*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

February 25 – March 2

*Jesus in John’s Gospel*

**Monday, February 25 John 8:21-30**

*“Believe that I AM”*

 When Jesus states that he is going away, the crowd concludes that Jesus is talking about committing suicide. Jesus’ response to their misunderstanding provides insight into his identity. It is God’s divine name (“I AM”) that they cannot understand since they are “from below,” since they judge “according to the flesh.” Jesus is not simply a prophet with divine things to communicate, but he bears divinity in himself. He is not a man with religious insight (from below, from the world), but God’s Son (from above, from heaven).

 This prompts his audience to ask its most important question. Not, “what do you mean?” But, “Who are you?” It is Jesus’ divine identity, his mysterious divine/human nature that makes everything about him important. The supreme moment of revelation will be when Jesus is “lifted up,” which is not merely the cross, but the series of events that lead to his return to heaven: betrayal, trial, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. Through these events, the world will see that Jesus is the bearer of God’s divine name.

*I believe that you, Jesus, are God, the One who calls himself “I AM.” Amen.*

**Tuesday, February 26 Exodus 3:1-15**

*“I AM has sent me”*

 The encounter between Moses and God at the burning bush provides the historical setting in which God tells Moses who it is that is sending him back to Egypt: “I AM” is sending you to speak with my people and with Pharaoh, the ruler of Egypt who refuses to let God’s people go.

 Having heard that God plans to free his people from bondage, one might expect Moses to skip with joy all the way from the burning bush to Egypt with the good news. But in a fashion more like a pouting child than a warrior singled out by his commander for an honorable task, Moses begins to question God’s wisdom, beginning with the question, “Who am I?”

 In the end, the issue is not who Moses is but who God is. When Moses asks God to give him his name so he, Moses, can tell it to the people of Israel, God’s first response is to say, “I AM WHO I AM.” This is not God’s name, but can be understood as a near refusal to dignify Moses’ question with an answer: “I AM WHO I AM; they know very well who I am. What a question!” Still, God announces his name as “I AM.”

*You are the “I AM,” Jesus, and you will always be with me. Amen.*

**Wednesday, February 27 John 8:31-38**

*“The truth will set you free”*

 With their history of slavery and bondage, freedom was a precious treasure among the Jews. Yet, Jesus claims, it is not religious heritage that brings true freedom, but truth. But to be set free means that there is a bondage from which you need to be freed. This inspires a major objection. Jews, of course, had been subject to many nations’ sovereignty: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. But Jesus’ audience is referring to spiritual or inward freedom, which they believed was theirs simply by belonging to the people chosen by God.

 The captivity to which Jesus points is bondage to sin. Jesus is urging that the more devastating bondage is not to any political power, but to spiritual and moral depravity. The Jews consider themselves to be free, but in actuality, Jesus insists, they are slaves of sin. Jesus acknowledges that his audience bears the bloodlines of Abraham but because of their desire to kill him and their refusal to accept his word they betray that their lives are not guided by the Father, whose voice Jesus obeys.

*The truth is, Jesus, that I am a sinner and need you to set me free. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

February 25 – March 2

*Jesus in John’s Gospel*

**Thursday, February 28 John 8:39-47**

*“I tell you the truth”*

 They will not even listen to Jesus’ words. He tells them the truth, but his word has no place in them. In fact, the darkness in them is so strong that when Jesus tells them truth they refuse to believe. If they were the children of God they would hear Jesus’ words because his words come from God. They would then love Jesus because he is loved by God. Instead, they seek to kill him. Since this is not the work of Abraham, then surely they are not the children of God. Then who is their father?

 None but the devil! He is the father of lies. He can only deceive and spread darkness, perverting the truth and dampening the light. His children are liars, themselves perverters of the truth. These men have not only stubbornly resisted the truth Jesus has spoken, but have made their lies seem as truth. This has revealed who their father is. Untruth becomes division, spreads disorder, pits brother against brother, and finally kills both by word and deed. The devil is the father of all murder, and as these religious leaders plot to kill Jesus they are doing his works.

*I hear your words, Jesus, and I believe they are from God. Amen.*

**Friday, March 1 John 8:48-59**

*“Before Abraham was even born, I AM”*

 Jesus could not call his antagonists the children of the devil without having them strike back. So they not only accuse him of being an outcast, a Samaritan, but a crazy one with a demon. How often we struggle to belittle the one who confronts us when we hear the truth that unmasks and shames us. But their attempt to degrade Jesus only focuses the issue of his identity more sharply. Jesus can have no demon for he seeks only to honor his Father, which is the central thrust of his whole ministry. In attempting to discredit Jesus, these leaders actually dishonor his Father.

 Contrasting his own eternal existence with that of Abraham, Jesus proclaims: “Before Abraham was, I AM.” Jesus is not saying, “I was,” but “I AM.” Abraham died, but Jesus is the Giver of life; the one is created, the Other is uncreated. Now there is no way that these Jews can miss the startling meaning of Jesus’ claim. He has spoken blasphemy, openly and brazenly. According to the law they must now stone him to death. And this they hurry to do, but suddenly Jesus is hidden from them and walks away.

*I am not ashamed of you, Jesus, for you have given me life. Amen.*

**Saturday, March 2 Luke 11:14-22**

*“Jesus cast out a demon from a man”*

 The issue in this passage is Jesus’ authority over Satan. When he exorcises a demon that is the source of a man’s being mute, the discussion begins about the unusual character of Jesus’ ministry. Two approaches emerge: (1) Some assign his work to Beelzebub. This name, probably originally referring to a pagan god, was applied to Satan. For them, Jesus’ power is demonic. (2) Others prefer to sit on the fence and wait for something more from Jesus. The request for a sign from heaven seems curious given the many miraculous acts Jesus has already done.

 Jesus knows the speculation about him and addresses it. He rejects the connection to Satan on a simple premise. If Satan’s goal is to destroy and Jesus is reversing the effects of destruction by healing, then how can one tie Jesus’ work to Satan’s? That would mean a house divided and a kingdom ready to fall. Satan’s kingdom cannot stand if Jesus is driving out demons with demonic power. Instead, Jesus claims that his miracles are audiovisuals of God’s power over Satan, exhibiting the Son’s authority to undo Satan’s evil.

*I praise you, Jesus, for your power liberates us from Satan’s destructive work. Amen.*