Jesus: The Eternal "I AM"

(John 8:51-59)

1-12-2025

Introduction:

**** Let the fact of Jesus' eternality affect your faith in Him and life for Him***

I. Only the Eternal One could promise <u>Deathlessness</u> to those who keep His word (v.51-52)

II. Only the Eternal One would receive the <u>Highest Honor & Glory</u> from God, the Father (v.53-55)

III. Only the Eternal One could infinitely <u>Pre-date Abraham</u> and the Prophets (v.56-58a)

IV. Only the Eternal One could claim to be the <u>"I AM"</u> of Exodus 3:14 (v.58b-59)

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Introduction:

A. Definition of Christ's pre-existence

Jesus did not begin to be at His physical conception, but literally and eternally existed in Heaven with God the Father and the Holy Spirit prior to His incarnation (taking upon Himself a physical body).

In other words, Jesus existed before His birth in Bethlehem

B. Proofs of Christ's pre-existence:

1. New Testament evidence:

a. John the Baptist bore witness to Christ's pre-existence when he said, "He (Jesus) was before me" (Jn. 1:15, 30).

NOTE: John by saying "He was before me" could not mean that Jesus had been born physically before John, because just the opposite was true. John was conceived and born six months prior to Christ's birth (Lk. 1:25). Such a statement only points to Christ's pre-existence.

b. Jesus Christ testified of His own pre-existence.

Jesus said that He "came down from Heaven" (Jn. 6:33, 50; Note the Jew's reaction - v. 41, 42)

Jesus said: "Abraham rejoiced to see my day" (Jn. 8:56; cp. with Gen. 17:22, 18:22, 19:27).

Jesus said: "Before Abraham was, I am" (Jn. 8:58)

Jesus said that He was with the Father "before the world was" (Jn. 17:5, 24).

c. <u>The Apostles</u> declared Christ's pre-existence:

Jn. 1:1-3 - "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . All things were made by Him. . ."

I Cor. 10:4 - ". . . they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ."
I Cor. 10:9 - ". . . let us not tempt Christ, as some of them [O.T. Israel] also tempted, and were destroyed of the serpents."

Phil. 2:5-7 V. 6 - "Who being [existing] in the form of God"

Col. 1:16-17 - "For by Him were all things created . . . and He is before all things . . ."

2. Old Testament evidence:

a. <u>Statements</u> about Christ in the Old Testament:

Psalm 2:12 - "Kiss the <u>Son</u>, lest He be angry and ye perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.

Prov. 30:4 - "Who hath established all the ends of the earth? What is His name, and what is His <u>son's</u> name, if thou canst tell."

Daniel 3:25 - "The form of the fourth is like the <u>Son of God</u>" (Nebuchadnezzar clearly saw a divine being who appeared different than the other three men in the furnace).

Since Jesus Christ is the Creator of everything (Jn. 1:3; Col. 1:16), every Old Testament reference to the Creator God is a reference to Jesus Christ.

(NOTE: Gen. 1:1 "Elohim" - plural form of God ["El"]. Cp. plural pronouns in Gen. 1:26; cp. with Isaiah 6:8. Plural references to the Godhead are implications of the Tri-unity of His nature.)

Jesus Christ is Eternal!

Proof:

1. His name is "Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end" (Rev. 1:11, 21:6, 22:13)

2. He is the eternal "I AM" (John 8:58, 18:5-6)

3. He gives eternal life (Jn. 10:28)

4. His descriptive name is "eternal life" (I Jn. 1;2, 5:20)

5. He is called "the everlasting Father" (Is. 9:6)

6. The Redeemer said, "I am the first and I am the last, and beside me there is no God" (cp. Rev. 1:8, 11)

7. Christ is the Creator of Heaven and earth and all the contents thereof (Jn. 1:3, 10; I Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2)

8. Christ did not begin to exist in Mary's womb but came from Heaven (Jn. 6:51; I Tim. 1:15; II Cor. 8:9; I Cor. 15:47)

9. Christ's "goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting" (Micah 5:2; Mt. 2:6)

The theme of John 8:51-59 centers on Christ's eternal nature.

There was never a time when He was not, and there will never be a time when He will cease to be.

Jesus is the "Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end," and He is "the same yesterday, today and forever."

For Jesus to make the claims that He did about Himself, He must be either a liar, a lunatic, or Lord!

If a liar, He knew who He really was, but portrayed Himself to be something He really was not. If a lunatic, He thought He was something He really was not.

But if Lord, He was Who He claimed to be!

**** Let the fact of Jesus' eternality affect your faith in Him and life for Him***

I. Only the Eternal One could promise Deathlessness to those who keep His word (v.51-52)

v. 51
"Verily, verily" – An attention-grabbing statement to show the absolute certainty of Christ's promise – "truly, truly." Here is a promise you can trust; it's result will pay eternal dividends.

"Keep my saying" = guard my word.
"Keep" – to securely hold on to and not let go of. Here, the "word" or "saying" refers to the Gospel promises Jesus gave, promising life to those who trusted Him.

