

## **JESUS – THE GREAT “I AM” John 8:58**

### **FOCUS**

A student was taking his final exams. He takes a seat in the exam room, stares at the questions and then in a fit of inspiration takes off his shoes, his shirt, his pants and then his socks.

The teacher, alarmed, came up to him and asked him what he was doing.

*“I just following the instructions”,* the student said. *“The test paper said – answer the questions in brief”.*

A healing Pastor came to a church. There was a long line to see him. It was a teenage boy’s turn in line. He said he wanted prayer for his hearing.

So, the healing Pastor grabbed his ears and said a prayer. The Pastor let go and asked, *“how’s your hearing now”.*

The boy replied - *“I don’t know ... it’s not till Friday,”.*

A theme that runs through the Gospel of John, more than any of the other Gospels, is how often Jesus was misunderstood. In John 12, where we read about the events of Palm Sunday and the Triumphal Entry, there is an interesting comment by John at verse 16. He writes – *“at first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize ...”*

You see this over and over again in the Gospel of John – at least a dozen times. In John 2, for instance, no one understood what Jesus meant while He was in the Temple in Jerusalem and said – *“Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.”* What?

The Jews questioned Him – *“It has taken 46 years to build this Temple, and you are going to raise it in 3 days?”* Jesus was of course alluding to His resurrection. Even the disciples we are told had no idea what He meant. It was only as verse 22 informs us – *“After He was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what He said.”*

In a way it is not surprising that so many, including the disciples, so often misunderstood Jesus. He said some hard to grasp statements. We probably wouldn’t have done any better.

This morning I want to look with you at one of the most astounding statements that Jesus made of Himself. It is found in John chapter 8.

Turn with me in your Bibles to John 8. You’ll notice as we read this account however, that the Jews referred to here, clearly understood Jesus’ incredible statement about Himself in v58. Let’s begin reading at v 48 to get the context that leads up to Jesus’ statement at v58. *RDG John 8:48-59.*

### **WHAT DO JESUS' WORDS MEAN? (1<sup>st</sup> Question)**

We get a clue from the reaction of the Jewish religious leaders – they wanted to stone Jesus to death.

#### **Q - Why do you suppose the Jews wanted to stone Jesus?**

Stoning was the penalty for blasphemy according to the OT Law – Lev 24:16.

#### **Q - But what is it about Jesus' statement here that made it blasphemy?**

There is of course the claim made by Jesus to have lived before Abraham did. But Jesus had claimed similar things before and no one took up stones against Him. They probably just thought He was crazy. Here the Jewish leaders just asked Jesus - "*How can you say such a (stupid) thing, you're not even 50 years old?*" They weren't commenting specifically on Jesus' age by the way they were just saying - "*you're still young*", "*you don't even belong to the 50+ group yet*". What these Jewish leaders considered blasphemous was Jesus statement - "*I AM*".

Notice Jesus did not say - "*I was*", but "*I AM*". It was a claim to be existing eternally before Abraham and before time. But even that is not all of what Jesus meant. There is more. When Jesus made the statement "*I AM*" He was not only claiming to be eternal, He was claiming to be the eternal God.

#### **OT BACKGROUND TO JESUS' STATEMENT**

You may remember the story of Moses back in Exodus 3. God called Moses to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt at the burning bush incident. Moses asked what he should say when he told the people God had sent him to lead them out. They might ask, Moses said, "*What is His name?*" In one of the great moments of Biblical revelation, God replied, "*Say to them, I AM, has sent you.*"

That is a powerful statement. On whose authority was Moses to go and lead the people out of Egypt? On the authority of the "*I AM*" - the one with all power and all authority. What confidence could Moses have as he went? The confidence of knowing the presence of the "*I AM*" - the one who is always present. What assurance could Moses have that God would be with Him later? He is the "*I AM*" - the one who was and is, and will ever be.

When God said "*I AM*" in Exodus 3 He was also making a connection to the name by which He made Himself known to Abraham back in Genesis 15. God said to Abraham - "*I am Yahweh or Jehovah*". The name Yahweh has the same root as the verb God used in Exodus 3 when He said - "*I AM*".

When Jesus said, "*before Abraham was, I AM*", the minds of the Jewish leaders would have gone back to Exodus 3 and Genesis 15. "*I am the God of Abraham and the God of Moses and your God*" The Jewish religious leaders clearly understood that Jesus was claiming to be God. He was making a claim to deity. It was this that enraged them. It was this that was the basis for their accusation of blasphemy. This could not be tolerated. They took up stones to put Him to death. But Jesus escaped.

## **JESUS HAS CONSISTENTLY CLAIMED DEITY**

John 8:58 is not the only time Jesus claimed to be God. Jesus' claim to be God is in fact a dominant theme in the entire book of John. In the first verse of the Gospel it was stated - *"In the beginning was the Word (the Logos, Jesus Christ), and the Word was with God and the Word was God."*

Then – in all these verses (1:18 / 5:17,18 / 8:19 / 10:30,31,33 / 10:36; 12:44,45; 14:1,7,9; 19:6-7) - Jesus over and over again claims that to see Him is to see God. To know Him is to know God. To believe in and receive Him is to believe in and receive God. To honor Him is to honor God Himself. The climax in the Gospel of John comes at 20:28. Thomas sees the resurrected Jesus for the first time and proclaims - *"My Lord and my God"*.

### **SO – WHAT DO JESUS' WORDS MEAN TO US? (2<sup>nd</sup> Question)**

**1<sup>ST</sup> – It means we need to acknowledge him as eternal God.**

It is obvious that Jesus claimed to be God. You cannot reinterpret it to mean anything else and you can't ignore it. The Jews of Jesus day understood this clearly and responded to it. We need to understand and respond to that claim as well. Either we accept that claim of Jesus or we reject it. Either Jesus is God or He is a blasphemer. There is really no middle ground. It will not do to make Jesus anything else. We cannot annul His claims by saying that He was just a nice teacher, or a holy man, or a do-gooder, or even a revolutionary. He did not claim to be any of those. What He claimed for Himself is that He is eternal God. Either we accept this or reject it.

