

WHO IS JESUS?
John 8:48-59

Back to John 8...

What is life's greatest question? – Most people would say life's greatest question is either, 'Why am I here?, what is my purpose on this earth?', or, 'What will happen to me when I die?', or, 'How can I be happy and find true satisfaction?', or, 'Can I find lasting love?', etc....

Those are all important questions – but *none* of them are ultimate, *none* of them get to the real root question, the question behind all other questions.

In fact, all of those other personal questions are flawed and only lead to a dead-end – UNLESS they cause you to dig down deep enough to face life's ultimate & most foundational question.

See, to know life's greatest question, you have to open history's greatest Book – the most published, most powerful, most read, and most hated Book ever: The Bible.

Right here in Jn. 8, as in many other places in Scripture, we are introduced to life's greatest question: v. 53c, Jesus' enemies to Jesus, "Whom do You make Yourself out to be? Who do You think You are?"

OR as Jesus once said to Peter, "Who do you say that I am?" (Mk 8, etc.)

'Who is Jesus?' – THAT, beloved, is life's greatest question. –

Get that answer right, and all else falls into place. – Get that answer wrong, and nothing comes right in the end, nothing.

Review Jn. 7-8: Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus in the temple, confronting 'believers', vv. 30ff...

...whom Jesus calls slaves of sin and sons of the devil...

That doesn't exactly cool things down or ease the tensions on that day in the temple. – In fact, ever since Jn. 2 and Jesus' 1st cleansing of the temple, the tensions have only mounted – the temperature of unbelief and hatred of Jesus has only risen hotter and hotter and hotter.

Here, in today's passage, that hostility against Jesus boils over and explodes – the worst we've seen so far.

BUT WHY does Jesus do this? – Why does He seem to just fan the flames, to intensify the conflict? –

Isn't He the Prince of Peace, the Wonderful Counselor? – Why does He keep saying things to the Jews here that only exacerbate the problem, that will eventually get Him killed?

WHY? – Because of His grace, because of His merciful love for sinners.

As one preacher states: *It is a mercy to shatter false securities. It is a mercy to devastate false religion. It is a mercy to strip people locked in some form of religious deception, strip them naked of that deception. These are people with the emperor's clothes. They need to be exposed for what they are. Their false religion needs to be dealt with in a very strong, stern confrontation.* (MacArthur)

+ If your loved one had a terminal disease, for which you carried the cure in your hands – *how hard* would you try to get that cure to them? –

Would *anything* deter you? – Would you care what they thought of you, what names they called you, or how hard they tried to ignore you or resist you?

No ways! – Who cares! – You love them and you will do whatever it takes to persuade them to receive this cure, *before it is too late!*

So it is with Jesus here on that day in the temple.

☒ And so it should be with us in our witness today, no matter how hostile world the world becomes against Christians.

Christian, has anything changed today? – Does Jesus need to be present physically for things to get heated? –

Never! – The moment any witness for Christ declares the truth about who Jesus really is, expect it – there will be hostility. –

So we must learn here from Christ about how to be His witnesses

About what to expect, how to handle hostility, how to respond to it;
About how to be a faithful and gracious witness, a bold and loving messenger for Christ,

...even if it costs you your life – even if your head is the next one to get cut off.

Stand, Read & Pray: ...thanks for how You work all things for good, how You used tension and heated conflict to reveal Your glory...

Give title...

***FOUR CYCLES of lies answered by the truth about Christ – that we might rejoice in who He is and witness as He does:**

1. vv. 48-51, Christ the HUMBLE Son who defeats death

Look at v. 48 – ‘So the Jews answered and said to Jesus, “Have mercy, forgive us oh Lord for our deafness of heart, resisting Your Word. Satan has taken us captive, we are following lies. Open our ears to Your truth, open our eyes to who You really are!’ –

Is that what they said?! – Hardly.

v. 48a – NB, not a once off insult, but a regular one, a saying amongst them. – Do you realise what a bad reputation Jesus had, what a cloud hung over Him for most of His public ministry?...

