

Focus Scripture:

Before Abraham was, I am (text: John 8:58; context: John 8:31-59).

Theme: Christians believe to know God is to love the son and obey His word.

“GROUNDED IN ETERNITY”

In John 8:31-59, Jesus proclaims that to know God is to love the Son and obey His word. Obedience to the word of Jesus is freedom from sin. Both those who believed in Jesus and those who did not believe were under the mistaken impression that their descendancy from Abraham made them free. Jesus could have easily disproved their claims to freedom by pointing to their occupation by Rome, but instead he pointed to two circumstances that were more telling: first, their enslavement to sin, and second, their desire to kill Jesus. It was bad enough that both believers and unbelievers have to struggle against sin, but it was even worse that some of those who did not believe wanted to kill Him. Most of the conversation that Jesus has in this passage is with those who do not believe in Him. They will claim to have both God and Abraham as their Father. Jesus will say that neither God nor Abraham is their Father. If God were their Father, they would love Jesus and obey His word. If Abraham were their Father they would do the same. Jesus challenges both their spiritual and their biological lineage primarily because they reject His word and seek to kill Him. In short, the proof of their lineage is that they are like their father, whether they are speaking in spiritual or earthly terms. Jesus prefers to speak in spiritual terms and concludes that their father is the devil because, like the devil, they deal in murder and lies.

Jesus is not speaking of all Jews here. Jesus is not even speaking of all the Jews who did not believe in Him. It is a mistake to turn the words of Jesus into a blanket condemnation of all Jews, even all unbelieving Jews. Jesus is only speaking of a small group of oppositional Jews who sought to appease Rome. There were many other Jews besides Jesus who criticized these oppositional Jews.

Jesus said that “whoever keeps my word will never taste death” (8:52). But the opposition tried to discredit Jesus by pointing out that Abraham and the prophets had died. Jesus told them that Abraham was glad to see the day when Jesus came into the world. They said that Jesus could not be old enough to have been around at the same time as Abraham.

Jesus then rises to completely shatter all their pretensions. “Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am” (8:58). Not only was Abraham still alive in the supernatural realm, but Jesus himself preexisted in that realm, before Abraham was born. So unprepared were they for Jesus’ astonishing declaration, that they slipped into murderous rage; but Jesus escaped before they could stone Him.

Because we love God we love Jesus and obey His word. Loving God is more than sentimental musings or motions. It is a full commitment of ourselves to a relationship with Him. The same is true of loving Jesus. There is no distinction to be made between loving God and loving Jesus. They are one and the same love. Moreover, obeying the word of God and the word of Jesus are one and the same obedience. The word is not only that which we obey, the word is also that which imparts life and knowledge to us. However, in a world of opposing spirits it is important to emphasize our response of obedience to the word that we hear. When we are anchored in the word of Jesus, we are anchored in eternity where Jesus dwells with Abraham and the prophets. Eternity is where we shall also dwell, but more immediately, where we presently dwell through the power of the word. Although we reside in the material world, we are neither defined nor bound by it. This is what inspires us to steadfastness against the toils and struggles that accompany life in this world. In the midst of threats, trials, and troubles we already have eternal life.

FOCUS QUESTIONS - John 8:58

1. What occurs to you as you read this? What questions arise for you?
2. Jesus claims the Father's authority by virtue of the fact that "God sent" him (8:42). Do we embrace all that Jesus has revealed to us about God? Or are we tempted to envision God as an angry, distant father?
3. What does "not defined nor bound by the material world" mean to you?
4. What earthly limitations and obligations do we have to keep in mind as, and if, we do this? The life Jesus offers us is rich and enduring (8:51). Are we learning to receive it as enough? Or are we beholden to other things that fail to offer true life?
5. As your soul is eternal, what are you doing to develop the "eternal" part of you?
6. As I AM is eternal, how are you getting into the mindset and practice of developing the eternal part of your being through your work, relationships, and service?
7. In an age where so much information is available and knowledge is plentiful, we are told by our culture that we could make better decisions or understand someone better if we just had more information. Knowledge, not God, becomes our key to understanding our lives. What can we do to allow God to guide our lives? How does worshiping God rather than knowledge influence your understanding of your role in the University?

Life/Discipline Application:

What does this passage mean in your school or department - consider the implications of the passage to your day-to-day lives.

Personal Reflection:

What does this mean to you - examine the implications of the passage to your own day to day life.

Additional Print Resources:

- Fuquay, Rob. The God We Can Know: Exploring the "I AM" Sayings of Jesus. Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2014.
- Harris, W. Hall III. Commentary on the Gospel of John. <https://bible.org>. 2009.
- Marrow, Tim. Before Abraham "I AM!" The Claims of Christ from the Gospel of John. Bloomington, IN., CrossBooks/Lifeway, 2010.
- Okorie, A.M. "The Self-Revelation of Jesus in the "I AM" Sayings of John's Gospels." Currents in Theology and Mission 28/5 (2001): 486-490.
- Simmons, Billy. "A Christology of the "I Am" Sayings in the Gospel of John." The Theological Educator 38/1 (1988): 94-103.
- Whitacre, Rodney A. Commentaries for the Book of John (IVP New Testament Commentaries). www.biblegateway.com. 2010.
- Wiersbe, Warren W. Jesus in the Present Tense: The I AM Statements of Christ. Colorado Springs, Co., David C. Cook, Publisher, 2011.