

Let Me Introduce You to God  
John 8:39-59

By Dave Urbanski

Pastor Scott began Sunday's message with a quotation that bears repeating: "People may spend their whole lives climbing the ladder of success only to find, once they reach the top, that the ladder is leaning against the wrong wall."

Indeed, as Pastor Scott shared, all of us need to make sure that above all else our "ladders" are leaning on Jesus alone. But we as Christians aren't immune from placing our identities or confidences in things other than Christ — whether it's a loving family, a steady job, a robust bank account, good health, or citizenship in America. Anything we place trust or hope in that isn't Jesus can fail. Jesus, on the other hand, never fails ... and never fails us.

In our passage — John 8:39-59 — we see the Pharisees arguing (again) with Jesus, and somehow these intelligent, learned men who possess all the outward appearances of great faith are leaning their ladders on the wrong wall.

What is the Pharisees' wall? "Abraham is our father," they proudly declare to Jesus in verse 39. Their identity and trust and confidence is in their Jewish heritage. But Jesus, as he frequently does, turns their declaration on its head, telling them that Abraham couldn't be their father since they don't do the works Abraham did and also seek to kill Jesus who brings them the truth.

They fight back harder and try to tear Jesus down by insinuating he was born as a result of sexual immorality — though the Scriptures tell us Jesus was born of the Holy Spirit — and then they take their identity many steps up and invoke God as their father. Again, Jesus knows exactly what to say: God can't be their father, either, because they don't love Jesus, who was sent by God to them; instead, their father is the devil.

Ouch.

With that, we come upon what Pastor Scott called the key verse of the passage: "Whoever is of God hears the words of God," Jesus tells them in verse 47. "The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God."

One of the benefits of becoming a Christian is that the Holy Spirit takes up residence in our hearts and opens our eyes to the Bible and makes its words come alive for us. Without the Holy Spirit, it's hard to hear and heed the voice of the Lord — and the Pharisees are experiencing that same problem.

Amid the intensifying argument, Jesus keeps pressing and pouring on the pressure. "Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death," Jesus tells them in verse 51.

Wow! That's not a statement a mortal typically makes, unless he's a liar or a lunatic. Instead Jesus asserts that he is Lord and in a direct relationship to God as his father.

The Pharisees sense this better than anyone and are deeply disturbed — and angry: “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.’ Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do you make yourself out to be?”

Jesus is ready for them again, telling the Pharisees not only that he knows God, and they don't — but also that “your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.” Where is Jesus going with this? What is he building up to?

“You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?” they reply.

It's arguably one of the biggest moments of Jesus' earthly ministry. Israel's religious leaders are pushing to know who Jesus thinks he is after he declared their father is not God nor Abraham, but the devil ... that those who keep his word will never see death ... and that he saw Abraham, despite Abraham having been dead long before Jesus was born.

So Jesus pushes them to the brink and then over the edge with the truth of the ages in verse 58: “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.”

Jesus just made himself equal with God by saying “I am” in the same way the Lord spoke of himself to Moses in the Old Testament. I am. The personal name of God. The One who was, is, and ever shall be. The King of Kings without limits and who exists outside of time. Not only did Jesus see Abraham, he declares that he existed long before Abraham did.

Pastor Scott explained to us that such a statement enraged the Pharisees to the point where they picked up stones to kill Jesus for what they judged as blasphemy. Clearly they still don't understand — or refuse to understand due to the hardness of their hearts — who Jesus is.

Jesus has a way of bringing truth to the forefront — and he's not necessarily polite about it. In Matthew 10, before he sends out the 12 apostles, Jesus tells them, “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household.”

The Son of God is still declaring the truth and bringing the world face to face with it. And he lays it on the line for his children, too, every day. “Who do you say I am?” Jesus asks us, even as believers. “I have told you who I am ... but do you really believe me? If you believe me, where am I in your life right now? Are you trusting in me today? Are you relying on me today? Is your identity in me today? Is your confidence in me today?”

The Christian life is no cakewalk. The world and its sin and troubles will find us. But amid all of life's difficulties and challenges — and when we get off course — Jesus waits for us to stop striving after every solution or salve or side road we think will make us all better and instead turn our eyes upon him. Because he's bigger than the evil the world is dishing out.

As Pastor Scott emphasized, God wants us in relationship with him — to enjoy him, to experience him, and to have confidence in him. Let us, therefore, determine this very day to refocus on him — and if need be, climb off our poorly placed ladders, and lean them instead upon Jesus, who's eternally solid and trustworthy.