

John 8.12-30 / COB / 08.03.14

Introduction

- † **[Slide 1: Title]** You can turn in your Bibles to John 8. I want to begin today by telling you about a friend of mine. After I hit the lowest point of my life and was asking God to help me, I was hiding out at a friend's house outside of DC while I figured out what to do. I have to believe it was God who used a former college student of mine to somehow find me in Maryland and offer me the job that would lure me back to Florida, because it became clear that was where God wanted me.
- This friend and I both confessed faith in Jesus and attended an Easter service when I arrived in Florida. But over the past seventeen years, his faith has diminished, he has not pursued biblical teaching or a walk with God, he has declined in his willingness to sacrificially love others, and his life has become characterized by what the Bible describes as the fruit of the flesh rather than the fruit of the Spirit.
 - In short, my friend has not followed Christ, even though he once said he believed. I went through a dark spell myself for over ten years, so I can't say with certainty that this friend is not saved. But I have to ask, where is the evidence?
 - The author of our gospel also wrote the letter of 1 John, in which he provided various measures that assure us we are saved. My friend is declining in these measures, rather than improving. It makes me fear for his salvation, and it certainly points to him walking in spiritual darkness right now, and thus lacking the intimacy with Christ we discussed last week. The question I would ask him is this: if you really believed in Jesus, wouldn't you follow him? Since you are not following Jesus, do you really believe in him?
 - Let's pray and then we will see what Jesus has for us today...

[Slide 2: 8.12] John 8.12 NET: Then Jesus spoke out again, "I am the light of the world. The one who follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

- † When last we saw Jesus, he was in the Temple courts at the end of the Festival of Tabernacles, teaching that he would give the Holy Spirit to those who came to him in faith. Using the imagery of the Temple water pouring ceremony, Jesus said that he would give living water or life-giving water – meaning the Holy Spirit – to true believers.
- Now Jesus is using the imagery of a light ceremony. The Jewish religious leaders would light four huge lamps in the Court of Women, where only Jews could go: you can see them in this picture of what this court looked like. The Levites would play instruments and the Jewish people would celebrate under this light, holding torches in their hands, dancing all night, singing songs and praises to God. The light from the Temple could be seen all over the city.
- † In this setting, no doubt standing in the Court of Women, Jesus spoke out again to the people, saying "I am the light of the world. The one who follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."
- We learned at the very beginning of this gospel that Jesus is the Son of God. We believe that God is triune or a trinity: One God who has revealed himself to be three individuals – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – each unique from each other in personality and action, but so unified in essence and will that they are one God; each is all of God yet God is all three, a divine mystery!

- We also learned at the start of this gospel that as the Son of God, Jesus is the source of life, who not only gave life to all of creation, but also is the one who enlightens people to see God clearly in faith and thus obtain salvation. Now Jesus is saying this about himself: he is the light, the one who brings life.

† **[Slide 3: Psalms 27.1]** The Jews would know that the Hebrew scriptures say that the one true God, known as Yahweh, is the light that leads to salvation and righteous living.

- Psalms 27.1 NIV: “The LORD [Yahweh] is my light and my salvation-- whom shall I fear?”
- Psalms 119.105 HCSB: “Your word [O God] is a lamp for my feet and a light on my path.”
- Knowing this, the Jews listening to Jesus would interpret his statement as one of divinity, they would think he was identifying himself with Yahweh, the one true God. Since they did not believe in a trinity, this would be confusing to them; how could Jesus be God?

[Slide 4: 8.13] John 8.13: So the Pharisees objected, “You testify about yourself; your testimony is not true!”

† The Pharisees were the religious teachers of the Jews. Their thinking here might reflect their understanding of the Mosaic Law from the Old Testament.

- Deuteronomy 19.15 NIV: “One witness is not enough to convict anyone accused of any crime or offense they may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.”
- But this is not relevant to the situation at hand. Testimony from one person is not necessarily false, it just was not sufficient to convict someone.

† The Pharisees also were trying to use Jesus’ own words against him.

