

Sermon, 2018.05.06

Title: Questioning Jesus "Before Abraham was, I am"

Text: John 8:31-36; 51-59

Theme: The most important promises of the Christian faith depend first on whether the claims made by Jesus about His own identity are true, and second how we respond to those claims.

31 To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. 32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." 33 They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?" 34 Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. 35 Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. 36 So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

51 Very truly I tell you, whoever obeys my word will never see death." 52 At this they exclaimed, "Now we know that you are demon-possessed! Abraham died and so did the prophets, yet you say that whoever obeys your word will never taste death. 53 Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?" 54 Jesus replied, "If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. 55 Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and obey his word. 56 Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad." 57 "You are not yet fifty years old," they said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!" 58 "Very truly I tell you," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" 59 At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.

Key Points

1. Jesus calls Himself the same name God uses in the burning bush to reveal the deepest secret of His identity. By doing so He proclaims He is equal with God, and the self-existent cause of all cause.
2. Jesus promises that if we abide in His word, we will truly be His disciples, that we will know the truth, and that the truth will set us free from bondage to sin.
3. Jesus makes clear that putting our hope in religious and moral living is just as much slavery as to be irreligious and immoral.
4. Jesus says He's interested in changing our status with God from one in which we try to earn our salvation to one in which we are accepted unconditionally as a son.
5. Jesus promises that if we abide in Him, we will never see death.
6. Jesus claims His day is the Day of the Lord the Abraham and all the prophets look forward to in the Old Testament.

7. Those listening to Jesus can have only one of two reactions: crown Him or kill Him.
8. Trying to understand Christ, or maintain the integrity of the Christian faith, apart from His claim of divinity isn't possible.
9. Christ is the only way to forgiveness of sin, salvation, and reconciliation with the Father.

Questions for discussion / application:

1. What part of Sunday's text / teaching stood out most to you? Why?
2. Verse 31 indicates those listening to Jesus were people who had believed Him, so why does Jesus push them?
3. What does Jesus mean when he says, "If you abide in my word ... you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."?
4. What is the fundamental problem with those listening to Jesus?
5. Who does Jesus claim He is?
6. What problem do the listeners accuse Jesus of having?
7. What does Jesus mean when He says in Verse 56, "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; and he saw it and was glad."?
8. What is God's saying when he names Himself "I am who I am."? What was the response by Moses and the Jews to God calling Himself, "I am who I am."?
9. What is the response of the listeners when Jesus uses God's name to identify Himself?
10. How would we respond today if we heard someone describe themselves in the terms Jesus described Himself? Why would we react the same — or differently — than Jesus listeners in this passage?
11. Why is the claim that Jesus' divinity was a later "legend" created by His followers wrong?
12. What is the problem for Christianity with changing the identity of Christ as God?
13. What do you think of the Lewis Trilemma — Christ is either liar, lunatic, or God. Can we say Jesus was just a good teacher?
14. What are the major distinctions between Christianity and other religions?
15. Who do you say Christ is?