

Passage: John 8: 21-30

Title: The One who sent me is with me / translated by Emma Choi

## 1. Jesus, An Apprentice of God the Father

In John chapters 7-10, we see the kind of Messiah Jesus is to be in the context of the faithlessness of the Jews. In particular, we are exposed to many conflicts arising between the Messiah and the Pharisees. The argument in today's passage has the background of In John chapters 7-10, we see the kind of Messiah that Jesus is to be in the context of the faithlessness of the Jews, and we are in particular exposed to many conflicts that arise between our Messiah and the Pharisees. The debate from today's passage occurs on a backdrop of the Feast of Tabernacles, and specifically addresses the kind of Messiah Jesus is portraying Himself as through his debate with the Pharisees. Indeed, even from his childhood days, Jesus was so skilled in arguing the Law that He was able to stand His own amongst the leading scholars of His time. Where did this confidence, which resisted and stood up to even the Pharisees, come from? Is it to be expected that Jesus would be silver-tongued and quick-witted because He was the Son of God? Is it natural given Jesus' divinity? We have to understand that the scholars against whom Jesus was debating represented the very best of their complement; it would be like arguing against multiple Ph.D. holding theologians in today's time. And yet, no matter how convoluted or difficult the Pharisees and the Scholars of the Law attempt to make their question or argument, Jesus sees right through them. For example, when he is challenged because he eats without washing his hands, Jesus responds by saying "It is not what goes into the mouth that makes a person dirty, but what comes out of it." They inquire about what to do as the Law dictates that a woman who had committed adultery should be stoned to death, and Jesus responds by saying that "Let those among you without sin be the first to cast a stone." Moreover, Jesus likely was not one of a fragile or particularly scholarly complexion; he was likely a muscular man with a stern gaze, cultivated from his days of hard labor as a carpenter. And yet He was simultaneously filled with knowledge and wisdom regarding the law. Where did this confidence which allowed Him to stand up to even the teachers of the Law, come from? In verse 28, Jesus states the following: "I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me." Jesus states that he does exactly as His Father instruct Him to do and say. In Luke 2:51, it reads that Jesus "was obedient to them," referring to his earthly parents, Mary and Joseph. In short, through learning obedience to his earthly parents, Jesus learned obedience to His heavenly Father as well. And so, Jesus' confidence is rooted in doing exactly as He has been taught by the Father – that is to say, "The One who sent me is with me."

An apprentice is someone who follows after a master and learns their skills and duties through close observation and assistance, in order to become a master themselves. In the Star Wars saga, we are familiar with a group of masters who are called the Jedi, as well as various apprentices under these Jedi masters. The Jedi masters are empowered through something called "The Force" and their greeting to each other goes "May the Force be with you." In a similar vein, Jesus closely sought and followed after his master, Father God, and learned to hear him and obey him from the days of his youth. As an apprentice to the Father, the authority of Jesus is the end-result of a lifetime of obedience and closely walking with the Father. In Isaiah chapter 50, it highlights the type of obedience that will be demanded of the servant of the Lord: "The Sovereign Lord has

given me a well-instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being instructed. The Sovereign Lord has opened my ears; I have not been rebellious, I have not turned away, I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting.” This is a prophecy by Isaiah several hundred years before the time of Jesus, about the kind of obedience that will be asked of and given by the Messiah. In standing with this prophecy, Jesus stood and heeded the words of the Lord every day and obeyed it. And through such obedience, Jesus was able to gain such confidence and authority. And in the end, He was able to obey to the very end, even to death on the cross.

## **2. I and the One Who Sent Me Are One**

We should emphasize and underline the phrase “the one who sent me” which is repeated so often in the gospel of John. I recommend that you go through from John chapters 3 through 8 and underline or highlight every instance of the phrase (or variants thereof) of “the one who sent me.” Phrases such as “the one who sent me,” “the Father who sent me,” “the one whom God sent,” “the one who comes from heaven,” “the one from above,” and “only begotten son” are all referring to the same character here. It is to say – they all point towards the only begotten son of God, Jesus. John, to describe the Father God who sent Jesus, uses the analogy of the Father and the Son. It is important for us to realize that in Jesus’ time, the one who was sent (i.e. messenger) and the one sending the message were regarded as one and the same. This was a tradition that had been present for thousands of years, and we see that all the way back in Genesis chapter 24, Abraham, who has grown old in years, sends his servant out to find a bride for his only son Isaac. Abraham bestows on this servant all of his authority and resources – and how his servant was to be treated would be how Abraham would regard as his own treatment. We often summarize this type of relationship to state that the sent one is a plenipotentiary, or holds the power thereof. In sum, Jesus, who was sent by God, is the same as the one who sent Him. The revealer and the one being revealed are one and the same. God, to reveal Himself to the world, sent His Son to reveal Him. In the book of Exodus, we see that God sends Moses to the Pharaoh, but before Moses can go, God reveals Himself to Moses, as it is through the authority of the name of the Lord that Moses will be acting in the stead of in Pharaoh’s kingdom. And how does God describe Himself to Moses? In Exodus 3:14, God tells Moses that “I am who I am,” and tells Moses to let Pharaoh know that “I am sent you.” This phrase is reflected exactly in the Greek version of the Old Testament, called the Septuagint, and we must understand that “I am who I am,” is the same exact phrase “ego eimi” that Jesus uses to reveal himself in last week’s passage. In some bibles, you will find a little asterisk or mark by the “I am” in verses 24 and 28 in John chapter 8, which in Greek is “ego eimi.” In short, the name that God calls Himself by in Exodus chapter 3, and the name that Jesus uses to call himself, are all one and the same. This was to emphasize that He was the same as the Father God who sent him, and that His name was God’s name. A person’s name is their identity and reveals who they are to the world around them. And so, Jesus, the one who was sent, and God, the one who sent him, are both one and the same – and emphasized that Jesus and the Father who sent Him occupied the same position and identity.

