

Notes on the Greek New Testament Day 135 – May 15th – John 8:21-30

Works frequently referenced in these notes on John

Barrett, CK	<i>The Gospel According to John</i> , London, SPCK, 1967
Beasley-Murray, GR	<i>John</i> , <i>Word Bible Commentary</i> , vol 36, Word Books, 1987
Carson, DA	<i>The Gospel According to John</i> , Leicester, IVP (Apollos), 1991

John 8:21ff.

"The points raised in the short opening discussion are developed and combined with one another.

- i) Whence Jesus comes: vv 23; 26, 29 (ὁ πεμψας); 41f.; 48; 58 (ἐγὼ εἰμι).
- ii) Whither he goes: vv.21f., 28, 35, 54.
- iii) Who is Jesus? vv 23-6, 38, 54f.

Each of these themes, moreover, is applied, as it were, in reverse, to the Jews. As Jesus is ἐκ τῶν ἄνω, they are ἐκ τῶν κατω; whither he goes, they cannot come; God is his Father, they are of their father the Devil – even their descent from Abraham is misleading; he cannot but speak the truth, they cannot but speak falsehood." Barrett.

Verse 21

Εἶπεν οὖν πάλιν αὐτοῖς: Ἐγὼ ὑπάγω καὶ ζητήσετε με, καὶ ἐν τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ ὑμῶν ἀποθανεῖσθε· ὅπου ἐγὼ ὑπάγω ὑμεῖς οὐ δύνασθε ἐλθεῖν.

παλιν again, once more

Cf. v. 12. Verses 21-22 repeat the thoughts of 7:33-34, but now in stronger language.

ὑπάγω go, go one's way, depart
ζητεω seek, search for, look for
ἁμαρτια, ας f sin

"Cf. v.24 (where the plural ἁμαρτιας is used). The singular focuses attention upon the cardinal sin of rejecting Jesus." Barrett.

ἀποθανεῖσθε Verb, fut midd dep indic, 2 pl
ἀποθνησκω die

"This may be meant ironically: they will seek what he proclaimed as God's gift through him, but in vain, for they will die in their sin, i.e., the sin of unbelief (cf. 16:8-9). This represents the opposite of what is proclaimed in 8:12; whereas followers of the Christ walk in the Light, in possession of and with hope for the eternal life of the kingdom of God, unbelievers walk in the darkness of this age to 'death,' i.e., exclusion from the kingdom of God." Beasley-Murray.

Carson suggests that Jesus' meaning is "that they will go on looking for the Messiah (which is why Jesus says *you will look for me*). If they do, they cannot possibly find him; they are chasing an ephemeral wisp, for they have rejected the only Messiah there is."

ὅπου adv. where

δυναμαι can, be able to

ἐλθεῖν Verb, aor act infin ἐρχομαι

Verse 22

ἔλεγον οὖν οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι· Μήτι ἀποκτενεῖ ἑαυτὸν ὅτι λέγει· Ὅπου ἐγὼ ὑπάγω ὑμεῖς οὐ δύνασθε ἐλθεῖν;

μητι Negative particle, used in questions to indicate the expectation of a negative answer or that the questioner is doubtful concerning the answer

'Surely he will not ...'

ἀποκτενεῖ Verb, fut act indic, 3 s kill, put to death

ἑαυτος, ἑαυτη, ἑαυτον him/her/itself

A wrong interpretation of Jesus' words conceals a truth, for Jesus will lay down his own life (10:17f).

Verse 23

καὶ ἔλεγεν αὐτοῖς: Ὑμεῖς ἐκ τῶν κατω ἐστέ, ἐγὼ ἐκ τῶν ἄνω εἰμι· ὑμεῖς ἐκ τούτου τοῦ κόσμου ἐστέ, ἐγὼ οὐκ εἰμι ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου τούτου.

κατω down, below

ἄνω from above

"For τα ἄνω cf. Col 3:1.; there is no corresponding New Testament parallel to τα κατω. τα ἄνω (here as in Colossians) means the heavenly world; τα κατω means (as the second part of the verse shows) this world; not hell, but all that is not contained in the heavenly world." Barrett.

Verse 24

εἶπον οὖν ὑμῖν ὅτι ἀποθανεῖσθε ἐν ταῖς ἁμαρτίαις ὑμῶν· ἐὰν γὰρ μὴ πιστεύσητε ὅτι ἐγώ εἰμι, ἀποθανεῖσθε ἐν ταῖς ἁμαρτίαις ὑμῶν.

