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Jesus: The Light of the World John 8:20-30 Part 3

One of the things that I am periodically called upon to do as a pastor is to conduct funerals. And each funeral that I conduct will invariably impact me emotionally in one of two ways. I will either be filled with a sense of joy, knowing that the deceased person by the way he or she has lived their life has gone to be with Christ, or I will be filled with a sense of sorrow, knowing that the deceased person by the way he or she has lived their life has not gone to be with Christ.

What will determine whether or not a person will go to be with Christ after their death? It totally depends upon whether they have established a relationship with Him while they were living. Why? Because if they have not established a relationship with Him while they are living, they will not be able to establish a relationship with Him after they are gone.

This point will be brought out to us very clearly in the passage that we will be examining this weekend.

So what have we covered so far? We are continuing to examine events associated with the Feast of Booths. More specifically, we are presently examining John 8:12-59, which is a continuing record of the events associated with the last day of the feast. And how did this passage begin?

The passage began with a claim by Christ that He was the light of the world (John 8:12). Let me read for you the first part of **John 8:12**. "**Again therefore Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world.'**" And how did the Pharisees respond to Christ's claim? The initial response of the Pharisees to the claim of Christ consisted of two short but hard-hitting statements (John 8:13-20).

What was the first statement? We found the first statement in **John 8:13** when the Pharisees challenged the credibility of Christ's witness by saying to Him "**You are bearing witness of Yourself; Your witness is not true.**" What was the second statement made by the Pharisees?

After Christ makes it clear to them that He is not alone in His witness but that His Father also bore witness of Him, the Pharisees disdainfully challenged Christ to produce His Father by saying to Him "**Show us your Father**" in **John 8:19**. This is the second hard-hitting statement by the Pharisees in response to Christ's claim that He was the light of the world.

After these two brief but very hard-hitting statements, Jesus then declares at the end of **John 8:19** "**You know neither Me, nor My Father; if you knew Me, you would know My Father also.**"

This statement by Christ apparently brought His present conversation with the Pharisees to a temporary halt. How do we know this? Let me read for you the words of the Apostle John in **John 8:20**. "**These words He spoke in the treasury, as He taught in the temple; and no one seized Him, because His hour had not yet come.**"

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These words by John seem to indicate that that the dialogue between Christ and the Pharisees that we have just considered created some kind of hubbub that had to be dealt with before the dialogue between Christ and the Pharisees could once again be renewed, and this dialogue, I believe, was renewed most likely on the very same day.

This brings us to **John 8:21-30**, the passage that we will be studying this weekend. Christ, in John 8:21-30, warns the Pharisees that if they do not respond positively to His claim in the here and now, they will be forever separated from Him in the hereafter.

My Hope for this message is that we would be challenged to live our lives in such a way that when we die, the question about whether or not we have gone into the presence of Christ would not be open to debate. My hope for this message is that if I ever have to officiate at your funeral service, each person attending that service would be filled with a sense of joy, even in the midst of his or her tears, knowing that you have entered the presence of Christ.

Let us now begin our study by looking at **John 8:21**. **"He said therefore again to them [or in other words, picking up his earlier conversation with the Pharisees recorded for us in John 8:12-20], 'I go away, and you shall seek Me, and shall die in your sin; where I am going, you cannot come.'"**

He in essence was saying to them, "You have been very attentive to everything that I have been saying at this great feast, and you have also been taking issue with everything that I have shared at this great feast. You have rejected me, and you have rejected what I have said. But there will come a time, after I have gone away, that you will seek me, but it will be too late." Isn't this exactly what this verse is saying? I believe it is. Let us now look more carefully at this verse so that we might confirm what I have just said to be true.

First of all, He speaks of **"going away."** What does He mean when He says that He is going away? When Jesus speaks of going away, He is speaking about His departure back to His Father (John 7:33). His mission is coming to an end, and He will shortly be returning back to the one who had sent Him. This explanation of the phrase is rather straightforward and certainly is not difficult for us to understand. But what does Jesus mean by the next phrase?

Let us continue to read the verse. **"He said therefore again to them, 'I go away, and you shall seek Me.'"** Doesn't this strike you as a little strange? Why would they be seeking Jesus once He has gone away? Wouldn't His departure, or in other words, His going away have been greeted by these Pharisaical Jews with a hearty "good riddance" even if His departure were through death? And the answer would be of course they would be delighted if He went away, particularly if His reference to going away was in fact referring to His death. So, if this is true, how should we understand their seeking after Jesus once He goes away?

