

Introduction: An Axe and 2, 38's.

Acts 2:38 “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Messages are not always received. Misunderstandings are bound to take place in human discourse.

The text before us today is rife with phrases and claims by Jesus that are:

(1) Cryptic—Enigmatic speech designed to capture attention, and peak the curiosity of Jesus’ listeners, bringing them further into the truth.

(2) Provocative—Jesus’ sayings are deliberately provoking a response in order to reveal the truth and to expose false, or inadequate belief.

Transition: They think he’s saying one thing, and he’s driving at something else. Two truths that at this time they simply can’t hear. In fact, Jesus tells them the reason why you don’t understand me is because you actually can’t understand me.

In his ongoing feud with the Religious Leaders Jesus is charged with testifying on his own behalf—and in a Jewish court this would not be acceptable.

Jesus’ counter charge is that they are unfit judges, and Jesus’ other legal witness is His Father. ¹⁷ In your own Law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is true.

¹⁸ I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent me.”

The Religious Leaders misunderstood who Jesus’ Father was. ²⁷ They did not understand that he was telling them about his Father. ²⁸ So Jesus said, “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.

The scene is set for Jesus to begin to explain in more direct terms who He is, and who they are. While this controversy is going on at the feast of Tabernacles, the text says “many believed in him.”

Transition: Jesus now turns directly to those who appear to be warming to his teaching. Perhaps they are impressed by his debating skills. Perhaps they are persuaded by his colorful and forceful style of preaching. Whatever attracts them definitely doesn't keep them.

Jn 8:31-32

³¹ To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. ³² Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Apart from an understanding of what is actually true, they can't have life.

What is Truth? Is there any such thing as Truth? Lady with the Biscuit on her Head.

"There's good news and bad news ma'am. The good news is, you're brain is in tact. The bad news is, we've lost a can of Pillsbury biscuits."

Just because all the circumstances around her told her something was truth—she had been shot and was holding her brains in—doesn't make it so.

Truth, by its very nature, must be intolerant of error. And the truth of the biscuit was intolerant of the error of her imagination.

Freedom: True freedom is not absolute libertarianism. That is, true freedom does not grant us the unbridled pursuit of the self. True freedom lives within social constraints, moral laws, and civil duties. The freedom that Jesus is teaching them is a freedom from the insidiousness of slavery to sin. Both the **sentence** of sin and its **sway** over us.

Main Idea: Jesus insists that if they hold fast to His teaching then they are genuine disciples. "Real" disciples hold fast to Christ's teaching and they come to "know" the truth and that truth sets them free from sin.

What teaching was he referring to? Rather than extrapolate, let's stay within this text to discover the keys.

1. Jesus teaches the truth about the people: sinners in need of saving.

- Gentile nations are lost in idolatry, godlessness, and paganism.
- **Jews are lost in religion.**

Jesus' challenges them on several fronts:

(1) Their fine Abrahamic pedigree—their religious and ethnic heritage in Abraham. In their minds it was Hagar who was Abraham's slave, not Isaac. Isaac is the freeborn son, their ancestor. Ishmael was the slave son, not their ancestor. Jesus insists that they are still in bondage to sin.

(2) Their pride of political status—not as a slave state, but as a mere Client state of Rome. While they may not be fans of Herod, at least they have a King of Israel. "We are not slaves."

Jn 8:33-36 They answered Him, "We are **Abraham's descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone**; how is it that You say, 'You will become free'?" ³⁴ Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. ³⁵ The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever. ³⁶ So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. This sinful state includes both Jew and Gentile alike:

Rom. 3:9, 23 "For we have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

Sin blinds us to the truth. The Devil keeps us bound in sin.

2 Cor. 4:4 "The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." The thing is, the Jews already believed this about everyone else. And the shocking thing about Jesus' statement is that it now applies to the people who thought of themselves as the people of God. \

1 Jn. 3:8 "The one who continues in a life of sin is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work." It's so hard to hear the truth about ourselves. To be told that a belief we hold about ourselves just isn't true. **And when confronted we may experience fight or flight—our sympathetic nervous systems will kick in to make us recoil from it, or to challenge the truth-teller.** And the Pharisees choose "Fight."

2. Jesus teaches the truth about himself: God's unique, eternal Son.

This picture of Jesus will become more and more clear and explicit in the next few chapters. We'll focus on John's concepts here in this chapter.

