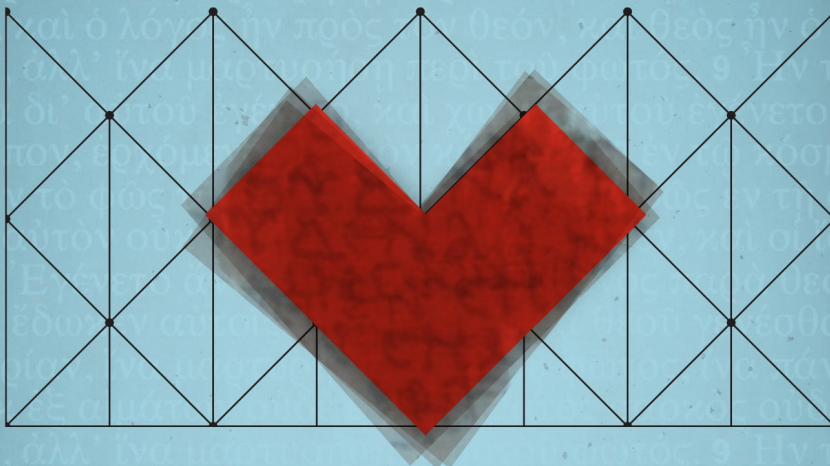


THE GOSPEL OF JOHN



BELIEVE

Studies in the book of John

PART SIX | John 8:31-10:42

Group Applications

Personal Study



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John 8:31-38

And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

Galatians 3:29-4:7

Slaves and Sons

Ever since Adam and Eve believed the serpent's lie over God's truth, the human race has been prone to embrace deception and darkness rather than truth and light (Rom. 1:18-25). Contrary to popular thought, we do not find truth by searching within ourselves, nor is truth relative or malleable. Truth is external, objective, and unchanging. Truth is a prominent theme throughout John's gospel and epistles. In the exchange between Jesus and the Jews in John 8:31-38, Jesus declares that his true disciples abide in his word. He is the Word made flesh, full of grace and truth (John 1:14). True disciples know not just truthful words but the Word who is truth.

He is the light of the world, "the true light, which enlightens everyone" (John 8:12; 1:9), and this light expels the darkness and exposes the truth both of who we are and who He is. To know Christ is to trust the one who is truth and be liberated from bondage to sin, the world, the flesh, and the devil. In Christ, we have assurance that the curse is broken, sin loses its power, death is defanged,

Satan is conquered, and sin is pardoned.

The Jews balked at the idea that they needed liberation, but Jesus exposed their self-deceived confidence in their heritage as Abraham's descendants and God's chosen people. They were offspring in the flesh but not according to the promise. No one inherits God's promises through human genealogy. It is only those who are born "not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12-13) who inherit the promises of God. True disciples abide in Jesus' word and turn from the lies and half-truths they once believed. The Truth stood in front of them, but they refused to see or hear it. They were slaves to sin, not true sons. Only the Son, who has seen the Father and made him known (John 1:18), can liberate the captive and give sight to the blind.

Sermon Notes

[illegible]

Treasure

1. Read through the passage two or three times.
 2. Write down 10 observations about the text. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why/how?
-
-

Grow

1. What are the differences between being a slave to sin and a true disciple?
-
-

2. How do you abide in Jesus' word (1 John 2:21-29)?
-
-

Go

1. How would you explain self-righteousness to a non-believer?
-
-

2. How would you explain Christian freedom to a non-believer?
-
-

Discussion Questions

1. When you hear the word “freedom,” what comes to mind?

2. Jesus says that those who commit sin are enslaved to it. What does it mean to be enslaved?

3. Why do you think many in this passage were not aware of their being enslaved? Why is it that many still aren’t aware today?

4. Jesus says that the truth will set people free. How does that happen? How has it happened in your life?

5. After being set free, we can be tempted to submit ourselves again to a yoke of slavery in one or more areas of our lives (Galatians 5:1). What might be an area of your life that you need freedom in Christ today? Ask your group to pray for you.

