Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Jesus Antagonizes His Enemies
Scripture: John 8:48-59
Code: 1524

Jesus Confronts His Enemies

Our message this morning is taken from John chapter 8, would you please turn in your Bibles to the eighth chapter of John? We at Grace Church believe in teaching the Bible. We don't believe that it's the opinion of men that matters, but it's the Word of God. And so we endeavor week by week to systematically and with content teach the Word of God. We are in a study of John's gospel and find ourselves at this point in John chapter 8. If you've been with us in our study of John you know that what we've really been studying is a great portrait of Jesus Christ. We have seen the pattern of His life, the pattern of His claims, the pattern of His testimony, the pattern of those who reacted against Him and for Him. And continuously on every page of John's gospel we hear again the claim of Christ to be the Son of God, the Messiah of Israel, the Savior of the world over and over and over again until it's ringing in our ears, cannot be turned out.

As we come to chapter 8 we find again that Jesus Christ is in direct confrontation with the Jews of Jerusalem, and by Jews I mean the Jewish leaders, and that He is making His claims to them and they are reacting to Him. Let me preface what I'm going to say about the text this morning by saying, I am personally a great lover of Israel. I love Israel. I love Israel for many reasons. First of all, God commanded us to love and bless Israel. Secondly, my Savior was of Israel. Thirdly, I believe Israel is in God's plan as yet. And fourthly, there is no racial barrier to the love of God that has been shed abroad in our hearts. When we talk about Israel and we talk about their sin and the Jewish leaders and their antagonism toward Jesus Christ, we are not minimizing Jewish people, we are doing what our Lord did. We are honestly and openly confronting unbelief and confronting sin, whether it be Jewish sin or anybody else's sin in order that we might open their hearts to reveal to them the truth of Jesus Christ.

And as we come to chapter 8 in John, that's exactly what Jesus does. Some have called Him the divine disturber and He has never been more disturbing than He is in John chapter 8. He literally antagonizes His enemies to the point where in verse 59 as the chapter comes to a conclusion, they have picked up rocks and they are ready to cast them against His head and kill him. He antagonizes them to the very end of their rope.

Now Jesus was to those who believed in Him, and there were a few in Galilee and a few in Judea, but He was to those who believed in Him the loving Savior, the promised Messiah, the great Healer, the tender forgiver, the Almighty Miracle Worker, the powerful conqueror of sin and Satan and many things more was He to those who believed. But to Israel, to the Pharisees, to the scribes, to other Jews who did not believe He was anything but that, He was a liar, He was a fake, He was a disrupter, He was a threat to their hypocritical security. He was a target for their jokes. He was a breaker of the law. He was to be mocked. He was to be scorned. He was to be ridiculed. He was to be insulted and He was to be murdered. And they ran the gamut of these attitudes. In verse 22 of chapter 8, as we saw in the past, they laughed at Him, they mocked Him. Their laughing didn't last too long, in verse 59 they tried to murder Him. It was a joke for a while, the claim of Christ to be God, but it wasn't a joke very long. He destroyed every one of their securities. You see, Israel had their security in two things, they knew God, they had all His laws, they obeyed Him, they thought. Secondly, they were the children of Abraham, instant recipients of the Covenant. Children of blessing. Their security in the fact that they thought they knew God and that they were the seed of Abraham. Jesus destroys both those securities to lay bare their naked sinfulness that He might give them the garment of His own righteousness.

Now mark it, and mark it well in your mind, in this passage you see clearly how Jesus reacts to willful ignorance and unbelief. This whole chapter is an encounter with willful unbelief. For example, back in chapter 7 they had been antagonized by Jesus and they decided the best thing to do with Jesus was to catch Him bodily and do away with Him. The only problem was they couldn't get their hands on Him. They sent the temple police to arrest Him and the temple police came back and said, "Never a man spake like this man." They were so dumbfounded they never even made a move toward Him. They decided if we can't get Him bodily, we'll trap Him in His words. We'll catch Him in some kind of a...of a dilemma where He'll say the wrong thing and the result will be He'll be accused by Israel or accused by Rome. We'll trap Him somehow.

Beginning in chapter 8 they started to trap Him. The first eleven verses they decided to trap Him into telling them to go ahead and stone a woman in adultery. A woman had been taken in adultery, they said to Him, "Moses said that this person should be stoned having been taken in adultery, sexual sin, what do You say?" Had He said, "I agree with Moses," which would have been the logical thing, since He claimed to be from God, they would have taken those stones that they had in their hand and they would have cast them at that woman and killed her and immediately the Roman law would have intervened and Jesus would have been executed for no Jew had the right to take a life under Roman law. They tried to put Jesus in a position where He would be the one who told them to kill this woman and thus the Romans would get rid of Him for them. They thought they had Him.

