

FBC Service Sunday November 26 2023 John 8:31-59 - Jesus – The Great I Am

Who is Jesus Christ? Of all the questions that might be posed to modern men and women, none is more important than this. It's no exaggeration to say that this is the central question of history and the most important issue anyone will ever face.

Who is Jesus Christ? Where did He come from? Why did He come? And what difference does His coming make in my life? In the end, every person must deal with Jesus Christ. No one can escape Him.

You can avoid the question, or delay it, or postpone it, or stonewall it, or pretend you didn't hear it. But sooner or later you will have to answer it.

It's certainly not a new question. It's as old as the coming of Christ to earth.

Even when He walked on this earth, people were confused as to His true identity.

Across the centuries the discussion has continued to this very day. Visit any Internet religious chat room and you'll find a bewildering array of opinions regarding Jesus.

It's quite possible even with a very sincere heart to misunderstand who Jesus is. It's possible for a person to be very sympathetic to spiritual truth and still not understand who our Lord is.

Here are some contemporary answers to the question "Who is Jesus Christ?" A good man ... The Son of God ... A Prophet ... A Galilean rabbi ... The Ultimate Revolutionary ... The Messiah of Israel ... Saviour

... A first-century wise man ... A man just like any other man ... King of Kings ... A misunderstood teacher ... Lord of the Universe ... A deluded religious leader ... Son of Man ... A fabrication of the early church.

You can find people today who will give every one of those possible answers. Does that surprise you? It shouldn't. Two thousand years have passed and still many wonder about the man called Jesus.

The Christian faith is all about Jesus! He is the heart and core, the touchstone of all that we believe. You can be mistaken on some secondary issues and still be a Christian, but if you're wrong about Jesus, you're wrong in the worst possible place.

Our faith in Jesus must be more than just an emotional experience of "having Jesus in my heart." Our faith must rest on the revealed truth about Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord.

The Nicene Creed calls Jesus Christ "very God of very God." He is not "similar" to God. **To call him "God's only Son" means that He is "God the Son,"** and thus worthy of the same worship, adoration, praise, and reverence that we give to God the Father.

Many people today, including some theologians and many liberal Christians, fight against this truth. They want a Christ who is somehow divine but is not truly God.

They want a Jesus who is a good role model, but they don't want him as their God. A good man? Yes. The Son of God from heaven? **Absolutely not!** But that is not possible if we take the Bible seriously.

In the Gospel of John, we find what we call today the "I Am's of Jesus."

- 1- "I am the bread of life" (6:35)
- 2- "I am the light of the world" (8:12)
- 3- "I am the door" (10:7, 9)
- 4- "I am the good shepherd", (10:11)
- 5- "I am the resurrection and the life" (11:25)
- 6- "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (14:6))
- 7- "I am the true vine" (15:1)

8- and then there is another, the eighth one, found in our text this morning in verse 58, oh so majestic, so magnificent and so powerful, "*before Abraham was born, I am*"... not "*I was*", but "*I am*."

At one time or another all of us have said some things we wish we could take back. We often see on television many of the things people have said; particularly celebrities that make them look bad, or just downright silly. Foot in mouth syndrome and slips of the tongue I'm sure has happened to us all.

There are entire TV shows devoted to the foolish and silly things people say. They call these shows, "**bloopers**". Some are extremely funny, but I'm sure embarrassing to those who bear the brunt of the bloopers. For E.G.

1. "I've never had major knee surgery on any other part of my body."
2. "Outside of murders, Washington has one of the lowest crime rates in the country."
3. "That lowdown scoundrel deserves to be kicked by a jackass--and I'm just the one to do it."
4. "After finding no qualified candidates for the position of principal, the school department is extremely pleased to announce the appointment of David Steele to the post."
5. The Low Self-Esteem Support Group will meet Thursday at 7:00 to 8:30. Please use the back door.
6. The Sermon this morning - GOSSIP . . The Speaking of Evil - Closing Song: I Love to Tell the Story

When we read today's text some might be tempted to conclude that Jesus made a blooper.

But these words He spoke were not slips of the tongue, or poor word choices, or mistakes. He knew exactly what He was saying, and what He was saying is the foundation on which our faith stands or falls.