Additional Reading

From *The Cross of Christ* by John R.W. Stott¹

First, through Christ we are no longer under the tyranny of the law. It comes to many people as a surprise that the law, God's good gift to his people, in itself "holy, righteous, and good," could ever have become a tyrant that enslaves us. But that is exactly Paul's teaching. "Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed." The reason is that the law condemns our disobedience and so brings us under its "curse" or judgment. But Christ has redeemed us from the law's curse by becoming a curse for us. It is in this sense that "Christ is the end of the law" and we are no longer "under" it. It emphatically does not mean that there are now no moral absolutes except love, as the advocates of "the new morality" taught in the 1960s, or that we now have no obligation to obey God's law, as other antinomians teach. No, since the tyranny of the law is its curse, it is from this that we are liberated by Christ, so that we are not "under" it any more. The law no longer enslaves us by its condemnation. ... The first four verses of Romans 8 bring these strands together. They say that for those who are in Christ there is "no condemnation" (Rom 8:1), for God has already condemned our sins in Jesus Christ (Rom 8:3), and he did it in order that "the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us" (Rom 8:4). So the same cross of Christ, which frees us from the law's condemnation, commits us to the law's obedience.

Second, through Christ we are no longer under the tyranny of the flesh. What Paul means by the "flesh" (sarx) is our fallen nature or unredeemed humanity, everything that we are by birth, inheritance and upbringing before Christ renews us. Because our "flesh" is our "self" in Adam, its characteristic is self-centeredness. Paul supplies a catalog of some of its worst and ugliest outworkings, including sexual immorality, idolatry and occult practices (misdirected worship), hatred, jealousy and anger, selfish ambition and dissensions, and drunkenness. Living this kind of life, we were "enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures." As Jesus himself said, "everyone who sins is a slave to sin." But he immediately added: "if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." And freedom from our fallen nature and its selfishness comes through the cross: "For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be rendered powerless, that we should no longer be slaves to sin." Christ by his cross has won the victory over the flesh as well as over the law.

¹Stott, John R.W. *The Cross of Christ* Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006. pp. 237-39.

Third, through Christ we are no longer under the tyranny of the world. If the flesh is the foothold the devil has within us, the world is the means through which he exerts pressure on us from without. For the "world" in this context means godless human society, whose hostility to the church is expressed now by open ridicule and persecution, now by subtle subversion, the infiltration of its values and standards. John declares outspokenly that love for the world and love for the Father are mutually incompatible. For by worldliness he means "the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does." In the first expression "sinful man" translates *sarx*. "Flesh" and "world" are inevitably linked, since "world" is the community of unredeemed people, whose outlook is dictated by their unredeemed nature. Putting the three expressions together, it seems that the characteristics of the world which John emphasizes are its selfish desires, its superficial judgments (the eyes seeing only the surface appearance of things) and its arrogant materialism. Jesus made the claim, however, "I have overcome the world." He totally rejected its distorted values and maintained his own godly perspective unsullied. John then adds that through Christ we can be overcomers too:

For everyone born of God has overcome the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

It is when we believe in Jesus Christ that our values change. We no longer conform to the world's values but find instead that we are being transformed by our renewed mind which grasps and approves the will of God. And nothing weans us from worldliness more than the cross of Christ. It is through the cross that the world has been crucified to us and we to the world (Rom 12:1-2; Gal 6:14), so that we are freed from its tyranny.

Fourth, through Christ we are no longer under the tyranny of death. It is sometimes said that, whereas our Victorian forebears had a morbid fascination with death but never spoke of sex, the contemporary generation is obsessed with sex, while death is the great unmentionable. The fear of death is practically universal. The Duke of Wellington is reported as having said that "that man must be a coward or a liar who could boast of never having felt a fear of death." And Dr. Samuel Johnson added that "no rational man can die without uneasy apprehension." But Jesus Christ is able to set free even those who all their lives have been "held in slavery by their fear of death." This is because by his own death he has "destroyed" (deprived of power) "him who holds the power of death – that is, the devil" (Heb 2:14).

Jesus Christ has not only dethroned the devil but dealt with sin. In fact, it is by dealing with sin that he has dealt with death. For sin is the “sting” of death, the main reason why death is painful and poisonous. It is sin which causes death, and which after death will bring the judgment. Hence our fear of it. But Christ has died for our sins and taken them away. With great disdain, therefore, Paul likens death to a scorpion whose sting has been drawn, and to a military conqueror whose power has been broken. Now that we are forgiven, death can harm us no longer. So the apostle shouts defiantly: “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” There is of course no reply. So he shouts again, this time in triumph, not disdain: “Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 15:55-57).