Samaritan = A very low-blow. – Half-breeds, hybrids & defectors, hated by the Jews – the product of intermarriage & defiling the Jewish race after the exiles had returned from Babylon. –

Worse than Gentiles, because they had sold their birthright, traitors of the rankest kind.

Recall Jn. 4, what the woman at the well said: “Jews have NO dealings with Samaritans”, none whatsoever.

Demon-possessed = Thrown at Him multiple times in his ministry.

I.e., ‘Who else but a demonised man would rebuke the righteous? To speak such ugly words to such fine people – he is demon-possessed, we are God-possessed.

‘Only Satan could get things so backwards – accusing Abraham’s offspring – instead calling them slaves of sin and sons of Satan?!

‘Has this Jesus been dabbling in the occult to reach such outrageous conclusions about pious Jews like us?!

☒ This is what false religion does! – Including nominal Christianity and unsaved believers and a dead Church – they reverse everything. – They call evil good, and good evil – it’s what false prophets have always done.

Look here: *They think God is speaking when it is Satan speaking, and they think Satan is speaking when it is God speaking!* –

It doesn’t get more backwards than that! – Indeed, Satan is the Father of Lies (v. 44).

HOW do you respond to lies? – With truth and truth alone...

v. 49 – I.e., ‘Why would a demonic man be so devoted to God’s glory? Impossible!

‘No, YOU are the God-haters because of the way you are treating Me. Your behaviour betrays demonic involvement, not mine.’

v. 50a – Jesus says this many times (cf. 5:41; 7:18, etc.). – In His full humanity, bombarded by temptation, assaulted by Satan and by sin – how often must He have had to remind Himself of this:

v. 50a (repeat)...

What a claim, what a liberated Man, like none other who has ever lived! – Free from any trace of pride or self-seeking! – What a life!

I.e., Jesus is saying, 'I'm here in humiliation, I gave up my glory.'

Philippians 2, He set it aside, right? 'Thought it not robbery or something to be grasped at, to hold onto His equality with God, stripped Himself of all that, took on the form of a slave, took on the likeness of man all the way down to death, even the death of the cross.'

This is His humiliation. – This is the essence of His incarnation. – He came to give God glory.

If He wanted his own glory, He'd have stayed where He was in Heaven. – And He wouldn't be saying all these hard, unpopular things!

...Even at Jesus' trial, He was silent. He doesn't defend Himself. – He doesn't seek His own glory.

v. 50b – 'I.e., I don't need to defend Myself or seek My own glory. There is Someone else who already does a great job of that – Almighty God, my very own Father!'

He "seeks" – He is determined to make Me famous, He will ensure that one day, b/c of My humiliation, followed by My exaltation – He will insist that "every knee will bow and every tongue confess" that I am Lord, to glory of God the Father (Php. 2:9-11)!

And He will judge, and He will vindicate Me. – He's done it already – at My baptism, at My transfiguration....

And He will do it at My resurrection, and once-and-for-all at My return to this earth!

'And My Father will also judge YOU – you who are rejecting His own dear Son. You who refuse to honour the One whom God honours. You who hate God's only beloved Son.'

Repeat: v. 50b...

'You may have reached a verdict on who I am. But God will render the final verdict, and that will overturn all other verdicts.'

☒ Also a principle & application here for us all – as we seek to slay our pride and grow in humility:

Bible verse handed to Eric Little when he chose not to run in the Olympics because it was on a Sunday. – 1 Sam. 2:30, "Those who honour Me, I will honour."

Repeat: v. 50...

v. 51 – One of the boldest, most radical promises Jesus ever makes. – A verse that should be read at every funeral!

Makes me think of Heb. 2:14-15 – that Christ, "through death might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil [their father here!], and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives."

+ In 1973, Ernest Becker wrote a book that won the Pulitzer Prize and was very popular, called, *The Denial of Death*. – It's a secular author, proving that the fear of death haunts the human animal like nothing else, it is the reason we do most of what we do – all of life is designed to avoid death or deny it in some form or another.

