

Above or Below

Trinity CRC, October 27, 2024
John Series

John 8:21-30

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Turn in your Bibles to John 8:21, please.

²¹ Once more Jesus said to them (primarily the Jewish leaders. He said), "I am going away, and you will look for me, and you will die in your sin. Where I go, you cannot come."

²² This made the Jews ask, "Will he kill himself? Is that why he says, 'Where I go, you cannot come'?"

²³ But he continued, "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; if you do not believe **that I am he**, you will indeed die in your sins."

²⁵ "**Who are you?**" they asked.

"Just what I have been telling you from the beginning," Jesus replied. ²⁶ "I have much to say in judgment of you. But **he who sent me is trustworthy**, and what I have heard from him I tell the world."

²⁷ They did not understand that he **was telling them about his Father**. ²⁸ So Jesus said, "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 but speak just what the Father has taught me. ²⁹ **The one who sent me is with me**; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him." ³⁰ Even as he spoke, many believed in him.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Beloved of God,

Sometimes you have to repeat yourself to get a point across. When you love people and see them heading full speed ahead in a dangerous direction, you **don't** mumble, "Stop!" and you don't say it just one time. You shout out, "Stop. Stop. Stop!" You'd probably do the same even for strangers if you saw them heading to their death. But would you do it for people who are trying to kill you?

Jesus has said the words of our passage in some fashion before. But he needs to repeat it. And he'll do it again. The people don't get it. They don't really understand or believe what he's saying. Their minds are closed. They are blinded by their earthly realities and can't see the spiritual ones. So, Jesus speaks again. That's why our reading starts with the words, "Once more" (NIV) or "He said to them again..." (ESV) or "Then he went over the same ground again." (MSG)

That begs the question, do we hear what he's saying? Do we believe it? Does the thick headedness of the Jewish leaders Jesus is speaking to say anything about our thick headedness and spiritual blindness? Jesus sees it in the Jews to whom he is speaking. Does he see it in us today too?

You could rightly ask, then, "What blindness? What thick headedness?" Well, let's think about that.

Understanding Below or Above

In a couple of words, Jesus calls us to examine whether we're from below or from above. Are we worldly or heavenly? Do we have a kingdom of God in view that matches our own worldly desires? Or do we sincerely seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, as Jesus puts it in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 6:33)? There's the old adage that we can be so heavenly minded that we're no earthly good. That's not what Jesus is talking about. He's talking about knowing who he is, who the Father is and submitting ourselves to their plan of salvation for the world, an eternal plan. That in contrast to the Jewish leaders who have a plan of salvation for the Jews that is limited to this world, the here and now. An earthly kingdom instead of God's desired kingdom.

Giving them the benefit of the doubt, these Jews have noble intentions as they see it. They want people to obey God. For that reason, they feel they need to control the ignorant masses. So they create buffers around the law of God by adding additional man-made laws designed to keep the people from breaking God's laws. It's all about keeping the people on God's good side, which seems noble enough. However, this idea of salvation is based on good works and a wrong view of God. Keep God happy by obeying his laws, rather than by knowing him and living in a restored relationship to him. In this view, sin is something we overcome by our obedience. We earn or win God's favour by our own righteousness.

This is why these people hate Jesus. His gospel overturns their view of God and his kingdom. Jesus comes to give us a relationship with God based on grace. He takes sin seriously. Sin has destroyed our relationship with God and it can't be restored by our obedience. Jesus repeatedly has to teach the Jews that our human obedience, good as it might look on the outside, is still deeply tainted by sin. A Pharisee or teacher of the law might say, "Do not commit adultery." Along with that, they might, for example, have rules that keep women and men separate from each other in the synagogue. But then Jesus comes along and shows how sin is so deeply rooted in us. He says, "If you look at a woman lustfully, you have already committed adultery in your heart." He keeps blowing holes in the salvation by good works rules of the Jewish teachers of the law. Theirs is a worldly salvation. Hence, they are from below. They don't really need God for salvation. They just need to keep God happy with their obedience.

However, Jesus, being from above, is in step with the Father and knows that salvation can only be accomplished by him giving his life to pay for our sin and earn God's grace for us. Obedience is not a requirement for us to earn salvation but obedience flows out of love and gratitude for the salvation Jesus has earned for us. Our obedience is not the reason God looks on us with favour. Jesus is the reason for that.

This is the plan of God. This is the heavenly plan that Jesus comes from the Father to fulfill here on earth.

