

The Exceeding Greatness of Jesus Christ

There are many big questions that need to be answered by every human being; such as, “Who am I? Where did I come from? Where am I going?” But the biggest and most important question for any human being to answer is “Who is Jesus of Nazareth?”; and “What does he require of me?” Our text today gives the answer to this huge question.

John 8:48-59

48 The Jews answered him, “Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?” 49 Jesus answered, “I do not have a demon, but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me. 50 Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is One who seeks it, and he is the judge. 51 Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.” 52 The Jews said to him, “Now we know that you have a demon! Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet you say, ‘If anyone keeps my word, he will never taste death.’ 53 Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do you make yourself out to be?” 54 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.’ 55 But you have not known him. I know him. If I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and I keep his word. 56 Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.” 57 So the Jews said to him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?” 58 Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.” 59 So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

This text provides the summit for the discussion Jesus has been having with Jewish authorities in John chapter seven and eight. The hostility increases throughout the week of discourses until, in this text, we hear very hostile words and see violent reactions. In this text, however, we behold the exceeding greatness of Jesus Christ.

I. He is exceedingly great in His grace (vv. 48-50)

It is remarkable that after all of the verbal abuse Jesus takes, that He graciously continues to present the gospel to those around Him. Shouldn't we learn from this that our patience is never to fail with those around us, regardless of their viewpoint and their conduct?

II. He is exceedingly great in His salvation (vv. 51-55)

He is great in His salvation in two ways:

- A. He rescues us from death, our last and greatest enemy. Notice, however, the condition for this deliverance; we must be those who keep His Word.
- B. He reveals deep need of Him. In verse 55, Jesus says, "You have not known Him," which is the essence of what it means to be an unbeliever. Notice that Jesus uses very strong language here in order to penetrate the thick walls of resistance among the Jewish leaders.

III. He is exceedingly great in His majesty (vv. 56-68)

The question is asked in verse 53 if Jesus is saying that He is greater than Abraham. The answer is clearly yes, for two reasons:

- A. Jesus is Abraham's hope (v. 56). Everything promised to Abraham (land, a great name, descendants, God's blessing to give to the nations) finds his fulfillment in Jesus Christ.
- B. Jesus is Abraham's God (verse 57 and 58). Jesus is claiming to be the very one who spoke from the burning bush to Moses in Exodus 23. He is none less than the great "I Am."

IV. He is exceedingly great in His sovereignty (vv. 59)

The Jews clearly understood that Jesus was making a claim to deity, for they picked up stones to destroy Him, presumably for the sin of "blasphemy." Jesus, however, eludes them, because

His time has not yet come, and because, as an act of judgment, removes himself from them. We get another picture of this in Revelation 2:5. Jesus, in all His patience, will ultimately reach a point withdrawing from hostile unbelievers.

There are many great questions in life, but the greatest of them all, is Who is Jesus and what does he require of us?

Discussion Questions

1. Was Jesus so patient with the Jews in John 8? Why is He patient with you? What does His patience mean for us in our relationships to a hostile world?
2. What does Jesus promise in verse 51? What condition does he attach to this promise?
3. What does He mean in verse 1 by "keeps?" Why is Jesus' language so strong in verse 55? What should we learn from this?
4. In what ways does Jesus say in verse 56-58 say that He is greater than Abraham?
5. In verse 59, what do we learn about the consequences of rejecting Jesus?

Going Deeper

1. In observing Jesus' encounter with his hostile Jewish countrymen, how are you convicted you encounter those around you?
2. What does it mean to you personally to say that Jesus is the great "I Am?"