

Sermon Outline

“LIFE IN HIS NAME”: THE PURSUIT OF WHOLENESS AND THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

THE HOPE OF ALL FLESH (JOHN 3:8-15)

I. Impotence and Humility

- A. Outside the grace of God, people are fundamentally the same—we are flesh. —What does the conservative moralist and prostitute have in common? What does the militant religious zealot share with the pimp? Where does the human rights activist sit down with the totalitarian tyrant? *Flesh*.
- B. Two implications dawn on us.
 - 1. Rules can guide, but cannot save
 - 2. Humility in the face of the failures of others

II. Those Born of the Spirit (John 3:6-8)

- A. When God shows us our sinfulness, it is to prepare us for his solution.
- B. Verse 6, 7: “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’”
 - 1. Two key realms/modes of life/life principles: Flesh and Spirit.
 - 2. Both will replicate themselves: Flesh replicates flesh, the Spirit of the Lord will replicates himself.
 - 3. Those who want to see the Kingdom of Heaven must have the life of the Kingdom in us. This life is in the Holy Spirit. It *is* the Holy Spirit.
- C. Verse 8: “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”
 - 1. When we hear that there are people who are born of the Spirit, we begin to have hope.
 - 2. It shows me that God desires to save.
 - 3. The Lord compares the work of the Holy Spirit to the wind.
 - 4. Like the mysterious wind, the Spirit of God is sovereign and free. He gives life to whomever he wishes.
 - 5. Those who receive the life of the Holy Spirit will become new creations, no longer only flesh, but Spirit (or Spirit-dominated) as well.

- D. Just as the presence of the wind can be felt, the work of the Spirit can also be seen in those he has made his home.
—These are the ones who end up following Jesus for the rest of their lives.

III. Teachers without Understanding (John 1:9, 10)

- A. Nicodemus is perplexed. He asks Jesus, “How can these things be?”
- B. Jesus rebukes Nicodemus for his ignorance (v 10).
1. The Lord very likely meant for his words to sting.
 2. When we are so proud of ourselves that we no longer recognize our own brokenness, that’s when the Lord exercises tough love. He rebukes us. And he does this in an attempt to shock us out of our lethargy.
 3. As Jesus rebukes Nicodemus, he practically rebukes the entire Pharisaic establishment and others that would follow their paths.
 4. The Pharisees pride themselves on being Israel’s teacher, Israel’s conscience. But for all their learning, they were not able to receive what Jesus is saying.
- C. But Jesus knew that they were not able to receive his teaching, because they did not belong to him (cf. Jn 10:26).

IV. Jesus Confronts the Pharisees for Rejecting His Testimony (John 1:11, 12)

- A. Jesus charges the Pharisees for rejecting the testimony of his community (v 11).
- B. “If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?” (v 12)
1. Here, the “earthly things” refers to everything that Jesus had been teaching Nicodemus up to this point.
 - a. “Earthly” = The elementary things of the Gospel
 - b. “Heavenly” = The more advanced teachings of the Gospel
 2. In effect, Jesus is saying to Nicodemus that if he already has problems accepting some of the most basic premises of the Gospel, how is he going to receive more advanced instruction?
- C. Before we get too critical of the Pharisees, we must heed these lessons.
1. Apart from God’s grace, we *will* be Pharisee-like people—those who rely on their own fleshly strength to acquire our salvation.
 2. It is possible to be theologically precise and morally scrupulous and still be spiritually dead.

V. The Only One Who Can Save (John 1:13-15)

- A. The only religion that saves resides in a Man—the One who came from heaven to give us the life we need: “No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man” (v 13).
- B. Jesus the Son of Man
1. “Son of Man” sounds like “human being.”
 2. But there is more to this term when Jesus uses it.
 3. “Son of Man” originates from Daniel 7. The Son of Man is the human-like being who ascends to God and receives his Kingdom on behalf of his people.

*¹³ “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.*

*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.*

4. But Jesus also points out that the Son of Man also descended from heaven. His origins are from heaven.
 - a. While the Son of Man looks human (because he assumed a full human nature), he is from heaven.
 - b. Therefore, he can bring the life of heaven—the life of perfect wholeness—to us.
 5. Jesus is teaching Nicodemus and sinners everywhere that the life from heaven has come to the world in himself.
- C. Jesus the Bronze Serpent
1. How are we to relate to Jesus if we want to gain this heavenly life? Jesus uses another Old Testament account to teach us: “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life” (vv 14-15).

2. Numbers 21:9: “So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.”

VI. The Hope of All Flesh

Like the rebellious Israelites of the past, we must acknowledge our sins. We must admit that we are sinners and cannot save ourselves. We must admit that apart from God’s mercy, we are fundamentally haters of God. Yet we mustn’t despair. When God shows us our sins, he means to show us the way out. It is not first by rushing to improve ourselves (because flesh cannot improve flesh). And it certainly is not in justifying ourselves, coming up with all sorts of excuses and rationalizations to explain our actions (“So-and-so made me do it”). We are saved when we finally take our eyes off ourselves and look to Another instead. This Other is the new Bronze Serpent that God has provided. He is the Son of Man who comes from heaven. He is our Savior Jesus Christ.

Questions for Reflection

1. Was there anything in particular about today’s sermon that blessed and encouraged you?
2. Was there anything that you did not agree with?
3. Since we are fundamentally the same kinds of people (apart from God’s mercy), what are the implications for how we should view the world and live our lives?
4. Why can’t rules save (redeem) us? How does this affect our confidence in laws and traditions?
5. Why should we be humble in the face of the failures of others? When was the last time you heard about someone else’s fall from grace. What was your first reaction? Did you eventually bring yourself to see yourself in the failure?
6. What are two dominating life-principles that the Lord reveals in v 6?
7. Why shouldn’t we be surprised that we need to undergo rebirth if we want to see the Kingdom of God?
8. Before we become too critical of the Pharisees, what must we remember?
9. Who is the only One who can save us from sin?
10. What does Jesus mean when he calls himself the Son of Man? (cf. Dan 7:13-14) Why is the Son of Man able to impart heavenly life to his people?
11. Jesus uses the serpent account in Num 21 to explain what people must do in order to be saved. What lesson do we draw from there?