

Jesus Provokes His Enemies

Scripture: John 8:48-59

Code: 43-48

Turn to John chapter 8, John chapter 8. We're wrapping up this 8th chapter, and it has been a chapter of assaults on Jesus. Ten times in this chapter—which actually begins in verse 12—ten times in this chapter Jesus has been attacked and assaulted by the leaders of Judaism. Ten times. It's just one barrage after another.

And it's not just this chapter. The same thing was going on in the previous chapter. In the previous chapter, they were making the same blasphemous accusations, the same threats, having the same desire to kill him. This goes all the way back to the second chapter of the Gospel of John when Jesus came into Jerusalem and launched his ministry by assaulting the corrupt temple operations, and it's been nothing but conflict for the two and a half years since then with the religious leaders of Judaism.

This, however, is one of the most antagonistic events in that conflict, and that's why I titled it "Jesus Antagonizes the Enemies." And I might tell you that he purposely antagonizes his enemies because it's necessary. It's what the truth does to error and it's required.

Just to maybe set the context a little bit bigger outside the Book of John, have you noticed that it is only evangelical biblical Christianity that is persecuted in the world and in our society? People aren't persecuting Hindus. They're not persecuting Buddhists. They're not persecuting Muslims. They don't even persecute Roman Catholics. They don't persecute people of other religions because all false religion is a part of the same kingdom of darkness, and a house divided against itself can't stand, right?

So Satan can't be divided against Satan, and since he owns all false religion, he tends to contribute to its survival and its elevation. The attacks always come from the kingdom of darkness on the one category of truth, and that's the Bible. And those who rightly represent the Bible, biblical religion, biblical Christianity. So we aren't surprised that it's Christianity that is being marginalized, Christianity that's being taken out of the public discussion, Christians that are being persecuted, Bibles that are being set aside, references to Jesus Christ that are being eliminated.

All the attacks come on the truth because they all come from the kingdom of darkness. And it is also true to say that the greatest enemies of the truth have always been religious because man is invariably religious, inveterately religious, always has been religious, is still religious, and consequently, his false religion assaults the truth constantly. So it doesn't surprise me. It is a sign that we're doing something right to have the kingdom of darkness coming after us. That's how it is.

The harshest human attacks on Jesus didn't even come from the people. He got indifference from the people, for sure, but the really harsh, aggressive assaults on him came from the religious establishment and the people who were most devoted to that establishment: self-righteous Jewish leaders who were part of an apostate form of Judaism that basically belonged to Satan like all other

religion. All other religion is part of the kingdom of darkness. And since they were part of a false religion that belonged to Satan, they were enemies of the truth, and therefore they were enemies of Christ, who is the truth.

All religion claims to represent God, but it represents the devil. It represents Satan. And that is what Jesus said in verse 44. This is the high point. This is the escalation of the conflict to its highest level. He says to these religious leaders who continually said they represented God and spoke for God, "You are of *your* father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father." "You lie and you desire to kill me because I speak the truth and you are a part of the kingdom of darkness, the kingdom of lies, and the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of lies wants to stamp out the truth."

So here is Jesus saying something that is the most volatile thing he could possibly say to Jewish leaders who prided themselves on being children of Abraham, children of God, those who rightly represented God, those who were God's agents in the world. He says, "You are of *your* father the devil." That is Judaism in its most devout form is Satanic.

Our Lord's condemnation of these corrupt leaders reaches a real pinnacle in the final week of his life. Matthew 23 records during the passion week that in the temple he gives that message that's recorded in Matthew 23, in which he calls them, "whited sepulchers." He says they create "sons of hell," and he denounces all of them. And then he warns the people to stay away from them because of their damning influence.

Over these two and a half years of his ministry, this conflict has been escalating by necessity because he continues to confront their damning destructive error with the truth. Somebody might say, "Well, back off. We can't do that." The truth damns. The truth damns eternally. It sends people to hell forever. The consequences are incalculable and they don't ever change. Error must be confronted with the truth. These children of Satan see Jesus, then, as an enemy. They see him as a disturber. They see him as a blasphemer, a law breaker. They can't contain themselves in dealing with him. They're so full of fury at him. This kind of culminates, at least the eighth chapter version of it, episode of it, in the text before us. Let's pick it up in verse 48.

