

## John, Part 36: "Jesus Lifted Up"

**John 8:28 ESV** 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. **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." **30** As he was saying these things, many believed in him.

- I. This morning, as we unpack this portion of John's gospel, I want to consider most of all Jesus' statement to the Pharisees where he says, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man". There are three times in this book where the phrase "lifted up" is used in order to vividly portray Christ's mission to a given audience. Each one of them is unique, and yet with similarities. We will take a look at all three of them.
  - A. But before we begin, let me remind you that Jesus is continuing his conversation / dispute with the Jewish leaders. The setting is the Temple court., and the occasion is most likely the final day of the Feast of Tabernacles.
    1. They have disputed about Jesus' identity. Is he, or is he not, the messiah? Can he be? Does he have the credentials to claim that title?
    2. They also want to know where he is from. Not only is it important to know if he was born in Bethlehem or Nazareth, in order to see if he fulfills what is written about the messiah in the scriptures; but Jesus has been stating clearly that he is not even of earthly origin! Can this be possible?
    3. They also want to know if there is any testimony besides his own to corroborate his claims; even though as recently as John 5, Christ had supplied 5 confirmations (witnesses) ranging from the testimony of John the Baptist, to the writings of Moses to back up his testimony of who he was.
  - B. But in our text last week, Jesus ups the ante considerably by saying that unless these religious paragons believe that Jesus is God himself, that they would perish in their sins. **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. You'll recall that the phrase translated "I am he" is the Greek "ego eimi" (eGO-Ā-mee) which means, not "I am **he**", but "I AM"; a clear reference to the name of Yahweh God (Literally I AM that I AM from Exodus 3).
      - a) Yahweh, or "I AM" is the highest, most sacred name that God gave to Israel to identify himself. Since about the third century BC, well in advance of Jesus' day, observant Jews would not utter that name or read it out loud. They even wrote it in such a way that the vowel sounds were left purposefully unclear, making it difficult to pronounce. Instead, they would simply speak of "HaShem" or "The Name".
      - b) Jesus, in applying this name to himself, made quite a stir! He was clearly placing himself on an equal footing with the Father.
    2. And this allusion on his part was not lost on the Jews! Their next question was a clarifying one, making that obvious. "Who are you?" they asked.
- II. So Jesus begins our text today by speaking about his being "lifted up", and points to the event this represents as clear evidence that he is the Great I AM. "**When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know...**" But I'd like to leave it there momentarily and examine the two other times John uses this phrase. Both of them

are attributed to Jesus; one comes earlier in John 3, the other later in John 12. We are going to study them in this order: first mention, third, and then the second one.

A. But before we start, let's better understand the term "lifted up". It's meaning is at least two-fold.

1. First, "lifted up" is a reference to Christ's imminent crucifixion, giving stark imagery of Jesus stripped naked, nailed to a cross, and raised for all to see. Some would jeer and mock, while others wept and mourned, but there would be nothing hidden or private about Jesus' execution.
2. Secondly, there is also a reference to Christ's glorification. This means his death-defeating resurrection in a new kind of body, his glorious ascension, and his permanent enthronement as king at the right hand of the Father.
3. Don't forget that Christ could not be "lifted up" in glory without first being "lifted up" in suffering. One preceded the other. Though the devil offered him a shortcut in the desert, he insisted on doing things the Father's way.

B. **Philippians 2:8 ESV** And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (lifted up in suffering) **9** Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, **10** so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, **11** and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (lifted up in glory)

III. The first reference to Jesus being "lifted up" is in John 3, the great chapter that lays a theological foundation for everything that follows. A Jewish leader named Nicodemus has come to Jesus by night, curious about Him (Incidentally, we are told in John 7 that Nicodemus is present for the conversation in the Temple as well).

A. In John 3, Jesus tells Nicodemus that he must be "born again" in order to enter the Kingdom of God. He goes on to tell him that God has sent his own Son to redeem the world, so that whoever believes won't perish.

1. But he tells him that humanity loves the darkness, however, and because of this, those who refuse to believe in him have condemned themselves.
2. And tucked right in the middle of their talk, Christ says **John 3:14 ESV** 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.

B. This frames the "lifting up" of Christ as a **necessity**. Note that he said, "...so **must** the Son of Man be lifted up, (in order) that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."

1. Jesus is pointing back to the incident when God judged the ever-sinning people of Israel as they tromped through the desert by sending fiery serpents to bite and subsequently kill them. The people cried out to God for relief from this punishment.
2. In response, Moses was commanded by God to construct a bronze serpent and "lift it up on a pole" as the sole remedy for the people. **Numbers 21:9b ESV** And if a serpent bit anyone, he would **look** at the bronze serpent and **live**. This was not "an" option...it was "the" option! There was not an alternate pill to take or a procedure that the surgeon could perform. Only looking at the brazen serpent lifted high above them could rescue them.

