

The one who dispels darkness

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[0 : 0 0] Now, being special is very important for each of us to have a meaningful life. And so we would like to have something special about us, in what we do, who we are, or being special in a church, special church, special school, special work, or being special in a country.

What is Australia? How is it different to other countries? And that gives us meaning in life. And today, as we come to this part of the Bible, the Israelites, they had about 2,000 years of history by the time when Jesus came, and they were unique, and they were special, because they are the only nation in the world that was called by God, and started by God.

And so they prided themselves for the fact that they had God's word, God's law, and also they had Abraham as their forefather.

It did not mean that their life was trouble-free. During the time of Jesus, they were under Roman occupation. Also, in each of their lives, they were struggling as well.

So just like us, they were wrestling with living a life that was not quite the way it was supposed to be. So life was marred by pain, regrets, and sin.

[1 : 3 7] However, at least they were special, because they had God's law and Abraham as their forefather. And so that's what they were holding on to for the meaning of their life. So when Jesus came among them and spoke to them, Jesus seemed to have thrown a spanner into their works.

Suddenly, their traditional beliefs were challenged by these men from Galilee. Jesus was telling them that Abraham was special because of Jesus himself.

And so the Jews would also only be special because of Jesus. And the Jews could not accept that. And how would they respond to Jesus' claims?

If their traditional beliefs are not true, then how did they know what was true? So when our long-held beliefs are challenged by someone, how would we respond to that person?

And how would we decide what is true? 17th century philosopher René Descartes. René Descartes is a French name.

[2 : 4 8] So Descartes spelled as D-E-S-C-A-R-T-E-S. I suppose they don't pronounce the S. And so René Descartes wanted to decide what was the absolute truth he could be certain of.

So after thinking for some time, he was settled for the Latin phrase, cogito, ergo sum, I hope that pronounces that, which was subsequently translated into English as, I think, therefore I am.

And what René Descartes tried to say, was trying to say was that while he might doubt about everything else, he could not doubt about his own existence.

The fact that he was doubting, it means that he was thinking. And he need to be there or exist. He need to be existed to do the thinking.

And so he ended up with this phrase. That is the bottom line, truth. I think, therefore I am. But he didn't know why he existed.

[3 : 51] I suppose he couldn't find out by just thinking. And he didn't know how he should live. And again, he couldn't do that just by thinking.

We need to be told about that. But he was right in the sense that there are many truths we take for granted that may be wrong. Just for example, when we see the sun rising and setting, straight away we think that the sun revolves around the earth.

And when we are told about, actually it's the earth that revolves around the sun, then we could then think that if we could be wrong about this, we can be wrong about many things in life as well.

And that we thought is the truth. So like the Israelites, when we encounter Jesus in the Bible, from the Bible, we are also challenged to believe him or reject him.

So from a scripture today, from John chapter 8, verses 48 to 59, I would like us to think about at least two things when we are challenged.

[5 : 00] One is how we should not respond to challenges that we do not like. Secondly, the second one is how to think of what Jesus claimed to see if they are true.

So we start with how we should not respond to challenges that we do not like. So our common response to challenges, to our belief, is by either mocking or joking.

In chapter 8 of John, verse 22, there's a hint of joking when the Jews say, will he kill himself since he say, where I am going, you cannot come.

So they could not understand what Jesus was saying, but they just said, is he going to kill himself? There's a hint of joking there. But in verse 48, we start that today, they were mocking Jesus.

He said, are you not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon? They could not accept what Jesus said about himself and also about themselves.

[6 : 00] They therefore had to conclude that Jesus was either mad or bad or both. The Samaritans were despised by the Jews and the Gentiles because they were mixed breed from Jews and Gentiles.

And that's why the Jews used Samaritan to belittle people. But I don't think Jesus cared to be called a Samaritan. We can look at Jesus' response in verse 49.

He simply said, I do not have a demon. He didn't even want to go into the Samaritan thing. And he didn't care about being called a Samaritan. Now, if people like René Descartes heard what Jesus said, they would think over what he said and ask questions until they reach a conclusion.

But most people do not think when there is any command upsetting their identity or any challenge to their belief. They simply retaliate by attacking the messenger.

Nowadays, we do not say you are a Samaritan. We might say you are an Australian or you are a Tasmanian or something like this. We do not say you are a demon process.

