identifying him as the Messiah. When they ask him why he is baptizing people if he is not the Christ, Elijah, or the Prophet, we get the sense that they are wondering why they should care anything about what he says. John tells them that he baptizes with water, but that one greater than he is coming. Though John is preaching repentance, he is unable to remove sin. But he will be a witness to the one who does.

1:29-34 – *The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”³⁰ This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.’³¹ I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel.”³² And John bore witness: “I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him.³³ I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’³⁴ And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.”*

John the Baptist identifies Jesus as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). This statement is full of underlying meaning and taps into lots of symbolism for the Jews. One of these would be the Passover, a celebration remembering when God rescued Israel from the Egyptians. During the first Passover, God spared the firstborn sons of the Jews who placed the blood of a slaughtered lamb over their doors. The lamb died in their place. Not only were their sons spared, but God delivered Israel from slavery and oppression in Egypt. The prophets teach that just as God delivered his people from Egypt, he will deliver them from slavery to and the oppression of sin and death. John is proclaiming Jesus as the fulfillment of this picture.

In addition, Isaiah 53 discusses a suffering servant who is pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities. Isaiah says that through his wounds, we are healed. This righteous servant will bear the sins of others and make them righteous.

John states that Jesus is greater than he, that Jesus was before him, and that the Spirit descended on Jesus and remained on him. Though John did not know him through his own power, the Lord reveals to John that Jesus is the Son of God, the one who has the power to baptize with the Holy Spirit (a clear sign of the Messiah who is bringing about God’s kingdom, a time when God’s Spirit would be poured out “on all flesh” [Joel 2:28]). John declares what God has revealed to him—Jesus is the Son of God. And as the Son of God, he has the authority to rescue those who believe in his name.

The Main Point

Jesus is the foretold of Son of God who takes away the sin of the world. Will we recognize Jesus as the Messiah and be saved from our sin?

A Few Relevant Scriptures

- Deuteronomy 18:15-18
- Exodus 12
- Isaiah 53
- Joel 2:28-29
- Romans 3:21-26

Week 3

John 1:35-51 – Follow Me

By Harvey Edwards IV

Introduction

Think about what it was like to be a kid when it was time to open presents. Remember when you had no filter for your response to a present you opened. You ripped the paper off and took stock of what you received. If it is of no interest, you throw it over your shoulder into the pile of discarded wrapping paper. But if it piques your interest, you begin to loudly call for everyone to stop what they are doing and look at your gift. As we age, most of us are a little subtler with our reactions, but when we discover something good, we want others to know about it. We share music, restaurants, and books we discover. We want people to enjoy the good things that we have found. This is what happens when Andrew and Philip meet Jesus. They want those they care about to see whom they have found.

Read John 1:35-51 together

Study Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I've read?

Passage-Specific Questions

1. Why do you think John chooses to record the calling of these disciples? What do you make of Andrew and Philip's immediate response to go and tell someone close to them about Jesus?
 2. John has to choose between building his influence and giving glory to God. What are ways that you might have to make similar decisions while following Jesus?
 3. What does it mean for us that Jesus took on flesh? What are the implications of that for our lives?
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Commentary

1:35-42 – *The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶ and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" ³⁷ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸ Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, "What are you seeking?" And they said to him, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" ³⁹ He said to them, "Come and you will see." So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. ⁴⁰ One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. ⁴¹ He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ). ⁴² He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter).*

As discussed last week, John the Baptist is fulfilling his role as witness to the identity of the Messiah proclaimed in the Old Testament Scriptures. To fulfill this role, it is necessary for John to correctly understand his position before Jesus. Last week, we read that John made this statement about Jesus, "²⁶ I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, ²⁷ even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie" (John 1:26-27). Here John acts in light of his confession of Jesus' identity and confession. He proclaims Jesus as the Lamb of God to his disciples in order that they might follow Jesus rather than him. John knows that when he proclaims Jesus as Messiah, his followers will cease to be his followers. He has to choose between his glory and the glory of his Lord. He willingly chooses the glory of Jesus by turning his disciples over to Jesus. Proclaiming the name of Jesus forces us to recognize there is one greater than us. This is precisely what we see in John 3:25-30:

²⁵ Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification. ²⁶ And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him." ²⁷ John answered, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given

him from heaven. ²⁸ You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.' ²⁹ The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. ³⁰ He must increase, but I must decrease."

John knows his role is to pass whatever glory comes his way on to Jesus. And as he does so, people find life. One of John's two disciples is Andrew. He in turn finds Simon Peter and tells him about the Christ. Both of these men become apostles used mightily by the Holy Spirit in the expansion of the church.

1:43-51 – *The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." ⁴⁴ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." ⁴⁶ Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." ⁴⁷ Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!" ⁴⁸ Nathanael said to him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." ⁴⁹ Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" ⁵⁰ Jesus answered him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these." ⁵¹ And he said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."*

When Jesus finds Philip, Philip recognizes him as the fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures. Again, the idea of witness is addressed here. Philip meets Jesus, understands something of his identity, and immediately begins to bear witness about Jesus. A life of following Jesus is a life lived as a witness to his identity.

Nathanael's initial doubt is overcome by a mild demonstration of Jesus' power. Nathanael comes to the realization that Jesus is the Messiah. He, too, serves as a witness to the identity of Jesus. He identifies him as the Son of God and the King of Israel. Jesus tells him he will see greater things than Jesus' knowledge of his whereabouts, in particular the opening of heaven and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man. Here, Jesus references the story of Jacob in Genesis 28:10-17. Jacob had a dream in which a ladder went between heaven and earth and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. The Lord stands above it and reminds Jacob of the promises he made to Jacob's forefathers, Abraham and Isaac. Jacob's response to his dream is to name the place Bethel, which means house of God. Jesus is telling Nathanael that he is the fulfillment of the idea of Bethel. Jesus, God the Son, has taken on flesh and is dwelling, (or tabernacling) with man. God is bringing about the fullness of his promises given in the Old Testament through Jesus. We have access to the Father through his son Jesus.

The Main Point

Jesus calls the first disciples. They recognize him as the Messiah and respond to his call. Will we recognize Jesus as king and follow him as king?

A Few Relevant Scriptures

- Genesis 28:10-17
- Acts 2:29-36
- Hebrews 1

Week 4

Acts 2:1-12 – Water to Wine

By Aaron Barnes

Introduction

When I was a kid, our house never ran low on Kool-Aid. We'd be outside sun up to sun down shooting basketball or riding bikes and there it would be...the pitcher that never ran dry! Thanks to mom that is. It was an exciting day when we knew we were going grocery shopping because mom let us pick out our own flavors of Kool-Aid. Good times! I can't imagine what I would do if a new guy in town came up into our yard, stuck a water hose in a bucket, and then after filling it, dipped a cup in to give me a drink only to find out that what I thought was warm hose water had somehow transformed into ice-cold, Cool Blue Raspberry Kool-Aid. Man. I'd be telling everyone about that guy. He would be an American hero.

That's kind of what happens here in this Scripture. Except the new guy didn't pour out Kool-Aid; he filled the bucket with wine. There wasn't a water hose in a bucket, there were a bunch of stone water jugs. And he didn't pull up to an epic game of pick-up basketball with the neighbor kids. He was at a wedding feast. Jesus chose that very moment to show his disciples what he was capable of—not to show off, but to show them his real identity. What he does is amazing! And as the disciples saw what Jesus did, they believed. When we are given the opportunity to “see and believe,” what will we do?

Read John 2:1-12 together

Weekly Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I've read?

Passage-Specific Questions

1. Has there been a time in your life when you did not know what was going on, but in the end, you realized that God was using your relationships with others as an opportunity to reach someone else or put God on display? If so, share with the group.
2. When was the last time that you looked for an opportunity to point others to Jesus? What was that experience like?
3. What would it look like in your home for you to intentionally set aside time to point your family/roommates to Jesus? How about in your workplace?

Commentary

2:1-12 – *On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ² Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. ³ When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” ⁴ And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” ⁵ His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”*

⁶ Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷ Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸ And he said to them, “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast.” So they took it. ⁹ When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom ¹⁰ and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now.” ¹¹ This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

¹² After this he went down to Capernaum, with his mother and his brothers and his disciples, and they stayed there for a few days.

Is there a better way to kickoff Jesus' earthly ministry than with a sign at a wedding banquet? Within both the Old and New Testaments, we are told of a coming wedding feast that will take place as God sets all things right. The Church is referred to several times as the bride of Christ. He will receive his bride, and we will feast in the House of Zion. On the day that God calls his children home, there will be a wedding banquet unlike any other. How fitting it is that Jesus chose a wedding feast to launch his earthly ministry.

Do not let his words to his mother offend you. What he says to her is no different than something we might say today to our mothers. We might say, "Ok mom, but why are you telling me this? Since when did I become responsible for the wine?" In this particular circumstance, Mary could have been closely related to or asked to work alongside those that provided the meal for the banquet. This could be a possibility as to why she is concerned with the drink supply. This is not something that we should spend too much time dwelling on and debating, because as soon as she tells the servants to listen to Jesus, she fades into the background. Within John's gospel, we will see this happen time and again. People will come into the story long enough to point to Jesus and then fade into the background. For example, John the Baptist made the great statement that many companies have placed on t-shirts and bumper stickers. In John 3:30, John says that Jesus must increase and he (John the Baptist) must decrease. Even though Mary was more than likely not intending to evangelistically point to Jesus as the hope for salvation, she did move the focus from her and the need for wine onto Jesus and his ability to meet that need. Thank you God for your divine appointments and opportunities for us to point others to Jesus in any situation.

The stone pots that are present in this text are for Jewish purification. They were not the clay pots (earthenware) that were common in those days; they were carved from stone. The Old Testament Levitical rules call for the use of stone pots for ceremonial washing, because the clay pots could be impure. Jesus' act of "...turning water into wine signifies the transformation of the old order into the new through Jesus Christ" (Reformation Study Bible). Some look at this as one more layer of evidence pointing to Jesus as fulfilling all that was said of him in the Old Testament. He came and fulfilled the ceremonial laws. The water that was once used to wash a person and make them ritually clean in God's eyes has been replaced by the blood of Jesus that is able to cleanse once and for all.

In John 13, Jesus kneels down, takes on the role of a servant, and washes the feet of his devoted disciples. Coming to Peter, Peter attempts to keep Jesus from washing his feet. In this situation, Jesus reminds Peter that what he is doing is much more than just a cleaning of their feet. He is illustrating what happens when we trust in Jesus. Jesus became the sin sacrifice necessary for us to receive salvation from the Father. By Jesus taking on our sin and shedding his blood for us, we have the opportunity to be made clean. In the Old Testament, the priest needed to walk through a ritual of cleansing to be clean. Now that Jesus has come, the ceremonial stone jars are no longer needed for cleaning. They are free to be used for another purpose. The Messianic Day has come, and now, there is no need for ceremonial laws. Jesus has done what we could never do and he fulfilled them. Being pure from the beginning, he had no need of being made clean. Before Christ, priests had to follow a strict regimen of what to eat, what to wear, and how to bathe in order to be "clean" when approaching God in the Tabernacle. Because Jesus fulfilled the prophecies, we have no need of the ceremonial law in order to be found clean and worthy of worshiping him. We could not do that. Jesus could. Jesus did.

This sign is one of many that demonstrate that Jesus has the power to bring about expectations that have been laid out in the Old Testament for what the Messianic age will look like. This Messianic age is a time when God's promised Messiah (Jesus) will bring about a righteous kingdom that is filled with God's blessing, partially demonstrated in the abundance of good things. In essence, it is the curse of creation undone. He is making all things new. Genesis 49:8-12 and Amos 9:13-14 describe this age with a picture of the fruit of the vine being available in abundance. When Jesus turns normal water into the finest wine, he demonstrates that he has the authority and power to bring about this kind of abundant blessing.

John (the author of this gospel account) uses a great word to describe what Jesus does. He uses the word "sign" instead of "miracle." This is on purpose. John tells us in 20:30-31 the reason for his writing.

³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

John uses the word *sign* here because Jesus does more than just a wonder that would cause pondering and questions. He turns water into wine so that his new disciples might believe that he is who he says he is. When we read the entirety of the Book of John, we are not to just wonder at the miracles of Jesus. John wants us, as he did the readers in his day, to believe that Jesus IS the Son of God; that he came to fulfill what God gave him to fulfill. And, that in believing in him, we receive redemption.

One important note: Jesus will not be pressured to do our thing. His mother could not hurry him. His disciples could not hurry him. We can not hurry him. Jesus knew why he came to earth. He knew his role. He knew his purpose. Because he knew the plan from the beginning, there was freedom in his actions. We can share in that freedom as well if we will but spend time with our Father and listen to his Spirit as he guides us. Knowing that our purpose comes from him and that we are witnesses to what he has done in our lives, we can experience freedom that is unexplainable. We can experience a peace that is unknowable apart from knowing Jesus. “Knowing Jesus and making him known” can truly be a freeing life if we will give ourselves over to him.

The Main Point

Jesus performs signs confirming his identity as the expected Messiah. Will we recognize Jesus as the one who is bringing the kingdom of God?

A Few Relevant Scriptures

- John 3:22-36
- John 20:30-31

Week 5

Acts 2:13-25 – Jesus Cleanses the Temple

By Aaron Barnes

Introduction

WOWZA! Jesus, the loving and humble carpenter guy gets so angry with what he sees that he flips some tables and even whips some people and livestock. Maybe I should have given you a heads up first? Nah. That's how John records it. They're walking through the city, and they approach the Temple. I wonder if they are discussing what they think the Rabbi will discuss or if they'll sing the traditional or the contemporary rendition of "How Great Thou Art"? Then, it happens and they never EVER forget it.

As you'll read in just a few minutes, Jesus was very irritated with what was taking place in the Temple, so much so that he could not let it go. He had to step in and make an example of a few unfortunate men and livestock. He was so disgusted with the status quo that he stepped in to correct their actions and hopefully their motives behind their actions.

What about you? What is it in your life that gets you FIRED UP? So much so that you cannot help stepping in and correcting a few folks. Or do you? I am afraid that culture has other ways that it prefers we deal with issues. I think culture prefers we take to social media and let our fingers do the proverbial talking. But what if it isn't supposed to be that way? Though we can sometimes, we might be able to pen the most eloquent speech of all time and really pull at the heart strings of 100 people, what if God intends for us to actually step in and change the flow of the stream? Maybe we were meant to not only say things, but actually do things as well? Jesus taught his disciples about worship. He taught them about prayer and how to actually pray. And in this passage, he shows them how seriously he takes them both.

So I ask again, what is it that gets us so fired up that we cannot help stepping in? How can we use that situation to lovingly point others to Jesus

Read John 2:13-25 together

Weekly Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I've read?

Passage-Specific Questions

1. When things don't go your way, how do you tend to respond? Share with the group.
2. What is something that is so unacceptable to you that when it happens you have to say or do something about it?
3. How are we working to end the unacceptable while also pointing to Jesus as the answer?

Commentary

2:13-25 – ¹³ *The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.* ¹⁴ *In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there.* ¹⁵ *And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables.* ¹⁶ *And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade."* ¹⁷ *His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."*

¹⁸ *So the Jews said to him, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?"* ¹⁹ *Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."* ²⁰ *The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?"* ²¹ *But he was speaking about the temple of his body.* ²² *When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.*

²³ *Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing.* ²⁴ *But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people²⁵ and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.*

Can you picture it? You were asked to follow this new teacher in town, and you do because you are unexplainably drawn to him. You see him turn tap water in stone jugs into the best wine in town. You hear him teach in a way that no one has ever taught. As a matter of fact, you actually understand what you've been taught all these years. Now, you arrive at the Temple during Passover, and you see some guys selling stuff. Thinking nothing of it, you walk on by. Except this time, instead of hearing the bleating of sheep and cooing of pigeons, you hear money hitting the floor and see your teacher flipping the tables over and chasing people around the Temple. This is pandemonium! After the dust settles a bit, you step in to listen to what he is telling them. You've never experienced someone so meek and gentle be so authoritative and direct. Then a verse from fifteen years ago hits you... "Zeal for your house will consume me" (Psalm 69:9). This teacher guy definitely has zeal for God's house. Maybe at this point you begin to ask yourself THE question, "Can this be the ONE?" If so, what does this mean for me? For this city? For the world?

The Passover of the Jews was a time of remembrance for their people. It was meant for them to remember God delivering them from Egypt. On the last night the Israelites spent in Egypt, the final plague that God inflicted upon Egypt took place. This plague would result in the loss of the first born. The only way that they could be saved from the plague was if they took a spotless lamb, prepared it a certain way for a meal, and then spread its blood over the doorways to their homes. God sent an angel of death over the land, and if the angel saw the lamb's blood on the door of a home, he would "pass over." This pointed to the ultimate Passover lamb: Jesus.

Then John mentions the Passover in chapter 2, he gives us a frame of reference for when these events are taking place. Every good Jew, no matter how far away they lived, would make the journey back to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast. According to Levitical law, there would need to be sacrifices made for specific seasons of life and specific rituals that would need to take place for a person to be considered clean so that they could partake in the festivities of the Passover. What better place to find these items than at the Temple, or House of Prayer? This is not something that Jesus is going to let slide. There was an avenue made in Deuteronomy 14:22-29 for Israelites living in faraway places to bring their money and purchase the items. However, if they were going to do that, they could not purchase the holy items with pagan money. They had to visit the local money exchange. That also happened to be in the Temple. So with all of this going on, the Temple became less like it was intended to be as a house of worship and more like a local bank or money market. I do not think that Jesus is rebuking fundraising opportunities within the faith family. I think he is expressing his distaste that what should be used for God's glory is being used for ill-gotten gain. This was not something that Jesus was thrilled about. Hence his reaction.

The response from the Jews within the conflict was, "Who gives you this authority? Show us proof that you have the authority to do these things!" (My paraphrase.) They are not asking for a sign as he did with the disciples at the wedding feast. They are asking for proof almost as we would ask to see identification for someone knocking at our door claiming to be a police officer. The funny thing is, the Jewish leaders will repeatedly ask Jesus to prove himself to them, but he never does. He will not perform cheap parlor tricks as a street magician would. He does not allow them to dictate his mission. He knows why he came. However, he does offer them a prophetic statement that they were too hard-hearted to understand. They ask for a sign and Jesus says that he can do the unthinkable: rebuild the temple in three days. Of course with us being on this side of the resurrection, we know that he was talking about himself. However, they have no idea what he is talking about. It would be as if someone said that if we knocked down Bryant-Denny Stadium, Nick Saban could rebuild it in seven days. Even though there are some out there who would agree with him, we all know that Saban could not rebuild the stadium. A washed-up football program? Maybe. Throughout the gospel of John, the Jewish leaders are given opportunities to hear and respond to Jesus, but their hearts are too hard for them to comprehend who he is.

I love what happens in verse 23. It says that Jesus did perform other signs, and people believed in him because of those signs. However, Jesus did not reveal himself to them. There was still much for the disciples to learn and experience before Jesus would share that with them. That will come later in the book.

The Main Point

Jesus predicts his resurrection, pointing to the fulfillment of the imagery of the temple. Jesus gives us access to the Father.

A Few Relevant Scriptures

- Exodus 12
- Psalm 69:9

Week 6

Acts 3:1-21 – Jesus Is Our Hope for Life

By Aaron Barnes

Introduction

I am sure you have had someone ask this question before, right? It goes something like, “If you could have lunch/coffee/dinner with anyone past/present/future, who would you choose and what would you ask them?” That’s a great get-to-know-you game, by the way. I have asked myself this question several times, and I either have no idea who I would choose or I choose someone different each time. Right now, I would probably like to go back and chat with 15-16-year-old me. I’d ask him why he thinks he doesn’t need to study or why he thinks Paco jeans are cool? Research them. You’ll ask the same question. How about you? Who would you pick and why? What would you ask them?

Nicodemus was given that chance. He was there, sitting face-to-face, with the creator of the universe and redeemer of souls. I wonder what was going through his mind. Was he nervous? Were his palms sweaty, knees weak, or arms heavy? I wonder what his wife thought (if he had one)? Can you imagine it? Of course, we are on this side of the cross looking back through that lens. I imagine Nicodemus would have LOVED to know then what we know now. I will say though, it’s amazing what can happen in one simple, short conversation. Jesus wastes no time when it came to conversations with people. He loved them. He saw them. He spoke directly to them. Nicodemus was no different.

Read John 3:1-21 together

Weekly Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I’ve read?

Passage-Specific Questions

1. When was the last time something so spectacular happened that it left you speechless? Share with the group.
 2. Have you ever asked a question of someone only to receive an answer you didn’t expect? How did you respond?
 3. What is that one question you have always wanted to ask Jesus, but are too afraid to ask? Feel free to share with your group. This is a safe space. Chances are, they want to know too.
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Commentary

3:1-21 – *Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. ²This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.” ³Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” ⁴Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” ⁵Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ ⁸The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”*

⁹Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” ¹⁰Jesus answered him, “Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? ¹¹Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. ¹²If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? ¹³No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹And this is the judgment: the light has come into the

world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. ²⁰ For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. ²¹ But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.”

Have you ever experienced that lingering feeling when things just aren't right? Or maybe they have been wrong for so long that when they have been corrected, you aren't exactly sure how you are supposed to react? I believe that Nicodemus is sensing that lingering feeling as he approaches Jesus. We are told right away who Nicodemus is and, by that, we are told what he should know about this Jesus character. Nicodemus is a Pharisee. If this is your first introduction to that term, let me give you the CliffsNotes version of a definition. They know a great deal in regards to the law and the Old Testament... a great deal! Think of that one friend you have that can name any song on the radio just by hearing the first two bars. That was a Pharisee. They could tell you anything you wanted to know about Old Testament Scriptures, prophecies, and laws. They took great pride in knowing. And this pride is what would continue to place them in opposition to Jesus, his teachings, and his way of ministry. Not only is Nicodemus a Pharisee, but he also serves as a member of the Sanhedrin. They were the US Supreme Court of Jewish life in those days. So, yeah... Nicodemus knows the law and even passes judgment in court based on the interpretation of the law. So when he approaches Jesus, many are left wondering, why? Is he personally wondering if Jesus really is the Messiah?

Scripture says that Nicodemus comes to Jesus during the night. This could just mean that it is literally dark outside. However, John is not a newspaper reporter. He tends to lean more on the symbolic side of things. One commentator says that Nicodemus is in spiritual darkness when he comes to Jesus. When biblical writers use the references to darkness or night, many times it is spiritually related. If this is what John is intending, then it would lend itself to Nicodemus' spiritual state at the moment he comes to Jesus. And it shows up in their conversation. He may have some idea or hope that Jesus is who he said he is, but at the end of this conversation Nicodemus seems to be left wondering about the identity of Jesus. As modern-day readers, we are left wondering if he understands.

We should not interpret Jesus' response to Nicodemus as some sort of "gotcha game" or "Jesus Juke." Jesus simply knows why Nicodemus is approaching him. At the end of chapter 2, John makes it clear that Jesus does not need anyone to speak in his place because he knows all too well what man believes. So when Nicodemus approaches him with the complimentary title "Rabbi," Jesus cuts to the chase. Yeah, Nicodemus says things that are true, but he obviously doesn't fully understand the implications of these truths. He says that he believes that no one can do the signs Jesus is doing unless God is with him. But the signs, in and of themselves, are not the point. The point of the signs is Jesus! He is the Son of God. So as Jesus responds to Nicodemus, he is basically saying to him, "You say you have belief, but you are believing in the wrong things. They point to God, through me."