Having just heard Jesus say, "You are of *your* father the devil," and then explain that connection, because you desire what the devil desires, which is to lie and kill. You want to kill even me. They respond in verse 48, and "they said to him, 'Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?' Jesus answered, 'I do not have a demon; but I honor My Father, and you dishonor Me. But I do not seek My glory; there is One who seeks and judges. Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My - " message, My teaching, My " - word he will never see death.' The Jews said to Him, 'Now we know that You have a demon. Abraham died, and the prophets *also*; and You say, "If anyone keeps My word, he will never taste of death." Surely You are not greater than our father Abraham, who died? The prophets died too; whom do You make Yourself out *to be*?'"

"Jesus answered, 'If I glorify Myself, My glory is nothing; it is My Father who glorifies Me, of whom you say, "He is our God"; and you have not come to know Him, but I know Him; and if I say that I do not know Him, I will be a liar like you, but I do know Him and keep His Word. Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.' So the Jews said to Him, 'You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?' Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.' Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple."

The conflict has never been more dramatic than that. Things have reached the point where they either repent and believe in Him or they can't contain their fury, their rage, their hardness of heart. Why does he do this? Why does he exacerbate this conflict? Why does he elevate this? Why does he raise it to this level? Why does he say things like "you're of *your* father, the devil. You're liars and murderers, and you desire what the devil desires"? Why does he say that?

Well, the answer is because he loves them, because this is a mercy. It is a mercy to shatter false securities. It is a mercy to devastate false religion. It is a mercy to strip people locked in some form of religious deception, strip them naked of that deception. These are people with the emperor's clothes. They need to be exposed for what they are. Their false religion needs to be dealt with in a very strong, stern confrontation.

Now just backing off that for a minute, debates, when they're lost, deteriorate. And there's a kind of a four-level way in which this works, and you've experienced this. You experience it whenever you get into a debate, if you're not careful. You can see this. Debates start on an intellectual levels. Somebody says, "This is true." Somebody says, "Well, this is true." And you have a disagreement. So you approach your disagreement intellectually. You do it on a mental level. You say, "Well, here's the proof. Here's the evidence. This is what I believe. This is why I believe it." That's the first conflict level.

The progression, then, goes to a second level where it ceases to be intellectual and becomes emotional. This is where you start getting angry. You can't get your point across. You can't move the other person. The other person doesn't like what you said because they don't like the implications of what you said. They don't buy into what you said. The heat starts to rise. And this can happen in just about any kind of conflict. So you have an emotional level and you start to engage on an emotional level.

And that then drops to the third level, which is verbal abuse. When you can't make your argument any more and get it across and you're angry, you just start firing off the epithets, right? You just start calling people names. And that's exactly what you see here. And then the final step, of course, is you come to blows. That's the end. You deck the person you're trying to convince. You know, you give them a shot to the chops and leave them in a heap in the gutter or you wrestle them to the ground and hope you can win.

But this is how conflict goes. It starts at an intellectual level, goes to an emotional level, goes to a verbal level, and then goes to a physical level. And that's exactly what happens here. They start with an intellectual conversation about religion. It descends because they can't win. It's impossible for them to win. They're talking to the truth, the eternal truth. They can't win. Error can't win. It can't survive. So they're done in. They're incompetent, ineffective.

They then descend to the emotional level where they become angry and bitter and all they can think about is getting rid of him and killing him, and when they have the opportunity, they descend to this verbal level, where they're calling him things like a demon-possessed Samaritan. In chapter 10, they call him insane.

And then here at the end of the chapter, it descends to physical abuse and they pick up stones to try

to stone him to death, and eventually that's why they killed him because they couldn't win the argument and they ran that argument all the way down the scale to the lowest possible level and nailed him to a cross.

In the face of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Eternal One, they are infinitely incompetent. They are exposed, uncovered, condemned, their depravity demonstrated. They don't have the truth. They can't stand against the truth. They start descending to lower and lower levels until finally they pick up rocks to kill Him. Undone, stripped bare, no argument left, may I say that's necessary? Can I say that? That's necessary. Stripping them bare of the emperor's clothes is necessary. Telling them they may think they're clothed. They're not. They're naked. They're under judgment and condemnation. They have suffered the intellectual loss and they have resorted to physical violence.