Not Jesus. By the time He got done with them, they walked away in cowardice and conviction, knowing their own sin as He said to them, "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone at her." The Bible says they went away the eldest to the youngest convicted of their sin. He was devastating.

They tried another attack from verse 12 on. They tried to discredit His testimony by saying He had no witnesses to corroborate it. They said, "You can't just stand up here and say You're God and You're the light of the world and You're all of this and that. Who's going to testify that You're saying the truth? Why the Old Testament law say there has to be two or three witnesses, where are Your witnesses?" Jesus says, "First of all, I don't need any witnesses, I came from God. What I know I know innately, I don't need somebody to corroborate it. Number two, if you'd like to have two witnesses, here they are, Myself and God the Father." Pretty convincing witnesses. They decided they'd take another attack in verse 19 and they said, "Where is Your Father? You say God's Your Father, where is He?" And Jesus devastated them by saying this, "You wouldn't know My Father if He came here and stood in front of you."

Verse 21, they tried another attack. They had said, "Well," Jesus had said to them, "Well, I'm going to go away and you're not going to be able to come." And so they laughed and mocked and said, "Ha, You must be going to commit suicide," because according to their laws, according...I should say...to their interpretation of laws they felt that the person who committed suicide spent the rest of eternity in the darkest part of Hades, that was the one great gross sin and that that person would be sentenced to Hades forever. And they said, "Well, if He's going to go somewhere where we can't come, He'd have to kill Himself to go to the darkest part of Hades, we'll never go there, we're far too righteous to ever arrive in that place," and they laughed. And Jesus absolutely shattered them with one of the most potent statements I ever heard from His lips. He said to them in verse 23, "Ye are from beneath." Do you get the implication? They said, "Well, You'd have to go clear down to Hades, that must be where You're going to go clear to Hades. That's the only place You could avoid us. That's someplace we'll never go." Jesus says, "You'll never go there? You came from there." And then in verse 24 He says, "And that's where you're going to go again."

They tried another tactic in verse 33. They said, "We're Abraham's seed, we've never been in bondage, what's all this talk about You're going to set us free? We're Abraham's seed, what's this? We're already free." Jesus says, "You're not free, you're slaves to sin."

They tried another approach in verse 39, they said, "Why we are...Abraham is our father." Jesus says, "If Abraham was your father you'd act like Abraham. You have another father." Verse 41, they say, "That's true, our Father is God." Jesus says in verse 44, "No it's not, it's the devil."

Every time they had taken a stand, Jesus had destroyed it. And He sums it up in verse 47 by saying, "You're not of God...you're not of God, you don't know God and you're not the true spiritual seed of Abraham either." Their two big securities...we know God and we're of Abraham. Jesus shot both of them down. He laid them stark naked. They had no defenses. They had nothing left, nothing to say.

Well, you see, by the time this has gone on, there are only two reactions possible. If you would have been in this group of Pharisees and you had been standing there and all of this had been going on all through John 8, there are only two ways you could react by now. And, listen, indifference isn't one of them. By this time you couldn't be indifferent. You would be one of two things, you would be on your knees in penitence, bowing your heart before Christ and saying, "Christ, forgive me, God, cleanse me, I believe." Or else you'd be full of hatred and violence and anger and the deepest kind of unbelief and vengeance. See Jesus Christ is a disturbing person and when you have been confronted by Jesus Christ like these Pharisees, indifference isn't one of your options. Belief is one of them and fury is the other one. You see, the hearing of the good news of Jesus Christ and His persistent relentless claims either brings repentance and faith or it brings hardness and bitterness. And may I say to you with love in my heart and with seriousness in my mind, that if you have been saying no to Jesus Christ for very long, your indifference may one day turn into bitterness and hardness and you will be doomed because you have crystalized your attitudes and they cannot be changed. And at that point Jesus will no longer even be appealing to you, He will be repulsive to you. And I say to you at the same time, if today you sense God at all, if today the person of Jesus Christ is at all attractive, if today you can at all feel God working in your heart and convicting you to come to Christ, then today come that you may never find that hardness of heart that makes Jesus Christ repulsive.

