

Message #49

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John

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THE APPROACHING CRUCIFIXION

AND LIGHT OUT OF DARKNESS

JOHN 12:27-36A

I.

A couple of years ago, scientists at Northwestern University made a fascinating discovery. According to news reports, **“Human life begins in bright flash of light as a sperm meets an egg, scientists have shown for the first time, after capturing the astonishing ‘fireworks’ on film. An explosion of tiny sparks erupts from the egg at the exact moment of conception.”** (Breakpoint, 5/2/2016) In the Christian tradition, light is indeed associated with creation.

It is also associated with Advent. In much of the Christian world, the period that begins with the fourth Sunday before Christmas is called Advent. A tradition has developed in much of Christendom that associates a candle with each Sunday. Today is the first day of Hanukkah. Candles play a central part in that Jewish tradition also.

There is indeed a Biblical basis for the imagery of light in connection with the birth of Jesus. The prophet Isaiah spoke of the coming of Jesus in such terms. (PROJECTOR ON--- ISAIAH 60:1) Beginning in v. 1 of # 60, he wrote, **“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. (ISAIAH 60:2) For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you.”**

The Apostle John picked up on this imagery. At the beginning of this Gospel, he spoke of Jesus as the Word of God. (JOHN 1:4-5) In vv. 4 & 5 of the first chapter, he wrote, **“In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”** John uses this imagery in the rest of his Gospel and in his epistles, largely because Jesus Himself used it.

We have seen in our study of John's Gospel that He used it at the Feast of Tabernacles. In front of throngs of religious pilgrims in the temple in Jerusalem, Jesus declared Himself to be the light of the world. Jesus uses this imagery again in the passage before us today. He uses it to challenge people to follow Him. We will explore that imagery this morning to see what application it has to us. (PROJECTOR OFF)

We have reached #12 in John's Gospel. It is Passover week. Jesus is going to be crucified in a few days. He was welcomed into Jerusalem by cheering crowds. This popular support is superficial. Most of these people are looking for a Messiah who will deliver them from the Romans, not a Messiah who will deliver them from their sin. The religious leaders are threatened by Jesus, and they are plotting to kill Him.

Last week, we saw that rejection by the religious establishment was accompanied by the appearance of Gentiles who want to see Jesus. Jesus seems to regard this as a turning point. Israel has rejected its Messiah, and the Gentile world is interested in Him. The course is set. Jesus is about to be crucified. Now He describes something of its significance before it happens.

I.

In vv. 27 & 28 of #12 we find that THE APPROACHING CRUCIFIXION MEANS AGONY FOR JESUS BUT GLORY FOR THE FATHER. (PROJECTOR ON--- I. THE APPROACHING CRUCIFIXION MEANS...) Jesus says in v. 27, which is p. 899 in the black Bibles under many of the chairs, **"Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? Father save me from this hour?"** The exact context for these words is not clear. The reference to crowds in v. 29 indicates that Jesus is in the temple during Passover week. It may or may not be on the same day during which the Greeks showed up wanting to speak to Him in vv. 20-26.

The verb that Jesus uses to describe the status of His soul is a strong one. It implies an emotional reaction of anguish or agitation. The literal meaning of the Greek word is "to be stirred up." Back in #11, the same word was used to describe the reaction of Jesus when he came upon the scene in the home of Mary and Martha where they were weeping at the loss of their brother Lazarus. The verb is also used in Matthew's Gospel to describe the reaction of King Herod when he gets news that a king of the Jews has been born in Bethlehem. Matthew writes that he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

Why is the soul of Jesus troubled? In the passage before this, which we examined last week, the Gentiles showed up to see Him. Jesus saw this as an indication that His crucifixion is near. He speaks of that in v. 29 as "this hour." His approaching death was troubling to Him.

Jesus had both a human nature and a divine nature. By virtue of His divine nature, Jesus had a foreknowledge of all that this crucifixion would involve. As a human being, it would mean a lot of physical pain. He was going to be beaten. He was going to have his wrists and ankles pierced with nails. He was going to suffer an agonizing physical death on a Roman cross. It would mean great emotional pain. One of his disciples was in the process of betraying Him. The others would run away upon his arrest. He would see the grief of His mother who would watch Him experience all of this.

