

Passion Sunday

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[0 : 01] May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be always acceptable in thy sight. O Lord, our Rock and Redeemer, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Please be seated. In the past few weeks, we have talked about the identity of Jesus of Nazareth. We learned from his encounter with those questioning his exorcism that Jesus has the power and authority of God because he has control over the evil powers of this earth, Satan and his demons. We learned last week that Jesus is the one who feeds the whole world and that he is the true bread from heaven, the one who is to provide true life to us all. Our Gospel text this week will add one more thing to the identity of Jesus, that he is the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, and of all the Israelites.

Think back to a time very early in the history of Israel. God had built a great nation of people from the descendants of Abraham, and now they all resided in Egypt.

The king of Egypt was not the king that knew Abraham, so he placed all of Israel under slavery, under subjugation to serve the needs of Pharaoh. Under this distress, the Israelites called out to God, and he heard them and remembered the covenant that he had made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

[1 : 26] God then came to a man named Moses in a very tangible way, in a bush that was on fire, yet was not consumed by that fire. God told Moses in the fire of the bush that he had come to rescue his people from their affliction.

Moses asked God what he shall tell the Israelites when they ask him, what is this God's name? And he said, Tell them I am who I am has sent you.

I am the existing one, the God who made covenant with your fathers, has sent you and will redeem you. This is my name forever.

It is from this point of view that we can understand what Jesus is saying to the Jews. After telling them all that they are liars, that they cannot hear him because they are not of God, and that they do not follow after Abraham, he tells them that Abraham was the one who rejoiced to see his day, and he was glad when he saw it.

We can anticipate the response. Well, what does Jesus mean? How can Abraham rejoice to see the day of Jesus? Jesus is at least younger than 50, and Abraham lived a long time before Jesus did.

[2 : 36] When we read the story, we know this is exactly what they say. You are not yet 50 years old, and have you seen Abraham? Jesus responds with the most enraging words that they could hear.

Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am. With this response, they take up stones to stone him, but he hid himself and left.

So what exactly is he saying here then? What does he mean that Abraham rejoiced to see his day? Furthermore, what does he mean in the great I am statement that he was before Moses was?

The answers to both of these questions help us answer the question of Jesus' identity. It was early Jewish tradition that held that Abraham was able to get a glimpse of how God's plan for the world would take place through the Messiah.

Abraham would have actually been able to see what was going to happen. Therefore, when Jesus says that Abraham was glad and rejoiced to see his day, he was making an even stronger statement that he was the Messiah to bring salvation to the world.

[3 : 46] Jesus is the great Savior of Israel and of the rest of mankind. Secondly, when Jesus says the words before Abraham was, I am, he was referring back to the very name of God that was

revealed to Moses at the burning bush.

I am who I am has sent you. Before Abraham was, I am. Jesus was making the claim that he was the one that existed from all eternity with the Father.

These are the two identity claims that Jesus is making here. He is the great Messiah that was to come and he is God in the flesh.

Now we can understand why the Jews wanted to stone him. Jesus was telling them that he is their God and that they must follow after him if they want to have life.

However, the Jews take pride in their nation and as their status as descendants of Abraham. They reject the message of Jesus, saying that he is a Samaritan and that he has a devil. They have developed systems that have added to the law that was given on Mount Sinai.

[4 : 57] Before this portion of our gospel reading, St. John records the Pharisees talking amongst each other and saying that the crowd who is amazed and believes the words of Jesus does not actually know the law.

Yet, it was Abraham who was chosen to be the founder of God's people and he was not chosen on any prior basis of worth. Abraham did not establish the law, yet he trusted in the Lord and he was considered righteous by God.

It was God in his eternal wisdom who chose Abraham to be the father of not just one nation, but many nations. The Jews said that they had one father and that father was God.

Yet, this father has sent his son to be the bearer of his truth. If the Jews do not believe the son of who they say is their father, then their true father is the devil because they speak lies from the very mouth of Satan.

They can take pride in their fleshly sonship to Abraham, their circumcision, their adherence to whatever man-made laws the Pharisees instituted, but this does not show them to be sons of the father.

[6 : 07] It is their acceptance of God's son, Jesus, that will lead them towards true life. And in that way, they will never see death. So what does it matter that Jesus is the one who existed before time with the father?

What does it matter for us? We are past this point. We aren't like the Jews who claimed to be the sons of Abraham, but are really children of the devil. We've moved beyond that.

Friends, we must be wary. We must be wary lest we end up in the same situation that the Jews were in. Just as the Jews began to take pride in their fleshly status as sons of Abraham and placing worth on things that ultimately didn't matter to Christ, we must be careful to never do the same.

Well, how can we do that? Well, we must remember that we are all sons of Abraham, Jacob, and Isaac. And this is what St. Paul tells us in his epistle to the Galatians.

We are all spiritual sons of Abraham who should not be using any other measures to assess people's worth in our eyes. That's why the Jews didn't follow after Jesus.

[7 : 18] And the same could happen to us if we don't remember that we are just as prone to this sin as they were. Finally, let us remember that our Savior is not a God who is distant, one who is far off.

He is not someone who can fail us. He is not the president, a military general, or even our most favorite spiritual guides or leaders. Our God is found in the man who is Jesus.

I am before Abraham was. Our God is personal. He loves us, and he shed his very blood for us. He did not leave us as spiritual orphans without food or drink, for he has left us a church to feed us his very body and blood at the altar.

Let us reject the God of this world who is far off and has no cares for us, but rather turn to the true God who is personal, close, and feeds us with true spiritual food and true spiritual drink.

Come, friends, let us feast on the great I am. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.