

DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

JULY 2024 | JOHN 7

The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory, but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true and in him is no falsehood.

John 7:18, ESV

ETERNAL LIFE DEMONSTRATED

The four evangelists whose books begin the New Testament proclaim the gospel each from a different angle. John, for example, announces that the arrival of Jesus on earth is as monumental an event as the original act of creation. When the eternal word became flesh, a whole new creation began. John helps us interpret his gospel by telling us his purpose in writing:

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and

that by believing you may have life in his name.

John 20:30, ESV

The account as written reveals the conflict between the life of the unbelieving Jews and the unique life that Jesus brought to the earth. Humans in the fallen condition focus on résumés or “bios”- emphasizing the material, observable, rational, and physical. Jesus was speaking the language of heaven and demonstrating the life of God through a human. There is another word for life: *zoe*. *Zoe* is the superior form of life that Jesus displayed. The natural “bio” mind has difficulty grasping it.

In John Chapter 7, he tells about the growing hostility among the Jews who could not recognize Jesus as the Son of God. There was a feast taking place in Jerusalem that attracted thousands. The brothers of Jesus suggested He go to the feast to better display His ability to do signs. It would be strategic marketing - He could gain more followers and build His ministry. Jesus told them that He was not going with them because He operated on a different agenda and calendar. He reminded them that they did not yet have the same life that He had.

The eternal life that Jesus lived and gave to His followers is a God-directed life. It is not random, but is instead being guided to fulfill the purpose for which we exist. God is so magnificently sovereign that He can give us agency in our choices yet direct our lives in ways to bring about His purpose in exactly the right time. The heart of the gospel is that Jesus came in the fullness of time. All of history had prepared for the time when a virgin would conceive and the Word would become flesh. Earlier in John's account, Jesus went to a wedding with His mother, and she told Him about the embarrassment her friend faced by running out of wine for the party. He responded that His time had not yet come. Later in John's account there is the story of Jesus' friend Lazarus getting sick, yet He waited three days to go to him. Mary

and Martha accused Jesus of being late, but He was on the Father's agenda and living by His calendar.

Humans constantly look for guidance in finding their way. We look to parents, mentors, education, science, government, religion, etc. We feel smothered by the demands on our time. We catch ourselves frantically trying to get everything done, yet never sure we did the most important stuff. As we compare the two forms of life, "bios" respond to situations as they come up in ways that enhance our own agendas of preservation and promotion. Jesus, on the other hand, lives only to please the Father and knows that the Father will have Him at each appointed place at exactly the right time. The question arises: "Will He do that for me?" The New Testament assures us that He longs to. We are to live consciously for the exaltation of Jesus. As we do, the Spirit of life in us moves us along the agenda of God's calendar, and we experience the joy of being His channel of life to the world around us. Jesus indicated that the key is that He lived to proclaim the message of another, not Himself:

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and in him is no falsehood.

John 7:18, ESV

Resting in His unconditional love and His faithful commitment to us, we can be assured Jesus won't let us miss what He has appointed: "Those who are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God" (Romans 8:14, ESV). Jesus was not demonstrating the life that can only happen in heaven. He was showing us how we can live now as we share the same Spirit that raised Him from the grave.

In John's account, Jesus goes later to the feast and teaches in the temple. This arouses the ire of the religious leaders, and they try to arrest Him. Strangely, they can't. No one can touch Him because His time had not yet come. They even send down the temple police who have the authority and manpower to subdue Him. They go back to the leaders without Him and are severely rebuked. "But no one ever spoke like this man," they said. Jesus' words were echoing the sound that has always existed - the sound that created all things, the sound that moved the prophets. The sound of heaven infused His words, and the people were mesmerized. They were in the presence of eternity, and it overwhelmed them. "Bios" can't comprehend "Zoen."

In the early church, Stephen had such an experience as he saw Jesus standing

to welcome him as he was stoned. Paul experienced it on the road to Damascus. Early in my life as a preacher, I read a book by D. Martin Lloyd-Jones on preaching that changed me. His chapter on the Romance of Preaching described what I had seen, but couldn't grasp. He explained that sermons that were mostly lectures or inspirational talks weren't preaching. Gospel preaching is a dance with heaven, earth, and the preacher all moving together. Something happens when the Spirit who inspired the Scripture joins the proclamation of the Scripture and Proclaimer of the Scriptural truth that is beyond the natural mind's ability to define. It is beyond the skill and intellect of the preacher. It is more than a well-crafted sermon. The word becomes flesh in a way that the inner being of the hearer is arrested.

During seminary days, my wife and I pastored a church in Fort Worth, Texas. There was (and is) so much I didn't know about being a pastor. I loved to preach. It was more than talking or being the focus of the service. It was magical-like. One Sunday, I was trying to explain how the anchor of hope reaches into the heavenly Holy place as the book of Hebrews says. It is a deep truth, and I wasn't sure I was getting through. Then I glanced over to my left and on the second row of pews, brother Sam Borden was looking up, tears streaming down his face.

His mumbling became louder as he audibly said, "I see it. I see it. I see it." I stopped, and we all enjoyed a movement of the dance. I am talking about the difference in truth that can be proven by empirical evidence and truth that streams from the eternal life we have been given. It is what happens when God begins to open the eyes of hungry people to see what they have heard about but not yet known. On the eighth day of the feast that John recounts in his Gospel, Jesus stood up and broke through the ritual they had been practicing for the previous seven days. Each day some priests went down to the pool, filled the pots, brought them back to the temple, and poured them out. This commemorated the time in the wilderness that God provided water for the company of Israel following Moses. Jesus declared that all that was about Him, and He stood and identified Himself as the source of a water that never runs out:

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given,

because Jesus was not yet glorified.

John 7:37-39, ESV

Jesus was telling them that the hope they had gained from reading Ezekiel 47 about the river flowing from the temple all the way to the Dead Sea and the desert was pointing to him. The river brings life to whatever it touches - fruit trees, fish, and fishermen. Jesus was telling them that they didn't have to wait. He has come. The Spirit is the eternal kind of water that satisfies the existential longing of the human heart. Those who come to Jesus and believe will not only be satisfied, but become a temple out of which rivers flow to the ends of the earth. The legitimate hopes created by the story of the Old Testament are fulfilled in Jesus alone.

The eternal life demonstrated by Jesus is a God-directed, heart-arresting, hope-fulfilling life. It is available now. He has arrived. The Spirit has been given. We can drink and flow in the river that takes life to everywhere that the blood has bought. What a life!

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