

John, Part 35: The Great Divide

John 8:21 ESV So (Jesus) 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.” **22** So the Jews said, “Will he kill himself, since he says, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come’?” **23** He said to them, “You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. **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.” **25** So they said to him, “Who are you?” Jesus said to them, “Just what I have been telling you from the beginning. **26** 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.” **27** They did not understand that he had been speaking to them about the Father.

- I. This morning I want to show you how Jesus Christ represents himself as the **ultimate chasm**, dividing humanity.
 - A. If you were to list the things that divide us, what would make your list? Politics? Religion? Race? Socio-economic status? I knew a man who lived in Lubbock (deep in Red Raider country!), but he would become terribly offended if you said anything unkind about his Texas Longhorns! And it wasn't a matter of good-natured ribbing; he would seriously carry a real grudge over it!
 1. All of us are aware of more serious divisions stretched for centuries across human history. As believers, we are grieved by this and long for the day when the redeemed people of God will be gathered together in perfect unity, under the banner of Amazing Grace.
 2. But this morning we are not concerned with the very real and bright reality of the **coming** fullness of God's kingdom; rather with the turbulence of our **present existence** as inhabitants of a fallen planet, and it's ultimate cause.
 - B. Some of you might have recoiled at my initial statement that “Jesus Christ is the ultimate chasm, dividing the human race”. You may protest that it shouldn't be that way; and truthfully, I would be compelled to agree.
 1. But as you know, things often **are** the way they **shouldn't be!** No child should ever be neglected or abused, but they are. No innocent person should be punished, but they are. No criminal should go free, but they do.
 2. How wonderful if every person were convinced of the goodness of Christ, forsaking the destruction of sin forever! Yet there are 1,000 ways that people shut their ears to the sweet melody of the gospel; and 1,000 more that they give in to the seducing voice of the world, the flesh, and the devil.
 - C. Instead of running **to** Jesus, the entire world has an ingrained response to him; though it is varied in it's expression. That response is **always** to resist him.
 1. Some resist by sleepily ignoring him, others resist by claiming they don't need him, believing they have accomplished everything they suppose he desires through religious activities and achievements.
 2. Still others resist him by mockery and blasphemy; while some run from him thinking that they can escape judgement. Some seek after other gods and

religious philosophies; while pay constant tribute to the idols of greed and materialism, lust and pride, resisting the Savior.

- D. So while it **would** be great if the whole creation acknowledged “what a friend we have in Jesus”, the fact remains that we’ve **all** decided in favor of other things. Every man, woman, boy and girl, ever born or to be born, comes into life already taking a position to **resist God**. Theologians call this “total depravity”.
1. **Romans 3:10 ESV** as it is written: **“None is righteous, no, not one; 11 no one understands; no one seeks for God. 12 All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.” 13** “Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.” “The venom of asps is under their lips.” **14** “Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.” **15** “Their feet are swift to shed blood; **16** in their paths are ruin and misery, **17** and the way of peace they have not known.” **18** **“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”**
 2. A few short verses later, in verse 23, Paul reminds that “**all** have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God”. John obviously agrees with this...
 3. **John 1:9 ESV** The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. **10** He was in the world, and the world was made through him, **yet the world did not know him.**
 4. Jesus had declared himself to be “the Light of the World”. This scripture in John 1 adds even greater weight to what we are suggesting; that Jesus does not unify humanity, but divides it; “the world did not know him.”
- II. So this is the world that Jesus was born into at Bethlehem. A world that he would give every ounce of himself -blood, sweat, and tears- to serve and redeem, but a world that would still reject him nonetheless. And it is among people in this “God-resisting” posture that he taught and ministered during his earthly ministry.
- A. He even found this resistance prevalent among his chosen people, the Jews, who whom he first made himself known; offering his sweet salvation.
1. This is why John goes on to say **John 1:11 ESV** He came to **his own**, and **his own people did not receive him**. This is what we are finding in this discussion between Jesus and the Jewish leaders in the Temple at the close of the Feast of Tabernacles. It continues in our text today.
 2. Jesus has just told the irate Pharisees that (a) everything he says is backed up by the witness of God the Father, and (b) this fact gives him the right to make authoritative judgements. This doesn’t help Jesus’ standing with them!
- B. **John 8:21 ESV** 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.”
1. When it says, “he said to them **again**”, it is referring back to chapter 7, where he had said something similar. “I will be with you a little longer, and then I am going to him who sent me. You will seek me and you will not find me. Where I am you cannot come.” (John 7:33-34)
 - a) When Jesus had said this to them before, their assumption was that he would relocate; taking his ministry to the Jews that had been dispersed over the years in Babylonia, Egypt, or Syria.

