

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Origins

by Dan Trygg

“He was saying to them, ‘You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world.’²⁴ I said therefore to you, that you shall die in your sins; for **unless you believe that I AM, you shall die in your sins.**’²⁵ And so they were saying to Him, ‘Who are You?’ Jesus said to them, ‘What have I been saying to you from the beginning?’²⁶ I have many things to speak and to judge concerning you, but He who sent Me is true; and the things which I heard from Him, these I speak to the world.’...²⁸ Jesus therefore said, ‘**When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I AM,** and I do nothing from Myself, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me.’²⁹ And the One sending Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him.’³⁰ As He spoke these things, *many were believing in Him.*³¹ Jesus therefore was saying to *those Jews who had believed Him,* ‘If you abide in My word, *then you are truly disciples of Mine;*³² and you shall know the truth, and the truth will make you free.’⁵⁸ ...Jesus said to them, ‘**Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I AM.**’⁵⁹ Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself, and went out of the temple. ” John 8:23-26, 28-32,58,59

The context still is at the Jewish temple in Jerusalem, during the Feast of Booths. This was the final day, ...the culmination of their worship and remembrance of Yahweh’s abiding presence leading them in the wilderness. Jesus, the miracle-working preacher from Galilee had already inserted Himself into their ceremonies *twice*:

(1.) When they were commemorating Yahweh’s provision for their thirst in the wilderness, He boldly cried out, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink, and out of his belly would flow rivers of living water!” God had provided water from the rock (Ex. 17:6), or by purifying poisonous waters (Ex. 15:23-25), or by directing them to uncover a spring (Num. 21:16-18). As marvelous as these provisions were, they were temporary, and localized. The congregation moved on from each occurrence. They would get thirsty again, and there was need for another miracle. Jesus was saying that those who came to Him could have an unending spring rising up within them. *The Source of their soul-thirst would be abiding within their own innermost being.*

(2.) When they were commemorating the pillar of fire and cloud that would lead the congregation through the wilderness, Jesus again boldly proclaimed, “I am the Light of the world, the one following Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of Life.” *Instead of following the pillar of fire, Jesus instructed the multitude to follow Him.* (While they were debating that no prophet would arise out of Galilee, He Himself stood in their temple, under the 75 foot tall torches which commemorated God’s light, and proclaimed that HE is the Light. If they had the perception to grasp it, they would have seen that HE was Galilee’s great Light, spoken of by Isaiah 700 years earlier [9:1-6].)

We have been reading about how the Jews had intended to kill Him, and even sent soldiers to arrest Him, but it was not yet His time. By the time we get down to 8:20, we are thinking, “Whew! He narrowly escaped disaster! Surely, He will retreat into the crowd, ...or head out of town.” *Oh, no! He is just getting warmed up!!*

Jesus introduces a new line of thought: He is going to be *leaving*. They will search for Him, and die in their sin. “Where I am going, you will not be able to come.” They do not know what to make of this statement. Some think He may even intend to kill Himself! Jesus comes at them again, “I am *from above; you are from below.* ...I am *not* of this world. I said *therefore* that you shall die in your sins; for unless you believe that I AM, you will die in your sins” (vs. 23,24). What does that sound like *to you?* It sounds like He is *claiming to be from heaven, ...and He even seems to use the Divine name in reference to Himself* (“I AM” – Ex. 3:14). This is the third time in this gospel where Jesus speaks this way, using the unusual construction of “I AM” to identify Himself (4:26; 6:20). As we shall see, this is *very significant* and *intentional* in this chapter. *Somehow, believing in Him can keep them from “dying in their sins”.* Incidentally, *this phrase was used of the fate of those who died in the wilderness wandering.* They “died in their sins” (Num. 27:3). *Remember that they were at the Feast of Booths, a commemoration of the wilderness wandering!* Jesus seems to be drawing a parallel between those who died in the wilderness, and those who went into the promised land. *Just as that entire generation resisted God’s leading in the time of Moses, and were doomed to perish in the wilderness, Jesus is saying that they, too, were resisting the leading and provision of God in their day. If they reject Him, they will “die in their sin”. They will not be able to follow Him.*

This generates a question from His listeners: “Who are You?” (vs. 25) Jesus’ response is that He has been telling them right along, ...since the beginning. “I hear from My Father who sent Me, and speak what He says.” Then He boldly says, “When you lift up the Son of Man, *then you will experientially-know that I AM, and I do nothing from Myself* (Jesus’ *m. o.* – 5:19; 7:16,17), but I speak these things as the Father taught Me” (vs. 28). Moreover, “He is with Me; and has not left Me alone, because I always do what pleases Him” (vs. 29). Wow! Powerful words! At

the least, Jesus is claiming to be the mouthpiece of God. At the most, He seems to be speaking as though *HE were the great I AM*. This is *second* time He seems to be using the Divine name in reference to Himself in this dialogue.

