

“The Truth Shall Set You Free – Part 2”

John 8:31-32

I have made mention in recent years that there has been a significant resurgence in writing on the nature of God as Trinity – Father, Son and Spirit. I realize that for many in our churches thinking about the Trinity is a frightening and even overwhelming proposition. However, understanding God rightly as Father, Son and Spirit – the Triune God – is the lodestone of all our thinking about who He is, about creation, humanity, history, redemption, living rightly in relationship with Him, understanding how to face life in all of its ups and downs, relating rightly to one another and sharing Him with our culture etc.

I think it is safe to say that understanding who God really is begins with His revelation to us in Jesus (cf. 1:1-5, 14-18; 14:7, 9; 17:6). James Sawyer laments what he calls “*incredible shrinking of Jesus*” in the thinking of culture over the centuries since the Enlightenment.¹ He writes;

“Ultimately, the vision of Jesus we have inherited today is one that is strictly ‘spiritual,’ that belongs to the realm of ‘faith’ and is unrelated to the larger created order: science, politics, economics, the arts, or any kind of public discourse. Jesus has been relegated to our private internal spiritual experience. His name is not mentioned in polite society.”²

Sawyer goes on to lament that for most of our evangelical traditions, we are set apart from one another by certain theological/truth distinctives which become central, the lens if you will, “through which all theological understanding is focused.” The consequence is that the true lens or lodestone – God as Trinity (Father, Son and Spirit) is affirmed but practically marginalized. That is especially true with respect to the implications of the incarnation so that Jesus is precious but not central or transformative. Who He really is, what He has actually come to do and what that actually means with respect to how we understand our lives in Him, our calling, and our mission in this world – should be the centerpiece of our understanding and life.³ Jesus’ coming into our world as fully human and fully Divine/God is the starting point of truly knowing God and understanding our condition, our world and our hope. By His very nature, Jesus as the Son of God incarnate, does not, cannot fit easily into our thinking/understanding and certainly not into our daily lives. He is necessarily and fundamentally transforming.

The Gospel of John and passages like this dialogue in John 8 are antidotes to the tendency to drift. Though the context is vastly different than what we face in our church and our culture in the 21st century – the message is more than relevant in its instruction to us – in this place and this time!! In this passage Jesus presses the truth that God is His Father; that He is The Son of God. In each section of the passage Jesus presses the truth of His relationship with God as His Father –

¹ Sawyer, “Resurrecting the Trinity,” 105

² Ibid.

³ Ibid. 106

that He is the Son of God with all that means – and He lifts up His work – the work the Father sent Him to do – highlighting a different facet and its implications to the Jews.⁴

Jesus Disputes the Jews' Claims That They Have Never Been Slaves and Have No Need to be Set Free Because They Are Abraham's Descendants – 8:33-38 – **Note:** Jesus pressed the issue of faith in Him being seen by “abiding” in His word – with the promise of liberty – because He knew the hearts of many who “believed” in Him was not genuine. They believed so as to bring Him into their thinking as an affirmation of their lives, while never really being challenged by who He claimed to be. ***Have we been guilty of the same in our thinking, in our “believing in Jesus?” Has who He is and how and why He came rightly impacted us?***

- Assuming Jesus meant physical, national liberty; the Jews declared that as descendants of Abraham they have never been slaves and have no need to “be set free.” – 8:33

- Jesus clarified for the Jews that the liberty He brought was “freedom” from sin – 8:34

Note: This freedom or liberty from sin which Jesus offers is likened to the freedom only the Son can provide – the freedom which comes with a permanent place in the household of the Father. This is the adoption as “sons” of the Father in the Son (cf. John 14:1-7, 15-23; 17:1-3, 20-26; Romans 8:14-16, 23; Galatians 4:4-5; Ephesians 1:3-6).

- Jesus then acknowledges that they indeed are descendants of Abraham. ***However, their Abrahamic lineage is contradicted by their rejection of Jesus and their desire to kill Him.*** In fact, though they are Abraham’s descendants, Jesus’ word (in which they are to abide) has no place in them. – 8:37

- This is all the more indicting when it is understood that ***the things He has seen with the Father*** – the things the Son has seen in His Father’s presence - are the very things which He declares by His Word (cf. 8:38a; also 1:1-2). In rejecting Him and opposing Him, they are, in fact, “doing” ***the things they have heard from their father*** (cf. 8:38b – Later identified as the devil).

