

Into Thy Word Ministries Bible Study www.intothyword.org

General Idea: After Jesus gave some startling insight to His Divinity, the spiteful religious leaders reacted viciously; instead of a debate by the Scriptures or by the Law, they resorted to calling Him a devil, saying that He was possessed and even threw in a racial slur. Jesus again stood up for His position and defended it by saying His purpose was to honor His Father. As the religious leaders were seeking to glorify themselves, Jesus was pointing to the Father and proclaiming Him as the Judge. Then, He reassured those faithful ones who were listening that *whoever believes in Me will never die!* This further aggravated His opposers and insulted their pride and positions; they then just called Him more names. They wrongly cited Abraham and tried to trap Jesus in a contradiction, but they did not succeed. They could not wrap their minds around the fact that God was there in their midst, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe in their very presence—and all they could do was call Him childish names. They exclaimed, *who do you think you are?* Jesus answered them, *I do not boast about myself; rather it is my Father who says these glorious things about me. If you say our Father is our God, then why do you not know me? You all are liars; you do not know God. I know Him and I obey Him; you do not. Your ancestor Abraham looked forward to and overly rejoiced in these events as I do here.* The leaders, replied, *you are not even fifty years old! Do you think you knew Abraham when he is long dead?* Jesus then further astounded them by stating, *before Abraham was, I am.* At this point, they knew He was claiming to be God—*Yahweh*, the One True God—and they could not accept Him.

Contexts and Background:

This passage continues Jesus' discourse with the religious leaders and their highly intensified hatred during the Feast of Tabernacles. Here, the religious leaders continued to challenge Jesus' claim as the promised Messiah, but resorted to name calling and innuendos to attack Jesus because they could not win an honest, logical argument with Him. Calling Jesus a Samaritan was a tactic to get the crowd on their side, because Jesus was winning the day. The crowd hated the Samaritans just like the hatred that existed between the whites and blacks for one another in the US in the 50's or in South Africa in the 80's. This was a cheap shot as Jesus was centered in a very hostile environment and such cheap tricks worked with a people who refused to reason or search the Scriptures. Jesus left them to their ignorance and sin. John also used these events to validate the claim that Jesus was the Messiah and to answer the skeptic's rebuttals.

Commentary—Word and Phrase Meanings:

- *Samaritan.* This was an expression of contempt here, that Jesus' Father was not God; rather that He was a social outcast, born out of wedlock. The Samaritans questioned and attacked the Pharisees' right to be the leaders of the Law and be Abraham's exclusive "children;" Jesus' challenge was in a similar theme. They were a sub-Jewish cultural group that also followed the Law of Moses, but with a few distinctions. They were the remnant of the 10 tribes of the Northern Jewish Kingdom who had been taken captive by the Assyrians in 729 B.C. They then intermarried with their captors instead of remaining separated, as the Southern Jews did in Babylon. Thus, ever since the days of Nehemiah, when the two Southern tribes came back from captivity to find their Northern brothers in heinous sin, intermarried with Gentiles and forsaking much of the Law, they had been regarded as reprobates—a hated, heretical, Jewish cult. This is why they were a social pariah, treated with contempt by the Jews. The Samaritans likewise held the Jews in contempt (1 Kings 16:24; 2 Kings 17:1-31; Ezra. 4:1-24; Neh. 4:1-6; Luke 10:25-37; 17:6; John 8:48).
- *Demon-possessed.* Here, Jesus was being accused of blasphemy; they claimed He was either insane with a mental disorder, possessed, or paranoid (Matt. 11:18; 12:24-32; Mark 3:22-30; John 7: 1-24; 8:48-52; 8:48-52; 10:20-21).
- Demons are supernatural beings that were created many eons ago, before the *Fall* (Isaiah 14:12-14; Daniel 10:13; Ezekiel 28:12-15; John 12:31; Ephesians 6:12; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6). The word for *demons* (*daimon/daimonia*) is from the Greek; it is a broad term meaning *spiritual beings*, or

sometimes referred as *small gods* (Acts 17:18). Elsewhere in the New Testament, the word for *demons* refers to evil spirits (Matt. 8:16; 17:18; Luke 10:17, 20; Mark 9:25). They are actually fallen angels who used to hang out with God, doing His will and worshipping Him in a perfect utopia paradise (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6)! But, under the command and influence of Satan, they were persuaded to go his way in rebellion against God (Matthew 9:34; 12:24-29; Mark 3:22; Luke 11:15). They lost, and fell from their state of grace, thus becoming demons. They are basically angels who turned evil, and became totally depraved (extreme malevolence), in contrast to the angels who are still in a state of harmony with God and grace, and who act in goodness and are still sinless, as they did not fall with Satan (Mark 1:21-28; Luke 10:17-20; 11:14-26; 1 Corinthians 10:14-24; 1 John 4:1-6).

