

## Sermon- Defined by Our Destination

Scripture: John 7:32-36

Sunday, June 17, 2018

Today we are going to look at the last part of Jesus' sermon at the temple that I am going to call his Festival of Shelters sermon. You will recall that at the height of the Festival of Shelters, one of the 3 most important Jewish festivals, when the authorities were searching for Jesus in order to arrest and kill him, Jesus appears at the temple and starts teaching. And what does he speak on? Well, Jesus addressed the question on everybody's mind is, his identity question, is he the Messiah?

You also have to remember that in this period in Jewish history there were literally hundreds of people named Jesus and dozens of people who claimed to be the Messiah. So when Jesus Christ presented Himself, he had to do more than declare who he was. He had to start by giving the people ways to discern the truth. So that is what Jesus does mostly in the first part of his teaching. He starts by presenting the Divine Messenger Test. He says anyone speaking on their own authority and seeking glory for themselves is not from God and speaks lies and not the truth. You remember this right? Next he presents the Seeker Test. I did not focus on this earlier but I will address it today. And after presenting these tests, he then addresses who he is. And what he says at this stage about himself are three things. He is one who **knows God**, that is was sent **by God** and **to them**. When Jesus starts pulling back the curtain on his identity many people in the crowd start believing that he was the Messiah. What happens next is that, when the powers that be see the effect Jesus was having on these people, they move to arrest him. This signals to Jesus that his window of opportunity is closing. So he moves to present some critical things he must tell them about himself. And that is what we are going to focus on today.

So think of this last part of Jesus' Festival of Shelter's sermon has the crux of his message. What he shares now are things that are the most critical. What are they? Well, lets start with Jesus' actual words. He tells them this. "I will be with you only a little longer. Then I will return to the one who sent me. <sup>34</sup> You will search for me but not find me. And you cannot go where I am going." At this point, Jesus has returned to speaking cryptically. And the people hearing his words where puzzled. They were saying, Where is he planning to go?", "Is he thinking of leaving the country and going to the Jews in other lands?<sup>[d]</sup> Maybe he will even teach the Greeks! <sup>36</sup> What does he mean when he says, 'You will search for me but not find me,' and 'You cannot go where I am going'?"

Let's just examine for a minute how the people were responding to Jesus' words. Jesus just told them that he is going to return soon to the one who sent him. This is a place where they could not come. The people hearing that begin wondering, where Jesus is planning to go. The only thing they can imagine is that Jesus is talking about going to another country. That is why they ask, is he planning to go teach the Greeks. I just want to point out the irony of this situation. These people are actually clueless about what Jesus was talking about and they cannot stretch their thinking to come anywhere close to Jesus' meaning. And yet, the irony is that, Jesus did come not just for the Jews but for the Greeks and everyone else. And in fact it is only in the Gospel of John that we have this detail that when the Greeks start seeking Jesus in the later part of John chapter 12, and make their way to him that Jesus receives his signal that this phase of his ministry is over and it is time for him to go to the cross. So even though the people view Jesus' words about going where they cannot see him with a really limited imagination, what comes out of their mouth, "is he going to teach the Greeks also?" is actually very prophetic.

But I want to turn next to another matter of communication. You see, after speaking very directly in the middle of his sermon as we saw last Sunday, in this ending section, Jesus returns to a very cryptic speech. *"I will be with you only a little longer. Then I will*

*return to the one who sent me. <sup>34</sup> You will search for me but not find me. And you cannot go where I am going.”*

If you were following everything I talked about last Sunday about why Jesus in the middle of this storm of public opinion used as direct a speech as possible, you might be asking, why then would he now switch to such cryptic language? Now before all of you turn against me, I want to look at something interesting about the change that has taken place in the context. When the room was full of doubts and negative thoughts about Jesus, he uses very direct language. But when that wall of doubt was broken and the room is now divided between those who believe and those who don't, then the task for Jesus changes. The task for Jesus becomes to test their fledgling faith. And by using cryptic language at this point, in effect, Jesus is telling those people who have started believing in him was this, it is great that you believe that I am the Messiah. But for you to understand fully understand who I am, you will have to you will have to follow the rest of my life and be willing to stretch your mind and stretch your faith. Every time Jesus shares a lesson as a parable or some indirect language, he is actually throwing out a seeker challenge. He wants to see who is serious enough to wrestle with God for a deeper understanding of His word and who is really desperate for God's blessing. Something received too easily has no value right? So Jesus' use of cryptic language was to filter out those who were not serious and filter in those who were serious enough seekers to spend the rest of their life trying to follow Jesus and find out the full meaning of His words.