- 8:38 He is the **Son who has "seen" the Father** before the creation of the World.
- (8:40, 45-47) He is the **Son who tells them the truth** he heard from God
- (8:42) He is the **Son sent from God** the Father
- (8:49-50) He is the **Son who honors and glorifies** the Father
- (8:54) He is **the Son who is glorified** by the Father
- (8:55) He is the **Son who knows and obeys** the Father
- (8:58) He is the pre-existent **"I AM"**

Let's look at the text more deeply...

Jn. 8:52-59

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?"

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. ⁵⁵ 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.

⁵⁶ Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad."

⁵⁷ "You are not yet fifty years old," they said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!"

⁵⁸ "Very truly I tell you," 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.

They press Jesus, and every sentence he reveals more and more. Finally, they ask "You are not even 50 years old yet and you have seen Abraham!" This isn't merely sarcasm on their behalf. It's procedural. There are many offices within the rabbinic order that a younger man at the age of 30-40 would not have been eligible for, until the age of 50. Yet Jesus is not just claiming as a young rabbi, a positional authority—his claims are far grander and more scandalous.

Notice that the grammar here is unusual. Jesus doesn't say "Before Abraham was born, I Was." But "Before Abraham was born, I AM." This is a conscious statement that he is Yahweh, which in the OT is translated "LORD." This is God's name.

WORSHIP TEAM: COME BACK UP:

The hallmark of Jewish faith is that they were staunch Monotheists. That is, God reveals himself as "The LORD God" in all of their OT covenants. He warns the nation repeatedly to abandon polytheism and henotheism (the worship of many Gods or one God as merely supreme above all others), and the penalty for not heeding the warning is exile. Which later they will go into Babylon, exiled because of their worship of false gods instead of the one true God of Israel. After the exile, Israel had learned its lesson—*Never again would they worship any god but the One True God of heaven and earth. So for Jesus to come along claiming in no uncertain terms that he is the embodiment of that one true God—their God,* it runs against the grain of everything for which they have been trained, biblically and experientially.

Just a small sampling of 100's of passages where the name "YHWH" (I AM) is identified as El, Elohim (God). I'll give you just a few today.

Gen. 2:4 This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, when the LORD (YHWH) God (Elohim) made the earth and the heavens. Here we see the claim that Yahweh Elohim is the God who created all things.

Exodus 3:14-15 ¹⁴ God (*Elohim*) said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM" (eHYeH ASAR eHYeH); and He said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM (YHWH) has sent me to you.'" ¹⁵ God, furthermore, said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'The LORD (YHWH), the God (*Elohim*) of your fathers, the God (*Elohim*) of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations.

Now, I'll read the rest of the passages substituting our English "LORD" for I AM.

Dt. 6:4-10 "Hear, O Israel! The I AM is our God, the I AM is one!"

Ps. 18:34 For who is God, but the I AM?

Is. 42:5-6 Thus says God the I AM,
Who created the heavens and stretched them out,
Who spread out the earth and its offspring,
Who gives breath to the people on it

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And spirit to those who walk in it,

⁶ “I am the I AM, I have called You in righteousness.”

Is. 43:10 “You are My witnesses,” declares the **I AM**, “And My servant whom I have chosen. So that you may know and believe Me And understand that I AM is He. Before Me there was no **God** formed, and there will be none after Me.

Is. 44:6 Thus says the **I AM**, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the **I AM**, the Almighty: ‘**I am** the first and **I am** the last, And there is no **God** besides Me.

Is. 45:5 “I am the I AM, and there is no other; Besides Me there is no God.

45:14 Thus says the I AM... ‘Surely, God is with you, and there is none else, No other God.’”

45:21 “Who has long since declared it? Is it not I, the I AM? And there is no other God besides Me, A righteous God and a Savior; There is none except Me.

This helps us to sympathize with the Jews to whom Jesus is speaking in Jn. 8. Because their entire way of life, their belief system—has been geared toward this cornerstone doctrine of their Jewish faith. There is no other God but YHWH—the Great I AM.

And now a man, what to them appears to be a blasphemous, crazy, possibly even demonized human being standing before saying, “

“before Abraham was born, I AM!” ⁵⁹ At this, they picked up stones to stone him”
This is affirmation that brings life. This is this is what we believe.

All who believe on him will never see death (51-52).