Then there's the "how can someone enter back into the womb" dialogue that leads to the point in verse 8. Jesus hands Nicodemus a switch in perspective. You can't see the wind nor do you know where it originates, but you see its effects. So it is with the people of God. Those that are not born-again believers have a difficult time understanding why we (as believers) do what we do. However, they *do* see what we do, and this provides opportunity for us to share the *why*. Nicodemus is on the outside looking in and is attempting to gain knowledge to the how without first asking about the why. Jesus chides him a bit, and I honestly think that Jesus may be a bit disappointed in his lack of understanding at this point. Then, as Jesus typically does, he points to the reason he is here. He connects what Moses did in the Old Testament (something that Nicodemus would be VERY familiar with) to himself (something Nicodemus would struggle to understand without faith). In Numbers 21:4-9, the Israelites are bemoaning the daily struggle of not having exactly what they want when they want it. They are busy complaining and all of a sudden, snakes are all over the place. People are being bitten left and right. They realize that they have messed up BIG TIME! They go to Moses and repent. Moses goes to God, and God's response is for Moses to make a snake out of bronze, place it on a huge wooden pole, and then raise it up for all the afflicted to see. If the people who had been bitten by the snakes look upon the bronze snake, they will be healed. Jesus says he is the fulfillment of this Old Testament picture. He tells Nicodemus that just as Moses raised up the snake in the wilderness that would lead to salvation of the Israelites from evil snakes, he (Jesus) must also be raised up (crucifixion) leading to the salvation of humanity from sin.

Wrapping up his conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus leaves him with this thought... I am who I say I am, and I believe you are sensing that truth, but what are you going to do about it? That's the same question we must all answer: what do we do with Jesus? We may not understand all that happens between the covers of our Bible. We may have never heard of Nabal and Methuselah, or have ever wondered why the ark was made of gopher wood. But at the end of the day, Jesus is either the Son of God or he is not. Either he came to accomplish what he set out to do or he did not. For Nicodemus, we are left to wonder what he decided. For us, we still have that opportunity. God did not send Jesus as his enforcer. He did not send him to beat us into submission. It's quite the opposite. Jesus came as a lowly carpenter who

lived his life poured out for others that cared little about his mission. Why? Because he loves us THAT much! He came to give his life as a “ransom for many.” What will you do with Jesus? Receive him or reject him?

The Main Point

Unless one is born again, they cannot enter into the kingdom of God. Will we look to the Son of Man? Will we step into the light so that others may see what God has done?

A Few Relevant Scriptures

- John 1:4-12
- Ephesians 5:7-14

Week 7

John 3:22-36 – He Must Increase, But I Must Decrease

By Michael Green

Introduction

Have you ever had the pleasure of watching the TV show “Say Yes to the Dress” on TLC? I have learned that there is one fundamental, recurring concept in this show that, no matter how hard I try, I will never be able to wrap my mind around. Every time I watch this show I want to scream at the top of my lungs, “IT’S NOT ABOUT YOU!” Every episode, the same scenario unfolds: the bride-to-be’s entourage makes comment after comment about the bride’s selections of would-be wedding dresses as if it is THEIR wedding, often driving the bride to the point of tears! To be sure, the bride wants help, opinions, and insights, or she wouldn’t have brought the cloud of commentators in the first place. However, she often gets a great deal more than subtle input. As a matter of fact, the more critical and out of place the comments are, the more captivating the episode becomes! It is the bride’s wedding, but often the show becomes more about the onlookers’ out-of-bounds personalities than helping to adorn the bride in a beautiful gown in preparation for her wedding day.

John the Baptist did not suffer from that same kind of role confusion. He knew his purpose, his God-ordained task of heralding the arrival of the groom, Jesus Christ. John rejoices in his arrival, gladly receding out of the spotlight so that the only one worthy of worship rests solely in it. It is Jesus’ day, not John’s.

Read John 3:22-36 together.

Weekly Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I’ve read?

Passage-Specific Questions

1. How could you use this passage in addressing the false notion that Jesus was a good moral teacher, but He wasn’t God?
 2. Paraphrase John’s point in verses 27-29.
 3. John the Baptist works to make sure that his followers understand that he is not the Christ. He is a herald of the Messiah, not the Messiah. Why do you think it is necessary for him to articulate this distinction? What are some ways that this type of confusion gets expressed in our modern world?
 4. Describe the relationship between the Father and the Son outlined in verses 31-35.
 5. What are the consequences for remaining under the wrath of God (v. 36)? How is one delivered from the wrath of God? Why?
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Commentary

3:22-30 – *After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he remained there with them and was baptizing. ²³ John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized ²⁴ (for John had not yet been put in prison).*

²⁵ *Now a discussion arose between some of John’s disciples and a Jew over purification. ²⁶ And they came to John and said to him, “Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him.” ²⁷ John answered, “A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. ²⁸ You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.’ ²⁹ The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. ³⁰ He must increase, but I must decrease.”*

John the Baptist has a very clear understanding of his role in the gospel story. He speaks to this point in John 1:19-28 when he is being interrogated regarding the peculiar activities that he is carrying out. In this conversation, he

emphatically states that he “is not the Christ” (1:20) and that he is “the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said” (1:23). In referencing Isaiah, he is indicating that he is very aware of his God-given task in this life. He is the messenger of which the Prophet Isaiah foretold that is sent into the world to proclaim the arrival of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. As a matter of fact, shortly after saying he is the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, he performs his role in the most literal sense. Upon seeing Jesus come toward him, he says in 1:29, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world!” John teaches that he came into the world baptizing with water in order to reveal to Israel the one that would baptize with the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11). John tells them that this is Jesus, the sandals of whom he is unfit to carry. From a human perspective, John has much reason to boast. He has a specially designed task, unique in the history of Christianity literally foretold of by a prophet, written about in sacred Scripture. But from a heavenly perspective, this is just what he is designed to do. His purpose is not to elevate himself; his purpose is to herald the only one worthy of being elevated. All glory is due to the groom, not the friend of the groom. John drives this point home emphatically when he says, “A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven” (v. 27). The same is true for believers today. We too are given gifts and God-ordained specific tasks. But, the gifts and the tasks are designed to bring glory to God, not ourselves.

3:31-36 - *He who comes from above is above all. He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way. He who comes from heaven is above all. ³² He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony. ³³ Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true. ³⁴ For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. ³⁵ The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. ³⁶ Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.*

Jesus is above all. There is a Creator, and there is creation. All of humanity, including John, falls into the latter category. As humans, we have all sinned and are in need of forgiveness and cleansing. Jesus teaches that this can only be found in Him. John is making the case that to accept Jesus’ teaching is to accept the testimony of God. To reject Jesus’ words is to make God out to be a liar. The Father has sent the Son who “gives the Spirit without measure” (v. 34). The Father, the Son, and the Spirit are one. If a person rejects the Son, then it is equivalent to rejecting God and his accompanying offer of salvation. Thus, that person remains under the wrath of God because he or she has rejected Jesus’ offer of taking the penalty of a person’s sins upon himself. In doing this, that person has chosen to remain in his or her sin. On the other hand, everyone who “believes in the Son has eternal life” (v. 36).

The Main Point

God is one. To reject the Son, Jesus Christ, is to reject God and his accompanying offer of salvation, which results in remaining under the wrath of God. But, believing in Jesus results in eternal life.

A Few Relevant Scriptures

- Isaiah 43
- Matthew 3

Week 8

John 4:1-45 – Living Water

By Michael Green

Introduction

Rejection isn't pleasant. Being an outcast in any scenario is painful. Have you ever been on the outside looking in on a group of people that seems to be privileged, enjoying community and acceptance with one another, and having that sense of belonging escape you? The good news is the Kingdom of Heaven isn't like that. God's offer of salvation is not based on credentials. There is no heavenly hierarchy of human value. The Gospel is for everyone. Jesus sought out the sick, the sinners, and the social outcasts. He touched lepers, hung out with tax collectors, and reached out to societal rejects. Christ goes to the downtrodden. To quote a song lyric, He loves the unlovely. Many times I feel unlovely, or, more specifically, unlovable. In times like this, I am thankful for interactions like the one in John 4 where Jesus engages with a woman with a tattered past, from a culture at odds with his own. He doesn't tolerate just her; he seeks her out. She is what's on the Son of God's agenda that day, and he is in pursuit of her soul.

Read John 4:1-45 together.

Weekly Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I've read?

Passage-Specific Questions

1. Jesus got tired. Is that disruptive to how you typically view him? Why or why not?
 2. If you were having a discussion with a non-believer, how would you explain verses 13-14?
 3. Verse 16 seems like an abrupt detour in the conversation to our human minds. At the very least, it certainly seems out of place. But, given that Jesus is fully God, he knows what he is doing. Why do you think he goes there?
 4. What do verses 23 and 24 mean?
 5. In light of verses 34-38, are there any areas of your life where you haven't been laboring in fields that are ripe for harvest? What is an action step that you can take to address that?
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Commentary

4:1-10 – *Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John ²(although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples), ³he left Judea and departed again for Galilee. ⁴And he had to pass through Samaria. ⁵So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour.*

⁷*A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." ⁸(For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) ⁹The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) ¹⁰Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."*

Samaria was north of Judea. The people of the land were Israelites by heritage but had intermingled their lives and, more particularly, their faith with people that worshipped foreign gods. Thus, in the mind of a first century Jew, they were a defiled people that had betrayed their faith. Jewish travelers would actually often go way out of the way on journeys (at a time when traveling was much more difficult than today) just so they didn't have to pass through Samaria. Furthermore, due to the cultural tension, but also due to the difference in their genders, Jesus' interaction with the Samaritan woman was out of place. This leads the woman to ask him, "How can you ask me for a drink?" (v. 9). Jesus quickly gets to the heart of the issue, pointing the woman to the fact that this conversation could have a much greater

impact than just providing a Jewish man with a drink. Jesus tells her that he has the power to provide her with “living water” (v. 10).

4:11-26 – *The woman said to him, “Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?”¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock.”¹³ Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again,¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”¹⁵ The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water.”*

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come here.”¹⁷ The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; ¹⁸for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.”¹⁹ The woman said to him, “Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. ²⁰Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.”²¹ Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. ²²You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. ²⁴God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”²⁵ The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things.”²⁶ Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am he.”

Jesus tells the woman that the water he offers has an eternal impact. The person that partakes in the water he provides “will never thirst” (v. 14). It’s obvious that she is still operating on the temporal plane when she asks him to give her that water so that she won’t have to keep coming back to the well. But the water that Jesus is offering has a whole lot more to do with the thirst of the soul rather than the palate, and he takes the conversation in that direction. Jesus tells the woman intimate details about her sordid past and present with regard to men, and the woman surmises that he is a prophet [insert Captain Obvious joke here]. Now seemingly realizing that this conversation is operating on a much deeper level, she asks the “prophet” about whether or not the Samaritans’ worship is acceptable to God. Jesus tells her that salvation is from the Jews, but the Father desires worshippers that worship him “in the Spirit and in truth” (v. 23). And, these worshippers are not limited to a certain people group or geographic location. The time has now arrived for that salvation to go out to all the earth, and this conversation with Jesus is a dramatic example of that truth. He is offering salvation (living water that results in eternal life) to a perceived enemy of the Jews. Digesting his discourse, the woman then brings up the Messiah stating that he will clear everything up when he arrives. In response, Jesus does not mince words, stating “I, the one speaking to you—I am he” (v. 26). Jesus declares to the woman that he is the Messiah, the long-anticipated Savior foretold of in the Old Testament!

4:27-38 – *Just then his disciples came back. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but no one said, “What do you seek?” or, “Why are you talking with her?”²⁸ So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people,²⁹ “Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?”³⁰ They went out of the town and were coming to him.*

³¹ Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, saying, “Rabbi, eat.”³² But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you do not know about.”³³ So the disciples said to one another, “Has anyone brought him something to eat?”³⁴ Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work. ³⁵Do you not say, ‘There are yet four months, then comes the harvest’? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest. ³⁶Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. ³⁷For here the saying holds true, ‘One sows and another reaps.’³⁸ I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.”

Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman has a profound impact. She goes back to town telling everyone that she has possibly met the Messiah. In response, many flock to see him. When the disciples return, they ask Jesus to eat, but he’s still operating on the level of heavenly nourishment. As with the eternal water offered by Jesus that quenches the parched soul, so too Jesus has spiritual food. His nourishment comes from doing the will of the Father, satisfying his desire to finish the work that the Father has set out to accomplish. In John 6, Jesus refers to himself as the sustenance necessary for the souls of men, and he teaches about the will of the Father. The Father is drawing people to the Son, and Jesus states that the will of the Father is “that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life,

and I will raise him up on the last day” (6:40). Jesus is about that work. He is offering the Samaritan woman eternal life, and many more are now coming out to see him. “The fields are ripe for harvest” (v. 35). He wants the disciples to open their eyes and see that they are standing on the shoulders of the prophets, and the time has arrived to sow the seed of the good news and reap the harvest of transformed souls. This is why the Father sent the Son, and the disciples have an incredible opportunity to participate in this Kingdom work. The same is true for us today. The Father is still drawing folks to the Son, and we get to join in the Father’s work as he builds his Kingdom.

4:39-45 - *Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me all that I ever did.”*⁴⁰ *So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days.*⁴¹ *And many more believed because of his word.*⁴² *They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.”*

⁴³ *After the two days he departed for Galilee.*⁴⁴ *(For Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in his own hometown.)*⁴⁵ *So when he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, having seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the feast. For they too had gone to the feast.*

Not only did Jesus extend his offer of salvation to the woman at the well, but he actually stayed with the people in the community upon their request. He remained with them two more days, continuing to teach the Samaritans as is evidenced by the fact that “because of his words many more became believers” (v. 41). Can you imagine having that opportunity: the chance to eat with, fellowship with, have a conversation with, and possibly host in your home the Son of God? And, what does that say about the Messiah and his message, remembering that this group of people is detested by his own people? The good news is for everyone. The arrival of the Messiah on the stage of human history along with his accompanying offer of the gift of “living water . . . welling up to eternal life” (vv. 10 & 14) is now spreading out from Jerusalem to rest of the world.

The Main Point

The good news of Jesus Christ is for everyone. It is not confined to a particular set of people, nor is it respective of any type of credential. The Son of God freely offers living water welling up to eternal life to anyone that would believe in him, irrespective of background.

A Few Relevant Scriptures

- Isaiah 55
- John 7:37-39
- Revelation 7:13-17
- Revelation 21:6-8

Week 9

John 5:1-18 —Healing on the Sabbath

Harvey Edwards, III

Introduction

Traditions are generally thought of as beliefs, habits or customs originating in the past and transmitted from one generation to the next, with the hope that they will serve a worthy purpose. Some are light-hearted and fun, such as making a wish before blowing out the candles on a birthday cake. Some are costly, such as our country's clinging to the old Imperial System of Weights and Measures and rejecting the Metric System used by all but three countries in the world (which is estimated to cost our economy upwards of \$5 trillion per year). Some are superstitious and silly, like the ancient Chinese custom of the groom's carrying the bride over a pan of burning coals upon entering their home for the first time, hoping that this act will lead to an easy labor when the first child is born. Some are horrifically misguided and wrong, such as the now-outlawed custom of Sati in certain regions of India, the practice of self-immolation by a widow on the funeral pyre of her husband. And some have potential to be tremendously beneficial, such as the oral traditions of the Jewish rabbis that promoted observance of a day of Sabbath rest and a fearful reverence for the name of the Lord. In the time of Jesus, these ideas and other interpretations and paraphrases of the Hebrew Scriptures were collected together as the Targumim and taught orally in Aramaic, which had replaced Hebrew as the dominant language in common usage. But as we will see in the Scripture for this week, even well-intended traditions with worthy purposes can be corrupted by the hearts of fallen men.

Name a tradition you participate in or witness that is positive. Name one that is negative, and that you'd like to see end.

Read John 5:1-18 together.

Weekly Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I've read?

Passage-Specific Questions

1. Do you think Jesus happened by the pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath by chance or by intent? If by intent, what was his purpose?
 2. Why were some reasons the religious authorities were so angered by Jesus's actions?
 3. What is it that threatens you about handing over the lordship of your life to Jesus? If what you profess to believe about Jesus is true, are your fears rational?
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Commentary

5:1-9 – *After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.*

² *Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades. ³ In these lay a multitude of invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed. ⁵ One man was there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. ⁶ When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to be healed?” ⁷ The sick man answered him, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going another steps down before me.” ⁸ Jesus said to him, “Get up, take up your bed, and walk.” ⁹ And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked.*

John begins this chapter by telling us that Jesus has travelled to Jerusalem to observe one of the feasts of the Jews. In his previous trip to Jerusalem he had zealously, even violently, cleansed the Temple, not exactly endearing himself to the religious authorities. Upon taking leave from the city, we are told that he passed from the pious southerly portions of the country directly through renegade Samaria, where he unexpectedly engaged a Samaritan woman at a well, and told her of the living water in him, the water that gives the permanent cure of thirst. This made an impression on the Samaritans,

so he lingered there a few days and gathered many enthusiastic followers from that ill-regarded region. Next, he returned to his home territory of Galilee, even more distant from Jerusalem and fairly irreligious, with a large number of Gentiles and less pious Jews. This time, after news of his Jerusalem actions had returned to Galilee, he was welcomed back warmly by the residents, and he was even able to heal the critically ill son of a Gentile officer of the government without even traveling to see him, so great was the officer's faith. John seems to be painting a picture for us of Jesus being believed and received with ever greater faith and enthusiasm the further he got from the holy city of Jerusalem.

But now he's traveled back to Jerusalem to observe a Jewish feast, and while there on a Sabbath day, he happens to pass by a public pool called Bethesda. The pool attracts "a multitude of invalids," mostly ill, impoverished unfortunates, generally looked down upon for the sin thought to have caused their infirmities, not welcome in the temple or polite society. Though such a place would generally be avoided by most pious Jews, it's exactly these most helpless and hopeless to whom Jesus is drawn. They have come in the hope of being healed by the curative power of water, and one of these is a pitiful man who has been lame for thirty-eight years. Jesus addresses him with the seemingly unnecessary question, "Do you want to be healed?" The man answers that he has little hope since he has no friends to put him into the water when it is "stirred." Jesus obviously feels compassion for this poor man whose only hope is a superstitious belief in the supernatural power of the water, who seems to think that God's mercy is shown in a first-come, first-served manner, and who believes himself to be bereft of friends to help him. With no further conversation, Jesus gives the short, direct command, "Get up, take up your bed, and walk"—and the man does.

What an amazing scene! There can be no question of the authenticity of this miracle, since the man has been a known invalid for thirty-eight years. One would think the reaction of any who might have observed or heard of this miracle would be wonder and delight, similar to the reaction of the secular Galileans who had witnessed the other healing miracle in the days preceding.

5:10-18 – *Now that day was the Sabbath. ¹⁰ So the Jews said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed." ¹¹ But he answered them, "The man who healed me, that man said to me, 'Take up your bed, and walk.' " ¹² They asked him, "Who is the man who said to you, 'Take up your bed and walk'?" ¹³ Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place. ¹⁴ Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, "See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you." ¹⁵ The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him. ¹⁶ And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. ¹⁷ But Jesus answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I am working."*

¹⁸ *This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.*

Rather than celebrate the divine miracle and ponder thoughtfully over its meaning, instead of recognizing it as a sign of the true identity of Jesus and regarding it with great joy, the Jewish religious authorities choose instead to focus on the violation of religious "law" committed by the man in carrying—on the Sabbath—the pallet upon which he had lain. It's important to understand how committed the rabbis were to this particular commandment, to remember the Sabbath and keep it holy. There was even a theological belief that the coming of the Messiah was linked to the perfect keeping of one Sabbath. So it's not surprising that much of the oral Targumim were devoted to promoting perfect observance. And later, as these oral traditions were collected in the written works known as the Mishna, we see that no less than thirty-nine specific types of work were prohibited, including, "taking out aught from one domain to another."

So they challenge the man, telling him that by their interpretation of the Mosaic commandment to remember the Sabbath and keep it holy, he is a law-breaker. Obviously intimidated, the man immediately shifts responsibility to "the man who healed me." Though the man could not name Jesus, John tells us of a later encounter in the Temple where Jesus and the man meet by chance, and Jesus encourages him to live righteously, "so that nothing worse may happen to you" (since other Scriptures clearly show that Jesus rejects the idea of specific physical infirmities being the direct result of discrete personal sins, by "something worse" Jesus surely must be referring to the judgment and eternal separation that awaits all who are not identified with him). This encounter affords the still-nervous, healed man an opportunity to identify Jesus to the authorities, which he does, perhaps hoping to mitigate the consequences of his own "law-breaking" by so doing. When directly rebuked by these same authorities for healing on the Sabbath, Jesus answers, "My Father is working until now, and I am working." And John explains that the authorities are thus doubly offended by Jesus' breaking of the Sabbath, as defined by their tradition; and by what seems to them to be Jesus' making himself equal with God by calling God his own Father.

Of course, neither of the offenses are legitimate. Jesus, in other Scriptures, emphasizes that the Sabbath is created as a gift to man, not as a burden to bear. In the other Gospel accounts, he is unconcerned about some of his hungry disciples breaking at least three Sabbath rules as they pick and eat a small amount of grain on a Sabbath while traveling through some fields, because their actions are not violations of the intent of God in establishing a day of rest. The Sabbath is made for man, not man for the Sabbath. And in calling God his Father, Jesus is not seeking to make himself equal with God. In fact, as the Son of God, he repeatedly and definitively submits to his Father's will in all things. He is merely stating the fact that the work of God never ceases—a fact that even the rabbis acknowledge, or else the world would collapse; and that his identification with the Father—as his Son—is so complete that there is never any variance between the purposes of the two.

But the rabbis can not see it, and thus—tragically—when given an opportunity to regard with wonder the compassionate and supernatural act of a loving savior, to recognize with joy the arrival of the long-awaited Messiah, these power-craving authorities are blinded by their own pride and self-worship, and totally miss it all. Traditions indeed have power—power to guide, power to inform, power even to unite. But traditions are not immune to corruption by our corrupt hearts, and we worship them at our own peril. In this particular case, the power to form and amend and interpret tradition and thus rule over one's fellows proves to be more power than can be rightly handled by men, all of whom are wayward-born, all of whom naturally prefer to control rather than submit.

The Main Point

There is always something in our hearts competing with Jesus to be our Lord. What should I learn from the failure of these Jewish leaders, my fellow humans, my fellow sinners? What beliefs, habits, and thought patterns do I need to discard in order to fully receive and believe Jesus, and grow in his grace?

A Few Relevant Scriptures

- Matthew 12:1-8
- Mark 2:23-28
- Luke 6:1-5

Week 10

John 5:19-47—The Identity and Authority of Jesus

Harvey Edwards, III

Introduction

A recent story in the sports section of the *Tuscaloosa News* was entitled, “Out of their Comfort Zone.” It told of how it takes new football players quite a while to figure out how to relate to their head coach, Nick Saban. Most are afraid of him at first. All of them hold him in tremendous respect, with tight end, Hale Hentges, even going so far as to refer to him as “the next closest thing to God.” And it’s no wonder. He studies their every move at practice, both live and on film. He knows every detail about how they perform on the field, in the classroom, and in life. And they know that the football futures that they’ve been dreaming about since they were children are entirely in his hands. He is the holder of unquestioned authority within the Alabama football program. Our lesson this week is about the infinitely greater authority of another: the humble carpenter’s son from Nazareth.

Read John 5:19-47 together.

Weekly Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I’ve read?

Passage-Specific Questions

1. Describe the attributes of Jesus the man.
 2. Contrast these attributes with those of Jesus the righteous judge.
 3. Do you think you have a balanced view of the entire identity of Jesus?
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Commentary

Last week, we studied the story of Jesus’s healing of the lame man at the pool of Bethesda. We recall how angered the religious authorities were at Jesus for disrespecting their ideas about what is allowable on the Sabbath, and for claiming that if it was okay for God to work on the Sabbath, it was okay for him to do so as well. We remember how offended they were as he referred to God as his Father, considering it blasphemy to claim such a special relationship with the Lord. In today’s passage, we hear the response of Jesus to this challenge of his authority.