In Hollywood there's a large synagogue and a very famous rabbi. When I was in seminary I went to see that rabbi because I wanted to confront him with the claims of Christ, I wanted to talk to him about Judaism and Christianity. Well I was, you know, inexperienced and very much in those days and I thought I could just go in and have a sensible conversation with him and present to him the claims of Christ. And I went there, walked into his little office where he had all of his books and he was in there studying and his wife ushered me in there and he was sitting behind his desk and he greeted me and I greeted him and he sat down and I sat down. And we began to talk about the Tora and began to talk about Jewish history and it was going wonderfully. And then I said, "Well, you know, Jesus Christ said..." and that's as far as I got. He flew out of that chair, both fists hit that desk where everything went...whoosh...just like that. He stood up and with fury in his eyes he said at the top of his voice, "Don't you ever mention that name in my presence," as loud as he could. That's bitterness. Jesus Christ absolutely nauseated him, repulsed him. And there you have a little indication of what was going on in the minds of these Pharisees who had been devastated by Jesus Christ.

You know, it's an interesting thing about arguments. They have a progression of levels. Conflict is a progressive thing. I was kind of analyzing it in my mind this week. Conflict starts in the intellectual level and you have a debate, right? And you present your side, you present...Uh-huh, yeah,...you do

a little mental gymnastics back and forth. Then if you don't seem to be getting your point across intellectually, it deteriorates to the next level which is the emotional level and you start talking louder and you start getting red cheeks, see. And you're starting to think not only is his point bad, I don't even like him, see. And what started out as an intellectual argument has deteriorated into an emotional involvement. And you don't stay at that level for too long. When you begin to lose on that level you go down one more step and you wind out at the verbal slander level, "You dirty...you know..." and you're there, see. And there's one more level left and that's the physical attack level. Before we're done in this passage today, you're going to see that the Jewish Pharisees starting at the slander level and ending up in verse 59 at the physical attack level. You see, their argument had deteriorated so far that they've got nothing left but to call Jesus names and pick up rocks. You see, the incompetent always drops to the level of the verbal slander or the physical attack and they are infinitely incompetent in conflict with Jesus Christ, the God of the universe.

They're undone. They're naked. They have no arguments. They have no nothing. They've suffered intellectual, emotional defeat. And now all they've got left is slander, name calling, and ultimately they're going to pick up stones and resort to physical attack. Jesus had driven them to this. He has purposely antagonized them to this point.

You say, "Well why would He do that? I mean, why would Jesus want to just keep pushing and pushing and pushing until they just were wild with anger? Why does He do this? Why doesn't He just after a while sees them and start turning.... Fellows listen, I know it's tough and you're really a swell bunch of guys, I mean, let's just shake and I understand?"

No, no. What would make Jesus drive them to absolute extremities of response? I'll tell you what the answer is, the answer is love...love. You say, "Love? That's not love." Oh yes it is love. We've got it all backwards...we've got it all backwards. Someone said that we...this is interesting...we alienate the people that Jesus befriended and we befriend the people that Jesus alienated. We think that when somebody doesn't respond to the truth in Christ, we've just got to fall all over the place and start catering to their thoughts and then we despise the outcasts. Jesus did the very reverse.

For example, let's assume that the dearest person in my life or your life, the person you love the most had terminal cancer and that you were a doctor who had made a fantastic discovery that had been verified, you had the cure to cancer. Hypothetically one dose of one drug could cure cancer and you had that in your hand. And you went to this dear one and you said, "Listen, I have the cure here. You have cancer."

"No I don't. I do not have cancer. I am healthy. Not a thing wrong with me." See.

And you say, "You have cancer. Let me show you how I know..." And you give them an intellectual thing and you tell them all that.

"I don't have cancer."

And then you begin to get a little warm inside and you begin to get a little frustrated. And you would say, "Listen, I don't want to irritate you, it's okay. You have cancer, if you don't think so, that's fine."

What kind of idiocy would be that? If that was me I'd have that person on the ground with my heal on their neck, "YOU have cancer, here's the remedy, now open your mouth." I would not stop until that person began to beat me up physically and I had to fight for my life. That, my friend, is love. And the reason Jesus Christ kept hitting them where He hurt them was because He had to show them their disease before He could give them the cure. And as far as the rejection went, that's how far Jesus Christ went with them. And that is love.

Jesus never gave up until finally He wound up hanging on a cross looking right straight down at those same Pharisees and saying in infinite love, "Father...what?...forgive them." That's love. Love made Jesus confront sin and chop it down to its roots.

Well, while He was going at it, they were deteriorating in the levels of conflict and they arrived at the level number three, the level of slander, verbal insult. We're going to see that as we look at our passage, we're going to see four things. You have the little outline in your bulletin if you want to follow it. Please do one thing for me, change the word "not" to the word "now," typographical error. We're going to see four things in this passage and these four things will give us the message of this section...the dishonor, the dialogue, the defiance and the disappearance. These four sections will teach us what is in this passage.

First of all, the dishonor. They have deteriorated the name calling and they dishonor Christ. Verse 48 begins the slander, "Then answered the Jews and said unto Him, 'Say we not well that Thou art a Samaritan and hast a demon.'" Now back in chapter 7 and verse 20 they said, "You have a demon." Now they say, "Boy, we were really right, you are a demon-possessed Samaritan."

