

## Hard Truths For Hard Hearts John 8:52-55

We are coming to an end of chapter eight and another major section in this gospel of John. The first four chapters introduced us to the person of Jesus and his ministry. He is none other than the eternal God who has come in human flesh to give his life as that perfect offering for sin. The last four chapters have shown the rising hostility to Jesus, especially, but not exclusively from the religious leaders. We have seen the debate here about the ministry and purpose of Jesus just seem to almost boil over. The tension is so thick in this chapter and the exchange is full of emotion.

And we have pointed out that the one who is in control of this whole scenario is none other than Jesus. He is the sovereign Lord who has come to do the will of the Father. And that will is that he would offer himself as that perfect payment for man's sin. And so part of that plan of God is seen in this passage. By Jesus engaging these religious leaders there is a rising hostility toward him. If he remains in the outskirts of Galilee then we have no rising hostility. But by Jesus pointing out their sin and need to trust in him, it just incensed these proud men that he would ever say that they are not the children of Abraham or that they have their spiritual parentage with the father of lies - the devil himself. And Jesus knows full well where this will ultimately lead. This rise in opposition and hostility will lead to the cross. The one who is in full control are not the earthly powers but none other than our Saviour Jesus Christ.

But in the midst of all of this is so much grace. Jesus is not just goading the religious leaders trying to get a negative response. It is not that he is looking for a fight or just looking for problems and difficulties. No, Jesus in love is also presenting them his grace and where true hope is found. We saw that earlier in 31-32, **"So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, 'If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.'"** There is freedom from the penalty and tyranny of sin through belief and trust in the words of Christ, and it is offered to all. You can also see it in the verse we looked at last time together in verse 51, **"Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death."** The meaning of "keeps my word," is to believe, trust and follow Jesus. And the promise is given to anyone irregardless of who they are. And this would have annoyed self-righteous individuals who think that they do not need Jesus, but also that they have some special status before God already.

And what we enter into tonight is the last exchange and the next week we will look at the glorious words of Jesus' deity, and we will see the anger and hostility of the religious leaders boil over. But what I want us to look at tonight is hard truths for hard hearts. We come across people all the time that have hardened dispositions against Christ and against his truth. They might be in our homes. It could be even a spouse or a child or parent or whoever. It could be someone with a religious confession but really has no possession of Christ. It could be individuals at work who are bitter and angry at any thought of God. And here we see Jesus in one of the most heated exchanges in the gospel, never loose his cool, never lash out in accusation or hatred against his opponents, and most importantly never change the message or alter that message. And in these times where we are put in very uncomfortable positions we have to see

Jesus' example of handling hard hearts, and how he handles them is through Biblical truth.

So what I want us to see tonight is two things. I want us to see the response of the religious leaders, and then I want us to see the response of Jesus, and I hope in all of the tough and trying relations we will not only have the attitude of Jesus but seek to have the words of Jesus.

1. We see the response of the religious leaders Vv. 52-53.

When anger takes over the human heart people will start grasping at any argument and will seek to make any accusation against others. If the gospel is preached and someone is angry they might think of some way to make it look foolish and themselves more righteous. "You mean to tell me that if Hitler trusted Jesus on his deathbed he would go to heaven, and if a person who lived a good life died without trusting Jesus then they would go to hell?" Now the reason why someone asks that question is not for understanding, but it is inflammatory to the gospel. They might even say that with some intensity in their voice and with their forehead furled.

The question is how should we answer this person. 1 Peter 3:15 gives great counsel, **"but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,"** Peter says to honour Christ. We are to give an answer for our great hope. But we are to do it with gentleness and respect. In the age of Covid there is very little gentleness and respect. It is not about winning an argument or debate but honouring our God and seeking the welfare of the person who is asking the question. So to answer that question, "yes that is what it means." But you are wrong in thinking that there are good people before God - **"All have sinned and come short of the glory of God."** And Jesus' sacrifice is big enough to forgive any and all who come to him. The problem is how will you come before a holy God?