Christianity is all about Christ. It's all about the person of Jesus Christ; His person and His work—who He is; who He claims to be--and our response to that.

This man who lived over 2,000 years ago, and some of the most extraordinary claims that He ever said about Himself are found in this passage that we're looking at this morning. Take a listen!

"Which of you convicts Me of sin? Or can any of you prove Me guilty of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me?" (v.46)

What a bold claim this was. Who among us would dare to invite others to point out our sins?

Jesus can make this invitation because He was without sin.

Verse 46 is a verse worthy of underlining in your Bible, because this is Jesus' word and it's an extraordinary word. Imagine you or I making a statement like that.

"Which of you convinces me of sin?" Perhaps we've said it to our spouses in a disagreement when we've been adamant that we're right about something. But you only need to be married for a short space of time to know the folly of that stance.

But Jesus can say, **think about the extraordinary incredulity of it**, *"Which of you convinces Me of sin?"* "Can any of you prove Me guilty of sin?"

What make this claim so very important? It's important because not one person steps forward and gives evidence of any wrongdoing. **No one! Not one solitary person!**

What has sparked off this extraordinary statement of Jesus is that His listeners, Jesus is saying, wouldn't know the truth if it hit them between the eyes.

They weren't capable of recognizing truth because essentially even though they were the sons of Abraham, they were, in fact, children of the devil. *"You are of your father the devil."* Verse 44 Quote.

Imagine Jesus saying that to a group of Jews in the temple courts. **Their father is the devil.** The devil is a liar. He's always been a liar. He always will be a liar. He's blinded the eyes of his children.

But Jesus, on the other hand, never lies; He's incapable of lying because He is faultless, there isn't the faintest trace of transgression in Him. **Jesus was free from actual sin.**

When He teaches the Lord's Prayer, it's the disciple's prayer, not His prayer. He doesn't need to pray for forgiveness. He has no capacity for sin. There is no inclination to sin.

He doesn't have a fallen human nature inherited from of Adam.

Hebrews 7:26 says about our Lord that *"he is holy and blameless, unstained by sin."*

And Hebrews 4:15 - *He was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.*

And here we have this astounding statement, *"Which of you can truthfully accuse Me of sin?"*

Attempts have been made to find sin in Christ.

Sometimes Jesus' response to the moneychangers in the temple is dragged up as evidence that He may have lost His temper in the temple when He overturned the tables of the moneychangers.

Spurgeon once met someone at a train station who came up to him and said that he was perfect. So Spurgeon stomped his toe. The man yelled and screamed at him, and Spurgeon said, "There, I told you; there's no such thing as perfection." **But Jesus is perfect.**

The Bible records the confession of the sin of David in Psalm 51, and it's one of the most moving episodes in King David's life.

The prophet Isaiah acknowledges that he was a man of "unclean lips."

Job, saintly godly Job, who was known throughout the world for his godliness, repents in dust and ashes.

That's the reality for us as well, isn't it? We also are sinners in need of someone sinless to be our Saviour. That someone is Jesus.

Here is Jesus saying to a group of hostile opponents who are ready to take His life, "*Which of you can accuse Me of sin and wrongdoing?*" This extraordinary claim is met with insults. (v.41, 48)

His hearers are sophisticated in the caustic art of insult and slander.

They don't have any sin to accuse Him of so they cast slurs on His parentage, calling Him a Samaritan, which was about the rottenest thing a Jew could think to say about someone, for "Jews have no dealings with Samaritans," and they also claim He is demon-possessed.

Verse 31 identifies these individuals as "*those Jews who believed in Jesus.*" **So not all faith is saving faith!** When your foes begin to insult you rather than address the issue, you have won the debate.

In verse 51 Jesus says, "*if a man keeps my word, he will never see death.*" Here he claims that anyone who becomes His follower will never die. The Jewish leaders choose to ridicule rather than ask for an explanation.

If they had asked Jesus to explain they would have seen that He was not saying we would never die physically . . . **we all do that.**

In John 14:6 He goes even further. **He is not just A WAY to eternal life . . . He is The way to eternal life.**

The implications of this statement are enormous. First, it means "being saved" involves more than mental assent to a list of truths. It means following, keeping, believing enough to take action.

