

“The Man Called John”

(John 1:19-34, 3:22-30)

September 25, 2011

Order of Worship for September 25, 2011,

Pre-service Song

Welcome and Announcements

Ministry Moment:

Call to Worship: Psalm Isaiah 40:3-8 and Prayer

Songs of Worship:

“We Have Come to Join in Worship”

Song # 207

“All Heaven Declares ”

Overhead

“Come, Let us Worship and Bow Down”

Song # 227

“We Bow Down”

Overhead

Offering and Offertory

Special Music

Message: “The Man Called John” (John 1:19-34 and 3:22-30)
by Pastor Bronson

Closing Song: “Make Me a Servant”

Song # 669

Parting Word of Grace

Sunday Evening in the Word
Hebrews 12, Preparing for the Coming Kingdom
5:30 to 7:00
The Henneker Music Building

“The Prayer Closet”

September 25, 2010

“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”
(Colossians 4:2a)

This week let us be united in praying that:

1. **The Nelsons, EFCA church planters in the Philippines:** that by the Spirit’s anointing the gospel will dispel the teachings of both traditional Catholicism and Islam, winning many converts to Christianity; that strong church leaders will grow up amongst the Filipinos; that the Lord will protect the Nelsons’ physical, mental and spiritual health
2. **President Obama:** the Word will become a lamp for his feet and a light to his path; the Spirit will give him an understanding mind and a noble heart; he will distinguish truth from error and wisdom from folly
3. **AWANA:** the Lord will raise up all the leaders and helpers needed for an excellent and spiritually effective ministry; the Spirit will lead the staff to love the children they serve; the children will be receptive of the truth and eager to bring their friends
4. **Military or Public Service Personnel of the Week: SMSgt Tye Turner** (husband of Cathy): that he and his unit mates continue in safety at Beale AFB
5. **Young Adult of the Week: Tiffany Wubbolding:** now living and working on a ranch in Texas as a trainer’s assistant of show horses; please pray she and find a church with midweek services (her job travels most weekends); that she find a car

Let me ask you to open your scriptures to John 1:14-18. I am going to read these scriptures:

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John [the Baptist] bore witness about him, and cried out, ‘This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.’”) And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.”

I have entitled the message – different than you find in your bulletins – “The Son of the Father”. I did not quite finish this section last week and there are some matters here that are just essential for our right understanding and appreciating of all that John is seeking to accomplish not just in the Prologue, the introduction to his gospel, but sets us up for the Gospel as a whole.

It is often said, and I imagine many of us in this room have heard this, that the cross is the defining event of all history, that all things lead up to the cross and all things then lead away from it. Certainly that is understandable particularly if you are a sinner. For we all understand that it was on the cross that the Lord Jesus Christ took upon Himself the whole weight of our guiltiness and has freed us from that so we don’t stagger beneath the weight of our own moral failings and spiritual rebellion. However the work of the cross was really one part of a larger work that God was accomplishing through the incarnation. When the Logos – which if we had read this whole opening section you would have remembered is the Word of God – when the Logos which is the Word of God became incarnate, the cross was virtually guaranteed. It was so for two reasons and I want to put those before us. The purpose of the incarnation was first the cross, as we agreed. The cross work of Jesus, however, is not a separate event but is integral as to why He came: the Logos became a man in order that He would save us as sinners. We know that; we affirm that. We rest in that. We understand that the way in which He has saved sinners is by satisfying the Law of God. That is what He was doing on the cross. To put it in short form, God said sin is death-worthy and therefore Jesus died in order to remove the just penalty against us for our sin.

So we understand that the incarnation led to the cross where Jesus died for sinners, to satisfy the justice of God and did so by being a substitutionary sacrifice. If you know the Old Testament, you know that the whole structure of the sacrificial system was substitutionary: you gave an animal instead of yourself paying the price for what you had done. Here is the ultimate expression of that: substitutionary death [by a sinless person]. The resurrection was proof that the law was fully satisfied. So when you and I close with Christ – an old term for yielding and submitting to what God has done – we understand from Romans 8:1 (these words should be memorized by everybody who is a Christian) that there is therefore now no condemnation, none. So anyone here in this room, if you are looking back over this past week and you are feeling that you are under some sort of accusation and you are staggering under some sort of guilt, let me assure you it is not the Holy Spirit who is talking to you. There is someone else in the Bible who is called the accuser of the brethren, and that is Satan. He is the one who wants to break you and bury you beneath guilt. God never does that. He knows that we are now without condemnation. That is the first reason, but it is not the whole reason for the incarnation.

