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Series: The Gospel of John
Message: Who Are You?

Transcribed Message
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John 8:21-30

It's in 1 Corinthians chapter 2 and verse 14 that I think we have one of the clearest statements in the Bible regarding the condition of the human heart and the ability of the human heart apart from Christ and apart from the Holy Spirit. For it is in that verse that Paul says this matter of the natural person not accepting the things of the Spirit of God. And the natural man can't accept and can't understand the things of the Spirit of God because they are folly to him and he can't understand them. He can't discern them because it requires spiritual eyes and spiritual insight.

I think you could say that in John's gospel, especially in this eighth chapter, it's as if John in the storyline of his gospel and the interactions between Jesus and the people of his day and especially the religious leaders is living out the truth in 1 Corinthians 2:14 right before our eyes. It's in the narrative form. When Paul recorded those words in 1 Corinthians 2:14, that is a part of the didactic doctrinal teaching of the epistles. I think it's just kind of a beautiful picture to see it lived out in real space, time, history in Jesus' interaction and then also seeing as Paul puts that truth forward in the epistle to the Corinthians.

This morning let's turn to the eighth chapter of the gospel of John as we continue our work through this wonderful gospel. And we really do want to see this truth come to life in this way. And here's what I want you to see this morning. You have no one to blame but yourself if you don't believe in Jesus as your Savior. You have no one to blame but yourself. And you say what to that? You say not so fast, my friend, because didn't we study in John chapter 6 and verse 65 and Jesus said no one can come to the Father unless the Father draws him. And somebody else says well yeah, but what about John chapter 5 and verse 41 when Jesus in that interaction said you will not come to me that you might believe and have eternal life. And you say well, which one is it? And I say to you, yes, it is both. It is the

sovereign purposes of God, and it is human responsibility. These are the tensions that the Bible teaches in this regard showing to us that God is the initiator. God is the pursuer. God is the seeker. We're the responder. But it is both of these that the Scriptures teach.

So, we come again to John 8. Let's just catch up with a little review with our week off last Sunday and notice again these three things that really set the context for this chapter. This is a series of exchanges. This eighth chapter is between Jesus and the religious leaders, and we see that because three different times John uses the word again. We'll see it in just a minute but in verse 2 and verse 12 and verse 21 John just slips in this word again, and it's like he's saying to us there were conversations that were happening on the temple mount between Jesus and the religious leaders and the people of his day right? It's not one long uninterrupted conversation, but it is an interaction that evidently occurred over the period of that day.

The second thing is of course, and we've seen this and will continue to see it, that the tone is increasingly one of agitation. It's going to culminate in verse 59 when the religious leaders want to pick up stones and kill Jesus. Now that's about as agitated as one can be, isn't it? You really want to do him in and then I think all of this is set in this statement in the 19th verse. Ringing in the ears of these religious leaders certainly has to be the words of Jesus. When he said to them you do not even know the God that you claim to worship. Now that is about as blunt as Jesus could be. Here are the religious leaders of his day. They pride themselves in their knowledge and in the leading of people, but Jesus says you're leading them to a God that you do not know and you're leading them away from the truth.

Let's look this morning – where are you going? Heaven or hell? Now you're going to notice very quickly that the word “heaven” and the word “hell” don't appear anywhere in these verses, but I assure you that the words heaven and hell are behind the storyline that we look at this morning. So, let's begin by looking at opposite destinies in verse 21. So, he said to them again, I am going away, and you will seek me and you will die in your sin. Where I am going you cannot come. There's that third “again”. It was in verse 2, verse 12,

and now verse 21. There's a bit of a pause in the action, but there is also the sense that this conversation is being picked up throughout the day.

Jesus speaks first of all of the fact that he is returning to the Father. You remember where we are in the chronology of the life of our Lord. We're in the fall season with the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles and we're going to go into the spring and we're about six months away from Jesus being crucified. It just gives you a sense of how close we are to the reality of the death of our Lord. That's the time frame. And so when Jesus earlier said in chapter 7 in verse 33 that he was going away, remember what they said. They said is he going on a missions trip? Is he going to the Greek dispersion? Is he going to go and visit some other people than us? Of course, they didn't understand and they still don't understand, but this going away language in verse 21 which you find multiple times in the gospel of John is language that's not just looking at the ascension. Ultimately it is going away, isn't it, but the going away phrase always includes what leads up to the ascension. There is no ascension apart from the cross and that's always the path that our Lord is aware of. So, this going away includes his death. It includes his burial. It includes his resurrection, and yes, ultimately it will be his ascension.