But worst of all would be the pain that His divine nature would experience. For all of eternity the Son of God enjoyed a perfect, unbroken relationship with God the Father. Now that connection was about to be broken. Not only was the Son of God about to experience a separation from His Heavenly Father for the first and only time, but also He was going to be the recipient of His wrath. It is hard for us to imagine what this would be like. We know that it meant that Jesus was acting as our substitute and that He was paying the penalty for our sin. This separation and this bearing the wrath of God would lead Him to cry out with the words of Psalm 22 v. 1. (MATTHEW 27:46) Matthew records Him as saying, **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”**

Such was the prospect that troubled the soul of Jesus. In a couple of days Jesus would be in Gethsemane, where He would express the same anxiety. The Gospel writer Matthew would record that His sweat became like drops of blood. Perhaps there were other moments during this week that He experienced similar emotions which simply are not recorded, perhaps not even observed by His disciples. (PROJECTOR OFF)

As for the form and meaning of the questions posed in v. 27, it is most likely that Jesus is posing hypothetical, or rhetorical, questions. “I am troubled in my soul. But should I say, and express, the temptation that I feel--- deliver Me from this hour? After all, I could call upon seven legions of angels to rescue me. But I cannot do that. This is the central purpose for My coming into the world--- to die on the cross.”

Thus the approaching crucifixion meant agony for Jesus, but it also meant glory for the Father. Jesus prays in v. 28, **“Father, glorify your name.’ Then a voice came from heaven: ‘I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.”** This is a theme that the Apostle John has noted in the teaching of Jesus. He recorded Jesus as telling the religious leaders at the Feast of Tabernacles that His mission was to honor the Father. (8:49) In His priestly prayer in #17, Jesus will ask the Father to glorify the Son so that He can glorify the Father.

In an earlier lesson, we saw that “glorify” means not just to give attention to someone but also to reveal the character of that person. In this case, it is God the Father. In the Ancient Near East “name” was understood to represent the person behind that name.

Jesus gets a strange and unusual response to His brief prayer. A voice comes from heaven saying that He has glorified this name and will glorify it again. It would seem that this is God the Father Himself providing this reply.

There are two other instances recorded in the Gospels when a similar thing happened. When Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, a voice came out of heaven saying, “You are My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” When Jesus was transfigured in the mountains of Galilee, He was with three of His disciples. Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus. The disciples heard a voice come out of heaven, saying, “This is My beloved Son. Listen to Him.”

In claiming that He has already glorified His name, it would seem that He is referring to the ministry of Jesus. The Father has been glorified in the public ministry of Jesus, through His miracles and His inspired teaching and His behavior. He will glorify it again through the death and resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Back in v. 23 Jesus spoke of the hour that had come for Him to be glorified. In the next verse, He spoke specifically about the crucifixion.

Glorifying God has to do with revealing the characteristics of God. The crucifixion itself will reveal much about the characteristics of God. Perhaps we can have a little audience participation right here.... How are the attributes of God revealed in the crucifixion? .....

The crucifixion will display the justice of God in punishing sin. It will demonstrate the omniscience of God. For the crucifixion will fulfill prophecies that the Lord made in the Old Testament about this future event. It will show the love of God in that He provides His own Son to pay the penalty for the sins of the world. It shows the wisdom of God in that the crucifixion will provide a way for Jews and Gentiles to be united in one spiritual body.

So it is that the approaching crucifixion means agony for Jesus but glory for the Father. The challenge here for us is to deal with the hard challenges of life that come our way. There are physical and

emotional and spiritual challenges that come across our path that cause us agony of some sort. Are we able to glorify God in those situations? In order to do that we have to trust Him. We have to rely upon His promises and remain confident that He is sovereign and that He is good.

II.

Then, in vv. 29-31 and v. 34, we find that THE APPROACHING CRUCIFIXION MEANS JUDGMENT FOR THE SKEPTICAL WORLD. (PROJECTOR ON--- II. THE APPROACHING CRUCIFIXION MEANS...) According to v. 29, **“The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, ‘An angel has spoken to him.’”**

Not everyone who was present understood this voice from heaven. Obviously Jesus did. The Apostle John is recording this incident. He was present. Did he and his fellow disciples understand it? We are left with the impression that John understood it, but it is possible that Jesus had to explain the meaning of this voice. In the other two similar instances, it seems that the disciples, at least, understood the voice from heaven. Such was the case at the baptism of Jesus. They also understood the voice on the Mount of Transfiguration. Perhaps a certain spiritual condition was needed to understand the voice.

The responses of the crowd to this voice that they did not understand seems to me to be symbolic of the world’s response to the revelation of God. The skeptics thought that this voice was simply thunder. Many people around us look at the universe and conclude that there are physical explanations for all that we see. Time plus chance plus physical laws of the universe explain our existence. Life on planet earth is a result of the process of evolution. There is no need to introduce a god or gods. This is the skeptical response to what theologians often refer to as general revelation.

