

Jesus, The Great “I Am”
John 8:48-59

Introduction & Review - John 8:31-47

Who is Jesus of Nazareth? There is no absolute God in Buddhism, so He could only have been a great ethical teacher to them. The Hindus have a plethora of gods, but Jesus is not one of them, much less The God in human flesh. In Islam, Allah is “the God” and Jesus is just a human prophet of Allah. In Christian Science, Jesus is a mortal man and Christ is the “divine idea.” The Jesus of the Unity church is somewhat similar, but is also recognized as being the same as the “Krishna” of the Hindus. In the Unification Church (Moonies), Jesus is no different from you or I except for lacking in original sin. To the Jehovah’s Witnesses, Jesus is the first born of Jehovah God, but is not Jehovah God, but is instead, Michael the Archangel. The Jesus of the Mormons is the first born spirit child of Elohim with Lucifer as one of his brother “spirit children.”

What does Jesus Himself claim? We have seen throughout our study of the Life of Christ and especially in the gospel of John that Jesus claims to be the promised Messiah, the living God Himself in human flesh. Our previous studies in John 7 & 8 have shown there was much confusion among the Jews at that time about Jesus’ identity. Some rejected Jesus’ claims outright. Others wondered if He was a prophet of some sort or perhaps the prophet spoken of in Deuteronomy 18. Some were considering His claim to be the Messiah to be true. As Jesus continued to teach in the temple after the conclusion of the Feast of the Tabernacles, John 8:30 states that “*many came to believe in Him.*”

It is to these Jews that Jesus began a discussion in John 8:31. They had an initial belief, but it was more a mental assent that had developed as they observed the debate between Jesus and the Pharisees than actual faith in Him. Concluding Jesus to have the better arguments in a debate is not the same as putting your trust in Jesus because of His claims. Jesus challenged them to abide in His word so that they would be true disciples that would know the truth and be set free (verses 31-32). This did not match their own ideas of either the benefits they thought they already had as descendants of Abraham or the kind of message they thought Messiah would bring to them. They quickly went from an initial faith in Jesus to challenging Him about their need to become free.

In verses 34-35, Jesus answered their question by pointing out that their heritage from Abraham did not absolve them of their sins. They still sinned and needed to be freed from its bondage. Jesus knew their hearts and went on in verse 37 to accuse them of seeking to kill Him, and in verse 38, Jesus pointed out that He was telling them what He had seen from His Father, but they were listening to their father who was someone else.

They became defensive responding that Abraham was their father. Jesus was very blunt with them in verses 39-41 telling them “*If you are Abraham’s children, do the deeds of Abraham.*”⁴⁰ “*But as it is, you are seeking to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God; this Abraham did not do.*”⁴¹ “*You are doing the deeds of your father.*”

As I pointed out last week, Abraham welcomed the truth. He was hospitable to the Lord and those who came from Him. He sought to preserve life. They were doing the opposite on all accounts.

They become agitated and respond with an accusation and assertion in verse 41, “*We were not born of fornication; we have one Father, [even] God.*” Jesus again responded directly and bluntly in verses 42-47, “*If God were your Father, you would love Me; for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me.*”⁴³ “*Why do you not understand what I am saying? [It is] because you cannot hear My word.*”⁴⁴ “*You are of [your] father the devil, and you want to*

do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own [nature;] for he is a liar, and the father of lies. ⁴⁵ *“But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me.* ⁴⁶ *“Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me?”* ⁴⁷ *“He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear [them,] because you are not of God.”*

Their claim to be children of God was more ludicrous than their claim to be following the spiritual example of Abraham. Their deeds demonstrated they were of the devil and not God. The devil is a liar without regard for the truth and they are the same. The devil was a murderer from the beginning and they are seeking to murder Jesus. Jesus challenges them to convict Him of sin and thereby prove He is not speaking the truth. All they had to do was show that they were not seeking to kill him, but they do not even deny the accusation.

As I pointed out last week, it is one thing to claim to believe in Jesus, and it is another for the claim to be true demonstrated by living according to the claimed belief. The sad fact is that many people have a false claim of faith. The greater tragedy is that many of them believe their own lies. They will have lived their lives thinking they are right with God and servants of Jesus Christ, but as they enter eternity they will hear Jesus say, *“I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness”* (Matthew 7:23).