He says to them, you will seek me. You will seek me. Jesus is not wondering about his going away and after he's gone if they are still going to be going around and wondering where he is. Remember those *Where's Waldo* books and you had those pictures that were just crammed with every imaginable visual and there was a little Waldo in there somewhere. Jesus is not saying they're going to be walking around the streets of Jerusalem and Judea saying where is Jesus. I think what he's saying is you're going to keep on looking for a Messiah of your own making. I'm not that Messiah because they wanted a Messiah that was going to bring about political freedom from Rome, that was going to bring about material prosperity. That was their worldview of their Messiah. Jesus isn't that Messiah. He's not the Messiah of their making and he's not the one that they are looking to follow.

In verse 12 remember Jesus said, follow me and you won't walk in darkness. Now he says you won't follow me. You won't know where I'm going. They were seeking after something they could never find and it's so \ spot on when you think of what Paul says in 2

Timothy 3:7 when he says people are ever learning but they're never able to come to a knowledge of the truth. Is that a description of our day and time? When we think of the explosion that's happening almost every day right in the sphere of knowledge and technology and AI. Our world is just moving at a pace that nobody can keep up with. We certainly aren't keeping up with it ethically and morally. But it's almost the same thing that Jesus is describing here. They're ever learning. They're always looking but they're always looking and they're ever learning apart from the truth. Here he is the Messiah – right before them.

Why won't they follow him? Well, the answer is they have rejected him. The rejection of Jesus. You will die, he says, in your sin. Where I am going you cannot come. Now it doesn't get any more forceful than that. It doesn't get any more blunt than that. What other word would you put in there to describe what Jesus just said to them? You will die in your sin, and you will not follow. you can't follow after me. What word other than blunt or forceful would you think of? What comes to my mind is terrifying. How about terrifying? You will die in your sin. That's the words that Jesus speaks to them.

Now notice two things about that. Notice first of all the singular use of sin. He says you will die in your sin. Jesus is pointing to the human condition into which we're all born into this world. We're all born into this world separated from God because of sin. That's the condition with which every one of us enters into the human race. The Bible says so. When we had that little toddler, Bonnie used to take our kids when they were that age and she would take them into a room. She didn't know I was listening, but she would sit them down and she would say, would you say mommy. Say mommy. Say mommy. And then she didn't know that I would take the same kid and I'd take him into the other room, and I'd say, say daddy. Say daddy. Do you know what the first word they said was? No. They say no. I don't think anybody went into a room and sat him down and said I want to teach you a new word. They know that word because the condition with which they're born. That's what Jesus is saying here. You're going to die in your sin. It's what Paul says in Romans 1 describing the condition of the human heart. Then he gets to chapter three, and he says there's none

righteous, no not one. There is nobody who understands. There's nobody who seeks after God. That's the condition of our heart.

Now notice Jesus doesn't say you have committed too many sins. He doesn't say you've committed so many sins that you can't follow me, that you can't come after me. I dare say if you went on the streets of Oklahoma City and just did a little in-person interview and you asked to people if it's possible to commit so many sins that there's no hope, I would bet the majority of people would easily agree with that statement. There's some number and if you dare go over that number, even though nobody knows what the number is, you're done. You're lost. There's no hope. That's not what Jesus says at all. Jesus doesn't say anything about a threshold because there isn't a threshold. There isn't a number. He's talking about something completely different. He's talking about the sin of all sins. The sin of all sins is that they have rejected Jesus as their Messiah. They've rejected Jesus as their Savior. You could rightly call that the unpardonable sin. The unpardonable sin is the sin that is ultimately the rejection of Jesus as your Savior.

Matthew talks about that very thing in his gospel in the twelfth chapter. He calls it the sin of the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Now I think that that sin could only be committed when Jesus was physically on the earth because Jesus in the incarnation took upon himself the form of human flesh and he looked just like us. He was a man. He did all the things that everybody else did. And yet in that twelfth chapter, Matthew draws attention to the fact that the Holy Spirit has empowered Jesus to do the works of God, the miracles that the Messiah was going to do. It was on full display. Instead of falling on their face before Jesus and acknowledging him as Lord, they blasphemed against the witness of the Holy Spirit and said I think you're doing the works of the devil. Well that that sin I believe was an isolated situation for that day and time. But you can still commit the unpardonable sin today, not by a number of sins, or not a special sin, but simply by rejecting Jesus as your Savior.

