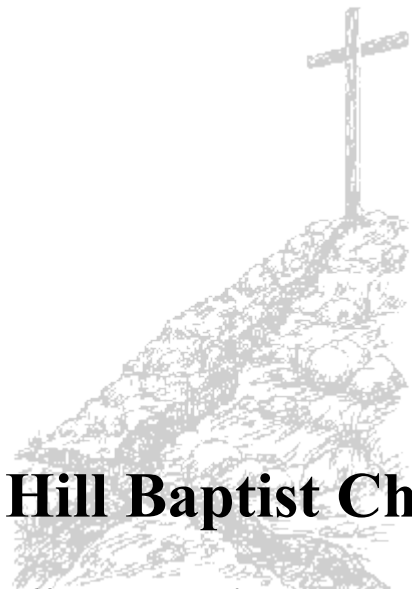


Before Abraham Was, I Am

John 8:51-59



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FOCAL Read Responsively John 8:51-59 ^{KJV} Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death. (52) Then said the Jews unto him, Now we know that thou hast a devil. Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and thou sayest, If a man keep my saying, he shall never taste of death. (53) Art thou greater than our father Abraham, which is dead? and the prophets are dead: whom makest thou thyself? (54) **Jesus answered, If I honor myself, my honor is nothing: it is my Father that honoreth me; of whom ye say, that he is your God: (55) Yet ye have not known him; but I know him: and if I should say, I know him not, I shall be a liar like unto you: but I know him, and keep his saying. (56) Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad. (57) Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham? (58) Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am. (59) Then took they up stones to cast at him: but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.**

Who is Jesus Christ? We cannot properly answer this question without going to the Source Himself. Who did Jesus say Jesus was? Did Jesus believe that there were *many ways to reach God*, or did He believe in only One Way? Let's see how Jesus defined Jesus, for there is the best Source available!

**1. Jesus Has An Exclusive Word
That Gives Power Over Death**

FOCAL John 8:51 ^{KJV} "Verily, verily, I say unto you,

If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death. ..."

Begin with the first two words, **Verily, verily**. This is one of Jesus' trademark statements, a veritable *double amen*¹.

Our Lord uses this **double amen** *twenty five times* throughout the Gospel of John.

John loved it when Jesus gave His **double amen**, and recorded it in the following texts:

Where in John	The Truth Stated
John 1:51	Ye shall see the heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.
John 3:3	Except one be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God
John 3:5	Except one be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God!
John 3:11	We speak that which we know, and bear witness of that which we have seen; and ye receive not our witness.
John 5:19	The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father doing: for what things soever he doeth, these the Son also doeth in like manner.

Where in John	The Truth Stated
John 5:24	He that heareth my word, and believeth him that sent me, hath eternal life, and cometh not into judgment, but hath passed out of death into life.
John 5:25	The hour cometh, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live.
John 6:26	Ye seek me, not because ye saw signs, but because ye ate of the loaves, and were filled.
John 6:32	say unto you, It was not Moses that gave you the bread out of heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread out of heaven.
John 6:47	He that believeth hath eternal life.
John 6:53	Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, ye have not life in yourselves.
John 8:34	Every one that committeth sin is the bond servant of sin.
John 8:51	If a man keep my word, he shall never see death.
John 8:58	Before Abraham was born, I am.
John 10:1	He that entereth not by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.
John 10:7	I am the door of the sheep.
John 12:24	Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abideth by itself alone; but if it die, it beareth much fruit.
John 13:16	A servant is not greater than his lord; neither one that is sent greater than he that sent him.

¹ (Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries) G281, ἀμήν, amēn, *am-ane'*, Of Hebrew origin [H543]; properly *firm*, that is, (figuratively) *trustworthy*; adverbially *surely* (often as interjection *so be it*): - amen, verily.

Where in John	The Truth Stated
John 13:20	he that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.
John 13:21	one of you shall betray me.
John 13:38	Wilt thou lay down thy life for me? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice.
John 14:12	he that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto the Father.
John 16:20	ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy.
John 16:23	in that day ye shall ask me no question.
John 21:18	When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not.

