

## **The Gospel of John (58); Jesus and His Jewish Adversaries**

### **Introduction:**

Let us turn in God's Holy Word to John 8.

It is our intention today to complete our study of this eighth chapter of John's Gospel, which contains the fifth of seven discourses of Jesus recorded by John the Apostle. We have read of the tension between Jesus and His Jewish opposers that has increased in intensity as the events of this chapter have unfolded. Last week we read of the Lord Jesus openly and forthrightly charging these men with their wickedness for failing and refusing to hear Him and to believe what He had taught the people. He declared to them that their inability to understand His Words was due to the fact that they were not of God. Jesus declared that God was His Father, but that the devil was their father. Today we continue to consider this hostile exchange between Jesus and these unbelieving Jewish men. It culminates in the clearest assertion by Jesus that He is eternal God, who has become incarnate--God coming into this world as a man.

It is important that we understand the entire context, so we will begin reading once again with John 8:30, but we will continue to read through the end of the chapter.

<sup>30</sup>As He spoke these words, many believed in Him.

<sup>31</sup>Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. <sup>32</sup>And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

<sup>33</sup>They answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can You say, 'You will be made free'?"

<sup>34</sup>Jesus answered them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. <sup>35</sup>And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. <sup>36</sup>Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.

<sup>37</sup>"I know that you are Abraham's descendants, but you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you. <sup>38</sup>I speak what I have seen with My Father, and you do what you have seen with your father."

<sup>39</sup>They answered and said to Him, "Abraham is our father."

Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham. <sup>40</sup>But now you seek to kill Me, a Man who has told you the truth which I heard from God. Abraham did not do this. <sup>41</sup>You do the deeds of your father."

Then they said to Him, "We were not born of fornication; we have one Father—God."

<sup>42</sup>Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me. <sup>43</sup>Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word. <sup>44</sup>You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it. <sup>45</sup>But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me. <sup>46</sup>Which of you convicts Me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me? <sup>47</sup>He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God."

It is at this point we left off last time. We now continue to read what then transpired:

<sup>48</sup>Then the Jews answered and said to Him, "Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?"

<sup>49</sup>Jesus answered, “I do not have a demon; but I honor My Father, and you dishonor Me. <sup>50</sup>And I do not seek My own glory; there is One who seeks and judges. <sup>51</sup>Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death.”

<sup>52</sup>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.’ <sup>53</sup>Are You greater than our father Abraham, who is dead? And the prophets are dead. Who do You make Yourself out to be?”

<sup>54</sup>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. <sup>55</sup>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. <sup>56</sup>Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.”

<sup>57</sup>Then the Jews said to Him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?”

<sup>58</sup>Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.”

<sup>59</sup>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.

There will be little new that we may glean from this passage than what we have already read and considered in earlier portions of this Gospel. But what we do read and consider here may improve our understanding and enhance our appreciation of the truths that all of us Christians believe and affirm. We could consider this passage in a number of ways, but we will do so by reflecting on the relationships of Jesus with the others identified in our passage. Jesus is set forth before us in His relationship with Abraham, with these unbelieving Jews who rejected Him, with His Father, and with His (“true”) disciples—you and I—who believe and follow Him as our Lord and Savior.

## I. Jesus and Abraham

One of the main characters in this passage is Abraham. In these verses his name is mentioned eleven times. He was held in the highest esteem by the Jewish people. He was their progenitor. He was the one through whom God had made His initial covenant with His (collective) people. Abraham knew God, talked with God, and was a friend of God. To be in family relationship with Abraham was viewed as being in relationship with the God of Abraham. These Jews who were so vehemently opposed to Jesus had great confidence in their standing with God, because they were the physical descendants of Abraham. They said to Jesus in verse 33, “We are Abraham’s descendants”, and in verse 39 they said, “Abraham is our father.” To these Jews, there was no one greater than Abraham. They challenged the Lord Jesus, assuming no man could be greater than Abraham. In verse 53 they asked, “Are You greater than our father Abraham, who is dead?”