C. As a righteous judgement for their sin, the people of Israel would find themselves bearing the fang marks of the serpent and condemned to die. But God, in his mercy, provided a single way of escape; one with great prophetic implications for his future redeeming work!

1. Look around you at the faces in this room. Every one of us has been bitten by that old serpent, the devil. His venom has been flowing through our bloodstream since the moment our first grandmother bit that cursed fruit.

a) But God! But God! But God, rich in mercy has lifted up for us a representative figure for all our sinning and suffering; Christ, the just and holy one, has taken our “snake bites” upon himself!

b) **1 Peter 2:24 ESV** He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.

2. But don't think for a minute that there is any other way to be free from the curse, the sting, and the penalty of your sin. The Hebrews were simply told, “Look and live!” It is no different for you and I.

a) By necessity Christ, and Christ **alone**, has been lifted up so that we might be free and forgiven, healed and delivered!

b) Any other solution to the problem of sin (whether religious effort, or unbridled worldliness and rebellion) will leave you snake-bitten and dead!

D. **Acts 4:12 ESV** And there is salvation in **no one else**, for there is **no other name** under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

IV. The next reference to Jesus being lifted up is found in John 12. I won't go far into the context this morning, since we will be studying that passage in the coming weeks. I will just tell you that Jesus has come into the final week of his life before the crucifixion. He has entered Jerusalem to the cheers of crowds waving palm branches and throwing down their cloaks for the donkey that bears Christ to tread upon. Shouts of “Hosanna!” meaning, “Lord, save us!” fill the streets.

A. But the shadow of the cross is looming heavily over him. Those who wave palm branches will soon be spitting upon him, and tearing out his beard. Their shouts of praise will be replaced by loud demands for his crucifixion.

1. Yet in the middle of this paradox, Christ once again (for the last time in John) mentions his being “lifted up”.

2. **John 12:32 ESV** And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself. **33** He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.

B. In John 3 we saw the **necessity** of Christ being “lifted up”. John 12:32 represents the **universal benefit** of Christ's being “lifted up”; namely, that by dying on the cross, Christ will “draw all people” to himself.

C. But when I say the “universal benefit”, what do I mean? Am I suggesting as some false teachers like Rob Bell, Carlton Pearson, and others have that there is no consequence to be paid for a life sin and depravity?

1. Wouldn't that be the meaning of “I will draw **all** people”? That no one will go to hell and that all people in the end will be saved regardless of the lack of humble response they made to the Lordship of Christ?

2. No. The scripture is clear. As I reminded you last week; those who don't believe are condemned already. Lost people wind up in hell. That fact, should motivate

us all, not toward spiritual smugness as the “chosen people”, but to share the truth about Jesus Christ with everyone we know!

- D. So what **does** “all people” mean? The Greek word translated “all” is “pas”. When speaking collectively, it means “some of every type”; as opposed to “every single individual”.
1. Therefore, by “universal benefit”, I mean that Christ’s death will be effective and sufficient for every **type** of person under the sun. People of every language and skin tone. People from every continent and island on the earth. People who are filthy rich and dirt poor. People who are physically strong and those who are devastated by disability. The MIT graduates and the illiterate.
  2. While some will remain in unbelief and be damned, a promise remains that people from **every segment** of humanity will join in the eternal songs of praise to the Lamb of God who has taken away the sins of the world!
  3. You must acknowledge that Christianity is not a white, black, red or yellow religion; a Jewish or gentile religion; a religion of the poor or the rich; a religion of men or women, children or the elderly! In fact, it’s not a religion at all! Christianity is the fellowship of all who have placed their trust fully in Christ alone for forgiveness of sin, and the hope of eternal life!
- E. But the text says that Christ’s mention of being “lifted up” indicated what kind of death he would die. What does that mean? On the surface it means that he would be physically lifted up on the cross, hung there for all to see.
1. But could it also mean more? Could it mean that Christ would also die a **substitutionary** type of death? One in which the guilty are pardoned and in exchange, the innocent one dies in agony?
  2. Could it mean that Christ would die a **propitiating** type of death? One in which the holy and just wrath of God toward believing sinners would be forever satisfied; never to be roused again?
  3. Could it mean that Christ would die an **atoning** type of death? One that would accomplish the final reconciliation between God and his image-bearers once and for all?
- F. Wouldn’t such a death result in unending praise from God’s newly redeemed people? Yes, Christ would be “lifted up” on the cross, but he would also forever be “lifted up” in the praises of his people for willingly dying such a death!
- G. **Isaiah 52:13 ESV** Behold, my servant (Jesus!) shall act wisely; he shall be high and **lifted up**, and shall be exalted. (glorified and praised) **14** As many were astonished at you—**his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind—** (description of his suffering) **15** so shall he sprinkle **many nations**. Kings shall shut their mouths because of him, for that which has not been told them they see, and that which they have not heard they understand. (universal benefit!)
- V. But now we return to today’s text, where we find the second of the three references that Jesus made in John to his being “lifted up”. Lets look at it once more...
- A. **John 8:28a ESV** So Jesus said to them, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he...”

