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JUMPING INTO THE POOL

John 8:48-59

On one of our flights on our recent trip as we were boarding the aircraft there was one of those jam ups where suddenly the line of people eating on the plane stops moving. I assume someone down the aisle is having trouble negotiating a working agreement between their carry on bag and the overhead bin and is blocking the aisle. In this case it happened just after I had stepped into the plane, so I was stopped right by the open cockpit door. I had some time to look in the cockpit. I’ve done that before, but I was reminded again of what a complex machine a jet airliner is. That little room is jammed with a bewildering array of dials, screens, switches and instruments that seemingly cover every inch of space. I know what some of them are, but not all of them. It reminded me again that piloting one of these technological marvels requires an enormous amount of knowledge and training, something I get every time I talk to my son in law about his experiences as an airline pilot. The more I know about flying an airliner the more I realize I don’t know. I certainly would not presume to tell a pilot how to do his job, because I don’t know what I’m talking about.

Having a son who is a doctor has the same effect on me. I have gotten glimpses of the vast amount of material he has had to master to a depth that is for me almost inconceivable. I realize again how little I understand about his field of knowledge. A year or two ago he was treating a patient who was having a serious, potentially life threatening crisis. The patient took an unexpected turn for the worse. He didn’t understand why this was happening, then he learned a nurse had administered a medicine he had not ordered. She was trying to be helpful and was familiar with this medicine and thought it was needed in the situation. Unfortunately it had some effects she wasn’t aware of and in this case it was absolutely the wrong thing to do. It put the patient in severe peril of dying and only prompt action by Toby saved his life. She didn’t know what she didn’t know, and that almost proved fatal.

It amazes me how often people think they know more than they do and presume to advise those with massively more knowledge and expertise. Their ignorance can be not just foolish, it can be dangerous. There is someone who has infinitely more knowledge an wisdom than we do, and yet we routinely deign to judge his actions and take it upon ourselves to advise him when we don’t have a clue what we are talking about. Our hubris is both foolish and dangerous. We will get a glimpse of what I mean as we look at John 8:48-59, where we will see Jesus say something that was shocking and bewildering.

JESUS WAS ACCUSED OF BEING DEMONIC

In John 7-8 made claims that seriously upset the religious establishment of Judea. In chapter 7 he claimed he was the miraculous life giving water celebrated in the Feast of Tabernacles. In chapter 8 he claimed he was the light of the world which was also celebrated in that feast. Then in chapter 8 he claimed he gave the truth that will set people free. He really got them riled up when in 8:44 he said the religious leaders were children of the devil. They were the spawn of Satan. He claimed that he knew this because they were doing what Satan does, trying to kill him, an innocent man. It’s not hard to see why they were furious at Jesus.

In their minds, Jesus was calling them names. So they fired back in verse 48, “Aren’t we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon possessed?” This is a response right out of the playground. “We’re not the devil. You’re the devil. I’m rubber and you’re glue. Whatever you say bounces off me and sticks to you.” Real mature. The only creative part of their counterattack is to call Jesus a Samaritan as well as demon possessed. They hated the Samaritans. In their minds, Samaritans were evil because they perverted the true worship of God. The heart of their slander against Jesus was that he was demonic. He was downright evil.

In verses 51-52 Jesus said, “Very truly I tell you, whoever obeys my word will never see death.” In a couple of other places he clarified this meant that they might die, but it would not be permanent. They would rise to live again. However, his opponents weren’t interested in understanding his intent. They were at war with Jesus and wanted to crush him. So communication and understanding were not what they wanted. They wanted ammunition they could use to fire at him. So they took the most negative approach they could find. They basically were looking to spin whatever he said, and in this case they essentially said that he was promising that people could avoid death altogether by believing in him. They said at best he was crazy, and at worst, which was the most likely, he was a con man promising people something that is impossible. He was lying and had some ulterior motive. He was truly evil. That excused their hatred of him and their plotting to kill him, because they were opposing evil. They were trying to save the people from him and his evil.

