

## *The Appalling Jesus OR What It Means to Be Free*

John 8.12, 30-39, 44, 56-59

March 17, 2024

*Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life."*

<sup>30</sup> *As He spoke these things, many came to believe in Him.*

<sup>31</sup> *So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; <sup>32</sup> and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." <sup>33</sup> 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 '?"*

<sup>34</sup> *Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. <sup>35</sup> "The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever. <sup>36</sup> "So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. <sup>37</sup> "I know that you are Abraham's descendants; yet you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you. <sup>38</sup> "I speak the things which I have seen with My Father; therefore you also do the things which you heard from your father."*

<sup>39</sup> *They answered and said to Him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you are Abraham's children, do the deeds of Abraham. <sup>40</sup> "But as it is, you are seeking to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God; this Abraham did not do.*

<sup>44</sup> *"You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.*

<sup>56</sup> *"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad." <sup>57</sup> So the Jews said to Him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?" <sup>58</sup> Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am." <sup>59</sup> Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple.*

**As Phil pointed out saw last week**, the conflict in this book is now becoming more pronounced. Two weeks ago, we saw the *Galilean Crisis* that ended with an ominous mention of Judas Iscariot. Last week the hostility rises and THIS week it intensifies even more.

Jesus of Nazareth is in the capital city. AND everyone knows there's something VERY wrong in the capital city, an overwhelming social problem that any good Jewish politician or leader or king simply HAS TO address: IT'S THE ROMANS! But the foreign Roman army is not the concern of Jesus...He ignores THE obvious problem that's on everyone's mind ("It's the economy, stupid!")

Instead, Jesus Christ's concern is the Church, the leaders and religious professionals are (What's the theological term?) JERKS and worse, they're corrupt and fixated on being powerful and being respected/feared and on proving their superiority to others. AND worst of all, Jesus is troubled that they don't believe in God... ministers who don't believe in God. Troubling INDEED!

What's OUR problem? I mean as we approach the political season what does a candidate HAVE to address else, he or she is "out of touch" and irrelevant? What are the most urgent issues facing us as a society? AND what's YOUR difficulty...some problem, issue, concern, vice, conflict, something facing you that, if your friends knew about it, they'd say, "MAN! You better *devote effort to that thing... focus on that* immediately!"

What IF that glaring problem facing our culture AND facing you personally were NOT really "where it's at"? What if the deepest, most important, urgent need in our society and in our families and personal lives is something you thought was low on the list or didn't make the list at all? Would you want to know about it?

The title of the sermon IS the outline of the sermon:

**1<sup>st</sup> – The Appalling Jesus**

**2<sup>nd</sup> – What It Means to Be Free**

In His teaching at the feast of "Succoth" (Tabernacles) ... Jesus attracts the attention of the "Jews" (when John uses that designation, he's referring to the Jewish leaders or clergy (priests/scholars) and Jesus is saying things they find to be outrageous.

They're horrified by what He says 1) about THEM and 2) by what He says about HIMSELF... Let's look at it:

This is a kind of cross-section of the longer dialogue but IN these few verses, Jesus is exposing the religious establishment. He confronts them on at least 3 points:

- 1) How they misuse their racial/religious heritage
- 2) Their naïve self-image (and what they're really like)
- 3) Their strained/forced religiosity

They pride themselves on their racial religious heritage. Now... this may sound odd *but if EVER racism should've been permissible or tolerated or even celebrated it was with them*. What I mean is: this was God's Chosen Race. God approached these pagan, idol worshipers and God's approach made them (Abraham/Sarah) God's own special nation.

God separated the people of Abraham from ALL other people for His own purposes. And that *should* have made them humble and grateful and useful in serving the world as a City on a Hill. But instead of being a source of blessing and truth to the Gentile nations the Jewish clergy had become thoroughly racist! "*We can trace OUR family tree back to our roots in Abraham!*"

The Rabbi from Galilee says, "*That stinks! Your chosen-ness is having the opposite effect that God intended for it to have. Your genetic link to Abraham is choking your compassion and swelling your pride! You're attributing God's grace to your deserving – ABSURD!*"

Second, the Appalling Jesus tackles their mistaken self-image: "If you want to talk about your traits and your spiritual DNA and how you're just like Abraham, well, now that you mention it, you DO in fact resemble your father. Not Abraham...your father, the devil."