And so, again, why do this? Because this is the most loving thing Jesus could possibly do. A simple analogy would make that clear to you. If you had a known cure for cancer and the person you loved most in the world had cancer and you went to that person and said, "Here's the cure. Take this and you'll never have cancer again," you would fight until that person beat you up and threw you out the door to get them to respond to that because you understand the implications of what you possess. That's what Jesus is doing. Never give up. Never give up. Keep coming back. Keep coming back.

So you see a pattern in this dialog. Three phases appear in this dialog, and they flow through a kind of a consistent pattern. First comes blasphemy from them. Then Jesus speaks truth, and then He gives a gracious invitation. So the first one: blasphemy, truth, gracious invitation. Second one: blasphemy, truth, gracious invitation. Third one: blasphemy, truth – and then we'll have to wait to see what the third one is. It changes.

But love destroys false securities. Love doesn't leave people alone in their false religion. That's why we can never turn these people into the enemy. They are the mission field. Can we grab that? People in false religion are the mission field. They may be persecuting you. They may be persecuting you at work. They may be persecuting you at school. They may be messing with what's going on in our country and in our world. They may be changing our culture. We might not like the fact that they advocate the things they advocate in the immoral realm. We might not like that. They are the mission field.

And so when you get blasphemy from them, you respond with truth and an invitation, okay? Truth and an invitation. That's what Jesus does. So there's of necessity the shattering, the antagonizing of the enemies of Jesus. He has to go at their false securities and chop them down to leave them exposed, to use another metaphor.

So let's look at these three phases in this dialog that wraps up chapter 8. Phase number one is in verses 48-51. Phase one: blasphemy, truth, grace, gracious invitation. The blasphemy comes in verse 48. "The Jews answered - " now remember, He has just said, "You are of *your* father, the devil." That's the high point. That's the most outrageous thing that, in their minds, anybody could ever say of them because they thought God was their God, as Jesus says they claim a little later in the dialog.

So He says, "You are of *your* father, the devil." Their reaction, rather than taking the exposure and saying, "Whoa. Whoa. Help us. What are we missing? Lead us to the truth," they harden their

hearts. They become harder and harder and more bitter and more bitter. And so they respond in verse 48, here's the first blasphemy.

"The Jews answered and said to Him, 'Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?'" Apparently, they had been saying this a lot. This is their mantra. This is what they've said, as I noted a moment ago in 10:20, many of them said, "He has a demon and is insane." This has been the standard statement about Jesus. This is what the leaders had cultivated about Him. See it in Matthew 11:18. In Mark 3:22, it says, "He is possessed by Satan." Satan-possessed, not just demon-possessed, but Satan-possessed. Matthew 12, He does what He does by the power of Beelzebub, which is another name for Satan. They were spreading the word. Here they justify it. "Do we not rightly say that You are an insane, demon-possessed Samaritan?"

Why did they throw the "Samaritan" in there? What's that? Well, Samaritans were people that the Jews hated. They hated them because of what they had done recorded back in, let's see, it would be in 2 Kings 17, where when the northern kingdom was taken captive in 722, and all the northern kingdom people were basically taken out of the land, the stragglers, the Jewish stragglers that remained there intermarried with the pagan nations that came to occupy the northern kingdom of Israel.

Pagans were transplanted into now the vacated northern kingdom of Israel and the Jews intermarried with them, and they became this hybrid defective traitor Jews who intermarried with pagans and idolaters. They were the Samaritans. They were named "Samaritans" because the city that was the capital of the northern kingdom was Samaria.

So through the centuries, the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans at all. None. Remember the statement that the woman makes by the well in John 4? "Jews have no dealings with Samaritans." They were the worst. They were worse than Gentiles because they'd sold their birthright. They were traitors of the rankest kind. So it's about as low an epithet as you could throw at a Jewish person to say, "You're nothing but a Samaritan."

There may be overtones, also, of a rumor that the Jews had planted that Mary, because she was not impregnated by Joseph that clearly was the testimony of the family, had an affair with a Roman soldier and Jesus was an illegitimate child born to a Jew and a Gentile pagan. So there could be those kind – that, by the way, follows through Jewish history as an explanation. But whatever it is that they mean by this, these are the worst things they can say. This is outright blasphemy.

And while he's being blasphemed, the response is truth. He doesn't go to that level. Please notice His response in verse 49. "Jesus answered, 'I do not have a demon;'" That's pretty calm, cool, and collected, isn't it? "I do not have a demon; -" that is the truth "but I honor My Father, and you dishonor Me." That's the truth. They needed to hear this.

