

35. Before Abraham was, I AM

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In my opinion John chapter 8 is the most confrontational chapter between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders in the entire Book of John. Like no other chapters, Jesus literally antagonized them with the truth of God, because these people were blinded by their religious tradition so much that they could not and chose not to see the Savior, God Himself right in front of them.

By any means I am not limiting this blindness to these religious leaders. In reality, every single human being has one's own faith in something or someone. It can be oneself, or things around, or make-believe, or the one true God. Everyone comes to the point where he or she must, without an exception, decide whom he or she will follow and worship.

It doesn't matter with one's age. I've seen very young people whose hearts are stone cold already against the Lord at their young age. I just hope and pray that they change their minds later. At the same time some elderly people who were set in their way for ages receive Jesus into their hearts, some even on their death bed. God extends His mercy and grace to the last moment of each person because He loves them very much and He doesn't want them to be perished in hell.

If you've been with us in our study of John you know that what we've really been studying is a great portrait of Jesus Christ. We have seen the pattern of His life, the pattern of His claims, the pattern of His testimony, the pattern of those who reacted against Him and for Him. And continuously on every page of John's Gospel we hear again the claim of Christ to be the Son of God, the Messiah of Israel, the Savior of the world over and over and over again until it's ringing in our ears, cannot be tuned out.

If you swap the word 'Israel' to "the United States' and 'the Jews' to 'the Americans' in chapter 8, you will be surprised how many things described in this chapter are happening right here in America spiritually.

Again, Jesus confronts the Jewish religious leaders with His truth about His identity. You cannot miss Him.

A. I HONOR MY FATHER, AND YOU DISHONOR ME

John 8:48-50 Then the Jews answered and said to Him, "Do we not say rightly 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 And I do not seek My own glory; there is One who seeks and judges.

Israel had their spiritual security in two things. First, they knew of God, they had all His laws, they thought that they obeyed Him by following their own religious traditions which often actually went against God's truth and intentions. Secondly, they were the children of Abraham which they thought had secured their instant get-out-of-hell card no matter what.

Jesus destroys both of those securities to lay bare their naked sinfulness that He might give them the garment of His own righteousness. But they would not accept His.

You can imagine the conversation between Jesus and these religious leaders didn't last long in civil way. When an argument or debate begins, it typically starts at the intellectual level. Somebody has a point and he shares the point and then the other side makes a counterpoint and then the first person hears the counterpoint and he thinks he has a better counterpoint so he says it. That's the intellectual level.

However, it doesn't stay that way very long as you can imagine. I don't watch CNN, MSNBC, CBS or other major TV network to get my news. I exclusively watch FoxNews. Whenever they have two opinionated guests on the same show, moving from the intellectual level to emotional level takes about a minute, if it goes that long. They try to talk over each other. You can see their veins on their heads were popping up and their faces turning red. I get tired of them, so when they start to do that, I either mute the volume or turn off the TV.

The second level is the emotional level. People get emotionally involved. They raise their voices. Their cheeks get red and they're thinking, "Not only do I not like his points, I don't think I like this jerk!" And then it can finally even digress to the physical level.

From the beginning of chapter 8, Jesus systematically was peeling off their false piety. They no longer can handle Jesus' logic. So they only resort to what they have left – name calling.

Actually, they have another option – they could be on their knees in repentance, bowing their hearts before Christ and saying, "Christ, forgive us; God, cleanse us; I now believe." You may know someone who became hostile to you when you tried to tell them about Jesus.

The name of Jesus always draws the line. People either draw near to Him or run away from Him. In a way you can say, He is like New York Yankees or Dallas Cowboys – either you hate them or love them, nothing in between.

Last Wednesday Chief U.S. District Judge Fred Biery in San Antonio, Texas banned not only prayer during the graduation ceremony of a high school, but also he banned other words or phrases such as: "join in prayer," "bow their heads," "amen," and "prayer." This all came about because Christa and Danny Schultz, who sued to block such religious expressions at their son's graduation ceremony.

But the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals thought differently, reversing the judge's ruling Friday, so that the students can exercise their freedom of speech.

They called Jesus a Samaritan which was one of the most despised races to the Jews and demon possessed. They could not make name calling any worse than that. The Jewish people hated the Samaritans because they were mix-breeds between the Jews and Assyrians. The Jews didn't like the Gentiles, but the Jews considered the Samaritans less than the Gentiles. They probably had worse racial problems between them than the KKKs and the Black Panthers which is the radical black militant racial group.

B. KEEP MY WORD YOU SHALL NEVER TASTE DEATH

Not Jesus. Let's see how He handles Himself from next verse:

John 8:51-55 Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death." 52 Then the Jews said to Him, "Now we know that You have

a demon! Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and You say, 'If anyone keeps My word he shall never taste death.' 53 Are You greater than our father Abraham, who is dead? And the prophets are dead. Whom do You make Yourself out to be?" 54 Jesus answered, "If I honor Myself, My honor is nothing. It is My Father who honors Me, of whom you say that He is your God. 55 Yet you have not known Him, but I know Him. And if I say, 'I do not know Him,' I shall be a liar like you; but I do know Him and keep His word.