Resources

Crump, David M. *Truth* in Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels ed. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, I. Howard Marshall, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992. pp. 859-62.

Packer, J.I. *Sons of God* in Knowing God Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993. pp. 200-29.

John 8:39-47

"I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other."

Isaiah 42:8

Your Father the Devil

Jesus was not afraid to ruffle some feathers when He encountered opposition. The Pharisees prided themselves in their ethnicity. They believed that merely being descended from Abraham meant they were children of God. Jesus countered their point by noting that if they were *really* Abraham's children they would act like Abraham. Instead of acting like Abraham, they were acting like the devil because they were seeking to kill God's Son. If they were truly Abraham's offspring they would love the God He loved and therefore love the Son the Father loved. Jesus was laying the axe at the root of the Pharisees' hypocritical posturing.

Why did the Pharisees not believe in Jesus? Because they could not bear to hear His word. They may come from God's people, but they do not live as God's people. God is no respecter of heritage but wants worshippers who come in "spirit and truth" (John 4:24). Satan was a murderer from the beginning and always went against God's plan. In condemning Jesus, these "sons of Abraham" were doing the will of Satan. They do not hear because they are 'not of God' (John 8:46).

Jesus' words here are very hard. He tells us that you cannot inherit your faith nor can you borrow someone else's. You must come to Jesus yourself and believe in Him. There are no neutral parties when it comes to Jesus. You either respond to Him in faith like Abraham would have or you reject Him because you cannot bear to hear His word. The good news is that by faith we are Abraham's children, not because of our ethnic descent but because of our shared faith. God's kingdom is open to all who repent and trust in Christ. His doors are wide open and the only thing that keeps us out is our pride. Even in the light of truth, the human heart rejects Christ and only by the work of God can a sinner repent and become a true child of Abraham.

[illegible]

Treasure

1. Read through the passage two or three times.
2. Write down 10 observations about the text. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why/how?

Grow

1. What does it mean to 'hear' God's word?

2. What is the significance of being a "child of Abraham"?

Go

1. In what ways does this passage apply to people who grew up in Christian homes?

2. What are common reasons people assume they are Christians?

Discussion Questions

1. Take some time to share about your father. What was he like? Any particular stories that capture his character and/or your relationship with him?

2. This passage is about 2 fathers—God and the devil. How does Jesus compare and contrast them?

3. There are several ways that the Jews seek to prove that their father is God. What are they? How might this compare to people you know who aren't believers but claim to know God?

4. Jesus says that those who are of God the Father will hear His words (verse 47). What does this mean? How would you characterize your "hearing" God's words recently? How might you grow in hearing God's word?

5. Who is someone you know who currently does not hear and follow God? Spend some time praying for them as a group.

Additional Reading

From *A Murderer from the Start* on Ligonier.org¹

One commentator has wisely noted that we need the Ten Commandments as a guide because of the inherent bent of the fallen human heart away from the kind of life that God expects from all people, not least the covenant community. When it comes to the sixth commandment, the proclivity to sin is made manifest in many different ways. Suicide, which is self-murder, is forbidden in the sixth commandment (Ex 20:13). Unjust wars violate the commandment against murdering innocent life. Criminal negligence that leads to injury and death also falls within the scope of the law against murder (21:28–32). Even those attitudes that can lead to murder are prohibited by the sixth commandment, for the law of God is concerned not only with our outward actions but with inward purity as well (Matt 5:21–26). The commandments are to penetrate deep into the hidden recesses of our hearts, so that the Spirit might use these principles to sanctify us.

We must all deal with the reality of inner corruption because our first parents chose the way of the one who is darkness itself. In today's passage, we read of a statement Jesus made to some of Israel's religious leaders in one of the most theologically rich interchanges in the New Testament. Facing those who sought to kill Him (John 7:25), Jesus tells them that their murderous hatred of Him is rooted in their family lineage. They are children of the Devil, who has been "a murderer from the beginning" (8:44). Jesus refers to Satan's temptation of Adam and Eve in the garden, which introduced death into the experience of those who bear God's image (Gen. 3). Since that day, all people (except Christ) have entered this world in Adam, who gave up his loving relationship with the Creator to partake of the corruption of the Devil. Abandoning God as our Father, we took Satan as our father in the garden, and we have been reaping what we sowed ever since.

