

“I Am”

June 1, 2014

Text: John 8:54-59

**In Jn 8:39, the Jews proudly said=> “*Abraham is our father,*”
**to which Jesus responded=> “*If you are Abraham's*
children, do the deeds of Abraham.”****

Sadly, their deeds were quite of opposite of Abraham’s deeds.

Most significantly, as we’ll see in today’s text, Abraham’s faith looked forward 2000 years, foresaw the coming of the Messiah, and rejoiced w/ gladness.

But Abraham’s descendants in Jesus’ day had no eyes of faith, were blind to the spiritual significance of His miracles, & deaf to His wonderful words of life.

Instead of rejoicing at His coming, they sought to kill Him.

There is a sobering lesson for us in this truth=>

However faithful a believer may be, he is not guaranteed that his descendants will follow his example, or embrace his faith.

In today’s text, Jesus will refer to “*Your father Abraham*” while speaking to people who would howl like wolves for the blood of the Lamb of God.

Abraham was called “*the friend of God*” (Jms 2:23), but his children proved to be Jesus’ deadliest enemies.

Faith does not run in the bloodline—there is no “faith gene.”

John warned us of that at the beginning of his Gospel, saying that those who receive Jesus by faith are=> “*born, **not of blood** nor of the will of the flesh, nor of*

the will of man, but of God” (Jn 1:13).

Our faith shouldn't be shaken/shattered when we see the children of godly believers reject their parents' faith in X.

We are to bring up our own children in the fear/love of our Lord, doing all that we can do to bring them to faith in Jesus.

If they do wander, we will hopefully have legitimate confidence that it wasn't due to our own negligence or unloving/sinful example.

W/ all our hearts we cry out to our Lord in prayer for our children's souls, that they will love/honor Him, for many generations to come.

But the only mother who has ever given birth to a perfect child guaranteed to become godly was Mary—all the rest are children of Adam's fallen race.

If they grow up thinking they are Xns simply because they are members of a Xn family, they need to hear=>
“You must be born again,” because there is no family plan of salvation.

Growing up in the nurture/admonition of a godly parent is a great privilege/advantage, for which a person should be deeply thankful.

But it does not guarantee that he himself will believe in X. If you were raised under such a godly influence, & you did embrace Jesus by faith, praise God for His goodness.

Today's text is the culmination of a whole chapter, in which Jesus has pressed home to the hearts of His listeners who He is, & how desperately they need to recognize their sin, repent of it, & place their faith in Him for salvation.

In Jn 8:54-59, we find Jesus' ultimate **revelation** of Himself, and His utter **rejection** by the shameful children of Abraham=> Jesus will reveal Himself to be the Son of God, the Messiah hoped for by Abraham, and God Himself.

But Jewish people listening to Him, who pride themselves on being children of Abraham, will try to stone Him.

*** The Revelation**

In the verses just before this, Jesus has said that anyone who keeps X's word will never see death, and keeping His word involves believing-in/obeying Him.

His Jewish listeners objected that, if Abraham couldn't keep people from dying, Jesus certainly can't.

Then they added (8:53)=> *"Surely You are not greater than our father Abraham, who died? The prophets died too; whom do You make Yourself out to be?"*

Jesus knew they thought He was trying to bring glory to Himself, & that's why He was making these extraordinary claims.

He had already told them, *"I do not seek My glory"* (8:50).

But now He will repeat that thought, & expand on it.

Jesus will now make 3 great revelations about Himself=>

*That He is the Son of God.

*That He is Messiah, anticipated by Abraham (vss 56-57).

*That He is God—the great “I am” (verse 58).

Jesus reveals Himself to be the Son of God

[**John 8:54**]=> “*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”;*”

Jesus referred to God as “My Father,” implying that He Himself was the Son of God.

The Jews called God “our Father,” but they never would dare call Him “my Father.”

Not only was Jesus God’s Son, He was the “*only begotten Son of God*” (Jn 3:16)—God’s Son in a special/unique sense, (which could never be true of anyone else) because He was with God, and was God, from before the very beginning (Jn 1:2).

As God’s Son, Jesus shares God’s divine nature/essence.

He is His Heavenly Father’s exact representation (Heb 1:3).