We live our whole lives preparing for death, dreading death, fearing death, trying to escape or at least prolong and delay death....

YET Becker offers no answer, no hope. – Only proof of the problem. – But Christ offers the solution!

Reread Jn. 8:51...

NB, first the CONDITION, not a universal promise or a blank check for anyone fearing death: "IF anyone KEEPS My Word" –

I.e., if you believe the gospel, if you receive Christ and hear His truth and face your sin & guilt and respond to Christ's promise of salvation!...

NB also the PROMISE: Jesus didn't just say, 'You won't ever die.' He puts it much more strongly....!

NB, even His own enemies clarify what He means in v. 52, "will never even taste death"?! –

+ The Christian dies, gets to Heaven, and says, 'Oh, was that death. I didn't even taste it, hardly noticeable! (or, wow, that was delicious, to die is gain, that was the best thing that could've ever happened to me!)' –

You reach the Celestial City and are so overcome by God & Christ, and by glory & joy & LIFE – that you forget entirely that you had to cross Death's cold, cruel river to get there!

*In mansions of glory and endless delight
I'll ever adore Thee in heaven so bright,
And say when the death dew lies cold on my brow
If ever I loved Thee, My Jesus 'tis now!*

BUT WAIT – Christians still have to die physically. – None of us is promised some special Enoch or Elijah exit! – What then does Jesus' mean?

Recall Jn. 5:24... I.e., once saved, you have already left the realm of "death" – sin's penalty & guilt, death's rule & dominion....

Jump ahead to Jn. 11:25-26... This is the paradox for the Christian:

You die, but you don't die ultimately. – Your body perishes, but your soul lives on, and even your body too will be raised one day!

Back to 8:51 – reread...

Must = The Christian never faces what Rev. 20-21 calls “the 2nd death” – ‘dying in your sin’ (Jn. 8:21) –

I.e., ultimate death; final, eternal death as judgment for sin and permanent verdict for unbelievers – a sentence to be carried out in Hell, forever, a living death.

☒ Christian, do you believe you have “eternal life” as Jesus promises repeatedly in His Word? (cf. 6:47!) –

NB, eternal life, by definition, cannot end. – Your new life with God, your new relationship & fellowship & communion with Him through Christ – that cannot be interrupted by death – NOT for 1 min. or 1 sec or 1 millisecond!

+ Can we stand at a fellow believer’s graveside or casket and say – ‘Win Hartman is not dead! Robin Barker is not dead! Carol Beyl is not dead! Those Egyptian martyrs beheaded last week, if true believers, they are not dead!’

Oh sure, their bodies have died. – “Asleep”, as the Bible puts it, for a while, until Jesus wakes them.

But their souls have *not* died. – Nor are their souls asleep! –

Those believers are personally, consciously, fully enjoying the presence of the Lord Himself in Heaven.

“Absent from the body, present with the Lord!”, 2 Cor. 5 says.

~ D.L. Moody quote, ‘One day you’ll hear that D.L. Moody is dead. Don’t you believe it. At that point, I’ll be more alive than ever!’

~ Another saint, ‘I’m not waiting to die. I’m waiting for Him, for Christ. When He comes or when He calls, I will be with Him, I will not be dead!’

Repeat v. 51...

REMEMBER to whom Jesus is saying this?! – His enemies – blaspheming, scoffing mockers! –

Yet *still* He is offering them life, while they plot His death!

If ever it was ‘casting pearls before swine, and answering fools according to their folly’, you would think it’s here?! – YET *still* Christ’s mercy is extended....

☒ O that we would love the lost more like this! – O that we would invite the lost & welcome them & compel them to come in more like this (incl those who think they’re saved, cf. vv. 30-31!)....

2. vv. 52-56, Christ the OBEDIENT Son anticipated by Abraham

vv. 52-53 – I.e., ‘You think you have power over death itself? Ridiculous! Even our great Jewish heroes – none of them could conquer death. Who do you think you are, Mr. Death-Slayer, Mr. Tomb Raider?! Since when did you defang death and render it powerless?!’