1. Christ points to his crucifixion and the glorification that will follow as the final witness, the indisputable “proof positive” that all the claims that he has made about himself are completely true.
  2. In John 3, his “lifting up” was shown to us as a necessity. In John 12 it was shown to us as a universal benefit. Now here in John 8, we see the “lifting up” of Christ as the ultimate **vindicating revelation**.
- B. Though they have argued, denied, and debated about every tiny detail of his life and claims, a final sacrifice and an empty tomb would remove all controversy as to his true identity.
1. After that, if there remained any doubt because of the stubbornness of their unbelief, it would vanish in the presence of Christ as their glorified judge, as it will with all unbelievers on that day!
  2. Jesus is saying that they, though unwittingly, will participate in their own demise by “lifting him up”.
- C. **1 Corinthians 2:6 ESV** Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are **doomed to pass away. 7** But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. **8 None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.**
1. Notice that Jesus said, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man...”; not when “they”, or “the Gentiles”, but “**you**” -the Jewish authorities, his own people. They would bear the responsibility for his crucifixion.
  2. They have been sneaking around for a long time plotting his arrest and execution, thinking they were smooth operators; but do you think any of this took Christ by surprise? Peter says in Acts 2 that Jesus was delivered up by the “definite plan” and “foreknowledge” of God.
- D. But what else did you notice in Jesus in Jesus statement? He said “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, than you will know that I am he...” This “I am he” is (once again) the Greek “ego eimi”, just like in verse 24!
1. Christ isn’t saying “you will know I am he” but “you will know that I AM”. They would seek to arrest a Nazarene carpenter / prophet to hang him on a cross, but they would find that they have crucified God himself!
  2. And what evidence would they have of this? **Matthew 27:45 ESV** Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. **50** And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit. **51** And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. **52** The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, **53** and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. **54** When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, **“Truly this was the Son of God!”**
- E. They would know that he was God by signs and wonders that would accompany the crushing of the precious Rose of Heaven beneath the heel of human sin. But there would be more!

- F. Three days following his crucifixion, a tidal wave of testimony would begin in every corner of Judea. Eventually over 500 individuals would claim to have seen him, heard him, and touched him over the course of 40 days. They would become a unified voice proclaiming he was alive! But there would be more...
  - G. 50 days after his crucifixion, 120 of his followers would meet in a nondescript upper chamber in Jerusalem and make a ruckus, claiming to have been filled with his Spirit as a gift from him. Refusing to keep silent, their numbers would swell to over 5,000 within a matter of days. But there would be more...
  - H. Within one generation of his crucifixion and glorification, the entire Roman world would be forever influenced by the testimony of his followers; as well as their willingness to die horrific martyr's deaths for his Name.
  - I. And this wave of influence has never receded since that first day! Everyday thousands more come to believe in his name; that Jesus is the Great I AM. **"When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he..."**
- VI. But there was more to his message to the Jews that day in the temple. He said, **"...you will know that I am he, *and* that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me. 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."**
- A. Jesus states 5 additional things that are to be proven by his being "lifted up". All of these things are things that the Jews have already disputed with Jesus in John, so we won't spend time on them today, except to say that Jesus is saying that his crucifixion and glorification will silence every wagging tongue.
  - B. **Zechariah 12:10 ESV** "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, ***on him whom they have pierced***, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn."
    1. This prophetic look at Jesus tells us that those who pierced Christ will weep for him. Why? Because they will finally see him as he is. There will be no more mystery, no more disputing. We see only the Christ, crucified!
    2. He will be vindicated as he is revealed by his cross and in his glory to be the Great I AM.
  - C. The text finishes, **John 8:30 ESV** **As he was saying these things, many believed in him.** How about you? Do you need more proof? More evidence? Is there still an argument remaining in you? Or will you simply believe the words that he has said? His cross has proven he is God. I assure you, when you see his glory, you will be left with no doubt. There are no atheists in the afterlife.