[7 : 08] We might say you are a bigot or you are intolerant. So these are the terms that we use to downplay the claim of other people. So the Jews were waiting for God to make their life better.

However, when God came, they could not accept him. We all have some preconceived ideas of who God is like or what God is like. When God appears, we might find him disagreeable.

I hope we can think over our encounter with Jesus rather than dismissing the encounter with mockery. So how can we think about Jesus' claim? So in chapter 8, we can see that Jesus is appearing to the logics of his hearers all the time.

He wanted them to think about what he said and to think about their responses to his sayings. The Jews responded by saying that Jesus had a demon. Jesus said he honored God, the Father, in the way he lived.

And you can see that Jesus healed the sick, comforted the poor, taught them from the scriptures, cleansed the temple, promised people life. So could they find anything that Jesus did betray him as a demon process?

[8 : 22] if they think about it. Even when they saw Jesus performing miracles, they were giving praise to God. But now, they label Jesus as demon process.

So how should we consider the claims of Jesus? We can consider at least three aspects of it. One is the motive. Why did Jesus claim? Why did Jesus say what he said?

The offer. What did Jesus actually offer? And the identity of Jesus. Who does Jesus say himself to be? So the motive. So because we all want to be God ourselves, we dislike people who claim to be God.

The Jews thought Jesus, being a man, was claiming to be God, to promote himself. It did not occur to them that Jesus was not a man wanting to become God.

Jesus is God, who became man. So it's just like the sun and the earth. It depends on how we see the truth.

[9 : 29] So Jesus explained, I told you to come to me, to believe me, to follow me, not because I'm seeking glory to boast my ego.

I honor my father, and my father honors me. I'm completely happy in my father. I do not need your validation. However, if you do not believe me, you will not have life.

Jesus' motive to call people to believe in him was not because he wanted to be well known or popular. It was so that those who believe may have life. Was Jesus' motive godly or devilish?

Did he have a demon inside to have such a motive? When we think about it, it is quite easy to differentiate the way, the devil, and the way of God. The devil told Eve to seek her own glory.

He has been telling people to seek their own glory since the beginning. The devil does not tell people to seek him because he knows that it is unpopular to tell people to follow someone else.

[10 : 32] He also knows that so long as people follow the desire of their heart, they will become like him eventually. Why did people become offended by Jesus after they went deeper into his words?

He told them they had the nature of the devil in them. He told them not to follow their own hearts. He told them not to seek glory for themselves. Jesus told them to follow himself.

Jesus said he was the son of God, the son of man, the real man who lived for God's glory. He kept God's word. Jesus said, Jesus did not tell people to follow their hearts.

If he had said that, then we can. We might label him or say that he had a demon himself. Jesus did not tell people to follow other great persons. If he had said that, the most we could say about Jesus was that he was a good teacher.

But Jesus said, follow me so that you will never taste death. And that is the offer. Has anyone besides Jesus ever said, truly, truly, I say to you, anyone who keeps my word will never taste death?

[11 : 42] Our automatic response is to label Jesus either a lunatic or a liar. Everyone dies. People before Jesus came and people after Jesus came all die.

Even Jesus himself died. But hold on, let us think deeper. Did Jesus live and speak in any way resemble a lunatic or a liar? Even as we look at Jesus, we can make some sort of, we have some sort of idea whether Jesus was genuine in what he said.

So, was Jesus trying to take advantage of anyone's naivety? Would you even tell people that you would never die? I mean, it's so obviously a lie if you are not in a position to say that.

So, it would be crazy for anyone to actually say that. What was Jesus offering and what is the price for his offer? So, Jesus was offering eternal life, a life that enjoys fellowship with God, a life that overflows to bless others, a life that appreciates the beauty and majesty of God's works.

What price will we put on eternal life and what price could I even pay for such an offer? Jesus said, the offer is free because I have paid for it. I paid for it with my death. Jesus tasted death so that he could offer us life.

[13 : 08] Jesus did not remain dead. He was resurrected three days later and that's why we know his offer is genuine. You may ask, but did not people still die after they listened to Jesus' word?

Our bodies do decay and die because they are inherited from the older order of things. God promised us a new body like that of the resurrected body of Jesus.

So the first body is formed from dust and it will return to dust. The second body is formed by God's power and it will last forever. The old body needs to go before the new body can come.