In their minds, this was the most demonic thing Jesus ever said!

HOW do you respond to lies? – With truth, pure truth...

vv. 54-55 – If Jesus denied His deity, if Jesus said He was anything other than the very Son of God, the perfectly obedient Son – if Jesus said otherwise, then He would be lying (v. 55).

As John keeps on showing us: *The Father is the key to understanding the Son. – And the Son is the key to understanding the Father. – Separate them, and you cannot understand either of them.*

I.e., ‘You claim to know God the Father, yet you reject Me. That cannot be. Either you show your love for the Father by loving Me, or you show your hatred of the Father by hating Me.’

☒ We live in an age where spirituality is ‘in’, and religion can be trendy in some places, and ‘interfaith’ has become cool, since ‘all roads lead to heaven’ and there are ‘many paths to God’, and ‘many different sides of the elephant’, but all the same elephant, right?!...

NOT SO, says Jesus here & often in John’s Gospel.

It doesn’t matter how religious a person claims to be, how spiritual, how tapped into the spirit world & interfaith & esoteric whatever. –

If they don’t love Jesus Christ, they do not know God; they are following Satan.

NB, v. 54, HOW will the Father glorify & exalt His Son? –

In the most ironic, unexpected way – through the worst humiliation imaginable, the shame & agony of the cross.

v. 56 – Yikes: Just saying “the day” would’ve been fine; but not “MY day”?! – I.e., ‘I am Messiah, I was the source of Abraham’s joy, I was the focus of Abraham’s hopes, I was the object of Abraham’s faith!’

I.e., ‘You claim to be Abraham’s sons, but how about just being Abraham’s students. If he is your revered patriarch, then sit at his feet for a moment. Take a page from Abraham’s book. Find out what made him tick!’

HOW did Abraham, some 2,000 years earlier, “see” Jesus “day”? – Doesn’t say specifically – so seems best not to limit it to any one incident. – But rather, to take it as a summary statement of Abraham’s whole journey of faith:

From Gen. 12 – told that through his family, God would bless the world and bring salvation blessing to the nations....

Then reiterated & expanded in Gen. 15 & 17 & 22...

And we're told in Abraham's most famous verse, Gen. 15:6...

If you had to pin it (v. 56) down to one event in Abraham's life, of course we would say?...
– The pinnacle of Abraham's faith, Gen. 22, the sacrifice of Isaac.

Heb. 11:13, speaking of Abraham & Sarah: "All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance."

Heb. 11:19, Abraham "considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead, from which he also received Isaac back as a type." – probably pointing to Christ!

Abraham and Sarah saw what God revealed as a dim, distant reality, but even that brought Abraham joy.

☒ NB again, Jesus inviting His enemies, loving His opponents, stretching out His arms:

'Don't you want to trade in your bitterness for Abraham's joy? Don't you want to swap your hatred for Abraham's happiness – by repenting of your unbelief and placing your trust in Me?

'Why would you scoff at what the patriarchs & prophets rejoiced in?!'

+ James White last week in light of ISIS beheading of 21 Egyptian Christians:

*...**To my Muslim readers** [and to any lost here today!]: ...[True Christians] worship only one God, and we do not worship the cross. We glory in what God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit did on that cross. All of time before the cross looked forward to it—all time will forever look back to it. It is the center point of time.*

There the God-Man gave Himself utterly freely, voluntarily, becoming sin in the place of every man, woman and child who would ever put their faith and trust in Him as their sin-bearer, as their Savior.

God joined His people to the Messiah there on the cross, which is why He had to be so much more than a mere prophet.

He bore in Himself the wrath justly due to their sin, so that they could have forgiveness. How can we not, I ask you, Muslim friend, glory in the cross? For there the God of Abraham fulfilled what He had pictured on the mountain when Abraham offered his unique son, so long ago.

God gave us life at the cross, and we rejoice. And our deepest desire is that you, too, come to know that life, through Him who gave Himself so freely there.