## **3. I Came to Fulfill the Will of the One Who Sent Me**

The second meaning of “the one who sent me” or “the one who comes from above” has to do with demonstration of Jesus’ absolute obedience. In the gospel of John, chapters 7 through 10 are filled with debates between Jesus and the Pharisees, but amongst the hardest concepts for the Pharisees to understand or accept is the fact that Jesus was the “one from above,” or “God’s only begotten son who came from heaven.” When Jesus refers to himself as “the one who sent me,” “I came from above,” “the son of man must be lifted on high,” the Pharisees are not able to understand what Jesus means in any way. When we look towards Isaiah, however, we are able to understand what Jesus is saying. If we do not know the Old Testament well, it becomes difficult for us to understand Jesus well also. When Jesus refers to “the one who sent me,” “the one who comes from above,” and so on, Jesus is referring to the Mission on which He was sent by the Father. I believe that during a prior message, I referred to the importance of the book of Isaiah whenever we hear the phrase “the one who comes from above.” In Isaiah 55:10-11, it states “As the rain and snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seeds for the sower and bread from the eater, so it my word that goes out from my mouth: it will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.” The mission of the rain and snow are to water the earth and so bring about the bearing of fruit and flourishing of the plants which receive this watering, after which they evaporate and thereby return to from whence they came. In this passage, “the word that goes out from my mouth” refers to the Messiah to be sent by the Lord. Isaiah confidently expresses that the Messiah, sent by the Lord, will accomplish the purpose for which He was sent in obedience, and thereafter return to the Father.

And yet, Jesus, the plenipotentiary granted the full authority of God who sends Him, did not state these words to just flaunt his authority or power. Rather, when Jesus refers to the fact that he came from above or refers to himself as the only begotten son, he is instead highlighting his will and desire towards absolute obedience. To accomplish the will of the one who sent him, Jesus is staying that he is willing and determined to obey unto death. Jesus clearly understood the purpose for which he had been sent to earth. The will of the Father was for Jesus to become “the lamb of God, who carries the sins of the world.” In short, Jesus was called to carry the cross and the sins of the world on himself. On one level, the sins of the world are the disobedience of Israel as a people, and writ on a larger scale, the disobedience of all men. Jesus will only return to the Father once this mission has been 100% accomplished. In John 8:29 and Isaiah 55:11, the words may be slightly different, but the meaning is the same; the passage in John reads as such: “The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him.” Jesus knew that he would only return to the Father after he had accomplished what he has been sent to this earth to do, and in verse 28, this returning to the Father is described through the son of man being “lifted up.” This being lifted up simultaneously refers to Jesus’ death on the cross as he was lifted up on the cross, and is also symbolic of the love of the Father which led the Son to be sacrificed for all men on the cross. And yet, the Son is lifted up in victorious resurrection, and is seated on the right hand of the Father. We can understand this as just reward for the Son who has fulfilled the will of the Father.

#### **4. Disciples who take after Christ**

We are those who are saved on account of Jesus’ obedience. Jesus was one who made up the lacking disobedience of the people of Israel in their stead and thus accomplished the will of God.

The Israelites decided to go astray and went their own ways. But the Father opened a way for us to approach him through assigning the sins of Israel and the world on Jesus. Jesus, the lamb of God, without saying a single word against it, carried the sins of the world and went to die on the cross for us. If Jesus had not obeyed unto death on a cross, how else could we have become children of God?