The Bible is described by theologians as special revelation. The skeptics regard it as simply a religious book that is the product of many different people. It contains myths and fables. The supposed miracles are not real. Christie’s in New York is offering a 1954 letter for sale on Tuesday in which Albert Einstein wrote, **“The word God is for me nothing more than the expression and product of human weaknesses, the Bible a collection of honorable but still primitive legends.”** (RJ, 12/1/2018) As for Jesus Himself, the skeptics regard him as an interesting historical figure. He was a religious teacher, but the stories about His miracles and resurrection from the dead cannot be taken seriously or literally.

There were others in the crowd that day who thought that an angel had spoken. This group is perhaps representative of those around us who acknowledge that there is a spiritual dimension in our world.

Maybe God got our world started and the principles of evolution took over. The Bible perhaps contains spiritual truth and God may have had something to do with it. Jesus perhaps did have real insights into God, as did other religious figures in the past--- like Confucius and Buddha and Mohammed and Joseph Smith.

But then there is the third group. These include the apostles, who seem to understand the voice of God in v. 28. They realize that Jesus is the Son of God who is about to perform a deed that will change the course of human history. His death will provide for the covering of human sin and will provide the basis for a new way for human beings to connect with the God who is really there. Ultimately a faith decision is necessary to hear the true voice of God.

According to v. 30, **“Jesus answered, ‘This voice has come for your sake, not mine.’”** As the Second Person of the Triune Godhead, the Son of God always had a close relationship with his Father. He knows the Father’s will and His plan for the future. Somehow this voice from heaven is intended to benefit the watching crowd.

At the Transfiguration, the voice of God was heard only by three of the disciples of Jesus. The voice that came from heaven at the baptism of Jesus was heard by the Jewish crowd. It would seem that the voice from heaven in both of those cases was a kind of divine testimony to the claims of Jesus. Perhaps that is its function here also, even though the crowds did not understand the meaning of the voice. It is just another of many evidences that Jesus is the Messiah sent from God. Most reject this evidence, but some will eventually embrace it.

Jesus continues in verse 31: **“Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out.”** “World” is a word that we have often seen Jesus use in this Gospel. It frequently refers to a mindset reflected in the thinking and behavior of the majority of people in the Biblical setting. It is the view of life that people have who deny the claims of Jesus.

It would seem that the crucifixion of Jesus is primarily about a judgment that people are making about Jesus. But Jesus sees it differently. He sees it primarily as a judgment that God is making upon this world system. It is a judgment upon the religious establishment which is rejecting the claims of Jesus. It is also a judgment upon the Gentile world in the form of the Roman leadership which will approve and carry out the execution of Jesus.

The head of this world system is the Devil. In 1 John #5 v. 19 (1 JOHN 5:19) the same Apostle John wrote, **“We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.”** In our verse, the future tense is used, indicating the the devil will be cast out in the future. This verse from 1 John notes that the devil still has a certain power over the world system. Yet the crucifixion of Jesus somehow does him in. Superficially the crucifixion of Jesus may appear to be a victory for the devil. But the reality is that the death of Jesus is a defeat for Satan. For that death pays the penalty for the sins of mankind. It also breaks the necessary hold that sin has upon people. Those who follow Jesus no longer are bound to the power of the devil.

The death of Jesus involves a divine judgment upon the devil. His sentence has been pronounced. But it has not yet been carried out. That sentencing will be carried out at the return of Christ. (PROJECTOR OFF)

We will skip down to v. 34 in our passage. There we read, **“So the crowd answered him, ‘We have heard from the Law that the Christ remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?’”** The fact that this crowd has “heard” from the Law may be indicative that they have been taught by the rabbis, who are mostly Pharisees, about the proper understanding of the Old Testament.

The crowd here appears to make two correct conclusions about Jesus. Jesus is claiming to be the Messiah. Also Jesus is speaking about dying. This doesn’t make sense to these people. They are skeptical. They have been taught that the Messiah will rule forever. They are perhaps thinking of Daniel #7, which speaks of the Son of Man receiving an eternal kingdom. (PROJECTOR ON--- DANIEL 7:13) In vv. 13 & 14 of #7, Daniel records this vision: **“I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. (DANIEL 7:14) And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.”**

They also may have been thinking of a verse in Isaiah that is often read in this Christmas season. (ISAIAH 9:7) In #9 v. 7 the prophet Isaiah declares, **“Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.”** These people and their rabbis made no room in their thinking for passages like Isaiah #53, which speaks of a suffering Messiah.

A big part of the problem with them was that they wanted a political Messiah, not a spiritual Messiah. (PROJECTOR OFF) For they saw their biggest problems as political. The Gentile Romans were the central challenge of religious life. They were the obstacle to the establishment of a Jewish kingdom. The reality was that their biggest problem was spiritual not political. What they needed most was a Messiah who would deal with the problem of the sin in their individual lives.