Jesus Disputes the Jews' Claim of Abrahamic Paternity (Fatherhood) – 8:39-41a

- The Jews respond to Jesus’ statement that their rejection of Him and His word – their desire to kill Him – is contrary to their claim that they are descendants of Abraham. He would say that they are, in fact, doing the bidding of their true father (an inference of Satanic paternity). They move from claiming to be descendants of Abraham to claims that he is their father. - 8:39

- Jesus disputes their claim that Abraham is their father by saying that their response to Him contradicts their claims to Abrahamic paternity. He would never seek to kill someone who was

⁴ Sawyer notes that the reference to God as Father is made over 100 times in John’s Gospel and 179 times in the four Gospels, while it is only made 15 times in the OT and always with respect to His relationship with the nation as a whole – cf. page 108.

speaking the truth which He had heard from God. He then repeats the accusation that they are doing the works of their true father. – 8:40-41a

Jesus Disputes the Jews' Claim That God Alone is Their Father – 8:41b-47

- The Jews argue that they are not born of fornication. They have but one father and the Father they claim is God – 8:41b. They quickly abandon Abrahamic paternity for the fatherhood of God. Jesus now has them right where He has been moving them all along.

- Jesus disputed their claim at a fundamental level; If God were their Father then they would love Jesus because He went out from God and stood before them as One sent from God, speaking the very words of God – as the one and only Son of the Father (Son par excellence) – 8:42.

- Jesus tells them that they do not know/understand His word - they are blind to the truth of His word - and they are ***not able to hear them, because*** they are children of the devil. He has blinded their minds “that they not see ***the light of the glory of the gospel of Christ***, who is the image of God” (cf. 2 Cor. 4:4; Ephesians 2:1-3; 8:43a, 45). As the devil’s offspring they “want” to do his will and they bear his image in all they do and say. ***He is, at his very core, a lying murderer. That is his essential being – his DNA, if you will. He passes that on to those who are his – 8:43-44.***

- It is this bondage to sin of which Jesus speaks. It is a bondage born in our sharing in the fundamental rebellion of the devil through Adam – our fallen-ness. Freedom from such bondage requires a fundamental and true change in family relationship which only the Son can effect (cf. 8:34-36). It requires a change in paternity which is only possible in a New Birth – 8:42, 45-47!!

Jesus Presses the Final Point of His Argument by Placing Abraham on the Continuum of Redemption Which Finds Its Ultimate Meaning/Purpose in Jesus' Coming – 8:49-59

- The Jews flail about in their attempts to discredit Jesus/refute Jesus' claims as they simply resort to calling Him names – 8:48.

- Jesus says – I do not have a demon – I am honoring ***my Father***. As I honor ***my Father*** you dishonor me!! It is the Father with whom my honor rests – So, effectively you are blaspheming God and will face His judgment – 8:49-50.

- Jesus now returns to the importance of “abiding in” His word or in this case “keeping” His word. First He promises liberty from sin and now eternal life – 8:51.

- The Jews believe that the promise/claim Jesus has made that “the one who keeps” His word “will not see death, forever” proves that He has a demon or is crazy. They appeal to Abraham and the prophets – they all have died. The obvious, no win, question for Jesus is asked – Are you

greater than *our father Abraham* who has died...? Who are you making yourself out to be? – 8:52-53.

- Jesus refuses to offer up an answer but simply says again, “My Father glorifies me, Whom you say is your God.” You neither know Him nor *keep His word*. Jesus then brings Abraham back into the discussion by declaring that he understood that he occupied a place on the continuum of redemptive history in anticipation of the coming of the Son. Abraham joyfully anticipated Jesus’ arrival in history and now that it Jesus has come Abraham rejoices – 8:54-56.

Like you and me – we live now for the day of His return (cf. Phil. 3:20-21; Col. 3:1-4; Heb. 9:28; John 14:1-7 etc.). The degree to which we understand that this is a period of time and a place on the continuum of redemptive history, we will be free to “abide in His word/His love.” We then will know Him and enjoy the liberty of intimacy with the Father, in the Son, and by the Spirit which will both keep us here in His peace and enable us to live here with His purpose, “speaking the word and doing the work” we ourselves have seen *with the Father!!*

Perhaps this question is a stretch. Nonetheless: If we are here in Jesus’ stead, are we occupying our place on this redemptive continuum rightly? Is there “joy” in heaven because of how we live here as “sons” of the Father in the Son?

- Now we are ready to understand the final exchange – the incredulity of the unbelieving Jews and the hope filled glory of the declaration of Jesus - 8:57-59.