

- I. Set Up:
- A. Last week we kicked off the I AM series with a look at John 6, where Jesus said, “I am the Bread of Life.” We chose that “I AM” passage because it was a communion weekend. This week we actually take a step back. Mike is giving the introduction to the series. And that comes out of John 8
- II. Introduction: Early this week I sent out a request to a half dozen friends. I said, “I want to open this weekend’s sermon by recounting some famous moments in which somebody says something and everyone is shocked. “No one can believe it.”
- A. I had Googled “Did he just say what I think he said?” but it hadn’t helped. And the only two I could come up with that worked was:
1. Joe Namath’s guarantee that the Jets would beat the Colts for the Super Bowl 3.
 2. Mohammed Ali’s claim to be the Greatest in the World.
- B. I did not share those examples in the email. I simply said I am looking for a famous statement – from real life or a movie – where someone says something and everyone gasps.
- C. Of the six I sent it to, five responded. All five of them – acting independently of each other – referenced Namath’s promise and the Ali’s statements. Four of them only gave those two examples.
1. One also mentioned John Lennon’s claim that the Beatles were more popular than Jesus.
- D. But apparently, when you are looking for the most shocking, memorable, Oh-my-goodness-did-he-just-say-what-I-think-he-said?, mic-dropping moments of all time: It’s either Joe Namath claiming to win Super Bowl 3 or Mohammed Ali making any of a half dozen things he said, or it’s Jesus making the most outrageous claim of all time, saying, “Before Abraham was I AM.”
- III. I am excited about this series because these statements – when they are rightly understood - instill confidence and hope.
- A. It’s been a challenging year for many. A year of hardship, setbacks, loneliness and fear. It’s been a year of national unrest and inner turmoil.
- B. And so, I want us to look at Jesus – which is always a good idea. But in particular, I want us to see him as he sees himself.
1. Because Jesus lives so simply; and is so focused on others; because he is so unpretentious; because he models and celebrates serving; because he tells us to go to the end of the line. For all these reasons and more, Jesus and humility go together.
 2. Indeed, they go together so well that when ancient historians set out to figure out how and why the ancient world shifted from an honor culture – where power is what mattered and humility was understood to be weakness – to a world in which humility was esteemed - where arrogance and pride were viewed as character flaws not something to be celebrated. They all end up pointing to Jesus.

3. We are so far downstream from Christ's impact that we have a hard time imagining what it was like before he showed up.

4. But as ? notes in his book, *Humilitas*,

a)

b)

5. Because Jesus is so equated with humility, many are not prepared for the statements he makes about himself. They expect humble statements. Which is not what they get. Let's be clear as we begin, it is impossible to make bigger claims than Jesus makes.

C. In light of these statements, this could be an evangelistic series – so you can invite your friends. And note, they do not have to show up if that is too risky. They can just watch.

D. But my intention is not to focus on those who have not yet put their weight down on Christ. I will give you a chance to follow Jesus because the text almost demands it. John 8 sets up three obvious questions:

1. Who did Jesus think He is?

2. Who did the people listening think He is?

3. And then, who do I think he is?

E. So, there will be a chance for those of you who are trying to figure out what to do with Jesus to opt in. But I want to direct this series at those of you who already have. There is great material here and the team has worked hard to pull together additional resources for your small group.

IV. OK. Today's passage is found in John 8. It is a fairly long and hostile exchange between Jesus and some of his followers. But before we go there, I want to explain a key point you need to understand to appreciate what we are going to read.

V. Exodus 3 records a very important moment in Jewish History. This is the place where God reveals his name.

A. The Jews have been living as slaves in Egypt and crying out to God for help. He is sending Moses. This passage – in which God manifests himself in the burning bush that does not burn records Moses being recruited.

B. I'm not going there other than to note, after Moses has agreed to the call, he asks God what his name is. This is more than, "What are you called?" It is a request to know God's character. Names in the Bible meant more than they do today. Up until this point – so, throughout Genesis and through the first two chapters of Exodus – God has been referred to by the Hebrew term "Elohim." Which is the generic term for God. (It's plural, but the El is the generic term for God.

C. Moses is not interested in that, when he asks, "What is your name?" he is asking, "Who are you?" Here is the text:

1. ¹³ **Moses said to God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?”**

2. ¹⁴ **God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”**

D. The Hebrew that is used here is the term Yahweh.

1. It is God’s covenant name. It is not a title, it is his name, and he had not given it out before.

2. It is special in that it is the only term in Hebrew that has four consonants – which is why it gets called the “tetragrammaton.”