How terrible would it be to have not only rejected Jesus, but to have labeled him Satanic? How would you like to have that as the summation of your life? Jesus has changed the world. He has changed the lives of billions of people much for the better. All of history is divided on his life. All over the world Jesus is nearly universally respected, and for billions he is worshiped. And these guys called him Satanic. That was as big and as bad a swing and miss as has ever happened in history. They covered themselves with shame and disgrace. Many still reject Jesus. But who calls him the devil? That’s not a camp anyone should ever want to be in.

Jesus responded by essentially saying, “My Father, whom you claim as your own God, glorifies me. You slander me because you don’t know God, but I do and I obey him.” His response comes across as unruffled and calm, but quite direct. I know God intimately. I obey him totally. If you knew him, you’d know that and respect me, at the very least. But you don’t know him, and that’s the problem.

JESUS PUSHED HIS OPPONENTS OVER THE EDGE

Jesus’ opponents made a big thing out of Abraham being their father. This made them special they claimed. Jesus had argued that they are not Abraham’s children because they weren’t doing what Abraham did. But in verse 56 Jesus basically said, “Let’s assume that, as you claim, Abraham is your father. You should know that Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day. He saw it and was glad.”

The ancient Jewish rabbis believed that Abraham had been given by God some knowledge of the Messiah coming. They believed he knew that this future descendant of his would fulfill the mission that God had given his descendants to be a blessing to the entire world. Jesus was saying that Abraham knew something of the coming of Messiah and he rejoiced in that, and in so doing he was rejoicing in Jesus. He claimed he was the Messiah that Abraham rejoiced in.

Jesus’ opponents, as I said, weren’t interested in understanding Jesus. They only wanted to argue with him and ridicule him, try to embarrass him. So they interpreted Jesus to be speaking literally of Abraham seeing Jesus’ day, which could only have happened if Jesus was alive when Abraham lived almost 2 millennia before this conversation. “You are not yet 50 years old, and you have seen Abraham?” John didn’t include what else they said, but it was something like, “What a joke. You’re crazier than a loon. If you think you’re 2,000 years old we’d better call the men in the white coats to take you away.”

That’s when Jesus went nuclear. I don’t mean he got mad. I mean what he said next went off like a nuclear bomb. He started his next statement with “Very truly I tell you.” In Greek it literally was “Amen, amen.” Uh, doesn’t that mean “over and out” at the end of a prayer? No, it doesn’t. It often was used at the end of a prayer. But beginning a sentence it was kind of like that announcement they make in Navy ships, “Now hear this.” Like “Now hear this, all hands man your battle stations.” It means listen carefully. What I’m about to say is super important.

What he said next was “Before Abraham came about, I am.” Oops, Jesus your grammatical slip is showing. That’s bad grammar. He seemed to have a problem with verb tense. He used present tense when he should have used past tense. Jesus had what seemed to be both a chronological error and a grammar error. His opponents highlighted the chronological problem, but here Jesus doubled down on it. He’s only in his early 30’s and he was saying he was around before Abraham was born. That clearly can’t be right, can it?

But the grammatical slip wasn’t a slip at all. It was intentional. He purposely used the present tense “I am” rather than “I was.” This is actually a reference to an Old Testament incident that can be found in Exodus 3. Moses was living out in the desert of Midian, quietly taking care of his sheep. Then he had a life changing, history changing encounter. He spotted a bush that is described as burning, but not burning up. That was an ancient way of describing a brilliant light coming from the area of a bush, a light that shone unwavering and undiminished. It did not go out. Abraham went to see this remarkable sight, and when he got there a voice told him he was on holy ground. He was in the presence of Almighty God. God proceeded to tell him he had been chosen to return to Egypt, take over leadership of his people, Israel, and lead them out of slavery in Egypt to a land God had promised to them. Moses’ response to that challenge was, “Um, are you talking to me? I think you got the wrong guy.” Moses wanted no part of that task because he couldn’t do it. God needed somebody with better leadership skills, somebody more dynamic, somebody great at public speaking, and none of those fit Moses. God countered all of his objections. But Moses had another one. He didn’t know who this was talking to him out of that blazing light. Was he supposed to go to Israel and say, “Uh, this brilliant light in the desert told me I’m supposed to be in charge.” “Right, Moses. Been out in the desert sun a little too long, have you?” Moses was asking, who are you, what am I supposed to tell them your name is so they can know I didn’t cook this cockamamie scheme up on my own? God’s answer in Exodus 3:14 was, “I am who I am.” Yeah, I know, it sounds like Popeye the Sailor Man. But it was actually a profound statement and an indicator of who this God is. God goes on to say, “Tell them I am has sent me.” The one who just is, who always has been and always will be, who exists always in the present tense, the Eternal One, is the one who sent you.

