

Message #23

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John

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JESUS AND DIVINE SECURITY

JOHN 6:35-40

I.

At 6 feet 3 inches and 220 pounds, Kareem Yashou has an imposing presence as a pastor. His physical appearance is probably a help, given the difficult part of the world in which he has been living. Kareem has been a pastor of an Arab Christian congregation in Damascus, Syria. He and his family and congregation have faced persecution from many sources.

Several years ago Kareem's life became more complicated. One night he had a dream in which Jesus appeared to him. Kareem had never had an experience like this before. But the dream and the message were very clear. Jesus told Kareem, **"I have chosen you to bring My love and My peace to a precious people."** The Lord went on to say that it was time for the Druze people to meet Him.

The Druze are a religious minority in the Middle East. (PROJECTOR ON--- DRUZE MAP) They are ethnically Arab. They are scattered in tight communities in Lebanon, Syria, Israel and Jordan. Prior to the recent battles in Syria, there were an estimated 500,000 Druze in that country.

Their religious origin is traced back to roughly 1000 AD. The group started out as an offshoot of Islam. But their beliefs now have little similarity to Islam. One of their beliefs involves reincarnation. Some of their rituals and beliefs are kept very secretive. They are revealed only to fellow Druze men when they become forty years old. At that point, to leave the Druze community for another religious faith means death, for that person and for the one who tried to convert him.

So the dream that came to Kareem to go to the Druze was troubling to him. He had a wife and two small children. To try to convert the Druze could mean death. After wrestling with this dream for a while, Kareem finally told his wife about it. She responded that she had a similar dream just the night before, and Jesus told her that they were to move to al-Sweida, also known as Suweida. (SWEIDA) Al-Sweida

was a Druze village about 60 miles southwest of Damascus. The Yashou family would be the only Christians in town.

What do we make of a story like this? (PROJECTOR OFF) We read in the Bible of stories where God occasionally communicated with people by means of dreams. Certainly the dreams that Kareem and his wife had were unique in their experience. The broader issue has to do with God's program in revealing Himself to the world. What is God doing, and what does He want from us? Why is it that people are so often resistant to the message of the Gospel? Even Jesus Himself had trouble getting people to believe in Him and His mission. We are going to see what our passage from the Bible this morning has to tell us about these questions.

We have been working our way through the New Testament Gospel written by the Apostle John. We have seen that he has organized his biographical material around seven miracles, which he calls signs. At the end of his book, he specifically says that these have been put forth to his readers so that they will be convinced that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

At the beginning of #6, which is p. 891 in the black Bibles, we saw that Jesus fed a crowd of 15-20,000 people by multiplying five loaves and two fish. (PROJECTOR ON--- FEEDING 5000) This happened on the northeast shore of the Sea of Galilee. The Galilean Jews recognized that a miracle had taken place. They wanted Jesus to give them more food and to help them kick out the Romans.

The next day (FEEDING OF THE 5000 PART 2) Jesus and His disciples were in Capernaum, on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus engaged these people in a discussion about His real identity and mission. They were slow to catch on. We take up today where we left off last week, with v. 35.

II.

In v. 35 we learn about THE HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY--- JESUS GIVES AN OPEN INVITATION. (II. THE HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY...) According to v. 35, **"Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.'"**

This is the first of seven "I am" statements that Jesus makes and that are recorded in John's Gospel. Jesus uses symbolic language to communicate something about who He is. These Galilean Jews connected the miracle of the multiplication of loaves with Moses. Moses had been involved with the

daily provision of manna for their ancestors for forty years in the wilderness. Moses had also led the Hebrews out of slavery in Egypt. Moses had left a prophecy that there would come one day a future prophet like him to whom it would be very important for the people to listen.

The Galilean Jews were hoping that this was the guy. They were hoping that this Jesus would give them daily bread from heaven and that he would lead them out from under the control of the Romans. But Jesus is explaining that He is connected with a different kind of kingdom. He is also a unique representative of God.

In proclaiming that He is the bread of life, he is using the centrality that bread played in the daily lives of these people. It was a staple of life for them. But Jesus is claiming that He is essential not just for physical life, but also for spiritual life. He is offering an ultimate satisfaction. He is promising to meet the deepest needs of the human soul.

Augustine lived around 400 AD. He was a smart, educated guy. But he was very wild in his lifestyle before he became a Christian. In his *Confessions* (1:1) (AUGUSTINE QUOTE), he wrote, **“You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”** Jesus is promising to fill this restless heart.