3. The Jews view it as being so holy that they would not say it – and even today you see some Jews who do not want the term God written, so the “o” is replaced with a hyphen.

4. In light of the way the Jews treated this word – in light of the steps they took to ensure that no one would ever say “Yahweh” we mistakenly pronounced it Jehovah.”

5. Most English Bibles spell this LORD.

6. There is a lot going on here. All you need to know as we go to John 8 is, God’s name – His holy, precious, not to be spoken, covenant name - is “I AM.”

VI. John 8:21.

A. **Once more Jesus said to them, “I am going away, and you will look for me, and you will die in your sin. Where I go, you cannot come.” This made the Jews ask, “Will he kill himself? Is that why he says, ‘Where I go, you cannot come?’” But he continued, “You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world.**

1. This is nothing compared with what is to come, but this is an odd conversation. And Jesus is clearly making big claims.

B. ²⁴ **I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am he, you will indeed die in your sins.”**

1. As before, a huge claim!

C. ^{v25} **“Who are you?” they asked.**

D. **“Just what I have been telling you from the beginning,” Jesus replied. “I have much to say in judgment of you. But he who sent me is trustworthy, and what I have heard from him I tell the world.”**

E. ²⁷ **They did not understand that he was telling them about his Father. So Jesus said, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man**

1. Note, this is a big claim. The Son of Man is from Daniel 7 and it is a claim to be God.

2. Daniel 7:13 reads: **In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.**

F. Back to John 8: When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me.²⁹ The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him.”³⁰ Even as he spoke, many believed in him.

G.^{v31} To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.

1. I am all about salvation by grace through faith. We are justified on the basis of Christ alone. Yes, yes, a thousand times yet. Rest in grace, but do not hide behind it. Obey. Seek to follow Christ’s example.

H.³² Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

I.^{v33} They answered him, “We are Abraham’s descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?”

1. Time Out: They say, “we’ve never been slaves to anyone.” But they were slaves to the Egyptians and the Babylonians. How can they state this?

2. Their claim is to inner freedom – to spiritual Inner freedom. They are saying, “We are the followers of biblical religion. We are the chosen ones. The good ones. The ones who have a special connection to God.”

3. The Gentiles - they are the ones into sex, drugs and rock and roll. They are the heathen. The bad guys. The Other. Not us. We are not spiritual slaves.

4. This is the classic religious mindset. This is the big brother in the parable of the Prodigal Son. This is the attitude of the Pharisees. And this is a dead end. If you read Jesus it is clear, to be religious and moral is just as much spiritual slavery as to be irreligious and immoral.

5. We are saved by grace. That should make us humble. They were arrogant.

J.^{v34} Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever.

1. He is noting that there can be two 15-year-old boys in a home. One is a slave and one a son. And while their lives may look similar at some levels – they eat there, sleep there, recognize the authority of the head of the home, etc. – their situation is very different. The one is a slave who can be thrown out or beaten.

2. Jesus is saying, “you are acting like slave to your Father. You are all wrapped up in religion. You need to come to the father through me. You need your status changed through me. I’m not just a teacher or prophet. Accept me because through me your relationship with God moves from slavery to sonship.

K. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. ³⁷ I know that you are Abraham’s descendants. Yet you are looking for a way to kill me, because you have no room for my word. I am telling you what I have seen in the Father’s presence, and you are doing what you have heard from your father.”

L. ³⁹ “Abraham is our father,” they answered.

1. Here is where it starts to get really good.

M. “If you were Abraham’s children,” said Jesus, “then you would do what Abraham did. As it is, you are looking for a way to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. You are doing the works of your own father.”

N. “We are not illegitimate children,” they protested. “The only Father we have is God himself.”

O. ^{v42} Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I have come here from God. I have not come on my own; God sent me. Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. ⁴⁴ You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires. 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.

P. ⁴⁵ Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! ⁴⁶ Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don’t you believe me? Whoever belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God.”

Q. ^{v48} The Jews answered him, “Aren’t we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?”¹

1. This is their attack. It’s a racial slur and an accusation that Jesus is from the devil. (Something Jesus had been accused of before).

R. ^{v49} “I am not possessed by a demon,” said Jesus,

1. Notice, he does not even deign to answer the racial slur. He just doesn’t recognize it as a slur. To his way of thinking, there is nothing wrong with being a Samaritan.