We go then to the second purpose for the incarnation. The larger purpose of God is what we find in the last verse here in the paragraph that I read this morning for John 1:18. Listen to what it says: “*No one has ever seen God. The only God who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.*” The purpose of the incarnation is to make the Father known to us.

I want to read a passage that those of us who have long experience with the Word and Christ are probably well familiar with. I encourage you to open your Bible’s to 2Corinthians 5:17-21. There is a very essential truth that needs to be brought forward for our understanding in order that we would gather in the riches of God’s grace. We

are familiar with this: the riches of God’s grace. All of us in this room who know Christ should feel ourselves to be either already very wealthy in Christ or approaching that with delight as we are gathering in these riches, this marvelous reality of peace and acceptance and joy [with God]. This is what Paul writes to the Corinthians.

“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold the new has come. All this is from God who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave to us the ministry of reconciliation. That is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.” (All of that is simply Romans 8:1, *“There is therefore now no condemnation [for those who are in Christ Jesus.]”*) *“Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us, we implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”*

Now I want to point out something about the ending of that passage. You will notice that Paul there does not say, “We implore you on behalf of Christ, be saved.” He could have said that. The Bible often says that. But that is not what he says at this point. Second Corinthians, you see, is not written to unsaved people. It is written to a church, a body of people gathered out of the world through the gospel of Jesus Christ. What Paul says is that he implores them to be reconciled. Jesus wants to lead us to the Father. That is why He sent the Son, to reconcile us to the Father, that we would understand that the Father is our God.

Someone might wonder, “Aren’t we really just confusing terms? Isn’t it really the same thing to say you are saved and you are reconciled?” The answer is, no. We have a perfect illustration here. Sam and Annie are married. Therefore Sam and Annie are entirely reconciled on all things in all issues and will have no disagreements or difficulties for the rest of their lives! Now Annie, we all know Sam. . .” You see, we just know that to say that is to instantly evoke laughter because we know it is just dumb, and it is true with us and God as well. Indeed, even more so, because the depths, the degree to which, the extent to which we are in ourselves in resistance against God and incomprehension of God and in a determined self-centeredness, thinking we must make our own way: oh, this is far greater for us to surrender, for us to work through, for us to harmonize with the purposes of God than just getting along with our spouse. So in this matter of reconciliation we need to understand that just because we are saved does not mean we have been fully reconciled.

I made an estimate, and I could certainly be wrong, but I would say that 75 to 80 percent of the New Testament was written precisely to encourage and exhort people to pursue reconciliation, to learn how to come fully to peace with God, and to accept God’s rule and direction in their lives. We need to understand the fuller purpose of God. Those fuller purposes are that God wants us to be His friends: Friends! He wants relationships that are characterized by trust. If you have a relation of trust, you entrust matters to the other, and in this case, of course, you would entrust them to the Father.

It ought not to surprise us that this is challenging. Indeed, if we reflect upon the beginning of the story, as it were, that is the story of the difficulties between us and God, you might recall that the first lie that was told, the beginning of all deception and all the sorrows of humanity, was a lie about the Father. When Satan seduced Eve into disobedience he did so not simply by convincing her that the forbidden fruit was good – she looked and said, “O, looks like it’s pretty good stuff”, there’s no question about that, he did that – but more profoundly, “God”, he said, “lied to you. He misled you. He said ‘Eat the fruit, you die.’ The reality is, eat the fruit, you become like God.” The essential matter there is that what Satan was capable of doing at that particular point was to slander God’s character, persuading Eve that, “God is not necessarily out for my greatest good. I can’t just trust Him. I won’t take His word. I will figure it out for myself.” That mindset is at the core. It is at the very depths. Even those of us saved and those of us saved for a long time continue to struggle with this fact: “Am I really sure that God’s will is the best thing for me?” Reconciliation is what is designed to answer that question: yes.

