

Before Abraham Was, I AM

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Preacher: Ife Ojetayo

[0:00] In the meditation of all our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer! The fifth Sunday in Lent is also commonly called, as I said earlier, Passion Sunday.

And it has been observed as such according to the traditional Western Sunday lectionary of the church since the 5th century. It wasn't until the late 20th century that the observation was discarded in many corners of the church.

Well, it's called Passion Sunday because the church begins to focus on the passion, the suffering of our Lord in preparation for Holy Week.

Although we will read the account of the passion in Matthew's Gospel next week, we are meant, even now, to remember, to begin to remember in these remaining days of Lent, to focus on the Lamb of God who takes away your sin upon Himself.

But our consideration of Christ's passion is meaningless unless we believe the claims about Him. Not anybody's claims, but the claims He made about Himself.

[1:45] The claims that is attested to in the words of Holy Scripture. That He is the God-man. He is the mediator between God and man.

The only mediator between God and man. It is this claim that Christ makes about Himself, which the Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testaments attests to, that we will look at this morning in our Gospel reading.

In the 8th chapter of John's Gospel, Jesus engages with the Pharisees. And we see the continuation of the Pharisees' willful blindness.

They've refused to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah, the one upon whom all their hopes rest. They refuse to acknowledge Him as such. They deny Him.

And even worse than denying Jesus, they attributed the great works He did among them. They attributed the great works He did among them.

[2:45] The healing of the sick, the miraculous feeding of thousands, the delivering of many from the clutches of demonic possession. All these great works, which testify to Jesus' divinity, they attributed it to the devil.

They claimed God's favor, these Pharisees do, on the basis of Abraham being their father, whilst refusing to trust in God's promises as Abraham did.

And Jesus said to them, earlier in chapter 8, if you were Abraham's children, you will be doing the works Abraham did. For now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth from God.

This is not what Abraham did. Jesus is really confronting them, add on, with their hypocrisy.

Abraham's work, where is Abraham's work?

His work was the faith that lays hold on the promises of God. It was by his faith that he was counter-righteous. And Jesus says to him, you are doing the works of your father.

[4:07] For your father is not Abraham. For you are of your father, the devil. And as he hated the truth, being the father of lies, that's the devil, hated the truth, because he is the father of lies.

Jesus says to these Pharisees, you resemble your father in the same way that you hate the truth. He said to them, if you abide in my word, if you abide in my word, you will know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.

He has said that to them just earlier in the same chapter. But these Pharisees, they chose bondage to the law rather than the freedom that the gospel of Jesus Christ announces.

And so Jesus then continues with them in verse 46. Which of you convicts me? He asked them, which of you convicts me of sin?

If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? Whoever is of God, hears the word of God. The reason why you do not hear is that you are not of God.

[5:21] So these Pharisees, these Jews, they claim God as their father. They claim God as their father.

And although they do so, their rejection of Jesus shows that it is not so, that God is in fact not their father, because they rejected the preeminent messenger from God.

His own beloved son, right before them. And they've rejected him. They reject his words from God. They reject his works that attest that he is from God.

Instead, what are they doing, trying to do? They're seeking to kill him. And if their hearts were not so hardened, they might understand the weight of Jesus' condemnation in the words he says to them.

This is what Jesus means when he said, he that has ears to hear, let him hear. But these, these ones, they do not have ears to hear.

[6:29] They've shut up their ears. And the same charge is before all of us here this morning. He that has ears to hear, let him hear.

Do you have ears to hear Jesus? Do you have ears to hear Jesus? Do you see him? And do you accept him as the truth and the life?

Do you see him as the only door that opens the way of peace with God? There is no other way. Do you have ears to hear? And do you have eyes to see Jesus as is revealed in Holy Scripture?

Let me say something that may seem harsh, but they're Jesus' words, actually, not mine. So, take it up with Jesus. But I hope that these words might stir you up.

And if you're not stirred from deathly stupor, if you remain indifferent to the gracious call of God, if you remain indifferent to the gracious call of God to come to him and to trust in him, that indifference, that indifference might be an indication.

[7:43] Even if you've been in church all your life, that indifference to the call of God might be an indication that you are, in fact, on the outside looking in. But it's not too late.