When we think of what Jesus says here – you will die in your sin. Death in the flesh always speaks about separation. When you see the word “death” in the Bible just put in your mind the word separation because when it's physical death it's separation of the body

from the soul. When we are born into this world spiritually dead, we're separated from God in time. If we go through all of time and never accept Jesus as our Savior, we step into what the Bible says is eternal death, the second death, separation from God for all of eternity. The writer of Hebrews picks up on that and says it is appointed unto man once to die and after this comes the judgment. But of course, for those who are in Christ there is no condemnation. So that's the Gospel's answer to that.

Look at this total misunderstanding in verse 22: So, the Jews said, will he kill himself since he says where I am going you cannot come. Remember, most of the time when John references the Jews, he's talking about the religious leaders. That certainly is the case here. The first thing we see is they willingly overlook the first part of what Jesus said. The first thing that Jesus said is I am going away and you're going to die in your sin. Now, my friends, that should have grabbed them by the throat and pushed them up against the wall and caused them to want to know everything that they needed to know about what Jesus just said. And yet they have no interest in that. There's no follow up about that at all. He says I'm going to heaven. You're going to hell, and nobody says could we ask for a further explanation. We'd like to know what you mean exactly. How could we avoid this? What is the possible remedy for what you just said?

The reality of hell is one of the most difficult doctrines to teach. Jesus says more about hell than any other writer in the New Testament. Jesus says more about hell and the separation from God for all of eternity than he says about heaven. Do you want to know why? Because he loves us. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life. The heart of our Lord broke every day as he looked at the brokenness of humanity before him. Think of the weight that was upon the heart of our Lord every day as he contemplated the hardness of heart and the rejection of himself as the Messiah.

So, they don't want to focus on the first part. You're going to die in your sin. They want to focus on the last part. The last part Jesus said, where I'm going you can't come. Look at that again. Verse 22. So, the Jews said will he kill himself since he says where I am going you cannot come. Why in the world would they ask such a bizarre question? Will he

kill himself? How does that even fit into the conversation that's going on? Why would their mind go to something like that? I think it's because of this. They envision themselves as going to heaven, and if he's going somewhere where they're not going, then he's not going to heaven because they're going to heaven. So, that must mean he's going to hell because they're not going to hell, but he is evidently. They also had a warped view of their theology that said if someone did take their own life they went to the lowest part of hell. There are still people of course who put forward something like that today without biblical support. But that I think is what is in view here.

And then in verses 23 and 24, we look at this distinguishing factor. Verse 23. He said to them, you are from below. I am from above. You are of this world. I am not of this world. So, here's a verse about origins and destiny, right? Jesus says you all are from below. Now he doesn't mean the underworld. He's simply talking about the fact they're from the fallen world. They're a part of the fallen world system. He is from above. He's from heaven. Jesus repeatedly talks about the fact that he's from above, that he has been sent by the father. It's a refrain all through John's gospel.

We start off as being a part of the world. We start off in life as being a part of this fallen world that Jesus describes here. But in John 3 when he talks about being born again, he also talks about the fact that we're born then from above. And so there's this change in destination, isn't there? A change in our destiny. And these two then are always in scripture in conflict and contrast with each other. We're born into this world system and we're a part of the world. When we come to Christ and we embrace the gospel, we're then born from above. But we're still living in the world and the pull and the enticement of the world is there for us every day. That's why Jesus says in John 17, you need to know that just as the world has hated me, they're going to hate you. You live as a Christ follower, you speak truth however graciously you speak it, you're going to be hated by the world. That's why when we go on into Romans 12, Paul says don't be conformed to the world. That's why he says in Colossians 3 to set your affection on things above, not on things below, not on things of the earth. That's why James says in the fourth chapter don't you know that to be a friend of the world is to be an enemy of God. 1 John 2. Love not the world neither the things that are in

the world. What did Paul say of Demas? He loved the world. He loved the world more than he loved Christ. This is where we live every day, isn't it? Jesus is saying the way that you live is to reflect that you're from above. The world is what you used to be committed to. The world was your original origin, but now your destination has changed, so our life has changed.

Here's the crucial point. Verse 24. I told you that you would die in your sins for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins. So what is it that you believe? What you believe is going to change everything, isn't it? Now you notice that we go from the singular to the plural. Did you catch that? I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins. Verse 21. It was singular. It was our human condition, our nature. Now it is plural. It is sins. The expression of our fallen sin nature is what it is. Sins. It is sins. It is expressed when Paul says the deeds of the flesh are these, and then he lists off all these terrible things that we don't want to have anything to do with in our life. That is what he's saying. Your old nature, your sin nature wants to express itself in certain behaviors. That's what Jesus is referencing here.