In any case, people who believe in Jesus may die in their bodies but they would not taste death because death would be the transformation from this broken world into the eternal joy of God.

And do you know why those who are in Christ will never taste death? Because Christ is alive. Eternal life means knowing Christ. Eternal life means it is no longer I live but Christ lives in me.

[14 : 15] Eternal life means I no longer live for my glory but for a much bigger glory. And how do we know we have eternal life? What difference would that make in us?

There are many differences. I can mention just two. One is that we will start to care about others and want them to have this same life. The other is that we will start to pray differently.

When we live for ourselves, we are the subject of our concerns and prayer. God is there to help achieving our goals. Three weeks ago, a friend from Sydney requested me to pray because his wife was diagnosed with kidney cancer.

His specific request was to pray that further investigations would reveal an early stage cancer. So when we are the subject of our prayer, we will tell God how best to help us, what God should do to make life easier for us.

That's what we will ask. But how did I pray for my friend and his wife? I pray that they would be drawn closer to God in their distress, that they would come to appreciate each other more, that they would not be defeated by fear and doubt, that they would treasure the Lord's suffering more, that the peace of God will overthrow from them as they talk about their suffering with their friends or families.

[15 : 44] So a life that does not fear death, a life that seeks first God's glory, that is eternal life. Alright, we will come to the identity of Jesus.

The Jews prided themselves for being the descendants of Abraham. Abraham was that great man who was called by God to forego his old way of living and follow God's way. God promised Abraham that all the families of the earth would be blessed in him.

Abraham did not know how all the families of the earth would be blessed in him. Abraham did not even think he himself was blessed because he didn't have a child. It was after 25 years of God's call when he was 100 years old that God gave him a child.

And that is how God was showing Abraham how this is going to be done. So God gave him a child, a son, and then requested Abraham to sacrifice the son as a burnt offering.

At the last minute God stopped Abraham and provided a lamb as a burnt offering. Abraham saw that God's promise would be fulfilled through a son and that God was going to provide that son.

[16 : 55] Abraham rejoiced to know that all the families on earth would indeed be blessed in him, not personally in him, but to his descendants. He understood that a son would come from his descendants who would take away the sin of the world.

Jesus was telling the Jews that Abraham was a sign pointing to himself. Abraham was waiting for the coming of Jesus to fulfill his role as the sacrificial lamb.

In fact, Jesus implied that he met Abraham. If you go to Genesis 18.1, he says that the Lord appeared to Abraham by the ox of Manry as he sat at the door of his tents in the heat of the day.

So that's in Genesis 18.1. But the Jews ridiculed him and said, you are not yet 50 years old. Do not bluff. Jesus said to them, truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.

So as Simon and Marty pointed out, this is not a grammatic mistake. Jesus did not mean that before Abraham was, I was.

[18 : 05] Jesus used the phrase, I am, quite a number of times, especially in the book of John. For example, in John 6, verse 20, but he said to them, I am, do not be afraid.

In John 8, 24, I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am, you would die in your sins. And the Jews understood that Jesus was telling them he was not only a better man than Abraham, he was the God of Abraham.

That was why they wanted to stone him immediately for such an unheard of blasphemy. At this point, I wonder to think about why Jesus did not simply tell the Jews that he was God.

One of the strongest objections of Islam to the identity of Jesus is the fact that Jesus never said he was God. Plenty, one statement like that. And there is a challenge when the Muslims say, show me in the Bible where did Jesus say he was God.

How do you show a Muslim? So we have to think about why Jesus never used that phrase, I am God. So we, did the Jews believe in God?

[19 : 21] They thought they did. However, Jesus said they believed in the devil. Jesus said they were liars when they said they believed in God because their pride, their jealousy, their murdering attitude towards Jesus betrayed their hearts.

So if you tell a Muslim that Jesus is God, he would think that Jesus is like Allah. If you tell a Buddhist that Jesus is God, he would think that Jesus is like Buddha.

Whatever the term God means to you and I, we are most likely wrong when we apply this term to Jesus. Jesus said I am the only one who knows how to describe God.

That was what Jesus had been doing as he interacted with the Jews. He was describing who he was and who he is but not in the term of the understanding of the Jews as they taught what God was like.

So Jesus used the terms like I am the bread of life, I am the light of the world, I am the door of the ship, I am the resurrection and the life, I am the way, the truth and the life, I am the true wine and the most powerful statement is what we come to today, simply, I am.

