

Living in a Hostile World
John 8:48-51

To say that the discussion with Jesus and the religious leaders was anything but tense would be an understatement. Jesus has made a free offer of the gospel to any and all who were there in the crowd, even explaining what true discipleship looks like. The Pharisees say that they are already children of God through physical birth through the line of Abraham, and they are not of illegitimate birth, probably an accusation against his birth. He shows their true parentage through their works that they are of the devil who was a liar and a murderer which they intended to do to Jesus even though they cannot condemn him for any sin in his life, which is quite a statement.

When people are proud and haughty about who they are and even the knowledge and status they have, when that is challenged rather than looking at the truth of what has been said, they go on the attack. And Jesus gives some of his most condemning speech that we read of in the gospels to these religious leaders for a number of reasons. One is that some in the crowd were seeing the truth about their sin and need of Jesus, but they were trying to prevent those who were believing from coming to Christ. So they needed to be warned about the spiritual condition of these men. The other was that Jesus is not coddling them, and soothing them, and even though he is speaking the truth, he is pushing the agenda which will end in his crucifixion. Hearing these truths will so anger them that they will want to kill him that much more, which we will even see at the end of the chapter. And the one who is in control of all of this is Jesus. But also, Jesus is really showing them the obvious, and even as we will see tonight is offering grace to those who do not deserve it.

And as we look at this text tonight we see when individuals might be losing an argument, all of a sudden frustration enters in, the tone of their voice increases and then they start making accusations against the person rather than seeking to debate the issue at hand or admit that they are wrong. If you have ever been in that position, it is so easy to volley accusations back at your accuser. It is so easy to return sinful rhetoric with sinful rhetoric. It is so easy at that point to make it more about me rather than the other person, and really seek to minister to him, her or them. Jesus is our example in how to respond in such a hostile situation. We see the one in whom no sin is and we see his responses and we can learn so much about that. Even if we are not in the same situation as the Lord in a mass of unbelievers who hate Christ, we are put in tense situations maybe with our children or spouse or at work or even in the church. And here is the question: what is coming out of us? Who are we defending - ourselves or are we seeking to be an ambassador of Christ; a representative of our holy God?

And it so easy to find excuses why we responded the way that we do, and we usually point to the sin of another. Or it could be that we started down the right path, and tried to help someone see their sin, but it quickly escalated and became sin in our lives, and the volleys and accusations kept coming. We need to look to Christ and see how he responded, and I hope as we do, we will learn from him, see what is going on in our hearts and seek to make these tense situations in our lives more about our God and less about us; that we would take these times and not make them personal moments but ministry moments. So I want us to see three responses of Jesus to the

hostility of the religious leaders, and I hope we will seek these same responses in all the tense situations that we find ourselves in.

1. In all circumstances we seek to honour God. Vv. 48-49

Any time we have interpersonal squabbles, and we are in the midst of those squabbles God seems to be absent from the whole situation. What I mean by that is He is not in our thoughts or in our hearts. We might think about it later, and try to judge our opponent as not honouring God. But how much truly did we think of him? How much did we even ask: how does he want me to respond? What are his goals and objectives in this? Am I representing him or am I just thinking about me? Remember he is sovereign and he put us in these circumstances for a reason. These are not our moments but his moments.

Look at how the religious leaders respond to Jesus' tough words. When the words fit, and the attitudes and motives of the heart are exposed, proud and defiant people go on the attack. Look at what they say here, "**The Jews answered him, 'Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?'**" Now remember "the Jews" here are the religious leaders. They didn't like what Jesus just said, so they go on the offensive. They really do not try and answer what he has just spoken or try to deny that they are trying to kill him, but use inflammatory rhetoric and resort to name calling. And they use an ethnic slur, which among sinful man I am sorry to say is all too common. They say that he is a Samaritan. And the Samaritans were half ethnic Jews who intermarried with other nationalities when the Assyrians defeated them. They had a form of worship that took parts of Judaism and assimilated them with cultic worship and beliefs. And they were hated and looked upon as traitors to the Jews but more importantly traitors to God. And again, along with that, that he has a demon and we know that the Father of lies is behind all false worship. Rather than look at their character and what they wanted to do to Jesus they resorted to offensive name calling to Jesus.

