

Wouldn't you like a Bible verse where Jesus simply said "I am God"? No hidden meanings like "before Abraham was, I am" or metaphoric references like "I am the bread of life" or "I am the light of the world" – but just plain, simple language of Jesus claiming to be the God who had come down from heaven!

Well, that is what the Jews wanted to hear from Jesus. I assume some were sincere in their desire, really wanting to know who he was that they might choose to believe or reject. But most, I think, just wanted to hear his claim of deity that they could dispose of him as a blasphemous liar.

In today's encounter, Jesus gives them what they want – a simple statement of his deity. But in typical Jesus fashion, he uses the opportunity to teach them much about both himself and themselves. And for us, he gives much instruction for our encounters. Let's read the account.

John 10:22-30 *At that time the Feast of the Dedication took place at Jerusalem; it was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple in the portico of Solomon. The Jews then gathered around Him, and were saying to Him, "How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly." Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father's name, these testify of Me. But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one."*

SETTING THE SCENE

First of all, let us take our cue from the author John, and set the scene. When it says "it was winter" it means both that winter was upon them, late in what we know as December, and also that it was wintry weather. Thus, Jesus was walking in the protected area of the court of the Gentiles just outside the Jerusalem temple. This covered "portico" was one of the few parts of the temple that was considered to be original from the time of Solomon, and thus it was referred to as "Solomon's portico." This covered portico area was supported by 40' tall pillars and gave ample room for crowds of people to flock around rabbis who were teaching. It would feel similar in grandeur and spaciousness to the lobby of one of our great 5-star hotels. And in this space, on a wintry day, Jesus the rabbi was surrounded by Jews who had come to the annual feast of what we know as Hanukkah.

Hanukkah, or the Feast of Lights, was (and still is today) celebrated on the 25th day of the Jewish month of Chislew, which is roughly equivalent to our December. Thus, Hanukkah was celebrated right around our Christmastime and near the beginning of winter, just as it is today. It was an eight day feast commemorating the cleansing of the temple by Judas Maccabaeus and his brothers in the year 164 B.C. when they rose up to restore Jerusalem and its temple from the desecration that had occurred over the last six years.

The King of Syria, Antiochus Epiphanes, was a lover of all things Greek and wanted to eliminate the Jews and their religion once and for all, introducing Greek ways and thoughts into Palestine. He initially tried to do this by peaceful introduction of ideas. But when the Jews resisted, he resorted to violent measures and attacked Jerusalem in 170 B.C. Some 80,000 Jews were slaughtered and more were taken into slavery. It became a capital offense to possess a copy of the Jewish Law and circumcision was met with the crucifixion of the parent with the circumcised child hanging around the parent's neck. The temple was turned into a brothel and swine's flesh was sacrificed on the bronze altar to the Greek god Zeus.

So when the Maccabaeus brothers finally defeated the rebellion and restored the city and the temple, an annual national feast was initiated to commemorate the event. It was called by many

names, including “the Festival of the Dedication of the Altar” or “The Memorial of the Purification of the Temple.” But above all, it became known as “The Festival of Lights” (Hanukkah) where all of Jerusalem, for eight days, was clothed in light, including in the windows of every Jewish home. These lights reminded the Jews of the light of God that had been brought back to their land.

But the lights also reminded of a legend – “The Miracle of the Menorah.” It was said that when the Golden Candlestick was restored to the Holy Place, there was found only one day’s supply of oil to light the lamps of the Menorah. It would take a week to produce more purified oil. But the Candlestick miraculously burned brightly for eight days on the one day’s supply of oil, until more oil could be produced. The Jews claim that God kept the Golden Candlestick burning by his eternal Light.

So this is the setting behind “The Feast of Dedication” mentioned in our passage. Jesus, “the light of the world,” was teaching during the festival of lights on a wintery day in December under the cover of the ancient “portico of Solomon.” And all eyes and ears were on him.

THEIR REQUEST

What many around us are wondering about Jesus is not really much different from the Jews in this encounter. Who is Jesus, really? Is he a great spiritual teacher, a human prophet, one with God-given miraculous powers - or is he more? Should he really be more than a historically significant religious leader to me? Who is he, really?

In this encounter the Jews say, “don’t keep us in suspense, tell us plainly who you are.” To be honest, sometimes our communications about Jesus aren’t so plain and simple. In our attempt to get the gospel across accurately we might make it far more complicated than it needs to be, by using multiple verses or confusing theological terms not familiar to our listeners.

JESUS’ PROOF IN WORDS AND DEEDS

Jesus responds by saying, in essence, you should know the answer by what I have said and done. **“I told you,” he says.**

John 5:24 *Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.*

Who could offer eternal life but God Himself?

John 6:35 *I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst.*

Who could offer unquenchable spiritual food and drink but God Himself?

John 6:54 *He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.*

Who could raise someone to heaven on the last day but God Himself?