Jesus didn’t need to glorify Himself, like a braggart trying to impress others, or persuade others, he’s important.

Everyone knows that the compliments/awards such a person bestows upon himself really mean “*nothing.*”

He might as well buy a lot of trophies, write his own name on them all, and declare himself the victor in a whole variety of competitions/contests he’s never had anything to do w/.

It’s all meaningless.

Sometimes, even the awards given to us by other people can be almost as meaningless.

E.g. activities in which competition is downplayed, by giving everyone who shows-up/participates the same award.

But Jesus wasn't interested in glorifying Himself, or even in receiving glory from other people—it was His Heavenly Father who glorified Him.

Now that's an award w/ some real worth/weight/merit!
God the Father glorified God the Son by performing miracles through Him, so that anyone witnessing those miracles could make a direct connection between Father/Son.

In John 11, when Jesus heard that His friend Lazarus was sick, He said=> *“This sickness is not to end in death, but for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it”* (Jn 11:4).

In stark contrast to God's honoring/glorifying His Son, Jesus' Jewish listeners were dishonoring Him (Jn 8:49).

Ironically, they claimed that the same God who glorified the same Jesus they had dishonored, was their God/Father.

They had told Jesus=> *“We were not born of fornication; we have one Father: God”* (Jn 8:41).

And in the context, the implication seems to be=>

“He's not your Father—He's our Father.”

Jesus said=> “*It is My Father who glorifies Me, of whom you say ‘He is our God,’*” pointing out to them how inconsistent they were, claiming God as their own, while denigrating God’s own Son, whom God Himself had glorified.

Now Jesus ratchets up the pressure 1 more notch=> Not only was God not their God, they didn’t even know Him.

[Verse 55] (Jesus)=> “*and you have not come to know Him, but I know Him; and if I say that I do not know Him, I will be a liar like you, but I do know Him and keep His word.*”

Jesus used 2 different words for “know” here—1 for them (*ginosko*), & a different word for Him—& the difference is significant.

When He told His adversaries “*you have not come to know [ginosko] Him [God],*” He meant they had come to know [*ginosko*] God through the learning process—progressive knowledge.

This is knowledge which develops over time, but in their case, time had added nothing to their knowledge of God.

So Jesus said=> “*You have not come to know Him.*”

They had read Scripture all their lives, & they had watched Jesus (God incarnate) for 3 years, but they still couldn’t even recognize God when they saw Him.

They knew nothing of God’s will/character/purposes, & sadly, they didn’t really care to know Him.

When Jesus said, “*But I know Him,*” He used the word *oida*, which is a much stronger term, referring to knowledge that is full/complete/comprehensive, direct/absolute.

Throughout eternity, Jesus had been in His Father’s presence, enjoying His fellowship.

He had not been learning about God, because Jesus Himself is God, & had always had full knowledge of God.

Not only did He know God, He “*kept His word*” out of His love-for/devotion-to His Heavenly Father.

He treasured God’s Word & obeyed Him scrupulously, impelled by love.

X keeps His Father’s word just as He told His listeners (51)

“*If anyone keeps My word he will never see death.*”

I.e., he will enjoy a life-giving relationship w/ Him, that’s like His union w/ His Heavenly Father.

X came to earth with comprehensive knowledge of God & graciously offered it to His own people—the greatest outpouring of divine information in all of history.

If they hadn’t been bound up in sin, & drunk w/ rebellion against God, they’d have declared Him a national treasure, enshrined Him in the Temple, and waited in long lines just to spend 5 minutes listening to Him.

But instead, they rejected, mocked, & finally murdered Him.

Why? Because they didn’t know God, & they never had.

The prophet Hosea had warned them=> *“Listen to the word of the LORD, O sons of Israel, For the LORD has a case against the inhabitants of the land, Because there is no faithfulness or kindness Or **knowledge of God in the land**”* (Hos 4:1).

Jesus added what might at 1st seem like a strange statement:

“If I say that I do not know Him, I will be a liar like you.”

Why might our Lord ever say He didn't know God?

Because He knew His Jewish listeners were seething w/ anger because He'd said He did.

They were liars, who said they knew God when they didn't, and they were putting the pressure on Him to lie and to say that He didn't know God, despite the fact that He truly/actually did.

