

Armagh Baptist Church – Sunday 22nd November 2009

'I am the Light of the World – Part 4'

'Who do you think you are?' (v.53)

John ch.8:37-59

Introduction

Last week we looked at that great statement of Jesus:

'If the Son shall set you free, you shall be free indeed!'

We saw first of all that:

1. Sin Enslaves (v.34)

'Everyone who sins is a slave to sin.'

But the problem is that...

2. People don't realize they are enslaved (v.33)

The Jews said: *'We have never been slaves of anyone!'*

Even though we know from history that they had been slaves in Egypt, in Babylon, and at that point in time they were under Roman occupation! So sin enslaves us all. But then we saw that...

3. Jesus Liberates (v.36)

As the Son of God, Jesus can set us free from our sin:

'If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.'

Well, tonight I want to take up the theme of Jesus' discourse from v.33 onwards. The theme running through this is all about Abraham. The Jews were proudly saying that they were Abraham's descendants and had never been slaves of anyone. What they were really saying was that since they were descended from Abraham, the father of the Jewish people, they were special, they were privileged - they thought they were in touch with God from birth. So they were depending on a privilege of their birth as their hope of salvation. They thought they were right with God just because they had been born into Jewish families!

A bit like how people today think they are right with God because they were baptized as infants into a particular church – whether that was the Church of Ireland, or Presbyterian, or Methodist or Catholic Church.

Such people may have little or no time for God now, but they reckon that their baptism as an infant gives them a privileged position as far as God is concerned, and it's on their baptism that they base their hope of salvation.

Well just notice what Jesus goes on to say in v.37,

'I know you are Abraham's descendants, yet you are ready to kill me, because you have no room for my word...'

So Jesus is not denying that physically they may be descended from Abraham, but where is the evidence that they have Abraham's faith in God?

- Why are they ready to kill him?
- Why have they no room for the teachings of Christ?

If they were truly Abraham's descendants then they would not be trying their best to kill Jesus, the Son of God!

If they were truly Abraham's descendants then surely they should sit up and take notice of what the Son of God was trying to teach them?

In other words this is the evidence which Jesus is looking for, as to whether someone is right with God or not?

It's not a matter of what family, or what Church you were born into.

It's not a matter of what Church you were baptized in as a baby.

The question is: Where is the evidence of your faith right here and now?

- Are you for Christ, or against Him?
- Have you room for His Word in your heart?
- Or have you no time for the Word of God?
- Which is it, as far as you are concerned?

Well, despite what Jesus has just said to them, they continue to protest strongly that they belong to their Father Abraham in v.39, to which Jesus says ***'If you were Abraham's children, then you would do the things Abraham did. As it is, you are determined to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things.'***

In fact He goes on to say in vs.42-43:

'If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me. Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say.'

Jesus was making the point very strongly, that if Abraham was truly their father, then Abraham's God would be their God too. He would be their Father.

But in fact they were doing the exact opposite of what Abraham would have done, if he had been alive in Jesus' day.

If Abraham had been alive in the First Century, he would have accepted Jesus gladly as his Saviour! Jesus could say that confidently. We'll see why later...

But in effect they were just proving beyond a shadow of doubt that they were of their father the devil – He was a liar and a murderer from the beginning.

- They refused to accept the truth that Jesus was saying to them.
- And they were determined to kill Jesus too - to murder Him!

So Jesus challenges them in vs.44-47

'You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me? He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God!'

So Jesus, as the Son of God, has just rounded on the Jewish Religious Leaders, telling them exactly what he thinks of them. They were liars and murderers. They refused to believe the Truth he was bringing them from God, and because they refused to believe he was from God, they were determined to kill him. They were liars and murderers. They were of their father the Devil!

Jesus has really rattled them now. He has them defeated. The Jews have run out of arguments, so they resort to name-calling and slander. Here they begin to throw all kinds of accusations against Jesus:

1. Their Accusations about Jesus (vs.48-53)

In response to what Jesus has just said, they accuse him of being a Samaritan – either that or he must be demon-possessed! One was as bad as the other in their minds!!

A Samaritan: We have come across the Samaritans many times in both John's Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles in recent months. We know that there was no love lost between the Jews and the Samaritans. They both had one thing in common – they could trace their ancestry back to Abraham. They both claimed Abraham as the father of their nation. The division between them had only come in 722 BC, when the 10 Northern tribes of Israel were scattered among the nations, and the Assyrians sent some of their own people to live in Samaria, where they intermarried with the remaining Israelites who lived there. So from that point onwards the Jews of the remaining 2 tribes in the South looked down on the Samaritans of the North as half-Jews/half-Gentiles. That's why the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans. So for these Jewish Leaders to call Jesus a Samaritan was a real put-down. Maybe that was why he was debating the fact that Abraham was their spiritual father - or at least that's what they thought anyway!

But then they went further, to say that Jesus was...

Demon-possessed: Jesus had just said that they were of their father the devil. They could only respond by saying that Jesus was demon-possessed!

Jesus doesn't take the argument any further. He simply says, *'I am not possessed by a demon.'* (v.49)

Then He goes on to say:

'But I honour my Father and you dishonor me. I am not seeking glory for myself; but there is one who seeks it, and he is the judge. I tell you the truth, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.'

