

Are You Greater Than Our Father Abraham?

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[0 : 00] Back in the Gospel of John this morning, we left off last Sunday with Jesus saying some very hard words to the Jews who were gathered in the temple courts.

Jesus told them that they were of their father, the devil. And the reason he said that was because they were desiring the same things as the devil and doing the same things as the devil.

They were seeking to murder him and they were choosing to reject his words, which they knew to be true. And we recalled last Sunday how all of this is explained well by what John said earlier in his Gospel.

John 3, verse 19 and 20. This is the verdict. Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of the light because their deeds were evil.

Everyone who does evil hates the light and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. So Jesus has been shining the light of truth upon them, exposing their evil deeds.

[1 : 12] And now we will see how the people respond to this. John 8, verse 48. The Jews answered him, Aren't we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?

Now this isn't the first time that they've accused Jesus of being demon-possessed. They did that back in chapter 7, verse 20. But this is the first time that they've called him a Samaritan.

And they probably don't mean that in the true sense of the word, as in being from the Samaritan people. No, they're using this word as an insult, a term of contempt.

Most of you know that in Jesus' day, the Jews generally looked down upon the Samaritans. There was hostility and suspicion between them.

And the Jews saw the Samaritans as half-breeds and as being unclean. It's like they're saying, Didn't we say it well when we said that you were demon-possessed?

[2 : 12] A good-for-nothing half-breed? You can feel the anger and the contempt that's flowing from them as they call Jesus' names and insult him.

Does Jesus know what it feels like to be insulted? Does Jesus know what it feels like to be insulted? To have the anger of people lash out at him? He does. Even though he was the perfect son of God, he still felt deeply the insults of people.

These words have just been rolling around in my head this week. You dishonor me, said Jesus. It's not just a cold statement of the facts.

Jesus experienced it personally. He felt dishonored. Not only were they venting their anger and hatred towards him with the things that they said, but the things that they were saying couldn't have been more false.

[3 : 33] They accused the very Son of God of having a demon, of being demon-possessed. They called him a Samaritan. One of those people that we hate.

Our enemies. What amazes me here is how Jesus responds. He does not retaliate in the least. He doesn't insult them back. He does say, I do not have a demon. But there are no...

Words of insult. I know if I was in that situation, I kept thinking, man, I would be so angry. I would be tempted. What can I say to change the minds of the people here in this crowd right now?

Jesus doesn't do that. He says, I am not possessed by a demon. I'm here to honor my Father, and you dishonor me. Verse 50, Jesus goes on.

[4 : 36] He says, I am not seeking glory for myself. But there is one who seeks it. And he is the judge. So even though Jesus feels the dishonoring accusations and the slanderous charges of the people, he does not seek to vindicate himself in their eyes.

He says, you dishonor me, but I am not here to seek my glory. Rather than taking his reputation into his own hands and fighting for it or trying to prove that, yes, I am who I say I am, he will leave his reputation and his honor and his name to the one who does seek his glory, his Father, God.

He will leave his reputation and his honor to the true judge, to God. How Jesus responds in this moment reminded me of what we've been talking about in Sunday school back in 1 Peter about suffering.

And Peter actually points to Jesus and perhaps even had this very moment in mind when Jesus was insulted. In 1 Peter 2, verse 23, this is what Peter says.

He says, when they hurled their insults at Jesus, he did not retaliate. When he suffered, he made no threats.

[6 : 03] Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He deliberately and consciously committed himself, his reputation, his honor, his good name to the judge, to the true judge, to God.

At this point, Jesus, I imagine at least in my head, addresses everyone and probably speaks in a loud voice and gives another one of those amazing promises.

A truly, truly moment. Very truly, or truly, truly, I tell you, whoever obeys my word will never see death.

Literally, whoever keeps my word will never see death unto the ages. What a statement.

Jesus has talked about this before, but again, he's using different words here. He's offering people eternal life. We'll never, ever see death unto the ages, forever.

[7 : 25] And to receive this, he says, you must keep my word. Some translations say, obey, keep, and obey are kind of sometimes the same thing.

Keep my command, obey my word. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever of you obeys my word, keeps my word, you will not ever see death unto the ages, forever.

Now, there's only one who can actually make good and deliver on an offer like that, and that's God. God is the source and giver of all life.

And so, in order to accept these words of Jesus, we must have faith that God is the one who has sent him with this message and that he intends to give this gift of eternal life through Jesus.

But even before we get to the response of the people, I have to say that it's not going to surprise me if the people do not believe Jesus.

[8 : 33] How many funerals do you have to attend before you come to know that death is an unchangeable certainty for every human being? In the ordinary earthly sense of the words, to not see death means to never die.

But it seems that everyone dies eventually. And now here's a man claiming that if you obey his word, you can become the exception to this law of the universe and cheat death not just once or twice but forever.

There's only one being who is powerful enough to make that happen. And it's the one who created us and gave us life in the first place. God.

