

This year marks an important anniversary in the history of food. It's the 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the nationwide advent of the McDonalds Quarter-pounder. Americans have loved them ever since. In the 80s A&W tried to capitalize on the success of the large burger and take a bite out of McD's market share with a big burger of their own: a 1/3 pounder = more meat for the same price. Better value! And it even tasted better, according to the consistent reports coming back from blind taste tests. Problem: American's refused to buy it. A&W began to survey consumers and discovered the reason: Americans stink at fractions. Alfred Taubman, A&W's owner at the time, wrote later:

More than half of the participants in the Yankelovich focus groups questioned the price of our burger. "Why," they asked, "should we pay the same amount for a third of a pound of meat as we do for a quarter-pound of meat at McDonald's? You're overcharging us." Honestly. People thought a third of a pound was less than a quarter of a pound. After all, three is less than four!

The verdict was in, and A&W recalibrated their advertising. A classic example of how the customer is always right, even when he's wrong because he can't do 2<sup>nd</sup> grade math.

There's a single point of that story that corresponds to our text in John this morning—there was nothing wrong with the product; the real problem was in the people. It's what Jesus is dealing with in our text today—a group of people (just like us, btw) who think the problem is in God when all the while it's clearly in them. But unlike A&W, Jesus doesn't change His message or give them what they want. He can't. He's not selling hamburgers; He's dealing with issues of life and death.

This story is all the more important because it is Jesus' final public discourse in John. Our text ends with Jesus returning to the scene of His baptism at the Jordan (vv40-42) – a literary signal that His ministry has come full circle and is nearing its conclusion. A shift takes place after this. Even though we are less than halfway through the book, Jesus' public actions from this point are very limited. Much of what follows is His private discourse with the disciples. Furthermore, what little He does in public rapidly leads to His demise – i.e., raising Lazarus is the last

straw. It galvanizes the opposition and takes Him directly to the cross.

So this is it—Jesus' final presentation of Himself to the public. As you might expect, it is a complete disclosure of who He is as the Messiah and the Son of God. Goal is always the same in this gospel:

**John 20:31** ...these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Once again, we're confronted with who Jesus is (Messiah & Son of God), presented with an incredible offer (life, here presented as security in His hand forever and access to the living God), if we will believe.

As always happens in this gospel, the story and the teaching it contains for our lives doesn't unfold like you'd expect. (not that straightforward)

- What they want – a plain answer
- Why He won't give it to them – they need something else
- What He offers instead

### What They Want

**vv22-24** *At that time the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem. It was winter,<sup>23</sup> and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon. <sup>24</sup> So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly."*

What they want is obvious: "Tell us plainly if you are the Christ." – i.e., God's anointed one, Israel's promised King, the Messiah. From a certain perspective, their request is reasonable: nowhere had Jesus come right out and said to these Jews in Jerusalem: "I am the Messiah" or "I am God Himself, the Second Person of the Trinity, in human flesh."

This is the crucial question that stands between life and death in this gospel—who is Jesus? Once you figure out who He is (Messiah, Son of God), how you should respond becomes obvious.

ILLUS: in the years before more modern navigation and communication technology... a battleship sailing in heavy weather, patchy fog, captain was on the bridge keeping an eye on things. Word came back from a lookout: "Light bearing on starboard bow"—something was approaching on a collision course with their ship. CAPTAIN: "Signal that ship: Change course 20 degrees." REPLY: "Advisable for you to change course twenty degrees." CAPTAIN: "Send: I'm a captain, change course twenty

degrees." REPLY: "I'm a seaman second-class. You had better change course twenty degrees." CAPTAIN (furious): "I am a battleship. Change course twenty degrees." REPLY: "I'm a lighthouse." We changed course.

Once you understand who you're dealing with, your response becomes obvious. If you are truly convinced Jesus is God and Messiah (Savior), you will worship Him, love Him, live for Him, obey Him, surrender yourself to Him. If you're not living that way, you don't really believe who He is—which is precisely their problem:

**v25:** *Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe."*

No, Jesus hasn't come right out and stated it directly. Given the how politicized their view of the Messiah had become, it's no surprise that Jesus was hesitant to make an explicit, public declaration of His identity so far. Yet even if He would have made an emphatic statement, they would not have believed Him (cf. v25).

Yet He has clearly identified Himself through His teaching, His works, and the careful way He fulfills the OT. It's the same thing He does in this text. Notice again the setting:

**v22** *At that time the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem. It was winter...*

Friends, one of the keys to nourishing Bible reading is not *knowing more*, it's *noticing more*. There's a scene change here from the previous 3 chapters. The Holy Spirit wants us to know it is the Feast of Dedication. In fact, you probably know the Feast of Dedication by another name, a festival Jewish people still observe today—i.e., Hanukkah (cf. NLT) = "Dedication."