In verse 15 he uses the specific name of the God of Israel. It is translated “Lord” in English, but the Hebrew name was YHWH. We think it was pronounced Yahweh, though that isn’t certain because ancient written Hebrew had no vowels. Scholars agree the name was derived from an ancient Hebrew word, *Hawah*, that eventually morphed into *Hayah*. It was the verb that meant “to exist, to be.” Some say the form of the name might have meant, “The one who causes to be,” in other words, the Creator. But I think it meant “the One who exists, in and of himself, always has and always will exist.”

Yahweh is the eternally existing one. The one who existed before Abraham, before Noah, before Adam and Eve, before the world was made, before the universe came into being, before the supposed Big Bang. Long after this world ceases to exist, which scientists say will happen at some point, the great I Am will still exist. When Jesus said, “Before Abraham was, I am,” he said it that way because he was claiming to be that Person, the one who exists always and always has. Sometimes you might hear people say, “If Jesus really was God in the flesh, why didn’t he come right out and say that?” Good question. He referred to himself as the Son of Man, even the Son of God. I recall even my own kids asking me that question at one point in their youth. This statement was an unequivocal claim to be Yahweh, the God of Israel, the Eternal One who always exists, the one who is not dependent on anyone or anything else for his existence. Jesus was saying clearly, “I am Yahweh, Eternal God.

It may not be quite as clear to us because we aren’t as steeped in the Old Testament as the ancient Jews were. To them it was crystal clear. There was no mistaking what Jesus was saying. Verse 59 says, “At this, they picked up stones to stone him.” Jesus had just, in their thinking, committed the ultimate blasphemy. They understood him to be claiming to be their God. The penalty for that was death. Jesus knew exactly what he was saying, and he knew they would understand it. There was no coming back from that nuclear blast. Everyone listening knew Jesus was claiming to be the one true God living on earth in human form.

Imagine if you met a regular human being who calmly informed you that he is Almighty God, the Creator, the all powerful, all knowing ruler of all that exists. What would you think? That guy is crazier than Daffy Duck. He is totally out of touch with reality. Jesus’ opponents thought that about him, and much worse. They thought he was evil.

IMPLICATIONS

There are implications in these verses both for understanding and application.

JESUS PRESENTS US WITH A CONUNDRUM

In verse 54-55 Jesus had said, “My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. Though you do not know him, I know him.” So God was his Father, and he knows him. The Father glorifies Jesus. But the Father was Yahweh, Israel’s God, the Great I Am, right? Now minutes later, in the same conversation Jesus claimed he was the Great I Am. He was Yahweh, the always existing one, the Creator.

Now I’m confused. Is he God, or is his Father, whom he talks to and obeys, God? It can’t be both. Is he God, or does he know God? Which brings us to the dilemma of the Trinity. Or I guess the trilemma, if there is such a word, of the Trinity. This is the teaching that God is one being, but has 3 persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But that makes no sense. I am one being, which means I am one person. I can’t be one being, but two or more persons. Yes, I know, you’re a son, a husband and a dad, so you’re kind of 3 people. Actually I’m 4 persons because I’m also a brother. I’m a quadity. No, that’s not what the Trinity means. It is not that it is one person regarded in different ways by different people. God exists as 3 actual persons who interact with each other. Husband Rick, doesn’t interact with Dad Rick. He’s just one guy who plays different roles in different relationships. That’s not what the Trinity is like. So much for me being the Quadity.

