

November 5

John 8-9

John 10

My name is Nancy Davies, I'm the Director of Ministry Environments and this is the accelerator for November 5th.

Our reading today takes us through 3 chapters of the gospel of John. The main focus of chapters 8 and 9 focuses on the incredible claims that Jesus Christ made for Himself, the equally incredible proof that He offered, and the adamant refusal of the authorities to accept even the possibility that the miracle working teacher in their midst was really the Son of God and the Messiah. Remember, as Jesus heads towards the cross he is revealing more each day about his identity as the Son of God; to his disciples, followers and the religious leaders. The tension is increasing with each step towards Jerusalem.

The claims Jesus makes were bold ones indeed. Earlier we saw Christ claim to be the Bread of Life and the giver of eternal life, the one with authority and power to raise the dead and judge all men on the basis of their response to Him. In chapter 8, His claims continue. "I am the light of the world" -- the dispenser of spiritual truth and knowledge. He claims to have come from above, or heaven, and to be the uniquely authorized spokesperson of God Himself. He even claims to be without sin, words that you and I could never speak when He says, "... I always do what pleases Him."

Christ's claim frustrates and infuriates His opponents and they accuse Him of being demon possessed. The straw that breaks the camel's back as far as they are concerned is His claim to be able to grant everlasting life to any who will follow Him. "How can you say that?" they scream. "Abraham died, but you promise anyone who follows you will be exempt from death! Who do you think you are?" Then it comes -- the plainest most unguarded claim to deity in His ministry to this point. Jesus says, "Before Abraham was, I Am" -- not I am the Bread of Life or the Light of the World or the door or the vine but just "I Am." Only a Jew could ever feel the force of that simple declaration, but no God-fearing Jew could ever miss it. Moses heard those words when he stood before the burning bush and they resonated down through the years to every righteous man. That was God's holiest, most personal name. The name **Jehovah** was so holy that no man would ever speak it -- whenever they saw the name Jehovah written they would say, "Adonai," "Lord!" But now Jesus stands and publicly says, "Before Abraham was, I Am." He is saying I am Jehovah. He literally blew them away and it is very clear they completely understood both what He said and what He claimed and meant by it. Because the Pharisees picked up stones and they are ready to stone Him for blasphemy.

This helps us to understand why the parents of the man who had been born blind were unwilling to involve themselves in any way in the matter. It was just too dangerous.

The proof of Jesus' claims comes from three sources -- from Himself, from His heavenly Father and from the miracles done in God's name for the people of Israel. The pattern of backing up every claim continues. When He was going to talk about being the Bread of Life, He fed a huge crowd by creating bread for them! After He claims to be the light of the world, He heals a blind man -- a physical proof for a spiritual claim.

In any case the blind man's healing and his response to the accusation he had been healed by a sinner is a classic demonstration of how spiritually blind they had become. "All I know is this," the newly sighted man told them, "I was blind but now I see!" "We don't even know where he comes from," they protested. They meant -- we can't be sure he is a good man.

"The man answered," "Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does His will. Nobody has even heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, He could do nothing." That was pretty clear thinking, but the Pharisees couldn't grasp it. They were the blind ones.

John 10

Moving on to John chapter 10, the marvelous account of Jesus claiming He is the Good Shepherd. John's purpose in writing his account of Jesus' life is found in John chapter 20, "These things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." The focus is upon the words and deeds of Christ which will help us to believe in His deity, that He is in fact God. This is definitely true in the 10th chapter of the book.

A few months ago, September 1st to be exact, we read the 34th chapter of the Book of Ezekiel. It was in that place God Himself said He would be the shepherd of His people Israel -- the message through the prophet was "I am the shepherd of Israel." That truth is stated in other Old Testament passages as well. Two wonderful Psalms come to mind: the great 23rd Psalm: "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want" and, Psalm 100, "Know that the Lord is God. It is He who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture." Every Jew knew that Jehovah God Himself was the shepherd of Israel, but here in John 10 Jesus says "I am the good shepherd" -- I am in the place of God and when they understood it exactly as he meant it, as a claim to deity and pressed Him further, He went further and said, as plainly as it could be said, "I and the Father are one." Once again they picked up stones to kill Him and when He asked why, they said "Because you have committed blasphemy by claiming to be God." I suppose you can read the New Testament and decide that Jesus Christ was not God. Some people do, even though the evidence seems overwhelming, but there is one thing you cannot do. You cannot honestly read the New Testament and not understand that the New Testament writers are truthfully telling us what Jesus said, He was claiming to be God Himself. There is no way around it. Jesus claimed to be, not just a man, but God become man. No other religious teacher has ever made such a claim; not Confucius, not Buddha, not Mohammed, not Moses. They all said, follow

me and I'll point the way toward God. Jesus said, I am God. Follow me. Ask yourself, "Can it really be so?" Is Jesus God?" That is still the central question that every serious seeker must answer. .

The next thing I want you to notice about the Good Shepherd discourse is that there are only three possible responses you can make when you really understand what Jesus is claiming for Himself. Listen to verses 19 and 20 of Chapter 10. "At these words, the Jews were again divided. Many of them said, "He is demon possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him." But others said "These are not the sayings of a man possessed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?" The great apologist, C.S. Lewis crystallized the same thought by saying that the one thing you cannot say about Jesus is that He was merely a good man -- a great teacher but nothing more. His own words preclude that possibility, Lewis reminds us, No "good" man would ever do that! If He is not God then He is a liar -- who deliberately made claims that have cost the lives of millions of followers. Or, if not a deliberate liar, then he was a lunatic, not worthy of our devotion. The third and only other alternative is that He was, in fact, God just as He claimed to be. Liar, lunatic or Lord. You decide, but you cannot say He was a great man, a wonderful teacher -- but nothing more.

Last note from today's reading in John chapter 10 is that Jesus predicts His own death but is at great pains to insist ahead of time that He will be voluntarily laying down His life for the sheep: "No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord." And then He predicts the resurrection by saying that having voluntarily laid down His life, He will pick it up again of His own accord. This passage gives three critical points about the death of Christ: voluntary, vicarious and victorious. All three ideas are present in John chapter 10. I lay down my life, I do it for my sheep, and I will take it up again!

Thanks for listening to the accelerator for today. I trust you will take time to listen to the Good Shepherd remembering His great love and care for you as you go through your day. God bless.