

Exegesis

Vs. 28-29 – While their confusion was evident, Jesus did give them some hope that they would eventually understand who he really was. He says when they "lift up the Son of man," then they will know "that I am *he*...." Again, it is worth noting that the pronoun "he" is being supplied by the translators as they thought the predicate "I am" referred to the "Son of man." However, taken by itself, Jesus' words could be yet another "I am" statement (cf. vs. 24). So, which is it? Both. While Jesus is the Son of Man (cf. 1:41; 3:13-14; 5:27; 6:27, 53, 62), he is also the great "I AM."

John makes this clear later, but the phrase "lifted up" is the way Jesus referred to his glorification on the cross (cf. 17:1-5).¹ And as bizarre as this may sound to us, "One of the functions of the cross is to reveal who Jesus is."² Interestingly, when Jesus used this phrase before, it was couched in the "divine passive," where God is portrayed as the one that is doing the lifting (cf. 3:14; 12:32).³ Now, however, the phrase refers to his audience as the ones doing the lifting.

But what of Jesus' words that they will "know that I am *he*"? There is a possibility that he is referring to a time when the Jews will realize too late that Jesus was God (cf. Mr. 14:62; Phil. 2:10-11). But unless spoken by those who clearly have no idea what they're talking about, "to know" anything in John's account is always a good thing (4:42; 7:17, 29; 8:32; 10:4; 21:24, etc.; cf. 1 Jn. 5:15).⁴ So, when Jesus says that they will finally "know that I am *he*," he was referencing Jews who will eventually believe. John will even say that in the very next verse, there were some who "believed on him"; though, it seems Jesus was referencing a belief that comes after his exaltation on the cross rather than that exact moment.⁵

Once again, Jesus says that he does "nothing" of himself, which is to say that he does not act according to his own authority; instead, the Lord "speaks" only those "things" that his "Father" has taught him (cf. 5:19, 30; 7:16; etc.). And because he only does those things that "please" the one who "sent him" (cf. 1 Jn. 3:22), Jesus claims that God has never "left [him] alone." In fact, the Creator himself is with Jesus as he speaks. The religious leaders wanted to know where Jesus' Father was and, now, they know (cf. vs. 19).

¹ Kruse (2017), p. 237.

² Carson (1991), p. 345.

³ Beasley-Murray (1999), p. 131.

⁴ Köstenberger (2008), p. 260.

⁵ Keener (2012), 1:745.

Vs. 30-32 – John interrupts the narrative flow for the third time (cf. vs. 20, 27). He will not do so again until the close of this scene (vs. 59). But here, the Evangelist tells us that as Jesus said these things, "many believed on him." To be sure, this is a startlingly statement, but who exactly were the "many"? Given the fact that **πιστεύω** (*pisteuō*), translated as "believed," is a keyword in John's account, we need to try and answer that question. How we will interpret what's to come will depend greatly on our conclusion. After all, a group said to have believed Jesus here will also seemingly be called children of the devil by the end of this passage. Unsurprisingly, good exegetes have disagreed on the meaning of John's words.

Generally speaking, there are two interpretations. Considering that this discourse ends with the "Jews" wanting to stone Jesus, some interpreters take this to mean that their belief was not sincere.⁶ They believe that John distinguishes between a persevering faith and an unsettled faith (cf. 1:32, 33; 5:38; 6:27, 56; 14:10; 15:4; see also 1 Jn. 2:19-24). As Thompson explains, John "contrast[s] between believing and abiding. Those who believe must abide in Jesus' word so that they will truly be his disciples."⁷ In other words, there is no such thing as a casual follower of Christ; there is only a committed one (cf. Mat. 7:15-20).

Other commentators see a mixed group that is comprised of believers and nonbelievers.⁸ And seeing as John does not immediately qualify his words,⁹ this seems the most natural reading of the text. Besides, we're not the crowds already divided about Jesus (cf. 7:31, 40-44)? There even seemed to be a division in the Pharisees' own ranks (cf. 3:1; 7:50-51; 12:42). Furthermore, Jesus was in the treasury. This meant that more than just the hostile elites heard him that day. Isn't it possible that, at least at this point, there were more than a few people who actually believed him to be the "son of man"?

