

“Who Do You Think You Are?”—John 8:53-58

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Who Do You Think You Are?”, is John 8:53-58 → *“Are You greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do You make Yourself out to be?” 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.’ 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. Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see My day. He saw it and was glad.” So the Jews said to Him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?” Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.”* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

“Who do you think you are?” This question surfaces in the midst of situations where a person accuses another of misconduct and seeks to impose his authority upon that person. You may think or say this question when your fellow employee tells you what to do on the job. Everyone understands that such authority belongs only to the boss or supervisor.

Children at play constantly tell each other what to do. They simply state the question differently: “You’re not the boss of me!” Every relationship in life seeks to clearly define an authority as well as the basis for that authority, especially when it is displayed amongst peers.

This was no different for Jesus as He encountered His fellow Jews during His public earthly ministry. *When He entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to Him as He was teaching, and said, “By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?”* (cf. Matthew 21:23) He claimed that *all authority in heaven and on earth had been given to Him.* (cf. Matthew 28:18) This authority displayed itself by forgiving sins and healing (cf. Mark 2:10-11); by the way He taught, His message and the miracles which accompanied His teaching (cf. Luke 4:26); and by the way he challenged the Jewish religious leaders by accusing them of hypocrisy (cf. Matthew 23) and being the spawn of satan! (cf. John 8:44)

Aside from such “authority issues,” that which caused these Jewish leaders the most consternation was how He spoke about relationship—specifically His relationship with God as His Father. John 5:18 says: *This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because not only was He breaking the Sabbath, but He was even calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.* Such blasphemy was reinforced in discussions like that of our text

when Jesus answered their question, “Who do You think You are?” by referring to Himself as “I AM.”

Keep in mind that God had revealed Himself to Moses as “I AM WHO I AM.” (cf. Exodus 3:14) It is God’s “personal” *name forever*, by which He is *to be remembered throughout all generations*. (cf. Exodus 3:14) In Hebrew it is pronounced “Yahweh.” However, the Jews considered this name to be so sacred that it’s flowing over sinful lips would constitute breaking the 2nd Commandment—“You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God.” (cf. Exodus 20:7 NIV) Thus, the Jews were outraged when Jesus referred to Himself as “I AM!”

The teaching of Jesus recorded by inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the Gospel of John is filled with “I am” language. Numerous times Jesus described His relationship with us with “I am” pictures: ***I am** the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.* (cf. John 14:6) *I am the door of the sheep.* (cf. John 10:7) *I am the vine.* (cf. John 15:5) *I am the bread of life.* (cf. John 6:35) *I am the good shepherd.* (cf. John 10:11) *I am the resurrection and the life.* (cf. John 11:25) Jesus started the whole discussion with the Jews in our text by saying *I am the light of the world.* (cf. John 8:12)

However, all of these descriptions have meaning only in light of recognizing the presence of Yahweh in the flesh in the Person and Work of Jesus. This is

what He was trying to tell the people 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.*

These were difficult words for them to accept for two reasons. First, He was claiming that He and God the Father were the same person! Secondly, he was telling them that their father was the devil (cf. John 8:44) who was keeping them from seeing their sins, repenting and believing that He was sent by God to bring glory to God by dying for those sins. Spiritual death in hell is the result of such unbelief. This led into discussion concerning their identity as God's chosen people through father Abraham in verse 53 of our text: *Are You greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do You make Yourself out to be?* They figured that He could only be demon-possessed!

Notice Jesus' emphasis on faith in the midst of this discussion of their identity through Abraham and His Person and Work. He said in verse 56 of our text: *Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see My day. He saw it and was glad.* He was referring to the basis of Abraham's identity in relation to Yahweh in the promise that *all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him.* (cf. Genesis 18:18) Thus, Abraham looked in faith to that seed from his line that would bring the blessings of God's forgiveness for all who believe in Him. He saw the Person and Work of Jesus by faith *and was glad!*

Taking up issue with His statement by referring to how young He was provided Jesus the opportunity to make the ultimate statement concerning His identity in verse 58 → *Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.* This was not simply poor grammar on Jesus' part. He intentionally stated it this way so they would clearly understand Him to be God in the flesh! According to Leviticus 24:16 they felt they had every right to pick up stones to stone Him to death. The Law says that *whoever blasphemes the name of Yahweh shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall stone him.* It was considered blasphemy to claim characteristics which only belong to Yahweh, let alone claim to be Yahweh **in the flesh!**

Romans 9:5 says: To the Jews *belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, **Who is God over all, blessed forever.*** It is only by faith in Him that you can escape the *death* that Jesus spoke about to these people—spiritual death which is eternal damnation in hell. The Bible's witness that Jesus is true God and the only way to heaven receives intense and sometimes violent opposition today as well. Thus, we all need to repent of our sins in the same relationship with Yahweh as Abraham had by faith in Jesus. Galatians 3:9 says: *Those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.* It is a relationship of faith and forgiveness based on the promises of God's Word fulfilled in the Christ **for you!**

“Who do You think you are Jesus?” He knew exactly Who He was. He knew what His purpose was during His earthly ministry and followed God’s Word perfectly to fulfill that purpose—the restoration of your relationship with Yahweh eternally through faith in His perfect obedience, death and resurrection **for you**. Not only does Jesus know Who He is but He is constantly present in your life as I AM! This is why He could promise you in Matthew 28:20 → *Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*

In this restored relationship with the Father by trusting the Person, Work and Words of Jesus we don’t say to Him “Who do You think You are?” Rather, we confess in humble repentance and faith: “My Lord and my God!” and follow His Word in daily living! Amen.

*God has highly exalted Jesus
and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name,
so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.*

(Philippians 2:9-11)

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