Going back to John 1:14-18, you see in verse 16 that John underscores the grace of God. He, John the Apostle, John the disciple, says, *“From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.”* Then in the 17th verse John goes on to say, *“For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”* I want to address this particular statement because it is consistently and widely misunderstood. We are talking here about the contrast between the Old and the New Testament, the Mosaic Covenant, it is often said, and the New Covenant that is in Christ’s blood. We celebrate communion and we talk about that. People assume that what is meant here is that the Mosaic covenant was one of works whereas the New Covenant in Christ’s blood is not of works but is of grace. So you have this contrast, you have works without grace – Old Testament – grace without works – New Testament. There is, however, a misunderstanding. We say, the Old Testament is characterized by sacrifices and rule keeping, and the New Testament is characterized by life in the Spirit. Again there is a misunderstanding here. What we are actually looking at is what the Pharisees made of the Law, but not what God told Moses. It is important for us once again to get behind the seeming contradiction in order that we would understand the gracious work of God in the lives of the Bible character, for that is our model, but also in our lives. It is good to remember these things. When Abraham was called by God and given the promise, there was no law. Equally, when Israel was called by God out of Egypt, out of bondage and into a covenant relationship with God, there was no law. The Law was not given until after these things had occurred. Consequently what we need to understand is that Israel as a people is the fruit of God’s electing grace. The Law was not put in place to save Israel; it was put in place to reconcile Israel to the ways of God. Beyond that, if you read the Old Testament, which I highly recommend, you soon realize that God in His dealings with Israel was constantly gracious, because Israel was constantly disobedient and idolatrous. They kicked against the goads, to use the term referred to Paul in the New Testament. God indeed dealt with Israel as you might see in Proverbs 3:11-12 or in Hebrews 12:5-6, he dealt with them as sons. How does a father deal with sons? [He does so] by disciplining them. Why does a father discipline his children? Is it because he hates them? It is because he loves them! They are his children, and he desires that it would be well with them. He wants them to know blessings, he wants them to know joy, he wants them to lead lives that are productive and harmonious with the purposes of God. If you let a kid run wild what will he be: Wild, incapable of restraining his own appetites, running up against other people, causing continual strife and contention. That is not a way to live!

So why, if God has been so gracious throughout the whole of the Old Testament, why does John say here in verse 17, “the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Christ”? There is a very good reason, an essential reason why he would say such a thing. It was simply for this. Grace in all of its phases and all of its manifestations is only the fruit of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. There is no grace, there is no favor from the Father apart from, in light of, and upon built upon the foundation of the freely given substitutionary sacrifice of His Son for the sins of all mankind. There just is no other grace. In terms of these few words that we have here, what John wants the Jews, who were probably reading this well, is that Moses did not die for anybody. He couldn’t possibly for anybody. He could only die for himself, and even that would not have been sufficient. His life did not secure grace. Furthermore none of the sacrifices in the Old Testament prescribed by the Mosaic Law could possibly secure grace for anyone. All you have to do is read Hebrews chapters 9 and 10. These spell out with clarity that the death of no animal can possibly have any actual substantive relationship to the sins of a man: it is [only] an animal! That won’t do. Only the freely given sacrifice by Jesus of His sinless life for all who would believe and receive it for what it truly is would secure God’s grace for sinners. The death and resurrection of Jesus came at a specific point in time. There was a time before it, and there was a time after it. However, the fact of the cross and of the resurrection was not only planned by God, but was operative in securing God’s grace from the beginning and even from before the beginning. Listen: what did Paul write to the Ephesians? Did he not write that they had been chosen from before the foundations of the world? That is when they were chosen, from before the foundations of the world. How were they chosen? [They were chosen] in Christ. Paul is indicating the centrality of the cross of Jesus Christ for all time. The fact that is being driven home to us is that God is a God of grace: always.

Clearing away this misperception of a clash in the Old and New Testaments—the Old Covenant was incomplete but it was not contrary to the purpose and character of God—by clearing that misunderstanding of a clash away we are able to see more clearly that both covenants, both Old and New, are part of the work of the Logos, the Son of God, the Reason of God, in making known to us the truth about the Father, overcoming the lie. The Law of God is part of the revelation about the Father. What do we know about the Father? These are the things we know about the Father from the Old and the New Testaments with certainty: God is holy. How “often” is God holy? He is always holy. God is gracious. He is always gracious. God is faithful, He is true. He is always faithful and true. God never changes. All of these affirmations are in some sense summed up for us in the wonderful statement that God is love. Now, this statement has been horribly abused in the modern age wherein preachers – people like me – have gone through and picked out some of the attributes of God and rejected other of the attributes of God and said some of the attributes of God are love and the other attributes don’t belong with God. So you think, who are you to say? To say that God is love is not to say that God is always “loving”. I have raised five children. I am the most sweet-tempered, gentle, loving guy on earth—most of the time, but now and then. . .! Now and then you’ve got to deal with stuff in order that the stuff will get dealt with! Right?

You have to be able to say that all that God does is an expression of His love. That is not easy. Right now you and I have to say – and you don’t rush to this; don’t play games. Don’t pretend what isn’t true. Right now what I am having to do in the back of my mind I am having to say, “Allowing A.J. Peters to experience what he experienced at the air show [he was present at a disastrous air crash in which an air plane crashed directly into the stands, killing a number of people with terrible carnage] is included in the love of God. I have to work that out. Right now I have not worked it out yet. I also have to say that the death of this young pastor [the victim of an utterly senseless random killing; he was the associate pastor of a neighboring Hmong church] devastating a congregation and bereaving his wife, that this too is within the love of God. You have to do that. I am not there, so we won’t talk about it anymore. But those are the issues. That is what you have to deal with. It is easy say it is God’s will that Lotte [Conley] becomes a member of this church. That is easy. The other stuff is not easy.

This is why you cannot possibly have a God of justice and wrath in the Old Testament and a God of grace and mercy in the New and yet say they are the same God. You either have both in both or neither are. God’s justice and wrath are just as much manifestations of His love and holiness are His grace and mercy and forgiveness. They come together on the cross. God poured out His justice and the wrath of His justice on His Son because He was pouring out His love on us.

That is the core of what Jesus wants us to know about the Father. The 18th verse of this chapter says, “*No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.*” I thought about this. I was supposed to preach about John the Baptist today and the music you picked out Kari [the choir director] was perfect and when I preach about John the Baptist next week we will remember all the wonderful things that were sung today. But John the Baptist was a man bearing witness to Jesus. We will look at that next week. Jesus on the other hand is the Son of God bearing witness to His Father. That is what you and I want to remember. The affirmation that is being given to us to here is that it is Jesus who reveals God truly. It is only as you understand God the Father as the Father of Jesus that you begin to understand Him as the Father. What we are being told is that God is quintessentially a father. What is a father? A father is one who gives life.

I suspect that in reading through these opening eighteen verses if you drop down to the eighteenth verse few of us would even notice that John has suddenly dropped a new name for God in the narrative. He has not referred to “Father” at one point until we get down to this last statement, the eighteenth verse. We probably don’t notice it because as Christians we are so used to thinking about God as our Father, and rightly. We pray the prayer, don’t we: “Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. . .” But as you read through those opening verses, [there is no mention], however John has made a most profound statement regarding God as Father when you look at

verses 12-13. John 1:12-13 look what John says: *“But to all to did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children...”* There is your open door. *“...children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”* I want to talk about this a little bit. It is relatively easy to lose track in that two verse statement of who the pronouns refer to. The first “him” is a reference to the true light and so is the second. But with the third you have something of a dilemma. In the grammatical structure of the sentence the pronoun “he” could equally refer to the Father or to the Logos, either way. There is a rule in grammar that says that you go back to the nearest antecedent subject to determine the reference of the pronoun. According to that rule, we would return to verse nine and find again it refers to the true light. So we continue: The true light gives to those who believe in him as the light “the right to become children of God, who were born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” Now reasonably we ask this question: which God is meant here: God the Logos or what is sometimes stated as God proper? We might think to ourselves that John has not been very helpful to us in straightening out the relationships [amongst the members of the Trinity], but you have to remember that John’s purpose is in order for us to see the Father and the Son in perfect harmony. He is not trying to separate out all their roles but is trying to help us understand that all that is accomplished is by both of them equally.