Like those who opposed Jesus, we are born murderers, liars, and thieves, unable to please God even if we never take these evil desires to their most harmful end. Consequently, we must "become partakers of the divine nature" through faith alone in Christ (2 Peter 1:4). Transformed from the inside out, we are enabled by the Holy Spirit to follow His law as we submit to Him.

¹"A Murderer from the Start." *Ligonier Ministries, Inc.*, www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/murderer-start/.

John 8:48-59

Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.' "This is my name forever, the name you shall call me from generation to generation."

Exodus 3:13-15

Jesus is Yawheh

In this passage, Jesus faces the charge that He is demon-possessed. In response, Jesus makes a startling claim: "before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58). Thus far in John, we've seen Jesus use the 'I am' phrase in several ways. Jesus says, "I am the bread of life" (6:35, 48, 51). And in this chapter, He says, "I am the Light of the World" (8:12). In these statements, Jesus is using the "I am" to teach us who He is by way of metaphor. Jesus is the Light that drives out the darkness. He is the Bread that gives life to our bodies and spirits. He is the Door through which we enter the kingdom of God and the divine family. He is the Life by whose death we have life eternal. He is the Resurrection who will raise our physical bodies and glorify them for eternity. He is the Truth and not merely the bearer of it. He is the Way, and the only way, to salvation, forgiveness, and union with God.

However, there is another way that the "I am" phrase is used in John, and we see one instance of it here, in 8:24. Jesus simply says, "I am."

You're what, Jesus? Hungry? Tired? Special?

He simply says, "I am."

And "Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day." (John 8:56)

When Moses sees God in the burning bush, he asks God for His name, and God answers, “I AM WHO I AM. This is what you tell the Israelites, ‘I AM has sent me to you’” (Exodus 3:14).

Jesus takes the Greek version of the Hebrew ‘I AM’ and applies it to himself! The Jews prided themselves in their descent from Abraham, but by saying He came before Abraham, Jesus demonstrated His superiority. Those who hear and obey the word of Christ will never taste death. Those who follow Christ follow the one whom the Father glorifies. These are amazing claims to be coming from a carpenter from Nazareth. And yet, Jesus affirms that He existed prior to Abraham. In doing so, Jesus affirms his pre-incarnate role as the eternal Son.

One of the beauties of John’s Gospel is its high Christology—that just means it has a high view of Christ. John understands that in Jesus was the fullness of God. The Word became flesh. The Son of God became the Son of Man. And this man loved us, lived among us, died for us, and rose from the dead for us. He has given us every spiritual blessing by uniting us to God (Ephesians 1:3). Let us learn to love these truths and become transformed by them.

[illegible]

Treasure

1. Read through the passage two or three times.
2. Write down 10 observations about the text. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why/how?

Grow

1. What are some difficulties you find when thinking about Jesus as God?

2. What parts of Jesus' life and story make more sense in light of his divine nature?

Go

1. When sharing the Gospel, do you find yourself talking about Jesus as a man? As God? Do you mention Jesus at all?

2. What are some ways we can incorporate the Old Testament into our evangelism in light of this passage?

Discussion Questions

1. Share a time you were present when someone made an outrageous statement. What happened? How did you and others respond?

2. In this passage, Jesus makes several outrageous statements. What are they? Why were they so significant?

3. How did the people respond to Jesus' statements in this passage? Why?

4. Today, what are some different responses people have towards Jesus' claim to be God?

5. If Jesus is the "I Am," how should this change the way you are currently living? Spend some time in prayer for one another asking God to help you change.

Additional Reading

From *On the Incarnation of the Word* by Athanasius of Alexandria¹

The Lord did not come to make a display. He came to heal and to teach suffering men. For one who wanted to make a display the thing would have been just to appear and dazzle the beholders. But for Him Who came to heal and to teach the way was not merely to dwell here, but to put Himself at the disposal of those who needed Him, and to be manifested according as they could bear it, not vitiating the value of the Divine appearing by exceeding their capacity to receive it.

