

John 8:31-59

II. Jesus Reveals Himself to the World (1:19-12:50)

N. The Woman Caught on Adultery (7:53-8:11)

O. The Sixth Discourse: The Light of the World, Part One (8:12-30)

The Sixth Discourse: The Light of the World, Part Two (8:31-59)

As Jesus continues His teaching as *the light of the world* (v. 12), we continue on in vv. 31-59 with Him addressing the Jews that continue to stick around. It's here in v. 32 that we have the well-known saying *You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free*. Ignorance isn't bliss! Remaining ill-informed or misinformed is no way to live. This is true in worldly matters, but it's all the more true when it comes to the Word of God, and the Son of God in particular! Knowing Jesus (and the implication that we believe in Him, too) sets us free.

Of course, as we would expect, the Jews take issue with Jesus' statement. After all, they are ethnically superior as *Abraham's descendants* (v. 33). That's not even entirely true, though. They served the Egyptians in the days of Moses, and they were carried off to exile in Assyria and Babylon some seven hundred years after that. Nevertheless, they don't understand their true bondage, which is bondage to sin. As long as they were enslaved to sin, they would not *abide in the house forever*; however, if they experience freedom as sons in the Son, they *shall be free indeed* (v. 36; cf. Gal 4:1-7).

When Jesus compares Abraham with His Father, the Jews reply that *Abraham is our father* (v. 39). This shifts the conversation slightly to a new center. Jesus tells them *If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham* (v. 39). It's likely that Jesus isn't really referring to Abraham's "works" at all; rather, the fact that Abraham *believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness* (Gen 15:6; cf. Rom 4:3; Gal 3:6; Jas 2:23). In other words, if they truly were Abraham's children, they would believe as their father believed!

Instead, they *seek to kill* Jesus, who has only told them the truth (v. 40). When the Jews finally catch on to what Jesus is saying, they admit that they *have one Father – God* (v. 41). To that, Jesus replied that *If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God* (v. 42). If the Jews really wanted to be like their father Abraham, and if they truly had God as their Father, then they would recognize Jesus as their Messiah!

The same is true for people today, and it's a point that we've seen before. People can hold the title Christian, they can claim to be Christian by virtue of the fact that they believe in God – perhaps they even believe that Jesus is somehow in the same realm as God – but unless they believe in Him as the Savior, the One who could fix their sin problem when they themselves can't, they don't truly have the label *children*. Instead, their father is *the devil*, the one in whom *there is no truth* (v. 44). Satan is *the father of lies* (v. 44). As his children, they *do not believe* Jesus, despite the fact that He is telling them the truth (v. 45). That they don't hear and believe Jesus only underscores the fact that they *are not of God* (v. 47).

As one can imagine, this downright irks and agitates the Jews! *Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon* (v. 48)? Jesus denies the charge and leans in all the more to His teaching: *if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death* (v. 50). "Aha!" the Jews exclaim. *Abraham is dead, and the prophets* (v. 52). "You even told us to do the works of Abraham! Yet even he died!" *Are You greater than our father Abraham, who is dead? And the prophets are dead* (v. 53). "Who do You think You are?!"

Not backing down from the truth, Jesus tells the Jews that He is honoring the Father – the same Father they claim to believe in and obey (v. 54). Nevertheless, the Jews *have not known Him* (v. 55). Jesus then goes in for the proverbial kill: *Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad* (v. 56). Now the Jews go in for the kill: *You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham* (v. 57)? In His reply, Jesus goes for the jugular:

Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.

There was no misunderstanding that day what Jesus had meant. After all, *they took up stones to throw at Him* (v. 59)! With this brief sentence, He was making it quite plainly known that He – Jesus of Nazareth – was Yahweh in the flesh. As we’ve mentioned before during our time in the Gospel of John, *I AM* is a reference to God’s covenant name as revealed to Moses in Exodus 3:14:

And God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And He said, “Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”

Yahweh is the Hebrew word for *He is*. Most versions translate it as *LORD* (note all capital letters), although the HCSB does well to translate it as *Yahweh*, especially in passages that highlight the name of God,¹ or His covenant relationship with Israel.

When Jesus uses that distinct present tense to say that He “is” before Abraham “was,” there was no doubt in the Jews’ minds, nor should there have been. He wasn’t trying to be tricky, elusive, or sneaky. He was telling them point blank that He was one with the Father; He was the Most High God Himself; He was the long-awaited Messiah. And if they were to experience true freedom, if they were to be true children of Abraham, if they were to please God, they’d do so by believing in His name. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. No one would come to the Father except through Him, the light of the world.

¹Isaiah 42:8 *I am Yahweh, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another or My praise to idols.*