

Text: John 8:21-29

Title: Believe because Jesus is from above

Time: 12/8/2024 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: With our live nativity program this afternoon, we hope to share with our neighbors the good news of great joy, which the angels announced to the shepherds, that would be for all people: "For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11). The true meaning of Christmas is that the baby Jesus was the Christ, the virgin born Son of God, the Savior of all who believe.

The message of the Gospel of John is the Christmas message of the angels. John writes that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and believing have life in His name, because He is our Savior (John 20:31). John's Christmas story goes back further than the announcements in Nazareth and the eventual birth in Bethlehem. He points out that Jesus is ultimately not from those places here below that He called home, but rather from a place above. He is not from the world of first century Palestine; He is from the beginning before there ever was a world or a century. During this last Feast of Tabernacles that Jesus would celebrate with His fellow Jews, He tells them again that they must believe that He is the Christ, the Son of God, because He is from above (v. 23).

We know from the book of Acts that, with only 120 exceptions, the Jews of Jesus's day disbelieved that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, prior to the great revival of Pentecost. Their Jewish descendants of the next century would include in their Talmud the lie that Jesus was the illegitimate son of a Roman soldier named Pandira. The Greek

philosopher Celsus used that falsehood to attack Christianity. Leaders of the Enlightenment, like Voltaire, followed by 19th century influencers, like Tolstoi, propagated the same denial of Christ. Twentieth century theologians like Emil Bruner, Rudolph Bultman, Paul Tillich, and Nels Ferre found it fashionable to adopt the same view for their liberal seminaries.

In 1970, a *Christianity Today* survey found that 60% of main-line Methodists, 49% of Presbyterians, 44% of Episcopalians, 34% of American Baptists, and 19% of American Lutherans denied that Jesus was from above, the virgin born, preexistent Son of God. Undoubtedly, those percentages would be much higher today among our fellow celebrants of Christmas.

So it is after all those ages of unbelief that we open our Bibles this morning to a passage of Scripture that still tells us to believe. The Apostle John insists here, that we must believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, because He was from above. He does so by relating another conversation Jesus had with the visitors at the Feast of Tabernacles.

Those who spoke with Jesus wondered three things about Him, and Jesus was very clear on each point. Notice those three things with me.

I. The Jews wondered, "Will he kill himself?" (vv. 21-24).

Illustration: Social media outlets were developed and popularized in the late 1990s and early 2000s, and since that time suicide rates in our nation are up 37%. The suicide rate among males is four times larger than that of females, and suicide is the second leading cause of death among people under the age of 44.

In October, news reports said that Canada's liberal euthanasia law, which technically requires some kind of medical reason for assisted suicide, has actually resulted for years in the assisted suicides of people who had merely unmet social needs [theguardian.com/world/2024/oct/17/canada-nonterminal-aid-assisted-death].

Application: So, we know about the horror and harm of suicide today, and as we read this question of the Jews about Jesus, we find it a bit perplexing. Jesus had told them that He was going away, that they would die in their sins, and that they could not come to where He was going (v. 21). At first blush, there seems to be nothing in what Jesus said to justify this response from the Jews about His suicide.

Their thoughts become more understandable, however, when we remember how this conversation between Jesus and the Jews began in chapter 7. Specifically, in 7:19 Jesus asks them a pointed question about His death: "Why do you seek to kill me?" Their answer was, "Thou hast a devil: who goeth about to kill thee?" Then in 7:33-34 Jesus mentions what he says here, that where He is going, they cannot come.

So their question makes some sense when we remember that these Jews are still not sure they are dealing with someone in his right mind. When Jesus repeats that He is going away where they cannot come, they wonder whether that is the devil in Him speaking again, and if so, will He kill himself? This seems to them to be the only alternative to His assertion that they were going to kill Him.

Jesus's answer to their question turns the table on them. His answer is essentially this: "Because of your sin of unbelief, you are killing yourselves" (v. 21, 24). In verse 21, the

word for *sin* is actually singular. D. A. Carson rightly calls this sin “the particular sin of unbelief.” Spurgeon called it the sin of final unbelief, the unforgiveable sin.

Jesus repeats this warning in verse 24, “If ye believe not, ye shall die in your sins.” Here the word for *sins* is plural, because each one of us is held accountable separately as individuals for believing. Each one of us will die in our sin of unbelief if we do not believe. Not believing is suicide.

Before we leave this question about Jesus killing Himself, I want us to see that there is another important answer that Jesus gives later to this question of the Jews. There is a sense in which He does give His life willingly for others: John 10:17-18, “Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.”

