

I AM  
John 8:56-59

Well tonight we come to the end of one of the most contentious interactions that Jesus had here between the himself and the religious leaders. And it all has been building to this point. And Jesus has been pointing all the way through this dialogue that he and he alone is where hope is to be found. He gave both grace and warning in John 8:24, **“I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins.”** And he also gave them a promise of great hope in John 8:31-32, **“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.’”** All hope is found in Jesus. He is the one that we have to trust in.

And there are all sorts of questions that people want answers for and that individuals even argue about and debate. They will debate this government policy or taxes, or whether the world is warming up or cooling down. There is debate after debate, and question after question that people ask and seek to answer. But have we ever thought about what is the most important question of all? The most important question of all that any person could ever ask and what should occupy every heart and mind is: who is Jesus? Who is this person who came on the scene two thousand years ago? And we should be so thankful that God has recorded these events with the answer to that question in the Gospels.

And that is the whole purpose of the writing of the Gospel of John. It is that we might know who Jesus is. The whole gospel starts in John 1:1, **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”** And then toward the end in John 20:30-31 we read, **“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”** And everything that happens to be in between is given that we might see and glory in and know who Jesus is, and by knowing that we might have life through his name — eternal life and his life might shape all that we have and all that we are.

And in this passage we have one of the clearest statements about who Jesus is from his own lips. And so often we get so caught up in making life about ourselves, our own pleasures, our own desires or about other questions and debates. We make life about wanting a perfect marriage or having more sex or more adventures or more money or whatever. If Jesus is who he said he is then life, all of life, is about him. People waste so much of their lives pursuing and being consumed with such trivial things in the here and now, and think that life is about the temporal things that are here. If Jesus is who he said he is then life is not about the temporary. If there is no Jesus, then eat, drink and be merry, and make all of life about self because it really does not matter because tomorrow we die. But then there is Jesus, and because of who he is there is meaning, and even a greater joy and satisfaction in making life about him. Let me ask you tonight: do you live as if Jesus is not Lord, as if he is not God who has come down to give his life as that perfect sacrifice? There is no one greater than Christ, and I want to see that tonight from our text that Jesus is the great I AM. And I am

asking you to let that truth ruminate in you, think about it and ponder that truth of who Jesus is until it changes you. So often we can forget how profound these truths as far as the person of Christ truly is, and we can forget how much life altering hope we have in Jesus. So I want us to see a couple of truths tonight. I want us to see that Abraham rejoiced to see the Jesus' day, and then I want us to see Jesus' identity revealed.

1. We see Abraham rejoiced to see Jesus' day. V.56.

Joy and rejoicing are curious words and concepts. They are things that we know and that we have experienced but they are usually here for a short time and then they are gone. And some of our joys even turn to sorrows. It could be a marriage. There was a time where you looked in the eyes of the others with so much joy and said, "I do." And now there is so much pain and dread and sadness. It could be a child that you held in your arms with a smile that seemed to you would never be erased but now there is such waywardness and much pain. Life is a mixture of joy and sadness. And we as people want joy. We were made to rejoice in joy and look for it and hope for it. The only question that truly remains is where are you looking for joy? What are you seeking to rejoice in? What gets you super excited that this is what you want to talk about? The problem is many of the things that we find joyful bring such pain also. And it is not that God does not want us to be joyful but he wants our joys in the right thing or the right person. He wants our joys in someone who will never disappoint and who will always satisfy.

And this is the ultimate joy of Abraham, because look at what Jesus says here, **"Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad."** It is an amazing statement because they have been arguing that they are the people of God and their star witness is none other than Abraham. But Jesus says, hold on — Abraham was looking forward to my day, and then he said that he rejoiced to see my day. Abraham was looking for the day of Christ and then rejoiced when he saw that day. Now it is difficult to figure out what is the meaning of the text here, because there is a sense where Abraham was longing for the coming of Jesus but didn't see it, but then saw the day of Jesus — the great hope. Now how did he long for that hope and see it? Some see this as a reference to the Abrahamic Covenant given in Genesis 12:3, this is God speaking to Abraham, **"I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."** There will be one that comes through the line of Abraham that would be a blessing to all the world, and he was looking for that day. And Abraham now sees that day because he is alive with God in heaven. And it could mean that but it seems that the language here betrays that interpretation. Jesus does not say that Abraham is seeing it right now, but that he saw it, which is past tense, and seems to be alluding to some event in the past that is unspecified by Jesus here in this text. The main thing is that Abraham wanted to see the day of Christ and somehow saw it.

