

I Am the I Am

Our Gospel lesson sets forth four astonishing claims of Jesus Christ that radically transform our lives.

- 48 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.

Introduction:

1. There are many great philosophical questions like: Who am I? What is the meaning of life? Does God exist? What happens after death? Without an answer to these questions, we struggle to find a real reason to live.
2. Hear the testimony of the Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy: At the age of 50, there was a question that brought him to the verge of suicide. He writes: “The question seeking an answer without which one cannot live was this: “Is there any meaning in life that the inevitable death awaiting me does not destroy?”
3. “Today or tomorrow death will come to those I love and then to me. Nothing will remain but stench and worms. But soon not only I will not exist but eventually no one will exist who will remember anything I have written or done. Why then go on with the effort? What is it all for? To what does it all lead? What difference will it make if I do this good thing or bad thing or nothing at all? So I could give no rational meaning to any one of my personal actions or of my whole life. Why bother?”
4. Tolstoy was in the grip of despair until he was confronted with the Question of All Questions: Who is Jesus Christ? And what difference should it make it my life? This is

the burden of the I AM sayings of John's Gospel and it is the burden of the passage before us.

5. In John 8:48-59, Jesus makes four astonishing claims. I would like to frame them up using Jesus' words: My word, my glory, my day, and my name!

I. My Word (8:48-53): Jesus is the deliverer from death for all who keep His Word. Jesus promises a deathless future to all who hear and believe His Word.

- In verse 51, Jesus is not suggesting that His disciples will never experience physical death. Rather, we will never have to confront death in its terror as the occasion of final separation from God. He speaks of the second death – when someone dies in their sins and is separated from God's love and is faced with the crushing weight of God's wrath and condemnation forever.

Implications:

- **People marked by an unshakeable assurance** John 5:24 - "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life."
- **People marked by a ready obedience.** To keep His Word means to hear, trust, and treasure Jesus' word. There are to be no limits to your obedience.

II. My Glory (8:50,54-55): God the Father seeks one thing: Jesus' glory. God the Father has a great longing and desire to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ. The Jews in this passage have an extraordinary controversy with Jesus. They want to dismiss and dishonor Jesus, ***the very one that the Father wants to honor and exalt.***

- Jesus' glory is His inexpressible beauty and perfection. It is His supreme importance. The Father desires for us to "behold his glory" (John 1:14)... to see Him for who He is and worship Him as our Lord and God.

How does the Father glorify and exalt the Son?

- The Father exalted and glorified the Son at His baptism.
- The Father exalted the Son at His transfiguration (Matt. 17).
- The Father glorified the Son at the hour of His crucifixion (John 17:1,2,5).
- The Father glorified and vindicated the Son by raising Him from the dead on the third day (Acts 3:13-15).
- The Father glorified the Son in His exaltation and heavenly ascension (Phil. 2:9-11).

Implications:

- **People marked by a supreme desire to see Jesus exalted and enthroned in the hearts of others.** Does it pain you to see the name of Jesus Christ so dishonored, dismissed and ignored? Do you, like Henry Martyn, mourn when you see others trapped in false religions and cry out, "I cannot endure existence if Jesus Christ is to be so dishonored and dismissed?"
- **People marked by an uncommon ability to smile at the future.** The best things in your life are yet to come. The full outburst of Jesus' glory is yet in the future. We shall behold the glory which Jesus enjoyed with the Father before the beginning of time. We will share it with Him. Remember Jesus' prayer for you (John 17:24): You will see and enter into Jesus' glory!

III. My Day (8:56-57): Father Abraham rejoiced in one thing – To see Jesus’ day. Third claim, not only does God the Father rejoice in Him, but also Father Abraham rejoiced to see Jesus’ day.

- Jesus says: I am the fulfillment of all of Abraham’s hopes for salvation. And if you were sons of Abraham, you would thrill to see My Day as much as your Father.
- **When did Abraham see Christ’s day?** Genesis 12:3 - “In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” Genesis 17:17 - “Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, ‘Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old?’”
- Abraham saw my day. Abraham’s personal experience at the sacrifice of Isaac was an object lesson to him of the coming incarnation, death, and resurrection of the promised One (Genesis 22:8,14 - God will provide for Himself the lamb for the sacrifice. On the mount of the LORD it shall be seen!).
- The same God who provided a ram in substitution for the death of Isaac would one day provide His own Son as the perfect substitute and sacrifice for our salvation.
- **Implication: A people marked by a contagious joy.** A believing sight of Jesus Christ and His day will put gladness into your heart. If you know that God did not spare His only Son so that He might spare you, your heart will rejoice.
- Franz Joseph Haydn, the Austrian composer of the 1700s, says: “When I think upon my Lord, my heart is so full of joy that the notes dance and leap from my pen; and since God has given me a cheerful heart, it will be pardoned me that I serve Him with a cheerful spirit.”

IV. My Name (8:58-59): Jesus makes His most profound, audacious claim: Before Abraham was, I AM. What is He claiming? I am the I am! The one that the Jews are claiming to be demon-possessed and of dubious origin (8:41) is really the eternal God.

- The **Significance of His Name.** He is not simply claiming antiquity. He is claiming to be the eternal God. Exodus 3:14 – The name I AM is the name God gave to Moses to introduce Him to his people. No clearer claim of deity is found in the gospel record.
- The **Sacredness of His name...**The Jews never pronounce the name Yahweh. They say Adonai instead of YHWH, for it is considered blasphemous to even pronounce the name of the LORD. Jesus says, “before Abraham was, I AM.” The Jews knew what Jesus was claiming for they pick up stones to stone Him.
- **Implication: People marked by unconditional surrender** to Jesus Christ. If Jesus’ claims are true, then He is properly worshipped and adored as the Messiah for He is the exalted Lord of glory.

Conclusion

How will you respond to the claims of Jesus?

Many are perfectly happy to have a Jesus who is merely a wise teacher and a prophet. This way they can keep Jesus on the periphery of their lives.

When we read a passage like John 8, we understand why C.S. Lewis says that Jesus does not give us this option:

“I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept his claim

to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic, or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”

There are only two biblical responses: You can kill Him as demonic or you can crown Him as divine. **Which will it be for you?**

Discussion Questions

1. Compare Jesus' answers to the Jews' three questions in this passage. What do you learn about Jesus from this passage?
2. What do you learn from Jesus about dealing with hostility and opposition?
3. Out of the four claims of Jesus, which one is the most difficult for you to believe and why?
4. What's one way you would live differently if you really believed Jesus' claims in this passage?
5. What does it look like practically to keep Jesus' words? How would you describe your personal patterns of hearing, believing, and treasuring Jesus' word?
6. Based upon what you learned about Jesus and His relationship with Abraham, how would you say people in the Old Testament were saved? Was there a different method of salvation in the Old Testament than the New? Or was Abraham saved the same way we are as New Testament believers?
7. What does the violent reaction of the Jews reveal about the nature of Jesus' claim in verses 58-59?

Going Deeper

1. Based on this passage, how would you answer scholars who assert that Jesus Christ never claimed to be God? They contend that Jesus' divinity was a belief developed later by the early church. See [John Hick, The Metaphor of God Incarnate: Christology in a Pluralistic Age](#). He quotes NT scholars who claim what we are doing in this sermon (in presenting the deity of Jesus Christ from his own claims) is a "precarious affair."
2. Why was Jesus crucified as a criminal? Compare John 8:58-59 with Mark 14:61-62. When asked, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" Jesus replies, "I am... and you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."