This is so important to grasp as a Christian. Time and time again, we fall into that trap of thinking we need to earn our salvation. We become so blinded to the depths of our sin and the separation it has created between us and God. We think we can fix it. But this is precisely the misunderstanding of the gospel that the Reformation had to address. We cannot fix it. We are incapable.

Just take a read through the Heidelberg Catechism sometime. It takes sin very seriously because it knows that only grace can save us. It mentions in Lord's Day 5 that every sin needs to be paid in full. Then the question is asked, "Can we pay this debt ourselves?" and the answer is "Certainly not! Actually, we increase our guilt every day." That leads to the only solution being Jesus who fully satisfies the demands of God's justice against our sin and earns for us and restores to us true righteousness and life.

So, the root sin that Jesus addresses in the Jewish leaders is unbelief. They refuse to believe that he's the Messiah because they don't believe they need a Saviour from sin. They've got that covered with their good works. They just want someone—a political Messiah—to overthrow Roman control. They want a kingdom from below.

Because the Jews **don't** understand this about Jesus, Jesus says to them in our opening verse,

Jn 12:21b "I am going away, and you will look for me, and you will die in your sin.

Where I go, you cannot come."

Once he dies and raises from the dead victorious over sin, he'll return to heaven above where he came from, having accomplished the Father's will. Meanwhile, the Jews will still be looking for a messiah, not realizing or believing that they just missed him. Even though he's already come, they'll be searching for the Christ. That is exactly what happened. Even to this day, many Jews are still expecting the Messiah to appear because they don't believe Jesus was it. They don't believe in the Messiah God has already sent. And hence, they will die in their sins and not be able to join Jesus in heaven above one day.

A Serious Call to Faith

My friends, Jesus' words here are a serious call to faith in him. Take seriously who we are apart from him. That we are lost in our sin and will perish eternally. Sorry for repeating this but no amount of good works will save us. God's justice cannot be appeased by our works; we can't win his favour by our perfect obedience because we're incapable of that. We can only be saved by grace alone through faith alone. **This is the gospel.** The good news. This is the basis of the Reformation. And this is why we are so blessed to celebrate the Lord's Supper. It shouts out to us that salvation is by grace alone and we receive that by faith alone.

Mixed into this passage is, therefore, Jesus' reminder that rejecting him is rejecting the Father. The two are one, along with the Holy Spirit, making up the Trinity, three

persons, one true God. You cannot say, “I believe in God but reject Jesus. That’s not possible because they are one. Therefore, if you reject Jesus, you are rejecting the Father and, at the end if you persist, you will be rejected by him. As Jesus is before the Jewish leaders, someone wrote, “They are sitting in a room of pure blazing light but still reject Jesus as the Light. When God reveals himself to us, to reject that is to reject the light and to insist on darkness and place yourself in a position for judgment.”

That’s the verdict that our God gives. The Jewish leaders, it seems from our text, are perhaps hopeful that Jesus will kill himself. In their mind, that would send him into the deepest darkness for eternity. That way of thinking is wrong because it’s tied directly to their idea of how salvation works. As they understood it, salvation depends on you doing good things and if you do a really bad thing right before you die, like kill yourself, then you can’t possibly go to heaven. However, as Christians, we believe in God’s grace. Grace means you receive the opposite of what you deserve—not by works but by faith. Ironically, the Jews are so blinded by their sin that they are heading for darkness themselves.

Meanwhile, Jesus is willingly giving up his life, not by suicide though. He’s laying down his life, willingly submitting to the unrighteousness of the world below in order to atone freely for our sins. He loves us. He even loves those people who hate him. But his love is not a touchy-feely thing. It’s a determined willingness to die in our place. In the place of those who hate him. It’s a passionate, sacrificial, gracious love that is willing to go to the cross to save all who put their faith in him.

All are invited to receive his free gift of salvation from our sin. That’s why Jesus warns these Jewish leaders over and over again to believe. He says to them and to us in v.28,

Jn 12:28 ...“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 but speak just what the Father has taught me.”

They do not understand what Jesus says. The power of their unbelief is so blinding!

