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The Great "I Am" John 8:48-59

Intro: We have come to the end of the conversation that occurred between Jesus and the religious rulers of His day, which takes up most of **ch8**. At the same time, we should understand that we are also coming to the end of a very important section of the Gospel of John. The first 4 chapters were written mainly to introduce Jesus Christ. In these chapters, the reception of Jesus by the people of His day was mostly favorable; meaning there was no noticeable hostile reaction towards Him. In the section we are concluding today (**ch5-8**), this initial open reception quickly turns to one of increasing hatred of Jesus by the religious leaders. This section began with a controversy over the Sabbath and ends with this conversation in which the religious rulers increasingly express their hostility towards Jesus.

Of course, Jesus has not been very cooperative with their efforts to eliminate Him. They tried to have Him arrested and failed. They tried to discredit His character and teaching and failed. They tried to disqualify His testimony about Himself based on a legal technicality but Jesus outsmarted them in that as well. When all these efforts fail to produce the desired outcome, all they had left was ridicule. But even in this, Jesus turns their ridicule into an opportunity to reveal some significant, convicting truths; truths concerning His death and the spiritual knowledge and blessings that will come from it; truths about themselves, their nature and their true spiritual ancestry. After all this, they still refused to accept or even acknowledge the testimony of Jesus about Himself and their great, desperate need for Him. In the end, the last recourse they thought they had was to sink to their lowest level yet.

48- Clearly, the enemies of Jesus were frustrated and exasperated. They were unable to tarnish the character or teaching of Jesus in anyway. The harder they tried, the worse it was for them; in fact, more people believed on Jesus as a result of this confrontation. In light of this, they launch the only attack they have left: name-calling! They accuse Him of being a Samaritan (people group most despised by the Jews) who was demon possessed.

49-50- Jesus' words were not the result of demon-possession; far from it!

They are the words the Father gave Him to speak and in speaking them, Jesus glorified the Father. Consequently, by refusing to accept them, these religious leaders dishonor Jesus and the One He represents: the Father. Jesus' only goal was to promote His Father's glory by obediently delivering the Father's message. Jesus is not concerned for His own reputation, He trusts the Father to take care of that. Jesus' desire to honor the Father and His own personal humility disprove any charge of demonic possession. The children of Satan will manifest the characteristics of Satan (pride and self-seeking) in their lives. Neither of these was to be found in Jesus' life!

51- Jesus is not content to merely refute their false accusations here; He actually offers them yet another profound truth: deliverance from the last enemy of all. This is one of the greatest promises Jesus makes because in it, He wipes away the greatest fear and dread of all humanity – death. This great promise must be considered in 3 parts:

1) The Conditions: “If” signifies there’s something we must do for the promise to go into effect – keep His word. But what does this actually mean? 1st, you must hear His word with understanding, how else can you keep it? We must hear His word and allow it to sink down into our understanding (**5:24**). 2nd, it means to commit (believe in) to Jesus, not just hear His Word with understanding but commit yourself to Him for salvation. 3rd, obey Him. The meaning of keep is related to guarding a prisoner. The whole idea is to keep Jesus' word (obey it) as carefully as you would guard a prisoner entrusted into your care. Do you keep His word like that? Do you hear Him, believe Him and obey His instructions? If not, check yourself because this glorious promise only applies to those who do.

2) The Promise: obviously, He is not referring to physical death because Jesus Himself died and since that time, all His followers have died and still do to this day. As we saw in **5:24** (passed from death to life) the primary reference is to spiritual death. The promise is that the one who keeps Jesus' word will never experience that final death that is the result of God's judgment. Now, the reality of escape from spiritual death should change the way we look at physical death. Why? The grave doesn't hold the terror of God's judgment (separation) but the promise of full union with Him! Paul said it 2 different ways: to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord and for me to live is Christ and to die is gain. Physical death is merely the door we pass through into eternal glory. Because of Christ's

death it's only the shadow of death, not the full reality of it; that touches the Christian.

3) The Assurance: Jesus prefaced this promise with "Most assuredly" or as the KJV renders it "Verily, verily." The original Greek is simply "Amen, Amen." Amen is a word found in nearly every language. It comes from an original Hebrew verb meaning to support with the arm or carry and referred to that which is supported or that which is shored up. Ultimately, it came to mean firm or unshakable. Tho this promise is conditional, it's a firm and unshakable truth to all those who are willing to meet that condition. The reliability of God is the secret of assurance and confidence in all things in the Christian life, including the confrontation of death, the last enemy; an enemy already defeated by Jesus.