[20 : 32] And what does I am mean? It can mean a lot of things, I am, but it gives us a sense of awe as someone much, much greater, someone who has been there throughout history, someone who is in control of everything, someone who is the prime mover who causes everything else to happen, and someone for the whole thing to happen is about him and for him, and that is what I am can convey to us.

So by the term I am, Jesus was telling the Jews to worship him, then they will be free. However, the Jews would not relinquish their self- worship, worship, they hid behind the thought that they were worshiping God when they offered sacrifices and kept the laws, but they did not love God.

It is like we hide behind the thought of being green or being socially minded, but we do not even love our neighbors. Ideology and religion appear to try to bless people, but they end up killing people.

It is like the Jews were doing as Jesus has been telling them three times before they want to stone Jesus that they wanted to kill him, and they did. It is only the seed of Abraham that all the families on earth will be blessed.

Jesus is the great I am that makes all things right. And what does this I am mean to me? As I was thinking about this sermon about four weeks ago, on one Sunday, two things happened.

[22 : 19] after the service, after I went home, I was talking to my sister in Malaysia through the phone, and she was telling me about her cleaning her apartment, and said that there's still the ceiling fan to be cleaned.

And then it straight away occurred to me, I need to ask how he's going to clean the ceiling fan, because he's 12 years older than I am. If he's going to climb up the ladder and clean it, it's so dangerous.

And then we talked about other things, and I totally forgot about asking her. And then a few hours later, I received a call and said that she had a fall from the ladder and had hemorrhage from the brain.

I felt so, why did I forget to tell her not to do it? Things like this happen in life.

But on that same Sunday in the morning, we were voting for David Bolt's appointment, and I was having the role of the members.

[23 : 32] I counted that we need to have 50 votes to pass the motion. And then we welcomed Sam Brown as a member.

that changed the whole thing. I said, oh yeah, it's not 50 now, it's 51 votes for the motion to be passed. So we counted the vote, we got 50 votes, and I totally forgot that we need to have 51.

So 50 votes, okay. So though I didn't tell David Collierwood that it's all right, but in terms of how I told him it's 50, he perceived that it is all right as well.

And so we said the motion was passed. So on the same Sunday, so two things happened that I felt so bad in terms of what's going on in there.

But reading this passage and going through it, I have to think that Jesus said, I am. So it's not about me, not about my sister, not about David, but not about anything else.

[24 : 36] In the end, he is. whether things will turn up as I expect it to be or not, in the end, it doesn't really matter so much. There's so many things in our life that do not turn up as we expect them to be, but I'm not, he is.

So like Eve's split second decision to eat the forbidden fruit, each of our lives can be changed in any moment, a moment of foolishness, a moment of carelessness, a moment of dozing off when we're driving, a moment of blocked arteries, giving us heart attack, can lead to much regrets and sorrow for myself and for someone else.

But Jesus said, before your accident was, I am. Before your mistakes were, I am. I knew all about them, trust me. It is for your brokenness that I can.

And Psalm 94, 19 said, when the cares of my hearts are many, your consolation shares my soul. And when Jesus said, I am, that is a big consolation to me.

René Descartes said that because I was thinking, therefore I existed. I want to take this conclusion further. I want to say that because I can think, therefore God exists. I do not create myself or anything else.

[26 : 01] There is a prime mover that started all things. Jesus said, I am. life does not make sense until we see that everything is from Jesus, through Jesus, and for Jesus.

Life is difficult to cope until we see that we are not the subject of our existence. Jesus is. Life is hopeless until we see that things do not happen according to our plans, but according to God's plan for Jesus.

Jesus. The Jews during Jesus' time had a glimpse of greatness, of eternity, of majesty. Most of them chose to hold on to their own familiar mundane existence.

Every Christmas, we are reminded the great I am has come and offered us eternal life. May we be willing to surrender our small I am and follow him and trust him.

Let us pray. pray. Oh, Father, we stand in the presence of the great I am.

[27 : 13] We can be fearful because we do not know you. But we thank you that through the Lord Jesus Christ who revealed you to us to see grace upon grace, to see one who is full of grace and truth.

And we thank you that we could behold your glory in Christ Jesus. and we want to live on such a premise, on such a promise, on such a hope that we have.

Thank you, Lord. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.