Jesus acknowledged that these Jews were the physical offspring of Abraham. He said to them in verse 37, “I know that you are Abraham’s descendants.” But in reality it was Jesus who was in relationship with Abraham. Jesus declared of Abraham: “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad” (8:56). Jesus declared that Abraham knew of Him, that he “saw My day”, and rejoiced in that “vision” of Christ and His work. Now some have said that Jesus was describing the present state of Abraham in paradise, who was observing and rejoicing as he saw the life and ministry of Jesus played out. But the use of past tense verbs indicates that Jesus was speaking of Abraham during his earthly sojourn, some 2,000 years before this incident of John 6. In some way Abraham had “seen”, or foreseen, the earthly life and ministry of Jesus, the promised Savior, the “My day” of Jesus’ earthly ministry as the promised Messiah.

And so, our Lord was saying that Abraham had seen Him in His incarnation—“His day.” How was this possible? How was this done? It can be said that Abraham “saw” the incarnate life of Jesus in *the promise* that God had repeatedly given to him. It was Abraham’s highest interest and greatest delight. As one once wrote of Abraham’s desire and delight in seeing Jesus’ day:

This excited his interest, and became the subject of his ardent study. He meditated on it with delight, raised himself, as it were, on tiptoe to look over the shoulders of ages to catch a glimpse of it; stretched forward with eagerness and joy to behold it; made use of every light, and earnestly prayed for more.<sup>1</sup>

But were their more specific ways that Abraham “saw” the day of Jesus’ incarnation? **Matthew Henry** answered the question this way:

God told him of a land that He would give his posterity, and of the wealth and honour He designed them (Gen. 15:14); but he never *leaped* thus to see that day, as he did to see the day of the Son of man. He could not look with so much indifferency upon the promised *seed* as he did upon the promised land; *in that* he was, but *to the other* he could not be, contentedly a stranger. Note, those who rightly know any thing of Christ cannot but be earnestly desirous to know more of Him. Those who discern the dawning of the light of the Sun of righteousness cannot but wish to see His rising. The mystery of redemption is that which *angels desire to look into*, much more should we, who are more immediately concerned in it. Abraham desired to see Christ’s day, though it was at a great distance; but this degenerate seed of his (the Jews) discerned not His day, nor bade it welcome when it came. The appearing of Christ, which gracious souls love and long for, carnal hearts dread and loathe.

*Secondly*, the satisfaction he had in what he did see of it: *He saw it, and was glad*. Observe here, how God gratified the pious desire of Abraham; he longed to see Christ’s day, and he *saw it*. Though he saw it not so plainly, and fully, and distinctly as we now see it under the gospel, yet he saw something of it, more *afterwards* than he did at first...

But how did Abraham see Christ’s day? (*a.*) Some understand it of the sight he had of it in the other world. The separate soul of Abraham, when the veil of flesh was rent, saw the mysteries of the kingdom of God in heaven... But, (*b.*) it is more commonly understood of some sight he had of *Christ’s day* in this world. They that *received not the promises, yet saw them afar off* (Heb. 11:13)... Christ knew what Abraham saw better than Moses did. But there are divers things recorded in which Abraham saw more of that which he longed to see than he did when the promise was first made to him. He saw in Melchizedek one *made like unto the Son of God*, and a priest for ever; he saw an appearance of Jehovah, attended with two angels, in the plains of Mamre. In the prevalency of his intercession for Sodom he saw a specimen of Christ’s intercession; in the casting out of Ishmael, and the establishment of the covenant with Isaac, he saw a figure of the gospel day, which is Christ’s day; for these things were an allegory. In offering Isaac, and the ram instead of Isaac, he saw a double type of the great sacrifice; and his calling the place *Jehovah-jireh—It shall be seen*, intimates that he saw something more in it than others did, which time would produce; and in making his servant *put his hand under his thigh*, when he swore, he had a regard to the Messiah.<sup>2</sup>

Abraham was a man who lived 2,000 years before the arrival of Jesus of Nazareth to secure the salvation of His people. Abraham had seen this day through faith, and rejoiced in its prospect.