52-53- This great claim of Jesus got the religious rulers excited! Not because they saw the truth of it but because they believed they finally caught Him in a clearly blasphemous claim. We should note that these leaders slightly twisted Jesus' words here. He said that the one who keeps His word would never see death while they claimed He said this one would never taste death. The believer will taste death but they won't be terrorized by it. It's a subtle but important distinction and serves to prove how little attention they actually paid to what Jesus was really saying.

Still, in their literal-mindedness, they had a valid argument. Abraham had heard the word of God and obeyed it, but he died. God's word came to all the prophets of Israel and they delivered it faithfully to the nation, yet they died also. If God's word did not preserve Abraham and the prophets from dying, the ones who heard it and kept it, how can the word of this man prevent death? Hoping to catch Him in a trap, they ask once more, "Who do you think you are?"

54-55- Before Jesus answered their question, He returns to the matter of spiritual parentage. Jesus was secure in knowing the God was His Father and it was the Father who honors Him. The religious leaders claimed that the Father in heaven was their God but it wasn't a true claim. The reality was, they didn't know God and their actions and attitudes proved it. On the other hand, Jesus did know God and His actions and attitude proved it as well. His true knowledge of God the Father was demonstrated by a life of obedience to the Father's word. Then Jesus makes another remarkable

claim: not only was He greater than Abraham but old Abe himself acknowledged this too!

56- As we've seen, this conversation was centered on the person & example of Abraham. He's mentioned 11 times in this chapter and nowhere else in John. The religious leaders first referred to Abe in **vs33** where they declared that they were his descendents. The confidence of their salvation was based on their relationship to Abraham. Jesus pointed out that what matters to God is not physical descent but spiritual. Abe's children will think and act like Abe.

Of course, this begs the question: if God is not impressed with family tree, what is He impressed with? Maybe the better question is: what was it that Abraham did that pleased God?

1) Abe put the calling of God above earthly honors (**Heb 11:8-10**). Abraham was rich and prominent in Ur and in Haran but when God called, he immediately left the past behind and set out for the land that God was showing him. This speaks to both our text and the bigger problem of why so many people refuse to accept Jesus as their Savior.

These religious leaders held prominent positions of society and were real keen on hanging onto their own honor. Yet, here was Jesus, who's honored by God in such a way that shows the pettiness of their earthly honors. They had honor but He spoke the truth. They had power but He could make the blind see and the lame walk. These men were concerned with earthly honors so Abraham serves as an example of a man who sought the honor that only comes from God. All true honor must come from God, all other honor is meaningless and temporary.

God's call to Abraham was no different than His call to every believer. He calls us out of our comfort zone and sends us in another direction (His will) of which we only get snippets. There's no big presentation of a divine plan, just a calling and sending. Have you determined to place the calling of God above all earthly honors? Abraham did and God commended him for it (Heb 11 Hall of Faith)

2) Abraham believed God in spite of the circumstances and there were a lot of tough ones too! Famines, family problems (Lot) and constant threat from marauding armies (Lot). In all these circumstances, Abraham learned to

trust God, to stay close to Him and his faith in grew in spite of or because of these difficult circumstances. The greatest trial of Abraham's faith had to be God's challenge to him to believe that He could give him a son. By the time Abe was 99 (Sarah was 90) the promise of a child seemed ridiculous! Still, there was the promise – God had promised. The Bible simply says that Abraham believed God ([Rom 4:19-21](#)).

If you're a believer in Jesus Christ, we share faith in a sovereign God. He's in control of all things. He could make your circumstances more pleasing if He thought it best. He can remove barriers. He can eliminate difficulties. But, if He doesn't do this, then He acts this way for a purpose; and you should trust Him. One of those purposes is to teach you to trust Him, which you wouldn't do at all if everything in your life was pleasant and the journey was always easy.

