

JESUS IS THE GREAT I AM
Hear what He says -- Believe what He says.
John 8:46-59

TEXT: *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." The Jews answered him, "Aren't we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?" "I am not possessed by a demon," said Jesus, "but I honor 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." At this the Jews exclaimed, "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?" Jesus replied, "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. Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad." "You are not yet fifty years old," the Jews said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!" "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.*

In Jesus' name, fellow redeemed:

Who do you think you are? These words are usually said with disgust and condemnation. Who do you think you are? What I mean to say is that you are nothing! You are a far cry from what you imagine yourself to be! In fact, my opinion of you is now one of complete disgust because of the pretense you have set before me! Who do you think you are!

The Pharisees and religious leaders leveled this charge against Jesus. Jesus said: *I tell you the truth, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.* The Bible says: *At this the Jews exclaimed, "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?"* They heard what Jesus said and condemned him for it.

May we, however, hear what Jesus says and believe him for JESUS IS THE GREAT I AM.

Those who rejected Jesus had many things to say about who he was. Here, they charged him with seeking glory for himself and for demon possession. Here, Jesus tells them what he IS NOT: *I am not possessed by a demon," said Jesus, "but I honor 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."* Even today, many people who consider themselves to be religious, would be disgusted with Jesus. They hear what Jesus says but do not believe him.

That fact is revealed in no better location than in those places where God's Word is proclaimed in its truth and purity and the Sacraments are administered according to Christ's institution of them. In other words, in our worship services. But the Third Commandment is one of the most difficult commandments for us to teach. That's because there are so many who would say, "You're nuts, Pastor!" Yet Jesus told these unbelieving Jews: *Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad.* What does this mean? Only that Abraham rejoiced at those blessed thoughts of the coming Savior. That's the meditation that glorifies and worships God. Also: *he saw it and was glad.* What does this mean? Only that Abraham's worship was based on faith in the Savior. With eyes of faith he saw and the Holy Spirit enriched his faith so that he was glad, like David who wrote: *I rejoiced with those who said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD."* Ps 122

But the thing that these ungodly religious hypocrites heard Jesus say that moved them to attempt murder was this: *"I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.* They heard but rejected when he told them I AM! That was the ancient name that God had commanded should be used for Himself as the LORD, the Savior God. Remember what He told Moses? *This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.' ... This is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from*

generation to generation. Ex 3

This they heard Jesus say, but this they rejected. May we who also hear, never reject the blessed name by which we are saved!

In addition to Jesus' use of this name God had given for Himself, this great "I AM," John records a number of instances of our Savior's use of this name.

Earlier, in John 6, Jesus said: ***I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.*** Some heard him say this, called him crazy and left. Others, like Jesus' disciples, declared: ***Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy one of God.*** Jn 6 Each of us will ask himself: With whom do I identify?

A few verses prior to today's text, another I AM of Jesus is recorded: ***I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.*** Jn 8 To follow Jesus is to gather together with those who are gathered by the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. There the Holy Spirit who has called us also gathers, enlightens and sanctifies us by His power through the Gospel AND KEEPS US IN THE ONE TRUE FAITH!

In John chapter 10, Jesus' I AM declaration reveals that He is the only way of salvation: ***I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep.*** ... There is no other way, as he clearly told his disciples the night before his death on the cross: ***I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. 7 If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.*** Jn 14 Will we leave our beloved worship services with this truth on our lips? Will we now boldly tell others that unless they too repent of their sins and follow Jesus they stand condemned in their sin and will be damned? Will we invite them to come here to see and hear Jesus and so also know and see the Father as well?

Here, where we gather for worship, the voice of the Good Shepherd is heard. You know what shepherds do. They guard and protect the sheep. They feed and water the sheep. They lead the sheep even through dark valleys of death to the safety of eternal life in heaven. It is another I AM declaration of Jesus: ***I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*** Jn 10 If Jesus would lay down his life for us, will he not also keep our lives for now and eternity?

And now, during this Lenten Season, as we follow our Lord to Golgotha's Holy Ground, we do so believing that great I AM that he declared a few days before his crucifixion as he stood outside the tomb of his friend Lazarus just before he was to raise him from the dead: ***I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.*** Jn 11 Then Jesus demonstrated his power over death with the words, ***Lazarus, come out!*** And he did.

I have one question for you who have gathered here again to worship Jesus, THE GREAT I AM: Of all those people in the cemetery that day, why did he just raise Lazarus? Why not any of the others buried there? Answer... the Bible says: ***Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days. Then he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea. ... Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up."*** Jn 11 The answer is that Lazarus was Jesus' friend. Are you Jesus' friend?

What do you hear Sunday after Sunday as we worship the great I AM? Do we not hear him tell us in many different ways that you are his friend? You are his friend for whom the Good Shepherd laid down his life. He feeds you with Word and with his actual body and blood in the Lord's Supper. He says take and eat, this is my body given for YOU, my friend, for the forgiveness of your sins! He has doused you with the water of Baptism, put his name upon you and have united you with him through baptism into both his death and resurrection. Are you Jesus' friend? You are his friend, not because you have come to him, but that he has come to you and calls you his friend.

Believe what you hear! Believe what you hear Jesus the GREAT I AM saying to you and he will keep that friendship with you for eternity. Amen