Jesus used this **double Amen** so often that when you read:

Revelation 3:14 ^{KJV} **And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God;**

you know that **Amen** refers to Jesus Christ our Savior! Our Lord used that **amen - amen** prior to issuing very important statements - and what He's getting ready to say is a very important truth. The Lord said:

FOCAL John 8:51 ^{KJV} "Verily, verily, I say unto you, **If a man keep² my saying, he shall never see death. ...**"

Jesus used the *exact same word* in

John 17:15 ^{KJV} **I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil (one).**

In His final recorded prayer that He made just before He died on the Cross, the Lord prayed that we who are His people would be *guarded* or *protected* from the evil one (Satan).

When you guard or protect something you *preserve it from harm* or *from modification*. Again, Jesus uses the *same word* in our focal text. He said, **If a man guards**

2 (Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries) Aorist Active Subjunctive of G5083, τηρέω, tēreō, tay-reh'-o, From τηρός teros (a watch; perhaps akin to G2334); to guard (from loss or injury, properly by keeping the eye upon; and thus differing from G5442, which is properly to prevent escaping; and from G2892, which implies a fortress or full military lines of apparatus), that is, to note (a prophecy; figuratively to fulfil a command); by implication to detain (in custody; figuratively to maintain); by extension to withhold (for personal ends; figuratively to keep unmarried): - hold fast, keep (-er), (ob-, pre-, re) serve, watch.

my Word or My Gospel then he shall never see death.

Those who have accepted Jesus Christ as Savior recognize that the Lord gave us an *exclusive Gospel message*. This message is to be guarded against any type of blending. It must not be blended with *law*, nor must it be blended with *lasciviousness* or *lust*. Jesus Christ offered an *exclusive means of salvation by faith in Him and Him alone*. Those who seek to modify that message *have never been saved*, for they do not guard the integrity of His message. Those who have *truly* accepted Jesus Christ as Savior carefully *guard His Word - His Logos* - from any adulteration.

The world - and the *pretenders to salvation* - cannot understand this message. Notice how the Pharisees responded:

FOCAL John 8:51-52 ^{KJV} ... **If a man keep my saying, he shall never see³ death. (52) Then said the Jews unto him, Now we know that thou hast a devil. Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and thou sayest, If a man keep my saying, he shall never taste⁴ of**

3 Aorist Active Subjunctive of G2334 (Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries), θεωρέω, theōreō, *teh-o-reh'-o*, From a derivative of G2300 (perhaps by adverb of G3708); to *be a spectator* of, that is, *discern*, (literally, figuratively [*experience*] or intensively [*acknowledge*]): - behold, consider, look on, perceive, see. Compare G3700.

4 Future Middle Indicative of G1089 (Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries), γεύομαι, geuomai, *ghyoo'-om-ahee*, A primary verb; to *taste*; by implication to *eat*; figuratively to *experience* (good or ill): - eat, taste.

death."

This is the same sort of thing I generally get when I'm talking to unbelievers about Christ. They have *no understanding nor comprehension* of what they are hearing.

Jesus said, "If a man guards My Word, He shall never SEE death". The Pharisees responded with, "How can you say that if a man guards Your Word, He shall never TASTE death".

Do you see the confusion here? These Pharisees are doing the exact same thing that Eve did in the Garden of Eden - they are adding to God's Words. Jesus never said **"You will not TASTE death"**, He said **"You will never see - or be a spectator to death"**. There's a world of difference between these two statements. When is the last time you ate a steak with your eyes? Tasting and seeing are two different senses. These Pharisees, just like the serpent in the Garden of Eden, are *twisting* Christ's Word. They are not even using the same tense-voice-mood when they refer back to what our Lord said. Jesus Christ *never said* that those who believe in Him will never die. He said *they will not see or be a spectator of death*.

I firmly believe that the Christian who is a Christian by faith in Christ never *sees death*, just as our Lord promised. I believe that when death comes, when we close our eyes for that last time, I believe that we immediately open our *spiritual eyes* in God's Heaven.

The unbeliever cannot understand this. The unbeliever who is *disguised as a Christian* (often called Nominal or Notional Christians) cannot understand this. Only those who are fully convinced that Jesus Christ *is the Conqueror of death* never see death. Let me give you an example.