At last, it seems that Jesus is having an impact! “As He spoke these things, *many came to believe in Him*” (vs. 30). If this were a modern-day evangelistic effort, at *this point*, we would be jumping up and down, celebrating at the response of people. “*Many came to believe!*” **For us, ‘faith’ is the ‘finish line’.** It is *our* measure of success. **NOT FOR JESUS! For Him, ‘faith’ is the ‘starting line’!** So, immediately He begins telling “those Jews who had believed in Him” *what it means to be a “disciple”*. See, Jesus is not looking for “*decisions*”; He is looking for “*disciples*”! Again, remember the context of the commemoration of the wilderness wandering. **What good was it if you believed that God was in the pillar of fire, if you did not follow when the pillar moved?** What good was it to get “marching orders” to go take the land, if you *did* nothing? **Doing nothing was seen as rebellion against the counsel of God!** Those who *resisted the orders to go ahead* were among those who “*died in their sins*”.

What does Jesus say about true or genuine disciples? He only has the opportunity to delineate two aspects of what it means to follow Him, before He has rebellion on His hands. **(1.) The operative principle of discipleship is “if you live in, continue in, abide in, remain in My word (or My message), then truly you are My disciples...** A genuine disciple is an *active-follower*, one who lives-out the teachings, instructions, message and example of Jesus. **(2.) One key objective of the discipleship process is “...and you will experientially-know the truth, and the truth will set you free” from bondage to sin.** That is *not* the sum-total of what being a disciple of Jesus is, however. Looking at the context, again, those who did not believe in Jesus would “die in their sins”, but those who were willing to genuinely trust in Jesus would *not* be content to wander through life in sin. They will learn, and live in, Jesus’ word, to find liberty from sin in order *to live in the Spirit*. **You have a choice, to die in your sins, or actively follow Jesus.**

The very mention of “slavery” puffed up the pride of some of those listening. “We are children of Abraham; we have never been enslaved to anyone.” This initiated a downward spiral in the conversation, as Jesus began to expose the origin of their evil intent toward Him. Jesus said, “I know you are Abraham’s offspring; yet you seek to kill Me, *because My word has no place in you.*” **Note how quickly Jesus recognized their true hearts!** That prideful rejoinder was *not* the response of a teachable disciple! **Pride and discipleship do not go together.** **Jesus correctly identified the problem: They had no place in their hearts for Jesus’ word.** Intellectual recognition of who Jesus was did not address the issue of their heart. **They were unwilling to submit to Jesus as their Master.**

Jesus begins to contrast His Father with their father. They *claim* to be children of Abraham, but **they do not do the deeds of Abraham.** His word has no room in their lives. They seek to kill Him, a man who only told them the truth. Jesus repeats, “*You are doing the deeds of your father*” (vss. 40,41). Exasperated, and wanting to avoid the suggestion that their spiritual origin was illegitimate, they blurt out, “...we have one Father, God.” Ironically, *this* was the very claim Jesus Himself had made that had set them against Him, months before (5:18). Now, *they* are making the same statement about *themselves*! **Jesus quickly points out, “If God were your Father, you would love Me,** because I came *from* God and am here. I did not even come from Myself, rather That One *sent* Me” (vs. 42). Why do you not understand what I am saying? Because **you are not able to hear My word.** **Then Jesus states it plainly, “You are of your father, the devil, and you want to do his desires. He was a murderer from the beginning. ...He is a liar and the father of lies.”** **By contrast, Jesus speaks the truth, and they can point out no sin in His life** (vs. 46). He challenges them, “**If I speak truth, why do you not believe?** He who is out-from God hears the personal-directives of God. **This is why you don’t listen, because you are not out from God**” (vs. 47).

At this, **they resort to name calling**, saying He is a Samaritan and has a demon. **He simply dismisses their charge, and points out that He honors His Father, and they dishonor Him.** (What does *that* tell you?) Jesus says He is not seeking to glorify Himself; God will see to that, and will judge those who oppose Him, as well. **Then, He makes one of those solemn statements, “Truly, truly, I say to you...”** Listen up! Important Message Coming! **“...if ever anyone might keep My word, not never will he behold death unto the age.”** *That* is a radical statement! Jesus’ opponents are quick to jump on this as a sign that He is, indeed, demonized. They say, “You aren’t greater than Abraham, who died? The prophets died also. **Whom do you make yourself out to be?**” (vs. 53).

Jesus gets even more direct: “My Father, whom you identify as your God, is the One glorifying Me. You have not experientially-known Him, but I do know Him. If I said that I didn’t, I would be a liar like you; but I *do* know Him, and keep His word. Your father Abraham rejoiced in order that he might see My day, and he saw it and was glad.” His opponents said, “You aren’t even 50 years old, and you have seen Abraham?” **Another solemn statement from Jesus: “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham came to be, I AM.”** This is the third time in this chapter that Jesus used the Divine name in reference to Himself. **That they understood what He was doing is evident by their reaction: “They picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple”.** Note, those same “believers” from verse 30 are, within a short time, ready to *kill* Him. **“Decisions” or “disciples”?**