Unless Jesus speaks for him and comes from him then they're right to just laugh him off here. Let's look at how they respond. Verse 52.

At this they exclaimed now we know that you are demon possessed. Abraham died and so did the prophets yet you say that whoever obeys your word will never taste death?

[9 : 48] Again, they call him demon possessed. In other words, what you're saying Jesus is absolute baloney. Let's take a little inventory here.

Let's think about the men that we know God chose specially in history. Men like Abraham and the prophets. We know that God chose them specially and spoke through them and yet all of them died.

Except of course Elijah but they forgot that part. All of them died and you're saying that if anyone obeys your word they will never taste death unto eternity? I don't think so.

No. Not even the great forefather of our faith or the prophets themselves escaped death. So don't even think that you can shovel baloney like this saying that whoever keeps your word will live forever.

Never die. They go on. Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died and so did the prophets.

[10 : 58] Who do you think you are? You can just feel it in their voices and the words they say. These are quite the questions.

All of them are rhetorical. especially this first question. Are you greater than our father Abraham?

The people in the crowd there, they weren't totally irrational or stupid.

Do you hear what they're asking? It's a rhetorical question and of course the answer is no. But they're on the right track.

Are you greater than our father Abraham? They say. No. Who died? Their answer is no. I don't think so.

But listen to the reasoning that's going on in their minds. The only way that we could accept what you are saying Jesus to be true is if you were greater than Abraham.

[11:58] We don't think you are. Is if you were greater than the prophets. We don't think you are. But if you were somehow greater, then perhaps you could say such a thing and we would believe you and it would be true.

So the people recognize that Jesus is claiming something that goes way beyond what has ever been claimed by the people God chose to speak through in the past. And they asked Jesus this question at the end of this verse.

Who do you think you are? Literally. Whom do you make yourself out to be? Who do you glory? Jesus answers verse 54.

If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim is your God, is the one who glorifies me.

In other words, I'm not making myself to be anything. I'm not here to get glory for myself. I'm here to speak the truth that the Father has sent me to speak.

[13:08] And He is the one who will glorify me. For the third time in the gospel, if my counting is right, Jesus just claimed again that God is going to glorify Him.

It's quite a thing to say. Jesus goes on, verse 55. He says, though you do not know Him, my Father, God, I know Him.

If I said I did not, I would be like you, a liar. But I do know Him and obey His word, says Jesus. Again, Jesus tells them, you do not know God. You think you do, but you do not. He says, I do know Him.

I couldn't even deny that I know Him. If I were to say that I didn't know Him, I would be lying. No, His words are a little more pointed than that.

[14:12] He says, I would be like you, a liar. And I don't think Jesus is just calling names here. I think He is, again, speaking what He knows to be true.

And these people are sure to take offense at that. Verse 56, Jesus goes on. He says, Your father, Abraham, rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day.

He saw it and was glad. This is another amazing statement of Jesus. First, let's notice how happy Abraham was.

My translation is a little flat. Literally, it's more like your father, Abraham, was overjoyed that he would see my day. So not just a little bit of joy, but Abraham had lots of joy.

Why? Let's think about the cause of that great joy. He was overjoyed, Jesus says, that he would see my day. What does that mean?

[15:23] And then Jesus says one thing more. He says, and he saw it. As in, it's done. He saw it. Already happened.

What is Jesus talking about? I'll be the first to admit that I don't know what Jesus means by this. There's a few good ideas and guesses out there.

Some think that this refers to a particular moment back in history when Abraham, perhaps God, revealed directly to him that someday Jesus would come.

Maybe it's just not recorded in Genesis. Others think it refers to how Abraham rejoiced greatly in the birth of the promised son, Isaac. And that kind of through that he was anticipating the coming of the ultimate son who would fulfill all of God's promises.

some people think that Abraham rejoiced greatly when he saw the day of Jesus, not back in the past, but right now in the present. Just like Moses and Elijah were there at the transfiguration, perhaps Abraham is also watching this and seeing the day of Christ unfolding right in front of his eyes and he's rejoicing greatly.

[16:40] I'm not sure what Jesus means here, but this is how the people in the crowd responded to his statement. You are not yet 50 years old, they answered, and you have seen Abraham?

It's kind of like a mocking statement. Like, look at you. You're what, 30-something? You're not even 50 yet, and you think you've seen Abraham? Like, the guy who lived 2,000 years ago?

And then Jesus says this, verse 58, Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.

What a statement. Before Abraham was born, I am. This is probably the greatest thing that Jesus ever claimed while he walked the earth.

death. At least it's up in the top three, perhaps. And there's so much in these words. First, let's notice the way that this statement works.

[17 : 54] He says, before Abraham was born, I am. Jesus is claiming to have existed before the day of Abraham's birth, 2,000 years earlier.

father. That in itself is astounding. And this is why John began his gospel in the way he did. We're going to start this story at the beginning of Jesus' story, thought John.

not his birth, no, the beginning. In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God.

