

Message #42

Kurt Hedlund

John

10/14/2018

## TRUSTING JESUS' WORDS AND WORKS

JOHN 10:31-42

### INTRO AND REVIEW

Begun in 1947 in Anaheim by radio evangelist Charles Fuller, Fuller Theological Seminary (PROJECTOR ON--- FULLER SEMINARY) has had a reputation as an evangelical institution. Kimberly Livesay graduated with a Master's Degree in Marriage and Family Therapy from Fuller a few years ago. She went to seminary there to be a counselor, in particular, to help people who are "sexually bewildered." She wanted to get a solid Biblical foundation.

Kimberly was disappointed. She says that she is confused about what she got. She found that the professors said that homosexual behavior is sinful, but then went out of their way to defend and show understanding to those who continued to live in a gay lifestyle. (*World*, 7/1/2006)

Husband and wife team Jack and Judith Balswick have taught in the counseling department. They wrote a book entitled *Authentic Human Sexuality*. In Chapter 5 they say, **"We acknowledge that some gay Christians may choose to commit themselves to a lifelong, monogamous homosexual union, believing this is God's best for them. They believe that this reflects an authentic sexuality that is congruent for them and their view of Scripture. Even though we hold to the model of a heterosexual, lifelong, monogamous union, our compassion brings us to support all persons as they move in the direction of God's ideal for their lives."** They seem to be saying that God's ideal for some people may be a homosexual union. So is the Bible wrong when it says that homosexual behavior is sin? Is it a bit out of date and not to be trusted completely? Such is a key issue in the passage before us this morning.

Our passage today is the last public appearance of Jesus in Jerusalem before the week of His crucifixion. In the next few months Jesus will be hanging out in outlying areas. Last week, we saw that Jesus was in Jerusalem to celebrate Hanukkah. This was a winter festival established by the Jews to commemorate their national deliverance from the Greeks and the rededication of the temple in the 160s BC. Though

this was not a Biblically required holiday, Jesus saw it as an opportunity to promote His claim to be the Messiah.

Jesus in vv. 22-31 of #10 returned to the theme of being the Good Shepherd. He promised eternal life to those who would become part of His flock. In v. 30 He said that He and the Father are one. The use of the neuter pronoun in the original text means that He was not claiming to be the same person as the Father. He was saying at least that He was of one mind and one purpose and one will with the Father. Perhaps He was also saying that He is of the same essence as the Father. The fact that the Jews in our passage today try to stone Him for blasphemy suggests that they understood Jesus to be claiming to be God. We will look at the response of the religious leaders to Jesus' claim this morning.

I.

In vv. 31-33 of #10, which is on p. 897 of the black Bibles under many of the chairs, we find that THE WORDS OF JESUS PROVOKE A NEGATIVE REACTION FROM THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS. (PROJECTOR ON--- I. THE WORDS OF JESUS...) In v. 30 Jesus claimed a oneness with Got the Father. In v. 31 the Apostle John writes, **"The Jews picked up stones again to stone him."**

We saw last week that Jesus was in the temple compound when this conversation with the religious leaders took place. According to v. 23, they were in Solomon's Portico (SOLOMON'S PORTICO 1), which was on the east side of the temple. It was there that the first Christians would later meet.

The religious leaders had wanted a clear statement from Jesus about whether He was claiming to be the Messiah. Jesus went further than that. He claimed oneness with God the Father. These guys understood that to be a claim to deity. None of the current understandings about the Messiah held that he would actually be God in some form. In their eyes, for a man to claim to be God, was to commit the sin of blasphemy.

The law addressed this sin in Leviticus #24 v. 16. (LEVITICUS 24:16A) There God said, **"Whoever blasphemes the name of the Lord shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall stone him."** The religious leaders were ready to apply that penalty on the spot. They picked up stones large enough to do Jesus in.

The law written down in the Talmud years later said that a judicial proceeding was required to administer this punishment. The residents of the Roman province of Judea were also subject to Roman law, which said that only the Roman governor could give the OK for the death penalty to be applied. This is why Jesus was later brought to Pontius Pilate. At times, however, mob rule seemed to take over. Such was the case early in Acts when Stephen was martyred. (PROJECTOR OFF)

According to vv. 32 & 33 in our passage, **“Jesus answered them, ‘I have shown you many good works from the Father, for which of them are you going to stone me?’ The Jews answered him, ‘It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God.’”** Notice that Jesus does not head for the exit while these guys were picking up stones, like I might have been inclined to do. Instead, He engages them in more conversation. He challenges them. They take up the verbal challenge. Words, not works, they say, are the issue.

The later written law in the Talmud would say that the capital offense of blasphemy required that the offender had to pronounce the personal name of YHWH in order to be charged. Here the claim to be God, or on the same level of deity, is sufficient for these leaders to raise the charge of blasphemy.

