

John Part 27 - Sermon Manuscript - “God’s Word”

When I was growing up, one of my favorite things to do was watch a good movie. Most of us probably remember the days when we actually had to go to the video store to rent a movie.

There was something about walking into a library of movies and seeing everything that was available. Do you remember walking in there knowing exactly what you wanted, only to find they were out of it!?

But that was okay, wasn’t it? We were all probably a bit more patient back then. I actually liked looking at all the movies on the shelves and reading the back of the box to see if it was something I wanted to watch.

I’d usually hit the sci-fi section first and then make my way over to the action movies. I always liked a good vs. evil kind of story. I mean who could forget stories like Batman vs. the Joker? That’s an easy one...

Does anyone remember Superman vs. General Zod? And I’m talking about the classic Superman movies from 1978 and 1980...

[**Superman & General Zod, 1978**]

Well, usually in movies like this where you have a hero and a villain, the good guys are clearly separated from the bad guys. There’s no middle ground. Someone is always fighting for what’s right. Superman was fighting for freedom and justice. He was selfless; often putting the needs of others ahead of himself.

But General Zod was just the opposite. He had a craving for power. His ultimate goal was to make himself a King and rule the entire planet! Again, there was a clear distinction between right and wrong.

And in our passage today, that’s exactly what we see. We see the stark contrast between truth and lies, right and wrong, good and evil. There’s no room for a middle ground.

So go ahead and turn with me to John 8:31-47.

We're continuing the conversation from last week where Jesus said to the Jewish leaders that they would die in their sins if they didn't believe that Jesus is the Son of God who has come to save the world from their sins.

Many of them didn't believe Jesus, but John notes in verse 30 that many did believe in Jesus. So, John continues with this thought. He says in verse 31...

John 8:31a - “To the Jews who had believed in him...”

Just to be fair, there is a question as to who exactly these Jews are. Were they the religious leaders - the Pharisees? Or were they just Jews in general that were at the Temple listening to Jesus? Or maybe a mixture of both?

I'm inclined to think that the Jews in verse 30 were a mixture of all the Jews that were there, including the religious leaders.

But in verse 31, I think John is referring to the Jews that secretly wanted to kill Jesus (v37 & 40). These guys weren't really believing... they were faking it. Which makes sense because as you read down through chapter 8, you'll see their true colors.

So, Jesus said to them...

John 8:31b - 32 - “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

Jesus is saying: "If you continue or remain in my word... If you abide in my message... then you really are my disciples; my followers. And if you remain in my word, then you will know the truth."

Jesus has the words of truth, and His truth is what He says will set them free. But free from what? Aside from the fact that the Jews had to live under Roman authority, they pretty much felt like they were already free. So they said...

John 8:33 - “We are Abraham’s descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?”

The Jews were offended! They considered themselves to be blood relatives of Abraham, and because of that, they were righteous in the eyes of God.

John 8:34-36 - Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. 35 Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. 36 So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

Jesus is saying that He's the Son of God... and if the Son of God sets you free from sin, you will most certainly be free from the bondage of sin.

It struck me this week that Jesus says 'a slave has no permanent place in the family.' They're temporary. At any moment, they could be taken. And so if people are slaves to sin, it stands to reason that any moment they could be taken as well.

That's what Jesus is saying. He's inviting them to leave their life of sin so that they can live in true freedom. So He continues...

John 8:37 - I know that you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are looking for a way to kill me, because you have no room for my word.

Jesus is acknowledging that they are true relatives of Abraham. I think a big "So what?!" is implied... "So what if you're descendants of Abraham? What does that prove? You're a relative of Abraham, and yet you're still looking for a way to kill me."

So, again, these guys are the ones who "believed" in Jesus? They were faking it. They were going along with the other Jews who actually did believe Jesus so that they were sure He'd eventually say something that would warrant the death penalty according to Jewish law.

But why didn't they really believe in Jesus? What prevented them from really trusting Him?

Jesus tells us - They didn't believe Him because they had no room for His word. A super literal Greek translation would say, "Because my word does not have a home in you all."

I find that humbling, because it ought to make us think: Does the Word of God have a home in us? If our heart is a home with many rooms, are all the doors unlocked so that we can allow the Word of God in? Or are there certain rooms that we keep locked away?

The truth is that Jesus wants all of our hearts.

Deuteronomy 6:5-6 says, “Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. 6 These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts.”

Psalm 119:11 - “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.”

When we allow God's Word to have a home in our hearts, we're allowing Jesus to be the Lord of our lives. Jesus continues...

John 8:38 - I am telling you what I have seen in the Father's presence, and you are doing what you have heard from your father.

Jesus is saying He's telling the truth, and we can know that because His teaching comes from God the father. But what the religious leaders are doing... they're only doing what they have heard from their father. But who's their father?

John 8:39-40 - “Abraham is our father,” they answered. “If you were Abraham’s children,” said Jesus, “then you would do what Abraham did. As it is, you are looking for a way to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things.

In other words, if they really were Abraham's *legitimate* children, then their actions would look a lot like Abraham's. So, here we have Jesus telling them the truth from God, but instead of listening, they're thinking of ways to kill Him. Jesus is saying Abraham never would have killed a man who heard the truth from God.

So Jesus continues...

John 8:41 - You are doing the works of your own father.” “We are not illegitimate children,” they protested. “The only Father we have is God himself.”

The Jews here are still offended, so in a backhanded way, they imply that Jesus is an illegitimate child. They wouldn't have believed in the virgin birth, and it was no secret that Jesus wasn't Joseph's biological son.

