

“Altered Vision”
Pastor John Bronson

John 10:19-30

July 1, 2012

Message for 7/1/12; text, John 10:19-30, title, “Altered Vision”, Communion Sunday

Ministry Moment: Sheryl Jackson and Lynn...

Call to Worship: Psalm 82 and Prayer

Worship Theme: Christ in us the hope of glory

Question: does Ruth Bowen have plans for this Sunday?

Sunday Evening in the Word
The Sermon on the Mount: The Beatitudes
5:30 – 7:00 pm in the Music Building

Pre Service Song:

“To God Be the Glory”

Song # 56

Welcome and Announcements

Ministry Moment: Sheryl Jackson & Lynn Silvernale

Call to Worship and Prayer

Psalm 82

Preparing the Heart in Song:

“Mighty to Save”

overhead

Offering and Offertory:

“Eternal Father, Strong to Save”

Ron Wolcott, Caleb Bronson, Regan & Dylan Lundberg

The Lord’s Supper

Coming to the Table

Communion Song:

“Above All”

overhead

Invitation to the Supper and Prayers of

Confession and Consecrations

Distribution of the Elements

Message:

“Altered Vision”

John 10:19-30

Pastor John Bronson

Response to the Word:

“Majesty”

Song # 10

Parting Word of Grace and Invitation to Prayer

Sunday Evening Studies:

5:30-7 pm in the Music Building

The Sermon on the Mount: The Beatitudes

“The Prayer Closet”

June 24, 2012

“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”

(Colossians 4:2a)

Bob & Jeanne Nelson, EFCA's ReachGlobal: After serving in the Philippines for many years, the Nelsons have relocated to the United States to work with ReachGlobal, the missions arm of the EFCA. Pray for health, strength, and much joy as they (1) provide pre-field training to new missionaries, (2) facilitate on-line classes, and (3) conduct research related to the educational needs of missionaries.

President Obama: the Lord will protect and provide for his family and bring clarity of thought for true wisdom in governing the nation; that the Spirit will give him a true understanding of freedom and its value

The Trustees: after their excellent service in readying the kitchen for VBS, as the Lord to strengthen and bless them for the continuing projects upgrading our facilities and repairing the parking lot

Military or Public Service Personnel of the Week: SPC Casey Brubaker, National Guard (son of John, grandson of Larry & Wanda): deploying to Afghanistan, please pray for safety and Christian fellowship

Young Adult of the Week: Seth Duenas (son of Rudy & Tracie): that he seek God's guidance for his life and draw closer to Christ.

Please pray for the health and recovery of our church family: Carol Bernerd, Harley Chapman Sr., Nathan Giordano, Diane Kinnamont, Carol Koehler, Volker Ladendorf, Roseanne Lane, Larry McFall, Dick & Jane Miller, John Montgomery, Fred & Jean Pauly, Phil Peterson, Jean Price, Cindy Rodney, John Stancik, Wally Yates

We are looking at the words of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as He is in continuing dialogue, as it were, if you can call this argument a dialogue, with the scribes and the Pharisees, often referred to by John as the Jews in this Gospel. When you come here in John’s Gospel, the words that Jesus gives, the teaching that He gives to us in chapter 10:14 right to the end that chapter, are remarkable, and the more you reflect up them, meditate on them, study them, the more remarkable they become. As you [do, you] begin to understand through the ministry of the Holy Spirit exactly what it is that Jesus is saying to us as well as to those in His day. In those verses – we looked at this last week – in the first half of the chapter Jesus gave a couple of criteria that are good for us to keep in mind when assessing those to whom we listen as spiritual guides, counselors or teachers. Jesus made this comment about Himself. He said, “I am the good shepherd and I give My sheep abundant life”. So the criteria that we should look for from any spiritual guide or teacher or whatever you want to call them is this, are those who sit under that person’s ministry gradually experiencing an increasing abundance of life.