The religious leaders are correct in understanding the claim of Jesus. They just don't like it. Some of the cults today say that Jesus never claimed to be God. If that was not what Jesus was claiming, then He could have corrected His opponents. He does not.

Among the cultural elites of our society today, the dominant religion is scientific materialism. The scientific laws of the universe are what rule supreme. Evolution is our creation story. The priests of scientific materialism are scientists. The tenets of Christianity and our creation story are blasphemy to these other religious leaders. Thus philosopher Daniel Dennett in his book *Darwin's Dangerous Idea* (pp. 515-516) says that religious believers are like wild animals who may have to be caged. Parents should be prevented (presumably by coercion) from misinforming their children about the truth of evolution, which is obvious to the properly educated. The words of Jesus provoke a negative reaction from the religious leaders.

II.

In vv. 37 & 38 THE WORKS OF JESUS GET IGNORED BY THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS. (PROJECTOR ON--- II. THE WORKS OF JESUS GET...) Skipping down to vv. 37 & 38, Jesus says, **“If I am not doing the works of**

**my Father, then do not believe me; but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.”**

The words “know and understand” are forms of the same verb in the Greek text. They simply involve two different verb tenses. It is literally “know and keep on knowing.”

The Old Testament contained many prophecies that the future Messiah had to fulfill. He had to be born in Bethlehem. He had to appear as a bright light in Galilee. He had to be preceded by a forerunner who would prepare the way. Then there were certain miracles that he had to perform. According to Isaiah #61 v. 1 (ISAIAH 61:1), these would be the words and actions of the future Messiah: **“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound.”**

When Jesus showed up in his hometown of Nazareth and spoke in the synagogue, as recorded in Luke #4, these are the words that He quoted. Nearby, in the Sermon on the Mount, He had earlier pronounced blessings upon the poor in heart and the meek and the persecuted. He had performed miracles of healing and exorcism upon the broken-hearted and those enslaved to demonic powers. The people of the Nazareth synagogue, however, were offended by the extraordinary claims that Jesus was making, and they also tried to kill Him.

Isaiah #35 speaks of the coming kingdom of God. This is a subject that Jesus addressed when He earlier proclaimed that the kingdom of God was at hand. According to Isaiah 35 vv. 5 & 6 (ISAIAH 35:5), these are the characteristics that would mark the coming of this kingdom: **“Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; (ISAIAH 35:6) then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert...”**

When John the Baptist was imprisoned by Herod Antipas, he needed reassurance that Jesus was truly the Messiah. He sent disciples to Jesus seeking that assurance. Jesus replied by quoting these verses. In #5 we saw the lame man healed by the pool of Bethesda. In #9 Jesus healed the man born blind, a miracle that had never been done in all of Jewish history. These miracles were the clear fulfillment of these prophecies concerning the Messiah in Isaiah. But they were both done on the Sabbath, which was a violation of the interpretation by the Pharisees of the Sabbath law. The Pharisees could only focus on

that perceived violation. They ignored the implication of these great miracles. Jesus in our verse says that these guys are responsible to recognize the significance of these sign miracles.

Yet the Jews kept demanding more signs. After the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and the fish in #6, they wanted more signs. (JOHN 6:30) According to #6 v. 30, **“So they said to him, ‘Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform?’”**

The religious leaders were never satisfied. Jesus doesn’t meet their requirements and their preconceptions about the Messiah. They want a Pharisee like them. To accept the evidence of the work of Jesus would require repentance and humility and an abdication of their standing and power. It would mean rejection from their fellow religious leaders. (PROJECTOR OFF)

So it is today. The works of Jesus and God the Father are ignored by most of the cultural elites of our day. The amazing variety of life on our planet and the evidence of an incredibly fine tuned universe are ignored. For most scientists, life is an accident of time and chance and physical laws of the universe.

Earlier in our series, we looked at some of the stories of dreams about Jesus among Muslims in the Middle East. This has produced a small but growing movement of Christianity in unlikely places like Iran. Closer to home, we here in this church hear fascinating stories about changed lives through our prison ministry and through our children’s outreach. The underlying problem that produces resistance is human sin and pride. A work of the Holy Spirit is necessary for people, especially religious leaders and priests of science, to come to faith in Jesus. For works of Jesus get ignored by religious leaders.

III.

In vv. 34-36 we find that THE WRITTEN WORD OF GOD IS COMPLETELY TRUSTWORTHY. (PROJECTOR ON--- III. THE WRITTEN WORD OF GOD IS...) The response of Jesus here comes out of the charge of the religious leaders in v. 33 that Jesus is claiming to be God. According to v. 34, **“Jesus answered them, ‘Is it not written in your Law, ‘I said, you are gods’?”** The term “Law” is sometimes used in the New Testament to refer to the first five books of the Old Testament. Sometimes, as here, it is used to refer to the entire Old Testament. Jesus calls it “your Law” because this is what the Pharisees claim as their authority. The Sadducees only accepted the first five books of the Old Testament as authoritative. So it is clear that Jesus is primarily addressing Pharisees here. Most of the high priests were Sadducees.

