

**THE GOSPEL OF BELIEF - Studies in John's Gospel - Part twenty-two**

Sunday, July 28<sup>th</sup>, 2013, 10 a.m. - Teaching #1668

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**WHY ARE SO MANY PEOPLE UNRESPONSIVE TO DIVINE TRUTH?**

John 5:38-47 - "...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] 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?"

These verses form the surprise ending to the block of text we began studying last week. **Verses 30-37** are the words of Jesus convincing us of the **witnesses** to His trustworthiness and authority. There is the witness of **Father God** to the Son's work and words. There is the prophecy-fulfilling witness of **John the Baptist**. And there is the powerful witness of the **mighty works** of Jesus, verifying His claims.

But, in spite of all of these, Jesus has nothing optimistic to say about these Jewish people placing their trust in Himself. He predicts that all of these witnesses won't open the hearts of these people. They won't change their minds - **John 5:38** - "...and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent."

So we're brought face to face with people who have become **fixed** in their opposition to the best evidence of Jesus as the Christ, God the Son. They aren't **moved** by this list of witnesses to re-order their lives. A **spiritual paralysis** has taken hold of their wills.

And the reason this is such an important text in John's account is Jesus **tells us why** people get like this. He, in deep concern and compassion, reveals **two primary causes** of blindness toward Himself.

**Why** does Jesus vent such negative sounding words? What is His purpose? I have two thoughts. **First**, there is a stubborn hope in these words that might encourage a passionate prayer for the lost that is **informed** as to what the problem of sin actually is and how deep it goes. And **second**, a knife of severe mercy that might cut into sin-darkened hearts and bring about the required **depth of repentance** before it's too late. So **intercession** and **repentance** are fueled by Jesus' strong words.

1) **RELIGIOUS PEOPLE CAN STUDY THEIR BIBLES WITHOUT COMING TO JESUS, THE MESSIAH**

John 5:38-40, 45-47 - "...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....45-47.... 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] 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?"

We're meant to observe the striking paradox in Jesus' opening words here. Notice how He places two statements back to back - "**You do not have his word abiding in you**" (38), and "**You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life**" (39). So they **search** the Scriptures with diligence but do not have God's word **abiding** in them. They're searching **in a sense**, but there is nothing **filling up their hearts**. They're **searching** and **avoiding** at the very same time. There's Jesus' definition of personal emptiness and frustration. This is the **motion** of giving God space but not having God ever **moving into** that space.

In Israel we have, according to Jesus, the most instructive example of the **greatest privilege ever** and the **greatest missed opportunity**. Before these people - these **Jewish** people - this people **created to be God's Messiah-seeking people** - before them stands the Messiah Himself. And they, while studying the very Scriptures pointing to Him, won't put their trust in Him.

We learn it is possible to talk of God, read about God, sing about God and even think one is pleasing God and yet never yield to God the Son, Jesus Christ. God **in general** (creator, first cause, divine energy, etc.) is more palatable than depending

on *redemption through Christ's death and the ongoing Lordship of Jesus specifically.*

Notice the way Jesus pinpoints the root of the problem in 5:39-40 - "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." There are two processes described here. One is *mental* - "...You search the Scriptures...." The other is *volitional* - "...you refuse to come to me...."

"...You refuse to come to me...." God's Word will have no *abiding, transforming power* in hearts not pressing toward deeper and deeper confirmation to the will and way of Jesus Christ. Jesus says so - John 5:38 - "...and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent." The only fruit-producing purpose in religious profession - the *test* of its genuineness - is *trust* in Jesus for access to Father God and ongoing *responsiveness* to His Lordship in all the details of life.

Christians must lovingly, yet firmly insist that any professed interest in or pursuit of God that *resists* the claims of Christ is *fake godliness*. It doesn't *reach* God. God doesn't *receive* it. There can be no doubt whatsoever that this is exactly what Jesus intended to say in John 5:23 - "...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."

Father God can't be honored except through the *means* of the Son, Jesus Christ. We are clearly told this is the Father's *choice*. It is not the Father's will to be honored *apart* from the Son. It's not the Father's will to be *approached* apart from the Son. This means when some well-intentioned person tells me his relationship with Father God is "*just fine, thank-you,*" yet is living in clear disobedience to the Lordship of the Son there is a bad, deep, and, perhaps, if left unchecked, damning deception that has taken hold of that life.