- When Jesus was in Jerusalem the previous year, back in John 5, he made some bold statements about being the prophetic Son of Man whom God the Father had chosen as his representative on Earth, about how God had granted only him the right to judge everyone at the end of time, and about how God had empowered him to give spiritual life to people.
- At that time, Jesus made the point that if all this were true, then God the Father would testify to it also, but if Jesus were saying all this on his own, alone, apart from God the Father, then obviously it would be false.
- So now the Pharisees want to throw his words back at Jesus. But they are taking his words out of context and changing the meaning.
- Jesus had said that if only he were testifying about himself then his testimony would be false; he did not say that if he testified about himself at all his testimony would be false. As scholar D.A. Carson noted in his commentary, light cannot help testifying about itself as it shines forth!

[Slide 5: 8.14-18] John 8.14-18: Jesus answered, “Even if I testify about myself, my testimony is true, because I know where I came from and where I am going. But you people do not know where I came from or where I am going. You people judge by outward appearances; I do not judge anyone. But if I judge, my evaluation is accurate, because I am not alone when I judge, but I and the Father who sent me do so together. It is written in your law that the testimony of two men is true. I testify about myself and the Father who sent me testifies about me.”

- † Jesus is answering the Pharisees, but he still is speaking among the crowd in the temple courts. He will be opportunistic in using what they said to lead to a discussion he wants to have. He will argue their point, but he will do so in a way that guides them to consider the bigger issue of who he is and from where he comes.
 - Jesus knows he is the divine Son of God who came from Heaven and will return to sit at the right hand of God the Father. And he knows that God the Father has testified with him in this respect, through Old Testament prophecies, miracles, the testimony of the contemporary prophet John the Baptist, and God's own audible voice about Jesus being the Son of God.
 - The Pharisees do not understand all this, but that is what Jesus wants them to consider here.
- † Jesus says they are judging people, especially him, by outward appearances, by human standards derived from fallen fleshly ways of thinking. They would assess people and then categorize them as good or bad, clean or unclean, important or not important, worth knowing or not worth knowing.
 - We do this all the time in our society: we see people in Walmart and we assess their looks, wealth, classiness, cleanliness, friendliness or riskiness of threat; then we determine whether we would want to know them. Even in seminary, there was a distinction in many people's minds between the "real" students who learned Greek and Hebrew and the others who did not. Real men drive trucks and own lots of tools; real seminarians learn Greek and Hebrew.
 - Jesus at this time was not judging anyone. He was offering grace and truth to everyone and letting them respond; all were welcome to come to him in faith.
 - But as Jesus said last time he was in Jerusalem, if he were to judge people, he would be accurate, his judgment would be trustworthy, because he would not judge by his own will, but rather in unity with God the Father. This is how it will be at the end, Jesus judging each person in accordance with the will of God the Father.

[Slide 6: 8.19-20] John 8.19-20: Then they began asking him, "Who is your father?" Jesus answered, "You do not know either me or my Father. If you knew me you would know my Father too." (Jesus spoke these words near the offering box while he was teaching in the temple courts. No one seized him because his time had not yet come.)

- † Jesus has them focused now on the topic of who he is and who is his father. When they ask about his father, he tells them if they knew him, they would know his father. The Son of God is the perfect reflection of God the Father, he is walking revelation!
- † Your translation might say Jesus was teaching in or near the treasury. "Treasury" is a solid translation of the Greek term γαζοφυλάκιον, but the crowds were not allowed in the treasury, so the context indicates this refers to one of the thirteen offering boxes placed around the Court of Women. This is an attractive translation also because that is where the light ceremony was held.
- † The animosity toward Jesus on the part of the religious leaders, is still present. Remember, Jesus for a while stayed away from Jerusalem, because the religious leaders were plotting to have him seized and put to death, and even during this Festival of Tabernacles, they have tried to seize him multiple times. Again, he is able to walk away, because this is not yet the time for his sacrifice.