- b) They were puzzled by Jesus statement that they **could not** be where he was! Where could that possibly be? They could travel across land and sea to confront his alleged heresies if they so desired!
 - 2. But his point was different than what they heard. He would soon be returning to the Father's side at the completion of his mission, so it is with an ominous and final note that Jesus adds, "**Where I am you cannot come**".
- C. But now Jesus repeats this warning, but instead of simply **barring** them from where he will be, he becomes way more pointed in his statement of judgement: "**I am going away, and you will seek me, and you will die in your sin**".
 - 1. This is the first place in our text where we see this "great divide" I referred to earlier. Jesus removes any possibility of neutrality. He has no interest in being their "great teacher", or the poster child for some peace and harmony movement, or a magic genie who regularly fulfills every demand. Rather, He is Lord. He is the Truth. He is the Savior (on his terms), and **he is God!**
 - 2. So in a culture that loves options and the sense of control that comes with many choices, Jesus provides two: believe or perish. **John 3:18b ESV** "**whoever does not believe is condemned already**" - you will die in your sin.
- D. In chapter 7 the Pharisees falsely assumed that Jesus intention was to "get out of Dodge" by going to the dispersed Jews; but now, because Jesus mentions dying, they make a fantastic leap. **John 8:22 ESV** So the Jews said, "**Will he kill himself, since he says, 'Where I am going, you cannot come'?**"
 - 1. Understand their thought process: If Christ was insisting that he knew the time of his departure, and if this meant his physical death, then surely this indicated suicidal intent! "The time of a man's death is in the Lord's hand!" they reasoned" If he's certain of his, he must be planning to kill himself!"
 - a) But there's more to it than even that - According to Josephus, the prevailing rabbinic attitude of the day was that people who commit suicide buy a one-way ticket to hell! Maybe, they thought, Jesus had resigned himself to the fact that there was no way out of the mess he'd made for himself by making these Messianic claims and rousing the anger of the leaders! He would end it all and go to punishment in Hades!
 - b) But, arrogantly, they were sure he was right about one thing! They **could not** follow him into hell! They were the Pharisees! The San Hedrin! The cream of Israel's crop! They wore long robes and made long prayers and were called "teacher" and "father" by the common riff-raff!
 - 2. See how subtle and deceitful religion is? They thought because they were religiously impeccable, that they would ascend into Paradise with the applause of Heaven when they died, while Christ, the precious Son who carried on his royal shoulders the very approval and witness of God, his Father, would descend into hell! What delusion and self-righteousness!
 - a) Here also we see the "great divide"! Although they are deceived about Christ's eternal destination, they are **sure** that they **won't** be with Jesus wherever he is...and they are sure they don't want to be!
 - b) How different was the condemned thief that was crucified next to Christ! He cried out to him at the last minute, "Lord, remember me when you

come into your kingdom.” Christ replied, “I assure you, **TODAY** you will be with me in paradise!” He believed and lived. Yet the prim and proper Pharisees have a curse pronounced, “You will die in your sins.”

3. Some of us will try so hard to be good little Pharisees in life, earning our way in, only to find ourselves torn by evil spirits on the last day. Better to be an honest thief who cries out for mercy! It is a mercy that will not be denied!

III. **John 8:23 ESV** He said to them, “You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. **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.”

A. So Jesus’ response to this bizarre speculation on theirs is to remind them that there is something elementally different between them. This is more evidence of the “great divide”. Who is Heavenly? Who is Earthly? Who is from above? Who is from below?

1. As we indicated earlier, there is no one who is inherently “heavenly” or “from above”. I don’t care how precious your baby is, how sweet your grandma was, how philanthropic you are, or how talented and good-looking your pastor is, scripture is clear, “**None is righteous; no, not one**”.
2. Only Christ is heavenly. Only Christ is from above. We are dead in our sins; earthly, and from below. So when we become believers, we’re told...

B. **Colossians 3:5 ESV** Put to death therefore **what is earthly in you**: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. **6** On account of these the wrath of God is coming.

1. Paul instructs us, if we are in Christ, to show no mercy to any earthly relics in ourselves...another indication of a “great divide”! The worldly person embraces **all** the worldly aspects of their lives. They make excuses and justify them. But someone who has been converted by hearing the gospel by the power of the Holy Spirit **hates** their sin and isn’t satisfied until it gurgles it’s last breath, even if it means a violent, painful separation for our flesh.

2. **1 Corinthians 3:3 NIV** You are **still worldly**. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans?

a) How do we know we’re “still worldly”? Over the years, people have come to me saying “I’m really struggling with pornography.” After I ask them what that means, I often must say, “Let’s realign our terms. You’re not **struggling**. You’re getting your butt kicked. One who is “struggling” confesses, asks for help, and tries to rid his world of easy temptation. You’re not struggling. You’re waving the white flag of surrender.”

b) Struggling and wrestling with sin are good and noble. Why? Because victory is **guaranteed**. **James 4:7 ESV** **Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.**

c) Real struggle with sin demonstrates how much we treasure the savior; but surrender indicates that we don’t hate our sin enough to fight for him.