So it is today. So much of our world is focused on external, political problems--- immigration, the economy, trade with China, the threat from North Korea, the evil Democrats, the nasty Republicans, national debt and health insurance. The biggest problem from the divine perspective is our individual hearts, our personal sin. What we need is a Savior who will deliver us from our sin. This is what Jesus came to address in His first coming. When His own people rejected Him, it meant judgment upon them. That came in a collective form in 70 AD, when the Romans came in and leveled Jerusalem and crucified thousands of Jews. Most of these individuals went into a Christless eternity.

We will, too, unless we trust in this Jesus and embrace the provision that He made for us by dying on the cross. We can experience that deliverance if we will simply put our trust in Him.

III.

In vv. 32 & 33 and vv. 35 & 36 we find that THE APPROACHING CRUCIFIXION MEANS RESPONSIBILITY FOR CHRISTIANS TO WALK IN THE LIGHT OF THE MESSIAH. (PROJECTOR ON--- III. THE APPROACHING CRUCIFIXION MEANS...) According to vv.32 & 33, Jesus told the crowd, **“And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.’ He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.”**

Jesus is clearly speaking about crucifixion. He used this same terminology when he was speaking to Nicodemus at the beginning of His ministry. (JOHN 3:14-15) In #3 Jesus told this member of the Sanhedrin, **“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of an be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.”**

Jesus said the same kind of thing to the leaders of the religious establishment at the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem. (JOHN 8:28) In #8 v. 28, we read, **“So Jesus said to them, ‘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 authority, but speak just as the Father taught me.’”** So this is not new teaching. But these words were perhaps new to many in the crowd at this Passover.

The new thing about this statement is Jesus' indication that His crucifixion will result in drawing all men to Himself. The word "draw" is used in the New Testament of a "drawing" that is always effective in accomplishing its intent. (JOHN 6:44) For example, in # 6 v. 44 Jesus said, **"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day."**

So if this is an effectual drawing that always accomplishes its purpose, how is it that Jesus says that He will draw all people to Himself? It is obvious that many in this crowd have rejected Him, and will continue to reject Him. After the crucifixion, some of the Jews will be attracted to Jesus, but it will still be a minority. (PROJECTOR OFF) So the best way to understand this is that Jesus is talking about all kinds of people. It will not be just Jews who are attracted to Jesus, but also Gentiles. The inquiry of the Greeks about wanting to see Jesus, which we looked at in the previous paragraph last week, seemed to be a central factor in this discussion from Jesus. Some Gentiles, as well as some Jews, will be drawn to Jesus by God's word and by the Holy Spirit.

Skipping down to vv. 35 & 36, we read, **"So Jesus said to them, 'The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light'."** This response follows the skeptical reaction of the crowd in v. 34. They wanted to know how Jesus' talk of being lifted up could be consistent with their understanding of a Messiah who would reign forever.

Jesus does not give them a direct answer. He returns to His theme of light. They are dealing with the One who has declared Himself to be the light of the world. If they are serious about Jesus, they must trust Him and accept the considerable evidence that He has provided them that He is indeed the Messiah.

Still Jesus is graciously offering this skeptical crowd the opportunity to follow Him. Jesus' time among them, however, is limited. The death and resurrection and ascension are coming soon. With all of the miracles that Jesus has performed and the teaching from God that He has given them, they need to act in faith.

Such is the challenge to all of us, especially in this Christmas season, to walk in the light. We will go to the grave without all of our spiritual questions being answered. But we are responsible to respond to the revelation that Jesus has provided for us. We are to walk with Him.

Prison can be a very dark place. Don shared last week stories about people in prison who have come to discover the light. One of those is M. M as a teenager committed a very serious crime, for which he was given a life sentence. He was a gang leader. In prison he used to beat up guys who crossed him. Then somehow he stumbled across a Bible correspondence course which was distributed by people in our church. He started doing the lessons and came to faith in Jesus. He went around to people in prison whom he had beat up and asked for forgiveness. The prison officials were afraid that this might be seen as a sign of weakness and that someone might try to kill M. So he was put into solitary confinement.

M persevered. He was sent to another prison, where he became a chaplain's assistant. He asked for copies of my sermon to be sent to him. Since then, five others have asked for copies of sermons from each Sunday. The Williams and I have visited him a couple of times. This past summer he was granted parole. His parents have had difficulty in having an apartment that satisfies the parole board's requirements for housing. His father has a terminal cancer situation. They have limited funds. We are trying to help them to get a place that will meet the state's requirements. M continues to try to walk in the light. That light is transforming.

The approaching crucifixion means agony for Jesus but glory for the Father. The approaching crucifixion means judgment for the skeptical world. The approaching crucifixion means responsibility for Christians to walk in the light of the Messiah. Let's remember that crucifixion done for us by Jesus, as we prepare to participate in the Lord's Supper.