In verse 56 Jesus Claims to be the Focus of Old Testament Believers

"*Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad.*" Jesus tells his listeners that Abraham looked forward to His coming.

When God promised Abraham that through "his seed" all the nations of the earth would be blessed, **he was talking about Jesus.**

When Moses talked about a prophet that was to come, **he was pointing to Jesus.**

When God told Adam that the seed of the woman would crush Satan's head (Gen. 3:15), **He was talking about Jesus.**

When Isaiah talked about the suffering servant, when Daniel spoke of "one like a Son of Man", when Solomon spoke of the "rose of Sharon".... **they were all pointing to Jesus.**

When God set apart the Day of Atonement it was to be a picture **that pointed to Christ.**

When God established the Passover, it was meant to point to God's activity on our behalf through Christ.

The men and women of the Old Testament believed in the One God would send. They trusted God's promise. **But the greatest claim of all is found in verse 58.**

The final claim is the boldest of all . . . Jesus claims to be God in human form! He said to the people in verse 58, "*Before Abraham was born, I am*". This is not poor grammar . . . Jesus knew exactly what He was saying.

Jesus proclaimed His divinity. The Jews in John eight assumed that if Jesus was saying that Abraham saw His day, then He must have been implying that He had been alive at the time of Abraham.

They asked how that could be. Jesus responded with the statement, "*Before Abraham was born, I AM.*" Jesus is here referring not to His human experience but to His experience as the eternal Son of God.

Jesus is here using the language that God used when He revealed Himself to Moses at the burning bush in Exodus 3:14. There God told Moses when he asked him for His name, **"I am that I am."**

Jesus is the only great religious figure ever to claim that he was not just sent by God, inspired by God or speaking for God, but was in fact God. The Jews who heard Him say this regarded what He said as blasphemy. And they took up stones to stone him for making such an assertion.

They heard Jesus saying, "*That before Abraham existed, Jesus had existed.*" Never was there a time when Jesus was not.

There's no self-consciousness of sin, but there is a self-consciousness of His deity, of His eternal relationship with His Father in heaven.

Paul expanded on this when he wrote to the Philippians in chapter 2? Speaking of Jesus, he begins in verse 5, "*Who being in the form of God.*"

That is to say, possessing all of the attributes and characteristics of deity, that before the creation of the world, before anything else existed, Jesus had form, **He had existence, possessing all the qualities and characteristics of God Himself.**

You see, Jesus is so much more than a moral teacher. There's more to Christianity than bringing your children to Sunday School or knowing tons of Scripture off by heart just like these people Jesus was talking to.

There's more to Christianity than belonging to some religious social club. **It's having a saving relationship with the One who claimed to be God.**

And here is Jesus making these astonishing claims of sinlessness, and that before Abraham He had an existence.

If you or I were to say the sort of things Jesus said, they would lock us up.

They would give us a few stiff sedatives and lock the door. They would nod their heads and say that we're lunatics and they would be right.

So why is it that we gather together in this sanctuary on 418 Greenfield Street in Petrolia Ontario, on Sunday mornings in worship and praise of Jesus?

We're joined here today as men and women who believe this one foundational truth — that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of the Living God. We place our Christian faith and our eternal future upon that fact.

That is the fundamental principle of the church. It's our fundamental organizing principle. It's the thing which makes us forever different from every other organization, guild, club or fraternal order.

I'm saying that we believe something special about someone special.

—We believe that a man once walked this earth who was like no other man who ever lived.

—He said things no other man has ever said.

—He did things no other man has ever done.

—He made claims for himself which, if they are not true, brand him as history's greatest fraud.

—He gathered around himself a group of men who believed his claims.

—He predicted his own death ... and then he predicted his own resurrection.

—He made good on all his claims.

—He died that we might be forgiven, he died to make us good, that we might go at last to heaven, saved by his precious blood.

—After He left, his followers took his message and spread it around the earth.

—And for 2,000 years countless men and women have believed that this man was indeed the Son of the living God. And they have staked their lives upon it.

—That man is Jesus of Nazareth.

—That is what Christians believe.

—That is what this church is all about.

We must be careful to treat our Lord with the reverence and honour He deserves. Be gone with the idea that Jesus is our "pal" or "the man upstairs" . . . **He is our God, the great I Am.**