And so, we have to move from unbelief to belief, don't we? Unbelief to belief. Look at that word right in the middle of that 24th verse. Unless. That's the word you circle in verse 24, isn't it? It is the word that is like the line of demarcation. There are only two possibilities. You die in your sin. You die in your sins. You die in faith. You believe. I said you would die in your sins for unless you believe... and the word believe, take note, is in the aorist tense, which is looking at a point in time. Your testimony, your story, and it may be a wonderful one, that begins like this. I was born into a Christian home. There's no greater blessing than that. That can set the trajectory of your life in a different way than it would otherwise have been, right? That's true of many of you who were born into a Christian home. but your testimony dare not continue to simply be I was born into a Christian home therefore I am going to heaven. That's not the way it works. Jesus says you must believe.

There's a point in time. Now if you're like me, you don't even have the opportunity to know exactly when that was, but that's not the determinative thing. I know that there was some point. I don't know when, but sometime as a child or a young teenager I trusted

Christ as my Savior. If you know the day and the time, that's awesome. That's great. But what Jesus is saying is there has to have been a point when the gospel became clear to you and you understood it. You believed it for yourself, not because your mom and dad believed it, not because your grandparents believed it, but because you believed it. And when you believe that he says it changes your destiny. It changes your life. Otherwise, if you don't, you will die in your sins.

And what am I to believe? Look what he says. Unless you believe that I am he, you will die in your sins. There it is again. *Ego eimi*. How many times have we seen this? This isn't one of the seven "I am" statements, but he does say it again. The same phrase. *ego eimi*. I am. It takes us right back to how John started his gospel. Verse 1 chapter 1. In the beginning was the word. In the beginning was Jesus and Jesus was with God and Jesus was God. You have to believe, Jesus says, that I am the self-existent one. You have to believe that I am the one who is very God of very God. I am co-equal with God. I was there in the beginning when all of this started. That's what John claims. That's what Jesus claims.

We've talked repeatedly about how it takes us back to Exodus 3:14 when Jehovah God said to Moses, I am who I am. And that certainly is true here as well. But I think it's possible that Jesus, in the minds of these religious leaders who know their Old Testament scriptures and who know the truth of the Messiah that is to come, I think Jesus might very well have had in his mind the statement of Isaiah chapter 41 in verse 4. Who has performed and done this calling to generations from the beginning. I the Lord, the first and the last. I am he. Jesus is just taking us back to the book of Isaiah. Then in chapter 43 and verse 10 the same similar statement. You are my witnesses, declares the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe and understand that I am he. What's Jesus doing? He's claiming to be God. What do you have to believe to be transferred from darkness into light? What do you have to believe? You have to believe that Jesus is who he claims to be. You have to believe that Jesus is the Son of God. You have to believe that Jesus is the sent one. You have to believe that when he died on the cross he died for your sins. You have to believe that what he did was all that needed to be done. That's what he's saying here – that he is in fact very God of very God.

Now look. This is the culmination, the blindness on display. Verses 25 through 30. It begins the beginning of verse 25 with the question: So they said to him, who are you? Now you just read that in that English statement – who are you? well, that's a very good follow-up question. Just a nice innocent statement. Who are you? No, that's not it at all. The way this verb, this phrase is constructed is a question of mockery. It's a question in which they're really looking at Jesus with a sense of sarcasm. And here's how we would say it to somebody today. We've all said this, I'm sure, and we've all heard it said, who do you think you are, right? How many parents would confess right now they have said that multiple times to their children? Who do you think you are, right? It's a statement of calling into question something significant, isn't it? That's what they're doing here. Who do you think you are to say these kinds of things? Who do you think you are to lay claim to Isaiah 41, Isaiah 43, that you are the I am? That is absurd. You're just a man. That's their response.

His reply in verse 25. So, they said to him, who are you? Jesus said to them, just what I have been telling you from the beginning. I have much to say about you and much to judge, but he who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him. They did not understand that he had been speaking to them about the Father. I mean, verse 27, it just kind of stands as an astonishing statement. It's 1 Corinthians 2:14, the natural man does not understand the things of God, neither can he know them, because they're spiritually discerned. He's done all these things right before them. Their problem is not a lack of information. Their problem is not a lack of revelation. Their problem is simply that they will not believe.