All things were created through him, and then later on the word became flesh and lived among us. John was listening that day.

Jesus is no mere man. Abraham was a mere man. The prophets were mere men, but Jesus is in fact greater than all of them, because he existed with God long before any of them were even born.

[19 : 02] This is at least one thing that Jesus is saying. But this is in all. If this was all Jesus meant, he could have simply said, before Abraham was born, I was.

But he doesn't say I was. He says, I am. This is undoubtedly a claim of Jesus to be God, to be the Lord, to be Yahweh.

This is the name that God the Creator gives to himself, ascribes for himself. Perhaps you remember that story back in Exodus chapter 3 verse 13 and 14.

Moses is at the burning bush, this bush that's burning and yet not being consumed. And God is speaking out of this bush and having a conversation with Moses about going to deliver the people from Egypt.

And Moses says to God, suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, the God of your fathers has sent me to you. And they ask me, what's his name?

[20 : 07] Then what shall I tell them? God said to Moses, Moses, I am who I am. This is what you're to say to the Israelites.

I am has sent me to you. Now there's so much in there. I mean, we could have a whole sermon on that alone. What does that mean? It's almost as if God is saying there is no one name that captures all of who I am.

I am who I am in all my glory. But this is what he, the name that he takes for himself and tells Moses to take to the people in Egypt.

Tell them that I am has sent me to you. The one who is. This name seems to refer to how God exists.

He is self-existent. He is the one who always was, is, and always will be. And here, amazingly, Jesus takes that name upon his own lips.

[21 : 16] He says, before Abraham was born, I am. And the Jewish people there that day understood what Jesus was saying.

They took it as blasphemy. And we know this because of how they responded. In verse 59, that this, they picked up stones to stone him. And Jesus not only claimed to exist before Abraham was born, he claimed to be God.

He claimed to be not just any God or another God, but he claimed to be the one true God, the Lord, Yahweh, the great I am.

And this is why John starts his gospel the way he does. It's kind of a strange starting at first, but it's starting to make sense. In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God.

The one who was God became flesh and dwelt among us. God himself took on human flesh and came to live among us.

[22 : 32] the great I am walked the earth. Jesus does indeed make some astonishing claims and offers and promises, and we've seen lots of these in John, like resurrection from the dead for those who believe, and eternal life for those who keep his word, and forgiveness of sins.

And the Jews were right that day in thinking that for him to deliver on these things, he's got to be greater than Abraham, and greater than the prophets. Is he?

In Jesus' own words, I am. this is quite the claim. But this claim has not come without evidence.

All of these people have heard of it, many of them have seen it. Jesus does the very things that only the great I am can do. He calms storms with his words.

He heals even the worst of debilitating sicknesses and diseases. He provides bread for multitudes out in the middle of nowhere.

[23 : 55] And somehow he knows the very thoughts of people's hearts as they're thinking them. Like father, like son. The signs are everywhere that this is no ordinary man.

This isn't even just a specially chosen man like Abraham was. This man Jesus is God himself in human flesh. He is the great I am who has come down from heaven to live among us and amazingly to give his life for us and to save us.

I hope you see that here and I hope you believe that and I hope that in your heart you are rejoicing just like Abraham was even as you think about how this is true.

But this moment in the story of Jesus really is bittersweet. It's the moment in which he wonderfully declares who he is. But it's also the moment in which the people listening try to commit one of the greatest evils that they could possibly do.

They try to kill him. John tells us that they picked up stones to stone him but Jesus hid himself and slipped away from the temple grounds.

[25 : 16] We don't know how exactly but one way or another he got away and they weren't actually able to carry out the deed. But it's bittersweet. I mean think about this.

Jesus reveals that he is the great I am and in that same moment they tried to kill him. What about you?

Do you believe that Jesus is the great I am? God who has come down into our world and taken on human flesh and lived among us?

Do you believe that he's greater than Abraham? Greater than all the prophets? Do you believe that he can deliver on all that he's promised to do for those who believe in him?

God can forgive sins. God can raise people back to life after they die. God can give eternal life, sustain life forever.

[26 : 18] And he himself has come down to offer all of this in his words to whoever believes. or in this passage, if you keep my word, to those who keep his word.

Do you believe in Jesus? Are you keeping his word? Lord, let's pray. Lord Jesus, we thank you for coming down.

We can't even imagine what it was like to be there that day and to face what you faced, the hatred, the anger. But we thank you that you came down and that you went through that and even more, all the way to the cross.

For us, so that we could be saved. Thank you that you give us eternal life and that we will never die. Those of us who believe in you and keep your word, that's amazing.

And for all of us here this morning, Lord, we pray and ask that you would help us not to take your word lightly, but to believe from our hearts, from the depths of our hearts, everything you said, and to hold on to it, to keep it all the way to the end when you return.

[27 : 39] we long for that day. In your name, amen. Amen. Amen.