John 8:48-59 - The Jews answered him, “Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?” 49 Jesus answered, “I do not have a demon, but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me. 50 Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is One who seeks it, and he is the judge. 51 Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.” 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.’ 53 Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do you make yourself out to be?” 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.’ 55 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. 56 Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.” 57 So the Jews said to him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?” 58 Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.” 59 So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

UNGODLY ACCUSATION

Last time we saw that Jesus boldly called out the Jews who were listening to his teaching as he called them children of the devil. Now, they turn the accusation, without foundation, back on him and accuse him of two of the lowest things they could think of – a Samaritan and demon-possessed.

The race wars were alive and well in first-century Palestine. Samaritans were half-Jew and half-Gentile. There was no contact between Jews and Samaritans, which is why it was so strange for Jesus to stop at Jacob’s well back in John chapter four to talk to the Samaritan woman.

The worst claim these Jews could make about Jesus was to call him a Samaritan and a man possessed by demons. Much of Jesus’ teaching in the last couple of chapters had to do with his identity, but his hearers refused to listen and believe that he was sent by God and the Father in heaven initiated his mission. Instead, Jesus took one final chance in this paragraph to pronounce his deity.

If one resorts to name-calling, they've ceded the argument. It is the absolute lowest form of response in a debate. In an arena such as politics where dissent and disagreement are expected and needed, take care to make your arguments cogent and reasoned without attacking the person or people with whom you disagree. Name-calling is only meant to slam doors of communication shut rather than keeping a healthy dialogue open.

UNINHIBITED ANSWER

We can paraphrase Jesus’ answer to the Jews’ allegations with “By dishonoring me, God’s very own Son, you are heaping dishonor upon the Father as well – and God himself will judge your accusation.” Also, Jesus is referring to judgment that will fall on every person after their earthly life is over, as he makes clear in the next verse. But as for his rebuttal to their mischaracterization of him (and by so doing, dishonoring the Father), Jesus has to set that straight.

AND SO CHRIST TEACHES US TO AVANGE INSULTS OFFERED TO GOD BUT TO OVERLOOK THOSE THAT ARE DIRECTED AT OURSELVES.

Chrysostom, Homilies on the Gospel of John
UNBELIEVERS ASTONISHED

The next statement by Jesus blew the group away, but it’s a truth we must believe and take to heart. He told them (again) that anyone who believes in him and obeys his teaching will not die. Obviously, when such great men as Abraham and the prophets have died, Jesus was claiming superiority over them. That was too much for this crowd to take. To them, this confirmed Jesus was possessed. But just a few chapters later, standing in front of the tomb of Lazarus, Jesus will make the same assertion.

John 11:25, 26 - “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.”

This is a crucial biblical concept. There is a first death and a second death. The one who believes and is saved will not face a final, second death. Their earthly death will just usher them into a life with Christ for eternity. The one who rejects God, will experience a second death apart from God in eternity.

HE MEANS THAT, FOR THE MAN WHO FULLY ACCEPTS HIM, DEATH HAS LOST ITS POWER; HE HAS ENTERED INTO A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD THAT NOTHING CAN DISSOLVE. HE GOES, NOT FROM DEATH TO LIFE, BUT FROM LIFE TO LIFE; DEATH IS ONLY THE INTRODUCTION TO THE NEARER PRESENCE OF GOD.

William Barclay, The Gospel of John

UNVARNISHED AUTHENTICITY

It’s fitting for us to be in this particular text the week after celebrating Resurrection Sunday because Jesus backs up his claim to have power over death with his mandate and purpose given to him by his Father. This is what we rejoice in whenever we praise God for the life-giving message of Easter.

Jesus again stresses his identity as the one sent by God who is glorified along with the Father. As he did so often in the book of John, Jesus again is claiming to be deity. And it is an authentic statement. The Jews said they knew God but didn’t. Jesus calls them liars and asserts he is not a liar, since he knows and loves the Father.

ULTIMATE AUTHORITY

When Jesus says here that “Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day. He saw it and was glad”, he was referring to the promise God made to Abraham about the nation that he would father. And out of that nation would come the one God would anoint to bring peace between God and mankind.

Hebrews 12:2, 3 - I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you, and all the peoples of the earth will be blessed through you.”

The group is confused again since here is a man in his thirties claiming to have been around when Abraham lived. So when they questioned him about it, Jesus states the ultimate declaration of deity – “before Abraham was, I am”. Of all his “I am” statement in the book of John, this one was superior.

Hebrews 13:8 – Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

BY USING THE TIMELESS “I AM” RATHER THAN “I WAS”, JESUS CONVEYED NOT ONLY THE IDEA OF HIS EXISTENCE PRIOR TO ABRAHAM, BUT HIS SHEER TIMELESSNESS – THE VERY IDEA OF GOD HIMSELF.

Homer Kent, Light in the Darkness

BIBLE STUDY
Legislators and Staff (During Session)
Thursdays, 8:00 a.m.
(ZOOM)