εἶπον Verb, aor act indic, 1s & 3pl λεγω
ἀποθανεῖσθε see v.21

"The plural *sins* contrasts with the singular in v. 21, and refers to the diverse and ugly forms of corruption that mushroom from the one sin of unbelief." Carson.

ἐὰν if

"Faith in Christ is the only escape from sin and its consequences." Barrett.

Jesus' absolute use of ἐγώ εἰμι echoes the LXX rendering of אֲנִי אֵל (I am he') which occurs especially in the words of God himself (see particularly Is 43:10 but also Deut 32:39; Is 41:4; 43:13; 46:4; 48:12). It may also include an allusion to the divine name יהוה (YHWH) given in Ex 3:14-16. "We may say then that ἐγώ εἰμι, thus understood,

- i) indicates the eternal being of Jesus;
- ii) thereby, and in itself, places Jesus on a level with God (ἐγώ εἰμι usually is found in the LXX on the lips of God himself...)"

Barrett.

Schnackenburg highlights the parallel between Isa 43:10 and v. 24: "Jesus is in a lawsuit with the 'world' (vv 14–18), and in him God testifies that he is the eschatological helper and saviour who turns darkness into light and wants to bring every human being into the light of life (8:12). The Jews should put themselves on God's side, accept his testimony and believe that in Jesus God says his 'It is I.' Then they too would win a share in God's eschatological salvation."

Carson comments, "In Isaiah, the contexts demand that 'I am he' means 'I am the same', 'I am forever the same', and perhaps even 'I am Yahweh', with a direct allusion to Exodus 3:14 (cf. Is 43:11-13). For others to apply this title to themselves was blasphemous, an invitation to face the wrath of God (Is 47:8; Zp 2:15). For Jesus to apply such words to himself is tantamount to a claim to deity."

However, the (admittedly partially obscure) phrase is not understood by Jesus' hearers and gives rise to the question of v.25.

Verse 25

ἔλεγον οὖν αὐτῷ· Σὺ τίς εἶ; εἶπεν αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς· Τὴν ἀρχὴν ὅ τι καὶ λαλῶ ὑμῖν;

ἀρχη, ης f beginning

(την) ἀρχην is used adverbially quite frequently in Greek (though not elsewhere in the New Testament).

Beasley-Murray comments, "V 25b is the most obscure sentence in the Gospel and the most uncertain how to translate." The oldest MSS had no punctuation, neither did they have any spaces between words. Hence there are several ways of rendering the Greek of this verse:

- i) As a question with ὅτι and with την ἀρχην taken adverbially in the sense 'at all', i.e. 'Why do I speak to you at all'. So Westcott, Sanders, NEB.
- ii) As an exclamation with ὅ τι in the sense of the Hebrew הַי, 'That I speak to you at all!'
- iii) An affirmative (or possibly a question) with ὅ τι meaning:
 - (a) 'I am from the beginning what I tell you' Barrett.
 - (b) 'I am what I tell you from the beginning' (RSV, JB, GNB, NIV). This, Carson argues, is the most unlikely meaning.
 - (c) 'What I said to you from the beginning I say to you now' Brown.
 - (d) Beasley-Murray follows Bernard in understanding την ἀρχην as 'primarily'. He translates the phrase, 'Just what I am telling you.'

Verse 26

πολλὰ ἔχω περὶ ὑμῶν λαλεῖν καὶ κρίνειν· ἀλλ' ὁ πέμψας με ἀληθὴς ἐστίν, καὶ γὰρ ἃ ἤκουσα παρ' αὐτοῦ ταῦτα λαλῶ εἰς τὸν κόσμον.

Barrett thinks that ἔχω should here be understood in the sense 'I can'.

πολὺς, πολλή, πολὺ gen πολλοῦ, ης, ου
much, many

πέμπω see v.16

ἀληθης, ες true, truthful, honest, genuine
καὶ γὰρ a compound word = καὶ ἐγώ

Perhaps I address these words *to* the world'. Or maybe the sense is that Jesus limits what he says to those things given him by the Father and which constitute his earthly ministry.

Verse 27

οὐκ ἔγνωσαν ὅτι τὸν πατέρα αὐτοῖς ἔλεγεν.

