

Sermon- Christ's Response to the Blasphemy Accusation

Scripture: John 10: 31-42

Sunday, January 20, 2019

Last week I discussed two kinds of responses to Jesus' beautiful Good Shepherd promise to his people. One set of people as you will recall had the ridiculous response that he was demon possessed. I called them the truth spinners. The other set of people could sense the truth in what Jesus was saying even if they did not understand it all. These people I called the Truth Seekers. In the next section of chapter 10 we get an escalation of both rhetoric and action. Because the Truth Spinners were not just blabbering nonsense, but they are literally picking up stones to kill Jesus. Actually, by way of irony I want to point out that back in John 8 you might remember the story of the woman caught in adultery. At that time also people had picked up stones to throw at the woman. But when Jesus spoke, his words convicted them and they dropped their stones, remember? It would be very possible that because today's event takes place in the same vicinity that some of those same people were in this crowd ready to stone Jesus. So picture the scene we are entering today. Jesus is here surrounded by a mob with stones in hand. And we get an opportunity to see just what Jesus does about it.

Let's start with what Jesus does not do. Jesus does not raise his hand, call down fire from heaven or tell his supporters to take up arms. If there was any endorsement for the logic, "the only way to stop a bad guy with a stone is with a good guy with a stone" then Jesus would have made all the good guys around him pick up stones as well. You know that is not what Jesus does here or ever. And if that was not what Jesus does, it should not be what his followers do, right? Ok but today we are going to focus on what does Jesus do. Let's take a look.

The first thing we see is that Jesus speaks directly to the crowd. And he speaks calmly and with respect. That is the most disarming thing you can do to someone who is about

to attack you. Speak calmly and with respect. And what does Jesus tell them? He tells them that he has shown them many Good works directly from His Heavenly Father. So which of these works deserved stoning? Jesus here is uses a persuasion technique called Implicit Assumptions here. The first assumption that He is inserting here is the assumption that they have a clear reasoning for their action. Now they have to come up a notch and live up to the respect they are being given by stopping and explaining their reasoning. Jesus also slips in a second Implicit Assumption that the works He has done are Good Works. Now they also have to specifically address how they can justify killing someone who has shown them Good Works.

His accusers cannot come up with any arguments against Jesus' Good Works so they are forced to justify their actions. To justify they bring up the issue of Jesus' claims. Specifically His claim to be God. You see they accuse him of blasphemy because blasphemy did have the death penalty. I want to dwell on this for a moment. Of course we know that claiming to be God if you are not God is blasphemy. But what if you are actually God like Jesus was, right? It would not be blasphemy for Jesus to tell his people who he was. But legal cases revolve around getting the technicalities right. Jesus was not just 100% God but 100% man as well. And to the people there he looked like a man. Also they did not have the Holy Spirit to guide them in their thinking. So you have to account for the possibility that these people because they could not perceive Jesus' divinity would at the time be right in their own minds for thinking that Jesus was a man claiming to be God. While Jesus was not committing the sin of blasphemy, it would not be so unreasonable to see that they thought he was, right? And Jesus was very sensitive to this fact.

So how was Jesus supposed to reveal his divinity in human form without violating any blasphemy laws? Also in every culture except North American culture self-promotion or boasting about yourself was always looked upon as something only a very shameless person would do and something that no one would take seriously. Jesus referred to

self-promotion in John 5:31, when he said, “if I testify about myself, my testimony would not be valid”. And because of that I think that you will be able to relate to why Jesus does not go around saying “I Am God” in those specific words in any of the Gospels including John. And many the 20th century have looked at this lack of direct claim from the opposite view point of our mob today and go on to say that Jesus never claimed to be God. It was just his followers who made it all up! But here is the interesting fact. In all four Gospels¹ Jesus is accused of blasphemy. That blasphemy accusation happened because the people in Jesus’ time were clearly getting the message from him that he was God come to earth for a purpose because of the miracles He did, because He claimed to forgive sins, because he said “if you have seen Him you have seen the Father” and he said “If you want to go to the Father, there is no other way except through him”. So clearly Jesus communicated his divinity to the people. But he never called himself God by instead he claimed to be the “Son of God”. This phrase communicated two things. It communicated his divinity but also communicated that he was a human son. Son of God communicated both his divinity and humanity. So if you ever meet people who tell you that Jesus never claimed to be God, remind them of the blasphemy accusations. This is just a bonus fact that I wanted to equip you with for when you get into spiritual conversations with people around you.

But the meat of today’s passage is the legal and technical case against Jesus and how he handles it. So I just want to reiterate that because Jesus was 100% God and 100% man, and the title of Son of God communicated that flawlessly. But the problem is this.

If people could not perceive His divinity for whatever reason they would have been justified in thinking that Jesus was committing blasphemy. This was a real issue. Jesus wanted to be extremely fair to his opponents. So Jesus starts where they are, and tries to address the question, if Jesus looks like a man, how can he refer to himself as the Son of God. Here is how Jesus reasons. Jesus goes into scripture and presents a fascinating

¹ Mat 26:65, Mark 14:61, Luke 5:21, John 10:33

fact. He quotes Ps 82 verse 6 and I quote ³⁴ *Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, "You are gods" '?"* ³⁵ *If He called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken),* ³⁶ *do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'?*

So what is this defense that Jesus is using? Well, I want to say that this is a really difficult part of scripture that scholars have spent centuries writing about. But here is how I want you to understand it. First, I want us to look at this quote along with the rest of the verses to see a little more context. So Ps 82:6-8 reads like this,

⁶ I said, "You are ^[e]gods,

And all of you are children of the Most High.

