

Jesus, the Great I AM

(John 8.41-59)

Introduction –

Last Sunday's recap: We saw two kinds of people: those enslaved to sin and those freed in Christ. The main point of our last sermon was that all of us are mastered by someone. If Christ is our Master, we are truly free. If sin is our master, we are truly enslaved.

Today's theme: Following the same contrast, Jesus expands on this theme by changing the imagery from slavery to fatherhood and sonship. Today we will see the children of the devil contrasted with the Son of God. It is always good to remind ourselves that there is no neutral ground. If we are not for Christ, we are against Him.

1. The Truth vs. Lies (vv. 45–47)

Jesus asks, "Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me?"

I want to introduce you to three of the greatest men in the Old Testament:

- A. David, a man after God's own heart. He says, "Surely I was sinful at birth; sinful from the time my mother conceived me" (Psalm 51). David is acknowledging that he was a sinner from the very beginning.
- B. The prophet Isaiah. When he saw the Lord in His glory in the temple, he cried out, "Woe is me! For I am ruined, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts" (Isaiah 6).
- C. Job. We could call him "Mr. Righteous." God Himself—not Job, not his friends, not his family—declared that there was no one like him on the earth. Yet after encountering God, Job said, "I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes. Before, I had only heard of You, but now my eyes have seen You" (Job 42).

All these men, as great as they were, honestly assessed themselves and recognized their own sinfulness. None claimed perfection.

Then Jesus makes an astonishing statement: "Can any of you prove Me guilty of sin?" His record is perfect, and He knows it. Jesus then asks, "Why can't you believe Me? Why won't you accept My works and My words?"

The answer is simple: they belong to the devil.

Perhaps this is shocking because these were not robbers, burglars, cartel members, gang members, or hooligans. These were deeply religious people. They were respected scholars, teachers, and leaders. They held positions of authority, taught the Scriptures, and made the religious decisions.

Religion may clothe a person outwardly, but what truly matters is what is within. As Jesus said, “A tree is known by its fruit.”

In this section we see several characteristics of the children of the devil:

- A. They reject the Word of God (vv. 37, 43). They may accept it intellectually, but they refuse to obey it.
- B. They are hypocrites (vv. 39, 41). Outwardly clean, inwardly corrupt. They boast of being Abraham’s children—pure blood—while insulting Jesus by calling Him a Samaritan.
- C. They hate God and are murderers (vv. 40, 44). In light of the Sermon on the Mount, hatred toward one’s brother is murder in the heart. In their case, they even sought to carry out literal murder.
- D. They are liars (v. 44). In this context, they are not merely lying to others—they are lying to themselves. They deceive themselves into believing they are saved, chosen, a light to the nations, and eternally secure. Yet because they reject the truth—Jesus Christ—they possess none of those privileges.

When we think about lying, we usually think about speaking falsehoods to others. That is certainly true. However, in the Jewish mindset, the worst kind of lie is the one we tell ourselves. It is hypocrisy—living a double life, claiming to belong to God while denying Him every day.

The book of Revelation warns us that “the cowardly” will not inherit the kingdom of God. Who is the coward? The one who hides behind hypocrisy. On Sunday he appears to be a believer; from Monday through Saturday he lives as an unbeliever.

2. The Son of God vs. the Children of the Devil (vv. 44, 48–51)

Jesus gives a profound theological interpretation of Genesis 3, the fall of mankind: The devil—the serpent—was a murderer from the beginning. Through his lies, Adam and Eve fell into sin, bringing spiritual death immediately and physical death as its consequence. Throughout Scripture, God grants the devil no rightful ownership over creation. Yet Jesus attributes one kind of fatherhood to him: he is the father of lies. He is the source and origin of all falsehood.

You speak English. I speak Portuguese. Jesus spoke Hebrew and Aramaic. The devil speaks lies.

When reason and argument fail, people often resort to insults. They called Jesus a Samaritan and accused Him of being demon-possessed.

What was the basis for these accusations? None. At this point, they are simply resorting to name-calling.