Who is Jesus? There are many opinions about that. These Jews had been listening to Jesus teach and began to believe He was the Messiah as He was claiming. But when they found out that Jesus’ concept of being Messiah differed from their own about what Messiah was to be, they rejected Him and became antagonists. If your belief in Jesus does not match Jesus’ claims about Himself, then you have a different Jesus, and your Jesus cannot save you from your sins.

Accusations, Defense & Hope (John 8:48-51)

As the passage continues in John 8:48-51, we find that these Jews become even more antagonistic. They are incensed at what Jesus’ says about them, yet they do not make any denial of His charges. Instead, they respond as evil people often do when caught in their sin by making wild accusations against the one who exposed their wickedness. Jesus will respond directly to their false accusation, and He will do what He so often did to His enemies. He offers them hope if they will change.

Accusations: John 8:48, *The Jews answered and said to Him, “Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?”* This is a rhetorical question used as a direct accusation that they considered Jesus to be a Samaritan and demon possessed. Their belief that Jesus was the Messiah was very short lived. They have quickly reverted to the arguments and conclusions of the Pharisees, whom I believe would have quickly joined in the accusations against Jesus.

How serious are these accusations? When a Jew called someone a Samaritan, he was seeking to be as caustic as possible. I have spoken before about the antagonism these two groups had for each other. The Jew could not think of something more vile than these people of mixed heritage that had perverted the Mosaic law into their own system of worship. It is keeping with their accusation that Jesus was born of fornication, adding by this that His father was a Gentile. In addition, they claim that Jesus had a demon. This cannot be toned down to mean that Jesus was crazy, for they were well acquainted with people who were demonized. They are claiming that Jesus must be controlled by a demon for Him to make such accusations against them who were the children of Abraham and the children of God.

Jesus does not back away. He deals with the charge they make and then goes right back to His point. Perhaps that is a good thing to keep in mind if you ever find yourself the victim of evil false accusations. Deal with them directly and then go right back to your own point.

Defense & Hope. John 8:49-51, ⁴⁹ *Jesus answered, “I do not have a demon; but I honor My Father, and you dishonor Me.* ⁵⁰ *“But I do not seek My glory; there is One who seeks and judges.* ⁵¹ *“Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death.”*

First, Jesus asserts very clearly and directly that their accusation is false. He could not have a demon because He honors His Father and does not seek His own glory. A demonized person could not and would not do that. Their accusation dishonors Jesus and in doing so puts them at risk for, as Jesus points out, there is One who seeks and judges. Jesus honors the Father and the Father honors the Son. It was that way during Jesus sojourn on earth and it will be that way in heaven.

What is more amazing in this passage is that even with these sort of vile accusations being made against Him, Jesus still offers them hope in verse 51. If Jesus wanted to condemn them, He could have stated this from the negative with a personal application - i.e. "If anyone fails to keep my word, which you are doing, he shall see death." But Jesus states this from the positive. Certainly this speaks to the fact that the opposite is true, for the force of it reiterates what He had said back in 8:24, "*unless you believe that I am He, you shall die in your sins.*" Yet, Jesus states this from a positive position that gives hope. Eternal life is still offered to them, but they would have to change and keep His word.

What does it mean to keep Jesus' word? The word "keep" here (*threvw / tēreō*) means "*to keep, observe, obey, pay attention to; keep under guard, keep in custody.*" So it would include both the idea to first, accept His word by faith (John 6:29; 8:24), and second, to obey His word (John 3:36). The sense of both is that it is an ongoing belief and obedience.

Rejection & Challenge - John 8:52-53)

These Jews utterly reject the offer and Jesus. John 8:52-53, *The Jews said to Him, "Now we know that You have a demon. Abraham died, and the prophets [also]; and You say, 'If anyone keeps My word, he shall never taste of death.'*"⁵³ *"Surely You are not greater than our father Abraham, who died? The prophets died too; whom do You make Yourself out [to be]?"* They have become even more antagonistic.

They again accuse Jesus of being demonized except this time they state it as a fact of which they are now assured. They consider Jesus' denial and offer of eternal life proof of a demon controlling Him. Again, this cannot be reduced to the equivalent of being crazy. They were well acquainted with demonized people and they are accusing Him of being one.

