

The People from Beneath – *John 8:13-29*

Introduction – In C.S Lewis’ “*Out of the Silent Planet*” our earth is the “*silent planet*.” In the fantasy novel, Earth has been shut out of the rest of the universe (where planets and their spirits communicate with one another) because its spirit has become “*bent*” or evil, corrupting humanity so that we are all bent and broken as well. In the gospel of John, Jesus proclaims that He is the light of the world (8:12) come to a dark and dead place, a bent world and nature where people love and live in that dead, dark world (3:19-20). Jesus has come from somewhere “*above*” our broken world and we are the people from “*beneath*” (8:23). Wherever the light and life of Jesus is rejected, the world becomes dark and confused, bent and broken, and everyone is lost. Jesus promises to have the answer, but we must come to Him in faith to receive the answer – and Him.

The Stubborn Unbelief of the People from Beneath (vv13-20) – Embarrassing the scribes and Pharisees who wrongly brought a woman allegedly caught in adultery before Jesus “*testing Him, that they might have something of which to accuse Him*” (8:6), Jesus proclaims that He is the light of the world, promising that those who follow Him will have the light of life. This is all Messianic language, and the Pharisees know it. They try to flip the argument on Him (never a good idea to try and out-argue God). Jesus had called for witnesses to prove the guilt of the woman, following the law (Deut 13:1-5, 18:21-22). It turned out there were none willing to come forward (and there was no man caught in the act) and so Jesus refused to condemn her. “*Well, two can play at that game*” the Pharisees seem to think and charge Jesus with not having valid witnesses (v13). This was insincere and hypocritical when compared to the previous scene. And there had already been a discussion about witnesses to who Jesus was (John the Baptist in 1:19-36, Nicodemus in 3:2, Jesus’ own list in 5:31-47).

Nevertheless, if He needed witnesses, He has two. He knows where He has come from and where He is going (v14), meaning He knows He is God. Not only that, He has the witness of the Father who sent Him (v16-18). Yes, this is circular reasoning; and this is because everyone and every worldview has presuppositions; every ultimate question must be addressed in a circular way. The Bible doesn’t try to prove *that* Jesus is God. The Bible proves *from* the fact that Jesus is God, that He came in the flesh, and that He was crucified and rose from the dead, and is now seated at God’s right hand – it goes on to reason from that what our obligations are (i.e. Acts 2:38, Phil 2:9-11).

But as we continue to see in this gospel, the stubborn heart of unbelief never runs out of objections. People from “*beneath*” search the scriptures but refuse to go where they lead (John 5:39). We don’t want to acknowledge what we know to be true (Rom 1:18-19). We say that we needed to see Jesus face to face; Peter says we have something as sure if not more sure in the written Word of God (2 Pet 1:16-19). Many saw Jesus, many saw His miracles, and many of those still refused to believe. Unbelief, at its core, is a heart issue, not an intellectual issue.

A Dreadful Sermon (vv21-29) – That’s what Martin Luther called this passage, “*a dreadful sermon, an appalling and dreadful word of farewell*” (Phillips). But of course, Jesus knows what He is doing, and John knows why he is recording this in the writing of this gospel. Jesus Christ, while fully man, is also fully God. He is not from this bent world. He told the Pharisees that He is going away and they will seek Him but, in their system, with their demands to make god according to their own system, to test and accuse and seek to prove Jesus wrong as a way of pursuing truth, they will die in their sin (v21). They misunderstand again (v22) and Jesus tells them why: they are from beneath and He is from above (v23). Unless they believe that “*I AM*” (v24 – clear in the Greek text and explicit later in v58), they cannot go to where He is going.

There is much nuance going on here. While this is an eternal truth (for Jesus is the only way to the Father), He is addressing the Pharisees as representative of unbelieving Israel. That nation, in that generation, is going to die in its sin and they will see it when they lift up the Son of Man (v28) and all that happens because of that. They ask, “who do you think you are” in response to the “*I AM*” statement (v25) and Jesus again answers with nuance: He has been saying the same things “*from the beginning*” (this is a HT to John 1:1, Gen 1, Exod 3:14).

They didn’t understand that He was speaking to them of the Father (vv26-27). And I want to connect that to what Jesus said in v19, “*You know neither Me nor My Father. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also.*” Ultimately, Jesus is not speaking about coming from and going to heaven. He is speaking about being with the Father (vv28-29). The Father loves the Son, and the Son only does what the Father tells Him (v28b). Jesus is going to the Father and if they do not believe that He is the Way to that destination, they will die in their sins. No one wants to go to heaven who does not want to go to the Father and no one wants to go to the Father who does not want to believe on Jesus.

High and Lifted Up - How would they ever see this? *“When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I AM”* (v28). This is the glory of the Cross, that instrument of violent torture we find symbolized all over the world today. The Pharisees, and all men, can harden their hearts, but they could not, and we cannot, stop what Jesus would do in the hour He determined to do it (v20). He is the great I AM and so no one can master Him or thwart His plans. No one could stop what pleased the Father, which was to offer His own Son to die for the sins of those who believe. Pilate would write the sign for the cross, *“Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews”* and they could not stop him (19:19-22). They could not stop Jesus from rising from the grave, no stone would stand in His way. *“And no amount of scholarly scorn, government persecution, or public indifference will stop the spread of His gospel”* (Phillips). This dreadful sermon was used then to bring some to faith (v30). Even more, the hard truth of the One from above given to the ones from beneath, has and will continue to be used to break stony hearts, open blind eyes and deaf ears, and bring the dead to life in Jesus Christ.

The people from beneath cannot get to the above. So God sent His Son to the beneath to be lifted up for the sins of those beneath so that we might be lifted up with Him, and then buried with Him, and then raised with Him, to be the people of the above (Col 3:1-4).

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