[Slide 7: 8.21-24] John 8.21-24: Then Jesus said to them again, “I am going away, and you will look for me but will die in your sin. Where I am going you cannot come.” So the Jewish leaders began to say, “Perhaps he is going to kill himself, because he says, ‘Where I am going you cannot come.’” Jesus replied, “You people are from below; I am from above. You people are from this world; I am not from this world. Thus I told you that you will die in your sins. For unless you believe that I am he, you will die in your sins.”

- † During the festival, Jesus had talked about going away and they not being able to find him. Then and now, he said the Jewish religious leaders would look for him, perhaps meaning they would wonder about the empty tomb, perhaps meaning they would be seeking a different Messiah.
 - But now he turns more ominous on this subject. He will be going to Heaven, but they will not be able to come. Jesus says first that they will die in their sin [singular] and then that they will die in their sins [plural].
 - Because they have rejected Jesus as the Messiah-savior and Son of God, they have not accepted God’s salvation promise in faith, so they will die in their sin. The one sin of disbelief leads to remaining in a state of sin, of being dominated by it instead of free. That one sin of disbelief also leads to remaining guilty from all sins instead of forgiven.
- † **[Slide 8: salvation]** Salvation often is misunderstood, even in churches. Kevin pointed out on Facebook last week that in Portland, Oregon, people are angry that Child Evangelism Fellowship is teaching children that they are born with a corrupted human nature which leads them to commit sins against God, with the result that they are in spiritual darkness, headed for eternal separation from God, which we call Hell.
 - The protestors say this negativity can hurt children, but what they really object to is the biblical truth. That God is not all sunshine and hugs, that his purity illuminates our impurity, that his righteousness is intolerant of our unrighteousness. People don’t want to need a savior. They want God to accept them how they are, they want a sense of inherent self-righteousness. This is the attitude Jesus faced with the Pharisees too.
- † Throughout the Bible, God gives us promises and commands. We have never been able to obey the commands perfectly, and this has resulted in corruption of our nature, guilt before God, and actions of our own choosing which go against the will and nature of God, whose image we were created to reflect. This is total failure on our part. This failure and our inability to fix it is why we say we are born in to total depravity. That might not be politically correct, but it is correct!
 - Because we are not perfect, because we struggle so with the commands, salvation has always been based on faith in the promises. From the day of the first sin, God has promised a savior would come. For thousands of years before Jesus’ birth, God revealed more and more about this savior. He would be a man who would be God’s ultimate representative, God’s chosen king in the line of David, God’s greatest prophet and high priest. He would be a healer and a miracle worker. He would bring salvation from sin and a new covenant with God. He also would be God himself, because the only way for God to offer salvation from sin was for someone to pay the penalty, and nobody could do that but God himself.
 - So God the Father sent the Son of God to come and be born as the human Jesus. Jesus is both God and man, and as such he was able to live a perfectly pure life and be our perfect substitutionary sacrifice. In his death, he took on all the penalty for all our sins. He made the redeeming payment so we could have freedom and victory over sin in this life, so we could have

forgiveness and a new and eternal relationship with God that would start now, continue as we were progressively sanctified to become the image of God that we were created to be, and last throughout eternity in Heaven and on the new Earth.

- There is no salvation without first facing a judgment of condemnation. There is no loving God who forgives unless there is the righteous God who demands purity.
- What God asks of us is to believe his promise. Throughout history, God has revealed greater detail about this promise, and today we know it centers on who Jesus is and what he did for us in his crucifixion and resurrection. Believe in Jesus' gospel – believe that he is the light of the world who can offer you the light of true spiritual life! – and you will be saved by God's grace! Reject the message of Jesus, and you will continue in your state of sin, guilty of all your sins; just like the Pharisees of Jesus' day.

[Slide 9: 8.25-27] John 8.25-27 So they said to him, “Who are you?” Jesus replied, “What I have told you from the beginning. I have many things to say and to judge about you, but the Father who sent me is truthful, and the things I have heard from him I speak to the world.” (They did not understand that he was telling them about his Father.)