But the good news is this. The good news of the gospel is this. The door to the heart of salvation is still open. It hasn't been shut yet. You may still hear the call.

You may still heed the call. The call of Jesus. And you may surrender to that call and come to him. Don't be like the Pharisees who are increasingly heartening their hearts against the Lord.

Do not be like them. Respond in faith and come to him and bend the knee and he will accept you. He will enfold you in his loving arms.

And he will receive you unto himself. That's why he came. It is for that very purpose. But look at the response of these people as Jesus talks to them, the Pharisees.

[8:55] Look at their response. Instead of being pricked unto repentance by the sword of truth coming from Jesus. They answered him. They answered him.

They said to him, Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon? Now, they're not just calling him Samaritan because they thought he's a Samaritan by ethnicity. It's meant to be a pejorative. Now, they sought to heap contempt on Jesus by calling him a Samaritan. And then they added to it what they've been saying all along that he's demon possessed.

Well, to them, Samaritan and dog are synonymous. And perhaps no greater insult could they have imagined in their minds than to call Jesus a Samaritan.

But Jesus will willingly identify with the Samaritans. He does willingly identify with the Samaritans. He will willingly identify with the Gentiles.

[9:52] He willingly identify with all people wherever they may be from. For he came not only to save the house of Israel, but he receives all who turn to him from every tongue and every tribe and every language.

Wherever they may come, he will receive them. So he doesn't mind identifying with the Samaritans. In fact, he doesn't push back when they call him a Samaritan. But he did push back when they say he's demon possessed.

He doesn't deign to defend himself against the charge of being a Samaritan. But he strongly denies being controlled by a demon. So Jesus in verse 49 answered them, I do not have a demon, but I honor my father and you dishonor me.

Yet I do not seek my own glory. There is one who seeks it and he is the judge. See, Jesus' work is to honor his father.

And he does this by not seeking his glory, but the glory that comes from God. That is why he came. To perfectly obey the law, to keep the covenant, to seek the glory of his father.

[11:08] That is what he has come to accomplish. Unlike the Pharisees, unlike you Pharisees, Jesus seems to be saying, who seek man's praise. That's all they're about. You Pharisees who parade your piety before men so they may see your good works.

And to such people, Jesus already said earlier, that they receive their reward. For God, the true judge, sees the inward hearts of man.

He rejects the prayer of the religious expert who comes into God's house and puffs himself up before God and men. He rejects the prayer of such a man.

And yet he lovingly welcomes the religious outcast who comes on bended knees, sorrowing over his sins and trusting in the saving work of Jesus Christ.

This is the judge to whom we stand before. He sees our hearts. He sees beyond all the things on the outside. And Jesus, knowing this, has entrusted himself to his Father in the face of the wicked lies and slander that has been poured out against him.

[12:23] Brothers and sisters in Christ, we must follow the example of our Lord in this. Even as we are attacked by a world that loves lies rather than the truth.

As Apostle Peter said in the second epistle, chapter 2, verse 23, he says this concerning Jesus. He said that when he was reviled, he did not revile in return.

When he suffered, he did not threaten, but he continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. Are you willing to entrust yourself to him who judges justly?

This is the area of compromise in our world now because we live now, brothers and sisters, in a world that is more and more heaping lies and slander at the followers of Jesus.

If you claim to stand upon the truth of God's word, you'll be called all sort of names by the culture out there. But what is our tendency when we're called names?

[13:30] Is it to fight back? Or should we be like our Lord Jesus and trust ourselves, body and soul, to him who judges rightly?

We also, in like manner, must strive to be like Jesus in this way. As the world throws its darts at you, you must be like Jesus and trust yourself to the Lord.

Commit to seeking in his glory, even if it's through your suffering as you suffer for righteousness' sake. And Jesus, he's still, even as he's engaging with these Pharisees, this is a heated conversation at this point.

There's no pulling of any punches. They're calling Jesus a son of the devil and Jesus, in turn, is telling the truth about who they are. So you, in fact, are the sons of the devil.

And Jesus, but even in the midst of that exchange, Jesus still wants them to hear the gospel. He wants them to turn from their wickedness and turn to him.

