**“WHO ARE YOU?”**

It’s been a while since we left off in our study of the Gospel of John. John writes his Gospel to answer the fundamentally important question of his day and of ours, “Who is Jesus?” John’s answer is that Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior, the Son of God, God in human flesh, and (John 20:31) that by believing we might have eternal life in His name. John makes his case by giving us accounts of what Jesus did, telling us what He said (His teachings, His amazing claims, His words) and by presenting the witness of many different people about Jesus. Not all the witnesses are favorable in their opinion of Jesus as we will see in our lesson today. The Pharisees, Jesus’ primary antagonists, the religious leaders, the teachers of the O.T. scriptures, are going to ask Jesus the question, “Who are You?” And Jesus is going to tell them, though they won’t believe Him.

We’re going to pick up where we left off (John 8:21). Here’s the setting: Jesus is in Jerusalem at the Feast of Tabernacles. In 6 months He will go to the cross. It’s the last day of the feast and Jesus is in the Temple teaching the people. Ch 8 records a rather lengthy discussion between Jesus and the Pharisees. The Pharisees view themselves as morally righteous people and close to God. On the other hand, their opinion of Jesus is that He is a dangerous false teacher, demon-possessed, crazy and must be stopped. They hate Jesus -- with a passion. They reject His claims at being the Messiah who has been sent by God. But not only do THEY not believe Jesus, they use their position and influence to lead their nation’s, Israel’s rejection of Jesus. John 1:11 says, “He (Jesus) came to his own, and His own people did not receive Him” – in large part due to the Pharisee’s influence. The Pharisees don’t like what Jesus says and they don’t like what He does, specifically, healing on the Sabbath. As early as Ch 5 we’re told that they “were seeking all the more to kill” Jesus (5:18). More recently they’ve tried to have Jesus arrested in the Temple during the Feast of Tabernacles (7:32), but God’s hand protected Jesus and prevented that from happening.

I want to read to you what Jesus told the Pharisees back in John Ch 5 and this really set the stage for the animosity that would exist between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders throughout His earthly ministry.

READ John 5:37-42

It is quite an indictment of the Jewish religious leaders by our Lord!

So they hate Jesus and they want Him dead. As we left off last time, listen to Jesus’ words to the Pharisees…

READ John 8:21

This isn’t the first time He’s told them this (John 7:34). Where IS Jesus going? We established this last time – to heaven. Jesus knows that after His death and resurrection He’s going back to heaven, back to the Father (3:13, 13:3, Acts 1:11, Mark 16:19, Heb 10:12). So if Jesus is going back to heaven, where He came from, and the Pharisees are not going THERE, then where are THEY going? It isn’t too difficult to figure out. Their willful rejection of Jesus (5:40, 7:17) is what will ultimately condemn them to Hell. This is very sad. As we read John’s narrative it’s clear that the Jewish religious leaders think they’re OK. They think they’re good enough to get to heaven based on their good works and religious credentials. They’re just like the Apostle Paul prior to his conversion. Listen to how Paul describes himself (this shows us the mindset of the Pharisees): “If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.” (Phil 3:4-6) Paul, just like these Pharisees in John Ch 8, thought he was doing God’s will. The Pharisees believe they are saved, headed for heaven, because they are the children of Abraham, God’s chosen people, specially privileged people, diligent doers of good works, keepers of the Law of Moses. These are self-righteous people. But Jesus message to them is, “No, you’re NOT OK. You’re lost.” Why does Jesus say this? Because they reject Jesus as the Messiah sent by God, as the Savior of the world. Their sin is the sin of rejection, the willful rejection of Jesus Christ. And as a result they will die in their sin. They will not be forgiven and will ultimately end up in Hell, a place of unending torment and eternal separation from God’s presence. The Pharisees are so wrapped up in own their self-righteousness, so blinded by their hatred of Jesus that they can’t – no, they WON’T see the truth. They’re spiritually blind. So no matter what Jesus says to them, they argue with Him. And we see this pattern as we go thru Ch 8.

So Jesus tells them that they will die in their sin. Notice their reaction.

READ John 8:22

To the Jews in Jesus’ day suicide was considered one of the worst sins. In essence the Pharisees are saying, “Well, we know where we’re going. We’re God’s chosen people. We’re going to heaven. So, what’s Jesus going to do? Is He going to kill Himself and by doing so end up in the deepest darkest part of Hell?” They’re basically mocking Jesus. They are completely twisting around what He has just told them. So, Jesus sets them straight. He tells them exactly what He means.