5:19-30 – *So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. ²⁰ For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel. ²¹ For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. ²² For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, ²³ that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. ²⁴ Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.*

²⁵ *“Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. ²⁶ For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. ²⁷ And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. ²⁸ Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice ²⁹ and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.*

³⁰ *“I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.*

Jesus begins his response with the double use of the word “truly,” which ought to make us sit up and listen, for what he is about to say must be important. He will assert his identification with the Father, his legitimacy, and his

authority. He begins by saying that “the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing.” Whereas the authorities have been angered by what they consider a high and haughty claim of equality with the Father, Jesus begins this assertion of his authority by highlighting his complete dependency on the Father to guide all his actions. He points to the Father as his model. He states the reason that the Son may so confidently rely on the Father as his model is that the Father loves the Son. He talks about “greater works than these” that the Father will show him, surely referring to the future salvation of sinners. He asserts that just as the Father was the original life-giver and has the power to raise the dead to life, he himself is like the Father in possessing life and the power to give it to whomever he will.

He goes on to state that the Father, though perfectly just, declines to judge any person, passing that prerogative entirely to the Son, so that the Son may be just as honored as the Father. And he explains that the basis for a favorable judgment and indeed a new and blessed eternal life is to believe the Father, who is revealing the divinity and authority of his Son. The Son will resurrect all: some to life and some to judgment. The judgment will be just, because the Father is just, and Jesus conforms his judgments perfectly to his Father’s will. This discourse of Jesus establishes without question that Jesus and the Father are in perfect unity and that the Father is actively bearing witness through miraculous works to both the authority and divinity of his son Jesus.

5:31-47 – *If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not true. ³² There is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the testimony that he bears about me is true. ³³ You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. ³⁴ Not that the testimony that I receive is from man, but I say these things so that you may be saved. ³⁵ He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. ³⁶ But the testimony that I have is greater than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me. ³⁷ And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen, ³⁸ and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent. ³⁹ You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, ⁴⁰ yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. ⁴¹ I do not receive glory from people. ⁴² But I know that you do not have the love of God within you. ⁴³ I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not receive me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him. ⁴⁴ How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God? ⁴⁵ Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope. ⁴⁶ For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. ⁴⁷ But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?”*

According to Jewish tradition, it required the testimony of more than one person to establish a fact. So in this courtroom-like monologue, where it seems that Jesus is on the defense against those who accuse him, Jesus concedes that it might be difficult for them to believe in him as the Messiah based merely on his own testimony. To overcome this excuse for doubt, he provides three testimonies provided by God to man to help man understand the identity of Jesus. The first was John the Baptist. Jesus calls John the Baptist “a burning and shining lamp” and indeed John was known to have caused much excitement in his sermons preparing the way for the Messiah. He was a popular prophetic figure, and the religious authorities had apparently consulted him regarding his thoughts on Jesus. The second testimony was the works of Jesus: the miraculous healing of individuals whose duration of illness ruled out any chance of fraud; and his words, which were directly from the Father and caused so many to marvel at their clarity, purity, and at the authority with which they were delivered. The third testimony was the Scriptures, the written word of God, which Jesus asserts bear reliable witness about him.

Jesus goes further to warn them against relying on obedience to the Law of Moses to save them. Actually, that very law accuses them and points out their uncleanness, their hopelessness, in making claims of righteousness. Besides, all that Moses wrote was ultimately designed to prepare the nation of Israel to receive Jesus as the Christ, the Holy Lamb of God, the perfect sacrifice. Whereas a right reading of Moses leads to belief in Christ, a warped reading of Moses produces only obstinate, spiritual blindness. And as Jesus finally brings this monologue to a close, we come to realize that it’s not Jesus who is on trial in this courtroom drama, but all who reject his authority, and Jesus himself is their judge!

The Main Point

Jesus is given authority by the Father to execute judgment. Those who believe will pass from death to life. The Father, John the Baptist, the works of Jesus, and the Scriptures all bear witness to the identity of Jesus as the Son of God.

A Few Relevant Scriptures

- John 1:14, 18
- I Thessalonians 4:16
- Deuteronomy 19:15

Week 11

John 6:1-71 – Jesus Begins the New Exodus

By Rand Nelson

Introduction

Having grown up a wrestler, I don't watch a lot of basketball. I couldn't name half of the NBA teams if you offered me a million dollars. And March Madness? It simply doesn't appeal to me. Yet, I still know that there is one debate that sports broadcasters have argued for over a decade. This argument is guaranteed to be discussed at least once on every single day of the year: Is LeBron James as good as Michael Jordan? The basketball universe is simply obsessed with mulling over the argument again and again and again. It never stops. The answer to this argument is not found in John 6, but a similar, comparative line can be drawn between Jesus and Moses. Should they have had cable news back in the first century, surely the respected Jews would have been going back and forth, comparing the miracles of Moses to the miracles of Jesus. They'd question Jesus' legitimacy and always challenge him to do more, because it's always easier to pose a question than to bend a knee.

Read John 6:1-71 together

Weekly Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I've read?

Passage-Specific Questions

1. At first, what did you make of the statements and zeal from the crowds toward Jesus?
 2. The disciples said that Jesus' teaching was harsh. What in this passage do you find harsh, and how do you process harsh teachings in Scripture?
 3. What do you think about Peter's response to Jesus in verse 68? How can you relate?
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Commentary

6:1-15 – *After this Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. ² And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick. ³ Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. ⁴ Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. ⁵ Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?" ⁶ He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. ⁷ Philip answered him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread would not be enough for each of them to get a little." ⁸ One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, ⁹ "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?" ¹⁰ Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, about five thousand in number. ¹¹ Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated. So also the fish, as much as they wanted. ¹² And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost." ¹³ So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten. ¹⁴ When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, "This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!"*

¹⁵ *Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.*

This chapter of the Book of John begins with Jesus being followed by a very large crowd. The gospel narrative includes that it was a crowd of about five thousand men, which could mean the crowd had the potential to exceed 20,000 total. It is significant that this takes place around the time of the Passover, as what will follow certainly alludes to the Passover and Exodus of the Old Testament. John includes this point as a signal to the reader, framing the passage to set up Jesus' discussion on the Bread of Life. Peter locates a boy who is apparently generous with his lunch, and his five barley

loaves and two fish are blessed by Jesus and multiplied to feed the enormous crowd.

The food is distributed to the people so that they all eat as much as they want. After they have all eaten their fill, the disciples gather the remaining fragments to the amount of twelve baskets full. Seeing the miraculous sign performed by Jesus motivates the crowd to declare that he is indeed the “Prophet who is to come into the world,” a messianic reference from Deuteronomy 18 that reveals their zeal. The problem in this moment is that their zeal is misplaced. They long to see Jesus raised up as their leader not because he can heal their ultimate need, but because he feeds them. The present fullness of their bellies will not endure, and they fail to see the miracle’s message of significance. Refusing to be made their king, Jesus removes himself and seeks shelter in the mountains.

6:16-20 - *When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea,¹⁷ got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them.¹⁸ The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing.¹⁹ When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were frightened.²⁰ But he said to them, “It is I; do not be afraid.”²¹ Then they were glad to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going.*

That evening, the disciples set sail across the Sea of Galilee for Capernaum, and Jesus was not with them. Winds across the area picked up and the disciples rowed over rough water, three or four miles into the sea. It was then that they saw Jesus coming near them, walking on the water. Though this frightened the disciples, they were comforted by the voice of Jesus calling to them, “It is I; do not be afraid.” In the moment of their fear and worry, Jesus’ identity is their fear’s alleviation. The “immediately” in verse 21, indicates that there was a second miracle performed—one where Jesus guides their ship to land safely and quickly.

6:22-40 - *On the next day the crowd that remained on the other side of the sea saw that there had been only one boat there, and that Jesus had not entered the boat with his disciples, but that his disciples had gone away alone.²³ Other boats from Tiberias came near the place where they had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks.²⁴ So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor his disciples, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum, seeking Jesus.*

²⁵ When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, “Rabbi, when did you come here?”²⁶ Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.²⁷ Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal.”²⁸ Then they said to him, “What must we do, to be doing the works of God?”²⁹ Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.”³⁰ So they said to him, “Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform?”³¹ Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”³² Jesus then said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven.³³ For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”³⁴ They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.”

³⁵ Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.³⁶ But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe.³⁷ All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.³⁸ For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me.³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day.⁴⁰ For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”

The part of the crowd who remain in Tiberias awake the next morning and realize that—though he has not left in the boat with his disciples—Jesus has apparently moved on. In a desperate attempt to follow Jesus, they get in boats and sail for Capernaum. When they encounter Jesus in Capernaum, he speaks directly to their hearts’ desires. He accuses them of seeking him because they ate his bread, not because they understand that the purpose of the feeding is to signify and declare the true identity of Jesus as the Messiah. In short, he tells them that they’re after the right thing for the wrong reason. In God’s economy, that yields the same outcome as being after the wrong thing.

Jesus tells them to work for the food that endures to eternal life, rather than the food that perishes. Their response is to ask him what works they can perform to please God. Their question reveals that, in their hearts, they lack an understanding of how God operates. Still wanting merely to be fed, they wish to learn what performance God requires to earn his favor. Jesus’ answer is that they need to have faith in God, they need to believe in the one whom he has sent.

To this, the crowd issues a challenge, and much here is implied that is not expressly stated. They desire a sign—a

sign greater than feeding thousands from a Jewish kid's brown bag lunch. In fact, they even frame the challenge bluntly: *What sign do you have for us, Jesus? Moses provided our fathers with manna in the wilderness—can you top that? We've even got a Bible verse—“He gave them bread from Heaven to eat.”* But the manna in the wilderness didn't come from Moses; it came from the Father. And the manna in the wilderness wasn't the true bread of Heaven, because the bread of heaven isn't bread; it's a person. The true bread of heaven is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. Here, Jesus is speaking somewhat cryptically, and the crowd does not understand. They assume he's just talking to them about better bread, and so they hold out their hands.

Jesus moves from cryptic to direct: “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.” He is clearly communicating to them that they're missing the point, that the purpose of the sign was to symbolically reveal to them that he is the fulfillment of the Scriptures. He is the prophet they think he is, but it's not because he can feed them; it's because he can save them. His message is not, “Believe in me and you shall have bread,” but “Believe in me and you will not be cast out, you will not be lost, but you will be saved eternally and raised up on the last day in accordance to the will of the Father.” He's offering eternal security, and they want more rolls.

6:41-51 - *So the Jews grumbled about him, because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.”* ⁴² *They said, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven’?”* ⁴³ *Jesus answered them, “Do not grumble among yourselves.* ⁴⁴ *No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.* ⁴⁵ *It is written in the Prophets, ‘And they will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me—* ⁴⁶ *not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father.* ⁴⁷ *Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life.* ⁴⁸ *I am the bread of life.* ⁴⁹ *Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died.* ⁵⁰ *This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die.* ⁵¹ *I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”*

The Jews reject the notion that Jesus has come down from heaven, because they know his mother and father. They do not understand that he is a member of the Trinity, born of a virgin and both fully man and fully God. The Jews are frustrated because of their lack of understanding. Jesus tells them not to grumble because they are not able to come to him unless the Father draws them. This is a clear declaration from Jesus that the work of belief in the heart of a person must begin with a supernatural drawing (or wooing) of the Father. This is not a statement of desire, but of ability; only with this drawing can one believe in Jesus. Jesus explains what this drawing looks like: a person hears from God, is taught by him and, as a response, comes to Jesus in faith. The result of this is that, in Christ, they have eternal life.

Jesus contrasts this saving faith with the manna in the wilderness. The manna was unable to offer salvation to the Jews: “Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness and they died.” Jesus is the living bread that comes from heaven to nourish people eternally with life. And the bread that Jesus gives for the life of the world is his flesh. His sacrifice on the cross is therefore a breaking of the bread that it may be given to those who have come to him in faith.