From *Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion*

The case was certainly desperate, if the Godhead itself did not descend to us, it being impossible for us to ascend. Thus the Son of God behaved to become our Emmanuel, the God with us; and in such a way, that by mutual union his divinity and our nature might be combined...to give us hope that God would dwell with us; so great was the repugnance between our pollution and the spotless purity of God. Had man remained free from all taint, he was of too humble a condition to penetrate to God without a Mediator...It is not without cause, therefore, that Paul, when he would set forth Christ as the Mediator, distinctly declares him to be man. There is, says he, "one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus," (1 Tim. 2: 5). He might have called him God, or at least, omitting to call him God he might also have omitted to call him man; but because the Spirit, speaking by his mouth, knew our infirmity, he opportunely provides for it by the most appropriate remedy, setting the Son of God familiarly before us as one of ourselves. That no one, therefore, may feel perplexed where to seek the Mediator, or by what means to reach him, the Spirit, by calling him man, reminds us that he is near...[he is one of] us, inasmuch as he is our flesh. And, indeed, he intimates the same thing in another place, where he explains at greater length that he is not a high priest who "cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin," (Heb. 4: 15).

Resources

The Person and Work of Christ by B.B. Warfield

The Doctrine of Jesus Christ by Thomas Torrance

¹Athanasius. *On the Incarnation of the Word of God: Being a Treatise of St. Athanasius De Incarnatione Verbi Dei*. Macmillan, 1946.

²Calvin, John. "Appendix 2. Calvin's Editions of Institutes of the Christian Religion." *John Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2016.

John 9

But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, to this day, whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed.

2 Corinthians 3:14-16

The Light of Life Makes Blind Men See

In John 9, we have a beautiful, tangible picture that deepens our understanding of how Jesus, the “light of the world” (John 8:12), impacts not just the world as a whole, but the individual who embraces its exposure. Jesus calmly disrupted a debate among a group of Pharisees over why a certain man was born blind by restoring the man’s sight. We are often consumed with the “whys” of our struggles and sorrows, but Jesus stands ready to cut to the heart of the matter—what do you need?

What the Pharisees didn’t see, and what we often miss, is the fact that what we need more than anything is Christ Himself. We need Him to open our eyes, give us the light of life, illuminate our hearts by his truth, and heal our spiritual blindness. The Pharisees asked the wrong question. They were aggravated that Jesus refused to act within their carefully constructed boxes. For the Pharisees, sin caused suffering and the cure was renewed obedience to the law. Jesus obliterated their misconceptions, or rather, He broke them down and rebuilt them. He not only gave a blind man sight, but He exposed the blindness of the Pharisees. They were blind to the fact that the only way forward was through Him, the Savior.

In the Pharisees, we see fear of the law and its ramifications. In the blind man’s parents we see fear of the Pharisees. In Jesus we see perfect love casting out fear. There are really two options when confronted with the light of life. You can believe and find freedom, or hold tightly to your fear and remain in the dark. What do you do when confronted with the light of the world? The darkness seems safe, but the light is where eternal safety truly lies. Believe, as the healed man did, and walk in the light.

[illegible]

Treasure

1. Read through the passage two or three times.
2. Write down 10 observations about the text. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why/how?

Grow

1. Where do you see yourself in this story? Do you relate most to the faith of the blind man, the fear of the parents, or the rebellion of the Pharisees?

2. What is an area of your life where you need Christ to give you new eyes to see? What is in the dark that needs to come out into the light?

Go

1. How would you explain spiritual blindness to a non-believer?

2. Is there anyone in your life who is blind to the hope of the gospel? How might this chapter help you to illuminate the gospel for them?

Discussion Questions

1. Share a time when Jesus did a miraculous work in your life. How did that impact you and/or others?

2. Jesus healed a blind man on the Sabbath. Why was this significant?

3. What were some of the different responses to this healing? How might you compare people's responses then to people's responses today when God does miraculous things?

4. While many are confused about Jesus, some people believe in Him. What are some ways Jesus has proved Himself to you? Spend some time praising Jesus as a group.