## II. Jesus and these unbelieving Jews

It would seem that the conflict between Jesus and “the Jews” could not become more intense than what we have played out before us in this passage of John 8. There is simply no common ground between them. Jesus made it quite clear that these leaders of the Jewish people were strangers to the truth of God. Although they claimed to be the closest associates of God, who represented Him and His will before the world, Jesus set them apart from God as ignorant, errant, and estranged from God. Because they did not

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<sup>1</sup> B. Thomas, **The Pulpit Commentary**, vol. 17, The Gospel of John, edited by H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell (William B. Eerdmans, 1950), p. 397.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew Henry, **Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible**, vol. 4 (Fleming H. Revell Company, n. d., originally 1721), p. 1006f.

know and believe on Jesus for who He is in truth, they could not possibly know and believe in the true God, who was the Father of Jesus.

Jesus told them that they were actually slaves of sin, who were in need of being set free, a freedom that only He could bring them (vs. 34-36). And although the Jews were the physical children of Abraham, it brought no spiritual benefit to them. This was evident because they sought to kill Jesus and they refused to see any value or legitimacy in the words that He spoke to them (vs. 37-38). Although they claimed that God was their Father, Jesus told them that their claim was a false one (vs. 41). If God were their Father, they would love Him for He had proceeded and come forth from God. He was sent by God to give them His word (v. 42). But they could not understand Him or His words, for the devil was their father, who has no truth in him. Nor did they or could they understand Jesus because they were as their father the devil in their attitude, character, and their desire to kill Him (v. 44).

Our Lord's denunciation and repudiation of these Jewish leaders only incensed them further toward Him. They challenged Jesus and His claims as unreasonable and nonsensical. After our Lord had told them that they would not hear Him because they were not of God (v.47), their reaction was one of accusation and derision. We read in **verse 48**, "*Then the Jews answered and said to Him, 'Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?'*" The Jews regarded the Samaritans as the enemies of God and of God's people. Although they knew He was a Galilean, they accused Him of being (as) a Samaritan. This is coupled with their accusation that He was demon possessed. "You are a Samaritan and a have a demon." It was an insult and total dismissal of Jesus and His word. It was their desire and effort to discredit Jesus.

The Samaritans were ones who commonly claimed and taught that the Jews were not the true people of God. They taught that they were the true people of God. Here Jesus is somewhat like the Samaritans in that He also declared that these leading Jews were not among the people of God, that they did not know God. It is no wonder that they called Him a Samaritan.

The Jews believed what Jesus was asserting and teaching was satanic, that it was demon inspired and generated. Actually this charge against Jesus was a fairly common. When Jesus had accused before the people that the Jewish leaders were plotting to kill Him, we read, "The people answered and said, 'You have a demon. Who is seeking to kill You?'" (John 7:20). Later in John 10 in reaction to the content of His teaching we read, "Therefore there was a division again among the Jews because of these sayings. And many of them said, 'He has a demon and is mad. Why do you listen to Him?'" (John 10:20).

We also read in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) of similar occasions. In Matthew 12 we read:

Then one was brought to Him who was demon-possessed, blind and mute; and He healed him, so that the blind and mute man both spoke and saw. And all the multitudes were amazed and said, "Could this be the Son of David?"

Now when the Pharisees heard it they said, "This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons." (Matt. 12:22-24)

And later in our passage we read that they were confirmed in their assessment: "Then the Jews said to Him, 'Now we know that You have a demon!'" (John 8:52).

That the Jewish leaders accused Jesus both of being a Samaritan and demon possessed, was their way of accusing Him of being a heretic. What is a heretic? It is a person who believes a doctrine that is so far in error from biblical doctrine that it renders him or her outside of biblical salvation. A heretic is one who fails to believe an essential truth of the faith. They accused Jesus of being outside of any possible salvation for Himself. This, then, is but another example of Johannean irony. They claimed that it was impossible for Him to obtain salvation, when in fact He is the very author and source of salvation.