So *hear* Jesus speak today. Don't just *talk about God. Come to Jesus Christ.* And Jesus has a powerful way of restating this theme in the last sentences of our text - John 5:45-47 - "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] 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?"

This is the proof Jesus gives that people who don't honor the Son don't have God's Word in their lives at all - even if they can quote it by memory. He says the whole Bible is aimed at preparing the world to *give honor and truth to God the Son, Jesus Christ*. That's what He means when He says if these Jewish people really took Moses seriously they would have embraced Jesus as the Messiah because, says Jesus, Moses was *writing about Him!* Please take note. Jesus, in these incredibly daring words, is saying to these devoutly Jewish people, that if they reject Him as Messiah, God the Son, they don't really believe Moses either.

And let me wrap up this point with one of the best pictures of Jesus' words in the whole Bible:

Luke 9:28-35 - "Now about eight days after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. [29] And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white. [30] And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, [31] who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. [32] Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep, but when they became fully awake they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. [33] And as the men were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah"— not knowing what he said. [34] As he was saying these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. [35] And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!"

Jesus is placed right at the center of this story. With Him are *Moses* (representing the law), *Elijah* (representing the prophets), and *Peter, James, and John* (representing the New Testament apostles). It is right into the middle of this historic stew of God's revelational activity in this world that the Father speaks. And here's the primary point of importance in this whole incident. The Father *only* speaks of the Son - "This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to Him!" Not, "listen to them." But "listen to Him!" Or perhaps better still, "listen only to Him, even in and through them!"

I said there were *two causes* of blindness of heart toward Jesus. The first is a *failure to yield to Jesus* when we consider our

relationship to Father God. Now on to the second cause:

2) **WE ARE PRONE TO BE MORE EASILY MOTIVATED IN OUR LIFE DECISIONS BY SOCIAL POPULARITY THAN BY DELIGHTING OUR LORD, JESUS CHRIST**

**John 5:41-44 - "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?"**

We destroy ourselves by *seeking inappropriate acceptance*. We *crave the love of the wrong people*. And this is the birthing room of self-destruction. We crave the love of people who make loving God impossible. And Jesus highlights this as a *primary* problem, not an incidental problem.

We should all be grateful that Jesus begins this subject the way He does. He gives us a great deal of information about the source of His delight in doing the Father's will when He says flat out - ***"I do not receive glory from people."*** There. That's the teaching point Jesus wants to leave with the people. He learned (yes, *learned* - having never been incarnate in full humanity before) - He *learned* the life-producing secret of ***not making acceptance with others the source of His joy***. He is reminding all of us that we can't follow Him without this same fruit-producing, calculated independence.

John is once again bringing us back to the issue of ***what it means to say we "believe in Jesus."*** Jesus makes this link very clear in His words - **John 5:44 - "How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?"**

The conclusion of the matter, then, is this - ***to "believe in Jesus"*** means to care more deeply about receiving His approval than the admiration and acceptance of anyone else. In terms of the one person you're willing to disappoint, Jesus comes ***last*** in line. ***"Believing in Jesus"*** means being ***more influenced by Him than anyone else***. Apart from His ***ultimate influence*** over my actions my ***"belief"*** in Jesus is all talk.

The church desperately needs to listen to Jesus on this point. Jesus is calling us all to think twice about our tendency to join the entourage of the famous and the celebrity. He's calling us away from our wild enthusiastic craving for being ***among the impressive***. He's calling us all away from the desire to ***look good***. He's pleading that we ***replace*** our hunger for being linked to human popularity with a deep longing to be ***praised by Jesus Christ***.

One last thought. Look again at **verse 44** - ***"....you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?"*** Please see the positive implication tucked away in these words. God has ***glory*** that He wants to place on your life. True, Jesus says many of us ***shut that glory out*** even while praying for it. But God has glory to give, none the less.

You don't have to beg God to place His glory on your life. He longs to do it. But, if Jesus is telling the truth in this text, you can't receive glory from ***two sources***. If you crave the love of your social circle ***more*** than you crave the pleasure and smile of Jesus Christ God's glory will never settle and rest on your life. The only joy you will have is going to be flimsy, fleeting, and small. That's what's at stake here.

Learn to live for God's approval. Learn to ignore the immediate accolades of the crowd. Learn to live with a certain distance from the fickle and the empty trends of those clamoring for the largest piece of your heart. Live every moment looking for Father God's smile. And let God place His glory on your life.