Peter says in 1 Peter 2:23, "when He was reviled, He reviled not again." "When He was reviled, He reviled not again." He didn't give them back the same stuff they gave Him. You are heaping monstrous, blasphemous insults on God the Father. When you dishonor Me – back in 5:23, He said, "He who doesn't honor the Son doesn't honor the Father who sent Him." Go back to 8:42. "If God were your Father, you would love Me, because I proceeded forth and have come from God." "If you honored God, you would love Me. If God was your Father, you would love Me. By dishonoring Me,

you dishonor God.”

So He just gives them the truth. “I do not have a demon. I honor My Father - ” who is God. “And you dishonor Him by the way you treat Me. You can’t possibly be children of God and so dishonor Me, whom God honors.”

In verse 50, He takes it a step further, and there’s such a sort of deference here to His humiliation. “I do not seek My glory;” “I do not seek My glory;” “I’m here in humiliation,” is what He’s saying. I gave up my glory. Philippians 2, He set it aside, right? Thought it not robbery or something to be grasped at, to hold onto His equality with God, stripped Himself of all that, took on the form of a slave, became in the likeness of man all the way down to death, even the death of the cross. This is His humiliation.

“I don’t seek my own glory.” He has said this a number of times. This must have been kind of a regular thing that he said as he walked through the world. 5:41, “I do not receive glory from men.” I’m not here to receive glory from men. 7:18, “He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; He who is seeking the glory of the One who sent Him, He is true, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.” I’m not seeking my own glory. I’m seeking glory for God.

That’s the essence of His incarnation. He came to give God glory. If He wanted his own glory, He’d have stayed where He was. That’s why in John 17, He prays, “Father, I have finished the work You gave Me. Now restore to me the glory I had with You before the world began.” But he didn’t come to receive glory. He came to receive humiliation. He came to love sinners, expose their evil, bear their sin, feel their shame, die their death. That’s not glory. That’s humiliation. Now when He had accomplished all of that, the Father exalted Him, highly exalted Him and gave Him a name above every name, Philippians says. Even at His trial, He was silent. He doesn’t defend Himself.

So he responds to their blasphemy by saying, “I honor My Father - ” I seek His glory “ - and you dishonor Me.” “There is One who seeks and judges,” He says. He is not seeking His own glory, but there is one who does seek His glory. The Father seeks His glory. Psalm 2 – read Psalm 2 all the way through to verse 12. The Father has planned the final glory of Christ and He will rule the nations with a rod of iron. He will be the ultimate glorious Lord.

Read Isaiah 52:13-15, the end of the 52nd chapter, just before 53, how God has designed to exalt Him, highly exalt Him, elevate Him. This is all over Scripture that the Messiah will be exalted, and elevated and honored. And in Philippians 2, given “a name above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow” everywhere in the universe.

So there is a vindicator. There is a judge. There is One who will declare the glory of Christ. He has already declared it. He has already given testimony at the baptism of Jesus. “This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” And He will give further testimony at the transfiguration, Matthew 17:5. Again, “This is My beloved Son. Listen to Him.” In John 5, John writes how Jesus laid out all the ways in which the Father glorified the Son.

Through the Old Testament prophecies fulfilled in Him, through John the Baptist, through the words that He spoke, which were heavenly words of divine revelation. Through the works that He did, the massive miracles that He did, as well as through God’s voice coming from heaven, “This is My

beloved Son.” God has given His verdict on Christ. And “there is One who judges,” He says. “There is One who seeks and judges.” And He will give the final verdict on Me.

But there’s more in that. “There is One who seeks and judges and will give the final verdict on you, also, on you. I’m not here to seek honor from men. God will give me glory in time. But God will also judge you. God will also judge you. You need to honor Him now or you will face Him in judgment.” That’s the truth. Jesus responds to the outrage, the verbal blasts with the truth, the absolute truth.

And then comes the third phase, a gracious invitation. Verse 51. “Truly, truly - ” “Truly, truly,” 25 times in the Gospel of John because this is new. This is new. You need to be pulled up to hear something that is so contrary to what you have thought. This is a staggering statement, again, as are the others introduced by “truly, truly.” “I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he will never see death.” That’s a gracious invitation, isn’t it, to some hard-hearted, blaspheming, angry, abusive, hypocritical, false leaders? That’s the third phase. Blasphemy, truth, gracious invitation.