5. What is a miracle you are currently praying for? Spend some time praying for these requests as a group.

Additional Reading

From the sermon *Why Was This Child Born Blind* by John Piper¹

Suffering Not Owing to Specific Sin

Ponder a moment the words, “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents.” That is very significant. The point Jesus is making is not that suffering didn’t come into the world because of sin. It did. That’s plain from Genesis 3 and Romans 8:18–25. If there never had been sin, there never would have been suffering. All suffering is owing to sin. And part of the meaning of the physical horrors of suffering is to reveal the moral horrors of sin.

But that is not what Jesus is saying here. Nor is he not denying it. What he is saying here is: Specific suffering is often—I would say most of the time—not owing to specific sin. The disciples didn’t understand this distinction, it seems—that the existence of sin in the world is the cause of suffering in the world, but specific sins in the world are usually not the cause of specific sufferings in the world.

Explanation in the Purposes of God

But that is what Jesus is saying here in verse 3: “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents.” In other words, this blindness—this specific suffering—is not owing to the specific sins of the parents or the man. Don’t look there for the explanation.

Then he tells them where to look. Look for an explanation of this blindness in the purposes of God. Verse 3: “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.” The explanation of the blindness lies not in the past causes but the future purposes.

Countering an Objection

Let me address an objection at this point. There are some pastors and teachers who dislike intensely the idea that God might will that a child be born blind so that some purpose of God might be achieved. One of the ways they try to escape the teaching of this text is to say that Jesus is pointing to the result of the blindness, not the purpose of the blindness. When Jesus says in verse 3, “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him,” he means, the result of the blindness is that God was able to use the blindness

¹Piper, John. “Why Was This Child Born Blind?” *Desiring God*, Desiring God Ministries, 12 Feb. 2018, www.desiringgod.org/messages/why-was-this-child-born-blind.

to show his work, not that he planned the blindness in order to show his work.

But there are at least three reasons why that won't work.

1. One is that the disciples are asking for an explanation of the blindness, and Jesus' answer is given as an explanation of the blindness. But if you say God had no purpose, no plan, no design in the blindness but simply finds the blindness later and uses it, that is not an explanation of the blindness. It doesn't answer the disciples' question. They want to know: Why is he blind? And Jesus really does give an answer. This is why he's blind — there is purpose in it. There is a divine design. There's a plan. God means for his work to be displayed in him.

2. Here's another reason that suggestion doesn't work. God knows all things. He knows exactly what is happening in the moment of conception. When there is a defective chromosome or some genetic irregularity in the sperm that is about to fertilize an egg, God can simply say no. He commands the winds. He commands the waves. He commands the sperm and the genetic makeup of the egg. If God foresees and permits a conception that he knows will produce blindness, he has reasons for this permission. And those reasons are his purposes. His designs. His plans. God never has met a child from whom he had no plan. There are no accidents in God's mind or hands.

3. And third, any attempt to deny God's sovereign, wise, purposeful control over conception and birth has a head-on collision with Exodus 4:11 and Psalm 139:13. "The Lord said to Moses, 'Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the Lord?'" "You formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb."

Purpose: Displaying the Works of God

The meaning of Jesus in John 9:3 is not obscure. He is saying to the disciples: Turn away from your fixation on causality as the decisive explanation of suffering. And turn away from any surrender to futility, or absurdity, or chaos, or meaninglessness. And turn to the purposes and plans of God. There is no child and no suffering outside God's purposes.

"It was not that this man sinned, or his parents." This blindness came about "in order that that the works of God might be displayed in this man."

John 10:1-21

For thus says the Lord God: "Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land. And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord God. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice."

Ezekiel 34:11-16

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake."

Psalms 23:1-3

One Flock. One Shepherd.

In this passage Jesus tells us who He is and why He came. Throughout John's gospel, Jesus' claims about Himself bring division among the Jews, but here He demonstrates how their division stems from unbelief.

