

51 - Who Am I

John 8:46-58

For a human being to live in such a way that life has purpose, in order for someone to come to the end of their life and feel satisfied that they lived it well, he or she must have discovered the answer to these two questions: 1) Who is God? and 2) Who am I? Without knowing the answer to the first question it is impossible to answer the second, but just knowing the answer to the first does not mean a person automatically knows the answer to the second. In fact many people spend most or all of their life with far too little understanding about themselves. Historically the church has provided little help except to say that people are sinners and possibly some statements about being members of the Body of Christ.

One of the most outstanding qualities about Jesus is that He really knew who He was. There was no doubt in His mind, and when He preached He typically answered both questions. He would tell people who God is, but He would also tell them who He was. And it was the information He revealed about Himself that became the center of the controversy which surrounded Him. Some of His listeners believed what He said about Himself; others didn't and wanted to kill Him.

From chapter one onward the apostle John has been telling us who Jesus is. In fact clarifying the identity of Jesus is the main goal of this gospel. John said he wrote it,
"So that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (Jn 20:31).

John wrote to remove all doubt about the unique nature of Jesus. He wanted us to believe that He is both God's eternal Son, and the human son promised to David whom God said would sit on David's throne and rule forever.

Our purpose for this study today is not to revisit the facts of who Jesus is but to try to understand how He learned those facts about Himself. We want to answer the question: How did Jesus know who He was? One possible answer is that He brought all that knowledge with Him from heaven, but John, along with all the other gospels, shows us Jesus' humanity as well as His divinity. Jesus truly and completely became a man, and Paul tells us that in the process He laid aside His divine privileges in order to become one of us (Php 2:6-7). No one knows how much of His divine knowledge He laid aside, or at least refused to use, but it appears that to some degree Jesus had to re-learn who He was after He was born. That means He too, like us, had to walk in faith; He too, like us, had to refuse to doubt; He too, like us, had to choose to believe the amazing things God said about Him. If so, then His example shows us how to answer that question for ourselves. As we watch the man, Jesus, discover who He is, we discover where to turn for information about who we are.

Before we start on this journey we should note that there was one avenue of discovery available to Jesus that will never be available to us, and that was His memory of heaven. He existed before He was born. We don't. We begin at conception in our mother's womb. But the other avenues of discovery are available to us, so let's let Jesus teach us how to answer the second question: Who am I? It may be the hardest question for us to answer.

Who are You? (Jn 8:46-59)
• DBS (Thurs-Sat)

vs56-59: Then Jesus made a statement that simply stunned His opponents. He said, "Abraham, your father, rejoiced [in his spirit] that he might see My day and he saw [it] and was glad" (literal). Jesus may have intended these words to mean that Abraham prophetically looked into the future and saw that God would send His Son to die for our sins. That moment of "seeing" may have occurred when Abraham offered a ram instead of his son, Isaac, on Mt. Moriah (Ge 22:7-14). But Jesus' opponents took His words literally. They said, "You are not yet fifty years, and you have seen Abraham?" To which Jesus replied, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham came into being, I am" (literal). They told Him it wasn't possible; He wasn't old enough to have seen Abraham. They asked how He could say that He had. And whether or not His opponents had misunderstood what He meant by His original statement, Jesus answered their question. How was it possible for Him to have known a man who had died twenty centuries earlier? The answer was: He was older than Abraham, far older (Jn 1:15). Like the One who spoke to Moses from the burning bush (Ex 3:13-14), or perhaps because He was the One who spoke to Moses from the burning bush, Jesus applied to Himself one of the greatest statements of self-revelation made by God in the entire Bible: He used the term "I am" which God used to reveal His eternal nature. It means He is timeless; He doesn't have a beginning or an end. He always is. This is a quality possessed only by God. So either Jesus' statement is true or it is breathtaking blasphemy, and His opponents chose to believe it was blasphemy and picked up stones to stone Him as a blasphemer (Lev 24:16). Then John says, "Jesus was hidden and went forth out of the temple" (literal). His followers may have hidden Him by surrounding Him so that He could slip out through the crowd and leave the temple.