Jesus is quoting from Psalm 82. To appreciate the nature of the argument from Jesus, we need to look at this Psalm. (PSALM 82:1) Beginning in v. 1 it reads, **“A Psalm of Asaph. God has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods he holds judgment; (PSALM 82:2) ‘How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked? (PSALM 82:3) Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute.”**

The original Asaph was a Levite in the time of David who was given responsibility to lead music in worship. The Lord is criticizing leaders of Israel who have responsibility to judge their fellow Jews.

Skipping down to v. 5 (PSALM 82:5), the author continues, **“They have neither knowledge nor understanding, they walk about in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are shaken. (PSALM 82:6-7) I said, ‘You are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you; nevertheless, like men you shall die, and fall like any prince.”**

It is v. 6 that Jesus quotes in our passage. The psalmist is calling these judges “gods.” The word that he uses is the generic word for “god.” The main point that Jesus seems to be making is that God through the psalmist uses the term “god” to refer to ones other than God Himself. These rulers have a responsibility, ultimately given by God, to judge their people. Thus it is in the New Testament that the Apostle Paul calls civil leaders ministers of God. God sees human rulers as having god-like responsibilities in regard to judgment. In the time of Asaph, the rulers in view were doing a bad job of ruling.

In the Old Testament, YHWH Himself said that Moses as a ruler had a god-like function. (EXODUS 7:1) In Exodus #7 v. 1 we are told, **“And the Lord said to Moses, ‘See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet.”**

Jesus finishes his argument based on Psalm 82 in vv. 35 & 36: **“If he called them gods to whom the word of God came--- and Scripture cannot be broken--- do we say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God’?”** If the term “god” can be applied by the Scriptures in some sense to human beings, how much more appropriate it is to use it of the Son of God who has been set apart by God and sent on this mission to earth. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Hanukkah celebrates the sanctification, the making holy, of the temple after its defilement by the Greeks in the second century BC. Jesus is the ultimate sanctified One, the one sent from God and set apart for a divine mission. In #5 Jesus claimed to be the ultimate Judge of all humanity, greater than any human judges. In #6 He claimed to be greater than Moses, who spoke of a future great prophet. Jesus is also the ultimate Prophet. Hanukkah is the celebration of deliverance from the evil Greeks. Jesus is the great deliverer from sin. At His Second Coming He will deliver His people from evil Gentiles.

Jesus picks an unusual passage to defend His deity. It is rather obscure. He points to one word, “gods,” to defend Himself against charges of blasphemy. He then makes this important statement: “The Scripture cannot be broken.” The Greek verb used here is a general, common word that can mean “dismissed, dissolved, eliminated, or broken.” This brief statement from Jesus has very important implications for us Christians today.

Jesus made a similar statement about the authority of Scripture in the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew #5 v. 18 (PROJECTOR ON--- MATTHEW 5:18) He declared, **“For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.”** The reference here is to the smallest Hebrew letter and the smallest part of a Hebrew letter.

(IOTA AND DOT) “Iota” is the English word for the Hebrew letter “yodh,” which is represented here by what we would call an apostrophe. The dot is what is called in Hebrew a “tittle.” It is the difference between these two Hebrew letters. The one on the left is “resh.” The one on the right is “dalet.” The difference between them is the tiny little line that goes off to the left on the top of the dalet. Jesus is indicating that the authority of the Bible extends to the smallest letters and parts of letters.

The Apostle Paul gave a fuller expression of the authority of the Bible in 2 Timothy #3. (2 TIMOTHY 3:16-17) In vv. 16 & 17 he wrote, **“All Scripture is breathed out by God (theopneustos) and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”**

Unfortunately, the authority and trustworthiness of the Bible has come under attack, even from those who call themselves Christians. As I pointed out in the introduction, there are some who doubt that homosexual behavior is wrong. There are others who deny that there are gender specific roles in marriage, that elders of a church should be men, that there are historical parts of the Bible which are without error and that Adam and Eve were real people, the ancestors of all humanity.

(OLD FULLER STATEMENT) The original statement of faith from Fuller Theological Seminary said, **“The books which form the canon of the Old and New Testaments as originally given are plenary [fully] inspired and free from all error in the whole and in the part.”** That is a strong statement. Notice that it says that the Bible is free from all error.

Look carefully at their revised statement of faith (NEW FULLER STATEMENT): **“All the books of the Old and New Testaments, given by divine inspiration, are the written Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice.”** On the surface, this may look and sound good. But notice that the words “free from all error” are removed. Notice also that infallibility is claimed only for that which is “faith and practice.” This leaves room for the understanding that there may be historical errors and errors in matters that do not involve faith and practice. But then who determines what is faith and practice?