Jesus claims to be the giver of salvation (v. 9) and the giver of life (v. 10). He is not only the Good Shepherd who gives salvation and abundant life to the Jews but also to the Gentiles. Oh how thankful we should be as we read this! As Christians, we rightly get excited about God's desire to save people from every nation, tribe, and tongue, but we often forget that we are the Gentiles Jesus spoke about. When we read the Old Testament and the Gospels, we tend to read ourselves as the Jews. But we are the sheep of the other fold that Jesus promised in verse 16, "I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd." How thankful we should be for God's great redemption plan to include all nations—including us! What a rich history we inherit as those who have been joined alongside the Jews as God's flock under God's Good Shepherd.

Jesus' fulfillment of Ezekiel's prophecy is God Himself coming to dwell among and lead His people as a caring shepherd with humility, strength, and protection. Jesus' description of Himself as the Good Shepherd in John 10 says He knows His sheep by name. He leads them. He lays down his life for His sheep. In contrast, a hired worker has no ownership and does not truly care for the sheep. The worker will abandon them when danger arises. The sheep do not know the worker's voice, but the Good Shepherd knows His own like He and the Father know one another (John 10:30). What a personal, intimate knowledge!

As the door, Jesus claims that all who enter will be saved and find provision in a bountiful pasture. He came that we may have life and have it abundantly. Abundant life is not riches, health, or smooth circumstances but rather life with the Good Shepherd as He leads us to our eternal pasture. It is rest in His guidance, provision, and protection. It is trusting that we are saved through Jesus' sacrificial death and resurrection. Abundant life is being intimately known by our Triune God (John 17:3).

[illegible]

Treasure

1. Read through the passage two or three times.
2. Write down 10 observations about the text. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why/how?

Grow

1. In what ways do we see Christ as a provider and shepherd for his flock according to the Bible? In ways have you seen Him provide and shepherd in your own life?

2. Compare Ezekiel 34 & John 10 and write down any parallels you observe.

3. What does John 10 teach us about who God is? Spend a few minutes giving thanks for those characteristics.

4. What do verses 17-18 tell us about Jesus' death & resurrection?

Go

1. How would you explain Jesus' claim of being a 'door' to a nonbeliever?

2. How can we know the voice of the Shepherd from the voice of a thief?

Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever visited or spent time on a farm with animals? Share your experiences.

2. Talk about the responsibilities of a shepherd. How does Jesus relate this to Himself?

3. How have you experienced Jesus as a good shepherd to you?

4. Jesus speaks of "other sheep not of this fold." To whom is He referring? Why should this be significant to us personally and missionally?

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5. Several of our gospel partners are currently seeking to share the good news of Jesus with “sheep not of this fold” in other parts of the world. Spend time in prayer for them.
 6. John Piper states, *“It has proved often in history that the church has become ingrown and indifferent to the world; and that her chosen standing has been wickedly woven into the fabric of ethnocentrism, racism, and nationalism...and comfortable with its own kind - this ‘fold.’”* How would you respond to this statement? How might you pray and fight against it taking place in your life and the life of Four Oaks?
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Additional Reading

From *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* by Peter Chrysologus¹

The force of love makes a person brave because genuine love counts nothing as hard, or bitter, or serious or deadly... If love is present, it conquers everything... But is that death of the shepherd advantageous to the sheep? Let us investigate. It leaves them abandoned, exposes them defenseless... and exposes them to death... In light of all this, does the Shepherd prove his love for you by his death?... But what are we to do, since the Life himself could not die unless he had decided to? Who could have taken life away from the Giver of life if he were unwilling?... Therefore, he willed to die – he who permitted himself to be slain although he was unable to die. And so, let us investigate the strength and the reason of this love, the cause of this death and the utility of this passion... Clearly, there is an established strength, a true reason, a lucid cause, a patent utility in all this blood. For unique power sprang forth from the one death of the Shepherd. For the sake of his sheep the Shepherd met the death that was threatening them. He did this that, by a new arrangement, he might, although captured himself, capture the devil, the author of death; that, although slain himself, he might punish; that, by dying for his sheep, he might open the way for them to conquer death.

¹Chrysologus, Peter. *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament IVa John 1-10*. Downers Grove, Inter Varsity Press, 2006, p. 350.

John 10:22-44

Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am."

John 8:58

For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.