6:52-59 – *The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”* ⁵³ *So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.* ⁵⁴ *Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.* ⁵⁵ *For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink.* ⁵⁶ *Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.* ⁵⁷ *As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me.* ⁵⁸ *This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.”* ⁵⁹ *Jesus said these things in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum.*

The Jews understand Jesus to mean that they must (literally) eat his flesh. Their misunderstanding is not helped by what Jesus tells them next, that they must eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of Man to have eternal life. Two things should here be stated plainly. First, Jesus is not talking about the Lord's Supper. He is not communicating that the way to salvation is to partake of his body in a sacramental form. In fact, the Lord's Supper is actually a symbol pointing to what Jesus is expressing here about his sacrifice. Second, Jesus is not being literal, but is expressing spiritual things in physical realities. He's declaring that we need to come to him in faith through the symbolic language of “eat” and “drink.”

This language should startle us, disturb us even. “Feed on my flesh” and “drink my blood” should be statements that turn our stomachs and cause us to grimace. This is intentional. The cross of Christ is a gory, horrific display of God's wrath—far grislier and upsetting than the idea of cannibalism. To truly come to Christ in belief, to feed on his flesh, is to

see a comfort in the agony of the crucifixion and therefore glory in the victory of the resurrection. Those who have fed on the Bread of Life are those who have come to him in belief.

6:60-71 - *When many of his disciples heard it, they said, “This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?”⁶¹ But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, “Do you take offense at this?⁶² Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?⁶³ 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.⁶⁴ But there are some of you who do not believe.” (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.)⁶⁵ And he said, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.”*

⁶⁶After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.⁶⁷ So Jesus said to the twelve, “Do you want to go away as well?”⁶⁸ Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life,⁶⁹ and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.”⁷⁰ Jesus answered them, “Did I not choose you, the twelve? And yet one of you is a devil.”

⁷¹He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray him.

Jesus’ disciples are standing by listening to him speak this message to the Jews in the synagogue. It’s important to note here that this is a reference to the broader group of disciples who followed Jesus, not the twelve. Their complaint that he has delivered a hard saying is not to mean that it is difficult to understand, but that it is harsh, not soft. Because of this, they are offended. The method through which Jesus will ascend to where he was before is the cross of crucifixion. Therefore, if they are offended by the harshness and outrage of his words here, so much more will they be offended when they see the Messiah hanging on the cross like a common murderer or thief.

The words that Jesus speaks to them are harsh, yes; but they are also spirit and life. Rightly understood and believed, they have the power to give life in a way that the flesh—and all its best efforts and sacrifices—is unable to. Jesus knows that, even among his flock, there are some who do not believe—namely, Judas. Jesus alludes to the fact that Judas does not believe in him because he is not drawn by the Father.

Because of the harsh sayings of Jesus, many of his disciples leave him. Jesus calls to his twelve disciples, asking if they will leave as well. This should be understood somewhat as a challenge. Jesus is not passing out invitations, hoping that his classmates will choose to attend his birthday party. In this moment, he’s challenging his disciples to put their faith in him into words. Peter answers with remarkable honesty, “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.” The difference between those who leave and those who stay is that, in the face of harsh teaching, they see an ultimate value in its truth because God has revealed it to them.

The Main Point

Jesus is the Bread of Life. To feed on him is to believe in him and therefore reap the blessing of eternal life.

A Few Relevant Scriptures

- Exodus 16
- Deuteronomy 18:15-22
- Isaiah 44:18

Week 12

John 7:1-52 – Can This Be the Christ?

By Rand Nelson

Introduction

When I first got married, I was unaware how often my wife and I would clash heads. Turns out, when two sinners occupy the same space, tension and frustration can mount quickly. These weren't fruitless spats but were more often than not foundational (and passionate) discussions that would shape the way we communicate as a couple and how we reconcile after a disagreement. I'll never forget the end of one fight (which I share with my wife's permission), where she threw up her hands and said something to the effect of, "I know you're right, but I'm not ready for you to be right yet." I knew exactly how she felt because I had felt that way in some of our other conversations. I'm sure we all relate, because we've all been there. Sometimes, all the evidence is right in front of our faces, and we choose to walk as if it isn't so. One of the most stubborn things deep within us is that we simply do not want to believe what we do not want to believe. The encounter Jesus has in John 7 with the Jewish authorities is much like that. It becomes clear very quickly that their disbelief is motivated more by the hardness of their hearts than by the lack of evidence they demand.

Read John 7:1-52 together

Weekly Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I've read?

Passage-Specific Questions

1. The idea of belief is talked about in varying levels in John. What do you think makes up true belief? How can we be sure that we truly believe what we say we believe?
 2. Have you ever known that something was true and yet didn't act as if it was? What kept you from walking in the truth?
 3. How do you determine which teachers you can trust? What criteria should we use to evaluate teaching and teachers?
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Commentary

7:1-9 – *After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He would not go about in Judea, because the Jews were seeking to kill him. ² Now the Jews' Feast of Booths was at hand. ³ So his brothers said to him, "Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples also may see the works you are doing. ⁴ For no one works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world." ⁵ For not even his brothers believed in him. ⁶ Jesus said to them, "My time has not yet come, but your time is always here. ⁷ The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil. ⁸ You go up to the feast. I am not going up to this feast, for my time has not yet fully come." ⁹ After saying this, he remained in Galilee.*

The opening to this chapter indicates that Jesus has spent a considerable amount of time in Galilee after the events in John 6. He is avoiding Judea, because the Jewish authorities there have it in their hearts to kill him ever since the healing of the lame man on the Sabbath (John 5). A week-long celebration, remembering God's grace and providence during the 40-year period when the Jews wandered the wilderness living in tents (or booths) is taking place in Judea. Jesus' brothers consider this the perfect opportunity for Jesus to leave his rural ministry in Galilee and take his talents to the big city where crowds from the celebration will maximize his audience.

In the Gospel of John, the idea of "belief" is nuanced and difficult, because John allows peoples' actions to either validate or prove false what they have stated that they believe. When John comments that not even Jesus' brothers believe in him, he likely does not mean that they have no idea who he is or lack any faith in him, but that their faith in him lacks a necessary, corresponding obedience to him.

Jesus' brothers do not understand why he will remain, for it is not yet time for him to go down to Judea. The Jews there are seeking to kill him (v.1). The brothers' disbelief proves that they are part of "the world" in the broad sense that "the world" is code for the lost and broken realm of human experience. They are able to come and go freely in this environment, because they are a part of it—the world can't hate them. However, the world hates Jesus because Jesus stands opposed to it, testifying to it that its deeds are evil. Because of this, Jesus cannot at this time walk freely in Judea. So, he sends his brothers there, and he remains in Galilee for the time being.

7:10-13 - *But after his brothers had gone up to the feast, then he also went up, not publicly but in private. ¹¹ The Jews were looking for him at the feast, and saying, "Where is he?" ¹² And there was much muttering about him among the people. While some said, "He is a good man," others said, "No, he is leading the people astray." ¹³ Yet for fear of the Jews no one spoke openly of him.*

After his brothers leave, Jesus does indeed go to Judea quietly and subtly—not as his brothers want: "openly"—or literally "boldly." The Jews in Judea expect him to be there, and his absence causes something of a stir. The general public does not speak openly of him because they fear the Jewish leaders—the same Jewish leaders who seek to put Jesus to death. Yet these verses indicate that there is a wide variety of opinions on who Jesus is and what his intentions are.

7:14-24 - *About the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and began teaching. ¹⁵ The Jews therefore marveled, saying, "How is it that this man has learning, when he has never studied?" ¹⁶ So Jesus answered them, "My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me. ¹⁷ If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority. ¹⁸ The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory; but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood. ¹⁹ Has not Moses given you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why do you seek to kill me?" ²⁰ The crowd answered, "You have a demon! Who is seeking to kill you?" ²¹ Jesus answered them, "I did one work, and you all marvel at it. ²² Moses gave you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath. ²³ If on the Sabbath a man receives circumcision, so that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because on the Sabbath I made a man's whole body well? ²⁴ Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment."*

As always, Jesus' teaching elicits a powerful response from the people present. They marvel at the fact that he speaks with knowledge beyond his experience as a formal scholar. Jesus tells the people that his teaching is not his own, that it comes from him who sent him, and that ultimately it is aligned with the will of God. Jesus' rationale behind his teaching's power is that the authority of his teaching comes from God. The authority of true, Christian preaching always comes from God. Christians should be wary of those who would ascend a pulpit to preach from their own wisdom, experience, or opinion. Certainly, there is something to be learned from the collective experiences of the human race, but if we want to know the will of God, we will tune our hearts to the Word of God. Authority in preaching matters a great deal, and Jesus here warns that those who speak from their own authority—even sometimes with the best intentions—seek their own glory.

At this point, the situation escalates quickly. An attendee at the temple who had just left for a moment to use the restroom might have come back perplexed at how quickly the tone of the message has changed. The Law of Moses clearly teaches, "Thou shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13). Yet the Jews seeking to kill Jesus are in blatant violation of this commandment by their intentions. Jesus judges them openly, accusing them of seeking to kill him. The crowd rejects his accusation, essentially calling him paranoid with the label of being possessed by a demon or insane. But Jesus brings up Moses to make a point. The Jews are condemning Jesus for having healed a lame man, which is a violation of the Sabbath ordinances. Yet they still violate the same ordinances in order to keep the Mosaic law of circumcision. Jesus is saying it's hypocritical to condemn him for healing a whole man's body on the Sabbath, when they will perform the unclean task of circumcision on the same day. As he puts it, they are judging with improper judgment. They make character judgments based off of superficial appearances and a flawed understanding of the Old Testament.

7:25-30 - *Some of the people of Jerusalem therefore said, "Is not this the man whom they seek to kill?" ²⁶ And here he is, speaking openly, and they say nothing to him! Can it be that the authorities really know that this is the Christ? ²⁷ But we know where this man comes from, and when the Christ appears, no one will know where he comes from." ²⁸ So Jesus proclaimed, as he taught in the temple, "You know me, and you know where I come from. But I have not come of my own accord. He who sent me is true, and him you do not know. ²⁹ I know him, for I come from him, and he sent me." ³⁰ So they were seeking to arrest him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come.*

The crowds begin to wonder if the reason why the Jewish authorities can't answer Jesus' accusations is because they actually know him to be the Christ. Verses 25-27 is similar to verse 12 above in that it shows a collective processing of the people in response to the ministry of Jesus. Their doubt of him being the Christ is that they know where he comes from, and one commonly held take on the Christ is that his origin would be a mystery kept until he shows up to redeem Israel. The irony, of course, is that they are less familiar with Jesus' origin than they think.

Jesus answers this line of thought by declaring that he has not just appeared but has in fact been sent. He who sent Jesus is true, and these people do not know him despite their attempts at keeping the Mosaic Law and despite their knowledge and learning of the Old Testament Scriptures. With the people somewhat divided and the teaching of Jesus, it is again stated that the desire of the ruling Jews is to arrest Jesus. They are unable to do so because his hour has not yet come. Unlike verse 8 above, this is a reference to the hour of Jesus' glorification through his arrest and subsequent crucifixion. This is a reminder threaded through the Book of John that even the arrest of Jesus is ordered and upheld by the plan of God. No one will lay a hand on him until his time has come, and when it does, he will offer himself freely.

7:31-39 - *Yet many of the people believed in him. They said, "When the Christ appears, will he do more signs than this man has done?"*

³² *The Pharisees heard the crowd muttering these things about him, and the chief priests and Pharisees sent officers to arrest him. ³³ Jesus then said, "I will be with you a little longer, and then I am going to him who sent me. ³⁴ You will seek me and you will not find me. Where I am you cannot come."* ³⁵ *The Jews said to one another, "Where does this man intend to go that we will not find him? Does he intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks?" ³⁶ What does he mean by saying, 'You will seek me and you will not find me,' and, 'Where I am you cannot come'?"*

³⁷ *On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. ³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.' "* ³⁹ *Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.*

The signs performed by Jesus offer compelling proof of his identity to some, but the chief priests and Pharisees still hard-heartedly reject him and send officers to arrest him. Jesus proclaims that only a little time is left for him to be with them. Don't miss it—right now, Jesus is with them. He's present in their company, speaking the words of life. He's challenging their beliefs and inviting them to come to him while, at the same time, calling out their hypocrisy. God's love fuels the mission of the Messiah, and the time that he is with them is a display of his grace and long-suffering. But, Jesus warns, the time is short. And there will be a time when they seek him and will not find him. Unfortunately, they do not understand his teaching.