At the end of v 35, Jesus mixes His metaphors. (PROJECTOR OFF) He promises to satisfy thirst. Back in #4 Jesus engaged the Samaritan woman at the well in conversation. He asked her to get Him a drink. A conversation ensued in which Jesus told her that if she asked of Him, he would give her water springing up to eternal life.

The English scholar and Christian apologist C S Lewis pointed out that these are extraordinary claims for anyone to make. Some historically have wanted to write Jesus off as simply a great human teacher. But great human teachers do not make outlandish claims like this. It is megalomaniacs or those who are mentally ill who claim to be God, who claim to provide spiritual satisfaction for every human being, who claim to be able to provide eternal life. The other alternative is that this Jesus truly is God, who is able to provide ultimate satisfaction and eternal life.

So this is the open invitation that Jesus offered to His Galilean audience. This is the invitation that He offers to us today. It assumes that we have a hunger and thirst. It assumes that we recognize that something is missing in our lives. It assumes that we have a need to be connected with the God who is

really there. Jesus didn't ask anyone in His audience to raise His hand or to come forward in the synagogue. His invitation was simply to believe in Him and His message.

In the aftermath of His death and resurrection, the necessary content is that Jesus was God who became man. He died on the cross to pay the penalty for the sins of the world. He rose again from the dead to demonstrate that He truly was God.

The action words that Jesus uses in our v. 35 to describe our human responsibility are "come" and "believe." The same Apostle John recorded the last words of Jesus contained in the Bible. (PROJECTOR ON--- REVELATION 22:17) In v. 17 of #22 in the Book of Revelation, Jesus says, **"The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.' And let the one who hears say, 'Come.' And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price."** There is the invitation that is still good today. Come to Jesus. Believe in Him. The price has already been paid.

III.

In v. 36 and the first part of v. 37, we encounter THE DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY--- GOD THE FATHER MUST INTERVENE. (III. THE DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY...) Jesus says, **"But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. All that the Father gives me will come to me..."**

In #2 and #3 Jesus was in Jerusalem. There He also did miracles. Some of them were witnessed by the religious leaders. They knew the Hebrew Scriptures better than anyone. Yet, for the most part, they refused to recognize Jesus as their Messiah. Now Jesus was performing miraculous deeds among His fellow Galileans. But they want more. They are not buying into His agenda. At the end of the chapter we will find that most of them also turn away. Only a minority of people accept His claims.

What is the problem? Do you think that Jesus could have been more effective in His teaching? Do you suppose that He could have used better illustrations? Should He have tried a different teaching style? Do you suppose that He could have chosen a better musical team to come along with Him? Could He have made better use of humor?

If, indeed, Jesus was the Son of God, if He was God in the flesh, I submit to you that there was no more effective communicator in the world than Jesus. There is some encouragement in this to us preachers, teachers, Bible study leaders and everyday Christian witnesses. If Jesus Himself had a tough time

winning people to the Lord, then we should not be surprised that we find challenges in convincing people to follow the true God.

This should not be an excuse for second rate preaching and teaching and witnessing. The totality of the Bible communicates to us true followers that we are responsible to make the best use of our talents and gifts and opportunities to promote Jesus. But that alone is not enough to win people to Christ.

I have a pastor acquaintance who suggested some months ago that we pastors should ask God for the ability to perform miraculous deeds so that we would see more people come to faith in Christ. Was there any deficiency in that department for Jesus? He did incredible deeds. Luke's Gospel indicates that a bit before this, Jesus had raised a young man from the dead. Was any of this sufficient to win the allegiance of the religious leaders? Was the miraculous feeding of the 5000+ enough to convince His fellow Galileans to buy into His agenda? It was not.

What is the problem? In Romans #3 (ROMANS 3:10B-11), the Apostle Paul tells us, **"None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. (ROMANS 3:12) All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."** Even Jesus' countrymen were not looking for the true God.

Paul, in Ephesians #2 v. 1 (EPHESIANS 2:1), tells fellow Christians, **"And you were dead in your trespasses and sins..."** We were not partly alive. We were not almost there. We were spiritually dead and lost in our previous condition.

What makes the difference? Look at the first part of v. 37 in our passage (PROJECTOR OFF): **"All that the Father gives me will come to me..."** What is necessary is divine intervention. It is the sovereign work of God that makes the difference.

So it was that God called the Yashou family to move into the Druze village of al-Sweida. It was not Kareem's vision or long term plan to reach the Druze people. Like Jonah, he was not happy about bringing a divine message to an unfriendly community. But he went.

On the day that Kareem and his family moved into a house in al-Sweida, his first visitor was Musa Fatah. Musa Fatah was a member of the Syrian secret police. The secret police had Kareem's house in

Damascus bugged. So they knew about Kareem's plans for al-Sweida. Musa sternly warned Kareem that there was to be no proselytizing. He was there to keep the peace with Syria's religious minorities. At the first sign of proselytizing, Kareem was in big trouble.