And this was the kind of questions that was asked of Jesus here in this passage. It is not to find light but to reject that light. Look at verse 52, **"The Jews said to him, '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.'"** Now we know that you are a blasphemer and that you are off your rocker. It is amazing how they revered Abraham. Abraham is mentioned eleven times in this dialogue with by Jesus and the religious leaders. And think of what Jesus is saying. He is saying that he speaks from God. In other words God has given him direct revelation and that is why you must listen to him. But their argument is that Abraham had access to God and God communicated directly to him, and God spoke to the prophets but Abraham and all the prophets died. The promise of Jesus is just too fantastic. It is too outrageous.

And you have this response throughout the gospel that Jesus teaches spiritual truth but individuals do not either recognize the truth or do not want to recognize it. Nicodemus - you must be born again. Am I to go into my mother's womb a second time. Women at the well. I will give you water so that you will never thirst again. Give it to me so that I never need to come back to this well again. John six - you must eat of my flesh and drink my blood. That is it - we are leaving. We are not cannibals. Jesus in the last chapter - I am going to my Father. You will seek me and you will not find me.

He must be leaving Israel for Samaria- what nonsense! Those who have eyes that want to see know that Jesus is talking about not physical life and death but spiritual. It is the truth that Jesus says to Martha in John 11:25, **“Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live.’**” No true believer actually dies. There is grief that they are no longer with us when a loved one in the Lord passes, but we use that word “passes” because they are absent from the body but present with our Lord. They have not died. In a sense they are living in a greater capacity than they ever have.

But there is no way that these hard hearted men want to understand that truth. Look at the two questions that they ask, and they really are not looking for any answers. They are just venting. You know the kind of venting, maybe from a father who is angry at the disobedience of his child, “Do you know how hard I work and this is the thanks I get?!” He is not looking for a response and these religious leaders are just through these questions trying to show how idiotic our Lord is. They say, **“Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do you make yourself out to be?”** To them it is simple logic. No body is greater than Abraham. No body is greater than the prophets. That has got to be clear in everyone’s mind. When they ask the second question, they are no longer concerned about the words of Jesus but attacking his character, **“who do you make yourself out to be?”** Jesus who do you think you are? And notice that Abraham is “our father Abraham.” And the meaning of “our” is not all of us. It does not include Jesus but it does include the religious leaders. What they are saying is that because of the statements of Jesus he cannot be from God or even included among the people of God.

And the thing that this alerts us to is that we will have this kind of response if we seek to make Jesus Christ known, if we seek to make the truths of Christ known and live according to the words of Jesus. We might not be bold in proclaiming the gospel outright, but if we live it out, there will be some that will ask us about the hope that is in us. Why are you different? Why do you go to church? Where does that peace come from? And then we present the gospel. Oh! So you think I am going to hell because I do not live like you!? Oh! You think I am a bad person!? The accusations and the insinuations. They will come. People will jump to conclusions. They will only hear part of the message and not the full message. The only question is not whether this will take place or happen but how will we respond? Will we take offence or give up, or make it about us or will we represent God, and realize the only hope is that God would open their hard hearts, and the instrument that he has chosen to use is his word presented through his people. If he hasn’t then his commission makes no sense.

## 2. We see the response of Jesus. Vv. 54-55.

There have been times where individuals have been offended at the gospel and have been offended at me. Again, “You think I am going to hell.” And I try to explain to them it doesn’t matter what I think or my opinion or even your opinion, but it does matter what God says in his word. His opinion is the only one that matters. And all I am telling you is what he says in his word. We all need to understand who we are, but also the good news of what God has done. We never yell or scream but we represent God both in attitude but also in words. Words need to be spoken. Certainly if someone is

out of control and yelling and screaming it might not be the best time to keep the discussion going. But we have to be brave enough to love God and love the other person to give the necessary truth of the gospel of grace.

Now let me say that we are taken a little a back by the response of Jesus. The reader of the gospel knows the identity of Jesus. He or she knows that he is the great I AM, that he is God in human flesh. We expect Jesus to come out swinging. Don't you know who I am?! How dare you talk about greatness. I am greater than all. But here the response of Jesus first and foremost is concerned with his relationship as the Son of God. He came to do his will and his delight is to magnify and glorify the Father. Look at verse 54, **"Jesus answered, 'If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, 'He is our God.'"** He came to the will of the Father, and this Father Jesus says is my father. He comes to glorify Him. it is not about Jesus per say and his reputation but doing the will of the Father. And it is incredible because so often we get so offended that we at this point when others are hurling insults make it more about us and less about God, and by doing that less about the need and welfare of those whom God has sovereignly put in our lives.