Jesus' compassion for the people is most clearly visible in this narrative in verses 37-38, where he extends another offer to the thirsty to come and drink. This metaphor he's using fits well with the Feast of Booths, which contains a water-pouring ceremony that was developed a few hundred years before the birth of Christ. It is not necessary to go into the particulars of the ceremony, only so much to say that Jesus is offering living water to the people against the backdrop of a water ceremony. He wants them to see that he is the great fulfillment that all the feast of booths looked forward to. As D.A. Carson puts it, "If Isaiah could invite the thirsty to drink from the waters (Isaiah 55:1), Jesus announces that he is the one who can provide the waters."

7:40-52 – *When they heard these words, some of the people said, "This really is the Prophet." ⁴¹ Others said, "This is the Christ." But some said, "Is the Christ to come from Galilee? ⁴² Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the offspring of David, and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was?" ⁴³ So there was a division among the people over him. ⁴⁴ Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him.*

⁴⁵ *The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, "Why did you not bring him?" ⁴⁶ The officers answered, "No one ever spoke like this man!" ⁴⁷ The Pharisees answered them, "Have you also been deceived? ⁴⁸ Have any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him? ⁴⁹ But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed." ⁵⁰ Nicodemus, who had gone to him before, and who was one of them, said to them, ⁵¹ "Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?" ⁵² They replied, "Are you from Galilee too? Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee."*

The voice of the people is both perplexed and diverse; some believe and some doubt. Again, we see that the primary confusion comes from another misunderstanding with Jesus' birth. In fact, Jesus is from the lineage of David, and

he was born in Bethlehem, despite their understanding that he is from Galilee. Though the evidence is convincing to many, there is an overall division among the people including some who wished to have him arrested.

Though a warrant for his arrest had been provided by the chief priests, the officers do not arrest Jesus. This could be a protection of the Father over Jesus until the appointed time, or perhaps a conviction to some degree in the officers' hearts, but the reason why is clearly because of the authority with which Jesus spoke. For this, the Pharisees scold them, "Have you also been deceived?"

There is an ugly irony in this passage. The Pharisees are mocking the officers for potentially being deceived by Jesus and the crowd for their lack of knowledge of the law. Yet the crowd and the officers nearly get it. As Jesus said before, "You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life" (John 5.39-40). The authorities and the Pharisees are contrasted with the ignorant crowd, and even though they are educated and keepers of the law of Moses, they are those furthest from the truth.

Lastly, we see that Nicodemus—who certainly would qualify as an authority (v.48)—is the one who sticks up for Jesus, arguing the procedure in the law. The Pharisees would have him arrested and killed without the accepted Jewish and Roman due-process of law. When Nicodemus speaks up and asks the Jews to live according to their law, they respond in their frustration and desperation. They accuse him of sticking up for a Galilean because he is a Galilean. The truth of their question only matters so much as it illustrates how near the end of their rope they are. Entirely frustrated by the circumstances, they retreat to the only place they have solace: their study.

The Main Point

Jesus' teaching reveals that he is the Messiah and that there is but a short time to come to him. Though there is mounting evidence to this truth, people still reject him in their hard heartedness.

A Few Relevant Scriptures

- Isaiah 55
- John 5
- Leviticus 23:33-43
- 2 Timothy 4:1-5

Why Did We Skip John 7:53-8:11?

If you are following along in your copy of the Bible, you have probably noticed that there are either brackets around verse 7:53-8:11 or a footnote attached to this passage. The original King James Version is the notable exception to this (although the New King James Version contains a footnote). In the ESV, here is what the footnote says, “Some manuscripts do not include 7:53–8:11; others add the passage here or after 7:36 or after 21:25 or after Luke 21:38, with variations in the text.”¹ If we have not had opportunity to study the history of the Bible, this can cause a sense of uneasiness for us. However, with a little study, we can rest easy knowing that we have an incredible amount of information regarding it.

We believe that the Scriptures, in their original autographs, are inerrant. However, we do not have these original autographs. What we do have are thousands of ancient texts and early citations of these texts that enable us to determine with a very high degree of certainty what the original autographs contained. Obviously there were no printing presses available in the ancient world. The Scriptures were hand-copied by scribes, often with fastidious notes that accompanied their copies. However, copyist errors do occur. Where these occur, we are able to look at the various copies of the texts and determine with certainty what nearly every variant should actually say.

In order to give you some idea of the scope of evidence we have, here is an excerpt from *The Baker Encyclopedia of Apologetics*,

Catalogued Greek texts include eighty-eight papyri manuscripts, 274 uncial manuscripts, and 245 uncial lectionaries. Those early uncial manuscript witnesses are extremely valuable in establishing the original text of the New Testament. The other 2795 manuscripts and 1964 lectionaries are minuscule.

This is an astounding number and variety. It is not uncommon for classics from antiquity to survive in only a handful of manuscript copies. According to F. F. Bruce, nine or ten good copies of Julius Caesar’s *Gallic War* survive, twenty copies of Livy’s *Roman History*, two copies of Tacitus’ *Annals*, and eight manuscripts of Thucydides’ *History* (Bruce, 16). The most documented ancient secular work is Homer’s *Iliad*, surviving in 643 manuscript copies. Counting Greek copies alone, the New Testament text is preserved in some 5686 partial and complete manuscript portions that were copied by hand from the second (possibly even the first) through the fifteenth centuries (see Geisler, chap. 26).

In addition to the Greek manuscripts there are numerous translations from the Greek, not to mention quotations of the New Testament. Counting major early translations in Syriac, Coptic, Arabic, Latin, and other languages, there are 9000 copies of the New Testament. This makes a total of over 14,000 copies of the New Testament. What is more, if we compile the 36,289 quotations by the early church Fathers of the second to fourth centuries we can reconstruct the entire New Testament minus 11 verses.²

I hope you see that we can be incredibly certain of the text before us. What variants exist do not change our understanding of the text. Again from *The Baker Encyclopedia of Apologetics*,

There is widespread misunderstanding among critics about the “errors” in the biblical manuscripts. Some have estimated there are about 200,000 of them. First of all, these are not “errors” but variant readings, the vast majority of which are strictly grammatical. Second, these readings are spread throughout more than 5300 manuscripts, so that a variant spelling of one letter of one word in one verse in 2000 manuscripts is counted as 2000 “errors.” Textual scholars Westcott and Hort estimated that only one in sixty of these variants has significance. This would leave a text 98.33 percent pure. Philip Schaff calculated that, of the 150,000 variants known in his day, only 400 changed the meaning of the passage, only fifty were of real significance, and *not even one* affected “an article of faith or a precept of duty which is not abundantly sustained by other and undoubted passages, or by the whole tenor of Scripture teaching” (Schaff, 177).³

¹ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016).

² Norman L. Geisler, “New Testament Manuscripts,” *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 532.

³ Norman L. Geisler, “New Testament Manuscripts,” *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 532.

As noted above, none of the variants of the texts call into question any important doctrines of Scripture. This is an incredible level of certainty about an ancient text. If this continues to give you pause, please let us know. We want to help you see that we can have confidence in the Word of God. If you would like to read more about this, a good resource would be *The Big Book of Bible Difficulties: Clear and Concise Answers from Genesis to Revelation* by Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe.

With this background information, we can look at John 7:53-8:11. Our earliest manuscripts do not include this passage. In addition, nearly everyone agrees that this passage certainly does not fit here and that it is almost certainly not written by John. We should be encouraged by the fact that we have enough evidence of the Scriptures to be able to determine this. What has taken place is that at an early point, this passage entered into some of the manuscript traditions. However, where it is inserted, it occurs in a few different places. As noted, the earliest manuscripts do not include it. This lets us know that it is almost certainly a scribal addition. Although this quotation is difficult for most of us to read, I wanted to expose us to at least an idea of the breadth of information we have regarding this variant:

It is universally agreed by textual critics of the Greek NT that this passage was not part of the Fourth Gospel in its original form. The evidence may be summarized as follows. (i) It is omitted from our earliest copies of the Greek NT. (ii) In the East it is not found in the oldest form of the Syriac version, the Sahidic and sub-Achmimic, the oldest Bohairic mss, some Armenian mss, and the older Georgian version. In the West it is not in some Old Latin mss and not in the Gothic version. (iii) No Greek commentator on the Gospel before Euthymius Zigabenus (twelfth century) discusses the passage, and Euthymius stated that the accurate copies of the Gospel do not contain it. (iv) No Eastern Fathers cite the passage prior to the tenth century. The earliest Western Fathers, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Cyprian, also make no reference to it. (v) The passage is found in the MS D, and in the mass of later Koine mss, in some old Latin mss, the Latin Vulgate, the Ethiopic version and a few mss of other versions, the writings of Ambrose and Augustine; Jerome said that it was in many Greek and Latin codices. (vi) Many of the mss which have the passage have asterisks or obeli, showing that the scribes knew the uncertainty of its status. (vii) There is an extraordinary number of variant readings in the passage. (viii) While most of the Greek mss that include it set it in its present position, in the Ferrar group of cursives it follows Luke 21:38, in 225 it comes after John 7:36, in the Sinai Georgian MS 16 it follows 7:44, and a number of mss, including the Armenian, set it after 21:25. (ix) The style and language are more akin to the synoptic Gospels than to the Fourth Gospel.⁴

This passage is almost certainly not a part of the original autograph of John. In addition to the manuscript evidence, this section breaks the flow of thought in John 7-8. It says that the scribes and Pharisees meant to test Jesus. At this point in John, the Jewish leaders are way past testing Jesus. They already have the charge of blasphemy and do not need to test him. They have already decided to try to arrest and kill him (John 5:18; 7:19; 7:30, 32).

Although this does not appear to be a part of the Scriptures in their original autographs, it paints a picture of Jesus that is consistent with the Scriptures. Again, it is important to note that no variant in the existent copies of the Scriptures leads us to a conflict in the doctrines we hold. That being said, one of the things that we take very seriously at Anchor Church is teaching the Word of God. Because this does not seem to be part of the Scriptures, we aren't going to teach through this portion.

⁴ George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, vol. 36, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 143.

Week 13

John 8:12-59 – Jesus is the Light of the World

By Anthony Winfrey

Introduction

Have you ever been told something or been led to believe something and never questioned it? I think of little things that parents tell their kids. Their kids never question the legitimacy of the parents' statements, like: "The stove is hot"; "Your face is going to freeze like that"; "Santa Claus is real"; or "I love you." Some of these are true, but others are not.

Our spiritual belief system is shaped by our environment. Many people have been led to believe incorrectly about a relationship with God and never examine it. I was raised in a church that is very old fashioned and has some legalistic views that I grew up believing. I never knew that there was anything different than what I had been taught until God began speaking to me through his Word. I listened to him, and he revealed truth to me. The key ingredients to finding truth is to be willing to listen to God and change. We cannot only rely on others to point us to the truth that can only be found in God.

Read John 8:12-59 together

Study Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I've read?

Passage-Specific Questions

1. What does it mean for you to live knowing that Jesus is the light of the world?
 2. What does it mean for a true disciple to do the works of their father?
 3. What are some things in our context that make it hard for people to recognize and respond to Jesus?
-

Commentary

8:12 – *Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."*

Jesus' statement of being the light of the world is significant. To the Pharisee accusers, this was a claim of godly significance. During the Festival of Tabernacles that was being celebrated at the time of this conversation, a lighting of lamps to remember the pillar of fire (the light) that guided God's people in the Wilderness was a nightly event. Anyone familiar with the exodus story and the Feast of the Tabernacles would recognize that Jesus was identifying himself with God (Exodus 13:21; Daniel 2:22).