Paul Jewett was a Fuller professor who wrote a book entitled *Man as Male and Female*. At one point he talks about the Apostle Paul’s explanation of gender roles in 1 Timothy. He writes, **“Paul is not only basing his argument exclusively on the second creation narrative, but is assuming the traditional rabbinic understanding of that narrative whereby the order of their creation is made to yield the primacy of the man over the woman. Is this rabbinic understanding of Genesis 2:18f. correct? We do not think that it is...”** (p.119) Without analyzing everything that he is saying, in effect, the author is claiming that Paul is wrong. We can’t believe everything that he says in 1 Timothy.

That is what we get when we stray away from the authority of the Bible. That is why it is important for us as Christians to carefully look at what colleges and seminaries and churches and pastors and teachers believe about the trustworthiness of the Bible. Our church got its start almost sixty years ago when several Christians discovered that their pastor did not believe that the Bible was completely trustworthy. Miracles in the Bible could not be taken as literally true.

IV.

We come then to vv. 39-42 where we find that JESUS GETS THE BEST RECEPTION FROM THE OUTLIERS OF SOCIETY. (IV. JESUS GETS THE BEST RECEPTION...) The Apostle John writes in v. 39, **“Again they sought to arrest him, but he escaped from their hands.”** The “they” is the Jews, the religious leaders. They are not buying Jesus’ arguments. So they try to arrest Him.



An explanation is not provided as to how Jesus escaped. Ultimately it was not His time. Supernatural means may have been involved. At times there seems to be something about the force of His personality that enables Him to escape. Back in #7 the temple police was sent to arrest Jesus. They came back empty handed. When asked for an explanation by the religious leaders, they responded, **“No one ever spoke like this man.”**

According to v. 40, **“He went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing at first, and there he remained.”** In #1 v. 28 this place is identified as Bethany across the Jordan. We don't know for sure where that was. (PEREA DECAPOLIS MAP) It was obviously on the far side of the Jordan River. It could have been just east of Jericho in the territory controlled by Herod Antipas. Some scholars think that it was further north in Decapolis, a primarily Gentile area. This was friendly territory. John the Baptist had been well received there. It was in this place that Jesus was baptized and John identified Him as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Religious leaders had shown up there, but there is no indication that any of them responded positively to the messages of either John or Jesus.

(PROJECTOR OFF) In v. 41 we read, **“And many came to him. And they said, ‘John did no sign, but everything that John said about this man was true.’”** Jesus earlier declared that there was no one born among women who was greater than John the Baptist. Yet John did not do miracles. Greatness in Jesus eyes is not related to the exercise of unusual powers. It is related to faithfulness of witness about Him. In that there is a lesson for us about where our eternal contributions lie. Am I a faithful witness for Jesus?

Verse 42: **“And many believed in him there.”** The Apostle John presents us with a stark contrast. In the previous chapter Jesus interacted with the religious elite of Judean society. He argued with the experts in Hebrew law and the leaders of Jewish religion. They witnessed miracles that Jesus performed. They talked to people who had been healed by Jesus. They heard testimony directly from Jesus. Yet they rejected His message. Not only that, but they also wanted to kill Him.

Jesus was now out in the countryside, and removed from the center of religious and political power. There were probably some Gentiles around. It was here that Jesus got a much better response than He did in Jerusalem.

That is often the way that it is today. There are not many in the world of academia, in the world of science, in the world of government, in the CEOs of top corporations, or in Hollywood who respond

positively to the claims of Jesus. There are some, but there is usually a much better response from the outliers of society, from those who are not in the possession of power and fame.

That is consistent with the experience of our own congregation. We get the best reports about positive responses to the claims of Christ from jail and prison. It is our prison volunteers who have regular stories about conversions to Christ. The leader of a Hispanic gang was converted through our Bible correspondence courses. He was granted parole at a recent hearing. I expect him to be present with us in a few weeks.

We hear similar reports from our nursing home outreaches. Rob was recently involved in baptizing a woman near death, who has now gone to be with the Lord. Bob Nycek frequently shares stories about positive responses that he sees to the gospel at the Veterans' Home. There are good reports from our kids who get bused in from Henderson and Las Vegas. Many of them come from broken homes. Perhaps more of you would like to be involved in ministries like these.

At the very least, we can keep in mind as we encounter people on the margins of society that these may be the ones who are most open to the gospel. There is also a message of hope here for most of us. For few of us would consider ourselves to be at, or near, the centers of power of our society. But it is people like us, who realize our great needs, who often give a warm reception to Jesus. Jesus is looking for people like us to be His sheep, if we will put our trust in Him.