We read of our Lord's reaction to their charge in **verse 49**, "*Jesus answered, 'I do not have a demon; but I honor My Father, and you dishonor Me.'*" It would seem that our Lord calmly answered their charge. "Let us note our Lord's calmness and equanimity under insult."<sup>3</sup> The Lord denied forthrightly that He was

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<sup>3</sup> J. C. Ryle, **Expository Thoughts on John**, vol. 2 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, orig. 1869), p. 141.

possessed, motivated, or inspired by a demon to do what He did and teach what He taught. Here are the comments of **Donald Carson** on this verse:

But Jesus denies He is demon-possessed. His claims and behaviors are not the fruit of arrogance, dementia, Samaritanism or the occult, but simply of obedience to the Father (cf. 3:34; 5:19ff; 8:38; 17:8, 14). By saying and doing always and only what the Father gives Him to say and do, He honors the Father. By refusing to respond positively to those same words and deeds, His hearers dishonour Him, and therefore the One who sent Him.<sup>4</sup>

It is interesting that the Lord did not bother to answer their charge that He was one of those “despicable Samaritans.” He did, however, reject their accusation that He was demon possessed. Why did He not answer their accusation identifying Him as a Samaritan? It does not say, but that has not prevented proposals by commentators as to His reason. Perhaps He did not do so, for He did not believe to be a “Samaritan” was that bad of a charge, after all, Jesus had been received and believed upon by many Samaritans (Cf. John 4:39-42).

**Matthew Henry** (1662-1714) wrote of Jesus not answering the charge that He was a Samaritan:

He takes no notice of their calling Him a Samaritan, because it was a calumny that disproved itself, it was a personal reflection, and not worth taking notice of: but saying He had a devil reflected on His commission, and therefore He answered that. St. Augustine gives this gloss upon His not saying any thing to their calling him a Samaritan—that He was indeed that good Samaritan spoken of in the parable.<sup>5</sup>

Our Lord’s denial that He was demon possessed was based on the fact that His desires and efforts were completely opposite to that which a demon would desire. Jesus said, “I do not have a demon; but I honor My Father.” It is ludicrous to make the accusation that He was motivated and empowered by a demon. Satan and the demons are opposed to bringing glory to God, but glorifying His Father was the very beat of His heart, the longing of His soul.

But Jesus added this dig: “I do not have a demon; but I honor My Father, *and you dishonor Me.*” If anyone was playing the demoniac here, it was they, not He. Jesus was saying, “I am honoring, *you* are dishonoring.” “The implication is not, ‘I have no demon,’ meaning, ‘but *you* have.’”<sup>6</sup>

Jesus was implying by His response to these Jewish leaders that the only way to truly honor God was to honor Him, for as He stated, He Himself was God, even the Son of God.

As the representative of the Father, dishonoring Jesus is equivalent to dishonoring God. Jesus makes this clear, as recorded earlier in the Gospel (5:23). In essence, their claim against Jesus is self-refuting. The moment they raised their accusatory finger toward Jesus, they accused the very God they wrongly thought they were serving and defending.<sup>7</sup>

But after Jesus accused these men of not honoring Him, Jesus made it immediately clear that His own glory was not His concern. We read in **verse 50**, “*And I do not seek My own glory; there is One who seeks and judges.*” Our Lord had no interest, concern, or desire to be honored by these men. He sought not the praise of men, as long as He could enjoy His Father’s approval and praise of Him as having been a faithful Son.

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<sup>4</sup> Donald Carson, **The Gospel According to John** (William B. Eerdmans. 1991), p. 355.

<sup>5</sup> Matthew Henry, **Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible**, vol. 4 (Fleming H. Revell Company, n. d., originally 1721), p. 1006f.

<sup>6</sup> R. C. H. Lenski, **The Interpretation of St. John’s Gospel** (Augsburg Publishing, 1942), p. 658.

<sup>7</sup> Edward W. Klink, III, **John**. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan, 2016), p. 422.

It is His Father's glory that Jesus seeks to promote by obediently delivering His message; He is not concerned for His own reputation. He can trust His Father to care of that and in fact He, above all others, receives 'the glory that comes from the only God' (John 5:44). He need not be disturbed by the adverse judgment of those who cannot judge righteously because they judge 'according to outward appearance' (John 7:24); so long as He enjoys His Father's approval, He is well and content.<sup>8</sup>

If we live faithfully before others making known the Word of Christ, we can expect similar reactions and unjust accusations to that which was heaped upon our Lord. Do not be unduly concerned about what others think of you, if you are truly seeking the glory of God. The Lord Jesus told His disciples that this was their lot in this fallen world.