Admittedly, it is hard to see how their belief was not, in some way, deficient if the same group eventually tried to stone Jesus. But surely the question about who the "many" were is not easy to answer. In fact, an intermediate view is just as plausible. Perhaps their belief was neither insincere nor complete but was, simply, incomplete. We have already seen how many followed Jesus for the wrong reasons (cf. 6:26). And once that particular group found out that Jesus wasn't what they thought, all but a few actually continued to follow him (cf. 6:60, 66-71). Furthermore, it's after Jesus claims to be more than the Messiah that the whole crowd seems

⁶ Köstenberger (2008), p. 260-261, Carson (1991), p. 345-348, Keener (2012), 1:746-747, and Wright, C. J., *Jesus the Revelation of God: His Mission and Message According to St. John*, (London; Hodder and Stoughton, 1950), p. 214.

⁷ Thompson (2015), p. 189-190.

⁸ Morris (1995), p. 402; Kruse (2017), p. 238; Beasley-Murray (1999), p. 133; Phillips (1989), p. 169.

⁹ "Belief" is almost always positive in this account. In the few places where a subject's belief proved to be a sham, John explicitly mentions that it isn't genuine (cf. 2:23-25; 12:42-43).

to turn against him in this passage. Claiming to be the Messiah might've been a big pill to swallow, but it was possible, as the disciples' faith shows. However, to be told to believe that Jesus was God as well? That might've been a step too far for them.

In favor of this intermediate view, we know that their belief had yet to fully mature into saving faith because Jesus turned to "those Jews which believed on him" and said that the only way they become true "disciples" is if they "continue" in his "word." The Greek word translated as "continue" is the term μένω (*ménō*) and it means to remain, tarry, or, even, sojourn (1:32-33, 39; 2:12; 4:40; cf. Mat. 26:38; Mar. 6:10; Lu. 1:56; 9:4). Thus, Jesus' point to those who supposedly believed him was that their belief in him must not be abandoned. The Lord knows that they were at the cusp of the most significant revelation in human history. And so, Jesus forewarns them to remain in that belief because, although they had believed that he was the Messiah, they must also believe that he was so much more. The Lord is more than just a good teacher. He is more than just a miracle worker. And, yes, he's more than even the Messiah. Jesus is God, and only a faith that believes him to be God is a belief that perseveres enough to save the believer.

This is a truth that is so revelatory that Jesus says the captive will be set "free." Curious that such a passage would be picked up by pop culture. Usually, it is quoted when someone is claiming their innocence in some cheesy court show. But they may tout Jesus' words as a maxim to live by, they often divorce it from its original context. Rather than thinking of the truth as that saving truth that can only be found in Jesus Christ, they think of it as a relativistic term that could apply to any number of things (i.e., science, philosophy, popular opinion, etc.).¹⁰ In reality, Jesus' language was indicative of the Exodus.¹¹ And it is an especially good metaphor with the Feast of Tabernacles—a festival celebrating their freedom from Egyptian dominance—coming to a close (cf. 7:37).¹² Just as the Israelites were emancipated from bondage in Egypt, the believer is freed from being slaves to their sin. And they are released through one truth alone and that truth is this: to know Jesus as the Son of God is to break the bonds of sin itself (cf. vs. 21; 9:36-38; 20:31). So long as this the truth you know and believe, then you can also know and believe that you are free.

¹⁰ Morris (1995), p. 405.

¹¹ Beasley-Murray (1999), p. 133.

¹² Keener (2012), 1:747

VIDEO DESCRIPTION

Wednesday Night Live | John | Week 6

Text: John 8:28-32

How often have we heard the saying, "the truth will set you free"? Usually, it is quoted when someone is claiming their innocence in some cheesy court show. It's been applied to so many contexts that "truth" could apply to almost anything (i.e., science, philosophy, popular opinion, etc.). But, as tonight's passage will show, considering its original context, the only truth that will set anyone free is the truth that Jesus wasn't just a good teacher nor a great miracle worker; he was (and still is) the Son of God.

Pastor's manuscript can be found here: