

Sermon- Revelation that Extinguishes All Shadow of Doubt

Scripture: John 8: 47-59

Sunday, September 2, 2018

If you were here last Sunday you would have noticed that we were in a very intense portion of a conversation between Jesus and the Pharisees. I had pointed out that this was not just some burst of anger on the part of Jesus. We saw how Jesus was very methodically intensifying the revelation of his identity through his ministry. I also pointed out that the more clear the revelation becomes, the more hostile the rejection of that revelation is. So by the time we get to where Jesus is in John 8, when Jesus has revealed so much about himself, if the religious authorities can only respond by issuing a death penalty there is a serious problem. The diagnosis that Jesus gives of their condition is that they don't get what he is saying because their father is the devil. Of course they chose to fire back that Jesus is demon possessed. Very intense stuff. But in the midst of this intense back and forth, Jesus continues to remain in control of his emotions and continues to do his job of revealing who he is. There are many things to learn about what Jesus does under pressure and how he does it. This is what we are going to look at today.

In the first part of this conversation with the Pharisees, you will remember, Jesus began with a simple and beautiful promise to believers. He said, "if you believe who I am, you need to become my disciple. And a disciple is one who remains true to my teachings. And when you remain true to my teachings even when the heat is turned up, then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free". Simple, straightforward and very helpful, right? Yes, except that the Pharisees saw that Jesus was implying that they were in bondage of some sort. To the Pharisees that was an insult. And they mounted a major defense. They reminded Jesus that they were children of Abraham and therefore a people who were never slaves. Of course the children of Abraham were slaves for most

of their history so their pivot to talking about political freedom was exposed their lies even further. But Jesus was referring to their spiritual condition. Jesus was aware of their plots to kill him and so he tells them that their actions betray who their real father is and it is not God or their ancestor Abraham but the devil himself from whose heart all lies and murderous intent is born. This is a hard diagnosis to receive but a true one. The Pharisees of course are not really interested in the truth. They are interested in winning this argument. And they can't really counter Jesus' words so they attack Jesus' character. They call him demon possessed. This is a pretty common pivot in the heat of an argument right? You lob a missile at the other person designed just to hurt them. It has nothing to do with the specifics of the disagreement itself. Of course I am sure you all have never done such a thing but maybe you have seen it done 😊

But here is where we get to see how Jesus reacts when he is under fire. So what does Jesus do?...

Before I point out what Jesus does, let me point out what he does not do. Jesus does not turn on any act of false modesty. In verse 49 Jesus replies, *"I have no demon in me. For I honor my Father—and you dishonor me. ⁵⁰ And though I have no wish to glorify myself, God is going to glorify me. He is the true judge. ⁵¹ I tell you the truth, anyone who obeys my teaching will never die!"*. So think about this, in response to a character assassination, Jesus refutes their lies in a clear and simply way. He lays out clearly what his actions are. He declares, "I honor my father". He is pointing out what their actions. He tells them, "You dishonor me". He also prophesies, "though I have no wish to glorify myself, God is going to glorify me". He declares this about God, that God is the true judge. And after shedding light on what is true in the midst of all the lies, Jesus does something remarkable. He actually presents to these people who are slandering him a path to eternal life. He tells them, "I tell you the truth, anyone who obeys my teaching will never die." Think about this. Jesus does not try to hurt these people back in return for the hurt they inflict on him. He calmly affirms the truth about Himself and God. He

speaks truth about his opponents actions and he even shows them the way to eternal life in the midst of everything.

Does Jesus win these people over? Well, it does not seem like Jesus managed to win either the argument or win any individual over at this point of time. But the point I want to make is this. Sometimes you are in so difficult a situation that the action you undertake is not calculated based on how you can win the day. The action you take is simply based on who you are. A lion roars sometimes not because it needs to but because that is what it does. A lion is not designed to sign like a bird right? It is designed to roar. When Jesus is pushed to the maximum what does he do? He does not try to win, he simply is himself. Jesus remains true to what is in his DNA. And what is in his DNA. It is the DNA of God himself. His heavenly Father is going to use this intense moment to unveil the brightest revelation of Jesus yet. But before we get there we need to deal with the Pharisees a bit more, because in them the Bible is telling us something about our own nature.

How do they respond when Jesus presents this promise to them, “anyone who obeys my teachings will never die”? They say, in verse 52 and 53, “Now we know you are possessed by a demon. Even Abraham and the prophets died, but you say, ‘Anyone who obeys my teaching will never die!’⁵³ Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?”

Think about this. Everything that Jesus said, the fact that he refuses to be provoked or return insult for insult, the fact that he is returning insult with a promise, none of this registers even a tiny blip in their brain waves. All they hear is that Jesus is making some statement about eternal life and they know that no one can live forever and so they conclude that therefore Jesus is demon possessed. There are two things going on here from a psychological stand point and I want to bring to your attention.

The first is this phenomenon called Confirmation Bias. I have talked about this in the past but I will repeat it here because I believe a mind that is “renewed” is a mind that I believe has the capacity to shed its Confirmation Bias. Confirmation bias is a phenomenon in which when we look at certain set of data, we ignore the data points that do not fit with our thinking and only pay attention to the data that fits our thinking. So for example if you think that Honda cars never break down, if something sings praises of their Honda, that will register in your mind but if someone mentions to you that the other day their Honda would not start, that piece of information you ignore and soon don’t even remember it. The problem with Confirmation Bias is that it fills our minds with stereotypes and false ideas and stunts our capacity to learn new things. You see this in play with the Pharisees right? They have made up their minds that Jesus is not who he says he is and so they try and fit him in a category they are more familiar with. They know of demon possessed people and so they dump Jesus in that category. Of course Jesus does not act like other demon possessed people but they simply ignore all that data. On the other hand they find something that Jesus says about eternal life, and they take that to twist it to fit their position. This is an extreme form of confirmation bias.

But there is another struggle going on in their thinking. Do you hear what the Pharisees are asking in verse 53? “⁵³ Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?”

Now in these statements there is a struggle that I want to draw your attention to. And the struggle is this, these Pharisees are familiar with the prophets of the Old Testament. And they know about the biggest names in the book, Moses and Abraham. If what Jesus is saying is true he does not fit even the category of the greatest prophets known to them because all these great prophets died. Jesus is saying, if you follow his teaching, you will not die. No prophet in history has made such a claim. So what does that make Jesus? Who is Jesus? This struggle is really the crux of the matter. CS Lewis, the great

British theologian summed up the whole discussion of possibilities into three categories. He said, Jesus is either a Liar, a Lunatic or he is Lord. And the job of each person who is confronted with the claims of Jesus, is to decide for themselves, which category they would want to put Jesus in. This is what the Pharisees were dealing with. In calling him demon possessed, they were trying to fit him in either the liar or the lunatic category.

Ok so lets turn back to Jesus now. So how does Jesus respond to this characterisation? Remember what I said earlier. The more Jesus is pushed, the more He reveals who He really is. So at this time Jesus responds by making who amazing statements about things he has intimate knowledge of. One is about God himself and the other about Abraham. The insider statement about God is this. He tells the people as matter of factly as possible, that God is going to Glorify Him. He tells them that they don't "know God" But he knows God, he knows God's plans intimately and he obeys God in all things. He also tells them plainly that he is not a liar. In fact he adds that it would be a lie for him to pretend that He did not know God.

Then he reveals one more thing that he knows that will blow their mind. He speaks casually about their exalted ancestor Abraham who lived 2000 years before that time in history and says "Your father Abraham rejoiced as he looked forward to my coming. He saw it and was glad".

At this point, if the Pharisees where thinking, could Jesus be claiming that he is God, Jesus then turns on the revelation of his identity to the brightest setting yet and makes this incredibly mindboggling statement, " Before Abraham was, I AM".

Now you will notice in your Bible that the I AM is written in all caps. That is to signify that the original language is using the alphabets for the name of God here. There can be

no confusion about what Jesus is saying about himself. He has just revealed himself as God. You know the third option in CS Lewis' trilemma.

Think about this. In spite of all the skepticism and close mindedness and confirmation bias and just down right insults from the crowd, Jesus just keeps amping up the light of his revelation. So that there can be no doubt about what he is claiming. Jesus is claiming himself to be God. And to verify this claim, the only way to do it would be to allow the spirit of God to work in your life to give you the capacity to "know the truth". And right in the beginning of this conversation, Jesus had already told these people how they can know the truth. All they have to do is be faithful to his teachings and become his disciple. That process of receiving Jesus' teaching and implementing it would enable their eyes to be opened to the greatest truth on earth. And when that happens all the shadows of doubt would be erased.

How do we fit the principles exposed in this conversation in our own lives? First thing we have to ask ourselves is this. Where do we put Jesus? Is he for us a liar, a lunatic or Lord. If he is a liar or lunatic we are off the hook and can go on leading our life like we want to. If he is Lord on the other hand, everything changes. We have to then turn our life over to Him and let Him take control over everything. And one area where he wants to take Lordship of our lives is when we are pushed to the extreme. How are we supposed to react. Well we have to react like him. Not returning insult for insult but being ourselves, speaking truth, talking about things we have intimate knowledge of and even communicating to those who are hurting us how they can get a way out of their predicament and into the glory of eternal life. My prayer is that all of us will be known for who is the Lord of lives is. And the more you are pushed, may the Lord of your lives shine even brighter. Let us pray.