It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household? <sup>26</sup>So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. (Matt. 10:25)

Our Lord was confident of His future vindication from these spurious accusations. Again, we read in **verse 50** in which Jesus said, "And I do not seek My own glory; *there is One who seeks and judges.*" If you have been wronged by others, when you have actually sought to do good, your good God will vindicate you in His own way and at His own time. He may do so in this life, or He may do so in the Day of Judgment. But we may be settled that no unjust charge leveled against us will go uncorrected by our Lord who stands with and for His people. Although our Lord was not concerned about His own glory, for He knew that His Father would vindicate Him, He is concerned for your glory, if you belong to Him. He told the Christians in the church at Philadelphia:

Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you. (Rev. 3:9)

We read of our Lord's words that He then expressed. We read **verse 51**, "*Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death.*" We will say more of this later, only to say now that the Lord was speaking past His disparagers and would-be slayers, in order to reach perhaps one or more in the crowd that might hear and believe. But these words only further solidified the thinking of the Jewish leaders opposing Him. We read in **verses 52** and **53**,

<sup>52</sup>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.' <sup>53</sup>Are You greater than our father Abraham, who is dead? And the prophets are dead. Who do You make Yourself out to be?"

**John Calvin** (1509-1564) wrote on these detractors: "The reprobate persist in their stupidity, and are not moved by promises any more than by threatenings; so that they can neither be led nor drawn to Christ."

It would probably be a mistake to give emphasis between what our Lord declared, that His disciples would not "see" death (v. 51) and what the Jews said respecting them, that they would not "taste" death. It means the same. The Jews were mockingly reacting to Jesus' words.

The Jews gave an argument that they thought completely discredited Jesus.

"The best of the men of God of history, Abraham and the prophets, are dead, but you say that if anyone keeps Your word will never die? Are you, therefore, claiming to be greater than they were that You would make such a claim or promise?" Who do You think You are? Who do You make Yourself out to be?"

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<sup>8</sup> F. F. Bruce, **The Gospel of John** (William B. Eerdmans, 1983), p. 203.

These men were beyond disgusted listening to this man's spurious claims and statements. **F. F. Bruce** (1910-1990) described the setting:

Jesus' opponents in the debate continue to display what the readers are intended to recognize as crass literal-mindedness. While the readers know that the death of the body (a matter of small importance in Johanine thinking) is not what is meant, the opponents suppose that it is. Abraham heard the word of God and obeyed it; yet Abraham died. The word of God came to the prophets of Israel, and they delivered it faithfully to their contemporaries; yet the prophets also died. If the word of God did not preserve them from dying those who heard it and kept it, how can the word of this man serve as medicine against death? If He believes that, they reasoned, He is the victim of an illusion, and a demoniac illusion at that.<sup>9</sup>

Jesus declared that it was not His own honor that He was desiring. Besides, if He had tried to obtain honor for Himself, it would not amount to anything great. **Verses 54** through **56** record His words that would soon bring this episode to an end.

***“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.*”**

The Lord speaks of the most personal and intimate relationship between Himself and His Father. He is a dutiful and loving Son who desires and delights in the approval of His Father. And the Father on His part loves His Son and desires to see all honor conferred on His Son and for that honor to be recognized and acknowledged by all. And one day that will be realized, to the great pleasure of God the Father when He sees His Son honored by all. As Paul expressed of that occasion, due to the Son's humble and faithful service to do His Father's will, that day will come when

God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, <sup>10</sup>that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, <sup>11</sup>and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil. 2:9-11)

On the one hand the Son will be most glorified on that day that He exercises His righteous judgment on the human race and He gives over to His Father this creation fully and finally subordinated to His Father's will. On the other hand, the Father will be most glorified when He sees His Son glorified before and by all on that Day. The glory of Jesus Christ will be unto the glory of God the Father.

But then we read that our Lord Jesus declared forthrightly to these Jewish leaders their abject ignorance and error in their claim to know God His Father. We read in verse 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.”***

The Lord Jesus not only claimed to know God His Father, but in addition He kept His Father's Word. He knew God the Father because of own His divine nature in that He is the Son of God from eternity, but He also knew God in His human nature through keeping His Father's Word.