- † “Who are you?” ask the Pharisees. It's hard to know if they are genuinely confused or just trying to get Jesus on the record so they can prosecute him. Jesus says he is consistent in his teaching, what he has told them from the beginning is the same truth he is teaching today.
- † A moment ago, he said he presently was not judging people, but were he to judge, his judgment would be trustworthy because he and God the Father are in such unity. Now he tells them that he has many convicting things from God the Father to say to them. At other times, Jesus would say some very critical things to the Pharisees; and even here he tells them they are going to die in the condemnation of their sin. But he will hold off on saying more to them about this, because for the moment he is occupied with teaching the crowd about his identity, the gospel message God the Father sent him to proclaim.
- † The author John adds the aside that the Pharisees did not understand that Jesus was talking about God the Father. The Greek text does not have the possessive pronoun “his.” Obviously they could understand Jesus' words enough to know he was talking about his father, but they did not comprehend that he was the Son of God, whose only father was God the Father.

[Slide 10: 8.28-30] John 8.28-30: Then Jesus said, “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and I do nothing on my own initiative, but I speak just what the Father taught me. And the one who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, because I always do those things that please him.” While he was saying these things, many people believed in him.

- † **[Slide 11: I AM]** In v.24 Jesus says, “For unless you believe that I am he, you will die in your sins.” In v.28, Jesus says, “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he...” In both verses, in the Greek, there is no “he” at the end of the clause: what Jesus literally says is ἐγώ εἰμι in Greek, I AM! thereby associating himself with Yahweh the God of the Jews, for this is how God referred to himself through various prophets in the Old Testament.
 - “For unless you believe that I AM, you will die in your sins.” “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I AM.”

- It is interesting that English translations try to smooth this out in our language. Consider that Jesus already in this conversation has identified himself with Yahweh by calling himself the light that is life which the Jews associated with God, by saying he is in total unity with God the Father when judging, and by emphasizing his source as Heaven instead of earth.
- Consider also that later in this conversation, in v.58, which we will study next week, Jesus clearly identifies himself as I AM, and all English translations agree. So if we are going to smooth out the sentence in English, we should say, “you will know that I am Yahweh.”

† **[Slide 12: 8.28-30]** Jesus is the divine Son of God and the human Messiah. Those who fail to recognize him, who fail to associate him with Yahweh, the one true God who promised salvation, remain dead in their sins.

- When some of those people lift Jesus up onto the cross, they inadvertently will bring him to full glory in completion of his victorious work, and this also will lead many to accept in faith the revelation of his glory as the Son who came to conquer sin and death.

Conclusion

† **[Slide 13:]** Let’s go back to v.12 for a moment: Then Jesus spoke out again, “I am the light of the world. The one who follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

- You see the NET uses the word “never” here. That is their way of translating the emphatic negation of Jesus’ words in Greek. Another way to translate it would be, “The one who follows me *certainly* will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. If you are following Jesus, you are in the light as he is in the light.
- The one with true faith in Jesus will not walk in spiritual darkness, but the one who opposes Jesus will. The Pharisees were still in darkness. Many people you meet also will be.
- It is interesting that Jesus said “the one who follows,” instead of saying “the one who believes.” In the gospel of John, the author repeatedly shows us contrast between true faith and mere emotional excitement. The one who truly believes will actually follow Jesus, adopting his values and his priorities for life, doing the things he commanded and emulating his example. This true believer, who follows Jesus, is the one who certainly will not walk in spiritual darkness, but rather will have the light of life.
- In v.30, it says “While he was saying these things, many people believed in him.” As we will see next week, this is another example of John contrasting true faith with mere emotional response. John used a verb tense called aorist here. He uses the aorist form of the verb “to believe” when he is non-committal about whether it is true faith or not. But we will see next week that Jesus says these people are not faithful. Another way to translate the aorist would be to say they “began to believe” in him, and it is true that people repeatedly were impressed by Jesus when he spoke, but most of his disciples already had drifted away and this crowd will turn against him. Only the true believers really followed Jesus and had spiritual light!
- This week, assess yourself. Is your faith genuine enough that you are willing to follow Jesus in every aspect of life? If not, what is holding you back? If so, how can you improve in following Jesus, in adopting his way of life and values?
- Let’s pray...

[Slide 14: crucifixion slide for communion]