You say, "That doesn't really sound so bad." That is the worst thing they could say. They despised, above all other things, Samaritans. Samaritans were heretics. They had intermingled with the pagans. They were the worst of the worst. They were the ones that were sort of condemning Israel, they were the foes of Israel, they were the enemies of Israel. The Jews thought they were traitors. They were the worst kind of people. They had sacrificed their heritage for a convenience in mixed marriage. They had adulterated their religion. And the Jews hated them so much that when a Jew

went from Judea to Galilee, he'd go clear across the Jordan river twice to go around Samaria, he wouldn't walk on Samaritan soil. They hated them. And to call Jesus a Samaritan is to say, "You foe of Israel, you heretic, you enemy of God." The worst thing they could possibly think of in defamation of His character. They had racial hatred.

You notice how Jesus tried to bridge that barrier? The first person He ever revealed His messiahship to was just a little woman and a sinful one at that by a well in Samaria, Samaritan woman. And you remember that Jesus' great illustration of true human love was the illustration of the good...what?...Samaritan. Jesus broke those barriers down, but they didn't break them down and they say to Him with so much venom and so much hatred and so much frustration because they've lost their intellectual argument, "You're a devil-possessed traitor, you're a Samaritan." They were so switched, talk about a value switch. Listen, they thought Jesus was demon-possessed. He was God. They thought He was demon-possessed. They had reversed the truth. They were so self-righteous and so ignorant that they thought God was Satan and Satan was God. I mean, that's some kind of sick. So they dishonored Him.

Remember Matthew chapter 12 when Jesus cast out the demons? The Pharisees said, "Wait a minute, you did that by the power of Beelzebub, the prince of demons. You cast out the demons by Satan's power." Jesus said, "Good thinking, fellows. Satan casting out Satan, right?" They weren't really too sharp on that one.

But here they call Him a demon-possessed traitor. You see, they figured that anybody who would knock them, anybody that would assail their stand has to be a traitor because they are the repository of all truth, see. Watch Jesus' reply. Listen, they called Him a demon-possessed Samaritan. Have you ever thought of what He could have said in return? The master of all language? I've thought of so many things that He could have said. You know what He said? I love it, He said this, verse 49, "I have not a demon..." See? So simple but so profound. "I have not a demon, but I honor My Father and ye dishonor Me." Oh I think if Peter's words. Remember 1 Peter 2:23 he said this about Christ? "Who when He was reviled, reviled not again." See. He didn't have any ego hangup that made Him have to defend Himself all the time. Didn't have that problem. He says, in effect, "I don't have a demon." But then He said, "But listen to Me, I honor My Father God and ye do dishonor Me." Listen, to dishonor Jesus Christ, my friend, is serious business. He says, "I don't have a demon, I honor God. I'm not serving demons, I'm serving God and when you dishonor Me, you are in effect dishonoring God who you claim is your Father. You're heaping monstrous, blasphemous insults on God the Father when you dishonor Me."

Chapter 5 verse 23, mark it well, listen. Jesus said that all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. Now listen to this, "He that honoreth not the Son, honoreth not the Father who sent

Him." Did you get it, people? There it is again, same principle we see in all different angles. Here it comes. You do not honor God unless you honor Christ. You do not know God unless you know Christ. You do not love God unless you love Christ.

Chapter 8 verse 42 Jesus said unto them, "If God were your Father ye would...what?...love Me." He says, "I don't have a demon. I honor God. But by your dishonoring Me, my friends, you are the one that is operating under demon control." And they really verified in that statement the fact that Christ had said in verse 44, "You have your father, the devil." They proved it right there. So Jesus simply and masterfully puts in glaring contrast the fact that they are the ones controlled by demons. He honors God. And they prove they're under demon control by dishonoring the one whom God honors...Christ.

So, Jesus doesn't retaliate. He doesn't say, "You no good, super-pious, legalistic, devil-possessed know-it-alls." He doesn't say that. He just draws a simple contrast and says, "Listen, I don't have a demon, you do. You're the one devil-controlled because you're dishonoring the Father by dishonoring Me." And that's what Satan wants to do, dishonor God.

Verse 50, this is a tremendous statement. Jesus says end of verse 49, "You dishonor Me." The word "and" is *kai*, it can mean "but," make it say that, "But I seek not Mine own glory." Now just get this...get this. He says you do dishonor Me, but I'm not here to be honored by you. If I wanted honor and glory, I would have stayed where I was, right? "The glory which I had with You, Father," John 17, "before the world...what...began or was." If Jesus wanted glory He would have stayed where He was. He says, "Then you dishonor Me, but that's okay, I didn't come here to be honored by you. I'm not looking for My own glory in this world."