Illustrate Let's say that you and I are sitting together on an airplane, and its engines suddenly shut off. The pilot's voice on the intercom warns us that we are about to experience a crash. He tells us that underneath each of our seats is a parachute, and asks that we quickly put on our parachute and step to the door. Once at the door we are to grasp the ripcord, jump out of the plane and slowly count to ten. When we reach "ten" we are to pull our ripcords and relax - we will float to the ground.

You can sit next to me and say the words "I believe that will save my life" but if you don't get up and do as the pilot has said - Beloved, you're going to go SPLAT! Only those who listen to the pilot's word have any hope. All others can say what they will, but unless they trust in the parachute and believe in it, they will see death.

You can sit next to me and say, "I can't believe the pilot told me to *eat* the parachute. How can that save me?" That's not what the pilot said - he said *put on* the parachute, jump from the plane, pull the ripcord. Those who are Nominal or Notional Christians are much like the Pharisees were. They do not listen to what the Lord says, nor do they do what He said.

They turn the preaching of the Gospel into a *word of*

faith movement, or into a *prosperity Gospel*, or into a *saved-lost-saved* theory, or into a *you must follow this ritual to be saved* proclamation.

If you add to or take away from the Gospel message then what you have is not the Gospel, but the word of man. Quite frankly, dear friend, we don't need more of the word of man. We need more of the Word of Christ! The Word of Christ is what makes the difference. A good illustration can be seen in the following dialog⁵, all too common in our America today:

"...here you've got all these people around the world who believe in all these different things and worship God in all these different ways, and Jesus claimed that only His way was the right one?"

'And your difficulty with that is what?'

'A lot. Who is to say that Jesus' way was any better than Muhammad's or Buddha's or Confucius's or'

'Do you think Hinduism is true?'

'I don't know.. My friends Dave and Paula have gotten into some Hindu stuff, and it seemed to work for them.'"

This conversation is all too common among professing Christians today. We justify what others say by "It seems to work for them". Yet, just because the Dali Llama is

⁵ *Dinner With a Perfect Stranger*, David Gregory Smith, Waterbrook Press. From *Kindred Spirit* Fall 2005, Dallas Theological Seminary, page 6

happy all the time, and the Hindu believes that the universe is simply an extension of the *Brahman* so that God is the universe and the universe is God, the point remains - whether or not what they believe is TRUE to God. We're not talking about *preferences in color* -- by the way, I like the color *black* -- but we're talking about what Almighty God considers to be acceptable. It isn't about what I consider right or wrong, but it's about what GOD - the One Who made me- considers right or wrong. Back in the Middle Ages explorers considered the earth to be flat, and sailed only so far before turning around and coming back. Once man discovered that he misunderstood the geography of our planet and realized that he *wouldn't* fall off the edge of the world when he went so far, he was free to explore the greater truths that our world holds.

In the same way, when man realizes that Jesus Christ is *the Only Way to God* and *takes that way*, then man can discover the greater truths that the Father wants to show him. So many people in America today are trying to find satisfaction in the temporal, and excusing that by saying "Well, that works for me". But only once you discover Jesus Christ and make Him Lord of your life do you *really begin to live*. His Word keeps us from seeing death. His Word bring eternal blessing.

2. Jesus' Unique Word Is Established By Two Reliable Witnesses

FOCAL John 8:54-56 ^{KJV} Jesus answered, If I honor myself, my honor is nothing: it is **my Father that honoreth me; of whom ye say, that he is**

your God: (55) Yet ye have not known him; but I know him: and if I should say, I know him not, I shall be a liar like unto you: but I know him, and keep his saying. (56) **Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad.**

Jesus made a startling statement here. He said that there were *two witnesses* to the fact that He is the Only Way to God.

This is *very important*, particularly to the Jews. According to the Mosaic Law *two witnesses* were required to establish a charge against a person. There was *no such thing as circumstantial evidence* - either someone saw you do it, or they didn't! We read:

Deuteronomy 17:6 ^{KJV} "At the **mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death;** [but] at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death."

and again,

Deuteronomy 19:15 ^{KJV} **One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity,** or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established.

