

Rescue

Weekly Devotion #1

Below is a short devotion based on the Week 1 Devotion questions in your Renew: Session 3 handout. You'll get the most out of this devotion if you answer the questions yourself first. The goal is not for you to have the exact same response, but to understand the correct meaning of the Biblical text and then apply it personally in a way that uniquely helps you grow in your knowledge, love, and worship of God.

John 8:56-59 "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.

To better understand what's happening in these 4 verses, it's helpful to take a look at the surrounding context. After a lengthy back-and-forth conversation stretching over 20 verses, a group of Jesus' fellow Jews ask him, "Are you greater than our father Abraham...who do you make yourself out to be?" (verse 53). The reason they refer to Abraham as "our father" is because they traced their ancestry and faith back to that one man. He was the founder of both the Jewish people group and the Jewish religion. So, for the Jews, no man could be greater than Abraham. What they didn't realize was that Jesus was no mere man. That's the meaning behind the interesting and seemingly awkward grammar of verse 58. Notice that Jesus doesn't say, "Before Abraham was, I was." In other words, before Abraham existed, I existed. That would have made more grammatical sense, but Jesus is claiming much more than that. Over a thousand years before this moment, God revealed himself to Moses in a burning bush and commanded him to lead the Jews out of slavery in Egypt. Moses responded to God by asking, "If the people of Israel...ask me, 'What is [God's] name?' what shall I say to them?" And God answered Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'I AM has sent me to you'" (Exodus 3:13-14). So when Jesus says, "Before Abraham was, I AM," he wasn't accidentally using bad grammar; he was purposefully adopting for himself the very name of God. This is one of the clearest statements in the entire Bible that **while Jesus was fully human, he also remained fully God**. So, consider again the question that led to this moment: "Are you greater than our father Abraham...who do you make yourself out to be?" Jesus' answer is clear: "I am not only greater than Abraham; I am the very God who created and called Abraham." And just in case there was any doubt, look at how the Jews responded to Jesus' statement in verse 59: "So they picked up stones to throw at him..." Why would they do that? Because they understood that Jesus was calling himself God and, in their eyes and the eyes of their law, that was blasphemy that deserved the death penalty. Jesus escaped the death penalty this time, but willingly accepted it just 10 chapters later. Why? Not because he deserved it, but because we did. Earlier in this same chapter Jesus said, "Everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin...so if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:34-36). The only way for Jesus to set us free from this slavery was to pay the price to redeem us: death. That's perhaps the most shocking part of Jesus' story - not just that he was "God-become-man," but that **God became man in order to die in our place**. And so now, through his death and resurrection, Jesus has become the better Moses who frees us from our deepest slavery. And he has become the better Abraham who is not only the Founder, but also the Perfector of our faith (Hebrews 12:2).

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, Jesus himself told us that to see him is to see you (John 14:9). Looking at these verses, it's abundantly clear why that's the case. You and your Son are both fully God. And now you both make your home within us through your Spirit. These truths are beyond our full comprehension and so we lift our voice in humble praise with the words of the Apostle Paul: "Oh the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways" (Romans 11:33)! But, like the people in this story, too often we fail to see and savor the greatness of Christ, or we claim that we see it, but we don't live like it. We treat other people or things as more worthy of our time, energy, love, and devotion. Forgive us. Again, in the words of Paul, please "unveil" our spiritual eyes to behold the glory of the Lord so that we will be transformed into his image day after day (2 Corinthians 3:18). Thank you for sending your Son to become a man so that he could live, die, and live again for us. We know that even now, because He sympathetically prays for us at your right hand, we are approaching not a throne of judgment, but of grace, confident that we will obtain the help we need (Hebrews 4:15-16). In Christ's name, Amen.