We will never unravel the Trinity. It will never make sense to us, because we have no category for understandimg how it could be. Years ago there was a man in our church at the time whom I knew from seminary. We went to the same seminary at about the same time. He went into full time ministry as a pastor, but later left for a non-ministry job. He had moved to our area and began coming with his family to our church. One Sunday I talked about the Trinity as I am today and said that it is a mystery that is beyond human comprehension. I said we will never understand it, but we are to accept it. That’s living by faith, After that this man came to see me and said, “I think you’re wrong about the Trinity. I think we can understand it. I think I have learned a way to think about it that clears it up.” Wanting to be open to learning and growth, I said, “Tell me your solution.” He did, and I was surprised. I wanted to respond gently and humbly, so I said, “Do you remember when we studied Theology Proper in seminary?” Theology Proper is the study of the nature of God. He said he did. I then asked, “Do you remember studying Sabellianism, or modal Monarchianism?” He said he kind of remembered those terms, though he wasn’t up to speed on them. I said, “What you just described to me was modal Monarchianism. The problem is, that was a classic heresy, one that has been rejected for almost 2000 years. I’d suggest you might want to go back and take another look at that.”

The Trinity is a mystery. It bothers me that Jesus could talk to and about the Father, yet also be God. But let’s remember that if God can be completely comprehended by finite beings, then he cannot be infinite. A God we can completely comprehend cannot truly be Almighty, Eternal God. Yes, this nags at us because we want to be able to understand how it all works. But let’s consider some things from creation. First, I should say that the analogies and illustrations we typically hear about the Trinity don’t really help. We are told think of H2O. It can be a solid, ice, a liquid, water, or a gas, steam. All different forms, but all H2O. Well, that’s true, and maybe a little helpful, but not much. A particular bunch of H2O cannot be ice, steam and water all at the same time. It must be one or the other. But God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit at all times. Well he’s like an egg, which has a shell, a yolk and an egg white, but it’s all one egg. No, that’s not God. A yolk is not a total egg, nor is an egg white or a shell. They are parts of an egg. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are not parts of God. They are all God. In Colossians 2:9 Paul wrote, “In Christ the fullness of deity lives in bodily form.” Jesus is all that God is. He is not a part of God.

Yeah, it makes my head hurt to try to comprehend this, because I can’t. I have no categories to understand the Trinity, nothing to compare it with. All I’ve ever known is the equation one being equals one person. There are no two persons who are one being. No, not even identical twins. They a lot alike, but they are different beings. So this is hard because we want to figure it out, we want to understand. But there are some things in nature that can help us here.

Nabeel Quershi was a Muslim. To him, Christians worshiped 3 Gods, and that’s not right. There is only one God. But he found himself intrigued by Jesus, and eventually came to believe in him. He wrote a book titled *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus*. In it he tells of the moment he began to accept the idea of the Trinity. It was in an organic chemistry class. He wrote, “Projected in the front of the room were 3 large depictions of nitrate. We were studying resonance, the configuration of electrons in certain molecules…Different arrangements of the electrons are called ‘resonance structures.’ Some molecules, like water, have no resonance, while others have three resonance structures, or more, like the nitrate on the board.” He said his teacher then said, “These drawings are the best way to represent resonance structures on paper, but it’s actually more complicated. Technically a molecule with resonance is every one of its structures at every point in time, yet no single one of its structures at any point in time.” It hit him, there it was, three resonance structures all the time and never just one of them. The three are separate but the same and they are one. They are three in one. He wrote, “It clicked. If there are things in this world that can be three in one, even incomprehensibly so, then why cannot God? Just like that, the Trinity became potentially true in my mind.”

He’s not saying God is like resonance structures. He’s saying if something like that exists in God’s creation, something we can’t really comprehend, should we be surprised that the Creator might also exist in that mysterious three in one nature that we can’t truly understand? Maybe another natural occurrence can encourage us. Albert Einstein came up with a theory about light called the particle wave theory. Light sometimes acts like a wave, and sometimes like particles, now called photons, little packets of energy. So what is light, is it a particle or is it a wave? Well, it’s both. How can it be both? We don’t fully understand that, but we know it’s true nonetheless, so we just have to accept it.

These are not analogies for the character of God. They are reminders that there are things in nature that we cannot understand that seem to be more than one thing at the same time, and yet are one. Should we be surprised then that the Creator can also be more than one thing at the same time and still be one, even though we don’t comprehend how that works? No, it shouldn’t. So we don’t need to worry about understanding it. We’re not going to. We must accept it and trust it, for it ends up being very important to us in relating to God.