This is a model, folks, of how we live in the world. This is a model of how we live in the world. The abuse comes. The blasts come. The blasphemy comes. What do we do? We respond with what? The truth. We just keep talking truth and we end with a gracious invitation. And notice the word “anyone.” That applied to the ones that were throwing this right in His face. Anyone, anyone.

You know, you know, I just told you, that judgment will come on those who don’t honor God. And God’s the judge. And judgment will come on those who don’t honor the Son because those who don’t honor the Son don’t honor God. So you’re facing judgment and death. For the one who rejects and dishonors Me, rejects and dishonors God, there will be judgment. And that judgment incorporates death. But know this. “If anyone - ” anyone - there’s the magnanimity and generosity of that offer – anyone “ - keeps or obeys my - ” *logos*, “ - My message, - ” My gospel “ - he will not see death.”

“See” is *there*. It’s a Greek word that means “to fix on, experience, gaze at.” It’s not a “glance” word. It’s not saying you won’t glance at it as it goes by. It’s saying you won’t be caught in it as an experience. What death is he talking about? Well, He’s not talking about a physical death, because even He would die. He’s talking about the second death, what Revelation 20 and 21 calls “the second death,” eternal death, eternal death.

Yesterday I was talking to and praying with a lady who is dying, and just asking her, “What’s going through your heart and your mind?” And sweet lady. And so she said, “Well, I’m just a little bit afraid.” And I said, “Well, that’s understandable.” You know, we’ve all heard that expression, “I’m not afraid of death. I just don’t want to be there when it happens.” So I said, “Well, I understand that, but let me just tell you a simple way to explain it. You just had a big surgery and when you went in and they got you all ready, they put a little tube in your arm, and then they inject a little twilight sleep thing in there.”

They just did that to me and it fixed my hand.

“You just felt calm. You felt peaceful. You felt completely at ease. Next thing you knew, you woke up and it was over. That’s how death is going to be for a believer. The Lord will just pour into you massive dose of joy and peace and calm and you’ll wake up in heaven. You will not see death. You

will not see death.”

That’s true, but that’s not the primary issue. The primary issue is you will not see the second death, which is eternal death, eternal death. So this is an invitation. This is what we say to people. Okay? What are you going to say to people when they come at you and they blaspheme the gospel and they attack the gospel? You’re going to give them the truth and then you’re going to say, “You’re going to be judged. You’re going to be judged for this attitude. That’s the truth. I’m telling you the truth. You need to believe the message of Jesus Christ and if you believe the message of Jesus Christ, you will never see the second death. If you don’t believe the message of Christ, you will end up eternally in the second death.”

You know, it’s not really about finding purpose in life. It’s about escaping hell and death. So there is the pattern of our Lord and it’s a model for how we deal with the world in which we live when it comes against the truth, which it always will, always will.

That, then, activates the second phase of this conversation, which is very predictable. It’s the same thing, blasphemy, truth, and gracious invitation. They respond, verse 52, to the gracious invitation. “The Jews said to Him, ‘Now we know that You have a demon. - ” boy, there’s no progress there. “We know that You have a demon.” There they are, as always, hurling abuses at Him, scoring this gracious invitation, not recognizing that they are children of the devil, dishonoring God, dishonoring the Son of God, blaspheming, and they turn on Him and blaspheme Him again.

They believed He was demon-possessed and they were God-possessed. That’s what false religion will do to you. Reverses everything. They were so wretched, they thought God was speaking when Satan was speaking and they thought Satan was speaking when God was speaking. That’s what false religion does. Jesus must be demon-possessed. He’s promising no death. This is impossible. This is absurd. He’s saying you’ll never see death.

So they say, verse 52, “We know that You have a demon. Abraham died, and the prophets *also*; and You say, ‘If anyone keeps My word, he will never taste of death.’ Surely You are not greater than our father Abraham, who died? The prophets died too; whom do You make Yourself out *to be*?” Who do You think You are? You are a crazy, demon-possessed person. Insane. Who do You think You are?