"You look in the mirror and say, 'Wow! We really look like Abraham!' You lie to yourselves and then believe your own lies! But if you had an accurate self-image, you'd see: Abraham is NOT the one you resemble!"

Abraham is known for one particular spiritual/moral trait or quality and that is belief. He trusted in the promises of God. Abraham lived "before the face of God", in relationship with God as if God mattered more than the opinions of people and in that sense, you guys do NOT look like Abraham... No one would pick you out of a line-up and say 'Ah! Those must be Abraham's great, great grandchildren!' NO similarity."

But you DO have traits that are the most prominent characteristics of another father: you kill like he does, and you speak his language. In Bolivia they speak Spanish, in Pakistan they speak Urdu and in Hell they speak lies... You guys are FLUENT in that language ... You speak IT to one another and to yourselves.

The paternity test IS IN and it points NOT to Abraham but to the devil. But that's NOT how you see yourselves.

Third, Jesus speaks about their world-famous morality. The Jewish clergymen in the 1<sup>st</sup> C were amazingly disciplined and devout and scrupulous about their diet and their regulations and keeping the rhythm of the week (Sabbath), holy-days and festivals.

And Jesus Christ is saying, "All that has NOT kept you from the inner slavery that's bewitched the entire human race... Your apparent righteousness is only FORCED religiosity motivated more by a fear of getting caught by people than it's motivated by love for God or compassion for others. "Your hearts need to be liberated - you don't obey like sons - you obey like slaves!", says Jesus.

But they can't even begin to consider that because their "*superiority complex*" won't allow them to think!

"We're of Abraham and we have never been enslaved!!" (Did they forget about that little stay in Egypt [400 years!] or the Assyrian and Babylonian Exiles?)

Then the Appalling Teacher from Galilee shocks the leaders by what He says about HIMSELF (first them, now HIMSELF) "*I am the LIGHT of the world! He who follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life.*"

No one left to himself will come to know and worship God; our hearts won't "get it." We'll all make gods that only agree with us... gods who won't cross our wills or challenge or contradict us.

We're fallen and our ability to really know "the God who is there" (Schaeffer) that ability is broken. We've have lost our spiritual perception... we're blind and in the dark and here comes *The Appalling Jesus* to say, "I am the light of the world", an end to groping -- thē light that IS spiritual life ("light of life").

What audacity this Person has who would say, "I am THĒ source of spiritual enlightenment for the entire world?" And the Jewish leaders pick up on that AUDACITY and they're appalled! "We could

handle 'A light to the Jews' - that would be a little brash/cocky but we could handle THAT... What we simply CAN'T tolerate is Your saying, "Thē light of the world."

That'd be careless! THIS is inexcusable!

And, you know: this Rabbi is JUST as appalling TODAY! That this one Person claims to have some kind of corner on spiritual truth and that HIS WAY is the only way, HIS LIGHT is the only light "THĒ light of THĒ world".

And if that wasn't enough... He concludes this long discourse, cool. There's no indication that He's yelling or ranting just stating the case, directly and plainly.

And the teaching ("Q&A") ends with Jesus Christ making one more reference to Abraham, "*True: biologically you ARE the descendants of Abraham... though, you are not akin to him spiritually ... because he rejoiced to see My day; he saw it and was glad?* (Implied – 'YOU are anything BUT glad to see Me!')"

"You're not even 50 years old... Abraham lived like 2000 years ago and you're talking like You knew him."

And Jesus MAY be thinking, "Knew him? I made him! And when Abraham received the only begotten son of the Promise (Gen 21), he was seeing the next link in a long, generational chain that was the line of the Messiah – In Isaac, Abraham saw ME and he rejoiced!"

NOW, they just blow a gasket (appalled) "blasphemy!"

Famous reply: "Truly, truly before Abraham was born, I AM" and they picked up stones to kill Him for blasphemy because He was making Himself out to be God."

And what else COULD they do? That "I Am" is the equivalent of the "*tetragrammaton*" the 4-Letter name for God Jewish people counted too sacred to even say and Jesus Christ takes it for Himself. "I AM"

That's the Appalling Jesus.

And what does the Appalling Jesus have to do with true freedom? Especially since His exclusive claims strike us as the very OPPOSITE of freedom, seems like His claims are really limiting our options ■■■ to ONE!