What have we realized from the message for today? Where does Jesus' confidence and authority arise from? Jesus listened to the Father's words every morning, and trained himself to obey the Father's words every day. Because Jesus knew that to come from above meant that he was called to absolute obedience, Jesus clung to obedience to the Father. Last week, we discussed that following after Christ is a "present progressive tense," in that it is an ongoing work. We must decide to follow after Christ each and every day. Why would Jesus dedicate his early morning hours to seeking out quiet places to commune with the Father, even in the midst of his busy ministries? It was to hear the words of the Father and to receive His teachings. To become Christ's disciples requires us to become apprentices to the way of Christ. As an example, to become a specialized physician, one must go through intense periods of training in residency. As an intern and resident, you are required to closely follow after your attending physicians and obey their instructions and receive their teachings, as you develop your own expertise and experience. In a similar way, those of you who have done your PhD in biological sciences know that you must apprentice yourself to your professors and make their expertise and experience your own through close mentorship. It has been 10 years that I have been learning about how to brew coffee. In 2015, I was commissioned as a missionary to China, but realized that there were no coffee shops that were satisfying to me. Since that time, I have been trying to apprentice myself to a friend who is a barista. It started by watching how coffee beans are roasted in a pan, and ever since then, any time that I would return to Korea, I would visit my friend's café and learn more about how to brew coffee correctly. My only regret is that had I had a period of 6 months or so of uninterrupted training, I feel like I could be confident of my own skills as a barista, and at least would be able to brew great coffee for me to enjoy. It is not an easy thing to become a master in a single area. It is the same in following after Christ. It is not sufficient to just come to Church once every Sunday. To become disciples of Christ, we must follow after him closely, build up our obedience to him, and this requires daily discipline in the form of scheduled quiet time spent in the Scriptures and seeking after the will of the Lord. Disciples of Christ are not made on a conveyer belt, but are made by hand, bit by bit. You must build up for yourself a store of daily obedience towards the Lord.

Through understanding mission of Christ as he was sent by God, we can also better understand the will that God has for our own lives. Our purposes are to accomplish the will of the Lord in our lives. It is not merely to believe in Jesus and be blessed and experience peace and joy in our lives – that it not all there is to a life of faith. We have been sent by the Lord to transform the world in accordance with his will. Just as the snow and rain come and return after they have fulfilled their purpose, and as Jesus returns to the right hand of the Father after completely accomplishing the will of the one who sent him, so too have we been sent. We must have the will to obey unto death the mission for which we have been sent to earth. We too must follow after Christ and become lambs of the Lord who carry the sins of the world. In sum, we participate and represent the atonement for sins that Christ himself performed. Of course, only Jesus is able to atone for the sins of the world. But we must also understand that the Lord is calling us towards obedience

in the same way that Christ was called to obedience as the only begotten son of God. We must become the numerous lambs of God in this dark age, carrying the weight of the sins of those around us. What are the sins of this age, then? It is greed, lust, seeking after pleasure, monopolizing our own gain, and isolating and othering the marginalized. The Lord is calling for his innocent lambs to represent the atonement that Jesus performed two thousand years ago during this time and era. In this way, we continue to participate in the great restorative atonement work of Christ. The Lord is calling out for young men and women who are unblemished and innocent like lambs; the Lord is calling for both young and old who have not been tarnished by sin and who seek to follow after the Lord with clean hearts and honest consciences.

## **5. Boldness that the World Cannot Provide**

You might ask, “Reverend, it is really that necessary to live in such an exhausting manner?” I believe that verse 29 in today’s passage also provides the answer to this question. The passage reads “The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him.” The confidence that Jesus had was based on the fact that he belonged to the Lord and that he was always with the Father. It is perhaps a little odd to describe this relationship as “belonging to the Father,” but it is true. We must understand that the Lord will never abandon those who follow after the way of the only begotten son in their obedience to the will of the Lord. In Matthew 10:29-30, Jesus tells his disciples the following. “Truly I tell you, Jesus replied, no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields – along with persecutions – and in the age to come eternal life.” Who are those who have abandoned their homes, brothers, sisters, parents, children, or their wealth for the sake of the gospel? These are those who have made a decision to follow after the Lord with the same obedience that the only begotten son had. In rewarding those who follow in their obedience in this way, the Lord promises much, not only in heaven, but also in this present age. Not only that, but we are rewarded through confidence and boldness that comes only from surety in finding oneself in the Lord’s will.

In a capitalistic society, what is the thing that most closely and strongly gives a sense of security? It would be money, of course. There is no one who doesn’t want more money. As an old Korean proverb states, prosperity breeds generosity – and in the same way, we can only do more good the more we have. The more zeroes we see after our bank balances and the more money we have in our wallets – the more confident we feel. But confidence and boldness that comes from finding oneself in the Lord makes this confidence that comes from money pale in comparison. The things that we seek to possess with money are the domain of the created. However, the Lord stands apart from the created as the Creator. I might be nothing, but when I lean upon the largess of the Lord, I realize that my limitations mean nothing when I stand in the Lord, because I know that He knows my every want and need, and believe that He will satisfy the needs that need satisfying. When you stand in the domain of the Creator, there is a fullness of life that nothing else can provide. The boldness that comes from knowing that the Creator God walks with you allows you the strength to face every trial and tribulation, and this confidence is something that the world cannot give. The master of all, the Creator God, the Lord over all, the King of kings is my God who walks with me – what more could I want? And yet this Lord trusts in us and calls us to be stewards of this world that He has created. Do not think “what could little old me do?”

When a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it produces a plentiful harvest. It takes just one kernel. All it takes to make a difference is one person. The Lord calls us to be children of the light in our daily lives, disciples of Christ who listen to the words of the Master and stock up our stores of obedience in our walking with him. The force will be with you – no the grace and the peace of our Lord will be with you. I pray and bless all of you, that we will all be disciples of Christ who hold onto this promise that He will be with us to the very end of the age, and live out victorious lives out in the world.