⁷ *But you shall die like men,*

And fall like one of the princes."

⁸ *Arise, O God, judge the earth;*

For You shall inherit all nations

So in Ps 82 God seems to be doing something he never usually does. The real God is calling some other beings "gods". It is important to note that these other beings are gods with a small g. How do we know that? Because in our passage in Greek the word used is theos, when the word for the real God of course is Yahweh. And if you look at the quote in Hebrew the word used is "Elohim" instead of Yahweh for the real God. Now the difficulty is that we do not know who specifically Yahweh is calling theos or Elohim here. Put that on your to-do list to ask God when you see Him in heaven. But there are two pieces of information about this group of people. One is that they are mortal like human beings because verse 7 goes on to say "you shall die like men and fall like one of the princes". But secondly you also see from the context that these theos are people who received the Word of God. But I want to emphasize that this groups identity is not

important. What is important is the point that Jesus was making. And the point is this. If the Word of God conferred small g god status on some human beings according to their own scripture, how much more valid it would be for Jesus who was sanctified by His heavenly Father and sent into the world to have the status of “Son of God”. You see Jesus was arguing that it would not be blasphemy for Him to be called Son of God even if the Jewish people at the time could not perceive his divinity because He was exceeding the criterion of being called small g god by the standards of Ps 82:6. This kind of reasoning would have blown the minds of anyone, but especially the scripture experts in that group.

But let me point out three things about Jesus’ approach here.

Firstly, Jesus does not engage in violence but humanizes his enemies by speaking to them calmly and respectfully, by listening to their concerns and then showing their great sensitivity by addressing their concerns even though they were technically not valid.

Secondly, Jesus demonstrated an incredible knowledge of scripture to pull out a verse that most people would not know what to do with.

Thirdly, Jesus uses some very interesting persuasion techniques like Implicit Assumptions and appealing to common sources of authority like Holy Scripture.

You see what is special about Jesus’ actions here is that he takes the trouble to persuade people about something that he did not really have to care about. After all God does not owe anyone an apology or explanation for claiming who He is, right? And yet he very patiently does it.

So now, as we move past the Psalm quote and get into verse 37 and 38 what we find here is that Jesus is saying, now that I have put to rest any notion that I am committing blasphemy, can you go deeper and examine the work that I do? And if you have any understanding of who the Father is from your own study and prayer life, then you

should be able to see the Father's finger prints in my work and my finger prints in the Father's work. In other words if you know the Father, as those should who were steeped in Jewish tradition should have, then they should have recognized the Father's identity in the miracles that Jesus did. That is what it means in verse 38 when he says, the "Father is in me and I in Him". If even one person was convinced that Jesus was not committing blasphemy, he was giving that person some for ways for them to see Jesus' connection with His heavenly Father.

How do we apply the principles we have learned in this interaction to our lives.

The first one is of course the peace approach to any confrontation. If Jesus does not think violence was necessary to respond to a whole mob ready to kill him then we would be hard pressed to justify violence for any situation we may be facing. Now some of you may be thinking, yes but Jesus does have a special ability to simply disappear through the crowds, so what do I do if I don't have an invisibility cloak like Jesus did. Fair question. But remember, Jesus disappears not at the first sign of a threat but only after he engages his opponents. I can tell you, God has the capacity to sow confusion in the minds of the enemy and help even you and me escape any situation if God wants us to escape. I have experienced this personally in Vietnam. But our attitude should be, not whether a nonviolent approach will help us in a particular situation or not. Our approach should be, while God is able to deliver us from any situation, even if he chooses not to, I am not going to compromise my Christ-like witness. Because there is a Christlike way. Humanize your opponents, don't demonize them. Don't pick up stones but rather speak to them in a calm and respectful way.

Secondly, when we engage those who we are witnessing to, be it a Truth Seeker who wants to know the answers or be it a Truth Spinner who is ready to attack us no matter what, we need to show great sensitivity to their concerns. Ask God to help you see how they might be perceiving us. Start by looking at yourself through their eyes. Then appeal

to them through sources of authority that makes sense to them. If you are trying to talk to someone from another religion, try and use their scripture. If you are talking to a secular person, figure out what their sources of authority are and use those whether it is science or humanism or whatever it is. So once you have engaged your opponents calmly and respectfully, put yourself in their shoes and treat their concerns with sensitivity.

Thirdly, persuasion is skill that needs to be learnt and mastered for any Christ ambassador. Persuasion involves being well verse with your subject matter. If you are trying to persuade someone about the Bible, you have to spend time in it every day. Jesus was able to persuade because he knew his scripture. But persuasion requires more than subject knowledge. It requires knowledge of persuasion techniques like the Implicit Assumption technique. So once you engage your opponents calmly and with respect, and treat their concerns with sensitivity, then use both your knowledge of scripture and persuasion techniques you find right here in scripture to make your case. So the answer to the what would Jesus do question is, humanize, empathize and persuade.

Because Jesus engaged the mob, it is possible that at least one person in that mob was persuaded. If it makes a difference in one person's life, it is worth it.

My job as your pastor is to equip you to be effective in taking the Gospel to the streets. I hope you have learnt something today from the way Jesus engaged his opponents. I pray that we all move a step closer in becoming sensitive and empathetic scripture persuaders for the glory of God. Let us pray.