(Cp. The sayings (Promises) of Jesus in John 8 – note v. 12, 31, 32, 36)
Notice that Jesus did not make this promise to those who "heard" His saying or "read" His saying or "taught" His saying, but to those who **"kept"** His saying.

To "keep" something means to hold on to it and never let it go; to guard it in your heart (just as a guard would keep his prisoners – hence, the expression – "keeper of the prison").

Jesus used this expression in John 14:75 and 23 with the sense of "to obey"
John 14:15
If ye love me, keep my commandments.

John 14:23
Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.

The one who believes, cleaves, submits, and obeys Christ's words of eternal life (6:63, 68) will never experience spiritual and eternal death.

"He shall never see death" – No death (spiritual and eternally) will ever be seen by the one who keeps Christ's Gospel Word. The believer will see God, heaven, redeemed loved ones, Jesus Christ, the saints of old, angels, the new heavens and the new earth, the New Jerusalem, etc., but will never see death.

The word "**never"** is a double negative (*ou me)* meaning under absolutely no condition will you ever experience death to your soul even unto the ages of eternity. What a promise!

As John Newton penned, "When we've been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun, we've no less days to sing God's praise than when we'd first begun."

v. 52
"Hast a devil" = They wrongly accuse Jesus of being demon-possessed (as they did in v. 48). The reason is this: In their minds a person would have to be seriously deranged and mentally confused to offer a promise of never-ending life (in physical terms0, because everyone dies—event he greatest of prophets and saints.

Was Jesus' word superior to what Abraham and the prophets mediated to others? (cp. Carson, p. 355).

The Jews indict Jesus because He is promising to give to His followers something that not even Abraham and the prophets had. However, they thought Jesus spoke of eternal physical life, when in fact He was speaking of eternal spiritual life in Heaven.

The death that is beyond physical death would never be the experience of those who belong to Jesus Christ.

In other words, believers are exempt from the second death which is the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:11-15; 21:8).

Those who keep Christ's Word will die physically (Rapture saints excluded) but will never die spiritually and eternally.

II. Only the Eternal One would receive the <u>Highest Honor & Glory</u> from God, the Father (v.53-55)

v. 53
Abraham lived to the ripe old age of f175 (Gen. 25:7), and all of the prophets including Isaiah, Elijah, Jeremiah, and Daniel, etc., died. If they all died, who is this Jesus who promises never-ending life?

Even the greatest have died (they reason), who do You think You are by dishonoring great men of God and putting Yourself above them?

Beware of making yourself appear to be more than you really are (you don't have to lie about yourself or exaggerate your accomplishments). Just be who you really are in Christ Jesus and don't seek exaltation in the minds of people. Let God the Father exalt you (as did Jesus).

Jesus was not robbing anything that didn't belong to Him when He made claims of equality with God (Phil. 2:6). He said nothing about Himself that was untrue; everything He said about Himself the Father would back up (substantiate).

v. 54
"Jesus refutes any suggestion that He has promoted Himself. He well understands that any self-praise, any self-glory, independent of the glory of God, means nothing (cf. Heb. 5:5)" (Carson, p. 356).

Jesus says, in effect: Anyone can toot their own horn; anyone can express an inflated description of themselves; anyone can promote themselves, anyone can pile honor on themselves, but such self-accumulated honor is nothing unless someone else honors you. And the greatest of all honor would come from God.

It was God the Father who honored His Son while Jesus was on earth with His pronouncements from Heaven on a few occasions: "This is My beloved Son, hear ye Him."

It was God the Father who honored His Son when the psalmist said:

Psalm 2:12
Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.

It is God the Father who honors His Son by saving and transforming every life who puts their trust in Jesus Christ.

It was God the Father who honored His Son by doing miracles through Him while He was on earth.

It will be God the Father who will honor His Son by sending Him back to Rapture His Church, judge the world and rule and reign with a rod of iron.

It will be God the Father who will honor His Son by having every knee bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is lord (Phil. 2:10).

After His death, resurrection, and ascension, Jesus would return to the glory that He shared with the Father before the creation of the world (Jn. 17:5).

Jesus implicitly says: "The One who you claim is your God honors Me, so why don't you?"

v. 55
'Yet ye have not known Him" - Isn't it a shame that people can ascribe allegiance to the true and living God and yet not know that God in a personal way?!

They knew about Him, but didn't know Him; just as I know about the president of the USA, but do not know Him personally. Is such the case between you and God? Knowing Him is the greatest, most vital relationship you will ever have; but to not know Him (to be content with knowing doctrines about Him) will cost you your soul forever!

'But I know Him" – Jesus, of course, has the most intimate, close, personal knowledge of the Father, because the Father and Son shared eternity past in an inexplicable oneness of nature and essence, so that everything God ever did, He did through His Son. "Let us make man in our image..." (Gen. 1:26).

For Jesus to say that He had no knowledge of the Father would make Him a liar, because He of all who ever lived, had the greatest knowledge of the Father. And the proof of such a relationship was not found in Christ's words, but in His works or obedience to the Father's will.