John 8:12 *I am the light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.*

Who could offer the Light of life to guide but God Himself?

John 10: 9, 11 *I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.*

Who could offer salvation through Himself but God?

John 10:11 *I am the Good Shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.*

Who could offer His life to save mankind but God Himself?

All these statements were made in a public place to mobs of people. He had told them who He was, but they had not heard, because they did not have ears to hear.

As C. S. Lewis put it, either Jesus was a supreme liar, or a raging lunatic, or He was Lord and God as He clearly proclaimed. He had told them, and He speaks yet today to those who have ears to hear.

Then, “I showed you, he says.

And all the following are just from John's gospel, and all done in plain view of many.

He turned the water to wine (John 2)

He converted many Samaritans of Sychar to him (John 4)

He heals a royal official's son at Capernaum (John 4)

He heals a cripple of 38 years at the pool of Bethesda (John 5)

He feeds a multitude of 5,000 men plus women and children with a boy's lunch (John 6)

He crosses the Sea of Galilee without a boat (John 6)

He forgives an adulterous woman (John 8)

He heals a man blind from birth

Who could do these things but God Himself?

JESUS' 3 POINT SALVATION SERMON IN ONE SENTENCE

Verses 27 and 28 give us a brilliant 3-point sermon about God's sheep and what Jesus does for them. Notice that Jesus says it is He that does these things for His true followers.

SHEEP

1. hear Jesus' voice
2. follow Jesus
3. will never perish

JESUS

- knows His sheep
- gives them eternal life
- ever holds on to them

In just one sentence we learn of the call of Jesus and hearing by his sheep, leadership of Jesus and obedient following of the sheep and preserving of Jesus of His sheep forever.

Likewise in this same sentence we get a 3-fold message of eternal security, or predestination. Jesus knows those who are His, He assures that they receive eternal life and preserves that relationship forever.

And note that in the previous brief verse, verse 26, we have free will and predestination taught simultaneously. Free will: "you do not believe" (meaning they make a choice to not believe).

Predestination: "because you are not of My sheep" (meaning chosen sheep will respond and those not chosen will not.)

Again, note that it is Jesus who gives the call, leads the sheep through life, and brings them to safety in glory. Who would be able to do that but God Himself?

THE UNITY OF JESUS AND THE FATHER

It is in verses 29 and 30 that Jesus makes his clear statement of being deity. In verse 29 He sets it up by saying that "no one is able to snatch them [God's sheep] out of the Father's hand." He had just said that "no one will snatch them out of my hand." And so with these two statements side by side He is saying that He and the Father are one and the same (though two separate persons).

And then, He "seals the deal" and answers them as they had requested telling them "plainly": "I and the Father are one."

Note that if He had said "I am God" there would have been no distinction in the different persons of the Godhead. But by saying "I and the Father are one" He makes distinction, but yet proclaims unity of essence. This is reminiscent of John's opening verse of his gospel.

John 1:1 *In the beginning was the Word [clearly Jesus from 1:14], and the Word was with God and the Word was God.*

Here again Jesus is distinct from the Father in person ("with God") and one with the Father in essence of deity ("was God").

So this is about as clear as Jesus could say that He is God, without distorting the truth of the distinction between Father and Son in the unified Godhead. "I and the Father are one" – one in essence, personality and deity.

THE RESPONSE TO WHAT THEY HAD ASKED FOR

John 10: 31-39 *The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him. Jesus answered them, "I showed you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you stoning Me?" The Jews answered Him, "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God." Jesus answered them, "Has it not been written in your Law, 'I said, you are gods'? If he called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), do you say of Him, whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'? If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do them, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father." Therefore they were seeking again to seize Him, and He eluded their grasp.*

OK, so they really didn't want to hear who He was out of curiosity. They just wanted to confirm that He was not who they wanted to follow. And that may well be the result of our encounters. "No, thanks" is in essence what many will say. (Hopefully they won't want to pick up stones). But you never know who might want to investigate further, or who God might be calling to hear and follow. So we must share the truth of Jesus faithfully.

Most are glad to hear of the works (miracles) of Jesus, just like the Jews. They were glad to have people fed, raised from the dead and healed. They just didn't want to acknowledge Him as God come in the flesh.

Jesus had an interesting response to their "God" issue when he quoted Psalm 82.6 where David called human judges "gods" as if come from and used of God. If human judges could be called "gods" then why couldn't he be the Son of God come from and used by God? If in our encounters people can admit that Jesus came from God for mankind's good, that can be a step in the right direction of discovering who He really is. If we can just get them reading about Him in God's Holy Bible the convicting Word of God might just draw them to Him. It has happened to many others!

BOTTOM LINE

Bottom line, Jesus is God – one with the Father. And though He is one with God in deity He is Son of God in relation to God His Father.

If, in our encounters we find someone willing to acknowledge that Jesus is God in the flesh – then the obvious follow up is, "so what are you going to do with Him?"