**John 8:48-59 (ESV)**

48 The Jews answered him, “Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?” 49 Jesus answered, “I do not have a demon, but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me. 50 Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is One who seeks it, and he is the judge. 51 Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.” 52 The Jews said to him, “Now we know that you have a demon! Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet you say, ‘If anyone keeps my word, he will never taste death.’ 53  Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do you make yourself out to be?” 54 Jesus answered, “If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, ‘He is our God.’ 55 But you have not known him. I know him. If I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and I keep his word. 56  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.

**“Fighting Words or Faithful Name”**

Blessed be the Holy Trinity and the undivided Unity. Let us give glory to him because he has shown mercy to us. Amen. The Sunday after Pentecost recognizes the freedom for us to know God as Father, Son, and Holy revealed by the Gospel. All the same, many are celebrating on this Memorial Day weekend the sacrifices made by soldiers for religious freedom in our country. There is a tension at the present and our LCMS chaplains understand it well. As one writes, “My primary function in the Army is to ensure that all soldiers have the right to practice their religion, but at the same time I am allowed to hold Lutheran services…my calling is to faithfully serve both God and country. My challenge is to proclaim the gospel in a pluralistic environment.” [[1]](#footnote-1)

Just like the free market has opened the door for products made around the world, so God is just as generic in our country where freedom reigns supreme for all religions. What this means for Christians is that we can no longer rely on the culture to do the work of confessing the Gospel. Jesus did not send the Holy Spirit into a culture, but into the lives of His disciples who believed He came from the Father. Pentecost was exactly about preaching to a culture confused over God. So Peter said, “Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” It has been the same preaching for the Church throughout the ages. Yet, we are better off today because the Creeds help us to confess what has come by the Gospel. Jesus gives life to call upon the Triune God and be saved.

Of course, these words sound threatening to all idols of men. This is what Jesus faced in the temple when He made His claim to be God’s Son. The Jews answered him, “Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?” Being called a Samaritan is the equivalent to an idolater, heretic, or maybe a more modern label of infidel or reject. Claiming him to have a demon, meant Jesus was only a deceiver and was up to no good. How patient is Christ with those who persecute His Name. He did not return evil for evil but simply answered, “I do not have a demon, but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me.” Jesus did not address the label of Samaritan because He truly was the Good Samaritan sent from the Father to save. This is how the Son honored the Father by coming into a sinful world. However, by dishonoring Jesus meant these Jews at the temple had no honor for God in heaven.

Rejecting Jesus means rejecting life before God. The issue rears its head with having to respect religious freedom. It is falling prey to the popular view that God is God no matter what you want to call Him. As one person writes, “Christians who resist the postmodern claim of equality of all religions will be marginalized, labeled intolerant, unloving, bigoted, insensitive, outdated, primitive and prejudiced.”[[2]](#footnote-2) To place Jesus as just one among many gods deludes the only way of saving life before God. Just as to distort Jesus to be a prophet, like in Islam, dishonors the Father for sending His Son. No less is it with Mormons who claim Jesus as a god, but not the Son of God being of one substance with the Father. The same can be said with confusing the purpose of Jesus to be a life coach or my way to success but not the Savior of me the sinner. All of this overlooks Jesus in the Holy Trinity and the life He gives for us before God.

The false delusion over God was just not good enough before the Word of God become Flesh. As the Jews remarked in frustration to Jesus, “Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do you make yourself out to be?” That is always the question confronting Christ and His Church. Jesus asked His disciples the same thing, “But who do you say that I am?” (Matthew 16:15). Those in the temple refused to see the glory of God at work in the flesh as promised by the Word. “They didn’t glorify Jesus because they didn’t really know their own God anymore. For them to say they knew God and reject Jesus made them liars.”[[3]](#footnote-3) The Law was their glory and works are what they worshiped. There was no room for another glory by the Gospel. Yet, Peter declared on Pentecost, “this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.”

Glorifying Jesus means life has come from the Father. Talk about God so much today is not the same as Jesus saying, “But you have not known him. I know him. If I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and I keep his word.” He is the Son of the Father holding all wisdom from eternity. Proverbs describes the relationship, “I was beside him, like a master workman, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the children of man.” He is the Word become flesh born of the Virgin Mary, suffered and died for judgment of sinners, and rose from the dead never to die again. Relevant preaching is to hear the glory of God in Jesus Christ. No other life is good enough to praise at funeral, no other life stands to win against the Law, and no other life gloriously declares, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.” This exclusive title for God Jesus takes to Himself who alone brings glory to the Holy Trinity.

While the Jews at the temple became enraged over Jesus’ Words, His promise remained for life. “Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.” Tasting physical death is not the same as the death of hell we never have to see because of Jesus. Keeping His Word is to trust in Him for He alone has promised salvation. Much of what we face today tastes like death because the culture is moving away from Christianity. However, that was always the wrapping paper, but the gift given by Jesus still stands to save. The keeping of His Word is the true treasure showing up in our lives as those redeemed in Christ. This is what Peter explained on Pentecost saying, “He has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.” This means the baptized today need to explain morality for what is good before God and our neighbor. But even more importantly, is what we confess of Jesus who promises His Word will never let us see death.

Celebrating Jesus means life given by the Holy Spirit. This is what God promises to do for us all our days by being baptism into His Name. Luther states, “Creation is past and redemption is accomplished, but the Holy Spirit carries on his work unceasingly until the last day…” (419:61). Jesus still speaks and delivers forgiveness to repent and believe in the Gospel. This comes by the means of grace that He gave as life for His community of saints on earth. Yes, they are struggling sinners, but the Savior grants forgiveness because His sacrifice paid the price in full. No other man can give this freedom because it releases us from all sin, death, and powers of the Devil by faith in Christ and His Word . A midst the freedom of religion, there is still only one God who stands out freely for us. Jesus gives us life to call upon the Triune God and be saved. Amen. Blessed be the Holy Trinity and the undivided Unity. Let us give glory to him because he has shown mercy to us. Amen.

1. Missio Aposotlica, Vol XIX No. 1 May 2011 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Preus How can we give a witness for Jesus Christ in the public square 2003 2 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. People’s Bible Commentary 135. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)