Their blind minds have no real interest in getting to the core of what he is saying. And this goes on all through the Gospel of John, doesn’t it? He’s talking about spiritual truth and they’re talking only on a superficial physical level. Who do You think You are? You haven’t got power over death? Abraham didn’t have power over death. He died. The prophets didn’t have power over death. They died. Who do You think You are? This is beyond comprehension. They were the great heroes of Judaism and they all died. Only a demon-possessed lunatic would say he had power over death.

Jesus responds with the truth. Verse 54, He “answered, ‘If I glorify Myself, My glory is nothing; it is My Father who glorifies Me, of whom you say, “He is our God”;’ ” You keep claiming God is your God and you dishonor Him by dishonoring Me. Now remember, there was ample evidence that God had affirmed Christ in the verbal affirmations, in the Old Testament prophecies fulfilled, through John the Baptist, in His words and in His miracles. “God has affirmed Me, and you reject Me. I don’t glorify myself. My glory is nothing to you. If I try to glorify myself, it’s nothing to you.” He said that

back in chapter 4. “I’m not banking on my own claim. I know Deuteronomy says it has to be confirmed in the mouth of two or three witnesses.” You can’t improve on God as one of them, God the Father, and God the Holy Spirit as another one. “I’m not glorifying Myself. It’s My Father who glorifies Me, of whom you say, ‘He is our God.’ ”

This is what you have to remind religious people. You do not represent God if you reject Jesus Christ. You don’t. You don’t. Because God is on record affirming Christ as His Son and the only Savior. And the truth is, verse 55 – here’s the truth. “You have not come to know Him.” “You have not come to know Him, but I know Him; and if I say that I do not know Him, I will be a liar like you, but I do know Him and keep His word.” Truth again, just the truth.

I know Him. You don’t know Him. He’s attested to Me plenty of evidence. “If I said I didn’t know Him, - ” if I agreed with your estimate that I didn’t know God, “ - I’d be a liar just like you.” “You are liars,” He’s saying. You are liars. You are living a lie. You are propagating a lie. You’re catching people in a lie. You are creating “sons of hell,” He says in Matthew 23. That’s the truth.

And then he comes to that third part of this little phase, a gracious invitation, verse 56. “Your father Abraham - ” I will concede that. You did descend from Abraham’s line. “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw *it* and was glad.” Abraham was glad to look ahead and see My day. Wouldn’t you want to trade in your bitterness for joy? This is a gracious invitation, just a gracious invitation. Why don’t you join Abraham’s joy?

Well, what does it mean, “Abraham rejoiced to see My day”? Abraham was given a Messianic promise. In Genesis 12, he was told that through his family, God would bless the world, bring salvation and blessing to the world. This was the Abrahamic covenant. It’s expanded in all those chapters on into Genesis and particularly highlighted in chapter 15, and Abraham believed it. He believed it. It says, “he believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness.”

The problem was he was going to have a whole nation and didn’t have a son, didn’t have a child. So God says, “I’m going to give you a child.” When Isaac came into the world, he was the first in that line that looked toward Messiah’s day. There was the promise of God was for a seed. Galatians 3 says not “seeds” but “a seed,” the one who would “bruise the serpent’s head,” to borrow Genesis 3. Abraham believed that. He believed that through him would come the redeemer, through him would come the savior. And the promise began to be fulfilled in the birth of Isaac, and then continued through Jacob, and then on from there. Abraham saw down the path to the redeemer, the savior, the Messianic age. And he saw it with joy.

And now I’m here. I’m Abraham’s joy. And you, why don’t you want to enter into that joy?

Listen to Hebrews 11:13. Been talking about Abraham and Sarah, and it says, “All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance.” Abraham and Sarah saw what God revealed as a dim, distant reality, but even that brought Abraham joy. Don’t you want to enter Abraham’s joy? Again, this is an invitation. Why would you want to scorn that which the prophets saw with joy? It’s a sweet invitation, a gracious invitation.

Their response, however, just the same. So we come to phase three. Verse 57, sarcasm. “So the

Jews said to Him, 'You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?' " How do You know what makes Abraham happy? Who do You think You're kidding? You never met Abraham. How do You know what Abraham's joy is? How do You know what Abraham saw? How do You know what Abraham knew? You don't know that. You're not yet 50.