So Kareem and his family set about carefully making friends in their new community. They found the Druze people to be friendly. But no one showed an interest in learning about Jesus. A year went by and nothing was happening spiritually. Kareem was very disappointed. This house was also bugged, and Syrian secret police agent Musa Fatah was happy.

Then one morning a Druze villager showed up at Kareem's house. The man told Kareem that he knew that he prayed to Jesus, and he had heard that Jesus can heal people. Could he pray for his daughter? Kareem could hardly say no. So he went with him to the man's house. There he found twelve year old Jamilla. She was a pathetic sight in pink pajamas. Her father explained that she had terminal cancer. The doctors said that she was soon going to die.

Kareem was like most of us pastors. He had often prayed for sick people, but he had never seen a dramatic healing in anyone for whom he had prayed. But he proceeded to pray for this girl. When he was done, there was no evident change in the girl's condition. But the family had tea with him, and the father expressed his heartfelt appreciation for the pastor's fervent prayer.

Soon after Kareem returned home, there was a knock at his door. Somehow Musa Fatah knew about his visit to the Druze family. Musa and two goons who were with him took him down to his office. For the next couple of hours they beat Kareem. A couple of hours later Kareem stumbled back to his home. The joy of serving Jesus?

A week later, Kareem was still recovering from his wounds. There was a knock at the door. From his wife's first reaction, Kareem thought that Musa was back. But when he went to the door, he discovered that more than fifty villagers were lined up from the door to the street. At the front of the line was an elderly man who asked Kareem to pray for his wife in the wheelchair beside him who had been paralyzed by a stroke. Kareem was dumbfounded. Then from halfway down the line a little girl came running forward. It was Jamilla. Her father also came forward and explained that a few days earlier, he had taken his daughter to a regular appointment in Damascus. The doctors could not find any evidence of cancer. It was gone.

So Kareem and family proceeded to have a prayer meeting. An hour later, twenty people and their watching family members had been prayed for. Toward the end, Musa Fatah showed up. Kareem asked if he could pray for him and his family. Without giving Musa a chance to respond, Kareem proceeded to pray for him. Musa walked off in disgust.

In the days and weeks that followed, there were many stories of dramatic healings. Many Druze were converted to Christ. In one of the most dramatic conversions a man named Nihad, who used to beat his family, seemed to be demon possessed. He was converted and drastically changed. He demanded Christian training and instruction from Kareem. He became the first Druze pastor. Within six months, home churches had been established, and outreach was being made into other villages.

Traditional Druze religious leaders issued a fatwa calling for the death of Kareem. A reward of \$10,000 was promised to his murderer. Then Musa showed up at the Yashou home with a government order. Kareem and his family had two hours to leave al-Sweida, or he would be sent to prison. The Yashou family returned to their original ministry in Damascus. But Kareem's mission had been accomplished. At last report more than two thousand Druze have become Jesus followers. They have even sent out a couple of missionaries. One of the places where they have been sent--- get this, Wood family--- is Brazil. (*Standing in the Fire*, Chapter Five, Tom Doyle, 2017)

Such is the nature of God's sovereign work. We are responsible to believe in Jesus. But as with the story of Kareem and the Druze people, it is only the divine intervention of God that produces converts. That is true both with groups of people and with individuals.

IV.

We come then to vv. 37-40 and THE DIVINE ASSURANCE--- THE FOLLOWERS OF JESUS ARE ETERNALLY SECURE. (PROJECTOR ON--- IV. THE DIVINE ASSURANCE...) According to the second part of v. 37, **"...and whoever comes to me I will never cast out."**

Some commentators have understood this verse to mean that Jesus will not turn away anyone who comes to Him. That is true, partly on the assurance of v. 35 in our text. But that is not exactly what Jesus means here. The original Greek verb almost always is used in reference to something, or someone, who is already in. For example, in #9 the word is used in a story where a blind man is healed. He tells about the involvement of Jesus in the miracle. The text says that the Pharisees proceeded to "cast him out" of

the synagogue. He was already in the synagogue. So the point in our text seems to be that Jesus will never cast out someone who has become a Jesus follower.

The deal is that God the Father chooses us and brings us to Jesus. Those who have been chosen come to Jesus at some point and believe in Him. Jesus then preserves us. He makes us eternally secure. He uses a double negative to express the certainty that we Christians will never be rejected. Literally, He says that He will not never cast us out.