S. “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. Very truly I tell you, whoever obeys my word will never see death.”

T. ⁵² At this they exclaimed, “Now we know that you are demon-possessed! Abraham died and so did the prophets, yet you say that whoever obeys your word will never taste death. ⁵³ Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?”

U. ⁵⁴ 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 obey his word. Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad.”

1. By the way, this is likely when Abraham had Isaac tied up and was about to sacrifice him. At the last minute a ram was found in the bushes – a substitute. All of which pointed to Christ. He is the new and better ram.

V. V57: “You are not yet fifty years old,” they said to him, “and you have seen Abraham!” Abraham had lived 2,000 years earlier.

W. Here it is. They are asking him who he thinks he is, and he gives a twofold answer: **V58: “Very truly I tell you,”**

1. In the Greek, the word for truth is repeated. It’s “amen.” So be it. It is true.

X. Jesus answered, “before Abraham was born, I am!”⁵⁹ At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.

Y. Right here Jesus throws do the most “are you kidding me? Did he just say what I think he said” line. He takes the sacred name of God. He says the word no one is supposed to say. He claims to be God. Jesus says, I am self-existent; I am not caused. It all depends on me. I have no beginning. I am not like you. I am the uncaused cause. I am the Creator. I am the Messiah. I am bigger than your view of the Messiah, for I am the I am.

Z. There has never been a bigger claim. There can’t be. Don’t you see this. Jesus may live as a servant. He may go to the end of the line. He may be as humble as you can imagine in terms of his lifestyle. But his claims are the biggest and boldest of all time.

AA. Jesus claims to be God.

VII. Now, I said, there are three questions that jump out of this text. Let me briefly turn to questions two and three. Question one: Who does Jesus claim to be God. God.

VIII. Question two: who do they think he is? Well, let me point out who they don’t think he is. “A great teacher.”

A. Tim Keller talked about this. He noted that if you go to Barnes and Noble for a lecture, and someone is there to talk about principles of something, but they end up saying, “I am the ground of all being. I am the eternal creator of everything. I am ultimate reality. I am the uncaused cause. I hold the universe together and I will decide your eternal destiny.” You do not leave and say, “What a great teacher. Interesting stories. Great insights for living.”

B. No, you either say, “We have been in the presence of God, or you say, that person is a deranged, demonic.” There is no middle ground. He does not leave that option open. What you cannot say about Jesus is that he is a nice guy, a good person, a wonderful teacher. He is divine or deluded. Or, to cite Lewis: He is Lord or Liar or Lunatic.

IX. Men and women, please understand. Jesus says, Crown me or kill me. Make me center of your life or stamp me out. Anything in the middle completely misses the point.

X. And so, as this series starts, I am calling the question. Who do you think he is? Given that you are here – or watching – I am going to assume that you think you are in. Please note, Jesus said all this to people who thought they were in.

- A. Some of you are sitting on the fence. Now, if that is true, you are likely leaning a bit more to one side or the other. For obvious reasons most of us do not straddle a fence for long. We sort of commit one way or the other. Let me encourage you to get off the fence.
- B. Let me encourage you to do something you have not heard often from me – take out your phone.
1. I am going to give you an easy next step. So let me ask everyone to take out their phone.
- C. If you are following Christ – you already made a decision for him before, but you know it's time to take a next step, let me encourage you to move away from the fence. To take a next step. I'm not sure what they might look like for you. We have developed resources for small groups for this series. If you are not in one, sign up. Or maybe it's to meet with someone for a Spiritual Check in.
1. Hey, maybe you have been in a small group but it stalled during COVID, or you decided you were Zoomed out and dropped out. Jump back in.
 2. Or maybe you are not sure what the right next step would look like – small group or serving or something else. Let us help. If you are a Christian but need to take next step, text this number.
- D. If you are not a Christian but want to be, I am going to ask you to text this number (DIFFERENT)
- E. And I am going to close by giving you a chance to respond to Jesus. He demands a response. It may be to run away. I think that would be a huge mistake. You will never get a better option than to have Christ become your savior and Lord, so if he is not, let me encourage you to pray a prayer like this.

¹ It's worth noting that they cannot use his words against him. Jesus has proven them to be self-righteous law-breakers. But they have not yet got him. Although he will soon make it clear that he is claiming to be God (blasphemy).