Jesus is telling them that after they have nailed him—The “I Am” (which we heard about last week; after they’ve nailed him) to the cross and after he has risen and ascended, the awful truth will dawn on them that Jesus is the one he had always claimed to be. As one commentator puts it,

By saying “you will *know*” Jesus meant “you will recognize or perceive.” This verb occurs fifty-six times in John’s Gospel.... In this clause... the knowledge indicated is not a saving knowledge and does not refer to their conversion... What Jesus means is that having refused to accept him by faith and having nailed him to the cross, they would one day awaken to the terrifying realization that this One whom they despised was, nevertheless, whatever he claimed to be. Too late this truth would crash in upon them, in the hour of death and at the final judgment. (Hendriksen, NTC)

You see, church, the Apostle Paul tells us that even if we don’t confess Jesus as Saviour and Lord in this life, we will undoubtedly confess this truth in the afterlife. But then it will be too late. Nonetheless, all people will—without a doubt—confess it. Philippians 2:9-11 says,

*Php 2:9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.*

Do we believe this, congregation? Boys and girls? Young people? Young adults? Middle-aged folks? Seniors? Do you believe this?

Come to Jesus today. Rest in his finished work. Free yourself from self-righteousness which means you must earn your own salvation. Free yourself from looking down on others in order to make yourself feel better. Your worth is not in what you do. It is in Christ alone. His work alone on the cross. His obedience to the Father—even unto death—for our sakes. His victory alone in rising from the dead.

Jesus was set on doing the Father's will in order to save us. His mind was set on things above, the things of God, rather than below. Now that his work is completed and we are saved, we may join him in seeking to do the Father's will—not to earn anything but only to live more fully into the joy of our free salvation and the life from above, rather than below.

I hope you've heard the message. Jesus repeated it several times because it's worth repeating. It's a matter of eternal life. Believe and you will be saved. Such a great comfort that makes for a great life here already and for eternity. Amen.

– MORNING WORSHIP –

Reformation Sunday

October 27, 2024, 10AM

Note: *indicates please stand if you are able

GATHERING TO PRAISE OUR GOD

Welcome & Announcements

Pastor Tomas

Fellowship Games report/video (Edmund)

Opening Prayer

* Call to Worship

* God's Greeting

* Confession of Faith: *The Apostles' Creed*

PsH page 813

* Gathering Song: *In Christ Alone*

LUYH 770/ccli 3350395

BRINGING PRAYERS TO OUR GREAT GOD

Prayer of Confession

Assurance of Pardon

God's Will for Our Lives

HEARING GOD'S WORD

Children's Message

Harmel Potvin

Children age 3 to Grade 4 dismiss for Wee Worship

* Song: *Jesus Firm a Foundation*

6472799

Prayer for the Word

Pastor Rich

Scripture Reading: John 8:21-30

Sermon: ***Above or Below***

* Song: *Yet Not I But Through Christ in Me*

7121852

CELEBRATING THE LORD'S SUPPER

Institution and Invitation

Communing at the Table

Songs while partaking:

Bread: *Eat this Bread*

LUYH 818

Cup: *A Mighty Fortress is Our God*

LUYH 776

GIVING OUR NEEDS AND OFFERINGS TO OUR GOD

Congregational Prayer

Elder Harv Quartel

Tithes and Offerings:

1. Trinity Ministries

2. Deborah Edward, Mission Aviation Fellowship

Song: *The Church's One Foundation*

LUYH 251

LEAVING WITH GOD'S BLESSING

* Benediction

* Closing Song: *Goodness of God*

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Small Group Questions: October 27, 2024

Reading: John 8:21-30

1. Have you ever had to tell certain people (your friends, spouse, children or anyone else) something important over and over because they don't seem to listen or get what you're saying? Can you share an example? And why did you repeat it?
2. Why does this passage begin with "Once more Jesus said to them..."? Who is "them" that he's talking to?
3. What is Jesus saying in v.21 about going away? See also John 7:34 and 13:33. What's the one obvious difference in John 8:21 compared to those other two passages?
4. Why does Jesus say, "You will look for me"? And does he mean the same thing as in 7:34? Does 7:34 help clarify this passage a little more? Why won't they find him later?
5. Recalling that the Jewish leaders are looking to get rid of Jesus, do you have any idea why they might have jumped to the conclusion or hoped it was true that Jesus was going to kill himself (v.22)?
6. Jesus is warning these Jewish leaders—"religious folks"—about something very serious. What is it? (vv.23-24). Is there a warning there for us too?
7. What was the belief of the Jewish leaders keeping them from seeing or understanding? What was their belief versus what Jesus is offering?
8. How would "the Son of Man being lifted up" help them to know who Jesus really is?
9. What was the mark of Jesus following his Father? (see also Jn 4:34, 5:30, 6:38).
10. Does that give us some instruction or idea about what believing in Jesus looks like for us?