Some of you here who are hearing this message, in this space or even on the internet might be such a serious seeker. And I hope you will continue your seeking till God has opened the spectacular scope of the meaning of his words for your life. But what if you are someone who has walked with God a long time? If there something that this part of Jesus' sermon can teach you?

I believe so. And to get to that, you have to change gears with me to another aspect of Jesus' sermon finale. His message about where he is going. For you who understands more fully what Jesus meant, you understand that Jesus was talking about returning to heaven, which is where is Father is. That is the place that truly knows Jesus in all his glory. But you also know that the most critical part of Jesus' earthly ministry, the cross and the resurrection also lies ahead at this point in Jesus life. So when Jesus is telling his people, where I am going you cannot come, and I will be with you a little while longer and then you will not be able to see me, he is thinking about all those pivotal events that are uniquely his work to do after which he goes home. So think about this. Jesus knows all these things that he is about to do. These are the things for which people will know him for the rest of eternity. And yet he has to somehow communicate to the people in front of him who he is, without including the most important definition things about him on his resume. So what does he do? He throws this cryptic message that will have people who are really interested, following to find out what he is going to do rather than focus on his past. Because if they really wanted to find out who he is, Jesus' past even the most spectacular parts, his geneology from Adam, his virgin birth, the divine visitation to his parents, all of that don't even begin to answer the question of who Jesus is.

Jesus' past is a great introduction to who he is, but it is where Jesus was going that would define Him.

That brings us to a very important question I think for each of us. When you think of your identity, what do you think of? What makes you, you? When you have to fill forms for all kinds of purposes, they ask you your name, your gender, your age, your address, your ethnicity, your marital status and on and on. All these things have a say in who you are right? But if you were to go deeper, you would say that all those things I have filled on various forms are accurate but they hardly tell you who I really am. If you want to understand who I am, you have to first understand my parents and where I came from.

If you look at the Bible and how it defined people, their roots and ancestor were very important right? In the Bible almost everybody who is even a somewhat important character which be described as the son of ...

Some people look to other places to define who they are. Sometimes it is some big thing that happes in their life, a big failure or a big success even. Some people define themselves by the size of their possessions. Some people define themselves by their disabilities or addictions. But if you want to I believe learn something about how we should look at ourselves, from the example of Jesus Christ, I think we need to come to grips with the fact that the most important aspect of our identity is where we are heading. And the most critical aspect of our identity is our final destination.

Just to put this idea in context, take someone like Billy Graham for example. Now Billy Graham was born on Nov 7, 1918 to parents William and Morrow Graham. He grew up a good kid in Charlotte, North Carolina on a dairy farm with three other siblings. Now if that was all that was said about Billy Graham at his funeral that would not sound right to you, isn't it? Not really, because where Billy graham came from is interesting and helpful to know, but really the dairy farm in North Carolina does not really communicate his identity right? Billy Graham is defined by what he ended up doing for God, preaching the Gospel to 215 million people, from prince to pauper. But even that is not the full story. Billy Graham is fully defined by where he is right now. In the arms of a loving God. And everything he did when he was alive, he did because he was so clear that he belonged to His heavenly Father, he took his marching orders from his heavenly father and everything else flows out of that strong sense of identity.

When you think of your identity in terms of your destination as Jesus did, then you never deviate from your life's purpose. You are much more aware that God created you for the Good words that only you can accomplish and not even a Billy Graham or a Menno Simons can do. And when we peg our identity on our destination, then it is next

to impossible for the enemy to whisper lies into our heads as he tries to derail your life and try to attack your self worth and tell you that you will not amount to anything because a certain thing happened in the past.

When we peg our identity on our ultimate destination, it is much easier to keep a safe distance from material temptations. It helps shape our most critical relationships and gives us immunity from superficial things. It feels a bit silly after all to pursue a fad or want to drive only some fancy brand when you know that God is engineering every aspect of your life for a much greater destination.

When we peg our identity on our destination, it even gives us the capacity to pick up the cross that lies on the path to our final destination.

Yes, our past is a somewhat useful introduction of ourselves to the world. But we have no greater identity than as children of God, created to do specific good needs, here on earth after which we will spend a very special retirement for all eternity, in God's presence and living our best life in a home more glorious than we can imagine.

I when we think of who we are, I want to present this one caveat. Even though I am talking about identity, it is not all about us. What ultimately defines is not who we are but whose we are. It is about who we say Jesus is. It is about dying to self. Is it about being reborn as one who is fully in Christ. It is about whether we get filtered in as a seeker who really wanted to purpose the will of God.

My prayer is that, each of you will in closely examining what our savior Jesus Christ' has revealed to you about himself will build a clearer sense of your own identity, and that clarity will not just get you to your final destination, the home of your heavenly Father but that along the journey to your final destination you will have much occasion to glorify His name. Let us pray.