- *I am not possessed.* Jesus defended Himself with Truth, pointing to the Father. The religious leaders were using their pride and contempt; Jesus, as the Most Holy God, was using Truth, logic, and love. This would be the opposite of what someone who is “possessed” could do.
- *Honor.* The dialogue here indicates that when you reject a person’s representative, you reject the person who sent them. Here, Jesus placed the focus on God and Himself as the representative; therefore, the Jews are rejecting their own God to whom they pledged and devoted their life to know and serve—very ironic. To honor means to give respect and admiration, so we give tribute to God with our trust, obedience, and active faith, and then to others with our respect, love, and understanding. These are the opposites of what these religious leaders were doing. Being a person of **honor** and Christ-like character is the greatest witness and the greatest impact we can be for His kingdom (Ex. 20:12; Deut. 6:4-5; 1 Sam. 2:30; Psalm 119:9; 148:12-13; Prov. 1:8-9; 4:1-11; Mark 12:29-30; Rom. 13:1-10; 1 Cor. 12:21-26; Gal. 6:10; Eph. 6:1-3; Phil. 2: 3-4; 14; Col. 1:19-23; 1 Thess. 5:12-13; 1 Tim. 6:1-2; 1 Peter 2:17).
- *Dishonor.* The Pharisees could not rightly attack the veracity or reality of Jesus’ character or conduct, so they resorted to “ad hominem” attacks, meaning personal, unfounded, and illogical wisecracks, thus avoiding the real issue. The basic dishonor is the fact that many people were and are duped in this bad reasoning and thus miss out on the true Truth of our Lord.
- *Seeking glory.* By nature, we are all children of wrath; we are sinners, seeking our own pride, and are willfully disobedient. But in Christ, we have the choice and power to become children of God (John 1:12-13; Rom. 9:30-10:13; Eph. 2:2-3).
- *I tell you the truth/most assuredly.* Another declaration that Jesus is God and to be our only Yahweh! God is reliable and truthful; our human wisdom is weak on its best day and feeble on its own. Many Greek thinkers believed that correct, intellectual thinking like Gnosticism would win one’s salvation. But Jesus sets us all straight; only He has the key for a right relationship with God—and He is that key (Ex. 3:14; Deut. 32:39; Isa. 41:4; 43:10; John 6:22-58).
- *Never see death.* Meaning when we are in Christ, we receive eternal life. This is also a retort to the Sadducees who did not believe in a literal life after death; they were fatalistic. But this is not just about physical death or being immortal as humans. *Never* means “beyond this life on earth.” *Death* here also refers to judgment and being punished for one’s sin. Jesus’ meaning here is that those who are in Him are freed from the penalty of sin and need have no fear of condemnation (John 5:24-29; 6:40-47, 63-68; 11:25-26; Rom. 6:23; 8:1-2, 37-39).
- *Abraham died.* The religious leaders were being overly literalistic on purpose as a retort. Abraham was faithful and obedient, as he actively waited on God; He declared him righteous and made him the quintessential Representative for faith and righteousness, the opposite of the religious leaders (Gen. 11: 31-32; 12:1-3; 16:1-4; 17:17-18; Rom. 4:1-22; Gal. 3:7, 9, 29). Not all of Abraham’s descendants will receive salvation as God looks to the heart, not to the pedigree (Ex. 32:33-35; Num. 11:1; 14:37; 16:32-35; 25:4-4; Deut. 1:35)! God works through time, history, and people to bring about His plan of redemption (Gen. 17:7-8; Isa.41:8-13; Mal. 1:2-3; John 4:15; Rom. 4:11-18; 9:7; Gal. 3:29; Eph. 2:8-9; Heb. 2:12-18; 6:15-17; 11:9).