Jesus' claim to know God is founded not only on His being from eternity the Son of the Father, but also on His perfect obedience to His Father's will. Disobedience is a bar to the knowledge of God, 'in knowledge of whom standeth our eternal life'. 'I know Him and keep His word' are two distinctive correlative clauses, but there is an underlying implication: "I know Him, because I keep His word." If eternal life is to know God (John 17:3), it is made equally plain here that to keep His word (as

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

communicated through His Son) is the way to eternal life. What does Jesus make Himself out to be? That which He essentially is: the living and life-giving Word.<sup>10</sup>

Jesus then declared to these physical descendants of Abraham in **verse 56**, “*Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.*” Interestingly, there is an old Jewish commentary on Genesis 15:18, the verse in which God revealed Himself to Abraham. Here is what was stated:

We read, in a commentary on the opening words of Genesis 15:18, that when God made the covenant with Abram, He ‘revealed to him both this *Olam* (this age) and the *Olam* to come,’ which latter expression is correctly explained as referring to the days of the Messiah. Jewish tradition, therefore, asserts exactly what Jesus stated in these words, ‘Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day; and he saw it, and was glad.’ Yet we know what storm of indignation the enunciation of it called forth among the Jews!<sup>11</sup>

These Jewish leaders reacted to our Lord’s words with incredulity. “*Then the Jews said to Him, ‘You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?’*” (8:57). Perhaps they were just describing a normal man who would have been regarded as elderly at 50 years of age. Or perhaps to them, Jesus may have appeared to be much older than He actually was. He was perhaps in His early thirties, but did He appear much older? Some have suggested this is so, but this is discredited by most commentators. The point that they were making was that it was an absurd notion that Jesus could have “seen” Abraham. Of course Jesus did not claim that He had seen Abraham (although He had, of course<sup>12</sup>), rather, He had said that Abraham had “seen” His day. As is common in John’s Gospel, the characters understand matters only physically, failing to see and perceive the spiritual world.

The reaction of the Jews brought forth our Lord’s response in **verse 58**, “*Jesus said to them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.’*” Now we have already read and considered a number of Jesus’ well-known “I AM” statements in this Fourth Gospel. But whereas they are clear declarations of the deity of Jesus to the readers of the Gospel, the ones who were standing before Jesus did not necessarily see the importance and implications of our Lord’s words. But here there was no ambiguity. Jesus made the claim that He is eternal God. He is the “I AM”, the God of the Hebrew Scriptures who created the world, who revealed Himself to Moses and Israel.

The Jews would not stand for this “blasphemy.” We read in **verse 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.*” Perhaps, with the temple construction still taking place, there was rubble nearby that provided the stones. They would stone Him right there in the temple. They would slay, destroy, the true spiritual temple, Jesus Christ Himself, using the stones of the physical temple which spiritually portrayed and foretold His coming.

Our Lord’s escape should be understood as a miraculous happening. He went through the midst of them, apparently undetected, even as they were scrambling to gather stones to hurl at Him. Their murderous intention drove them, even as their father the devil, the murderer from the beginning, directed and moved them.

### **III. Jesus and God His Father**

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 204.

<sup>11</sup> Alfred Edersheim, **The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah**, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, vol. 1 (E. R. Herrick & Company, 1886), p. 193.

<sup>12</sup> It was here, possibly and likely, that the preincarnate Son of God “saw”, met, and spoke with Abraham on the occasions that “God” met and spoke with Abraham. The eternal Son of God had spoken with Abraham as His friend.

We will not say much on this matter, as we have already covered most of John's statements regarding Jesus and His Father. But in this passage we do see quite clearly that Jesus Christ is eternal God. Yes, He is the Son of God, eternally begotten of God the Father. But He is not less God than the Father. The Father and the Son (and the Holy Spirit) are of one essence, being one eternal God. As the historical Nicene-Constantinople Creed (AD 381) states the matter so well:

***We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Only-begotten, Begotten of the Father before all ages, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, Begotten, not made; of one essence with the Father; by whom all things were made... And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, and Giver of Life, Who proceeds from the Father, Who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified...***

What we have before us here in John 8 underscores the essential and important doctrine of the Blessed Holy Trinity. We are monotheists, in that we believe in one God. We are not tritheists, believing in three gods, as some of our spiritual enemies would wrongly charge us.