You can imagine that if you are going to have it as a criteria, how important it is that you have the right understanding of what “abundance” means. Americans have, of course, fallen in love with a very worldly kind of abundance. And there are many churches in America who say that if God loves you He will pour out a fantastic, unending stream of material abundance and physical health. May I say that is a lie. It is not that God is incapable of those things; He is perfectly capable of those things. He also knows that when we get too much of a good thing what happens to us? [We are] like old figs hanging on a tree: rotten. So it is important for us to understand what the abundance is. What is relevant is spiritual abundance. That is what Jesus is talking about. If you go through the entirety of the New Testament you get the same thing repeated over and over again. Spiritual abundance is a knowledge of the Word of God. Spiritual abundance is a knowledge of the doctrines of the faith: I know what I believe and why I believe it. Spiritual abundance is knowing the truth and having the wisdom which allows us to live well in this world. What does it mean to live well in the world? It is the ability to resist and overcome sin; it is the ability to live peaceably with others, especially within the body of Christ; it is the ability to have a consistent and fruitful prayer life; and the ability to have a consistent witness for Jesus Christ in the world. That is abundance.

The question then arises whether or not the person who stands as the preacher, teacher, spiritual counselor and guide is in fact offering what allows that kind of abundance to occur. These are the evidence we look for. Of course there is a caveat, there is a little addendum you have to add on, because sometimes the fault does not lie with the preacher or the teacher or the counselor or the guide. Sometimes the fault lies in the people. All of the Old Testament prophets faced exactly that didn’t they? [They were] men of tremendous faithfulness, tremendous consistency, deep dependence upon the Lord, a clear message from the Lord for the people of God, and who didn’t listen? You see, you look at the leader, and you also look at the followers, and you ask, “What’s happening here?”

We have to consider the bearing of Jesus’ words in chapter 10:14-18 on the sheep. We began to do this: read with me at verses 14-18 of John’s Gospel chapter 10. Jesus said,

“I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. (We celebrated that this morning [in the Lord’s Supper]) And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. (We also talked about that this morning. That is exactly what Lynn and Sheryl have been doing, wandering off and looking for other sheep.) I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”

Here Jesus is speaking, of course, of His relationship with His own sheep. Look at verse 3 (I didn’t read that today but I did last week.) Notice what He says in verse 3. He says, “I call my sheep by name.” This is not a general, abstract, categorical call so that anybody whoever [is included]; He calls His sheep by name, and they respond to His voice, knowing who He is. Some have concluded that this means Jesus did not lay His life down for all who

[might hear the call to the gospel of faith]. In other words some have interpreted this as indicating a limited atonement, that Jesus only died for a certain number of sheep. Let me make an observation about that. I don't think that is possible or reasonable. It concluded too much. The Father could not in good faith make an invitation to all and any who would believe if in fact He had not made sufficient for all and any who might come. So most assuredly He did. The door stands open, none are refused; any who come, any who cry out to God, any who say, “Lord have mercy upon me, may Your blood be the sufficient price for my sin, may I find clear and free access to the Father through You,” they are welcome. Do you believe that? I am looking for an amen!

But there is something extremely sobering you have got to understand. We are looking at sheep. You have to understand that just because an invitation is extended does not mean that it will be accepted. Indeed, if you look at Romans 3:9-23 and Ephesians 2:1-3, the message is appalling. Who comes? Not one! This is when you begin to understand grace. Paul says point blank: no one comes. [Jesus] gives a wonderful parable as clear as a bell. If you look in Matthew 22:1-10 it is the parable of a wedding feast. Remember the parable? They have been invited, the feast is ready, no one comes. So what does the wedding host do? We're told what he does. He has his servants go out and they compel people to come. Can I translate that for you? God the Father sends His Holy Spirit to penetrate the resistant, refusing hearts and He says, “You will come. I claim you as Mine.” You want to know what the name of that is: that is grace. That is the grace of a loving God who is determined to honor His Son, for His Son laid down His life that men and women would be saved, and the Father ensures that they will indeed be saved.