You know, that's humiliation, isn't it? That is...that's the whole picture of the *genosis*, that's God becoming man. That's condescension. That's God saying, "I'm not going to take My own honor for a while, I'm just going to go down and be abused for the sake of man." Jesus didn't come to receive glory from...for Himself, from men. He didn't come for that. He came to love sinners, to expose their sin and then to bear their sin and to die their death. He came to be spit on, mocked, slandered and killed. He says I didn't come to have you honor Me. No, not at all. Oh, that's condescension. You know, I love Him at His trial, He stands there majestic. In my mind's eye I can see Him, the Master of everything, the creator of every person sitting in that trial and they said to Him, "All right, Jesus, defend Yourself. You've been accused." You know what He said? He didn't say anything, did He? He had no desire to defend Himself. He could have created miracles, He could have done things that would have astounded them. He had no reason to defend Himself.

He came not to be glorified, He came to be humiliated. But He adds this, and this is so glorious, verse 50, "There is One that seeketh My glory and judgeth." And what He means by that is there is

One who is behind Me seeking My glory and He will judge who is to be glorified. And who is that One? The Father, see. "I'm not here seeking My own glory, My Father will take care of that." And you remember at His baptism how the Father in that great voice from heaven said, "Thou art My beloved Son in whom I am...what?...well pleased." And over in John 17 Jesus said, "Glorify Me, O Father, with the glory that I had with You before the world began." And then over later in verse 23, I think it is, He says, "And, Father, keep these that are Mine in order that some day they may come and see My glory." See? Because all those disciples ever knew about Him was His humiliation. And Jesus actually said, "Father, I just can't wait till they can see Me in My glory." No, Jesus doesn't need your honor. He didn't come for that. He came in humility.

You know, that's the story of Philippians chapter 2, isn't it? Did you hear the message that Paul gave there? Philippians 2:5, listen to this. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus," that's the mind of humility. "Who being in the form of God thought it not something to hold onto to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation." He didn't seek glory, no reputation. "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" "Took upon Him the form of a servant, made in the likeness of man, being found in fashion as a man He humbled Himself and...what?...became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." He didn't come for His glory, He came for His humiliation. But He says over in John 8:50, "But My Father will take care of My glory." And you know what Paul says in the very next verse? Listen to this, "Wherefore God hath also highly...what?...exalted Him and given Him a name which above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow of things in earth...in heaven, in earth and under the earth that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father." Listen, God will take care of My glory, Jesus said, I don't need you to give it to Me here.

Oh, that's a beautiful relationship He had with the Father. May I add this? Jesus doesn't need your honor, but may I add this? You need to honor Jesus Christ because if you don't the consequences are tragic. Verse 51, and Jesus knows they need to honor Him, He says, "I don't need your honor, God will honor Me, and God will judge who deserves honor, but let Me give you an invitation...He says...O verily, verily I say unto you, if a man keep My Word he shall never see death." You see, here Jesus says I don't need your honor, God will take care of that. But I want it for your sake. Verily, verily... verily means amen, amen, seriously, solemnly, truthfully, emphatically. Jesus gives an invitation. He was always the inviting Christ, wasn't He? He was saying, "If you desire and if you'll keep My word," *logos*the word translated saying. "If you'll keep My word, you'll never see death." And "keep," remember we talked about that? What does it mean? It means to obey, doesn't it? Obey and remember back there in verse 31, "If you continue in My word then are you My disciples," *alethos*, in truth, true disciple. If you will obey and live within My word you shall never see death. Oh what a fabulous invitation. I mean, they were worthy of judgment. Doesn't it say it at the end of verse 50? There's One that judges? They were worthy of judgment by dishonoring Christ, and still as far

as they had gone in rejection He's still holding out an offer and says, "Listen, if you'll just obey My word you'll never see death."

Now what does He mean "you'll never see death?" This is a tremendous truth. The word "see" here is not just to see in terms of a glance. It's *theoreo*and that word means to experience or to gaze at intently to discern. In other words, it's to look with understanding and experience the total thing that you're involved in. It's not just a glancing thing or having to look and see something, it's looking into and experiencing. He says this, "If a man obeys My word, believes in Me, all of it, he'll never experience all that death is."