3. vv. 57-58, Christ the UNCREATED Son of God

In comes the next round of sarcasm & scorn:

v. 57 – 'Most of us were around long before you were born, and you want to tell us about seeing Abraham? Who are you kidding?'

'You never met Abraham. How do You know what Abraham's joy is? How do You know what Abraham saw? How do You know what Abraham knew?'

HOW do you respond to lies? – With truth, pure truth...

v. 58 – *Ego eimi*. – How could any sane man claim this about Himself unless...He was God?

NB, Jesus does NOT say, 'I was'. – Nor does HE say, 'I have been'. Did you know that's what the Jehovah's Witness New World Translation/Perversion says? – Because that allows still for a created Christ, the false Christ that they proclaim. –

WHY here do the JWs translate *ego eimi* different from every other place in John's Gospel? – Here's why:

For the same reason the Jews pick up stones in the next verse. – Because they know exactly what Jesus means, that He is 100% God. –

And they hate that & refuse to believe it.

Reread: v. 58 – We knew this from Jn. 1:1ff. – But this drives it home all the more! – What a magnificent declaration! – Jesus' strongest, clearest claim to Deity in John's entire Gospel.

NB again, the "I AM" language of deity. – Takes us back again to that burning bush, that holy ground where Moses' first removed his shoes. –

Exod. 3:14, God's special covenant name revealed to Moses: "I am that I am" – Yahweh = always existing, eternal, ever-present One.

Prophetic echoes here too: Isa. 41:4, "I, the LORD, with the first of them and with the last, I AM HE". – Isa. 43:10, "Yes, and from the ancient days, I AM HE".

NB, Jn. 8:58 is not about Jesus' age; it's about His identity. – He's NOT just saying Jesus pre-existed, but that He has *always* existed.

Not just saying He was older than Abraham, but that He had no beginning. – 'Begotten, not made' as we say in the Nicene Creed.

+ One of Paul's many superb points in his debate in Makhado/L.Trichardt last week – video link will be in church newsletter this week – watch it!

Everything that has ever existed falls into 2 categories: created & uncreated. – Under "created" is everything except the Godhead. – Under "uncreated" is only God, the Creator, our triune God, eternally existing in three Persons.

NB, YES, Jesus had two natures – a divine & a human nature. –

His human nature was created – conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, at a point in time in history. –

NOT SO with Jesus' divine, uncreated, eternal nature. – As the eternal Son of God, He always existed.

'Remaining what He was, He became what He was not.' – Without removing any of His deity, in the incarnation He added humanity to Himself – He took on a 2nd nature.

☒ Jesus is God. – Not a 2nd God, not a lesser god, not god-like, but God – THE one God, eternally existing in three persons.

+ Muslims retort, 'But Jesus never said, "I am God."' – But Jesus also never said the exact four words, "I am a prophet," or "I am a man". – Yet who denies that Jesus was a prophet or a man?

Jesus' entire life & ministry had "I am God" written across it in blazing letters. –

Jesus proved He was God by the titles used by Him and about Him, the attributes He displays, the works He does, and the claims He makes.

Repeat: v. 58...

+ How different we puny creatures are compared to the uncreated Christ, the God-Man!:

We are mortal, we feel constantly threatened by time's flow. – The moments, days & years slip from our grasp no matter how frantically we try to hold on to them. –

NOT SO with Christ. – He holds all time in His hands. – Says one writer:

He is the eternal Christ sharing the everlasting life of the Father, the changeless Lord who towers over history, Master of time, Ruler of the ages, undiminished by the passing of the centuries, 'the same yesterday and today and forever' (Heb. 13:8).

Micah 5:2, Messiah's 'goings forth are from of old, from everlasting'!

Isaiah's "Immanuel", "Mighty God", God with us (Isa. 7:14; 9:6)!

☒ No truth is more practical, no truth is more comforting, than the deity of Christ! – If Jesus is not God, our faith is in vain, Christianity collapses! –

HOWEVER, IF the One that we trust in – to forgive our sins, to give us eternal life, to conquer death (v. 51!) –

IF He is no mere man, but is God the Son – then we can trust Him!