But the curious mind wants to know. It could be talking about when three divine visitors came to Abraham when he was at Mamre, and many think that one of those was a reincarnate appearance of Jesus and he hoped in Christ and saw him right there. But I think that Jesus uses this word "day", that he is not talking about just the coming of Christ but the day of his glorification — the day that Jesus would be offered up. I believe that what is being alluded to here by Jesus is the command of God to Abraham

to take Isaac and offer him up on Mount Moriah. It is incredible because Isaac is the son of promise. God had miraculously given them this child of promise when Sarah was 90 and Abraham was 100. And Abraham also was given the promise that his offspring would be like the sand of sea shore and like the stars of heaven. And Isaac has no children up to this point. So he knows that as goes up that mountain that God would do another miracle. If Isaac is offered up the Lord would resurrect Isaac. Listen to Genesis 22:5, **“Then Abraham said to his young men, ‘Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.’”** Abraham will go with Isaac to make an offering but he says that they both will come down from the mountain. I heard someone once say that Abraham was deceiving his servants about what he was about to do and that is kill Isaac. He had no thought of resurrection. But you cannot hold that view because Hebrews 11:17-19 gives us a commentary of that whole scene, **“By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, ‘Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.’ He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.”** This of course prefigured the coming death of Jesus and his resurrection. God provide a ram caught in the thickets. He provided a substitute.

So after the whole scene was over listen to what Abraham named the place in Genesis 22:14, **“So Abraham called the name of that place, ‘The LORD will provide’; as it is said to this day, ‘On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided.’”** And notice it is after the events just mentioned and he does not call the place “the Lord has provided,” but “the Lord will provide.” He saw the promise of coming Saviour’s day in figurative form and he trusted in what the Lord would provide.

This goes along with Jesus’ whole message that if you do not trust in him you will die in your sins, but if you trust in him there is life eternal and life abundant. He will provide. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. And this is what Abraham rejoiced in. And it is always amazing how we can know these truths but never be impacted by them so much so that Jesus and his life and resurrection and promises become our life and joy. There is so much hope. Have you ever had that in your life? You been discouraged and you start thinking about our hope in Christ and you cannot help be encouraged and even have hope in all the trials that we are going through. We were made to find joy, but we were made to find it in a certain place and in a certain person and that is in Jesus Christ. Is that where you joy is?

## 2. We need to see Jesus’ identity revealed by Jesus. Vv. 57-59

Up until this time, we have had various statements about the deity of Jesus, and many of them by Jesus but they have been very cryptic. He has talked about being at one with the Father, and even calling God - “My Father” making himself equal with God - of the same nature and unity with God. But so often individuals wants certainty. They want Jesus to stand up and say who he is. And we have that right in this passage here. Jesus clearly identifies who he is in so clearly in terms that none could ever mistake what he means. And for believers in Jesus Christ we come to glory and relish these statements of Jesus. This really is the pinnacle and climax of this very contentious

chapter. And if you never have trusted in Jesus, and want to hear what Jesus professes about himself, it is right here in this passage. This is who he says he is.

But look first of all at what the religious leaders say as they object to what Jesus has just said, **“So the Jews said to him, ‘You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?’”** This is a kind of mocking statement of the religious leaders. They are not trying to understand Jesus. They do not ask how Abraham saw your day, they just ask a question about his age. You are not even fifty, and Abraham is been dead more than 1800 years. How could it ever be possible that he could have saw your day? Now Jesus was really quite a bit younger, probably around thirty. But this is just used as a round designation. It was the retirement age for many in that society.

But look at the incredible response to this mocking question, **“Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.’”** “Truly, truly,” means pay careful attention to what I say. It is a necessary truth. And the reader also needs to pay attention, because it is the most extraordinary claim that has ever been made. “Before Abraham was, I am.” Now the Greek here for **“I am”** is **“ego eimi.”** Sometimes it is translated by adding the word he to the end, “I am he.” But there is no “he” there. Some have tried to alter or avoid the literal translation to make it in their words more understandable. The Moffat translation has, “I have existed before Abraham was born!” The Twentieth Century New Testament has “before Abraham existed I was.” And the Jehovah Witnesses New World Translation has “I have been.”

So here is the question: why don’t we translate it this way and why do so few translations translate it this way? And there are a couple of reasons. One is the context. The religious leaders are talking about age, and he is answering them. It is not that he is just saying before Abraham “I was,” in other words, I had preexistence, but “I am.” I have always existed. He is claiming the same truth that is found in Psalm 90:2, **“Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.”** He is claiming eternal existence. That is so clear from the context.

But what is also clear is what the Jewish religious leaders understood by the words of Jesus. We see this in their response in the next verse, **“So they picked up stones to throw at him.”** This man is guilty of blasphemy in their eyes - claiming to be none other than God. They understood that Moses when he was commissioned to go speak to Pharaoh that Moses asked God if the people asked who sent you what do I say, and listen Exodus 3:14, **“God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM.’ And he said, ‘Say this to the people of Israel: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”** Here is the most personal and intimate name of God that the scribes feared to write and the people shuttered to even speak in fear of somehow inadvertently blaspheming the name of God, and that is the name Jehovah. Well the name Jehovah is “I AM” in Hebrew.

Listen to what J.C. Ryle writes here, **“Let us carefully note what a strong proof we have here of the pre-existence and the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. He applies to Himself the very name by which God made himself known when he undertook to redeem Israel. It was ‘I AM’ who brought them out of the land of Egypt. It was ‘I AM’ who died for us upon the cross. The amazing strength of the foundation of a sinner’s hope appears here. Believing on Jesus we rest on divinity,**

**on One who is God as well as man. There is a difference in the Greek verbs here employed which we should carefully notice. The Greek for 'was' is quite different from the Greek 'am.' It is as if the Lord said, 'Before Abraham was born, I have an existence individual and eternal.'**

Now with all of that in mind it is so important to look back at what the religious leaders missed in 8:24, **"I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins."** Notice the "I am he." There is no "he" there. It is literally, "I AM." Unless you believe that Jesus is God you will die in your sins, which means that there is no hope for you before a holy God. You will be judge for the ungodly things that you have done, thought, and said in this life. The deity of Jesus is not a take it or leave it truth or doctrine but one that is key, indispensable to salvation in Christ alone. Again, we come back to the most important of all questions in all the world, the most important that we could ever ask and answer: who is Jesus?

And look at the response again in verse 59, **"So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple."** According to Deuteronomy 13 the punishment against any that would lead the people astray was stoning. And this is the second attempt in this chapter to silence Jesus. The first was in verse 20, **"These words he spoke in the treasury, as he taught in the temple; but no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come."** Notice that no one could lay a hand on him because it was not time for him to give his life as that perfect offering for sins. And that seems to be the meaning here. It seems that some way Jesus was hidden supernaturally, and delivered from any attempt to take his life before his life was taken.

And it is interesting and ironic here in that when they pick up stones that they are making a judicial pronouncement on Jesus. And the reader knows that Jesus is the ultimate judge. He is the one that everyone will one day face. The other thing we see here is that Jesus "went out of the temple," in other words he departs from them unharmed. And they certainly could do no harm to him but they also could not benefit from him because of their rejection of who he is. And maybe this describes you. You have reject Jesus and maybe even rejected some of his messengers who have brought you the truth of Christ. It is just like Jesus "went out." He went right by. He gave you the opportunity to trust him but you refused. And you always think that you have tomorrow. But no doubt many of them never got another opportunity. This is the day to trust in him. If you thought that Christians make more about Jesus than Jesus. Think again. Here his words. In this the short few verses. We see Abraham rejoiced to see his day and did it. The Lord will provide, and he has provided a sacrifice. And as we see that sacrifice is none other than the great "I AM." Trust in him, marvel in him, and let us all rejoice in him.