Now, of course, He's talking about spiritual and eternal death, isn't He? Separation from God because we may still physically die. But you want to know something wonderful? I'm going to tell you something that's going to be so wonderful. Do you know that you'll never experience death in the physical sense? I believe that. I believe you can take this verse not only in the sense of eternal death, if I love Jesus Christ am I going to be in eternal death? No, I'm going to have eternal...what?...life. Do I have spiritual death? No, I have spiritual...what?...life. But you know something? I don't even believe that we're going to experience physical death. Oh I think we'll die physically, but I don't think we'll experience it. You know, you do something every day of your life that you don't experience. You know what it is? Sleep. Some of you maybe don't do it, most of us do. You don't experience sleep, it's a non-experiential activity. You're there the whole time, but you...all you know is you're awake, you go to your bed, next thing you know you're awake. You do not know when you're asleep. You do not experience...oh dreams and things like this, but you do not literally experience the time and the situation of sleep. And some day when you fall asleep in Jesus, you'll experience life over here and eternal life over there, and not experience in the middle. I believe to fall asleep in the arms of Jesus Christ is to wake in immortality with nothing in between. We won't experience death, we fear it all the time. Oh there's pain attached to it sometimes, but Jesus said if you know Me, just...death is nothing, just passing from this into immortality.

Well, this is a tremendous statement. Let me tell you this way, Christian. If you're already a believer, you're already experiencing eternal life. You'll go so fast pass death, it will happen in such a flash of a split second that you won't even know it. It will be like the Rapture is, in the twinkling of an eye...like that in His presence. There's no lingering state in between. Absent from the body (snap) what?...present with the Lord. Jesus simply says, "You know Me and you keep My words, and you'll blaze pass death so fast it's a non-experience."

So they dishonor Him and what does He do? In turn for their dishonor, He offers them...what?...life. Isn't that like Him? So like Him.

Well, the reply brings the dialogue in verse 52, and this is obvious and we'll go very rapidly. But the dialogue, you can see it as well as I can, very clearly. This prompts their response. When He says He's going to give them life and they won't see death and, of course, they're all hung up on the physical, they never do understand He's talking about spiritual things. This is the pattern for them all the way along. He talks about living water and they say, "Where's the well?" He talks about eating His flesh, and they say, "How You going to do that, you're not big enough to go around for everybody?" They never ever understand the spiritual of what He's saying. They're always interpreting everything physically. He said, "Destroy this temple and I'm going to raise it in three days," and looking at the building they're saying, "How's He going to do that?" See. They never did understand He was talking about His body. He said to Nicodemus, "You must be born again." He says, "I can't get back in my mother's womb and be born all over again." You know, always on the physical level.

And so they think this too, verse 52 and 53, the dialogue. "Then said the Jews unto Him, 'Now we know that Thou hast a demon." If we had any doubt, it's all over. "Abraham is dead. The prophets, implied, are dead. And Thou sayest if a man keep My word he shall never taste of death. Art Thou greater than our father Abraham who's dead and the prophets are dead? Whom makest Thou Thyself?" That's the King James way of saying, "Who do you think you are?" You're going to give us something Abraham and all the holy prophets couldn't even get for themselves. They died.

There's always the physical...the physical...the physical. And as always, whenever God talked, they thought it was Satan. So they said, "Ah, we know You're demon possessed." And they're really shocked. They are shocked because here is Jesus promising them something that Abraham and the holy prophets didn't even get for themselves and Jesus is going to give it to them. And they say, "Boy, are You greater than Abraham? Are You greater than the prophets?" As a matter of fact, yes...although that's not what He says. Their blind, mocking unbelief...they say, "Who are You trying to make Yourself out to be? I mean, are You a super-saint of all time? Abraham and the prophets? Moses and all...You're greater than they are? Who do You think You are? You must be a demon-possessed individual."

And Jesus replies by denying that He is some madman, some egotist seeking to glorify Himself. Look at verse 54, "Jesus answered, 'If I honor Myself, My honor is nothing. It is My Father that honors Me of whom ye say that He is your God." Oh, sarcasm. You know what He says? He says, "Go ahead, say what you want, I'm not in a popularity contest with Abraham. I'm not trying to say for Myself...oh I'm greater than Abraham, I'm greater than all the prophets. No. You don't understand, people. I'm not just claiming My own glory, I told you that I don't need your honor. I'm only stating the fact for your own good."

Listen, the glory of a vain pretender and a braggart is meaningless. I went into a guy's house, one time, and this is really an experience and he had a couple of trophies. And I said, "Hey, where did you get the trophies?" He turned around and he said, "I bought them."

"You bought them?"

"Yeah," he said. "I bought them. I like to have them around."

"Give yourself trophies?"

"Yeah, you might put it that way."

"Yeah, I might." Who ever heard of a guy buying himself a trophy? I mean, when you get an honor you don't say, "I think I'll honor myself."