JESUS PRESENTS US WITH A CHALLENGE

**Have Confidence In Jesus, the Great I Am**

Who do you have confidence in? Who can you trust, who can you believe? This is a big deal. One doctor I never wanted to see was an oncologist, because seeing an oncologist means you have cancer. I went to an oncologist that several people told me was the best for my particular brand of the disease. Our first meeting with him gave me confidence in him. He has a quiet, humble demeanor, but it was apparent that he has exhaustive knowledge of his area of expertise. He explained the treatment he recommended and laid out both the pluses and minuses. He explained how this treatment had the best chance of success. So a couple of weeks later I received my first transfusion. At first it seemed to have no effect at all. But after a week I began to experience some minor side effects the doctor had told me about. Then I got more of them, and they got worse. It wasn’t long before I was really sick, feeling terrible. I talked to the doctor’s assistant and he suggested some ways to manage the symptoms, then he told me to watch for a couple of things, and if they happened I should call the on call oncologist immediately. The next day, the thing he warned me about happened. I called, and when the doctor heard what I was experiencing he said, “We’re getting into a dangerous area here and we need to stop this immediately.” He prescribed prednisone, which worked in less than a day and put the brakes on the whole thing. I was very concerned. I didn’t see how I could survive months of that treatment if this was the effect. When I saw my oncologist he said, “This was a failure. It was a small failure, but it was a failure.” Then he recommended that we continue the treatment. He said, “I know you’re thinking, what’s going to keep this from happening again? We will adjust the ratio of the medicines we’re giving you and hope that will work.” It was not immediately obvious to me that this would fix the problem. It came down to, do I have confidence in this doctor? Do I believe he has an answer? I decided I did have confidence in him, and that if he thought this would work, I should do it. That was the key question. Do I have confidence in this man? We proceeded with the next treatment, and I had some reaction to it, but they were able to manage it, and since then it has mostly been smooth sailing.

Who do you have confidence in? Who do you trust in life? Jesus is the Great I Am. He has been around since before the universe began. He knows what is ahead. He created all the laws of science, all that exists. He created us. He knows everything about us. He knows how we tick. There is no one else who knows what he knows. No one is as smart as he is. Furthermore, he loves us and wants good for us. Don’t you think it makes sense to have confidence in him?

We should have confidence in him in 3 ways at least.

***We should have confidence in what he tells us***.

He has a lot to say about what is most important in life, what matters. About what we should value, about what our priorities should be, about what is right and wrong, about how to find true life, about how to find our identity and worth, about how to treat other people, about how to handle money and how to handle our sexuality, about how to deal with it when other people hurt us or are unfair.

We hear much about these same things from other people, from our own thoughts, from the world around us. What we hear from these other sources often does not agree with what Jesus says to us. The question we have to answer is, who are we going to trust? Will we have confidence in Jesus, or will we put our confidence in what the world tells us? This is crucial for it will impact how we think, act and even feel. It will have huge impact on whether we experience God’s life in us.

We sang a song about choosing Jesus’ way this morning. It is choosing to bless those who curse us, choosing to forgive those who hurt us, choosing to love those who hate us, choosing to share the weights of the burdened, choosing to worship Jesus whatever comes our way. This is not the natural human way. This is not the world’s way. This is Jesus’ way, and we choose it because we have confidence in him and we trust him.

***We should have confidence in his plan for us***.

Psalm 139:16 says to God, “Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.” There were days ordained for us even before we existed. God had a plan for us. He is sovereign over everything, so we can trust that his plan for our days is happening even when we don’t see how it could possibly be.

Things are going to happen in our lives that seem like there is no way they could possibly be the will of a good and sovereign and wise God. Yet the Scripture says that he works everything according to his plan. We need to trust in that plan. We won’t always understand it, but we can trust in it. When we do, we can rest in his plan, be at peace, know that he is working.