Believe it or not while I was doing some research for this message I came across a web site called - *"athiests-for-Jesus.com"* It represents an organization founded by Ken Schei who states that he does not believe that *"any deity is probable ... or possible"*. But he says, he has *"come to have a great deal of respect for the teaching of Jesus"*. He goes on to state - *"a religion based on the principles that were put forth by Jesus and his original followers would be acceptable to an extremely large number of people. It would provide people with the moral and ethical guidelines needed to attempt to lead a good life."* He states his task as – seeking to *"Rescue Jesus from the Bible"*.

There is one major problem with this. One of the significant teachings of Jesus was the claim that He was God. You can't pick and choose the teachings of Jesus. You need to deal with all of it. If Jesus just went around saying - love one another, love your enemies, do unto others as you would have them do to you, and so on. If that is all that Jesus taught then the Jewish religious leaders would never have tried to kill Him in John 8. They would never have tried to kill Him again in John 10. They would never have pursued Him until they had Him nailed to the cross if that's all Jesus said, or if that was the main thrust of what He said. But it wasn't. Jesus made an astounding claim in John 8. I am God. Accept it or reject it. That's your only choice. Cry out, like Thomas, *"My Lord and my God"*!

**2<sup>ND</sup> – It means we can find forgiveness and salvation in Jesus as eternal God.**

It is because Jesus is God that He could turn the water into wine in chapter 2 of John. It is because He is God He could say to the royal official in chapter 4 - *"go your son will live"*. It is because Jesus is God that He could say to Nicodemus in John 3 - *"believe in*

*me and you will be born again; put your faith in me and you will have eternal life*". It is because Jesus is God that He could say to the woman at the well in John 4 - *"believe in me and you will never again thirst spiritually*". It is because Jesus is God He could say the things he did at v 12 / v 24 and also v 51. RDG

It is because Jesus is God that he can forgive sin and promise eternal life to you and me this morning. He can set us free from the bonds of sin. He can give us new life. He can transform our lives. He can bring us from darkness into light. He can bring us into the kingdom of God. He is Lord. He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Not far from New York there is a cemetery where there is a grave which has inscribed upon its headstone just one word, FORGIVEN.

There is no name, no date of birth or death. The stone is unadorned by the sculptors art. There is no flattering eulogy - just that one word, FORGIVEN.

But isn't that the greatest thing that can be said of any person, or written upon anyone's grave? FORGIVEN! Because Jesus is eternal God He can forgive our sin and bring us into His presence forever and ever.

If you know Jesus as Saviour, if you know your sins are forgiven and you have eternal life – that's something to shout – "Hallelujah" about isn't it? So?

If you are not sure – I encourage you to talk to someone from our prayer team at the conclusion of the service. Don't leave without knowing Jesus the Great I Am who forgives your sin and gives you eternal life.

### **3<sup>RD</sup> – It means we can bring any need to Jesus as eternal God.**

I read a story of a motorist who, after being bogged down in a ditch on a muddy road for several minutes, paid a passing farmer 20 dollars to pull *him out with his tractor*. *After he was back on the road he said to the farmer, "At those prices, I would think you would be pulling people out of the mud night and day."* "Can't," replied the farmer, *"At night I haul water for the mud hole."*

Jesus knows we are going to end up in some mud holes in life. He knows we will be overwhelmed at times and struggling to pull ourselves out, but feeling powerless. In these and any situation we need to remind ourselves of who Jesus is – He is "I Am". He is eternal God. We can bring any situation to Him at any time. Knowing he has the power to handle anything. Knowing He is always with us.

The Great I AM has promised us – (Hebrews 13:5)  
*"Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."*

David expressed his confidence in I AM with these words (Psalm 18:2)  
*"The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer;  
my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge,  
my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold."*

Paul put it this way – (Romans 8:38,39)

*"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all*

*creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

Jesus – the Great I AM assured us – (John 16:33)

*“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”*

And - (John 14:27)

*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”*

Do you ever go out at night and look up at the stars and think – Wow! – in this vast universe - the Great I AM - the Creator of it all, the Lord of Lords, the King of Kings – cares for you, and you can bring any need to Him at any time.

I love the song in Monty Python’s – The Meaning of Life:

Whenever life gets you down, Mrs. Brown  
and things seem hard or tough  
and people are stupid, obnoxious or daft  
and you feel that you've had quite enough....

Just remember that you're standing on a planet that's evolving,  
And revolving at 900 miles an hour,  
That's orbiting at 19 miles a second, so it's reckoned  
A sun that is the source of all our power.

The sun and you and me and all the stars that we can see,  
Are moving at a million miles a day  
In an outer spiral arm, at 40,000 miles an hour  
Of the Galaxy we call the Milky Way.

Our Galaxy itself contains 100 billion stars  
It's 100,000 light years side to side  
It bulges in the middle, 16,000 light years thick  
But out by us it's just 3,000 light years wide

We're 30,000 light years from galactic central point,  
We go round every 200 million years  
And our Galaxy is only one of millions and billions  
In this amazing and expanding Universe

### **FINAL THOUGHTS**

Jesus is saying in John 8:58 - that’s who I am. As big as the universe is - I AM. Before all this came into being, or was ever thought of - I AM. As the universe unfolds in the future - I AM. *“I am the God of Abraham, the God of Moses, the God of creation, the God of the universe, the God of salvation, the God of you and me – I AM”.*