LIFE LESSONS

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Teaching the Bible
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Four sources of information

With those remarkable words, “Before Abraham came into being, I am,” let’s ask the question again, “How did Jesus know who He was?” As we read through the gospels we come across passages that point us toward an answer. There appear to be four sources:

- 1) Jesus learned about Himself from the stories His mother and Joseph told Him about the events surrounding His birth. We know about these because they have been recorded in the gospels, and there is no reason to believe that Mary and Joseph did not tell these things to Jesus: The miracle of His conception, the prophetic statements made by the angel Gabriel, the prophecies Zacharias and Elizabeth were given about John the Baptist, Elizabeth and Mary’s prophecies about Jesus while He was still in the womb, the angels appearing in the night sky over the fields of Bethlehem, Anna and Simeon at the temple and the dreams given to Joseph that warned them to flee to Egypt. By the time Jesus was 12 years old He literally thought of God as His Father (Lk 2:49).
- 2) Jesus discovered Himself in the Scriptures. As He listened to the Torah and the Prophets being read in His synagogue in Nazareth or as He memorized and read large portions of Scripture Himself, beginning at four or five years old, Jesus was given profound insight into the Bible. He saw there who He was, where He came from and what God had sent Him to do. He saw His violent death and His resurrection. He even quoted a psalm that prophetically describes His death as He hung on the cross. That psalm (Ps 22) also assured Him that He would rise from the dead. By faith He gave Himself to death, clinging to the promise that He would rise again.
- 3) Openly and inwardly the Father confirmed who Jesus was by an audible voice from heaven, by signs and miracles and even by sending angels to help Him. Over and over again, in many ways, He told Jesus He was His Son and that He dearly loved Him.
- 4) And finally, Jesus had a fourth avenue of self-revelation that we don’t have. To one degree or another, even after becoming a man, Jesus remembered heaven. He says so, especially in the gospel of John. He assured His listeners that He was telling them truths He had seen or heard, first-hand, in heaven (Jn 6:46; 7:28-29; 8:26, 42; 13:3; 17:5, 8, 24).

Who I am not

If God wants us to know who we are, our culture wants us to know who we are not. We are taught from childhood to define ourselves by our victimization, our disabilities, our addictions, our brokenness, our fears, our diseases, even our allergies. Everything is about limitations, blame and survival. The process puts us into a mental prison and cautions us against expecting too much from ourselves. None of our culture’s answers to the question, “Who am I?” are like the answers we find if we follow Jesus’ example, so it will require a deep decision by many of us to let go of these negative self-definitions, pressed on us by our culture, and to choose instead to believe the answers God provides.

Our sources of information

Three of the ways Jesus learned about Himself are available to us. They are:

- 1) Jesus listened to the stories His parent’s told about Him. So can we.
- 2) Jesus discovered the truth about Himself by reading the Bible. So can we.
- 3) Jesus listened to the many ways God confirmed who He was. So can we.

Who I am

If I will follow Jesus’ example, the same sources that taught Him will teach me, and the person I discover will be vastly different from the person my culture says I am. His sources will reveal:

- The calling and giftings God planned for me when He formed me in my mother’s womb
- Who I am in Christ
- The great promises that are at work in my life
- The role the Lord wants me to play in the Body of Christ
- What I do that pleases the Lord
- That I have no limitations that can prevent me from fulfilling all God has planned for me
- That I can “run through a troop,” “jump over a wall” and “bend a bow of bronze” (Ps 18)
- That I can do all things through Him who strengthens me (Php 4:13)

Questions

- 1) Have family members told you stories about yourself when you were little? What insights do they contain about how God designed you?
- 2) Name a Bible promise that you often quote to yourself. How does that promise change the way you think?
- 3) Name a time when God’s presence came and helped you while you were ministering to someone. How did you know He was there? How often does that happen?