In the fourteenth verse Jesus says the knowledge of each other which subsists between Him and His sheep – notice what He says – is just as the way He and the Father know each other. Look at that verse. [It is] verse 14 in John's Gospel the tenth chapter. He says, *“I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father and I lay down my life for the sheep.”* What can this possibly mean? One of the commentators I read made this comment. He said, “This reciprocal knowledge is not superficial but intimate. It is likened to the knowledge with which Jesus knows the Father and the Father knows Him. It may be that the love implied in this relationship elicits the following statement that Jesus lays down His life for the sheep.” (Morris, pp. 511-512) This is a knowledge which arises out of and expresses itself as love. You and I should recognize that it is not in the first instance Jesus' love for us that prompted Him to lay down His life. It is His love for the Father. God the Son loves God the Father, and deeply desires and intends and determines that He will honor God the Father, and He does so in a way that most pleases the Father. He pours out His life blood that you and I, the Father's creatures, might be healed in the broken relationship that sin has divided us from the Father, and so [the Son] makes of us a gift back [to the Father]. You see this expressed in I Corinthians 15, the great chapter on the resurrection, in the 24th verse. There, the culmination, the grand moment of completion is when we are told the end comes when Jesus the Son delivers the kingdom to God the Father, having destroyed every authority and rule and power.

When saying that the mutual knowledge of Jesus and His sheep is like the knowledge He shared with God the Father, Jesus obviously cannot be referring to how God the Son knows God the Father; that would be impossible. These are infinite beings beyond our comprehension. The interpenetration of the knowledge of the Father with the Son and the Spirit lies well beyond anything that you or I could imagine. So that is not what He is referring to. What is He referring to? He is referring to the way He as the Second Adam knows the Father. He is the Second Adam who has come to undo the damage done by the First. He comes to reestablish the living bond between the creatures and their Creator. How does Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, know the Father and the Father know Him? This as a matter of fact is what being pointed to by Paul in I Corinthians 13:12 and again in Galatians 4:8-9. Let me read I Corinthians 13:12 – *“Now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, then I shall know fully (and then the last of the comment) even as I have been fully known.* Do you think you have any idea how well God knows you? He knows you fully.

What keeps us from knowing one another fully? What is it that even between husband and wife there remains always a remainder, a distance? Surely it is not primarily a defect of the mind, the limitations which are inherent to finite creatures that must rely on the tools of communication. No, no, it is the defect of the heart, the heart which is corrupted by sin. Not only do we hide our real selves from others; we also play games of denial within ourselves. Sin lives by lies. Until we are entirely freed of sin, the shadow world of lies will continue to play through us and keep us always at a distance even from those whom we love most deeply, profoundly, passionately and with the greatest degree of trust. But it does not keep us away from God.

In Galatians 4:8-9 Paul writes, *“Formerly when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. But how that you have come to know God, (then he shifts) or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world...?”* In that comment in Galatians Paul is not saying that God was ignorant as if He had no knowledge of the Corinthians or the Galatians before they were saved. Of course He knew about them. He knew them in Christ. What he is saying is that God did not know them in terms of His renewing, life-giving love. Herein is the change. The term “to know” in the Old Testament was regularly used to indicate sexual union, the union between a man and a woman which brings forth or creates new life. That is what is meant here. Jesus’ knowledge of the redeemed is life-giving. This is the same as saying that through Jesus we receive the gift of eternal life. That gift, of course, we are told in John 17:3 is the gift of knowing God the Father and Jesus as His Son. Such knowledge, you see, changes us. It is part of the power of God’s grace and truth which frees us from the death grip of sin and seduction of lies. God’s knowledge of us is the presence and the power and the manifestation of His love at work in us, changing us, so that we are drawn into an ever deeper and more intimate relationship with Him as God. God loves us.