The amazing thing is the logic of the Scriptures. We need to give that logic compassionately and faithfully, but there are no arguments against it. I witnessed to a gentleman once and he came back and said there are many truths, and truths are fluid. There are no absolutes. I gently challenged him on that assumption and what it looked like in every day life. And right after that his voice started to go up and started with the name calling. And if we try to minister in a hostile world we will have opposition. People hate the light of Christ. It is the message. The real issue is not whether this will happen but how will we respond?

Look at the response of Jesus here, "**Jesus answered, 'I do not have a demon, but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me.'**" This is such a great answer and there is so much here that we can learn from Jesus when we happen to be in very hostile situations where individuals could be maligning us or hurling abuse at us. The interesting thing here is that Jesus does not return name calling but keeps seeking to point out truth. He does answer their accusation but saying that he does not have a demon, which is interesting from the stand point that he does not say that he is not a Samaritan or a traitor of God. It could be that the accusation of having a demon was the main argument against Jesus. It could also be as we saw in chapter 4 that Jesus

came to identify with all sinners and offer all the salvation through his name whether they are Jew or Samaritan or whoever.

So we see first of all there is a denial. But after that Jesus speaks what he is seeking to do and that is honour his Father. And notice here that God the Father is “my” Father. This is contrasted with the religious leaders who had no relationship with God. But this is what he is seeking to do is honour God in all that he is doing. And the motivation is so different than his opponents, because he says, “and you dishonor me.” They dishonour Jesus who honours the Father, therefore they dishonour the Father. And do you see the difference? I believe in many of our battles and interpersonal squabbles that we think that we are so different than our opponent, but so often this is not the motivation of the heart and life. It is not about honouring God. We are not grieved when we see God dishonoured, or we are angered that someone said something about us. We are not grieved that his reputation is smeared but our reputation is smeared. And you can see it from the words that come out of our mouths.

Think about the last battle you had with someone: how much was God and his honour on your mind that you are his representative? How much of the fruit of the Spirit was coming out of your life? Galatians 5:22-23, “**But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.**” If we are representatives of God then we need to represent him and there needs to be something different that comes out of us. We need to be light bearers and not spread more darkness. It is at these times we see who we are representing, and more often than not it is self rather than God. Jesus represents his Father. He seeks to honour him in all and every situation.

2. Jesus seeks the judgment of one. V. 50.

One of the main goals of modern day Christianity is to have an easy life. We look to Jesus to give us to good things of life. And we think foolishly that if I live a life dedicated to Jesus then I will have the good things of life. There are a couple of things that are wrong with that way of thinking. One is that it is the opposite of this text. We are not living for God’s glory but our own. We are not primarily living a certain way because we love God but because we love self and we want an easy life. The other problem is the statements of Scripture. Jesus says in John 15:18, “**If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.**” Also Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:12, “**Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.**” If you try and live for Jesus, if you tell others that the only way they can escape the wrath of God is by believing in Jesus your life will not be easy but difficult. If you are seeking to glorify God it will add burdens and difficulties to your life, not lessen them. So the question becomes: why would I ever live a life dedicated to Him if it will bring in so much hardship?

Well, look at what Jesus says here, because he gives a couple of answers, “**Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is One who seeks it, and he is the judge.**” This is an incredible statement. First of all, Jesus says that he has not come to seek his own glory. By saying that he has come to honour the Father that mean that he has not come for his own glory. And you have to know what this means. It means that his life is totally submitted to doing the will of the Father. It is a life of loving commitment to do his will

and seek to manifest and glorify Him. And think of it: if we set our hearts on worldly approval or being liked and admired by those around us then there is going to be certain things that we do and certain things that we do not do. We will shape our behaviour and our words to gain the approval and the applause of others. But here Jesus says that he has not come for his own glory. He realizes that God is worthy of worshipped. He realized the worth of his Father. We need to realize regardless of the pressure or the rejection of others God is worthy to be worshiped and followed and obeyed. We ultimately live for him. He is present in every and all situations and we seek his glory even if in the here and now there seems to be no benefit coming to us. We were made for the glory of another. And that is a difficult message for sinners that life is not about us but about him.

