

Pastor's Devotional
November 12, 2017

First read John 5:1-12, then reflect upon Michael's comments:

Despite the trend towards secularism, many people claim some form of religious faith, saying that they trust in God. How much does it matter whether they believe specifically in Jesus?

The Apostle John had known Jesus personally as a young man. In his Gospel, he recorded Jesus saying that "God so loved the world that he gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (3:16). At the end of the Gospel, John wrote that his account was "written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ (Jewish Messiah), the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (20:31). Writing as an old man many decades later, John emphasized this same issue. While urging us to love people like Jesus, John was clear that deeds of love don't redeem us from death—what saves us is our trust in Jesus as our one and only Lord, what theologians call his "singular saving Lordship":

"Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God" (5:1).

"Who overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God" (5:5).

"Whoever believes in the Son of God accepts [God's] testimony" (5:10).

"God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son" (5:11).

"Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son does not have life" (5:12).

When John wrote, false teachers were distorting the Gospel by weaving aspects of Gnosticism into it (the "G" is silent; "Gnosis" is Greek for "knowledge"). Sort of like today's "New Age Religion," Gnostics taught that you know God by learning a pathway of spiritual self-help principles. An eyewitness, John urged the church not to abandon its trust in the basic message that God's Son lived as a man, then became the crucified and resurrected Christ. Because they refused to accept the news that God suffered, the Gnostics also distorted the Gospel message in claiming that God's Son entered Jesus only as an adult, then departed from Jesus just before he was crucified. To correct this error, John testified that Jesus came "by water (natural birth) and blood (his crucifixion). Happily, John's testimony became the orthodox teaching of the church (though the Gnostics wrote their own "Gospels," several have been discovered).

In every generation, the church must be faithful in communicating the glorious mystery of Jesus' uniqueness and the good news that God has made a way for sinful mortals to receive eternal life: the singular saving Lordship of Jesus Christ, the only Son of God. In our time, this good news is sometimes rejected as arrogant and "narrow-minded." Our culture's bias is to declare that all religions are equally valid pathways to eternal life. Representing Jesus, our response must always be gracious. While demonstrating respect for the contributions that other religions make to culture, morality, and justice, if we are to be faithful, we must gently explain that:

- No mortal can walk a path to eternal life; we fall way short of God's holiness (Rom 3:23)
- Our only hope is that God graciously makes His way to us—our Good News! (Rom 6:23)
- The Spirit uses our testimony to awaken others to receive eternal life by trusting Jesus (Acts 2:21, 3:15-16)

God can save whoever God wants. We can speculate whether our loving Lord might welcome into heaven people who did not hear about Jesus or understand the good news (for the church is often a pitiful witness). But this much is sure--the same source from which we learn about Jesus also insists upon the singular saving Lordship of Christ, "for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Let's be faithful witnesses!