The death of Jesus Christ was not the suicide of a man troubled by a devil. It was the willing sacrifice necessary to pay for our sins and provide life for those who believe. In this sense, with great love for lost sinners, Jesus did indeed kill Himself and then rise again for these Jews who were asking their silly question. He did the same for you and me.

We have sung a song title “Why?” that asks and answers the question about why Jesus died:

“Why did they nail him to Calvary’s tree;
Why, tell me why was he there?
Jesus the helper, the healer, the friend,
Why, tell me why was he there?”

“Why should he love me a sinner undone;

Why, tell me why should he care?
I do not merit the love he has shown.
Why, tell me why should he care?

“All my iniquities on him were laid;
He nailed them all to the tree.
Jesus, the debt of my sin fully paid,
He paid the ransom for me.”

Will you still wonder, “Why did he kill himself?”, or will you see why – that He loved you, and gave His life for you.

II. The Jews wondered, “Who are you?” (vv. 24-25).

Illustration: In verse 24, Jesus tells these Jews that they must believe that He is who He is. And so they ask, “Who art thou?” Their forefathers in Egypt had asked Moses a similar question. They wanted to know what was the name of the God that had sent Moses to be their deliverer. God had told Moses to tell them, “I Am has sent me” (Exod. 3:13-14).

Application: And now here Jesus says to His people, you must believe I Am. Note that the *he* is in italics in our KJV. Jesus is laying claim to the name of Israel’s God, the One who delivered them from bondage in Egypt.

He will persist in doing so throughout this chapter, until finally when He does so in verses 58 and 59, the Jews fully grasp His meaning and take up stones to stone Him for blasphemy. Jesus had told them from the beginning who He was. According to chapter 1 of this Gospel, he told them by making all things (v. 3), by giving life to all men (v. 4), by shining light into darkness (v. 5), and finally by becoming a man and having conversations like this one about who He is (v. 14). How could they still not know?

Do we know? Are we still wondering who Jesus was? If we are, it is not because He has not told us. If you are still wondering who Jesus is, it is for the same reason these Jews asked their question and ultimately took up stones to throw at Him, simply because of unbelief. To not believe Him is to die in your sins, because He is who He is.

III. The Jews wondered, "Of whom do you speak?" (26-29).

Illustration: There is a quote that appears in John Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* published in 1689 that says this: "I have always thought the actions of men the best interpreters of their thoughts." Locke wrote this in support of the idea that men enter the world with no innate tendencies as a blank slate. The Bible, of course, teaches that men are born in the image of God with innate blessings and also as sinners with an innate rejection of God and His blessings.

Application: So, we Christians disagree with Locke's misunderstanding of human understanding, but I think our Lord would agree with his point about the importance of actions to interpret thoughts - "I have always thought the actions of men the best interpreters of their thoughts."

So in order to provide evidence to the Jews of the truthfulness of His thoughts, He points to His actions. He tells the Jews in verse 29, "I do always those things that please God the Father who sent Me." He is the Son sent by the Father because He always did those things that please the Father. The Father sent Him, but the Father had not left Him alone.

And it is because He wanted to please the Father, and because it was the Father who had sent Him and had not left Him alone, Jesus tells them in verse 28 that a day would

come at which they would wonder about this no more: "When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things."

The Jews wondered about whom Jesus was speaking when He spoke of His Father and the One who sent Him. Here He tells them that they would know some day for sure. And He told them when they would know. Notice that it is not a matter of whether they would know. They would know. The important issue is when would they know.

Jesus tells them when they would know: "When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know." A sinner knows who Jesus truly is and what His true relationship to the Father is once he has lifted up the Son of man. Everyone is going to do this. Believers willingly do so when they believe, and unbelievers will do so someday because they have been forced.

Phil. 2:9-11 describes that day: "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Conclusion: So, these are the things the Jews were wondering about Jesus – "Was He a bit crazy, perhaps enough to kill himself?"; "Who was He really, perhaps just a mistaken Nazarene rabbi?"; and "Who was He talking about, whom did He call His Father?" Jesus's answer was that it is worse than crazy to die in your sin of unbelief, because He is the Christ, the Son of God and the Son of man. He told them

that if they did this worse than crazy thing, they will be forced someday to bend the knee to Him anyway.

John Moore's hymn, "Why?" contains one last question for each of us to ponder this morning:

"Why should I linger afar from his love;
Why, tell me why should I fear?
Somehow I know I must venture and prove;
Why, tell me why should I fear?"

"All my iniquities on him were laid;
He nailed them all to the tree.
Jesus, the debt of my sin fully paid,
He paid the ransom for me."

My prayer is that none who hear this good news of great joy would ever die in their sin of unbelief.

"A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction—the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching