

## Jesus and Abraham

HN/SS 22/05/05 am

Reading: Exodus 3, John 8:37f

Study Text: John 8:48-59

Sing Psalms: 67, 142, 70, 80:17-19

In the midst of carrying on a logical and reasonable argument many people will turn to personal abuse – especially if they are losing the argument. We see it in the playground, we see it in the parliament, we see it in the workplace and we see it in the church. We see it here in the passage before us.

Jesus had come to the conclusion, by reasoned argument, that the Jews he was addressing in the temple were children of the devil. Just like the devil, the adversary of Jesus, they wanted to kill Jesus. They were not children of Abraham in the spiritual sense, nor were they children of God. Children of God would listen to the word of God – and that was what Jesus was speaking to them.

The Jews would not accept this argument. They would not believe in him wholeheartedly or unreservedly. They could not convict him of any sin. As hard as they tried they could not disprove anything that he said. All they could do was turn to name calling and abuse.

They called Jesus a Samaritan. Samaritans were a group of mixed race Jews despised by the ‘pure’ Jews of Judea (4:9). But they knew that Jesus was from Nazareth in Galilee – he was not a Samaritan. Jesus did not bother to answer this name calling.

But he did answer their second accusation ‘you have a demon’. This was not the first time the Jews accused Jesus of having a demon. Previously they had accused Jesus of casting out demons in the name of the devil (Matthew 12:24). Such an accusation was illogical said Jesus and what’s more it was blasphemous. It was blasphemy here also. *Anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him* (Matthew 12:32).

It is amazing that Jesus did not walk away after hearing such blasphemy. To say Jesus, the Son of God, has a demon must amount to unforgivable sin. Maybe others were there listening to Jesus teaching. Anyway he graciously rejected their accusation. He said he was honouring his Father. He was doing and speaking what the Father gave him to do and to speak. Their reviling did not upset by him for he was concerned only for the glory of God, God who is sovereign in salvation and judgment. Jesus goes on to teach further truth that his Father sent him teach, even as these Jews hopelessly cling to the belief that Abraham is their father.

We might at this point note how much of Jesus teaching comes to us in the context of his speaking to a hostile audience. Does this add a sharpness and clarity to what he said? It certainly means that his words come to us having already passed the test of a hostile audience. How wonderfully helpful this is when we encounter a similar audience.

Let us also note how Jesus graciously persisted with those who opposed him. He did not give up, he did not turn to personal abuse, but remained faithful in the mission entrusted to him by his Father. Will you do the same? Will you always remember whose you are and whom you serve? Self-control, patience and persistence are essential in the ministry of the gospel.

## No Death

Jesus solemnly declared – *amen, amen...if anyone keeps my word he shall never see death* (8:51). Having no thought for matters of the soul and thinking only of this world, the Jews could not understand the profound spiritual truth that Jesus was telling them. All their ancestral heroes had died; every last one of them. What an outrageous thing to say – *if anyone keeps my word he shall never taste death*. Note they twist Jesus words somewhat. He did not say ‘taste’ death but ‘see’ death.

Jesus was not talking about physical death – death of the body. He was talking about spiritual death – death of the soul. He was talking about death in the context of judgment (8:50) – the second death.

*In him was life and that life was the light of men* (1:4). Jesus came to give life, life to people who were dead in their sin, who were born dead in sin. Whoever hears the words of Jesus and *believes in him who sent me has everlasting life and shall not come into judgment but has passed from death to life* (5:24). This is what Jesus is telling them once again. The words which he speaks are life. Those who hear these words and keep them will live. They will not go through the second death and end up in hell.

*Keep my word* – to keep the word we must first of all hear it. Like you here today, these Jews were blessed in being able to hear the word of Jesus. The word is all that the Father gave him to declare. Hearing we must believe. We must believe what Jesus said; we must take the words into the depths of our heart and embrace this living word. We must obey, we must keep these words. *Abide in my word and you are my disciples indeed* (8:31).

These Jews were following the law, they were attending to worship but it was all outward. Their hearts were hard and unresponsive. Augustine commented upon the last verse when they picked up stones to stone him – ‘as man he fled from the stones; but woe to those from whose stony hearts God has fled’.

That was the danger facing the Jews. They were slaves to sin. They were dead in their sin. If they would believe in Jesus and keep his word they would live. They would no longer be children of the devil but children of God and they would not see death.

It was a great and wonderful truth that Jesus declared. To them it seemed impossible so they called him names and argued with him. But Jesus could not retract what he said – he could not lie. He could not deny that he was sent by his Father to give this message to mankind.

Truth is truth. It cannot be changed. *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and for ever*. And his truth remains the same. Do not let the devil or his children push you or pull you into compromise with the truth. The truth may hurt at times. You may be hurt when you hold to the truth, when people react bitterly and abusively to the truth. But hold on to the truth.

Let the word of God be firmly planted in your heart and let all your words and actions be the outworking of that truth. Read the Bible, meditate upon what is written, and pray that by the power of the Holy Spirit the word may abide in your heart for ever. Remember *if anyone keeps my word he will never see death*.

## Abraham Saw My Day

One young student in the class objected – ‘but David died long before Jesus was born so how could he know anything about Jesus Christ’. Such thinking is all too common, even among theologians. How were people saved before the coming of Christ they ponder? They cannot comprehend the words that Jesus spoke *Abraham rejoiced to see my day, he saw it and was glad* (8:56).

Some commentators think that Jesus meant Abraham could see him now from heaven. We would understand this from the story of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16). But it is not what Jesus said or meant here – he spoke in the past tense. Abraham saw my day when he was on this earth.

This is how the Jews understood Jesus. Hence their response – ‘you are not yet 50 years old and you have seen Abraham’? Abraham died 2000 years before the days of Jesus. Jesus was only in his thirties but they were not sure so allowed a good margin of error. So how could Abraham know about Jesus let alone rejoice in this knowledge.

It is difficult to pinpoint a particular event or time in Abraham’s life when he demonstrated this knowledge. Some suggest it was his laughing or rejoicing in the birth of his son Isaac. Maybe it was when he went to sacrifice Isaac. He said at that time – *My son, God will provide for himself the lamb for the burnt offering* (Genesis 22:8). Abraham and the other patriarchs *died in faith not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them* (Hebrews 11:13). Let us not underestimate what Abraham saw and what he believed. *Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*

Are you glad? Do you rejoice in the day of Jesus Christ, the day he came into this world and died in your place upon the cross, died bearing your sins. If you rejoice in that great day, the day of your salvation, then you will also rejoice in the day of his return. He is going to return in glory and all the children of God will be revealed. Will you be among them? Peter, James and John had a foretaste of that day on the mountain when Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus.

### **Before Abraham Was I Am**

*Have you seen Abraham* the Jews asked Jesus? Jesus told them that Abraham saw my day – the present day of Jesus – he saw it by faith. Now Jesus tells them *before Abraham was I AM*. With these words, words introduced by the solemn preface once again, Jesus claimed both pre-existence and deity. He existed before Abraham. He existed before creation. He was with God in the beginning (John 1:1).

*Tell the children of Israel I AM has sent you* (Exodus 3:14). God told Moses to call him I AM. In taking the same name Jesus is clearly claiming to be equal with God. The Jews understood what Jesus was claiming and so they took up stones to throw at him. They wanted to kill him for blasphemy. But Jesus hid himself and escaped – for his hour had not yet come.

*And the word was God* (John 1:1). Jesus took upon himself the divine name I AM. How can anyone who believes the Bible claim Jesus was not divine, not fully God? Yet people do, whole groups do, denominations claiming to be Jehovah’s witnesses do. Have no fellowship with those who take the name of Christ but deny his divinity.

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