READ John 8:23-24

This is the exact opposite of what the Pharisees believe! Jesus also tells them, “You are of this world. You’re worldly.” The Pharisees love the things of this world. By “this world” Jesus is referring to the sinful world system as we know it, a system which we see all around us in America, in Rockwall Texas, in 2018. A world system which is all about materialism, lust, self-gratification, power, prestige, image, success, and so forth. These are the things people around US are pursuing and the things THEY were pursuing. Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount teaches that we are to seek first and foremost the kingdom of God and His righteousness. (Matt 6:13) God may choose to bless us with some of these other things, but they are NOT to be our primary pursuit.

So the Pharisees are guilty of self-righteousness and worldliness. In v 24 Jesus adds unbelief to this list. They don’t believe Jesus is the Messiah. And the result, which Jesus reiterates, is that they will die in their sins.

READ John 8:25

“Who are you?” Jesus’ answer is, “I’ve already told you.” When was that? In Ch 5 Jesus made the claim to be equal with God, which was why they initially wanted to kill Him. He claimed to be the very Son of God! He claimed to be the long-awaited Messiah that John the Baptist had been preparing the people for. In John Ch 6 Jesus claimed to be the bread of life, bread that came down from heaven to satisfy spiritual hunger. He said He was the One who could provide spiritual life, eternal life. In John Ch 7 Jesus claimed to be the living water, the One who could quench their spiritual thirst. In John Ch 8 Jesus has just told them that He is the light of the world – a clear Messianic reference by the prophet Isaiah. So what is it that they don’t understand? Jesus has already told them who He is. But they refuse to believe Him.

READ John 8:26-27

Jesus says, “I’ve already said a lot to you. I have much to say about you and even to condemn you for, but I won’t. My purpose is to give you and the world the the message from the One who has sent me. He is completely truthful.” Of course this One who sent Jesus is God the Father. The Pharisees are so spiritually blind, ignorant (as a result of their own willful rejection), that they don’t understand what Jesus is saying [v 27, John offers a commentary to let us know this]. Jesus continues…

READ John 8:28-29

“When I'm crucified, lifted up, then you'll know that I am He. You'll know that I am the Promised One. You'll know I came from God. You'll know God sent Me and speaks thru Me.” How will they know that? Well, let me point out several events that will take place at Jesus’ crucifixion. By the way, these are things which the Pharisees will witness for themselves: (1) The Roman centurion looking at Jesus when He dies says, “Truly this man was the Son of God!” (Mark 15:39); (2) The veil of the Temple is torn in two from top to bottom (Mark 15:38); (3) A massive earthquake, the earth shaking and rocks split (Matt 27:51); (4) Tombs open up and the bodies of dead saints are raised (Matt 27:52). The Pharisees will even be able to look beyond the crucifixion to Jesus’ resurrection and will hear for themselves the testimony of the Roman guards to this fact. Then there will be the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. This leads to the bold preaching and healing by the Apostles. In Jerusalem thousands will be saved. Just read the Book of Acts. All of this together will be clear evidence to the Pharisees and others that Jesus is no ordinary man. He’s not just another Jewish rabbi. No, He is, in fact, who He claims to be, their Messiah. Jesus tells the Jewish leaders that they will know later that what He is saying to them right now is true, that He’s not operating of His own initiative, but He is on a mission from God. He is doing His Father’s will.

READ John 8:30-32

At first reading of this passage one might think, “Hey, it appears as though some of these Jewish leaders are finally coming around to believing in Jesus! There’s hope for them yet!” Jesus has a message for this small group of believers: “The proof that your belief in Me is genuine, that your faith is real, is this – that you will abide in My word.” To abide means to stay, to remain.

[There are true disciples of Jesus Christ and then there are false disciples. Do you realize that? Both kinds of disciples claim to believe in Jesus. But not everyone is a true follower of Christ. This is an important point to recognize. Jesus taught that not everyone who says, “Lord, Lord” will enter the kingdom of heaven. In 2 Cor 13:5 Paul urges believers to examine for themselves whether they are in the faith. He says, “Test yourselves.” We’ve already seen in John Ch 6 where “many of His disciples turned back and no longer walked with Him.” In Jesus’ parable about the soils, Luke 8, He says this about the seed that falls on the rocky soil: “And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away.”]

So the mark of a true believer is that they abide in His word. Heb 3:14 says, “For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.” Abide in His word, continue in His word. And not just superficial believing, head knowledge, but belief, faith, that produces obedience. Obedience to everything Jesus says. 1 Jn 2:3 says, “And by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments.” 2 Jn 1:9 says, “Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.”

So, the question before us is, are these Jews who believe in Jesus here in this passage true believers in Jesus or not? Well, it doesn’t take long before we realize that they are NOT. Jesus tells them that the truth (His message of salvation) will set them free. He is speaking about being free from a life of sin, no longer being a slave to sin. That’s how we are in our fallen state, our old nature. We’re slaves to sin. Look at their response…

Notice the pattern repeated throughout the Chapter… Attacks on Jesus (arguing, blaspheming, name calling), Jesus responding with the truth in love, Jesus giving an invitation to repent…

READ John 8:33-36

There they go arguing with Jesus again! “We are the offspring of Abraham!” Jesus uses their claim to be the physical descendants of Abraham (which they are) to make a spiritual point. Remember from our study of Genesis a while back that Abraham had two sons. One was the son of a slave woman, Hagar. His name was Ismael. The other was the son of a free woman, Sarah. He was the child of promise, the covenant son, the miracle baby. That was Isaac. Which of these two sons remained in Abraham’s household? It was Isaac. Ismael was kicked out (for mocking Isaac). What Jesus is saying to the Pharisees is, “You are indeed sons of Abraham, but you are Ismael. You are slaves. You’re not free. And only the Son, only I can set you free!”

READ John 8:37-41

They argue with Jesus that they are not just the physical descendants of Abraham but that they ARE spiritual heirs. They are good moral people who don’t worship idols and practice immorality like the heathens around them do. “We have one Father, even God. We are children of God.” Again they are back to that self-righteous argument that they are good people. And just like all self-righteous people (like those we witness to) they don’t perceive a need to be saved from their sins. They don’t need a Savior. They don’t need Jesus. They’re OK. Jesus in His love, His grace, tries to warn them about the danger that lies ahead if they remain on this path of self-righteousness. But they just won’t listen. They really believe they’re OK spiritually.

In this passage Jesus counters that if they really were the spiritual children of Abraham (as they claim) then they would do what Abraham did. What did Abraham do when he heard the message from God (that God was going to give him a son in his old age)? Genesis 15:6: “And he believed the Lord, and He counted it to him as righteousness.” On the other hand, here’s Jesus. He has come from God with a message of salvation for Israel and for the whole world, for both Jews and Gentiles, male and female, slave or free. But the Jewish leaders don’t believe Him. And if they don’t believe Jesus then they don’t believe God. So what Jesus is saying is that “You are not really the sons of Abraham spiritually if you do not have the faith of Abraham. You are the sons of somebody else.” And Jesus is about to tell them who that is.

READ John 8:42-45

Talk about harsh! Jesus is being brutally honest. He’s not holding anything back. Why so harsh? Jesus is trying to warn the Jews about the danger of continuing on the path they’re on. It’s a path that leads to eternal destruction. Jesus is trying to save them! This is God’s grace at work as Jesus is trying to break thru the crusty hearts of these self-righteous, worldly, unbelieving Pharisees.

READ John 8:46-47

Discuss briefly top line-bottom line concept throughout scripture.

Of course now the Jews are beside themselves. They resort to name calling…

READ John 8:48-51

Calmly and cooly Jesus responds. 1 Peter 2:23 says this about Jesus: “When He was reviled He did not revile in return.” And we see that here. Jesus never backs down but reiterates His main message. Jesus was not seeking His own glory – Philippians 2:6-8!

READ John 8:52-53

“Just who do you think you are!” The Pharisees dig their heels in harder and refuse to believe Jesus’ message to them. They mock Jesus. When Jesus said in v 51, “if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death” He was obviously not talking about physical death but spiritual death, what Revelation 20 and 21 call “the second death.” But they miss Jesus’ point. Jesus isn’t finished. He gives them one last parting shot…

READ John 8:54-56

Abraham looked forward to God’s promise to him that thru his descendants, God would make a great nation, the nation of Israel, and would send the Promised One, the Messiah that would bless the nations. This is the promise God made in the Abrahamic Covenant, Gen 12, 15, 17. Abraham rejoiced, looked forward to it. Heb 11:13 says, “These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar…” That was Abraham. There was joy in God’s promise even if he would never see it himself. Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham! He came to save the world from their sins. He came to seek and to save those who are lost. He came to bring eternal life and to make peace with God. Why can’t these Jews share in the same joy that Abraham had?

READ John 8:57-58

Again the Jews mock Jesus missing the point He is making. But it is Jesus’ parting words that send them into a rage as Jesus applies the covenant name for God, I AM, Yahweh, to Himself. “Before Abraham was, I am.”

READ John 8:59

In keeping with Lev 24:16 they pick up stones in order to stone Jesus to death for blasphemy. But it is not yet His time and so He disappears, He leaves.

Application: Who is Jesus? Who do YOU say that He is? The fallen human race is on a path headed for destruction but Jesus brings words of life. Words of salvation for all who will believe. Most people, like these Pharisees here in John 8 think they are OK. They don’t need to be saved. But the bridge is out ahead and if they keep driving down the road they will face certain death. It is our job since we know the truth to tell others, to save them from hell. Ultimately it is their choice and we leave the work of regeneration up to the Holy Spirit. But we need to warn them. We need to give them the words of life!