Jesus said that He had *two witnesses* to the fact that He was the only way to God - and *look at the witnesses He used*. Jesus said that God the Father was one of His Witnesses (**My Father - God honoreth Me**) and **Abraham**, the father of Israel, was the other witness. Jesus had One Immortal Witness and one Impressive Mortal witness. Among the three greatest so called *religions* in the world today - Christianity, Judaism, and Islam or Mohammadism - Abraham is considered the *father of faith*. He is an impressive witness - but God the Father is the *most Impressive Witness*.

Jesus not only established that both God the Father and Father Abraham were His witnesses, but He also established that the Pharisees *failed to keep God's Law*. Jesus charged them with *lying*. He said:

FOCAL John 8:55 ^{KJV} Yet **ye have not known him; but I know him: and if I should say, I know him not, I shall be a liar like unto you:** but I know him, and keep his saying.

Jesus charged all those who *rejected His exclusive Word* as *liars* who could *not* know God the Father. How do Jesus' words stand up to our current "you tolerate me and I'll tolerate you" atmosphere in Christianity? Quite frankly, Jesus made it *very clear*. If you do not accept His Words *exclusively*, if you present *any other way to God outside of His teaching*, then - dear friend - you are a liar! Those are harsh words, but true nonetheless.

The fact of the matter is, we who are in Christ are *ambassadors for Christ*.

As such, we have no right to question His authority. We are to merely accept that which He has said, then present that to the world at large.

Doctrine of the Ambassador⁶

1 An Ambassador is a high ranking official of state who is sent to another nation to represent his Sovereign. All Church age believers are Ambassadors for Christ.

2 Profile Of An Ambassador:

- a. He doesn't appoint himself, but is appointed by another.
- b. He doesn't support himself (we have the Scriptures to support us).
- c. His instructions are often in written form.
- d. He does not belong to the country where he is sent (our citizenship is in Heaven).
- e. He doesn't live in that country for his own interests (we are here for Christ).
- f. He doesn't treat any insult to himself as personal (our opposition is from Satan, and we represent God).
- g. His recall is tantamount to a declaration of war (when we're reclaimed by Christ, the Tribulation will begin).

3 As Ambassadors We're To Witness For Christ:

Ephesians 6:20 "For which **I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may**

⁶ taken from the teachings of R.B. Thieme, Jr

Speak boldly, as I ought to speak."

2 Corinthians 5:20 "Now then **we are ambassadors for Christ**, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."

4 Not All Ambassadors Are Effective:

Proverbs 13:16-17 "Every prudent man dealth with knowledge: but a fool layeth open his folly. **A wicked messenger falleth into mischief: but a faithful ambassador is health.**"

5 We Are Personal Representatives Of Christ Here On Earth:

Philemon 1:9 "Yet for love's sake I rather beseech thee, being such an one as Paul the aged, and now also a **prisoner of Jesus Christ.**"

6 An Ambassador Promotes Peace, But Cannot Bring It:

Isaiah 33:6-7 " And wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times, and strength of salvation: the **fear of the LORD is his treasure.** Behold, their valiant ones shall cry without: the ambassadors of peace shall weep bitterly."

The sad truth is, there are many in Christianity today who are not *ambassadors*, but try to be *advisers* to God. God our Father needs no advisers, but ambassadors who

will represent the truths that our Lord Jesus Christ taught. Jesus has established His truth by two *incomparable witnesses* - God the Father and Father Abraham. We can't do any better than that, so let's stop trying.

3. Jesus Christ Is The Great "I Am", Eternal God In The Flesh

FOCAL John 8:57-59 ^{KJV} Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad. (57) Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham? (58) Jesus said unto them, **Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.** (59) Then took they up stones to cast at him: but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.

Illustrate In the Law of God, in Numbers 35 and in other texts, God established several places that He called *Cities of Refuge*. This is a very interesting part of the Law. If a person caused an *unintentional death* among the children of Israel, then this was not considered a murder (murderers were executed immediately) nor was it treated like a murder.

In the case of unintentional death the offending party was allowed to run to a city of refuge, though a family member (called the blood avenger) was allowed to chase the offender.