[14:44] Jesus still sought to give the free offer of the gospel to them, despite their stubbornness. And he said to them in verse 51, Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, you will never see death.

Well, that is the truth, brothers and sisters. To keep Jesus' word means to believe it. What does it mean to keep Jesus' word? To believe it, to stick to it, to obey it, and to live by it.

That's what Jesus means by keeping his word. And this is the way to eternal life. And the only rescue from the true death of the soul and spirit. For those who have the assurance of eternal life, and if you do, if you're in Christ, you do have that assurance.

You have the assurance of eternal life. And for you, who have the assurance of eternal life, do you notice that bodily death is merely an entrance into glory? The Jews said to him, because their hearts and their ears are so shut up to the words of life.

So they hear Jesus say that in verse 51, Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, you will never see death. And the only response to him was to say this, 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.

[16:06] Are you greater than our father Abraham who died, and the prophets who died? Who do you make yourself out to be? So the Jews. By the way, when you're reading John, the Gospel of John, when he's saying the Jews here, he's referring specifically to the Pharisees.

And so here, the Jews, for all their hard-heartedness, they do know their scripture. And so they readily understand the implication of Jesus' words in verse 51, when he says, Those who keep my

words will have eternal life.

They will never see death. They understand the implications. They know, as they hear Jesus' word, they know that he's claiming to be the mediator of a better and surer promise.

But for all their head knowledge, they cannot see past the physical realm. Their spiritual eyes were darkened. Unable to see with the eyes of faith, which only God can grant, days now say to Jesus, because they can only see with physical eyes, they say, Who do you think you are?

Claiming to be greater than the great mediator, Moses, or the Abraham, a patriarch, or the prophets. Who do you think you are?

[17 : 20] But they fail to see that before them stands the God of Abraham, and the God of the patriarchs, the God of the prophets. The one who delivered them from Egypt stands before them.

He has come before them clothed in the humility of human frailty. He's come before them to deliver them and all who will turn to him from death.

But they didn't see that. They could not see that. And he will, of course, accomplish this great deliverance by offering his own life, his own body as a ransom for the many who turn to him by faith. Yet they could not see that. And as he goes through this path, as Jesus goes through this path of humiliation, even to the death of the cross, not seeking his own glory, but seeking as a true covenant keeper that the Father may be glorified in him, the Father having been glorified in the Son by the Son's perfect obedience and atoning death, now will and as exalted the Son to be Lord and King and Sovereign over the world.

Jesus knows this. We know this. And Jesus answered them in verse 54. If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing.

[18 : 50] It is my Father who glorifies me of whom you say he is our God, but you have not known him. You may say he is your God, but you do not know him.

I know him, Jesus says to them. 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. Your Father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day.

He saw it and was glad. Now, they are already angry but Jesus kept pushing their button. So what Jesus just said to them now is probably sending them over the edge where he has already acknowledged put himself at the level of Abraham and Moses and the prophets but now he puts himself above them.

Your Father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad. Well, Jesus' path to glory is the same path to glory that we also must follow.

Do you know that? We must walk this same path that he walked which is the path of humility. humility. We are glorified in Christ as we trust in him and we seek to follow him.

[20 : 12] His path is unique and uniquely the path of perfect obedience. In that regard, when our path isn't like his, his path was the path of perfect obedience by which he then became our righteousness and at the same time he became the spotless lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

But as we follow that same path of humiliation and we seek to obey God, we know this brothers and sisters, we will not be perfect and we cannot be perfect but the sacrifice that takes away our sins has already been secured.

Even as you walk that path, you don't have to worry, you don't have to walk it in trepidation to say, oh if I fall off, if I stumble, that is it for me. Well he's walked the path, he's done it perfectly and he's paved the way, just follow, you will stumble but he's secured your salvation.

He's paid that one sacrifice, it's one oblation of himself, one suffered which is a full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.

so you may now follow with confidence. Your obedience is one of gratitude for the great work he's accomplished and when you fall, notice that is when not if, when you fall into sin all you need to do, all you need to do is turn to the one who by his perfect obedience has secured eternal life to you.