I mean, the guy who stands up and says, "I am here to declare my own prominence," Jesus "That's empty stuff" Anybody who honors himself, his honor is empty. That's meaningless. We do not honor ourselves. We must be honored by someone else, someone from the outside. And so, Christ's truth is obvious. It's obvious that a vain pretender has no legitimate honor. So Christ would not claim honor for Himself. Anybody who would have to conjure up their own trophies would be in a sad situation, evidently not having received any honors from any other source.

So Jesus says, "I'm not in this for My own glory. You think that I'm some kind of a bragging egotist who wants to elevate Myself above Abraham? That's not so, I'm not in it for that." Then He adds, "It's My Father that honors Me." "You want to know who I am? I'm just who God says I am, you ought to know, He's your Father." What a biting sarcastic word that is.

Verse 55, He really gets specific, a little sarcasm at the end of verse 44 (meant verse 54), specific rebuke in verse 55. He says this, "Yet ye have not known Him, but I know Him." He says, "You don't know God. You call Him your Father, you don't even know Him. Here you are calling Me of the devil, and calling yourselves of God and the exact reverse is the situation. With all your claims and pretense, you don't know God, you're children of Satan."

Now let me say something at this point that is very important. I believe Satan's biggest lie is religion. I believe religion is the curse of all curses. I hate religion. I hate it. It's a curse. Sounds a little strange coming from a preacher. No it's not because I think Satan uses religion as a self-delusion. There's nothing worse than to have somebody think they know God when they don't. You can't help them. You can't do a thing with them until they know they don't know God and you can show them how to know Him. Here they are, "We know God." Jesus says, "No you don't."

"We are the children of God."

"You're the children of the devil."

"You're demon possessed, I'm from God." They were trapped with the delusion of religion...we know God. Jesus says, "You don't know Him, I do, I know Him."

Interesting play on words kind of here because there's two words "know." Verse 55, "You've not known Him, I know Him," two different words in the Greek. The first one is *ginosko*, it means you have not learned or come to know, you have learned who God is, you have not come to know God. The second word is *oida*, it means to learn to know apart from learning. It means to know innately, without learning. "You haven't learned who God is," Jesus said, "but I know Him innately." And so they are making the empty boasts, not Jesus. They were the ones boasting they knew God, they were the phony braggarts honoring themselves, not Jesus.

And in verse 55 He continues by saying, "And if I should say I know Him not, I shall be a liar like unto you, but I know Him and obey His Word, keep His saying." What's He saying here? Just this, now watch, this is beautiful, this is beautiful. He says, "If I should say I know Him not," why would You say that, Jesus? Why would You say You didn't...? For expediency. Peter did, didn't he? Three times they said to Peter, "Ah, you know that...." "No, I don't know Him, I don't know Him," protect myself. Jesus said, "I could be better friends with you if I said I didn't know God, and you did if I was to come and say, "No, you're right, I don't know God, you guys do. You'd love Me. Oh you'd think I was terrific. I'd be so popular to go along with you."

Jesus said, "I can't do it...I can't do it because if I did it I'd be a liar like you." You know, Jesus couldn't tell a lie. "God who cannot...what?...lie." He couldn't do it. You know something? He couldn't tell a lie even though they took Him clear to a cross and hammered nails into His hands, He still couldn't disclaim what He claimed, could He? He couldn't say, "Okay, okay, I give, I give, all right, all right." No, He stayed with His claim to be God right to the time that He bowed His head and said, "It is finished," and yielded up His spirit. He never stopped making that claim and He makes it today as loud and long as He ever made it in the past. He can't lie. He said, "If I should say I know Him not for your sakes, for convenient sakes, I'd be a liar. But I know Him and I obey His Word." And you know something? That, my friend, is the key to true discipleship, not just to say I know Him, but...what?...obey His word. If you really know God it's going to be evidenced, as Jesus said back there in verse 31, by continuing in His word.

So He strikes at their greatest boast. They claim to know God. He says, "No you don't. You don't know God at all, I know Him and look what you're doing to Me." Oh tragic delusion of religion that can damn a man to hell.

Then they, of course, prided themselves in the fact of their Abrahamic ancestry. And they had already introduced this in the conversation. Jesus picks it up in verse 56. "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day and saw it and was glad." You're always talking about Abraham being your father and you're the children of Abraham. Listen, Abraham was looking forward to My day. Abraham rejoiced to see My day. And Hebrews 11:13 tells us how Abraham saw His day. Thousands of years before Christ ever lived, Abraham and the other saints of the Old Testament saw His day afar off. They saw it prophetically, they saw it in type, and Abraham particularly saw it in the continuing seed of Isaac. In that seed of Isaac, that child born to him in his old age, he saw the beginning of God fulfilling the Covenant that He had made with him. And Abraham by prophecy and by type and by fore-view saw way off into the thousand years of distant future some day one would come who would fulfill totally the Abrahamic Covenant. Abraham saw His day afar off. Listen, you call yourselves the children of Abraham and you want to murder the one that Abraham rejoices in? You're not children of Abraham spiritually.