This festival is not ordained in the OT; rather, it commemorated an event that took place during the 400-year span between the close of the OT and the ministry of Jesus. During that period, Alexander the Great conquered the Mediterranean world, died young, and passed the kingdom to his successors. Hundreds of years of warring for control followed, with little pieces of the empire passing from one ruler or family to the next. One of these, Antiochus Epiphanes was a blasphemous and violent man who persecuted the Jews without mercy. For about 10 years he ruled in Judea, outlawing circumcision, prohibiting the daily sacrifice, setting up an idol to Zeus in the temple,

and even offering a pig on the altar. His actions so provoked orthodox Jews that they revolted and eventually succeeded in expelling Antiochus's army from Jerusalem—the last great liberation of the Jews from a hostile power. To celebrate, they held an 8-day festival—temple cleansed, new altar built and dedicated, new temple instruments made. The Jewish liberator, Judas Maccabeus, established it as a perpetual feast which Jews observed right through the time of Jesus and still observe today—the Feast of Dedication, consecration of the temple, restoration of the Holy Place and the Jews' access to God.

It has everything to do with what follows. The Jews ask for the truth about Jesus, plainly told. If they had eyes to see and hearts to grasp, His answer couldn't be more plain. But first, Jesus has to do some work on them. The problem isn't in Him—it's in them.

### Why He Won't Give Them What They Want

Short answer: The problem is in them, not Him! Specifically, He names 3 problems in them that, if they would address any one of these, their questions about Him would be answered. They need to: believe, admit, consider.

1. believe what they've already seen

**v25** *Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me,"*

What works? Water to wine (2:11 "manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in him") / healing nobleman's son (4:53 "he himself believed and all his household") / healing lame man (5:1-9) / feeding 5,000 (6:1-15) / walking on water (6:16-21) / healing blind man (9:1-7).

In other words, they need to respond to the light they already have. Often this is an acid test of the heart: **what do you do with what you already know to be true about God?** You know you should obey God, be generous with your money, join a church, read the Bible. So do you? These people had a certain amount of light—the works Jesus had done—which demanded at minimum that they honor this man and listen carefully to His teaching.

It's a point Jesus has made over and over:

**7:17** *If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority.*

**8:31-32** *If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples AND you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.*

IF you commit yourself to Jesus, THEN you will know the truth. We don't need more truth; we need to commit to the truth we already have. **We come to know the truth, not by answering our questions or finding 100% certainty but by abandoning ourselves to Him.** This points out a deeper problem with these people—it's not just that they don't believe. There's something else more sinister...

## 2. Admit their need before God

**vv26-7** *...but you do not believe because you are not part of my flock. <sup>27</sup> My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.*

Why don't they believe based on these many powerful works? Because they are not of His flock.

Notice carefully the logic of the sentence: "You do not believe BECAUSE you are not of my flock." If we turn this statement around, it would read the way most people understand causation here: "You are not of my flock because you don't believe." The believing comes first and then God puts you in His flock. But no, Jesus says it's the other way around. True sheep believe. Sheep status comes first; belief comes naturally.

QUESTION: Why does Jesus charge them with wrongdoing in their unbelief, if their unbelief is due to the fact that they are not (previously, by God's doing) part of His flock? ANSWER: Because their unbelief is always culpable. **They do not want to believe because they do not think they need what He is offering.** They do not want to be saved from sin, rescued from wrath, brought near to God. They want someone to affirm their good standing and special privilege before God. They are Jews, children of Abraham, possessors of the Law, people in covenant with God. They are, in their view, all set.

God is not turning them away against their own will. They are not trying to believe and He is just gleefully rubbing His hands saying, "Sorry, I haven't turned you into sheep and let you hear Jesus' voice!"

ILLUS: Pharaoh is the classic example—God hardened his heart, but in doing so God acted perfectly in line with Pharaoh's own will in the

matter. We want to know who was ultimately responsible—God or Pharaoh? And the Bible says, "Yes!"

Why do I stress this? It highlights our need for utter humility. The greatest enemy to faith is not uncertainty about Jesus, questions about the Bible, busyness in our schedule; **the greatest enemy to saving faith is pride.** We don't really think we need what Jesus is offering.

And look at what He is offering:

**vv28** *I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.*

Verse 27 Jesus offers this awesome little tidbit: "My sheep hear my voice and I know them." Now He expands upon that. Not only does He know His sheep, but He also keeps them. Forever. In His hand. **The hand that hung the galaxies, the hand what was pinned to the cross, is wrapped even now around you and will never let you go. You are held by a power that no human force can overcome.** How can we be sure?

