

Sermon Series: “The Good News for Life”
A Rocky Reception
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It is not easy to stand for something today. One can get a rocky reception, and sometimes it can turn into a “rock star” reception. Have you ever gotten one? E.g., I recall after Hurricane Katrina there was a lot of confusion as to whether the New Orleans Saints would stay in New Orleans, and the then-owner of the Saints, Tom Benson, flirted with the idea of moving the team to San Antonio. He got some boos from people and bad publicity about it, but fortunately he changed his mind and committed to see the team move back to New Orleans— and he thus received a kind of rock star reception the rest of his time in New Orleans.

Sometimes people get a rocky reception because of personal decisions they make about their own lives. E.g., I recall reading about Eric Liddell when he decided not to run in the Olympics in his race, the 100 meters, he got a lot of bad press as unpatriotic because he would not run the qualifying heats which were on a Sunday, and his faith, he believed, said to run on Sundays would be to dishonor the Sabbath day. Fortunately, he got in the 400 meter race and won the gold medal, and then everyone seemed to forget how he let them down and instead celebrated him as a hero! It is not easy to stand for something today. Jesus knew a bit about that.

READ John 10:31-42 (p. 104)

CONTEXT: Jesus has just talked to a group of Jewish religious leaders who asked Him whether He claimed to be the Messiah. Jesus recognizes the insincerity of the question, and says they would know if they were His sheep. His sheep are safe and secure for eternity, in His hand and the Father's hand. For He and the Father are one. Now we see the reaction to this statement.

READ vv 31-33. "The complaint that drew the Jewish leaders' rage: Jesus made Himself out to be God. Cf. 5:16-18; 7:44; 8:58-59; 10:38." Have you ever seen someone overstep his or her position of power and authority? Sometimes politicians do this. E.g., I recall in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic President Trump at one point made a statement that the governors would do whatever he told them to do, and people came away questioning whether he thought he was a king, and that this type of authority oversteps the Constitution. President Trump realized he misspoke and did not pursue that line of action, fortunately, but it was interesting to see the reaction to his claim of authority. E.g., I recall President Obama instructed his Attorney General Eric Holder not to enforce the Defense of Marriage Act, which for federal purposes defined marriage between a man and a woman and said states did not have to recognize the same-sex marriage that happened in another state; President Obama was supposed to defend the laws of the land, not pick and chose which ones to enforce. Sometimes we see religious leaders with shocking authority. E.g., Rev. Sun Myung Moon claimed to be the Messiah the second coming of Christ. The Jews in the first century were very sensitive to their monotheism, and did not want the images of other deities in Jerusalem. E.g., the first-century AD historical Josephus wrote about an incident with Pontius Pilate when he became governor of Judea in *Antiquities of the Jews* 18.3.1. Pilate had Roman standards with images of the Emperor Tiberius stationed around Jerusalem at night, and in the morning the Jews were outraged and asked Pilate to remove them; Pilate planned to have the crowd killed by the soldiers, but when the crowd bore their necks and he saw how

determined they were, he relented. Jesus carried an authority which continually made the Jewish religious leaders feel outraged, and they have already in the Fourth Gospel desired to kill Him and arrest Him. READ 5:16-18; 7:44; 8:58-59; 10:38.

READ 34-38. “Jesus’ defense seems initially to be a confusing one. Jesus’ point is that if in Psalm 82:6 heavenly beings or human judges are called ‘gods’ in their representing the Lord, how much more should the One whom the Father set apart and sent into the world since He is doing the works/will of the Father?” It is kind of like giving honor to someone when the one due honor is right in our midst whom we might be tempted to overlook. E.g., when I was growing up one of my heroes was the quarterback for the Dallas Cowboys, Roger Staubach. I loved reading interviews with him because he was a Christian and he won a lot of games; I even got to see him play in the two Super Bowls he won, both of which happened to be in New Orleans against the Miami Dolphins and Denver Broncos. But it was tempting for me to want to honor him more than the one who really deserved it, namely my Dad who actually took me to see those Super Bowl games with Staubach in them. One could certainly have used the argument with me, why am I so fascinated with Roger Staubach, when the real hero who was doing the works of God in my was my Dad? Jesus is saying here that the Jews were used to calling certain judges “gods”, but why not especially Him, who was doing wondrous works of God in their midst?

READ vv 39-42. “Ironically, it is not those trained in the Scripture who believe in Jesus, but rather those immersed in the teaching of John the Baptist about Jesus. Cf. John 1:29-34.” John the Baptist called Jesus in John 1 the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, the one who was before John, who baptizes with the Holy Spirit, and the Son of God. This reminds of what Jesus said in Matthew 11:25-26; READ. It is not the learned in the Scripture that come to Jesus, but those in the crowd, the common, ordinary person. E.g., Oscar

Romero was bookish priest in El Salvador in the 1970s and early 1980s and was selected to be the Archbishop because he seemed so innocuous, but when he came to office he was critical of the government for its right-wing death squad abuses, and he took on the learning he had from the Bible and lived it out-- and it cost him his life, as he was murdered while serving communion. As a pastor, I find this quite convicting. With my formal education in the Bible, my faith and trust in God is not always what it should be; I find I have to make my head knowledge into heart knowledge. It is often the laypersons who teach me about following Jesus and trusting Him and being grateful. E.g, I recall visiting someone who lived in a poor part of New Orleans and she had a wonderful, joyful heart before the Lord— her joy in Him was not based on the wealth of her life circumstances.

“What reception does the biblical Jesus get today? Why? What is your and my reception of Him?” The biblical Jesus is not just compassion and kindness, but He is also the One who overturned the money changers’ tables and said take up your cross and follow Me, and if you don’t forgive others their trespasses your heavenly Father won’t forgive you, and no one comes to the Father but through Me, and He said the Father and I are one. It is *that* Jesus who often is not welcome in people’s homes, and especially people’s hearts, because His authority is absolute, and thus offensive. So, Jesus is now approaching us: what is your and my reception of Him today?