[21 : 51] Turn to him, rest in him confess your sins, receive his words of affirmation and forgiveness, receive, hear the comfortable words that beckons you to come and continue following.

It is this great work of salvation that Abraham rejoiced in. Abraham rejoiced in this work upon seeing and was glad. This is what Jesus means when he says your father Abraham rejoiced that he will see my day.

He saw it and was glad. Jesus here identifies himself as the fulfillment of all of God's promises to Abraham. He declared himself, Jesus does, he declared himself to be the Messiah of God and

therefore to be greater than Abraham and to be greater than Moses and to be greater than the prophets.

And it is this truthful declaration, this truthful declaration of himself that most angered the Pharisees. So did you say to him, you are not yet 50 years old and have you seen Abraham?

Well again, they are looking with eyes, physical eyes. They find it ridiculous that a man just above 30 years of age would assert supremacy over the patriarch Abraham who lived about 2,000 years before their time.

[23 : 13] But Jesus, not seeking to shy away from the truth, said to them, in verse 58, truly, truly I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.

I am. That phrase was no accident or grammatical error on Jesus' part. If Jesus just wanted to declare that he existed before Abraham, he would have just said before Abraham, I was.

But that's not Jesus' intent here. He's not just trying to say I existed before Abraham. He wants him to see who he is. Instead, he uses the phrase identified in all of Holy Scripture with God.

The phrase I am, ego, me, in the Greek. And by this, Jesus is saying to them, I am the ancient of days. I am the pre-existing word before creation.

I was the one who was with God in the beginning, who was himself God. That's who I am. I am, Yahweh, stands before you, but you do not have eyes to see it, or ears to hear him.

[24 : 31] And why is this claim of Christ's divinity the subject of our focus as we start to focus on the Passion Week of our Lord? It is because it is the focal point on which our faith in Jesus must be fixed.

This is why this is crucial. The world sees Jesus as a good teacher. The world sees Jesus as a great healer, a guru, an exemplary model to follow.

The world sees Jesus as all of those things. But the word denies his true identity as God, and as the Son of God. But if that is all the world sees, just a great teacher, a great healer, and guru, an exemplary model, if that is all the world sees, then his death is useless, and cannot accomplish your salvation.

You must believe the Bible's testimony concerning Jesus, which the church has confessed from the beginning, that this Jesus is God incarnate, God, Emmanuel, come to dwell with us, and that he in fact has come, and he came to lay down his life for the very purpose for which he came, that he might ransom you by his blood shed at Calvary, so you and me might be saved.

So will you this morning call on this merciful God who created you and came to redeem you, and if you have not yet trusted in him, will you call on him this morning?

[26 : 12] Will you continue, if you have trusted in him, will you continue to trust in his finished work for you? Only the Jesus who is truly man and truly God can save you from the clutches of sin and death.

you must believe him as such. But the Pharisees don't. And this is their response. They picked up stones to throw at him.

The Jews understood the implications of Jesus' words when he says I am. And they were scandalized by Jesus' true words concerning himself. They knew he was putting himself on equal footing with God and they considered it blasphemy.

So they picked up stones to stone him to death. They will not of course succeed at this point on this occasion. But they will eventually arrest him after he himself lays his life down at the fulfillment of time.

And in those early mornings of Good Friday when they brought him before trumped up courts to try him it's this same charge that they lay before him on which they trumped up charge on which they crucify him.

[27 : 33] They said that he claimed to be God and they accused him of such. But here's the truth. He is God. This very confession that we make that you must make is the same reason why the world out there still picks up stones to stone Jesus.

It is the same reason why the world will deny Jesus and will deny you because you follow Jesus. But you must not shirk back.

You must not draw back from that confession that Jesus is God incarnate. And as you do not shirk back as you confess it it might mean that you also will suffer for that same confession.

But you are only following in the footsteps of your Lord. And on the other side of that humiliation and suffering lies glory unimaginable. Brothers and sisters let us focus our minds fix our hearts on the

passion of our Lord.

He has walked the path we must follow it. He has perfectly become to us the perfect Lamb of God and He has taken your sins away.

[28:57] Fix your eyes on the cross of Christ. Look to His salvation. Rest in His finished work and follow with confidence and obedience.

Follow. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. He time.

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