#### **IV. Jesus and His disciples**

We should remember that even as our Lord was engaging directly with His enemies and detractors who would discredit and destroy Him, He was yet speaking to the crowds in the temple area. There were some there, even "many" who had believed on Him. He had a message that He would convey to them, even while He was engaging directly with these angry, hostile men. Our Lord cared for these "believers" and sought to instruct and encourage them even in this most difficult environment. And so, our Lord continued to speak in terms that He must have known would receive the angered response of the Jewish leaders as He sought to instruct and encourage His followers. We read **verse 51**, "***Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death.***"

Verse 51 is another example of that saying of Jesus that we wish the translators of the NKJV would have expressed another way. Jesus said, "Truly, truly", or "Verily, verily" I say unto you. There are 25 occasions of this expression which are all found in the Gospel of John. (I have lost count of what number this occurrence is.) Here He is describing His disciples, that is, true Christians. Earlier He declared of all those who "believed" Him (v. 30f), "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed." Here He declares the same truth, "***Verily, verily, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death.***"

We may assume that our Lord declared these words because He thought that there were some people still in this crowd in the temple that would be open and receptive to the salvation of their souls. Our Lord was willing to encounter greater hostility, if it meant the opportunity to proclaim eternal life to those who would hear and respond to Him in faith. I appreciated what **John Calvin** wrote concerning this verse:

Christ unquestionably knew that some persons in that multitude were curable, and that others of them were not opposed to His doctrine. For this reason, He intended to terrify the wicked whose malice was desperate, but to do so in such a manner as to leave ground of consolation for the good, or to draw to Him those who were not yet ruined. Whatever dislike of the word of God, therefore, may be entertained by the greatest part of men, yet the faithful teacher ought not to be wholly employed in reproofing the wicked, but ought also to impart the doctrine of salvation to the children of God, and endeavor to bring them to sound views, if there be any of them who are not perfectly incurable. In this passage, therefore, Christ promises eternal life to His disciples, but demands disciples who shall not only prick up their ears, like asses (donkeys), or profess with the mouth that they approve of His doctrine, but who shall keep His doctrine as a precious treasure. He says that *they shall never see death*; for, when faith quickens the soul

of a man, death already has its sting extracted and its venom removed, and so cannot inflict a deadly wound.<sup>13</sup>

### Conclusion:

As we read and consider the nature of our Lord's earthly ministry, we see that He was characterized by mercy and compassion on those who were humble and broken, but that He was quite bold and clear in His declaration and denunciation of sin when He met with resistance and to His Words. We cannot have a faithful ministry of the Word of God in honoring God our Father and His Son if we do not speak clearly directly, regardless of how we perceive people will receive us. I was reading some comments of **James Montgomery Boice** (1938-2000) on this passage. He recounted this story:

So we are not surprised to find these leaders taking up stones to try and kill Him just a few verses later. These words stirred their indignation, as Christ knew they would. But they were truth. They had to be said whether or not the men were offended.

It is the same today, of course. For if a desire not to offend men were the measure of what could be taught, little of the teaching of the Word of God could be communicated. Years ago an evangelist went to a little town in Nevada to hold meetings. When he met a minister of the church in which the meetings were to be held, he was told, "Now, my friend, I want to tell you that there are certain things you must not say here and certain sins about which you must not speak. For instance, it would never do for you to talk about divorce; this is the divorce capital of America, and many of our people have been married and divorced several times. They are sensitive on that issue. You cannot talk about drinking, for that is big business here. Don't mention gambling.

The poor evangelist looked at the minister and asked, "Well, of whose sins may I speak?" "Go for the sins of the Piute Indians, he was told. "They never go to church anyway."<sup>14</sup>

The fact is that many in churches do not want hard things said to them. There are those in churches who do not want clarity of truth proclaimed, for they know that it will result in difficulty and division. But that is no way to operate the church of Jesus Christ. Boice went on to say this about our Lord on this occasion:

"There are truths that need to be stated whether or not men and women are offended. Since Jesus knew this, He spoke the truth here. From our point of view it is good that He did, for as a result of it we have in these verses the clearest teachings about Satan and of the truth that God is not the father of all men and that all are not brothers that is to be found in John's Gospel."<sup>15</sup>

I appreciate **Matthew Henry Commentary on the Whole Bible** (not the shortened edited edition). In the text of his comments, he intersperses statements preceded with the word, "Note", to draw attention to an application of the text. In the verses that we have covered today, John 8:48-59, he gave 17 such notes of application. Here they are for your consideration.

