

THE GOSPEL OF BELIEF - Studies in John's Gospel

Part thirty-eight - Sunday, February 9th, 2014, 10 a.m.

Teaching #1708 - Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church

"IF ANYONE KEEPS MY WORD HE WILL NEVER SEE DEATH"

John 8:48-59 - "The Jews answered him, "Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?" [49] Jesus answered, "I do not have a demon, but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me. [50] Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is One who seeks it, and he is the judge. [51] Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death." [52] The Jews said to him, "Now we know that you have a demon! Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet you say, 'If anyone keeps my word, he will never taste death.'" [53] Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do you make yourself out to be?" [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] But you have not known him. I know him. If I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and I keep his word. [56] Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad." [57] So the Jews said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?" [58] Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am." [59] So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple."

Chapters seven and eight are John's *confrontation encounters* with Jesus. There is nothing but tension behind the conversations. It started with the religious leaders trying to trap Jesus with the woman caught in adultery and it builds to them telling Jesus He's demon possessed. Finally, this series of conversations ends with them looking for rocks to stone Jesus for blasphemy. There's nothing sweet in these chapters. They're John's way of telling us the end is coming for Jesus.

1) **JOHN'S ACCOUNT REVEALS INCREASING INTOLERANCE DUE TO NOTHING BUT CHRIST'S LOYALTY TO DIVINE TRUTH**

John 8:48-51 - "The Jews *answered* him, "Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?" [49] Jesus answered, "I do not have a demon, but *I honor my Father, and you dishonor me.* [50] Yet *I do not seek my own glory; there is One who seeks it, and he is the judge.* [51] Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death."

The opening sentence causes us to look backward from our text. They are *answering* Jesus (48). What words from Jesus are they answering? Here's what has them so upset - **John 8:45-47** - "But *because I tell the truth, you do not believe me.* [46] Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? [47] Whoever is of God hears the words of God. *The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.*"

Those are the words from Jesus these Jewish leaders are answering in today's text. And they tell Jesus such intolerant words can only be explained by *demonic influence* - "The Jews answered him, 'Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?'"(48).

Jesus had dared to tell these religious leaders that their religious devotion had *not* led them to God. He was telling them they were *wrong*. He was telling them they would be mistaken *until they believed Him* - "*...you do not believe me*"(45) - "*...why do you not believe me?*"(46).

Don't miss what's going on here. Jesus is telling them they need to *move their minds* from the way *they* were thinking to the absolute truth *He was telling them*. They had to switch their present mind-set because it was faulty and unable to bring them to God. They may have been *sincere*. They may have been *devout*. But they needed to acknowledge the *truthfulness* of Jesus' words because that alone would help them to know God. Because they won't hear the *words of Jesus* they don't *know God at all* - **John 8:47** - "*...The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.*"

I would submit to you that if you and I say the same thing to today's world many will be equally quick to look for stones to throw. Jesus crashes head on with the dominant notion that religious ideas - especially *sincerely held* ones - can never be classed as *mistaken*. Your religious concepts are true *for you* if you honestly *believe* them to be true or if they make you a more *loving, tolerant person*. And in our text Jesus is saying *sincerely held* religious beliefs can be as mistaken as *spelling mistakes*.

Today such words are heard with nothing but *intolerant*. It is still as unacceptable to tell people they are wrong about God apart from the words of Jesus Christ as it was for Jesus, or Paul, or Peter, or James to speak those words in their day. The

church was **born** into a world intolerant of the absolutely true and righteous Redeemer.

So **why** does Jesus say the very things He knows will bring about His execution? Why not choose an easier, more culturally adaptable path? He tells us - **John 8:49-50** - "**Jesus answered, 'I do not have a demon, but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me. [50] Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is One who seeks it, and he is the judge.'"**

Jesus is to be trusted with His words precisely because He wasn't adapting His words to accommodate His audience. He **knew** His words would cause listeners to "**dishonor**" Him (49b). But Jesus would never sell-out **truth** for the sake of **acceptance**. What **God the Son** said was received from **God the Father**. This is truth endorsed by the whole Trinity. This is a highly **trustworthy** proclamation.

2) WHERE DOES THE STRENGTH FOR FAITHFULNESS TO THE TRUTH COME FROM?

John 8:50 - "**Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is One who seeks it, and he is the judge."**

Compromise has its root in a hunger for **success**. That's what Jesus means when He says He does not seek His own **glory**. There is a fast-track to glory in this world. You study the market and give it what it wants. Jesus says the secret of His own faithfulness in His humble, incarnate state, was His hunger for a glory that had nothing to do with His own acceptance. He was **hungry to make Father God glad**. He places the gladness of Father God far above His own acceptance.

Something else. Jesus tells us another secret to remaining faithful to the truth is **committing future judgment to Father God** - **John 8:50** - "**Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is One who seeks it, and he is the judge.**"

Because faithfulness to the truth will bring mistreatment the way the sun brings warmth it is easy for truth proclaimers to be **bitter** truth proclaimers, or **angry** truth proclaimers, or **self-pitying** truth proclaimers. Jesus left all judgment in the hands of Father God.

True, He **proclaimed** future judgment on many occasions. But He always **left** that judgment for that later day. He offered grace and mercy to the worst offenders while never for one second failing to speak the whole truth.