Their reasoning is that Jesus could not be greater than Abraham who died. How then could Jesus offer something that even Abraham or the prophets did not experience. Jesus had made it very clear over the previous few days during His teaching during the Feast of Tabernacles of who He was claiming to be, yet they still ask. They have ears, but they cannot understand what Jesus is saying. They are blind to the truth for they are not of God (vs. 47).

Their reasoning is logical but very flawed. First, they again failed to understand that Jesus was speaking of spiritual life. Earlier they had understood Jesus had been speaking of their spiritual heritage, not just physical, but now they are blind again to the spiritual aspect of what Jesus is saying. Second, they failed to remember that even from the physical standpoint there were already two humans that had not died - Enoch and Elijah the prophet. Third, they failed to understand the Messianic prophecies. The claim to offer eternal life should have been expected of the Messiah, but they were blind to it.

Glory and Knowledge - John 8:54-56)

Jesus had offered them hope, but He does not repeat it. He is blunt with them. They do not know God or Him and they are liars. John 8:54-56,⁵⁴ *Jesus answered, "If I glorify Myself, My glory is nothing; it is My Father who glorifies Me, of whom you say, 'He is our God';"*⁵⁵ *and you have not come to know Him, but I know Him; and if I say that I do not know Him, I shall be a liar like you, but I do know Him, and keep His word.*⁵⁶ *"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw [it] and was glad."*

Jesus makes the point again that He does not glorify Himself, for if He did, it would be worthless. If you seek to magnify your own name, you are just boasting. True honor always come through another

person giving you glory. It is His Father that glorifies Him. How does the Father glorify the Son? Several ways. He enables the Son to perform miracles (John 11:4 cf. Acts 2:22). The Father causes the Son's virtues to stand out in connection with His suffering and rewards Him for it (John 12:16; 13:31; 17:1-5; cf. Philippians 2:9-11). The Father spoke to the Son and publically affirmed Him (Luke 3:22; Matthew 17:5).

Jesus is also blunt about the difference between His Father and their claim. Jesus is clear that His Father is the one they call "their God," but their claim to have Him as their father is false, for they do not even know Him. They should have known, but they did not. God had revealed Himself to and through the nation of Israel. They were to be a nation of priests who would reveal Him to the rest of the nations (Exodus 19:5-6), but they had no personal knowledge of God. They knew a few things about Him through the Law and the Prophets, but they had perverted those so that had an incorrect understanding. They were to be God's chosen people, but they had no personal knowledge of Him.

Jesus, by contrast, did know God. Not just through the Law and Prophets and personal experience of life which is available to anyone, but through His intimate relationship with the Father as the Son from eternity past. He saw and heard the Father directly. It was that knowledge that He was seeking to reveal to them. As Hebrews 1:1-3 states it, ¹ "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, ² in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. ³ And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power." However, they rejected Him and would not hear and receive that revelation. Jesus knew the Father intuitively and directly, but they did not even have an acquaintance.

In addition, Jesus contrasted His actions with theirs. He kept the Father's word while they disobeyed it. He was truthful and they were liars. If Jesus was to deny His relationship with the Father, then He would be a liar like them. He had implied this back in verse 44, but now He is direct and calls them liars to their faces. That did not seem to even phase them.

What did bother them was Jesus' statement in verse 56 - "*Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw [it] and was glad.*" Abraham, their physical but not spiritual ancestor, rejoiced to see the promise of the coming of Messiah. Some have suggested that this could refer to Abraham being in either heaven or the place of the righteous in Sheol and being glad at the birth of Jesus. I am sure that Abraham was glad about that, but it puts an element into the text that does not seem warranted. I believe it is rather referring to Abraham's joy at the birth of Isaac, whose name itself means laughter (Genesis 17:17; 21:3-6). Isaac was the son of promise through whom God's covenant to Abraham would be fulfilled including being a blessing to all nations. Part of my reason for saying this is the comment Hebrews 11:13 makes about Abraham and other men of faith. "*All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.*" Abraham welcomed the promises of God, including the future Messiah, from a distance.

Challenge and Declaration - John 8:57-58

Challenge. The Jews arguing with Jesus did not understand the meaning of what Jesus said for they had eyes to only see what was physically obvious to them. John 8:57, *The Jews therefore said to Him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?"*

The sense of their argument is simple. It is obvious that Jesus is still a young man. It was ludicrous to them for a man who was obviously not even 50 to claim to have also existed at the time of Abraham some 2,000 years earlier. I am sure they believed this response to Jesus' assertion would end the argument and prove Jesus was demonized to say such a ridiculous thing. They could not have anticipated Jesus' answer.