Well they didn't understand again, they thought He was talking about the physical. So their little minds were like this, "Hmm, Abraham rejoiced to see His day and saw it? That means Abraham had to be alive when Jesus was alive. That means Jesus had to be alive when Abraham was alive. That means Jesus had to be so many thousand....wait a minute." Verse 56, "That can't be...verse 57...Thou art not yet 50 years old." We figured it out, it couldn't be...real good. You're not even 50 years old, how could You see Abraham? See. He hadn't said He saw Abraham, He said Abraham saw Him. But their logic twisted it back around. See they were stuck on the physical, weren't they? They didn't understand. Abraham saw Him and they figured that Jesus must have been alive around Abraham...that's what He's claiming anyway. They didn't understand anything.

You know, I mean, Jesus was talking to them in great spiritual truth, He might as well have been talking to a stick. They didn't understand anything. Of course, Paul said, "The natural man understandeth not...what?...the things of God, the Spirit of God," he can't understand them.

Okay, verse 58, watch the reply of Christ. He says, John records, "Jesus said unto them, 'Verily, verily, or truly, truly, amen, amen, I say unto you, before Abraham was I am." And that did it. They absolutely blew their gaskets. You know what Jesus is saying in that? Do you know what "I am" is? "I am" is Hebrew Yahweh, that is the personal name of God. The Old Testament God said My name is "I am that I am." Jesus, my friend, is saying, "I am the eternal God, that's who I am and before Abraham began to exist, I am in existence. I am the great God."

Well they just couldn't take this and Leviticus 24:16 said, "Anybody who claims to be God and blasphemes like that should be stoned." And no self-respecting Jew would even say the word "Yahweh," they substituted a non-word, Jehovah, which we know now for Yahweh was too sacred and He says, "I am Yahweh." And that leads to the defiance, the third point in our outline.

Look at their defiant response, verse 59, "They took up stones to cast at Him." Listen, they couldn't restrain themselves any longer. They were infuriated at two things. They were somewhere tossed apparently warped and confused between number one, seeing Christ as a blasphemer who said the name of God and claimed to be God, and secondly, not only a blasphemer but a threat to their personal security. And their hatred flamed into action and they couldn't restrain it anymore.

Boy, I'll tell you, it's a sad thing when unbelief gets this far. When unbelief gets so far that you jump up and smash your fist down at the name of Jesus Christ, that you want to grab a rock and throw it at Jesus Christ, that's going pretty far. Listen, my friend, while your heart is still soft toward Jesus Christ and while His voice is still winsome in your life and while He appeals to your heart, you better come to Him lest there come a day when you can't. Oh such love on Jesus' part. I just read so much love in this statement, "They took stones to stone Him."

You say, "How do you read love in that?" Because Jesus would stay with them clear to the end of their ropes trying to convince them and to give them this invitation and only would leave in desperation to save His life. That's how He persisted in the presentation of His truth. While most of us present the claims of Christ and if we get kind of a strange look, we run. Persist, persist if it...if it's verbal slander, if it's death, persist in the communication of the truth of Jesus Christ. Listen, you've got a good example, Jesus did it. Stay there, compassionately, lovingly, persistently attacking sin till you've honestly relieved that person of their false security or else until they're ready to kick you out of the place, be persistent.

And so the defiance, they want to stone Him. Physical attack, the bottom level of conflict. Then lastly, the disappearance and only at the last possible moment, verse 59, "But Jesus hid Himself," evidently in one of the colonnades in the temple, "and then went out of the temple going through the midst of them and passed by." He left.

Why did He leave? It wasn't the proper time to die. But isn't it sad, isn't it sad that this is God the great I am, Emanuel, God with us, and no knee is bowed and no homage is offered and no love is given, only stones are gathered to smash against His head? Such injustice. See, I don't know where you are in the level of conflict with Christ, has He spoken to you today? I know He has. How do you respond? With penitence, honor and love? With rejection? Are you antagonized by Jesus or are you attracted to Him? Let me add a word of invitation. If you don't keep His word, you'll die, spiritually,

physically and eternally. If you keep His word, you'll never see death. Consider the consequences of each and choose Christ.

Our Father, we thank You this morning for Your Word, clear, powerful. We thank You for the reality of Jesus Christ. He's not some myth, but that He lives. We thank You, Lord, for what You've taught us through this passage. And now, Lord, move on our hearts to respond. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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