How, therefore, did the Son of God, the incarnate son of God, know God the Father? In conversation with someone whose thoughts and insights I respect, this person pointed to Jesus’ obedience to the Father, which is the completion of faith and the demonstration or the making real of love, and to Jesus’ trust in the Father. It is important for us to appreciate that only through obedience does Jesus know the will of the Father as a living reality and the Father knows the love of Jesus in the same way. Many of us know this. There is a great parable in the scriptures where a man speaks to two of his sons and he says to his sons, “I want you to go out and work in the fields.” The first son says, “I go!” The second son says, “I don’t go.” But in the outcome, who went? [It was] the second son, not the first. Which of the sons knew his father’s will? [It was] the second son. Which of the two sons expressed his love for his father? [It was] the second son. The words did not bear fruit [in the first son]. It is in obedience that the reality of our dedication, and our love and our thanksgiving to God are made known.

As the incarnate Son, Jesus lived by faith in His Father. When the disciples asked Jesus when the kingdom was to be restored, Jesus said “I don’t know.” That is not the only time in His life that Jesus seems to demonstrate a lack of knowledge. Do you remember when He was on the cross, and now the shadow of God’s judgment has fallen across [Him], He has become sin for us, and the relationship that the Son of God has with God the Father has broken so that He can become the object of God’s wrath. At that moment what does Jesus say? *“My God, my God, why have you deserted me?”* Please do not think He was play acting! There was no pretense in that moment of supreme agony. What, therefore, kept Jesus on that cross? [It was] His love for the Father; and by the way, His faith. He was absolutely certain the Father would not let Him go.

Jesus’ perfect obedience and perfect trust are His righteousness and together they are the necessary foundation for His perfect sacrifice on our behalf. When Jesus died for our sin, He took our guilt and He gives to us His righteousness. God sees us in Christ as if we had obeyed perfectly and trusted completely. Let me explain something to you. If God looked at each of us according to our own moral character and beliefs, and we had taken these elements [of the Lord’s Supper], we would be dead. They would be so toxic to us, because they would then become the expression of God’s condemnation against the arrogant who assume that in the strength of their own

corrupted will they can somehow make of themselves something acceptable to the Holy God and that is not possible. Consequently, when we take those elements, we are affirming not our righteousness but the righteousness of Jesus Christ. We are affirming that His blood covers my sins. We are affirming that it is His gracious will, not my faltering obedience that justifies our partaking of the remembrance of the sacrifice that He has made.

When we receive, we receive both justification – being cleared of guilt – and sanctification – being washed clean of pollution and trained in obedience – as gifts from God through faith in Jesus. Then we attempt to live in the reality of those gifts.

Jesus endured all this freely. That is what He tells us in the closing verses [of the paragraph], 17-18. *“For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”* First John 4:10, *“This is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation – the payment – for our sins.”*

We begin to grasp that the end point, the place where all of this action by God is taking us, the end point of our salvation, our being made well, is that we will be animated inwardly with a love that demonstrates itself in perfect obedience and complete trust in the Father. We become the imitators of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ loved the Father to the absolute uttermost, and Jesus Christ had total faith in God, and that is what you and I are called to be [like] as well. And therein is our glory: we receive the glory that the Father gave Jesus. It is the same.

In the midst of the tenth chapter of John as the people respond to Jesus’ startling description of Himself as the Good Shepherd, and more particularly in response to Jesus’ spelling the unique relationship between Himself and both His own sheep and His Father, we can read in verses 19-21 that the people are again divided. They cannot come to an agreed upon understanding of Jesus. *There was again division among the Jews because of these words. Many of them said, ‘He has a demon, and is insane; why listen to him.’ Others said, ‘These are not the words of one who is oppressed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?’”*