This seeking after Jesus does not refer to what the Pharisees would do immediately after His earthly departure but rather what they would do *later* in the time of their need. And when would that time be? I believe their future time of need, when they would be seeking Jesus, is referred to in the very next phrase in **John 8:21**.

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Let us go back and read the verse, "**He said therefore again to them, 'I go away, and you shall seek Me, and shall die in your sin.'**" "Seeking Him" and then "dying in their sins" are connected.

To die in one's sin is to receive the eternal penalty of *sin* after death. To die in one's sin is the supreme disaster.

Jesus is telling the Pharisees that you may not be seeking Me now or even in the near future, but when you are suffering the calamities of divine judgment you *will*. These Pharisees have very little use for Jesus now, but when they enter into their eternal judgment, their view of Christ will be dramatically changed, and they will feel this incredible need for Him.

And how successful will they be in their pursuit of Jesus after they have died in their sins, or in other words, have begun suffering the calamities of divine judgment? Let us continue to read **verse 21**. "**He said therefore again to them, 'I go away, and you shall seek Me, and shall die in your sin; where I am going, you cannot come.'**" Though the Pharisees and others as they suffer the calamities of divine judgment may seek Jesus, they will not be able to *come* to Him (Luke 16:19-31).

The teaching of Jesus here in **John 8:21** reinforces what He said in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in **Luke 16:19-26**. Let me read this story for you. "**Now there was a certain rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, gaily living in splendor every day. (20) And a certain poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, (21) and longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores. (22) Now it came about that the poor man died and he was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. (23) And in Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away, and Lazarus in his bosom. (24) And He cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue; for I am in agony in this flame.' (25) But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. (26) And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, in order that those who wish to come over from here to you may not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us.'**" What we learn from this story is very similar to what we learn from Christ in **John 8:21**, except, rather than Lazarus not being able to go to the rich man, in the passage before us it is the Pharisees who will, after they die in their sins, be unable to go Christ even though they may be seeking Him.

How will the Pharisees now respond? Let us read **John 8:22**. "**Therefore the Jews were saying, 'Surely He will not kill Himself, will He, since He says, "Where I am going, you cannot come.'"**" What a pathetic response!

These Jews persist in their very familiar pattern of seizing upon one word or thought and ignoring every thing else Jesus has said. In this case, they picked up only on the fact that Jesus said He was going away and totally ignored everything else.

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To their credit, this time they at least correctly understood Jesus' reference to His going away as meaning His death, compared to their response in **John 7:35** when they thought His reference to going away meant that He was going to escape to the Dispersion amongst the Greeks.

Their thought that Jesus was perhaps speaking of suicide when He spoke about going away was a wicked jab. Why would I say this? The Jews believed that suicide caused a person to occupy the worst place in Hell. Josephus, the Jewish historian, said, "The souls of those whose hands have done violence to their own lives go to darkest Hades, and God, their father, will visit the sins of the evildoers on their descendants." In essence they were saying, "He says we cannot follow Him. He must therefore be going to Hell! And He's right; we won't be following Him there!"

How will Jesus respond to this jab? He tries to get them back to the point by explaining the reason why they will not be able to find Him once He goes away. Let us read **John 8:23**. "**And He was saying to them, 'You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world.'**"

Jesus, in John 8:23, explained to the Pharisees why they would not be able to come to Him after they died in their sins. It is because they were from *two* different realms. Each of us is either from below or from above. There is no in-between. The implication of course is this: If nothing changes, then the Pharisees and everyone else who is of this world, which includes us, will ultimately die in their sins and suffer the calamity of divine judgment. Why? Everyone of this world is a sinner and is therefore personally deserving of judgment. This is horrible, but there is some good news. Let us now go to **John 8:24**.

What does **John 8:24** say? Let me read this verse for you. "**I said therefore to you, that you shall die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am He, you shall die in your sins.**" Jesus, who is not of this world, came into this world so that He might throw us a lifeline, and all we have to do in order to take advantage of this lifeline is to *believe* (John 8:24). This is what Jesus is teaching.

If we by faith take this lifeline that He made possible through His death, burial, and resurrection, we will not die in our sins, and therefore, we will enjoy eternal fellowship with Him; but if we fail to take this lifeline, we will die in our sins and suffer the calamity of eternal judgment always, forever sensing our need to be with Christ but not being able to go to Him.