- *Greater than... Abraham.* Abraham represented faith and was the father of the nation. Moses set up the Law and the Prophets and stood up for God's precepts, but neither of them could remove sins or promise life after death as Jesus was doing and as they heard Him. Furthermore, Jesus would triumph over death and become our Redeemer who lives.
- *Who do you think you are?* This theme was used for the Broadway play, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, a satire on Christianity, just as these religious leaders were creating a satire by treating God with contempt—not a good idea!
- *Glorify myself.* Jesus did not seek glory as He walked among us; rather, He let the evidence of His life, teaching, and works be the prime exhibit as He pointed to the Father. But, He will be fully displayed in complete glory in time and eternity (John 1:14; 1 Tim. 3:16).
- *Glorifies.* Meaning to honor God. The religious leaders were honoring their traditions and positions and Jesus was seeking to point them to truly honor God. In context, "your God" or "our God" are also statements of a confession of faith for the Jews to honor and keep God's Law (Ex. 6:7; Lev. 26:12; 1 Chron. 17:22; Jer. 9:24; 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:28; Hos. 2:20).
- *Abraham rejoiced/was glad.* Abraham received a preview and understood that the Law and all that he did were mere types and shadows of the Messiah Redeemer to come; now the Covenant has been fulfilled in Jesus. The Law points to Christ and the Gospel fulfills the Law; salvation for the Jews looked forward to Christ with animal sacrifice, faith, and obedience as signs while Christian salvation looks back to what Christ has done on our behalf (Gen. 22; Acts 4:12; Heb. 11:13).
- *Fifty years old.* This was the minimum age to serve as a leader in the various religious leadership guilds or in public civil service. At this time, Jesus would have been 30 to 32 years old. This was a retort; *you are too young to address us, let alone too young to do as you claim* (Luke 3:23).
- *Before Abraham was born, I am.* This was not a statement of age, rather an astonishing proclamation: I am God! Jesus was claiming preexistence and Deity. This is why they picked up stones (Ex. 3:14; John 1:1-1; 8:24; 17:5).
- *Picked up stones to stone him.* The offence of blasphemy was the worst one conceivable for a pious Jew. Claiming to be a messiah was not the problem; Jesus claimed to be God. However, carrying out such a sentence had to be done in a court of law, not in the streets. Their plot to kill Jesus would culminate in the crucifixion (Ex. 17:4; Lev. 24:16; Num. 14:10; 1 Sam. 30:6; Matt. 26:65; John 10:31; 11:45-57).
- *Jesus hid himself/going through their midst.* Jesus got away because His time had not yet come. It was perhaps a supernatural exit. Moreover, this was the departure of God from the people who had rejected Him and remained in sin (Ezek. 10-11; Jer. 36:26; John 7:33, 44; 18:6)

Devotional Thoughts and Applications:

This Gospel was a great reassurance of faith for a new, fledgling church, because they saw that Jesus had faced what they faced and had gone through what they either already had gone or would have to go through because of the extreme opposition He encountered—just as the original receivers of this Gospel faced and as we face today. This was of great encouragement to them, to know that God was not aloof but active, caring, and involved and we/they could identify with Him as Savior and Lord. This is also a retort to those early Christians who after becoming Christians, under pressure from their families and religious leaders, left the Church and betrayed Jesus and the faith community (John 6: 6:67-71; 1 John is a letter that addresses this as one of its prime themes).

God is more interested in how we are than what we are. He wants us to be good more than He cares what we do in vocation or living. He wants character, faith, and fruit from our spiritual growth, not spiritual descent from our disobedience, lack of faith, pride, or relying on what is not true or fleeting, like relying on one's ancestry as these religious leaders were doing.

We must beware of our preconceptions, and not be so entrenched in falsehoods or bad thinking that in the process of trying to convince others or ourselves, not fully knowing what we are saying because we did not think it through.

The Essential Inductive Questions (for more Inductive questions see Inductive Bible Study):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

Additional Questions:

1. Does your family have a religious heritage, like being a part of the same denomination for generations? How does that make you feel?
2. How do you feel when people use cheap tricks, spite, or contempt when they have a disagreement? Why did the people in this passage refuse to reason or search the Scriptures?
3. How do you feel when someone uses cynicism or sarcasm? Why did the religious leaders have such highly intensified hatred toward Jesus?
4. How has *the Truth*, set you free both for eternity and for the here and now of daily life? Why did the religious leaders react so viciously instead of debating by the Scriptures or by the Law? Keep in mind; these were the most educated people of their time and knew better.
5. What helps you to wrap your mind around the fact that God, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe is here in your midst, giving you grace?
6. How would you describe Jesus' role in the universe and in your life?
7. Why do some Christians see their lives of faith like a buffet, picking and poking only at what looks and feels good, ignoring what is needed to be fed and healthy? What can you do to make sure this is not you?
8. What does it mean to you that Jesus faced what we have, are, and will face in our lives and He can get us through?
9. What evidence of Christ's life, teaching, and works are being exhibited in you? How do you point to the Father?
10. How does belief lead to trust? How does trust lead to commitment? How does commitment lead to obedience? Why can't belief stand alone and lead us nowhere?
11. What can you do better to place your focus more on God and Jesus as His representative? How can you be a person of *honor* and Christ-like character? How would this help you be a better witness and impact for His kingdom?
12. How can you be more obedient and righteousness? How can you better actively wait upon God?