By the way, Luke 3:23 says Jesus was 30 when he started His ministry. Maybe He looked older, I don't know. It would be understandable, wouldn't it, after all he'd gone through? So they just mock Him. What a joke. You know what Abraham saw and what brought Abraham joy? Who are You kidding?

He responds with the most shocking truth. "Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly,' - " you have to use that again because this is so stunning. "I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am." Not "I was." "I am." Because He's an eternal being, there's no "was." He always is. "Before Abraham was born, I am." That's the name of God, Yahweh, Tetragrammaton from Exodus 3:14. That's God's name. "Say I Am That I Am sent me." This is the great I am. That's how John started. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God."

This is more than they can handle. This is way over the top. One thing to call them children of Satan, but to say You are I Am? They are without restraint. They've just been told the truth. They could have said, "How so? Sir, how are we to understand that?" Instead, thinking they were activating Leviticus 24:16, which called for the stoning of a blasphemer, they pick up stones to throw at Him.

So they're at the bottom of those little steps of progression, right? And they've gone from an intellectual discussion, to an emotional fervor, to verbal abuse, and now they can't constrain anything. They want Him dead. So they pick up rocks to crush out His life. At this point, there can be no gracious invitation. "Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple."

You know, there comes a time when even the best have to walk away. Jesus doesn't advocate standing there and letting people kill you unnecessarily. I know it's a noble thing to be a martyr if you can't escape, but if you can escape, get out. So you can reach another people on another day. They hate Him so viciously – it's the same kind of hatred that we see later, only much more vile in the case of hating the Son of God than in this other illustration.

But when Stephen was preaching - remember in Acts 7 – the people listened to his sermon, "were cut to the quick and *began* gnashing their teeth at him. So they scream with a loud voice, covered their ears, rushed at him with one impulse. When they had driven him out of the city, they *began* stoning *him*." And one of them stoning him was "a man named Saul." How tragic when unbelief reaches that point where you either get stoned or you escape.

No gracious invitation here. In fact, if you look over at 9:39, Jesus gives us a little explanation of this. He says in verse 39, "For judgment I came into this world." Wow. I thought he came to seek and to save the lost. He did. I thought – and He said in John 3 – "I didn't come to condemn the world, but to save the world." He did. But there comes a point when it's over. Jesus must antagonize His enemies. He must antagonize the people trapped in false doctrine. He must. It's a mercy. It's an act of love. But when the final response to repeated efforts to bring the truth to bear is deadly, that's a hard-hearted reaction. Jesus can say, "For judgment I came into this world."

And people who think they see and really are blind are going to feel that judgment. They tried to do this to Him in Luke 4, remember? In the synagogue in Nazareth, when he had preached there, and they tried to throw Him off a cliff, probably the idea that they'd throw Him down below and stone Him.

I can say this, that the gracious invitation as far as I know is still extended to you. If you will obey His message, the gospel of salvation, repentance, and trust in the One who died and rose again to provide salvation, you will never see the second death. You will not even experience physical death. You will go through physical death with no understanding of that reality itself and wake up in the glories of heaven. You will never see the second death, the second death is the frightening final death that never ends, but lasts eternally. That's still the promise of the gospel. While that promise is given, you need to respond. Let's pray.

/ Father, we come again to You at the end of looking at Scripture, compelled by its power and its clarity, amazed as we always are at its consistency, its truthfulness. It sustains its own integrity. It is weighty. It is heavy. It is profound. It is clear. And it is true. And we know that and we see that, we experience that when it unfolds before us. Thank You for the help of the Holy Spirit in our preaching and our hearing.

We ask that You, O Holy Spirit, would do a work in hearts to bring to confirmation these truths, to break up hard-heartedness, bitterness. The world is full of blasphemers, anyone who rejects Christ is a blasphemer. Anyone who says He's anything less than He is, is a blasphemer.

Lord, may they have heard the truth today and the gracious invitation that if anyone obeys the message, he will never see death, but pass into everlasting life and the joy that Abraham and all the saints looked for and experience. Work in hearts, Lord, to glorify Yourself. Thank You, again, for saving us, gracing us with the joy of salvation in this life and the hope of heaven.

Lord, now we ask that You would do what You can do, what only You can do. We only offer humble words, but we have no power in ourselves and we ask, Lord, that You would do a mighty work in hearts, that You would draw many to Christ, who has been lifted up again today. Do that for Your glory, we pray in Your Son's name.

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