1. On **verse 48**, which reads, "Then the Jews answered and said to Him, 'Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?'" Matthew Henry wrote, "*Note, Great endeavours have in all ages been used to make good people odious by putting them under black characters, and it is easy to run that down with a crowd and a cry which is once put into an ill name.*"

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<sup>13</sup> John Calvin, **Calvin's Commentaries**, Vol. XVII (Baker Book House, 1993), p. 356f.

<sup>14</sup> James Montgomery Boice, **The Gospel of John; An Expository Commentary**, vol. 2 (Baker Books, 1985, 1999), p. 656.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

2. On **verse 49**, which reads, “Jesus answered, ‘I do not have a demon; but I honor My Father, and you dishonor Me’”, Matthew Henry wrote, ***“Note, Those who can truly say that they make it their constant care to honour God are sufficiently armed against the censures and reproaches of men.”***

3. On **verse 50**, which reads, “And I do not seek My own glory; there is One who seeks and judges”, Matthew Henry wrote, ***“Note, Those who are dead to men’s praise can safely bear their contempt.”***

4. Also on **verse 50**, he wrote, ***“Note, God will seek their honour that do not seek their own; for before honour is humility.”***

5. On **verse 54**, which reads, “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’”, Matthew Henry wrote, ***“Note, Self-honour is no honour; and the affectation of glory is both the forfeiture and the defeasance of it: it is not glory (Prov. 25:27), but so great a reproach that there is no sin which men are more industrious to hide than this; even he that most affects praise would not be thought to do it.”***

6. Also on **verse 54**, which reads, “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’”, Matthew Henry wrote, ***“Note, Christ and all that are His depend upon God for their honour; and he that is sure of honour where he is known cares not though he be slighted where he is in disguise.”***

7. On **verse 55a** which reads, “Yet you have not known Him, but I know Him”, Matthew Henry wrote: ***“Note, Many pretend to have an interest in God, and say that He is theirs, who yet have no just cause to say so.”***

8. Also he gave this word on **verse 55a**, ***“Note, The Profession we make of a covenant relation to God, and an interest in Him, if it be not improved by us will be improved against us.”***

9. Here is a third word on **verse 55a**: ***“Note, There are many who claim-kindred to God who yet have no acquaintance with him.”***

10. He then made a fourth application on **verse 55a**: ***“Note, The reason why men receive not the gospel of Christ is because they have not the knowledge of God. Men submit not to the righteousness of Christ because they are ignorant of God’s righteousness.”***

11. On **verse 55b**, which reads, “And if I say, ‘I do not know Him,’ I shall be a liar like you”, Matthew Henry wrote, ***“Note, Those who disown their religion and relation to God, as Peter, are liars, as much as hypocrites are, who pretend to know him, when they do not.”***

12. On **verse 55c**, which reads, “but I do know Him and keep His word”, Matthew Henry wrote: ***“Note, The best proof of our acquaintance with God is our obedience to him.”***

13. On **verse 56**, which reads, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad”, Matthew Henry wrote, ***“Note, Those who rightly know any thing of Christ cannot but be earnestly desirous to know more of him.”***

14. Also on **verse 56**, he wrote: ***“Note, The longings of gracious souls after Jesus Christ will be fully satisfied when they come to heaven, and not till then.”***

15. Also on **verse 56**, Henry wrote, ***“Note, A believing sight of Christ and his day will put gladness into the heart. No joy like the joy of faith; we are never acquainted with true pleasure till we are acquainted with Christ.”***

16. On **verse 59b**, which reads, “But Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by”, Matthew Henry wrote, “**Note, God never forsakes any till they have first provoked him to withdraw, and will have none of him.**”

17. And lastly, on this same verse, Henry wrote, “*Note, Christ’s departures from a church, or a particular soul, are often secret, and not soon taken notice of. As the kingdom of God comes not, so it goes not, with observation. Samson knew not that the Lord was departed from him. Thus it was with these forsaken Jews, God left them, and they never missed him.*”

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Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way.  
The Lord be with you all. (2 Thess. 3:16)

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