Declaration. John 8:58, *Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I*

am.” Jesus emphasized the importance and veracity of what He said by introducing it with the phrase, “truly, truly.” The statement is more than a claim to have lived at the time of Abraham. It is a direct claim to deity, to be the very God of Abraham.

Turn back to Exodus 3. In this chapter we find that Moses has already left Egypt. He has married Zipporah and is now tending sheep for his father-in-law, Jethro.

Exodus 3:1 (NASB) *Now Moses was pasturing the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the west side of the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed. ³ So Moses said, “I must turn aside now, and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up.” ⁴ When the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush, and said, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.” ⁵ Then He said, “Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” ⁶ He said also, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.*

Please note that the LORD specifically identifies Himself in verse 6 as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In verses 7-12 God tells Moses about the affliction of the Israelites in Egypt and His plan to free them. In verse 13 Moses asks God a very important question to which God gives Him an answer that is directly relevant to Jesus’ claim in John 8:58.

Exodus 3:13, *Then Moses said to God, “Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I shall say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you.’ Now they may say to me, ‘What is His name?’ What shall I say to them?” ¹⁴ And God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM”; and He said, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” ¹⁵ And God, furthermore, said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.’ This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations.*

The name of the God of Israel forever is “I AM.” God used the first person singular form of the verb “to be” to describe Himself and His special name with His people. He is the self-existent one. This verb is the root of the noun used of His name which is often translated as “Jehovah” or “Yahweh.” It is translated in most English versions as *LORD* in small caps to distinguish it from the common words translated as lord which mean “master” or are used as a term of respect. Jesus claims is to be that very God, the I AM.

People have many different beliefs about who Jesus is, but there can be no doubt about what Jesus Himself is claiming. That claim is either true or it is false and you either believe it or you must deny it. The Jesus of the Bible is the great “I AM,” the eternal God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Any one who claims belief in a Jesus that is less than eternal and self-existent has a different Jesus. Such a Jesus cannot save anyone from their sins. The Jesus of the false religions and the cults are all different from Jesus’ own claims.

The great tragedy is that they often create their Jesus by twisting the Scriptures into what they want to believe. Much like the Jews Jesus was arguing with, they are blinded to the things of God and cannot understand what has been revealed to them in the Bible. But in one thing they differ greatly from these Jews. They finally understood Jesus’ claim and in rejecting it, they sought to kill Him. The modern scripture twisters still find it advantageous to have a belief in Jesus, so they make up a Jesus to match what they want.

The Jews respond in verse 59. *Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself, and went out of the temple.*

They rejected Jesus’ claim and in doing so had to conclude that Jesus was a blasphemer. The Jews were very serious about the rules they had instituted in trying to keep the ten commandments. They went

so far in their effort to not take the name of the Lord in vain that they would not say His covenant name - Yahweh (Jehovah). They would instead say, “adoni” - “the Lord.” For Jesus to use the covenant name of God was bad enough, but to apply it to Himself was more than they could stand. They then acted upon what Jesus had been saying about them all along. They were seeking to kill Him.

There was still construction going on in the Temple (John 2:20), so there were plenty of stones nearby and they went to get stones to accomplish their purpose. Jesus’ time was not yet at hand, so He was hidden and left the Temple and the immediate danger that was present there. Jesus was not afraid of them, but He was judicious to remove Himself from unnecessary danger. The verb tense in this verse is passive. Jesus “was hidden,” not actively hiding. Possibly just the crowd that was in the temple made it hard for those who had gone to pick up stones to find Jesus again and He simply left the temple. Jesus would not die until it was the Father’s timing according to the Father’s plan, not that of men.

Conclusions

Who is Jesus according to you? I cannot stress enough the importance of making sure that if you are claiming to believe in Jesus, that you have the true Jesus, for only He can save you from your sins. If you do believe in the true Jesus, then it should be expected that your life will be different from those that do not share that belief. The true Jesus is God Himself in human flesh. He is the creator of all things, and it only follows then that He knows best for us. We ought to obey Him without arguing. The next time you are resistant to obeying the commands of the Lord and following His principles and precepts in your life, ask yourself what you really believe about Him. Perhaps you are entertaining ideas about Him that are not true and/or you are elevating your own opinion and wisdom to foolishly think you know better than Him. That was the root problem of these people we looked at this morning. Don’t let it be your problem too.