There is a first observation that we should make. Notice that the people in Jesus’ day realized just how extreme Jesus’ statements were. They realized that there were only two options in dealing with Jesus. Either Jesus told the truth about Himself, or He was insane. How many have been in those places where people walk about saying, “I’m Jesus Christ”? So if you hear the words that Jesus says about Himself as if He was just a guy on the street, you would think one of two choices: he is either a nut, or He isn’t. What you cannot do in honesty, is you cannot try and alter what He had to say. We are called to believe the Bible, not to edit it. If you don’t believe what the Bible says, don’t rewrite it! Admit that you don’t believe it, and ask God to give you help. Can you imagine the people in Jesus’ deciding they are going to edit [the Bible]? Here stands Jesus: “You know Jesus, you just made some really weird comments. We are not going say things the way You said them. We’re going to improve your message so You are more reasonable and palatable to everybody.” That would make a lot of sense, wouldn’t it? In that conversation, who would be the one [who was] insane? [It would be] you! The guy [Jesus] is just standing right there! Well, there are a lot of insane people who write books, and we should never be taken in by their insanity.

What follows at this point is a most difficult conversation between Jesus and those who refused to take Him at His word, a refusal which Jesus points out once again to His opponents is made in stubborn denial of the clear testimony of His works. Listen as I read verses 22-30:

“At that time the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon. 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.’ 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, but you do not believe

because you are not part of my flock. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. 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. I and the Father are one.”

Few portions of scripture give more precious truth to the Christian. They are so magnificent that we are not likely to take particular notice of the bizarre context in which they are given. The Feast of Dedication today is known as Hanukkah. It celebrated the rebuilding of the temple and the altar of the Lord after the Babylonian Exile. It was, therefore, a great celebration of the faithfulness and restoring mercy of God after the long record of disobedience and even the apostasy of His own people. It is very important for us to keep in mind that when Israel was in Egypt they were the victims of oppression. But when Israel was in Babylon there were the victims of their own sin. Jesus is talking to a group of people who had every reason to know that they in their perplexing situation as the chosen children of God yet under oppression were indeed suffering from their own sin. You would think that that might generate a certain degree of humility. It did not.

You would think that the present condition of our nation would generate a certain condition of humility in the heart of God's people. In conversation this morning amongst the elders, one of them made this observation: he is deeply troubled by what is often the arrogant, condemning tone of those who claim to be Christians as they talk about others in our society. It is so easy to spew forth words of condemnation. It is very hard to cast yourself down on the ground and cry out to the Lord, “Have mercy, for we have been disobedient. Have mercy, for we have been corrupted. Have mercy, for we in our arrogance have betrayed the Lord Who loves us, and the sins that trouble our land are our sins, and there will be no healing until the body of Christ is healed. Lord, have mercy.”

Please pray with me: Gracious Father in heaven, we by Thy grace have today together celebrated the supper given to us by our Lord Jesus Christ. It is, Father the affirmation of Your faithfulness and Your grace. You have established the covenant for us, and You have drawn us to Yourself through Jesus. Gracious Father, You look for obedience and faithfulness from Your people as the testimony of our love for You. We desire to be servants. Grant to us the renewed mind and the renewed heart that we might indeed be servants. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Questions for Understanding and Application:

1. The message described living well in the world as: “having the ability to resist and overcome sin, live peaceably with others and especially in the body of Christ, having a consistent and fruitful prayer life as well as a witness for Christ in the world.” Is this your operative view of living well? Would you say this is the view most Christians take? If not, why not?
2. To whom does God offer the gospel? Who accepts that invitation? What makes the difference between those who do and those who don't? (see Romans 10:13, 3:9-23 and Ephesians 2:1-3)
3. What is unique about God the Father's “knowing” someone?
4. What is the relationship between knowledge and obedience? (See on this Hebrews 5:8-9)

5. Why were the works of Jesus needed? Which is more necessary for us, Jesus' works or His words and why is this so?
6. What role should works play in the Christian's life and witness and what sort of works would these be?
7. What bearing does the biblical concept of knowing have on a true understanding of marriage?
8. What is the difference between life endlessly extended and eternal life?
9. Why is it necessarily the case that even for mature believers eternal life is a gift given through faith alone, by grace alone, in Christ alone?