Jesus' response may initially seem unrelated, but John carefully builds every conversation so that each statement adds another layer of revelation, culminating in a powerful climax.

- First, Jesus refuses to answer the accusation that He is a Samaritan.

In context, His opponents believed that being true Jews and descendants of Abraham guaranteed God's favor. By calling Jesus a Samaritan, they were declaring Him to be an outsider and a false believer.

But both John the Baptist and Jesus had already warned them that ethnicity would not justify them before God. What mattered was not Abraham's blood flowing through their veins but Abraham's faith dwelling in their hearts.

- Second, Jesus once again identifies Himself with the Father and goes even further: His words give eternal life.

Anyone who keeps His word will never see death. They accused Him of being possessed by a demon—as though He carried death within Himself. Yet He is so full of life that even His words have the power to save. Considering the Jewish understanding that life and death are bound up with the Word of God, this claim is astonishing.

Jesus' words remind us of Peter's confession in John 6: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

3. The Eternal One vs. Mortal Men (vv. 52–59)

Once again, His opponents resort to insults. This time, however, they reveal their reasoning (at least): All the great saints of the Old Testament died. Therefore, if Jesus promises eternal life simply by keeping His word, then according to them, He is either blasphemous or insane.

If His words are interpreted literally, their objection seems reasonable. But Jesus is clearly speaking about spiritual death, not physical death. Understood that way, His teaching makes perfect sense.

Why couldn't they understand Him?

Because their minds were fixed on earthly things rather than spiritual realities. This is, actually, a recurring theme throughout John's Gospel.

- Jesus told Nicodemus that he must be born again, and Nicodemus thought only of physical birth.
- Jesus offered the Samaritan woman living water, and she thought only of the water in the well.
- Jesus called Himself the Bread of Life, and the crowds thought only about physical bread.

The problem was never the Speaker. The problem was always the listeners.

When they mention Abraham again, Jesus makes yet another astonishing claim: "Abraham rejoiced that he would see My day. He saw it and was glad."

They believed they knew Abraham because they constantly appealed to him. In reality, they did not understand him at all. The patriarch they claimed as their spiritual father longed for the coming of Christ. This should not surprise us, because Abraham lived by God's promise that through his offspring all the families of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:1–3).

When Abraham was commanded to offer Isaac, and Isaac asked, "Where is the lamb for the offering?" Abraham replied, "God Himself will provide the lamb." Abraham may not have understood the full significance of those words, but God certainly did.

Abraham's son was spared on Mount Moriah. God's Son was not.

Once again, the Jews interpret Jesus' spiritual words in an earthly way: "Are You greater than Abraham?" "You are not even fifty years old, and You have seen Abraham?"

Jesus concludes with one of the most astonishing declarations in all of Scripture: "Before Abraham was, I AM."

These words intentionally echo Exodus 3, where Moses asked God for His name, and God answered: "I AM WHO I AM." Philosophers, scientists, Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, and many others ask whether Jesus ever claimed to be God.

He did so repeatedly throughout the Gospels, but this is perhaps His clearest and most explicit declaration. His audience understood exactly what He meant. That is why they picked up stones to kill Him for blasphemy.

Conclusion

Notice the progression in John's argument:

- Words: truth or lies.
- Family: children of God or children of the devil.
- Identity: the Eternal One or mortal men.

These themes lead us to ask three important questions:

- Do I love and speak the truth?
- Whose child am I?
- Who is Jesus?

This passage contains no explicit command such as “repent,” “obey,” or “abide.” Instead, John’s purpose is to point us to Jesus so that we may know with certainty who He is. At the same time, he exposes the marks of those who belong to sin so that we may marvel all the more at the greatness of the salvation Christ has given us.

Today’s passage presents the children of the devil and exposes the marks that define them. Jesus describes them as liars, people who reject the Word of God, and those who harbor hatred in their hearts. These characteristics reveal the spiritual condition of those who stand opposed to God’s truth.

Yet the central message of this passage is not merely about morality, ethics, or behavior. It is a profound theological declaration: Jesus is God — he is worthy of our praise!