If the blood avenger caught the offender *before* he reached the city of refuge then the blood avenger had the right to kill the offender. But if the offender reached the city of refuge *before* the blood avenger caught him, the offender's life was spared *as long as he remained in that city*.

The Jews took the law of the city of refuge *very seriously*. It is said that every crossroad on the way to one of these cities was clearly marked so the offender wouldn't get confused and go down the wrong path. There was a sign at every crossroad that pointed the way to salvation. At least once a year the priests who managed these cities went down the main roads and picked up any stray rocks that might cause the offender to stumble. If someone wanted the grace of that city, the priests wanted to make sure that there was no hindrance, no cause of stumbling to the seeker.

As a pastor I find that I, too, often have to go out into the Way and clear away any stones of stumbling that might hinder someone from coming to the Lord Jesus Christ. One of the stones that caused Israel to stumble and fall short of the Grace of Jesus, is mentioned in:

1 Peter 2:6-8 ^{KJV} **Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.**
{7} **Unto you therefore which believe [he is] precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of**

the corner, {8} And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense, [even to them] which stumble at the word, being disobedient: where unto also they were appointed.

There are many in today's world that believe Jesus Christ to be a **stone of stumbling** that needs to be removed from the Way of Salvation. Yet the Bible makes it clear that Jesus Christ, far from being a **stumbling stone**, is the *very cobble stone on the Road to Salvation*. He is the road, He is the Way, He is the City of Refuge that you must reach if you expect to be saved.

There are *several stones of stumbling* that keep people from being saved.

There is the stone of denominationalism. These Jews believed themselves to be saved merely because they had *Abraham* as their father. There are many who hold onto this same thought today, and yet will not be saved because they know not Christ. There is the stone of works, that thing that says I can *work my way into Heaven*. And there is the stone of the common Christ. This stone is one of the greatest ones that keep many from being saved. The *stone of the common Christ* teaches that Jesus Christ is *mere mortal man* and no God at all - of if He is a god, He is a *little god*. But this is not what our Jesus taught about Himself. Look at what the Master said:

FOCAL John 8:58 ^{KJV} ... **Verily, verily, I say**

unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.

This was *not* bad grammar. Our Lord Jesus Christ applied the *very Holy Name of God* to Himself. This name was first given to Israel in:

Exodus 3:14 KJV And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, **I AM hath sent me unto you.**

Jesus Christ used the Most Holy Name of God *ever given by God* - and applied this name *to Himself*.

The Jews *immediately* began to pick up stones to stone Jesus to death. They believed that a mere mortal man had taken God's Most Holy Name and used it for Himself. The Law was clear⁷: stone Jesus with stones until He was dead! But Beloved, Jesus Christ is not mere mortal Man. Jesus is both *fully God* and *fully Perfect Man*. He is the Savior of all who will believe on Him. The Gospel message is that Jesus Christ, the Son of Man and the Son of God, died *for us*. The great I AM took on our sins and paid for them with His very life. He died for our sins, then rose again. All who believe in Him shall be saved.

⁷ Leviticus 24:15-16 ^{KJV} And thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel, saying, Whosoever curseth his God shall bear his sin. {16} And he that blasphemeth the name of the LORD, he shall surely be put to death, [and] all the congregation shall certainly stone him: as well the stranger, as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name [of the LORD], shall be put to death.

Because the great I AM died for you, you can be assured that your sins are forgiven. Because the God-Man Christ Jesus died for you and rose for you you can be certain that you will one day stand with Him in yonder glory. Jesus is the I AM, not the I WAS. He is eternally in your present, for He is the Eternal Present Tense. Because Jesus has never *not been* I AM, He can promise that:

Hebrews 13:5 ^{KJV} I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.

Mortal man could never say this, but only Almighty God can promise such a broad thing. Because He is the great I AM Jesus can say to the believer:

Matthew 9:2 ^{KJV} be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.

I could not trust the words of the a mere man, even a well meaning one. He could not assure me of my salvation, nor of my eternal estate. But I can trust the words of my Savior, Jesus Christ our Lord. He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He is the great I AM. I pray that you know Him as I do, and have believed on Him for eternal life.

God Bless!

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