They call Jesus names mercilessly, but He extends His mercy to them and shows them the way of salvation to heaven.

This is a great thing to practice, folks, especially as Christians. When someone behind your car blares his horn and yells at you something that you are not quite sure what he means, then he waves at you with one finger only. Now you have a choice – you can wave at him in the same way by lowing yourself to his level or smile at him and wave back at him with all five fingers.

Next time you're verbally attacked, you are so tempted to rip into an action of vengeance and shred him or her to pieces; or push their buttons and you know just what buttons to push. Stop and think about the way Jesus handled Himself here.

Sir Winston Churchill had quite a sharp mouth as some of you may know. On one occasion, George Bernard Shaw, the playwright in England, was opening a new play in London, and sent two tickets to Churchill with a note: "Bring a friend if you have one." Not to be outdone, Churchill wrote back and declined going on the first night. He said, "I'll attend the second night if there is one."

You also might remember the sharp conversation between Winston Churchill and Lady Astor, a member of Parliament. She tried to belittle him publicly on one occasion. She said, "Sir, if you were my husband, I'd put arsenic in your tea!" And he shouted back, "If I were your husband, I'd drink it!" On another occasion, again in public, he had a little too much to drink and she shouted out above the crowd, "Sir, you're drunk!" Without missing a beat he looked back at her and said, "Madam, you're ugly! And in the morning I will be sober."

With the solemn affirmation "*Most assuredly, I say to you,*" Jesus declared that any man who received His message would not experience death. It is the same style of negative statement of a positive principle later used by Jesus:

John 10:10 The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.

It is the summary of His mission, because he came to destroy the devil's work and to undo the penalty for sin pronounced in the Garden of Eden:

Genesis 2:17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.

A fuller statement of this principle appears later in Jesus' promise to Martha:

John 11:25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.

Jesus says, "*if anyone keeps My Word he shall never see death.*" This is a tremendous statement. Let me tell you this way, Christian. If you're already a born-again

believer, you're already experiencing eternal life on earth, and continuing in heaven later. It will happen in less than one millionth second that you won't even know it. It will be like the Rapture is, in the twinkling of an eye, absent from the body, present with the Lord.

There's no lingering state in between. One moment you are on earth, next moment you are in heaven and worshipping our God and Savior Jesus Christ with the millions and millions of saints who went before us. What a day will it be! Do you know what the better part of that is? It is your first day in heaven and you have the eternity to go. Do you know what the best part of that is? Jesus is there.

C. BEFORE ABRAHAM WAS, I AM

John 8:56-59 Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad." 57 Then the Jews said to Him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?" 58 Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM." 59 Then they took up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.

Jesus does not defend Himself here. He is letting God the Father defend Him and Abraham, the great patriarch of Israel.

How did Abraham "see" our Lord Jesus' day, that is, His life and ministry on earth? The same way he saw the future city: by faith.

Hebrews 11:8-10 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. 9 By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; 10 for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

God did not give Abraham some special vision of our Lord Jesus' life and ministry, but He did give Abraham the spiritual perception to "see" these future events. Certainly Abraham saw the birth of the Messiah in the miraculous birth of his own son, Isaac. He certainly saw Calvary when he offered Isaac to God in Genesis 22.

In the priestly ministry of Melchizedek in Genesis 14, Abraham could see the heavenly priesthood of the Lord Jesus. In the marriage of Isaac, Abraham could see a picture of the marriage of the Lamb in Genesis 24.

Jesus' statement in v58 can be translated, "Before Abraham was born, I AM." The is one of the most definite proclamations of Jesus' divinity in the whole New Testament. This is the third time Jesus claims His divinity in this chapter 8 – v24 and v28.

Jehovah's Witness' bible "New World Translation" twists this very verse to accommodate their heresy in spite of the original Greek words 'ego eimi' which means "I AM" as we learned in our previous study.

John 8:58 Jesus said to them: "Most truly I say to YOU, Before Abraham came into existence, I have been." Jehovah's Witness' New World Translation See that? They had the audacity to change it as if Jesus was nothing more than an angel.

The best proof of what Jesus meant was clearly shown by the reaction of the Jewish religious leaders. They wanted to kill Jesus by stoning for blasphemy of God – claiming to be God. They didn't misunderstand what He meant.

Leviticus 24:16 And whoever blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall certainly stone him, the stranger as well as him who is born in the land. When he blasphemes the name of the LORD, he shall be put to death.

The most difficult people to win to the Savior are those who do not realize that they have a need. They are under the condemnation of God, yet they trust their religion and their traditions to save them. They are walking in the darkness and not following the Light of life. They are sharing a "living death" because of their bondage to sin; and, in spite of their religious deeds, they are dishonoring the Father and the Son. These are the people who crucified Jesus Christ, and Jesus called them the children of the devil.

If God is your Father through Jesus, then heaven is your home. If He is not your Father through Jesus, then hell is your destiny.

D. APPLICATIONS

- 1) True Christian love can only be seen through what we do to others, not by what we say.
- 2) There is no middle ground or gray area in following and serving the Lord – either you are for Him or against Him.