This statement was completed by Jesus' saying that if you follow him, you would no longer be living in darkness. Even if you are not familiar with the story of Israel and the Exodus, most have the understanding that light signifies something that is good, and darkness represents something that is undesired.

Jesus ultimately was stating that he is the exclusive source of spiritual light. As the sun illuminates the physical world, Jesus illuminates the way to truth for the entire world. Jesus did not limit accessibility to himself, but anyone who chooses to follow him will walk in the light.

8:13-20 – *So the Pharisees said to him, "You are bearing witness about yourself; your testimony is not true." ¹⁴ Jesus answered, "Even if I do bear witness about myself, my testimony is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going, but you do not know where I come from or where I am going. ¹⁵ You judge according to the flesh; I judge no one. ¹⁶ Yet even if I do judge, my judgment is true, for it is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father who sent me. ¹⁷ In your Law it is written that the testimony of two people is true. ¹⁸ I am the one who bears witness about myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness about me." ¹⁹ They said to him therefore, "Where is your Father?" Jesus answered, "You*

know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also.”²⁰ These words he spoke in the treasury, as he taught in the temple; but no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come.

The Pharisees were not illuminated by Jesus’ statement. They responded with demands of proof. They stated he was his only witness, that he had no one to support his claims. Jewish law stated that you needed two witnesses for a testimony to be true. Jesus responded by saying that he and his father were the only witnesses needed.

The Pharisees continually questioned him about his claims. Jesus responded by basically stating they could not understand what he was saying because they judged by a mere fleshly mind. They could not understand him because they could not accept who he was and where he came from. Christ has to reveal himself to us for us to respond to his calling.

8:21-30 – So he said to them again, “I am going away, and you will seek me, and you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come.”²² So the Jews said, “Will he kill himself, since he says, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come’?”²³ He said to them, “You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world.”²⁴ I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins.”²⁵ So they said to him, “Who are you?” Jesus said to them, “Just what I have been telling you from the beginning.”²⁶ I have much to say about you and much to judge, but he who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him.”²⁷ They did not understand that he had been speaking to them about the Father.²⁸ So Jesus said to them, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me.”²⁹ And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him.”³⁰ As he was saying these things, many believed in him.

Jesus began to explain again the difference between him and a typical man. Jesus explained to the Jews that at death, he was going to a place where their sins would not allow them to go. They were confused, thinking that he was going to commit suicide.

He continued to explain to them that he is from God and that there is a separation between God and man. Sin caused this separation, and unless they repent and believe that he is the one that will die for their sins, they cannot be where God is.

They continued to ask, “Who are you?” Jesus explained that they would understand that he is “the Son of Man” once he is lifted up, referencing the cross. Jesus taught them that he was not acting alone and was sent by his father: God. He further explained that his father has given him all authority to teach these things. Jesus had total confidence that the one who had sent him would not abandon him. Jesus’ goal was to please his Father.

8:31-59 – So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples,³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”³³ They answered him, “We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, ‘You will become free’?”

³⁴ Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.³⁵ The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever.³⁶ So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.³⁷ I know that you are offspring of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you.³⁸ I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father.”

³⁹ They answered him, “Abraham is our father.” Jesus said to them, “If you were Abraham’s children, you would be doing the works Abraham did,⁴⁰ but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did.⁴¹ You are doing the works your father did.” They said to him, “We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father—even God.”⁴² Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me.⁴³ Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word.⁴⁴ You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.⁴⁵ But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me.⁴⁶ Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me?⁴⁷ Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.”

⁴⁸ The Jews answered him, “Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?”⁴⁹ Jesus answered, “I do not have a demon, but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me.⁵⁰ Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is One who seeks it, and he is the judge.⁵¹ Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.”⁵² The Jews said to him, “Now we know that you have a demon! Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet you say, ‘If anyone keeps my word, he will never taste death.’⁵³ Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died!

Who do you make yourself out to be?”⁵⁴ Jesus answered, “If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, ‘He is our God.’⁵⁵ But you have not known him. I know him. If I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and I keep his word.⁵⁶ Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.”⁵⁷ So the Jews said to him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?”⁵⁸ Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.”⁵⁹ So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

Jesus addressed those Jews who had claimed to believe. Evidently Jesus was not convinced that these “believers” were true disciples. He began to emphasize to this group what truly believing in his teachings would result in. He was simple and direct: if you continue in my Word you will show yourself as true disciples (8:31). Jesus further explained that knowing him as the truth transforms us from a people who are in bondage to those who are free. This totally caught this group off guard, because they were descendants of Abraham. They accredited their heritage to spiritual freedom—an inheritance to a relationship with God.

The freedom Jesus was offering was dependent on a relationship with him. Jesus was offering liberty from a continual state of sin. The consequences of not accepting Jesus as the way to spiritual freedom would result in bondage.

The Jews kept referring to Abraham as their authority while rejecting Christ. Jesus took the argument of being a descendant of Abraham and used it against these Jews. If Abraham was their father they would be doing the works Abraham (referred to as the friend of God) did. The fact that they wanted to kill Jesus indicated they had another father that they were following. Jesus also pointed out that God was not their father or they would love him because he came from God.

Jesus’ conclusion was that the father that was guiding their steps was the devil. They were not able to hear and understand the truth Jesus was speaking because they were allowing the devil to influence them. He described the devil as a liar and a murderer. These Jews were listening to the lies of the devil just as Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden. The result of listening to the devil always results in the truth being suppressed and lives being destroyed.

These Jews were so upset by what Jesus had told them that they began to call him names and accuse him of having a demon. Jesus responded by stating God would judge all things and made another statement that floored the Jews. Jesus said that anyone who kept his Word (the teachings of Jesus) would not taste death. They were insulted and enraged. They asked if Jesus was greater than the prophets who died before him.

Jesus continued to respond in a way that if they were listening for the truth, they would have found it. He never glorified himself. He always referred to the concept that he was doing the will of God his father. They did not know God and refused to listen to the truth. He further explained that Abraham knew the Messiah would come from him and in faith saw this day coming. They could not accept what Jesus was saying and began to throw stones at him.

The Main Point

Jesus is the light of the world, the one who sets people free from sin. Will we follow him, or will we continue in the works of the flesh?

A Few Relevant Scriptures

- Genesis 12:1-3
- Exodus 13:21-22
- John 1:1-18

Week 14

John 9:1-41 – Jesus Heals a Man Born Blind

By Anthony Winfrey

Introduction

From an early age, most of us are taught that if we are good, then good things will happen to us, and if we are bad, bad things will happen to us. We can look at Proverbs and see that there is truth to this idea but that it is much more nuanced than this, particularly when we try to evaluate what is good and bad from God's eternal perspective. Ecclesiastes helps us wrestle with this idea of "you get what you deserve," when we see those who suffer for what seems to be no reason at all. We have all experienced difficulties: disappointments, loved ones who have gone through sickness, and the heartache of death. I personally live with physical limitations and sometimes struggle with the reason why I have them. When I do struggle with why suffering happens, I am reminded that even in the toughest of situations, God can still be glorified. The effect of sin entering the world through Adam and Eve is evident in our bodies that are decaying daily. I gain comfort in knowing that the suffering in this life is temporary, and a new body is coming.

Read John 9:1-41 together

Study Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I've read?

Passage-Specific Questions

1. Are there circumstances in your life that are difficult to deal with and understand? Would you share them?
 2. What hope do we have in the midst of these difficulties? What promises does God give those who are his people?
 3. What is something in your life that God changed your perspective on? Has God used a difficulty to shape you or was it an unexpected blessing? Explain.
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Commentary

9:1-7 – *As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. ² And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" ³ Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. ⁴ We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." ⁶ Having said these things, he spit on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud ⁷ and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing.*

As Jesus was walking with his disciples, they noticed a blind man. This man had been blind from birth. The disciples questioned the reasoning for his blindness. Did sin cause this? It was common belief that disabilities like this were punishment for sin. Jesus denounced this belief and said this was for the works of God to be displayed. Jesus reminded the disciples that he is the light of the world while he is here. As he spoke he began making mud with his spit and dirt from the ground and applied it to the blind man. In previous miracles in which the blind were healed, Jesus did not use this technique. Even though it is not definitive why he began this miracle with his spit and dirt, the imagery reminds me of God forming man from the dust and breathing into him. This could be symbolic of new life for the blind man.

After Jesus applied this mud to the blind man's eyes, he commanded him to go wash in the Pool of Siloam. John emphasizes that the name of this pool means, "Sent." This name reminds us of the sending of the Messiah into the world. For the man to be healed, he had to have faith and be obedient to Jesus' command. He had to go and wash in this water. He did as he was instructed, and he came back healed.

9:8-34 – *The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar were saying, “Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?”⁹ Some said, “It is he.” Others said, “No, but he is like him.” He kept saying, “I am the man.”¹⁰ So they said to him, “Then how were your eyes opened?”¹¹ He answered, “The man called Jesus made mud and anointed my eyes and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ So I went and washed and received my sight.”¹² They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.”*

¹³ *They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind.¹⁴ Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes.¹⁵ So the Pharisees again asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them, “He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and I see.”¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.” But others said, “How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?” And there was a division among them.¹⁷ So they said again to the blind man, “What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?” He said, “He is a prophet.”*

¹⁸ *The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight, until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight¹⁹ and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?”²⁰ His parents answered, “We know that this is our son and that he was born blind.²¹ But how he now sees we do not know, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.”²² (His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue.)²³ Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”*

²⁴ *So for the second time they called the man who had been blind and said to him, “Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner.”²⁵ He answered, “Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.”²⁶ They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?”²⁷ He answered them, “I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?”²⁸ And they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses.²⁹ We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.”³⁰ The man answered, “Why, this is an amazing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes.³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him.³² Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind.³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”³⁴ They answered him, “You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?” And they cast him out.*

A great miracle happened to this once-blind man. He became a living testimony of the power of Jesus. His friends and neighbors were the first to experience his life-altering change. Some even doubted this was truly the same man. He assured them he was the man that was once blind. They began to ask him questions about what happened. He gave his account of how Jesus healed him.

His friends went to the Pharisees to tell them about Jesus healing their friend on the Sabbath. They began to question him about what took place. He gave his testimony of what happened. Instead of providing the spiritual counsel that would have been expected, they stumbled over the traditions of the Sabbath day. They denied this miracle was from God because it happened on the Sabbath. They even investigated this man’s story of being blind by contacting his parents. His parents confirmed that this was their son, and he was born blind. His parents were so afraid of the Jews that they did not want to confirm who performed this miracle, but said our son was of age, and they could ask him.

Again, the Pharisees questioned the man. At this point, they were calling him a liar and asking him to speak in the presence of God. He did not change his story. He became bolder as he realized they did not want the truth, but wanted their thoughts and opinions confirmed. He asked the Pharisees if they wanted to become Jesus’ disciples. The Pharisees responded by stating they did not know where Jesus came from. The once-blind man was confident that Jesus was from God or he would not have been able to do this miracle. He emphatically stated this and the Pharisees casted him out.

9:35-41 – *Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”³⁶ He answered, “And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?”³⁷ Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.”³⁸ He said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him.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.”⁴⁰ Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, “Are we also blind?”⁴¹ Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, ‘We see,’ your guilt remains.*

Jesus came to the man after his experience with Pharisees. Jesus asked him if he believed in the Son of Man. This is a different belief than the man expressed to the Pharisees. He had already received physical sight but had not received spiritual sight. The man was seeking truth, and Jesus revealed that he was the Son of Man that came to give sight. When

the man knew who Jesus was, he proclaimed belief and worshipped him. What seemed like an unfair circumstance in this man's life resulted in an encounter with the Messiah and because of it, he not only received physical healing, he received eternal life.

The Main Point

There are things in our lives that might be hard so that the works of God might be displayed in our lives.

A Few Relevant Scriptures

- Proverbs 1
- Ecclesiastes 8:14-17
- Romans 8:28

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