It is a commonplace with liberal Christians as well as with other religions that all men are children of God. We have heard that: all men are the children of God. That however is not what John is saying at this point. You can see that when he writes that we are not children who born of blood. We are not children born of the will of the flesh or the will of man. John is not referring to natural birth at all. What he is referring to is adoption. We are the adopted children of God. The English Standard Version [of the Bible] has a helpful explanation of adoption as an insert; you can look at it in your ESV Bibles under Galatians 4. This is what it says: “In Paul’s world, adoption was ordinarily of young adult males of good character to become heirs and maintain the family name for rich people who otherwise had no children.” That is what was going on. By the way we are not the first civilization in the history of man [for whom] when people become wealthy and busy and they don’t want to bother having in children. That is common in our day and it was common amongst the Romans in their day, and it was common amongst the Greeks in their day. So when they realized in that time to have no heir for the family was a disaster for all your properties, what they looked for a trustworthy young man—by the way, how many of you know who Caesar Augustus was? He was the adopted son of [Julius Caesar and became first Roman Emperor] so that was the relationship. So right now look around the room mentally [and decide] who are the guys, the young men that you would entrust your family heritage too? I’m probably too old so don’t look at me! Now listen to what the ESV says here: “Paul, however, proclaims God’s gracious adoption of persons of bad character to become heirs of God and fellow heirs of Christ.” Who were the persons with bad character he is referring to? Y’all, that’s who he is referring to! Did you ever wonder about the weird people God saves? This is the fourth church I’ve been a pastor of. He [saves people] just as weird here as every place else! It is just amazing. God just saves anybody. I would have a better list.

Now it is worthwhile to read the whole of what Paul said. Turn please to Romans 8:12-17. I have to move quickly here or I am going to be accused of being slow. This is what he says:

“So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided...” that we are reconciled.

I changed the word. *“...provided we suffer...”* All I am saying is that is part of reconciliation. I am saved, I am an heir, and now if I am to enter into the riches of His grace I must be fully reconciled, and if that means suffering, it means suffering. That is what he is saying here, *“...provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be*

glorified with him.” Even a short exposition of this passage would take a long time. I can’t do that. I just want to notice the relationship between these verses and verses 12-13 in John 1. We receive the right to become children does not mean that we choose to become God’s children. It cannot possibly mean that. I don’t care what you have been told. Read the verses: “who were born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man...” Whose will? God’s will. That is the foundation of the assurance of salvation. If God has reached out and put His hand on you and said, “You are mine.” Do you think He is going to let go? Absolutely not! He does not change His mind. So what is the choice? We choose whether or not we are going to act like children. You see, when we submit and we say “I will be reconciled,” we will cry out “Abba! Father!” For it is no easy journey. Sin is far too deeply woven into the fabric of my soul for it to be easily removed. And as I journey down the road I will learn more and more of the grace of God, grace upon grace, and I will also learn more and more of His love for me. Thereby I come to know what it means to be a child of God. I commend that to you, commend that if you do not know Him that you not stand off. Let the Spirit of God speak to your heart and mind. Listen, bend the knee, trust Him, accept what Christ has done for you, and know the love of God.

Questions for understanding and application:

1. What did the Cross accomplish for our reconciliation with God? Who was reconciled and was it needed?
2. Would agree that friendship entails a deeper level of reconciliation than adoption as a child? Why or why not? Is each of your children also a friend? What is the difference?
3. What is so destructive about slander? To what effect did Satan slander God to Eve?
4. How do the Mosaic Covenant and the New Covenant agree and how do they contrast? What was the great deficiency of the Mosaic Covenant?
5. What was the purpose of the incarnation and how does the Mosaic Covenant serve that purpose?
6. According to Romans 8:12-17, what is the challenge faced by the adopted children of God? In what way does the liberal Christian understanding that all people are God’s children undermine or get in the way of people facing this challenge?
7. Why is growth in Christian maturity properly seen as growing in grace? (on this see Romans 8:12-17)
8. Reviewing the eighteen verses of the Prologue, what are the truths which stand out as most significant to you and why?