

The Religious who Don't Know God

John 8:37-47

In verse 31, "Jesus said to those Jews who believed in Him..." In verse 37 Jesus said to seemingly the same group, "I know that you are Abraham's descendants, but you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you..." We have identified "those Jews who believed in Him" as the people who were on Jesus' side in the controversies of the feast. They were on His side in that they were not a part of the conspiracy to kill and to discredit Jesus. They were open to the possibility that Jesus might be the Messiah. But if Jesus was the Messiah then what would this mean in a practical sense to those who embraced this conviction? This is what Jesus was getting to when He encouraged them toward commitment, If you will make yourselves at home in My word then you will be My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free. But, the people who had been on Jesus' side rejected the notion that further commitment was needed. This put them in opposition to Jesus' word and made them resistant to Jesus Himself. Turning away from Jesus put them together with those who had already rejected Him and those who had rejected Jesus were seeking to kill Him. It was the nature of Messiahship that either you were the Messiah and worthy of complete devotion or you were not and thus deserving of the fate of an imposter. The crowd that cried crucify Him had once sought the favors of healing and the grace of His teaching. And so they turned on Jesus and very quickly were no longer on His side but "sought to kill Him."

The story brings to mind the experience of Christian conversion and the question of genuineness. We use terms like making a decision for Christ, receiving Christ as Savior, being born again, and giving your life to Christ as well as others. The language of salvation is Biblically based and it is the only way that we have to speak of the experience of conversion. All of the terms listed above contain the truth of the gospel. Jesus spoke of the narrow gate and way that leads to eternal life and few there be that find it. We choose to enter. We make a decision for Christ.

John's gospel begins with the description of Jesus as the Word coming into the world to save the world but that even His own people did not know Him. "He came to His own but His own did not receive Him." The ones who did not receive Him were those who did not acknowledge who He was. They thought of Him as a threat to themselves or as an imposter or as a heretic. But those who did receive Him were the ones who came to know Him as Messiah, God and their own Savior. Receiving Christ is standing with Him against all who reject Him.

Jesus used the term "born again" in His conversation with Nicodemus. Literally, "born again" means to be "born from above." This emphasizes God's part in our salvation. For if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation. Old things are passed away and behold all things have become new. Born again does not just mean starting over, it means spiritual birth so that you are now "new." When before you were not God's child, now you are. When before you had no desire to conform your will to that of God, now you do. When before you had no Holy Spirit within to lead guide and convict, now He is always with you no matter where you go or what you do.

Giving your life to Christ speaks to Jesus' own simple call, "Follow Me." Following Jesus meant leaving everything behind in order to be with Him wherever He goes. Jesus said "If anyone would come after Me let him deny Himself and take up His cross and follow Me." To deny yourself is to let go of your ambitions in favor of what you know to be God's will. We do this knowing that His will is always best. Taking up your cross is to live as Jesus did. Jesus went to the cross and died there for us to save us from our sins. This was His mission. Your mission is to do what you know to be God's will today. Following Jesus means that we learn to focus on our relationship with Him. He is the one we want to be with and in fact He is with us wherever we go.

But, how many "experience" salvation without understanding? Instead of realizing the full Biblical meaning of the language of salvation they express to them a favorable inclination toward Jesus. They are like the Jews of John 8 who "were on Jesus' side." Coming to His side they are then in a place where they can hear His call to commitment. "Make yourself at home in My word." Then you will

know the truth and the truth shall set you free... But like the Jews of John 8 the "on Jesus side" crowd is not ready for commitment.

For those who know Christ, to discover what He wants is to have our decision made. The consciousness of God's will is persuasive. When did Peter or James or John receive an instruction from Jesus and then respond, "Let me think about it..."

This is a great thing to contemplate. Peter has the role of the bull in the China shop in the gospels. Everything he touched seemed to break. He asked Jesus, "How many times should I forgive my brother, as many as 7 times?" He walked on the water to Jesus and then sank. He fought with James and John. He had to be rebuked by Jesus when he refused to hear Jesus saying that He was going to the cross. He denied Jesus three times on the eve of the crucifixion. But in the midst of all of his humanness Peter lived as a disciple. He followed Jesus and did all that Jesus asked him to do. He was not perfectly consistent but he was pretty consistent.

Let's let the discipleship of the 12 be a model for our own. And notice that the "I'm on Jesus' side" people were deeply conflicted. He could be the Messiah but if He expects me to be a disciple, He better think again. You can't tell me that I'm in bondage and please don't try to explain to me what I already know.