The second thing we see here is there is the judgment of another. Look at what Jesus says, **“there is One who seeks it, and he is the judge.”** Now I want us to see what Jesus is saying because it is easy to miss. He say “there is One who seeks it.” Now the One here is God the Father. And we see He is the seeking the “it.” But here is the question: what is the “it”? The “it” here is the glory of Jesus - the praise of Jesus. And look at what he says in the end of the verse: “and he is the judge.” And here are these men maligning and sayings all manner of evil about Jesus. Jesus is committing to honouring the Father, and in the end he knows beyond a shadow of a doubt that God the Father will vindicate Jesus. He knows that the Father cannot and will not do any wrong, and ultimately Jesus’ whole case will be vindicated. We realize that he will rise from the dead which will be a judgment from the Father of all that Jesus said and did. Peter says on the Day of Pentecost after declaring God raised Jesus in Acts 2:36, **“Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”** This is a judicial statement for Christ and against Israel. And we also know in the end every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord. God is judge! He will vindicate Jesus.

And for us as believers in Christ, we can take great solace. People will make judgments about you. They will make declarations about you. And you might not even be able to defend yourself. But there is one who will vindicate the believer. There is one who is even working for our eternal glory, and in the end analysis we care about his judgment the most. We care about his well done the most. We realize his judgments and what he is doing. 2 Corinthians 4:17, **“For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.”** We forsake the lesser glory of the here and now for the higher glory of God’s will in the here and now, but also the higher glory that will come.

3. The third way Jesus responds in this passage to the aggression of his opponents is to offer none other than the grace that none deserve. V. 51.

The one thing we often forget when individual malign us and say all manner of evil against us, we forget so often in our anger or wanting to get even, is we forget what they need most, and that is Jesus Christ. And think of it because Jesus is standing in front of some of the very men who will be responsible for his death on the cross. These individuals hate him. You are nothing but a Samaritan and a demon! And yet Jesus doesn't offer them like kind abuse but offers them grace. What a great

example to us as we live in this hostile world. People will exist for all of eternity somewhere, the only question is will they trust Jesus, and who will tell them in love about Jesus?

So look at this verse, **“Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.”** The double “amen” formula at the beginning indicates a couple of things. One is to pay careful attention to what I am about to say. It is critical that you hear this. But the second is the assurance and the absolute certainty of this truth. There are some that struggle with security, and Christ seeks to alleviate those fears with a security statement. There is a way even for these persecutors and haters of Jesus to find life.

But what is that way? And notice the conditional nature of this promise. It is not trusting in self or what family I was born into, but Jesus says, **“if anyone keeps my word,”** and then there is the promise, **“he will never see death.”** It is not that he might not, or that there is a strong possibility he will never die. And of course what he is talking about here is the second death or eternal death under the judgment of God, but that person will have life and life eternal with God and before him.

But what does he mean by **“keeps my word.”** And that is such a significant phrase. That is the condition you must meet. And let me give you three things that it means. One is that you have to hear the words of Jesus and understand them. You have to listen to him. Christianity is not some sort of mystical encounter but based on objective truth. The second thing it means is that you not only have to understand the words of Jesus but you have to believe on them. You have to believe that you are a sinner under the wrath of God. You have to believe Jesus came to die for you and take the punishment that you deserve that you might have life eternal. But it also means if we truly believe it that we will follow or obey Jesus. It does not mean that we live perfectly lives, but because we believe the evidence of that belief will be a new direction in our lives. And have you trusted Christ this evening? Do you understand and believe the message of Jesus, and is there evidence in your life that you have believed because you are following him? It is now time, even after all your rebellion - God in his goodness is extending his grace. It is now time to come.

And for us as believers in Christ what an encouraging and challenging passage in our lives as we face opposition in our lives. Jesus is our Lord. Evidence that we are his is that we do follow him. And so are you seeking to honour him when the people of the world splash their hatred on you? Is the whole goal of life just live a life where we are liked and applauded, or you you living for the one who ultimately is the eternal judge who will ultimately vindicate his people? And during these times when other demean and defame you, are you seeking to respond in grace? Is there anything of the gospel seen in your response? Let us follow Christ and make much of our God.