And Jesus will not depart or alter the truth also. It is ultimately the Father who will glorify the Son and vindicate the Son, even as we pointed out last time that he is talking about his death and resurrection. All the words and works of Christ will be authenticated and vindicate and beyond any doubt. And believers will ultimately be vindicated before God. And we as believers can take out much of the emotional baggage, as we come back to the word of God, and not make it about us. What I mean by emotional baggage is the unnecessary emotionalism that clouds the message. This is not about me but God and what he has said. He will glorify me, and it is this very God, Jesus says that you claim to know. Look at the contradiction. And remember, this is not an isolated conversation but it is on top of every thing that Jesus has said and all the miracles that should have convinced them by now. You see whether a person is for God or against God by what they do with Jesus. They rejected Jesus so they have to see what that says about their profession.

Now look at how Jesus continues, **"But you have not known him. I know him. 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."** When people get angry when the gospel is presented there are ways of calming the situation and appeasing the one who is angry. Just say there are exceptions to the gospel, or God knows your heart and you are one of his. Or I am just giving my opinion, or there are many ways to read and understand the Bible. Any of those statements make truth less definite but also less truthful. Truth that is mixed with error is not truth, and individuals who mix truth with error are not representing God, nor are they helping those around them. If Jesus says, "you are right and I am wrong," then he would be a liar. He would be deliberately changing or altering the truth. If it is about the glory of God and the welfare of others, then the truth cannot be altered. And here you are dealing with spiritual destinies.

So Jesus gives them the hard and difficult truth, **"You have not known him."** And the meaning here is that they have never been in a relationship with God. And again, Jesus is not looking to goad or just infuriate or just insult the religious leaders, but they need to know the truth, and there are not many truths but only one truth, one

way and one access to the Father and that is through Jesus. Jesus knows the Father perfectly and intimately. He is the one who keeps his word unlike the religious leaders.

So how do we apply this response of Jesus to our lives? We are to stand, live and make known God's word. We will be accused as being unloving, uncaring, and certainly not compassionate. You teach about the length and definition of marriage and and say this is the definite will of God, people will say all manner of evil, or if you teach of sexual identity you will be maligned and misunderstood and probably not even want to be understood. When we say that all other religions are only manmade and Jesus is the only way to God, people are going to be angered. Our response should be not to be silent or try to appease the culture around us, but to say this is in keeping with what God has said in his clear and sufficient and necessary word.

And this is where the church has to be careful because we are more concerned many times with being liked, then with loving God and loving others. The mandate of the church and of individuals in the church is to preach the Word of God whether in season or out of season, whether people accept it or reject it. We have to love God enough to do his will for his glory, and we have to love sinners enough to realize what he or she needs. We have to love the saints enough to give them what is most necessary in their lives - it is the Spirit ordain means of life and growth, and it always is through the Word. Steven Lawson wrote about the Word of God missing or disappearing from many pulpits. He writes, **"In their zeal to lead popular and successful ministries, many are becoming less concerned with pointing to a biblical text. Their use of the Bible is much like the singing of the national anthem before a ball game - something merely heard at the beginning, but never referenced again, a necessary preliminary that becomes an awkward intrusion into the real event. In their attempt to be contemporary and relevant, many pastors talk about the Scriptures, but sadly, they rarely speak from them. Instead, they rush headlong to the next personal illustration, humorous anecdote, sociological quote, or cultural reference, rarely returning to the biblical text. How can pastors expect dying souls to become spiritually healthy if they never give them the prescribed remedy? How can pastors expect sinners to be converted and Christians to be sanctified if they fail to expound God's Word?"**

Jesus didn't go out of his way to offend just to offend. He gave necessary truth. The religious leaders may have hardened their hearts against these truths, but these truths are the truths that magnify the glory of God and are what is necessary for all. Yes, others will be offended, but in the midst of that offence, we need to be both in action and attitude be conveyers of God's truth for his glory.