Sermon Notes - 11/6/2016
THE GREAT "I AM" - John 8:48-59

Introduction and Review- John 8:31-47

Who is Jesus of Nazareth? _____

What does Jesus Himself claim? _____

Jesus is talking to a mixed crowd in the Temple and in particular to Jews who “_____” (John 8:30-31)

Jesus has challenged them to be true _____ and the conversation becomes contentious (John 8:31-38)

They falsely accuse Jesus & their actions show they are children of the _____, not Abraham (John 8:39-47)

A claim of belief is _____ if the actions are contrary to the claim

Accusations, Defense & Hope - John 8:48-51

They are incensed at what Jesus' says about them, yet they do not make any _____ of His charges

Accusations: John 8:48 - they make the _____ false accusations made by the Pharisees against Jesus

Calling Jesus a Samaritan was meant to be _____ and implying Jesus' father was a Gentile

They also accused Jesus of being _____ by a demon (as did the Pharisees in Matthew 12)

Defense & Hope. John 8:49-51

Jesus directly denies their accusation pointing out He _____ the Father - they are in danger of being judged

Jesus could have condemned them, instead He still offers them _____ if they will keep His word

To keep (threw / tēreō) Jesus' word is to accept it by faith (John 8:24) and _____ it (John 3:36)

Rejection & Challenge - John 8:52-53

Despite the evidence, they _____ Jesus and His offer concluding by their own reasoning He is demonized

Their reasoning is logical but flawed: 1) Jesus was speaking about _____ matters.

2) Neither Enoch & Elijah had died. 3) They did not understand the Messianic prophecies

Glory and Knowledge - John 8:54-56

The Father glorified the Son in His miracles, virtues, and with public _____ (Luke 3:22; Matt. 17:5)

Jesus bluntly states that they do not even _____ God

Jesus does know God and _____ Him to man - Hebrews 1:1-3

Jesus kept the Father's word while they disobeyed it, Jesus is truthful and they are _____

Abraham rejoiced in God's promises to him which included the future _____ (Hebrews 11:3)

Challenge and Declaration - John 8:57-58

The Jews considered Jesus' statement to be ludicrous since Abraham _____ long before Jesus was born

"Truly, truly" emphasizes the importance and _____ of what is said

Exodus 3:1-15

The name, "*I Am*," is God's personal & _____ name with Israel = Jehovah, Yahweh, LORD

Jesus' claim is to be the _____ who spoke to Moses from the burning bush

They understood Jesus' claim, and rejecting it, sought to _____ Him for blasphemy

Jesus "was hidden," not actively hiding. He would die in the Father's _____, not man's

Conclusions

Make sure your faith is in the _____ Jesus

Consider what you really believe about Him next time you are _____ to obeying Him

KIDS KORNER

Parents, you are responsible to apply God's Word to your children's lives. Here is some help. **Young Children** - draw a picture about something you hear during the sermon. Explain your picture(s) to your parents at lunch.

Older Children - Do one or more of the following: 1) Count how many times the word "Abraham" is said. 2) Discuss with your parents the relationship each of the following had with God: Abraham, Jesus, the Jews in John 8, your own.

THINK ABOUT IT!

Questions to consider in discussing the sermon with others. Does genetic heritage determine character? What do different groups believe about Jesus? What did the Jews of Jesus' time believe about Him? What group of Jews was Jesus talking to in John 8:31f? Why did they become agitated and hostile to Jesus? What did they mean by calling Jesus a "Samaritan" and "have a demon"? How did Jesus respond to their accusation? What hope did Jesus give them? What does it mean to "keep" Jesus' word? Why did they reject Jesus' offer of eternal life? Where does Jesus' glory come from? What is wrong with trying to seek your own glory? What demonstrated that these Jews did not know God? Why did Jesus' statement at the end of verse 56 bother them so much? Why couldn't they understand what Jesus was talking about? What is the significance of Jesus claim in verse 58? What is the significance of the name, "I Am"? Why did they pick up stones to throw at Jesus? What is your own conclusion about Jesus' claims? How does your life demonstrate your belief about Jesus? What is the eternal destiny for those that reject Jesus? What are you personally doing to warn people about God's wrath to come and salvation from sin through Jesus Christ?