How will the Pharisees respond? Let me read for you the first part of **John 8:25**. "**And so they were saying to Him, 'Who are you?'**" Is this an encouraging question? No! This is not an encouraging question. Certainly Christ was not encouraged by this question. Let us continue to read the verse. "**And so they were saying to Him, 'Who are you?' Jesus said to them, 'What have I been saying to you from the beginning?'**" He in essence was saying, "I have already given you the answer to this question. In fact, I have repeatedly given you the answer to this question. In fact, I have repeatedly given you the answer to this question from the very beginning of my public ministry."

So who is Jesus? Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, the light of this world. This certainly is something that they had heard before. In fact, they had heard it before repeatedly. So what is their problem? The Pharisees' problem was not that they were ignorant of who Christ was, their problem

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was not believing what they had repeatedly heard (John 8:25). Will this repeated rejection by the Pharisees discourage Christ from continuing to speak the truth? No, it will not discourage Christ from continuing to speak.

Let us read **John 8:26**. **"I have many things to speak and to judge concerning you, but He who sent Me is true; and the things which I heard from Him, these I speak to the world."**

Far from being reluctant to speak because of their repeated rejection, Jesus tells these Pharisees that He had many things to say concerning them. He does not simply say that He has many things to say concerning them, rather He says, **"I have many things to speak and to judge concerning you."** The unbelieving responses of the Pharisees to the teachings of Christ were so consistent that He equated His teachings with judgments (John 8:26). He had earlier in **John 8:24** made it clear to them that if they believed in Him, they would not have to die in their sins, but here in **John 8:26** He is also making it clear to them that their continuing rejection of His teachings guarantees their future damnation.

Should they take this warning to heart? Absolutely! Let us continue to read the verse. **"But He who sent Me is true; and the things which I heard from Him, these I speak to the world."** Jesus was not pronouncing these judgments against the Pharisees based on His own volition. Jesus only spoke what He heard from His Father who had sent Him (John 8:26).

Now at this point in our text the apostle John will introduce an explanatory note in **John 8:27**. Let us now read this verse. **"They [the Pharisees] did not realize that He had been speaking to them about the Father."** This is a very puzzling statement. Does it mean that they did not, at least on a superficial level, understand that Christ had been speaking to them about His Father? No, I don't believe that this is what John meant. Clearly on a superficial level they would have understood that Christ had been speaking about His Father. This is clear from **John 8:17-19**. If this is so, then what is John's point when He says that they did not realize that He had been talking about His Father? When John says that the Pharisees did not realize that He had been talking to them about His Father, He simply meant that they had not taken it to heart.

The word "realize" (GINOSKO) denotes a complete and total understanding. This is what the Pharisees lacked.

Jesus, of course, perceived that what He had said about the Father's relation to every one of His utterances had not registered with these Jews just as John has explained. So what will He do next? Jesus issues a prophetic statement in **John 8:28**.

Let us read this verse. **"Jesus therefore 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 these things as the Father taught Me.'"** What is Jesus saying in this verse?

In John 8:28, Jesus declared that there will be a time when these Pharisees will finally completely and totally realize that He did not speak or act on His own.

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So the question that immediately leaps out at us is this: When will this time be? When will the Pharisees fully realize that the words that Christ had been speaking to them were the very words of His Father?

In answering this question we need to be careful not to connect the word "when" too closely with the word "then" in John 8:28. In other words, there appears to be a gap between when they lift Him up, or in other words crucify Him, and the time when they actually come to this full realization that the words of Christ were the very words of God.

How do we know this? We know this because when God finally allowed these Pharisees to lift up Christ on the cross, these Pharisees continued to mock Him and were rejoicing in His death. Though the prophetic statement in John 8:28 was not fulfilled immediately at the time of the crucifixion, it certainly will be fulfilled (Philippians 2:9-11). We see this in **Philippians 2:9-11**.

Let me read for you **Philippians 2:9-11**. "**Therefore also [after His crucifixion] God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, (10) that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, (11) and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.**"

CONCLUSION

Jesus, as the light of this world, was continually reaching out to the Jewish nation even including these hard-nosed and hard-hearted Pharisees. But they were continually rejecting Him. They were mocking Him. But He gives them a warning.

If they continue to do this, they will die in their sins and suffer eternal loss. Not only will they die in their sins and suffer eternal loss, they will also, in their death, come to realize who Jesus really is, but also it will be too late. They will seek Him, but they will not be able to come to Him.

So what about us? When should we seek Christ? Should we seek Christ in the here and now, or should we wait until the hereafter? We should seek Him now and seek Him in such a way that all doubt about a personal relationship with Him is totally erased both from our minds and the minds of others. If this is our commitment, then let this be our prayer.

At the time of our death, may people know by the way we have lived our lives that we did not wait to seek Christ until it was too late.