**vv29-30** *My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. <sup>30</sup> I and the Father are one.*

The true power behind Jesus is the Father. Sheep in Jesus' hand (v28) are simultaneously in the Father's hand (v29). Just in case they missed the logical implication, Jesus draws it out for them: "My hand and God's hand simultaneously encompass the same people. How? He and I are inseparable. We are one."

Well, this claim really stirs them up:

**vv31-33** *The Jews picked up stones again to stone him. <sup>32</sup> Jesus answered them, "I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?" <sup>33</sup> 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."*

One preacher I heard (M. Minnick) said this is the greatest statement of Jesus' identity out of the mouth of a lost person in the Bible: "You are a man, and you claim to be God." Jesus' reply states their third problem, the third thing they could do to know the truth:

## 3. Think more carefully about the Scriptures

**vv34-36** *Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your Law, 'I said, you are gods'? <sup>35</sup> If he called them gods to whom the word of God came- and Scripture cannot be broken- <sup>36</sup> do you say of him whom the Father*

*consecrated and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'?*

Jesus quotes Psalm 82:6, a rebuke from God of Israel's judges for injustice (vv2-4) and a call for God to take up that duty and judge the earth Himself. Rendering judgment is, of course, a duty that ultimately belongs to God, which is why He calls them "gods" in this context: "You are standing in the place of God, representing Him. You are 'gods' in that sense. You'd better act like it!"

When you understand that, Jesus' point becomes more plain: this Scripture (Ps 82:6) proves that the word "god" can be legitimately applied to someone other than God Himself. So why do they object when Jesus applies it to Himself? It's not an argument that proves He is God anymore than Psalm 82 was literally identifying these men as God. Jesus is simply giving them pause, slowing them down, silencing them for a moment so He can return to the testimony of His works (v37):  
*vv37-8 If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; <sup>38</sup> 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.*

What is Jesus doing? He's drawing their attention to the Bible and their superficial reading of it. Notice that phrase: "Scripture cannot be broken." He's affirming the complete authority and inerrancy of every word of the Bible. Jesus bases His whole argument on 1 word in Psalm 82:6: "gods." He follows that up with a parenthetical assertion "The Scripture cannot be broken," and they do not disagree with Him. At least in Jesus' view, not a single word of the Bible can be altered, unfulfilled, disregarded. ***Often the answer to our unbelief would be found in the Bible, if we would read more carefully and reverently.***

## What Jesus Offers Instead

We've already touched on v28: eternal life, perfect security in the Father's hand. Now He identifies Himself and offers something else:  
*v38 ...do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'?* <sup>37</sup> *If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; <sup>38</sup> 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."*

This is a profound point to make in the context of the Feast of Dedication. Jesus calls Himself "the one the Father consecrated." Jesus is claiming, "I am what Hanukkah is all about. Not dedicated by you or any great historical man. Consecrated by God Himself for this purpose." The most important act of dedication, setting something apart for God's exclusive use, the really critical "Hanukkah" was when the Father set aside the Son for His saving mission and sent Him into the world to do it.

At Hanukkah the Jews rebuilt the altar and consecrated the temple. Jesus is saying: "I am the dedicated place, the Holy Place, the temple, the altar. I am the place where God Himself dwells, the place you meet God, the means by which your sins are forgiven and you draw near to Him. Nobody is ever going to defile the temple or the altar again!"

That's exactly what He says in v38: "the Father is in me and I am in the Father." He's not just claiming to be God; He's claiming to be the fulfillment of this whole Feast of Dedication.

Two problems in Parker that keep people from believing:

1. Some believe they are too bad (suicide rate) – Jesus is the dedicated, consecrated One. Come through Him. Your sin cannot overcome His grace!
2. Some (most?) believe that are too good.

ILLUS: Devin's graduation. Brilliant spectacle, celebratory, fun, sharp, proud. Typical Parker (4.4 GPA). But not a single use of the word "grace" (except for a song, using it negatively, *Little Women*, Broadway: "I may be small but I've got giant plans / To shine as brightly as the sun / I will blaze until I find my time and place / I will be fearless, / Surrendering modesty and grace / I will not disappear without a trace / I'll shout and start a riot / Be anything but quiet / I'll be Astonishing"). It was all pure merit. Pure personal achievement. Every award and honor were for performance. It was wonderful! And it was devastating, if we carry that attitude into our daily lives. Why would people that good need God? Jesus came to save us from our worst moments... and our best. From our badness and our goodness.

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