Even though He was aware that His claiming to know God would widen the breach between Him/them, He had to tell the truth, because God cannot lie (Titus 1:2).

X would not loosen His grip on the truth, to gain acceptance w/ His audience, and reduce their pressure on Himself, or the tension between Him/them.

Jesus' words “a liar like you” were strong language designed to provoke a crisis, but not a conflict.

He was telling them the truth=> they were liars who did not know God, & would spend eternity w/ Satan, the father of all lies/liars, unless they repented of their sin, kept X's own words, & placed their faith in Him, as their Lord/Savior. Jesus wasn't trying to insult them, but to rescue them from their own selfishness and self-deception.

He was revealing Himself fully as God's Son, pursuing them, & putting the pressure of the truth on them, out of God's infinite love for His people.

2) Jesus reveals Himself to be the Messiah anticipated by Abraham

[Verse 56] (Jesus)=> *“Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.”*

In order to understand this, we must remember that

Abraham was, 1st/foremost, a man of tremendous faith.

In Rom 4, he is referred to as the father of us all who receive God's promise by faith, having the *“faith of Abraham”* (Rom 4:16).

Heb 11 says of him=> *“By **faith** Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going.... / For he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect & builder is God”* (11:8, 10).

Only a person of great faith could leave home when an unseen voice told him to do so, & travel to a distant foreign land, not even knowing where he was going, looking for some sort of city he'd never seen, whose architect/builder is God.

Now, w/ that understanding of the strength of Abraham's faith, we can begin to understand what Jesus meant, when He said Abraham rejoiced to see His day.

He looked forward by faith to the coming messianic age & all its promise, *having seen them & having welcomed them from a distance* " (as Heb 11:13 puts it).

The Messianic Age had begun w/ the birth of Christ.

Abraham foresaw the incarnation of Messiah by faith, and rejoiced in the Messianic Age he knew it would bring, as if he were part of it himself.

Abraham was a man whose strength of faith in God enabled him to see future things in his mind; but how?

1) He saw God's **promises** fulfilled w/ his eyes of faith.

God had promised (Gen 12:2, 3)=> *"I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; / And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."*

Then when God promised that Abraham's wife Sarah would give birth to a child w/i a year, his faith saw it as God's beginning to fulfill His promise of a great nation through which the whole of earth would be blessed.

That meant the Messiah would come from a nation, that would come forth from Abraham's son, Isaac, as God had promised, when He said=>

“In Isaac your descendants shall be called”
(Heb 11:18).

When we look at all of God’s promises to us in His Word thru the lens of faith, they can become so real to us, that we too rejoice in them, as Abraham did.

2) He looked at **Isaac** by faith as a living prophecy of Messiah Himself.

Isaac had been to him the son of God’s promise, because he had waited 30 years for God to fulfill His promise & give him Isaac.

His was a miraculous birth, long after Sarah’s time of child-bearing had past, & when Abraham was 100.

Isaac’s name meant “Laughter,” and he must always have brought a smile to Abraham’s face, because he saw in Isaac a prophetic picture of Messiah, whose virgin birth would also be miraculous/supernatural act of the H.S.

Jesus is the One who brings a smile to our faces.

He is for us, the Son of God’s promise, for a very bright future, in the Kingdom, & in the presence of God.

3) Abraham saw X’s day as he looked at the **altar** on Mt. Moriah, w/ Isaac lying on it bound, waiting to die at his father’s, just as God the Father would slay his only begotten Son at Mt. Calvary.

Then, when Abraham found a ram caught in the thicket, who could serve as a substitute for his son, he saw the day prophetically when God's Son would be offered as a substitutionary sacrifice for our sins.

Heb 11:17, 19=> *“By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his **only begotten son**; // He considered that God is able to **raise people** even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type.”*

The patriarch may not have understood every theological detail of all this, but he understood enough to rejoice.

So X said to His Jewish listeners=> *“Your father Abraham rejoiced to see **My day**, and he saw it and was glad.”*

The day X called “*My day*” was the day of His crucifixion.

As usual, the Jews failed to understand what He meant.