That was quite a statement for Jesus to make:

'If anyone keeps my word, he will never see death!' (v.51)

The Jews take this as further evidence that Jesus was demon-possessed: *'Now we know that you are demon-possessed! Abraham died and so did the prophets, yet you say that if anyone keeps your word, he will never taste death. Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?'*

Who do you think you are? (v.53)

That's what this argument has come to, these Jewish Religious Leaders, these mere mortals, asking Jesus: *'Who do you think you are?'*

Jesus was the Son of God, come in the flesh, to dwell among us for a short-time, and yet this is the reception he gets, from those who should have known better! These were the very ones who should have hailed his arrival as the Messiah they and their ancestors had been expecting since OT Times! But instead they argue and debate with him, they try to put him down, by calling him a Samaritan and demon-possessed, and when he says, *'If anyone keeps my word, he will never see death!'* They respond by saying: *'Who do you think you are?'* What a thing to say to God your Maker! That's something they are going to have to answer for one day when they stand before him as Judge. He will have every right on that day to say, *'Who did you think you were – talking to me like that?'*

And yet when we listen, day in and day out, to people using the name of Jesus as a swear word, or as an expletive tripping off their lips, there are an awful lot more people who will one day stand before Jesus, who will be asked *'Who did you think you were – treating my name like that!'*

Back in v.24 of this chapter Jesus said,

'I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins.'

Here in v.51 Jesus is actually prescribing the anti-dote to our sin problem:

'I tell you the truth, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.'

And yet all that these men can say is, *'Who do you think you are?'* (v.53).

If we continue in our sins, we will die in our sins, but if we come to Christ and put our trust in Him, we will never see death. Yes we may die physically if the Lord Jesus Christ doesn't come back before our time comes, but if we are still alive at his return then we will not see death. Instead we will be transformed in an instant, we'll be given a glorified resurrection body, and we will go to be with Christ in heaven for all eternity. That's what Jesus meant when he said that we would never see death, if we keep his word.

Jesus simply replied in v.54 by saying:

'If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. 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 keep his word.'

And that brings us to vs.56-58 where...

2. Jesus makes some Claims about Abraham (v.56-58)

There are two claims that Jesus makes about Abraham in these verses that I want you to notice as we close. The first is in v.56, the second is in v.58:

First of all Jesus says in v.56:

'Your Father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad.'

What did Jesus mean by that statement?

Well he meant that Abraham was able to look forward down the ages of time believing with all his heart that one day the Messiah would come, one day God would send a Saviour into the World.

We have to remember that people in the OT got saved in exactly the same way as we do now in NT times: **They believed** by exercising faith in the promises of God that one day a Saviour would come into the world, and lay down his life as an atoning sacrifice for sins, in fulfillment of all the animal sacrifices that had been made throughout the years of the Old Testament.

We believe by exercising faith in the Word of God which tells us that one day 2000 years ago a Saviour did come into this world, born as a baby to the virgin Mary; that he did grow up to live a life as a sinless human being, and that he did go to the cross at Calvary and lay down his life as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world, and that he did rise again on the third day. And if we believe that, then we are saved by God's grace and united with all the OT saints who believed before Jesus ever came into this world.

That's why Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing that day – Jesus says, he saw it and was glad! Glad because salvation would not be just for Jews in that day, but for people of every tribe tongue people and nation. He was glad about that, and we should be too, and believe in Jesus with all our hearts.

The Jews still couldn't believe a word that Jesus said, so they respond by saying: ***'You are not yet 50 years old – and you have seen Abraham!?'***

They just couldn't get their heads around that one!

Well, Jesus did in fact see Abraham. The writer to the Hebrews takes up this theme in Hebrews ch.7 As he refers to Jesus being a Priest forever in the Order of Melchizedek. Melchizedek was one form in which Jesus appeared to Abraham in the Old Testament at the end of Genesis ch.14. Do you remember how Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek – a tenth of all the spoils he had won from the battle with the Kings – when he went to rescue his nephew Lot? But there were other occasions when it says that the Lord **appeared** to Abram at Shechem (Gen 12:7), and as one of the 3 visitors who came to Abram's tent one night to tell him that his wife Sarah was going to give birth to a son even in her old age (Gen 18). Each of those encounters was the pre-incarnate Christ appearing to Abraham in the Old Testament before he was ever born as a baby in Bethlehem's manger.

And all of that brings us to the climax of John ch.8 in v.58 where Jesus says:

'Before Abraham was born, I am!'

There is the full significance of this name 'I am'. We are making our way through the 'I am's of Christ' in John's Gospel, but occasionally we get this name standing alone. Here is one of those occasions. Jesus is not only claiming to be God here, he is claiming to have always existed, not only in time, but indeed throughout eternity past: ***'Before Abraham was, or before Abraham was born - I am - I have always existed, because I am God!'*** Not only was Jesus making claims about Abraham, but he was making claims about himself. As Christ, He is God, and He always was God from eternity past, and he always will be God in eternity future. That's what makes him God! Am I reading too much into this? No! Just take a look at...

3. Their Reaction (v.59)

'At this, they picked up stones to stone him,

but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.'

These Jewish leaders knew exactly what Jesus was claiming, so they picked up stones to stone him to death, because in their eyes he had committed blasphemy – he as a mere man, was claiming to be God!

So this chapter began with the attempted stoning of an adulterous woman in v.5, it ends with the attempted stoning of the sinless Son of God in v.59.

But this chapter certainly left the Jews, and it leaves us, in no doubt as to who Jesus was and is. He is the eternal God come in the flesh, to die for sinners. So either you stay in your sins, and die in your sins; or else you come tonight, hear Jesus' words, respond to Jesus' words, and keep Jesus' words. If you do, you will never see death, but you will have eternal life in heaven with Him!