So they're saying, “*Unlike you, Jesus, we are not only natural descendants from Abraham, but our spiritual Father is God Himself!*” So Jesus responds...

John 8:42-47 - “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I have come here from God. I have not come on my own; God sent me. 43 Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. 44 You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. 45 Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! 46 Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me? 47 Whoever belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God.”

This is where the clear division of good and evil comes in. Here we have Jesus saying, “*If you knew God, then you would know me. You're not believing me because you belong to your father, the devil.*”

It's pretty clear that Jesus is talking about Satan. Satan was a murderer from the beginning - Jesus might have been talking about when Cain killed Abel... Cain was doing the will of Satan, not God.

Satan doesn't stand in truth - It's not even a part of him - He doesn't have any truth in him. Lying is natural to him because he is the father of lies.

Do you see the contrast?

Satan is the father of lies. God is the Father of truth. They're not like Superman and General Zod - those two were basically equal in power but opposite in values.

God and Satan are not two rival gods struggling for power. God has all the authority and power of everyone and everything. Nothing and no one comes close to His power. Satan doesn't stand a chance against God.

And yet Satan and the spiritual forces of evil have a lot of influence over the world.

John 12 calls Satan the prince of this world. Ephesians 2 says he's the ruler of the kingdom of the air. In fact...

Ephesians 2:2b says he's the “spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.”

The spirit of Satan influences the world in which we live. I want to be clear here... we can't blame everything on Satan. I like to say that Satan most likely doesn't have time for any of us.

Satan is not like God in that he can be anywhere and everywhere at the same time. Satan is a limited spiritual being. He's powerful! But my guess is that he's working on the bigger picture... he's influencing nations. However, he's not alone. As Paul says later on in Ephesians...

Ephesians 6:12 - “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”

So this is what was going on with the Pharisees - the Jewish religious leaders that wanted to kill Jesus. We're supposed to see as we read John and the other gospels that Satan was in the background the whole time pulling the strings of his religious leader puppets.

They were chained to his will. We can think of his will as being completely in line with sin. That's why Jesus implied that the religious leaders were not free in verse 34.

They were slaves to sin... remember John's words in chapter 3? Light has come into the world (Jesus), but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil - their deeds were in line with their father, Satan.

This is why the religious leaders couldn't hear and hold on to the word of Jesus. They were clinging to the words of their father. So, the question for us is:

What words are we clinging to?

This is so important...

How tightly are we holding on to the truth? Maybe you remember the classic rock song that says, "Hold on loosely, but don't let it go... if you cling too tightly, you're gonna lose control."

There's a growing popularity among Christians, especially here in the US, that this is the approach we should take with the Bible. "*Hold on loosely, but don't let it go ... but don't cling too tightly - don't take it so seriously that you lose control.*"

Control is the key word there.

It's what General Zod wanted - He wanted to control the world. He was essentially the Satan figure in the story - the prince of the world who desired power over anything else.

But all kidding aside, that's what it comes down to for us. Are we willing to give up control of our lives and surrender to Jesus? Are we willing to open the locked doors in our hearts so that His Word can enter in?

Because when we do, our lives will be changed forever. The more we allow God's Word to have authority in our lives, the more we will align with the will of God. And by the way... I have to say this...

There's a temptation today to separate the Bible from Jesus. Here's what I mean...

[picture 1] A pastor friend of mine posted this a while ago and it says...

Genocide is biblical.

Loving your enemy is biblical.

BUT ONLY ONE IS CHRISTLIKE.

Slavery is biblical.

Chainbreaking is biblical.

BUT ONLY ONE IS CHRISTLIKE.

Patriarchy is biblical.

Counter-cultural elevation of women is biblical.

BUT ONLY ONE IS CHRISTLIKE.

Retributive violence is biblical.

Grace-filled restoration is biblical.

BUT ONLY ONE IS CHRISTLIKE.

Segregation is biblical.

Unity is biblical.

BUT ONLY ONE IS CHRISTLIKE.

Christ transforms, not the Bible.

jordan harrell
WRITER

Be wary of those who know one but not the other.

Notice that it sets up a bunch of questions that we could easily agree with... but then at the end it hits us with something that should cause us to pause...

Christ transforms, not the Bible.

Yes, Jesus transforms... but did you notice what's missing?

The Bible IS GOD'S WORD!! If it's the Word of God, it comes from Jesus, because He is God!

Separating the Bible from Jesus is like taking the words right out of Jesus' mouth and throwing them away. It just doesn't make any sense, and to be blunt... this is the kind of lie that Satan would love for you to believe.

In chapter 3 of Genesis, in the Garden of Eden, Satan has these famous words... "Did God really say?" He's sowing the seeds of doubt... that's what he does.

So ... *Did God really say that the Bible transforms us? Be careful of those who know one but not the other...*

I get what this post is trying to say - it's highlighting heart knowledge over head knowledge - but what it implies is just bad theology.

The only way to have a real heart knowledge of Jesus is to allow for His Word (His Word that we find in the Bible) to be in our hearts.

So, we definitely take the Bible seriously here at Refton - we believe it has authority in our lives - we believe that we should live by it - but the reason we allow for it to have that kind of authority over us is because we believe it comes from God Himself.

It contains within its pages the message of Jesus ... the very message that He implores us to hold on to as His disciples. Because when we remain and continue in the teaching of Jesus, we will know the truth, and His truth is what sets us free.

[Jesus at the door] When I was a kid...

Gospel

Pray