3) Abe placed his hope in the coming of Jesus and rejoiced to see that coming. To what is Jesus referring? When did Abraham see this and rejoice? This can only be found in the story of when Abraham nearly sacrificed Isaac on the mountain. God came to Abe and told him to take his son (heir of promise) and sacrifice him. Now you know Abe didn't get much sleep that night but apparently, some time during the night, he hit upon a solution. He knew he must obey God, even if it seemed wrong, but he also knew that God was a God of His word and that He was committed to produce a great nation through Isaac. But, Isaac had no children at this point. So if God was telling Abraham to kill Isaac, then the God who had done a miracle in Isaac's birth was just going to have to do a miracle in his death. In other words, there was going to have to be a resurrection.

As crazy as that sounds, that's exactly what Abe implied in his instructions to the servants in [Gen 22:5](#), stay with the stuff, the lad and I will go yonder and worship and we will come back to you. [Heb 11:17-19](#) agrees. Abe believed God would miraculously bring Isaac back from the dead, which is precisely the miracle the Father performed for His Son Jesus. Abe realized all this and rejoiced in it by naming the place Jehovah Jireh – the Lord will provide – the perfect substitute for our salvation. Abraham saw the coming of Jesus clearly and he rejoiced in that coming.

57- The Jews are incredulous to Jesus' statement: You're not even 50 yet, how could you have seen Abraham?

58-59- Jesus' response here is the last straw for them because with it, He's telling them that He is the eternal God; existing not only during the time of Abraham but before that in eternity past. Jesus claimed to be the great I am, the name of the covenant God of Israel revealed to Moses at the burning bush – Jehovah. Jesus claimed to be Jehovah, using the very word itself. It's because of this that the religious leaders, who immediately recognized His claim for what it was, tried to kill Him. There was no ambiguity here. The Jews understood perfectly what Jesus meant. He claimed to be the eternal God and they took that as blasphemy and wanted to execute Him there on the spot!

Is Jesus God? If so, He's owed our allegiance and loyalty. We must follow Him. We can't honestly be indifferent to Jesus. He didn't leave us that option. We must either follow Him as our Lord and God, or attempt to eliminate His presence from our lives, as the religious leaders of His day did. Of course, this is foolishness because Jesus can't be so easily gotten rid of. If He's God, He's eternal. He's the Ancient of Days. How can you eliminate the Ancient of Days from your days? He's the Lord of life. How can you possibly hope to exclude the Lord of life from your life? Imagine trying to dislodge the Rock of Ages with a handful of stones!

Jesus is still the Rock of Ages and you'll not get rid of Him by throwing things at Him. He's inescapable. He's planted in life. Thus, you must either come to terms with Him now, or do so on the day of judgment. You have one of two choices. You can destroy yourself by pounding yourself against Him, just as you can destroy a piece of wood by pounding it upon an anvil. Or you can build upon Him. Why not do that? The Rock of Ages makes a great foundation.

Lastly, **vs59** shows the sad result of trying to get rid of Jesus. It says, "Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple" What does it mean that Jesus hid Himself? It means that although these men couldn't harm Jesus, they couldn't benefit from Him either. It will be the same for anyone who tries to keep Jesus out of their life. If you don't allow Jesus to be God in your life, you will *not* harm Him. You can't harm the invincible and omnipotent God. But you will *not* benefit from Him either. Jesus came to bring those divine benefits to you. He's the life. He came to give you life, abundant life. He's the light. He wants to shine upon you, to illuminate your darkness and guide

you. He is the bread upon whom you may feed and grow. He's the living water who can quench your spiritual thirst. You forfeit all these benefits if you refuse to give Him His rightful place in your life.

Thus, because of their stubborn refusal to accept the truth Jesus was offering them, the Bible says Jesus passed by these Jewish leaders. There are some people God gives up ([Rom 1:24,26,28](#)). God gives up nations, if they will not live by righteous standards. God gives up churches, when they depart from their first love. God gives up individuals. Woe to the person whom Jesus passes by! Of course, we all deserve to be passed by but the good news is that, while some are passed by, others are saved by God anyway.

The last words of ch8 are "passed by." It's a tragic end to the contact of Jesus with these religious leaders. But in the opening verse of the very next chapter the words occur again in a story that tells us that "as Jesus passed by, he saw a man who was blind from birth" and saved him. Here's a man who in his blindness could not even see Jesus. Yet, Jesus saw him and gave him both physical and spiritual sight. He could not seek Christ, yet he was found by Him. What a great hope for sinners! "Jesus passed by." Yes. But "as he passed by" he saw this one and saved him. With people such as these he began to build his church. Are you such a one? Why should you not be? Why should you not be one who finds Jesus? 😊