ἔγνωσαν Verb, aor act indic, 3 pl γινωσκω

The sense would seem to be that they did not understand *who* the Father was that Jesus was speaking of – i.e. that Jesus had been sent by God.

Verse 28

εἶπεν οὖν ὁ Ἰησοῦς· Ὅταν ὑψώσητε τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, τότε γνώσεσθε ὅτι ἐγώ εἰμι, καὶ ἀπ' ἐμαυτοῦ ποιῶ οὐδέν, ἀλλὰ καθὼς ἐδίδαξέν με ὁ πατήρ ταῦτα λαλῶ.

ὅταν when

ὑψωσητῆ Verb, aor act subj, 2 pl ὑψωω
exalt, lift up, raise

The verb has a double meaning (cf. 3:14-15; 12:31-32) referring both to Jesus' death on the cross but also to his return to the Father and to glory. The language reflects Isa 52:13 'My servant ὑψωθήσεται καὶ δοξασθήσεται σφόδρα,' i.e., will be exalted and greatly glorified.

"The use of this expression [Son of Man] in redemptive and, therefore, eschatological contexts derives from Dan 7:13, where 'one like a son of man' appears as the representative of the kingdom of God and its lord (possibly agent too). In the synoptic predictions of the Passion (notably Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:32), which are closely related to the Johannine lifting up sayings, the Son of Man suffers, dies, and rises as the instrument of the kingdom of God. This Christological, soteriological, and eschatological tradition is assumed in the Johannine counterparts." Beasley-Murray.

τοτε then, at that time

γνωσεσθε Verb, fut midd dep indic, 2 pl
γνωσκω

"The unique element in v 28 is its statement that the Jews responsible for the death of Jesus will afterwards know who he is, his relation to the Father, and the character of his ministry, for v 29 continues the flow of thought in v 28. In the view of many, the context demands that the saying be seen as a prophecy of doom, like Mark 14:62: the Jews will come to know the identity of Jesus too late; they will know, and be judged (so Bultmann, 349-50; Barrett [hesitantly], 344; Blank, 329-30; Brown, 351. Haenchen [following Bernard, 2:303] refers it to the time of judgment in the destruction of Jerusalem, 369). Others point out that γνωσκω in relation to Jesus is nowhere else in John used in a purely negative way (contrast 7:17; 8:32; 10:38; 14:31), and that the immediate effect of vv 28-29 is indicated in v 30: 'Many believed in him.' Moreover in this Gospel the offer of God in the Christian proclamation is always one of salvation, and it is changed to judgment only through man's unbelief. Hoskyns therefore takes this as a prophecy of conversion (337), while Schnackenburg (202-3), followed by Becker (296), recognizes in the saying the possibility of both salvation and judgment." Beasley-Murray.

Carson similarly comments, "One of the functions of the cross is to reveal who Jesus is. That is when the Jews will know the truth. By this John is not saying that all of Jesus' opponents will be converted in the wake of the cross. But if they do come to know who Jesus is, they will know it most surely because of the cross. And even those who do not believe stand at the last day condemned by him whom they 'lifted up' on the cross, blinded to the glory that shone around them, yet one day forced to kneel and confess that Jesus is Lord (cf. Phil 2:10-11)."

Ὁν ἐγὼ εἶμι cf. v.24.

οὐδεις, οὐδεμια, οὐδεν no one, nothing
διδασκω teach

Verse 29

καὶ ὁ πέμψας με μετ' ἐμοῦ ἔστιν· οὐκ ἀφήκέν με μόνον, ὅτι ἐγὼ τὰ ἀρεστὰ αὐτῷ ποιῶ πάντοτε.

ἀφήκέν Verb, aor act indic, 3 s ἀφημι
leave, forsake

μονον adv only, alone
ἀρεστος, η, ον pleasing
παντοτε always

Verse 30

ταῦτα αὐτοῦ λαλοῦντος πολλοὶ ἐπίστευσαν εἰς αὐτόν.

πιστευω believe (in), have faith (in)

Barrett thinks that the reference to *many* believers "must be taken, like γνωσεσθε of v.28, to refer to a time other than the ministry of Jesus."

Carson comments, "So compelling was Jesus' teaching, even without the full comprehension that depended on the cross and resurrection, that *many put their faith in him*. That had happened before, at another Jerusalem feast, in consequence of Jesus' miracles (2:23); but that faith had turned out to be spurious (2:24-25). What of this faith?"