Laurie and I had a very small, insignificant, but weird thing happen one night while we were on vacation. Our hotel room had a sliding glass door leading out to a lanai that looked out over the ocean. But there was no screen door. I thought that was odd, but we had that door open during the day for some extended periods and there was no problem. Then came that night. We left the door open so we could hear the waves before we went to bed. Then we closed it. As I was lying in bed I felt a bug try to land on my face. I shooed it away and thought, “Well, shoot, we’ve let a bug into the room.” I wasn’t quite right. It wasn’t a bug, it was bugs, some gnat like insects. Laurie spotted several of them above our bed on the molding up near the ceiling. She said, “I’m not going to be able to sleep with those bugs up there.” Then we looked around the room. They weren’t just above our bed. They were on the molding all around the room, and some had just lit on the walls and curtains. Laurie thought we should call the hotel and ask if they could do something about it, but it was already late at night. I didn’t want to stay up waiting for someone to come do something, plus I figured they would likely spray the bugs and I didn’t really want that in the room we were about to sleep in. I wondered if I could take on the bugs. What could I use? I remembered once when at home I had used a wet rag to rid us of a spider up high on the wall of our living room. I decided maybe a small towel would work. So I get a towel and went after the bugs. It was kind of weird that as I got near them they wouldn’t dart away like flies do, they just sat there. It made them fairly easy targets. So I would whack them with the towel. It was surprisingly effective. But there were a lot of bugs. I climbed on our bed, on a dresser, on a chair, going all around the room, whacking bugs. I found myself thinking that this was a fool’s errand, because it seemed like there was an endless supply of them. I also was thinking, “Really, Lord? We need this vacation, and now you have me doing this?” I spent a good half hour hunting and killing gnats. To my amazement, I then looked around, and they were all gone. I had gotten them all.

Why did that happen? Why does the Lord allow even tiny irritations like that? I don’t know. But my job is not to know, it is to trust in his plan. The funny thing is, as I have reflected on time, all of the things we have done on various vacations kind of tend to meld together. We probably won’t remember specifics all that well. But we will long remember the great gnat hunt. It will be a story we tell again.

***We should have confidence in his future for us***.

I have had conversations recently with friends and family members who are deeply concerned about things happening in our culture, in the world, in their lives even. There is stress, anxiety over where this is all going. We can have confidence thinking about the future because God is in control of it. Jesus knows all about it, even before it happens.

Wesley, our grandson, had a great time while we were on vacation playing in the swimming pool. He has said repeatedly that he thinks we should go back to Hawaii right now. One of the things his Mom and Dad worked on with him is jumping from the side into the pool where they would catch him. He’s a timid little guy, and he’s still not sure about that whole thing. He only wants to do it while his Mom or Dad is holding his hands. He has a little trouble trusting in what I know is true. His Mom and Dad will catch him and keep him from any harm in the water. I have utter confidence that they will keep him totally safe. He knows they love him and will take care of him, but somehow his fear keeps him from launching off into that great unknown without them holding him. He’s learning. Before this summer is over I suspect he will delight in doing it. We are the same. We know the Great I Am loves us and is there. But our fear keeps us from launching into his arms. A lot of what he is doing in life is teaching us to trust, to know that he is there, he loves us and will take care of us, so we can launch into the future with no fear.

**Honor Jesus, the Great I Am**

Before Abraham was, I am. Before Noah was, I am. Before Adam and Eve were, I am. Before the earth was, I am. Before the universe was, I am. Jesus, the Son of God, always has been and always will be. We cannot conceive of his majesty and power. He lived in glory before human history, and he lives in glory now.

What is astounding is that he did indeed enter human history as a human being. He somehow submitted to being a helpless human infant, then a child who was obedient to his parents, then as a grown man the only human to ever live perfectly, seeking to bring grace to humans. He subjected himself to ridicule, opposition, persecution, rejection, torture and eventually execution. He did all that for one reason. He loves us. He is worthy not only of our trust, but also our love, devotion and our honor.

In Revelation 5:11-12 John relates what he saw when he was given a vision of heaven. “Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they were saying, ‘Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise.’” He is worthy.

We get obsessed with our little desires and endeavors. What lifts us out of trivia and meaninglessness and hopelessness is when we remember the Great I Am, when we live to say in a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb to receive honor and glory and praise.”