Colossians 2:9

The Importance of Oneness

There are a lot of titles you can put on me. I am a Christian, I am a student, I am a son, I am a brother, and the list goes on and on. With all of my titles, I am in need of something else. For example, I need a school to be a student, I need a mom to be a son, and I need a Christ to be a Christian. God is not the same way. God describes Himself as the I AM. God is described in many ways in the Bible: a warrior, savior, king, and friend, but ultimately He is the great I AM. It is the title God gives Himself and best describes who He is. He is unchanging and supreme.

When Jesus says that He and the Father are one, He is not simply claiming a closeness in relationship. He is saying that He and the Father are of the same being. God has communicated Himself in human form through the Son. When we see the Son, we see God himself. When the Jews heard this, they accused Jesus of blasphemy because He was claiming to be God. The Jews held to a strict monotheism, which means they believed there was only one God. Jesus did not oppose monotheism but expanded and developed their understanding of God as one being in three distinct and eternally existent persons. What the Jews of Jesus' day could not understand was that God had come to dwell with His people in a way nobody imagined. When we say we know Jesus, we are claiming to know God. What an amazing thing to say! What an incredible privilege to possess!

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Treasure

1. Read through the passage two or three times.
2. Write down 10 observations about the text. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why/how?

Grow

1. Why is Jesus being one with the Father so significant?

2. Why is it important to say that God is one?

Go

1. How does knowing that Jesus and God are one change the way we approach evangelism?

Discussion Questions

1. Share a time when someone didn't believe you even though you gave plenty of evidence. What were the circumstances? How did you feel?

2. In this passage, the Jews do not believe Jesus is the Christ even though He has given plenty of evidence. What evidence has He given? What reason does Jesus give for why they do not believe?

3. Jesus says that no one will snatch His sheep out of His hand and the Father's hand. How does this security impact the way you feel? The way you live?

4. When accused of blasphemy, Jesus makes a theological maneuver rather than addressing the accusation directly. Why do you think He does this?

5. Jesus makes one more invitation to believe even as they are ready to stone Him. What does this say about His character and worth?

6. The Jerusalem story ends with anger, unbelief, and murderous plans. But across the Jordan the people believed. Why do you think Jesus received a different response?

7. In what situation is God currently calling you to trust in Him? Spend some time in prayer for one another.

Additional Reading

From *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading* by Scott R. Swain

Trinity

The eternal life of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is a life of perfect communication and communion. In the Holy Trinity, there is perfect communication (i.e., making common) of one divine life and perfect communion (i.e., sharing, holding in common) in one divine life. The Father eternally communicates his life to the Son (Jn 5.26), who is his perfect Word, radiance, and image (Jn 1.1; Heb 1.3; Col. 1.15). And the Father with the Son eternally communicates this self-same life to the Spirit, breathing him out in their perfect, mutual love and fellowship. We come to know of this perfect triune life of communication and communion because God graciously unveils it to us in the gospel. In the gospel God reveals his triune name to us: the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Mt. 28.19). And in the gospel God relates to us in accordance with his triune name: the Father sends the Son in order that we might become his sons and daughters (Gal. 4.4-5); the Father and the Son send the Spirit, who sheds abroad in our hearts God's love for us in Christ (Rom. 5.5) and who awakens in us the Son's own filial address to the Father (Gal. 4.6). The Trinity is thus the ultimate mystery of salvation, the secret hidden in ages past but now unveiled to us (cf. Mt. 11.25-27).

It is important to emphasize that God's triune life of perfect communication and communion exists before us, apart from us, and without any need of us. In and of himself God is the blessed Trinity, completely sufficient unto himself as the everlasting well of all good things which is never drawn dry. Indeed, it is a matter of sheer wonder that this glorious and blessed Trinity would desire anything beyond and outside of his own inherently blissful life. And yet, Scripture assures us that he does desire something beyond and outside of himself and, more than that, that he desires to communicate his own glorious and blessed life to us--in a manner appropriate to our creaturely status--in order that we too might have communion and fellowship with him, that we might become friends of God. The wonder of the gospel is that, in accordance with the divine good pleasure (cf. Mt. 11.26), we too have fellowship with the Father and the Son in the Spirit (cf. 1 Jn 1.3; 2 Cor. 13.14).

¹Swain, Scott R. *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading* (pp. 5-6), T&T Clark International, 2011.



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