[Verse 57]=> *“So the Jews said to Him, ‘You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?’”*

Jesus hadn't told them that He had seen Abraham, or even that Abraham had seen Him—He said Abraham saw His day.

Unlike Abraham, the notion of seeing by faith was totally foreign to these latter-day descendants of his.

Approaching Jesus' words from their faithless perspective, they prob. thought His words proved He was insane.

For what X had said, to be true (they thought), & for Him to have seen Abraham, He'd have to be 2000 years old.

Here was the Messiah, revealing Himself to His chosen people, & all they could do was try to prove that He was wrong/insane.

Jesus reveals Himself to be God

[Verse 58]=> “*Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you [this is another of those markers of solemn/sublime truth], before Abraham was born, I am.’*”

Not “Before Abraham was born, I was”—but “*I am.*”

Jesus was taking God’s sacred covenant name to Himself=> “I am.”

It is a shortened form of the name by which He revealed Himself to Israel, at the burning bush in Exod 3—“*I am who I am.*”

This is a name that reflects God’s eternal timelessness=>

I always am, not constrained by the dimensions/parameters of time—past/present/future—as is every created being, but transcending the very limits, limitations, and boundaries of time, as the Creator of time.

This is the way God identified Himself in Isa 43=> “*I am God. / Even from eternity I am He*” (43:12-13).

Because Jesus is God of very God, whose existence extends beyond the limits of time, His promise to us, “*If anyone keeps My word he will never see death,*” is assured of fulfillment.

The believer will always live, because his Savior, the Author of time/life, will always live.

Abraham’s life began at conception, & was fully realized at birth.

By contrast, Jesus' life had no beginning, & has no end.

He was the Logos, who was God before time (Jn 1:1), &

He is the One of whom Rev 1:8 says, “*I am the Alpha and the Omega, ’ says the Lord God, ’who is, & who was, & who is to come—the Almighty. ’*”

Jesus is simultaneously the One who is, who was, and who is to come.

X is the Redeemer whom Abraham saw in the distance by faith.

And when he saw Him, it made him rejoice w/ gladness.

He is the One to whom the gospel bids us come for the forgiveness of our sins.

And He is eternal God, who is “*able also to save forever those who draw near to God thru Him*” (Heb 7:25).

There are many people, including those who call themselves Jehovah’s Witnesses, who deny that Jesus is God.

Someone: How do they deny it in view of verse 58, where Jesus said, “*Before Abraham was born, I am*”?

Ans: By simply mistranslating it.

The original Gk wording is *ego eimi*, a present tense verb which can only mean, “*I am.*”

Ironically, they translate *ego eimi* as “I am” throughout this chapter, in verses 12/18/24/28, and in verse 23 they correctly translate *ego ouk eimi* as “I am not.”

But when they come to the critical text in verse 58, they cheat, and translate it “I have been” (a mistranslation) to accommodate their belief that Jesus made no claim of being God, whose essence/nature is timeless/eternal.

If they were honest w/ themselves and w/ the text, they’d have to conclude that He did.

*** The Rejection**

[Verse 59]=> *“Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple.”*

The Jewish people to whom X was speaking, angrily rejected His claim to be God, so they prepared to stone Him to death (another inexplicable truth for JW’s).

Lev 24:16 said that if anyone blasphemed the name of the Lord, he was to be put to death.

The Jews, hardened in their unbelief, and unwilling to consider the possibility that Jesus actually was God, God’s Son, the Messiah, decided that His claim to be God was false, & was therefore blasphemy.

And Jesus didn’t say they had misunderstood His meaning. They should have believed Him, & in doing so, they should have kissed Him in adoration, & fallen at His feet in worship.

They should have praised God in heaven for sending the Messiah in their generation.

But instead, they picked up stones, determined to kill Jesus.

When Jesus reveals who He is (God/God's Son/Messiah), man must either accept Him for who He is, or reject Him.

But he cannot modify Him, remaking Jesus to be more acceptable to modern man's tastes.

* If we accept His claims, we will bow before Him in humble, repentant faith, & ask Him to do His wondrous/saving work in our hearts.

* If we reject Him (like the Jewish people in our text), we can become hardened against Him, in bitter unbelief.

When the Jews picked up stones, Jesus hid Himself (probably making Himself invisible), and He left the Temple.

What an irony, that having revealed Himself as the Son of God, the Messiah anticipated by Abraham, and God of very God, Jesus should now hide Himself from these same people, in response to their rejection of Him.

But it was more than ironic—it was terribly sad.

Abraham had seen X's day by faith, even though it was 2000 years removed from his own day.

Abraham's descendants had refused to see X as the Messiah even when He stood right there before them.

This illustrates why it's so important to read Jesus' words w/ eyes of faith, and an open mind.

In the next chapter, Jesus will say (9:39)=> *“For judgment I came into this world, so that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind.”*

The Jews to whom X had revealed Himself had seen Him,
w/ their eyes, but they were spiritually blinded to
Him by unbelief.

Then He vanished from their sight, & hid from them,
blinding them to Him altogether.

**Question: Do you look to the past/future by faith as
Abraham did?**

* Have you looked back to Jesus on the cross, & seen Him as
your Savior, bearing your sins, & dying your death?

There is no more magnificent sight to the soul, because it is
the sight that gives us new/eternal life, by faith.

* Have you looked forward to X's coming again to meet you in
the air?

This is our great anticipation, & should make us glad, just
as seeing X's day coming brought Abraham such
gladness/joy.

We don't know when Jesus will come, & He may not come
till after our own deaths—but we know that He will
come, just as Abraham knew He'd come.

Fix your eyes by faith on X's future coming as King, to
right every wrong, and to rule the world in
righteousness.

It won't be long now, & if you have eyes of a faith that is
strong enough, you can already see it on the horizon.

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Text: John 8:54-59

1. Abraham’s faith looked forward two thousand years, foresaw the coming of the Messiah, and rejoiced; but Abraham’s descendants in Jesus’ day had [6 no] such eyes of faith.

Jn 8:39; Jms 2:23; Jn 1:13

2. Growing up in the nurture and admonition of a godly parent is a great advantage; but it does not guarantee that the person himself will [16 believe] in Christ.

In John 8:54-59 we find Jesus’ ultimate *revelation* of Himself, and His utter *rejection* by the children of Abraham...

*** The Revelation**

Jn 8:53; 8:50

Jesus will now make three great revelations about Himself...

Jesus reveals Himself to be the Son of God

[John 8:54]

3. Jesus referred to God as “*My Father*” implying that He Himself was the [8 Son] of God.

Jn 3:16; 1:2; Heb 1:3; Jn 11:4

4. In stark contrast to God’s honoring and glorifying His Son, Jesus’ Jewish listeners were [24 dishonoring] Him.

Jn 8:49; 8:41

[Verse 55]

5. Throughout eternity Jesus had not been learning about God, because Jesus Himself is God, and had always had [10 full] knowledge of God.

Jn 8:51; Hos 4:1; Titus 1:2

6. Jesus’ words, “*a liar like you,*” were strong language; He was telling them the truth: They were liars who did not know God.

Jesus reveals Himself to be the Messiah Anticipated by Abraham

[Verse 56]

Rom 4:16; Heb 11:8, 10, 13

Abraham was a man whose strength of faith in God enabled him to see future things in his mind...

*7. He saw God's [18 promises] fulfilled with his eyes of faith.

Gen 22:18

*8. He looked at [12 Isaac] by faith as a living prophecy of Messiah.

*9. Abraham saw Christ's day as he looked at the [12 altar] on Mt. Moriah with Isaac lying on it.

[Verse 57]

Jesus reveals Himself to be God

[Verse 58]

10. Jesus was taking God's sacred covenant [10 name] to Himself.

Isa 43:12-13; Jn 1:1; Rev 1:8

11. Christ is the One to whom the gospel bids us come for the forgiveness of our sins; and He is eternal [8 God].

Heb 7:25

* **The Rejection**

[Verse 59]

Lev 24:16

12. When Jesus reveals who He is (God's Son, Messiah, and God of very God), man must either accept Him for who He is, or [14 reject] Him.

Jn 9:39

13. The Jews to whom Christ had revealed Himself had seen Him with their eyes, but they were spiritually blinded to Him by [18 unbelief].

14. Fix your eyes by faith on Christ's future coming as [10 King] to right every wrong, and to rule the world in righteousness.