C. But Jesus not only points out to the Pharisees precarious position because of worldliness, but he dives deep to the very root cause of their damnation. **John**

8:24 ESV “I told you that you would die in your sins, **for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins.**”

1. “whoever does not believe is condemned **already**”. Theirs was not a problem of evidence, or theology, or culture. It was a problem of unbelief.
 2. Those in this world (and in this room) who will perish will do so, not because they never got enough illumination or information about God, but because they refused to walk in the light they had been given by God.
- D. Jesus is also very specific about what they are to believe! “unless you believe **that I am he** you will die in your sins”. There are many people who will claim to believe in God, only to find themselves cast into hell on the last day.
1. **James 2:19 ESV** You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! Please listen carefully! It is not enough to simply believe in God like a child believes in Santa Claus or the Tooth Fairy!
 2. Biblical belief always implies obedience. You cannot say you believe in one whom you are unwilling to obey!
- E. Jesus is saying so much more to them than merely, “You guys gotta believe that I am the messiah, or that God chose and sent me.” When he says, “unless you believe **that I am he**” the word “he” is not found in the original greek. He is literally saying “unless you believe that I AM (ego eimi), you will die in your sins”.
1. We have seen this before, notably when Christ was walking on the water. He told his frightened disciples, “I AM! Do not be afraid!” And we’ll see it again.
 2. Once more Jesus is clearly identifying himself with the Great I AM (The Triune, eternal, self-existing God of Exodus 3), Yahweh himself. While we, with our western minds and English translations of the Bible might have missed what Jesus has said, the Pharisees absolutely did not!
- IV. **John 8:25 ESV** So they said to him, “**Who are you?**” Jesus said to them, “Just what I have been telling you from the beginning. **26** 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.” **27** They did not understand that he had been speaking to them about the Father.
- A. They are stunned by Jesus’ insistence that they believe (both in their hearts and in their actions) that he, the blue-collar, uneducated, homeless healer standing before them is Yahweh, the Great I AM. This prompts an obvious question in their skeptical, scorn-filled hearts. “Who are you?”
- B. Jesus, (I’m certain with a sigh) says, “Guys, nothings changed since the very beginning of our conversations.”
1. “I told you that I am the true temple of God (2:19). I told you that I am the Father’s Son, working by his side from the farthest reaches of eternity past (5:17). I told you that I am the one who gives life to whom I will, and the one to whom all judgement has been entrusted (5:21-22). I told you that I am the one Moses wrote about (5:46).”
 2. “I told you that I was the bread of life, the true manna that came down from Heaven (6:35). I told you that I am the Light of the World, giving illumination to all who would follow me (8:12).”

- C. But now Jesus says he has given them enough testimony and proof. Now he'll talk **about them**, saying, **"I have much to say about you and much to judge"**.
1. This is not what you want Jesus to say when he talks to you. You want him to say, "Your sins are forgiven" or "Your faith has made you whole" but never "I have much to judge".
 2. Had they been wise and honest, they would have fallen on their face before him, crying out for mercy!
 - a) But that is not what happened. The debating with Jesus and the harassment of Jesus will continue throughout the book of John, so that, in the words of King David:
 - b) **Psalm 51:4b ESV** "...you (God) may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment." Their judgement is coming, and it will be flawless. It will be perfect, just, and final. They will die in their sins.
- D. Jesus next reaffirms what he said in our text last week: that the One who sent him and testifies of him -God the Father- is true; and that Jesus is his faithful and accurate messenger.
1. But the hardened hearts standing before him have no clue who that he even is speaking of the Father. Why? There is a "great divide" between them and Christ!
 2. Earlier I read you the passage from Romans 3 that says, "None is righteous, no, not one" in order to establish scripturally this concept of the "great divide". I understand that this might have been discouraging for some of you. Others might not have cared.
 - a) I will not concern myself with those of you who don't care. If God's holy word can't convict you and your hearts impenetrable by the Holy Spirit, what hope do I have of convincing you of your need of Jesus? You may go right back to sleep.
 - b) But for those of you who are concerned about their souls, who want to be made right with God; yet wonder if there is any hope in the light of Romans 3, I will leave you with a verse I started earlier from John 1.
- V. **John 1:10 ESV** (Jesus) was in the world, and the world was made through him, **yet the world did not know him. 11** He came to his own, and his own people **did not receive him. 12** But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, **he gave the right to become children of God, 13** who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, **but of God.**
- A. If there is any impulse in your heart this morning to come to Jesus; if there is any desire to know that you are saved and that you are his, that means you are being awakened right now from spiritual death by the Holy Spirit!
 - B. Don't hesitate! Receive him! Believe on his name! If you do, a promise is attached to this passage; a glorious one! **He will give you the right to become a child of God!**
 - C. But, don't be deceived! It won't be because of your goodness or efforts! You will be born into the kingdom by the grace and will of God.