He made the world, He created us, He is able to save us, He hears our prayers,

He gave us His Word & His Spirit, and He will return again to take us home, and He will reign forever!

We can be sure of all that because Jesus is God! – v. 58...!

4. v. 59, Christ the HATED but HIDDEN Son

+ Enemies of Jesus & the Bible will say that Jesus' famous claim, *ego eimi*, is just a common Greek phrase for 'It's me', with no special significance. –

Which is true, apart from any special context that indicates otherwise. – But where else did someone say, 'It's me', and get these kinds of reactions?

Jn. 18, Jesus says, "I Am", and the soldiers fall down! – Jesus here says "I am", and they want to kill Him.

v. 59a – NB, if Jesus had claimed to be an angel, they probably wouldn't have picked up stones. – But they knew He was claiming far more than that. – This was blasphemy in their eyes, claiming to be equal to God. – Like we saw already:

5:18...

NB back in Jn. 8:59: No trial here, no due course, no hearing, just rage & fury – b/c they believed lies instead of the truth. – They want to kill Him on the spot, instantly – like a pack of bloodthirsty hounds.

Jn. 1:11 all over again, "He came to His own, but His own received Him not."

☒ HOW stupid is unbelief! – Thinking their little rocks can destroy the Rock of Ages. – Thinking their little schemes & plots can stop them from having to answer to the eternal I am, Almighty God.

One last time – look at how GOD responds to lies, with the truth of His power & protection...

v. 59b – NB marginal note, literally: "was hidden". – By whom? – God ultimately. – The One they hate, God hid. –

God took the Light of the World that could've saved them out of darkness – God turned off that Light and took Him away from them.

As we keep seeing in chps. 7-8, Jesus' "hour had not yet come". – We are invincible until our work for God is done. –

A hidden hand protected Jesus. – He was destined to die. – Yet, not by stoning, but by crucifixion.

CONCL. – Repeat 4 cycles...

+ This is the Church's role in society – to answer lies with the truth about Christ. – As we'll be discussing in Bible Hour today – the Church's role is not just to be a moral voice, a moral conscience, a moral arbiter on issues. – Judaism & Hindus & many Muslims could do that also!

No, our role is to proclaim this one truth – to declare God's answer to this great question, 'Who is Jesus?' – history's greatest, eternity's greatest question!

+ This ends Jn. 7-8, all occurring probably during their Feast of Tabernacles – the favt festival for many – called “the season of our gladness”. – Yet this time, there was anything but gladness. – It was all hatred & hostility, all because of Christ.

Even in those who claimed to “believe”, vv. 30ff, their joy was only superficial and short-lived. –

When tested, it turned out that beneath their fake faith was just more hatred for Christ – no joy in Christ whatsoever.

+ What does it look like share in Abraham’s gladness (v. 56)? – All he had were shadows & a very rough sketch of Messiah, looking forward. – We look back to the Christ who has come, and has now given us a detailed, full picture of Him in His Word. – And we anticipated His 2nd Coming back to this earth!

☒ But what does this gladness of faith in Christ look like? – A recent illustration from our family:

+ Latest from Michelle in CA: Mom’s rehab location, possibly for next few weeks until she is strong enough to get home; a nursing home that is far from ideal:

They are understaffed, so when you walk down the hall, people think you are a nurse and they cry out from their rooms, ‘Help me, help me’.

One lady has lost her mind and just stares at you while laughing incessantly like a hyena. – One night at 10pm, she was competing with another lately who is a screamer, to see who was louder.

One of Mom’s roommates has trouble breathing & swallowing, so she often gurgles and gasps like she is dying.

Others will wander into your room aimlessly. – Others throw plates and break dishes. –

YET in this all, Michelle said, ‘Mom has not lost her joy. Still she is rejoicing in the Lord.’

☒ HOW is that possible? – It is possible b/c Mom knows the answer to life’s greatest question, Who is Jesus? –

Jesus is the very Son of God, the only Saviour for sinners, who has defeated death for us and given us life forevermore!

PRAY