And John tells us they will not believe for two reasons. They will not believe, first of all, because Jesus is the light, and they love darkness. Now that's a hard word, but it is what the Bible says. And you and I, even as Christ followers, experience it at times. When we want to do something that we know we shouldn't do, we don't want the world to know. We don't want the light to shine. We don't want to open God's Word to see what he says to us. We want to do what we want to do. And that's exactly the heart and the condition of every person apart from Christ. We prefer darkness to light.

The second reason John says they do not believe is because they are committed to a religion of self-righteousness. They are committed to a religion of self-righteousness. And that is really every other world system. That is literally every other religion in the world than Christianity by grace and faith alone in Christ. Because everybody is counting on their self-righteousness. They don't need a savior. They can do it themselves, and that is clearly what Jesus is speaking of here.

Now look at the climactic event in verses 28 through 30. We'll just look at these three things one at a time. Verse 28, 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. There is this lifting up language. This lifting up language in John's Gospel sounds like a glorious event, doesn't it? To be lifted up. And of course, if you're only thinking about the ascension, it is that. And it is for us. This lifting up of Jesus is a glorious thing. It's glorious for us, but it took Jesus on the pathway to the cross and being the sin bearer for the world. And so, glorious for us, incredibly, incredibly difficult for our Lord, right? The whole scope of redemption is captured in that phrase, lifting up. Remember, John spoke of it earlier. Jesus said, if I be lifted up, I will draw all men unto myself. And that's exactly what he speaks of here.

Verse 29, and he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him. For I always do the things that are pleasing to him. What an incredible statement. What an amazing life verse. This is Jesus's life verse. This is Psalm 40 and verse 8. I've said it a hundred times. Jesus's life verse, I have come to do your will, O God, my Father. This should be our goal as Christ followers. This should be every one of our life verses. What would it be like if we set out every day and we said, I want to follow the truth of verse 29. I want to be said of me, I always do the things that are pleasing to you, Father. I mean, it would change this church. It would change your family. It would change your marriage. It would change your parenting. It would change the way you see your parents. It would change everything about our life. If we were that fully devoted to the Lordship of Christ in every area of our life so that we could say, I want to live in a way that pleases you.

And then verse 30, as he was saying these things, many believed in him. And we're going to pick up there next time, Lord willing, because that verse needs further explanation in light of what comes.

But what do we take away? Embrace Christ, welcome Christ, and let the gospel permeate every area of your life. Now, of course, for that to be true, for that to happen, we have to first of all believe, don't we? We have to believe what we just talked about. You have to understand that apart from Christ, you're lost. Apart from Christ, if you were to die, you would die in your sin and you would go to hell, separated from God for all of eternity. God doesn't want that. God's not willing that any should perish. The message of the gospel is for everybody in this room and beyond. God's heart is for you to trust him and him alone for the forgiveness of sin. Stop trusting yourself. Stop trusting your works and trust in Christ alone.

And then for us as Christ followers, for those of us who are fully devoted followers of Christ, what does it look like to live our life every day, to embrace Christ, to welcome Christ, to let the gospel permeate every area of our life? On the most fundamental, simple level, it means you're in this book every day. You're wanting to walk in the light because the world is a dark world and it will engulf you if you don't walk in the light of the Word. You're praying every day for God to open that word and for God to stir your heart and for God to cause you to be even more passionately in love with him and with those in your life, right? You're walking in fellowship with other believers. You're opening your life to others. You're putting yourself in a setting like this and you're putting yourself in a setting where there's much smaller, where you can interact and encourage and build each other up. You're using your gifts. You're serving. You're engaged. All of that is a part of embracing Christ, welcoming Christ, letting the gospel permeate your life.

Let's pray. Father God, thank you for Jesus. Thank you for this incredible life that we get to look at, that we get to contemplate, that we get to focus on and hopefully, Father, that we get to model and follow after. Lord, I pray that as your people, we will welcome Christ, that we will run from the world and the things of the world and we will run to you, Jesus. We'll run to your word, and we will ask your Spirit to bring conviction and clarity and

truth into our lives. And Father, even as we close, I pray if there's someone here this morning that has never trusted Jesus as their Savior, that their destiny will be changed forever. Right now in these closing moments, as they say to you, I believe that your Son Jesus died on the cross for me, and I trust him and him alone for the forgiveness of sin and the gift of eternal life. We pray in Jesus's name. Amen.