Well first a BIG QUESTION for each of US to answer: IS IT POSSIBLE that WE, like the old priests, that we too have the wrong idea of what it means to be free? We laugh at these guys but maybe we have more in common with them than we think!

We're so sure we know ourselves and see ourselves clearly... but THEY didn't and but MAYBE we don't.

Maybe we need light. Maybe our own self-image is just as inaccurate as theirs was (all the contestants on American Idol THINK they can sing... Some clearly can't!). Maybe we too lack insight

into our own motives and hearts and the foibles and deep errors of OWN generation ... Maybe we're just as blind and laughable as they were ...Isn't that at least... possible?

Can we at least open the door to admit the possibility: that we may not know... that we need light, that OUR commonly held conceptions of freedom and of our true "issues" are not we think they are?

Here's another big question: CAN you entertain the possibility that Jesus Christ IS who He claimed to be; thĒ Source of light that we need, in order to see ourselves and to see freedom... light leading to LIFE?

The old ministers and rabbis weren't willing... they weren't FREE to be open to this possibility. They had the wrong perspective on LIFE – didn't have the Light of Life.

Second, we think freedom is being able to do whatever we want to do but Jesus is saying, "NO! That's only another form of slavery. It's slavery to one's own will."

Addicts are enslaved to their wills or appetites. Sociopaths and narcissists and the insane are enslaved to their wills ... And we don't envy THEM; we pity them... that's not freedom - it's tragedy.

Like the locomotive who dreamed of being free from the tracks (wanted to be like the cars on I-95) so he got off the tracks and got stuck in a field and rusted... or the Blue Whale who dreamed of living in the desert.

Maybe freedom is more than being uninhibited to follow our dreams when those dreams lead to captivity and death.

Maybe real freedom is the LIGHT to see and to know what limitations fit our true nature... the fish is limited by the water AND yet the water is what frees him to be what he was meant to BE. The tracks fit with the nature of the train and those rails set the train free... to fly down the tracks (and make Johnny Cash sing!)

The Appalling Jesus is saying to us: "You will only BE free if I set you free. On your own, at best, you'll be caged by your own desires and the often self-destructive-SELF ... V 36 *"If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed."*

"I," says Jesus "am not a slave to My SELF or My appetites. I'm not a slave at all but a Son."

"What I do, I do from the only pure motive there is: the motive of LOVE." Everything He does He does out of pure love for the Father... not to get rewarded; not to avoid punishment... not to elude getting caught.

"I love to obey! It's My food to obey (4.34) and I can begin in your present life what I will perfect in the coming life, to set you free. I can start a life-long liberation program in you, freeing you to obey and to love NOT AS A SLAVE but as a son... Not obeying strictly because you have to but because IT'S

YOUR JOY...because your duty has become your delight and you're free to obey... and therefore FREE to become all I've purposed you to be (infinitely greater than you imagine!)

See the "rest of the story" here is that Jesus Christ is not merely saying, "Get back on the tracks and roll like I command" or "GET back in the water and swim... stay in your LANE if you wanna be free" He's saying, "I AM the only truly free entity there is, the 'I AM' ... and I came to be restrained FOR YOU."

I've come, in love to lose My freedom and become bound in order to free you from guilt and that SLAVISH way you approach obedience. THE SON BECOMES A SLAVE so that the SLAVES CAN BECOME SONS.

And when I know that truth it sets me free! When I get a sense of that love... when I see Him and see myself IN HIS LIGHT, I can only say, "I will follow... I want to follow. In Christ, I'm free to become what I was made to be."

## Q U O T E S

**Above all, do not lie to yourself.** A man who lies to himself, and believes his own lies, becomes unable to recognize truth, either in himself or in anyone else, and he ends up losing respect for himself and for others. When he has no respect for anyone, he can no longer love, and in him, he yields to his impulses, indulges in the lowest form of pleasure, and behaves in the end like an animal in satisfying his vices. And it all comes from lying — to others and to yourself.

— Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880)

Our pleasure and our duty,  
Though opposite before;  
Since we have seen his beauty,  
Are joined to part no more:  
It is our highest pleasure,  
No less than duty's call;  
To love him beyond measure,  
And serve him with our all.

— John Newton (writer of "Amazing Grace"),  
Olney Hymns #3 (1779)