In v. 38 Jesus gives a further explanation of this eternal security: **“For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me.”** Seven times in #6 Jesus says that He has come down from heaven. He is the obedient representative of His Father. So He is sure to accomplish the will of His Father. What is the will of His Father?

Verse 39: **“And this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”** There are at least three aspects to the will of God. There is God’s permissive will. This is the aspect of God which allows us humans to do bad things, to disobey His commands. Then there is God’s preceptive will. God gives us precepts. He gives us commands and rules. He expresses what He desires from us. Thus in 2 Peter #3 v. 9 (2 PETER 3:9) we are told, **“The Lord... is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”**

Then there is God’s decretive will. There are certain things that He decrees. These are things that God determines will come to pass. Thus in Ephesians #1 v. 11 (EPHESIANS 1:11) we read, **“[God] works all things according to the counsel of His will...”** God is ultimately in charge. Everything works out in the end according to His sovereign will.

In v. 39 in our passage, Jesus says that the Father has decreed that the Son shall not lose anyone whom He has given to the Son. (PROJECTOR OFF) The Son always obeys the Father. The Son is divine. He is certain to carry out His Father’s will.

The elect are those who have been chosen by the Father. They are also the ones in v. 35 who believe and come to Jesus Christ. Jesus loses nothing or no one who is given to Him by the Father. Genuine Christians are eternally secure. They will be raised up on the last day.

The reference here is to the resurrection of true Christians. The Apostle Paul describes this “last day” in 1 Thessalonians #4. (1 THESSALONIANS 4:16). Beginning in v. 16 he writes, **“For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. (1 THESSALONIANS 3:17) Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.”** This is commonly known as the rapture of the church. This is the last day that Jesus is describing in our text.

Verse 40 is a restatement and reemphasis of the divine assurance in the previous verses. (PROJECTOR OFF) **“For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”** Earlier in our passage the human responsibility was described as coming to Jesus and believing in Him. Here it is described as looking on the Son and believing in Him.

George Whitefield was a famous British evangelist who was a contemporary of John Wesley. Like Wesley, George Whitefield was very religious as a young man. But he had trouble grasping the simplicity of the gospel, the responsibility to believe in Jesus. On one occasion he met a woman in London who wanted to commit suicide by jumping into the Thames River. Her husband had just been put in jail, and she had no food for her children. George Whitefield gave her some money to tide her over. He also promised to meet both her and her husband in the prison that afternoon.

When he did meet with them, he read from John #3 about the story of Nicodemus and Jesus’ words to him about the need to be born again. As Whitefield retold the story, the woman suddenly cried out, **“I believe! I believe! I shall not perish because I believe in Him now! I’m born again, I’m saved.”**

Her husband was still troubled and tightly grasped George Whitefield’s hand. He cried out, **“I’m on the brink of hell!”** In the next moment his whole face changed. **“I see it too! I’m saved! Oh joy, joy, joy!”** It was only after this experience that George Whitefield himself understood the simplicity of the gospel. He, too, saw it and believed. (*George Whitefield*, John Pollock, p. 14)

The Apostle John also grasped the simplicity of the gospel and the divine assurance described in our passage. He later wrote these words in his First Epistle in #5. (PROJECTOR ON--- 1 JOHN 5:11-12). Beginning in v. 11, he wrote, **“And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. (1**

JOHN 5:13) I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.”

We don't have to wait until we die before we discover our eternal destination. We can know now. If we have Jesus Christ, if we have believed in Him, we already have eternal life. Thus in these five short verses we have the human responsibility, the divine sovereignty and the divine assurance. This good news finds its foundation in the death of Christ. In just a moment we are going to focus our attention on that sacrifice He made for us. First, let's pause for prayer.

AFTERWORD A month after leaving al-Sweida, Kareem was walking down the ancient Straight Street (Acts 9:11) in Damascus when he encountered Musa Fatah. Musa Fatah explained that he was still charged with watching Kareem. He warned Kareem that there were death threats now that were coming from ISIS operatives. Musa also said that he respected Kareem for the strength of his convictions.

Kareem offered Musa a Bible. Musa said that he had been hoping that Kareem would give him one. Although his family was Muslim, he said that he would begin reading it with him that night. “And before I go, I want to tell you something. When you prayed for me the day all the Druze came to your home, I felt something. There's a power when you pray, and I want to find out what it is.”

Kareem offered to meet with Musa for coffee in another week, after he had a chance to read some of the Bible. Musa agreed. Two days later Musa was out for a morning cup of coffee when he was caught in crossfire between Al-Assad's military and ISIS fighters. He was killed. Kareem and his family attended Musa's funeral. Kareem never found out how far Musa got in his reading about Jesus.