3) IT IS OFTEN THE PRACTICE OF RELIGIOUS PEOPLE TO PROP UP OTHER SAINTS AND PROPHETS TO REPLACE THE UNIQUE GREATNESS OF JESUS CHRIST

John 8:51-53 - "**Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.**" [52] The Jews said to him, "**Now we know that you have a demon! Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet you say, 'If anyone keeps my word, he will never taste death.'**" [53] **Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do you make yourself out to be?**"

I will talk more about **verse 51** in the next point. Here, suffice it to note these people respond with equal anger in the face of **warning of judgment** and the **beauty of gracious promise**. They aren't awakened when Jesus tells them of Father God's coming judgment (50). And they aren't warmed and drawn when Jesus promises life that overcomes death (51). A hard heart is a fearful thing indeed.

The point here is **preferred subjects of religious devotion**. These people **admire** Abraham. They read the words of their **prophets**. They express pride in **faithfulness** to the persons of their religious heritage. They are **more** willing to embrace Abraham and the prophets than Jesus, God the Son.

Understand, the point isn't that Abraham was a great man of faith. And the prophets were diligent proclaimers of truth. That's not in question here. The point is the way these people **play Abraham against Jesus the Christ**. We're seeing Jesus' frustration as these people **fix devotion in the wrong place**.

This is not the first time Jesus encountered this. We've already studied another example in John's account - **John 5:45-47** - "**Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope. [46] For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. [47] But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?"**

Notice the way Jesus clearly says these people had "**set their hope**" on Moses (45). They would set their hope on Moses but reject the One Moses himself hoped in. They would treasure Moses' words and use those very words to reject the One

Moses *wrote* about!

That is the same kind of misplaced devotion Jesus now encounters with these Abraham followers in John 8. People are quick to *use* saints and prophets and leaders of all sorts to *flatten out* the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. We will fill up the world with saints if we can minimize Jesus Christ.

4) VALUE THOSE WHO POINT TO CHRIST, BUT RECOGNIZE THAT ONLY CHRIST CAN GIVE ETERNAL LIFE

John 8:51-58 - "Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death." [52] The Jews said to him, "Now we know that you have a demon! Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet you say, 'If anyone keeps my word, he will never taste death.'" [53] Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do you make yourself out to be?" [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] But you have not known him. I know him. If I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and I keep his word. [56] Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad." [57] So the Jews said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?" [58] Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am."

There are so many truths in these verses. I can only touch on one of them. I want to look at the two *bookend* verses because I think they summarize the heart of Jesus' words here:

John 8:51, 57-58 - "Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death....[57]....So the Jews said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?" [58] Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am."

What gives Jesus the right to make such a stupendous claim in **verse 51**? How can He be sure that if anyone *"keeps His words"* he will *"never see death"*? And how can Jesus say those who keep His words will never see death when everyone knew **Abraham** died, and Jesus clearly said Abraham *"rejoiced"* to see His (Jesus') day (56)?

All of this and more is explained in Jesus' closing words to these Jewish leaders in **verse 58** - "Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.'" And it's easy to miss the central point Jesus is trying to make. True, as is often pointed out, this is a very clear claim to deity on Jesus' part. He takes that massive *"I am"* title that God gave to Moses to identify Himself - **Exodus 3:14** - "God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.' And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, I AM has sent me to you."

But there is also something else intended in Jesus' words, *"...before Abraham was, I am."* There was a time when **Abraham was**. He actually walked this earth. And, very precious, Jesus reminded these same leaders that **Abraham is still alive** - **Matthew 22:32** -

"I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?" He is not God of the dead, but of the living." This is Jesus' reminder about life after the grave.

But even this isn't the point of Jesus' words in **John 8:58** - "Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am." Note carefully, Jesus *isn't* talking about Abraham's life *after death*. He's talking about the whole period of time before Abraham's birth - **"Before Abraham was, I am."**

In other words, there was a time when Abraham *wasn't*. And that's precisely what you *can't* say about Jesus, God the Son. The words *was* and *wasn't* can be applied to Abraham - and to everyone else who has ever existed. But *was* and *wasn't* don't apply to Jesus. They have no meaning whatsoever when attached to His Person.

But *why* does this matter so much? Isn't this just philosophical hairsplitting? No. Not when we come to Jesus' precious and powerful words in **verse 51** - "Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death." And Jesus can guarantee this because He is the only One so totally unbound by all of the constraints of *time* and the *Fall* that He is the **Creator** and **progenitor** of a timeless, eternal kind of living. He is the only One, so He says, who exists *beyond* the world of *was* and *was not*. He alone can resurrect and transform this dust into eternal life. Abraham couldn't *start his own life*. When Abraham *was not* he could do nothing about it. Nor could you or I. Only Christ can *give* life because only He is the *author* of life.

No wonder Abraham *rejoiced* to see Jesus' day! And that leads to our last point:

5) **THOSE WHO TRULY KNOW CHRIST DELIGHT IN HIM**

John 8:56 - "Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad."

To know Christ is to have the root of all your deepest joys shifted - *transplanted* - to Christ from all that *isn't* Christ. John continues to unfold what it means to *"believe in Christ."* And one of the sure results of authentic faith is finding your delights *loosened* from the temporal and temporary and material to be *deepened* in the eternal and the Godly.

This isn't some dry, religiously moral legalism. Belief in Christ propels Godliness from *delight*. It shuns sin and foolishness, not by *regulation* but by *delight*.

In a nutshell, thinking of Abraham, who Jesus said, *"rejoiced to see my day,"* the writer of Hebrews captures how this deep joy in Christ effected Abraham's earthly life - **Hebrews 11:8-10, 16** - **"By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. [9] By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. [10] For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God....[16]....But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city."**

Belief warms the heart of the one doing the believing. It sets his or her sights on what is possessed by faith now and what is yet to be possessed through Jesus Christ. A believing heart may have its ups and downs, but a believing heart can't remain more fascinated by this present world than by the greatness and grace of Jesus Christ.