"But I know Him and keep His saying" – Christ's perfect obedience to the Father's word, gives the best proof that He really did know Him. The same form of evidence should exist in the believer's life as well (yet in a less perfect form).

There are two different Greek words in this verse, and both are translated "Know." Jesus says, in effect: "Ye have not <u>come to know</u> (*egnokate*) Him; but I <u>know</u> (*oida*) Him (have always known Him)."

III. Only the Eternal One could infinitely Pre-date Abraham and the Prophets (v.56-58a)

v. 56
There are at least 3 ways in which Abraham saw Christ's "day" –

1) Abraham saw Christ's day literally (when God – in the person of Jesus – met him)

Since no one has ever seen God the Father with mortal eyes (Jn. 1:18; Exod. 33:20), every reference then in the Old Testament to people seeing God must refer to people seeing a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ (or as the term used in theology: a Christophany).

The occasions that Abraham saw Christ are:

a) When the LORD appeared to Abraham and promised him a son through Sarah (Gen. 17:1-8, 22).

b) When the LORD appeared to Abraham prior to His destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18:1-22, 26-27, 33; 19:24, 27).

2) Abraham saw Christ's day spiritually (when He though eyes of faith believed that God would provide Himself with a Lamb for an offering on Mount Moriah – Gn. 22:8).

Abraham "did look for and welcome the Messianic time, "My day" (Robertson, p. 158).

3) Abraham saw Christ's day visibly (when He went to Heaven and met the Lord face to face in all of His glory)

v. 57
At this time, Jesus was in His early thirties and Abraham had lived over 2,000 years before Jesus was born, so how in the world id Abraham see Jesus?

Now they really accuse Him of being "bogus." It was not humanly possible to pre-exist Abraham! And they were right! But Jesus was not merely human; He was divine!

IV. Only the Eternal One could claim to be the "I AM" of Exodus 3:14 (v.58b-59)

v. 58
"Verily, verily" = truly, truly. This is an absolute fat worthy of complete trust.

"Before Abraham was, I am" - Before Abraham lived, I am alive.

It is interesting to note that the most grammatically correct way of stating pre-existence would be to say, "Before Abraham lived, I lived."

But Jesus did not intend that His hearers miss His loaded point. His point is this: Not only did I exist before Abraham, but I am the eternal "I AM" – the God who appeared to Moses at the burning bush (SEE Exod. 3:13-14).

The phrase "I AM" was the equivalent to the word *Yahweh* or Jehovah. (the Hebrew words "I AM" and *Yahweh* are related terms).

Jesus is the great "I AM" of:

Isaiah 41:4
Who hath wrought and done it, calling the generations from the beginning? I the Lord, the first, and with the last; I am he.

Isaiah 43:13
Yea, before the day was I am he; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand: I will work, and who shall let it?

To further prove that John had more in mind when He quotes Jesus referring to Himself as the "I AM," see: John 18:5-8, where a whole mob of armed soldiers fall down to the ground backwards when Jesus uttered the words "I AM."

Abraham was not in the beginning with God, but Jesus was.

John 1:1-2
In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [2] The same was in the beginning with God.

v. 59
When you are confronted with the great “I AM,” you will either love Him ad submit to Him, or you will hate Him and seek to rid yourself of His authority in your life. Notice the Jews’ response.

Now the reaction of the Jews proves that they knew that Jesus intended to mean more than pre-existence by the words “I AM.”

They thought that He was committing blasphemy by claiming to be God, the “I AM” of the Old Testament, so they pick up stones to stone Him to death. But since His hour for death had not yet come (Jn. 8:200, He disappears from their view and walks right through the middle of the crowd.

This was not a “docetic vanishing” (Robertson, p. 159), but a quiet, bold, and clever mingling in the crowd that rendered Jesus unidentifiable.

The “Glory” now leaves the Temple; just as the shekinah Glory left the Old Testament Temple due to Israel’s rejection of God, now Jesus leaves the Temple due to the Jews rejection of Himself.

CONCLUSION:

THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF CHRIST'S <u>ETERNAL</u> NATURE

1) Patience - Be patient. God will fulfill (accomplish) what He has promised (II Pet. 3:3-10 - *v. 8; Rev. 6:9-11)

2) Assurance - Since God is eternal, He can give <u>eternal life</u> (Jn. 3:16, 10:28) (Eternal life will last as long as God will!)

John Newton captured this truth in the hymn "Amazing Grace" when he wrote, "When we've been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun, we've no less days to sing God's praise, than when we first begun."

3) Strength - He is our constant supply of *"everlasting strength"* (Is. 26:4)

4) Comfort - God is our eternal *"dwelling place"* (Ps. 90:1-2)

***"Dwelling place"* - God is pictured as a house that has never gotten old, decrepit, or ruined. As Paul said to the philosophers at Mars Hill, *"In Him we live and move and have our being"* (Acts 17:28)**

5) Security - Since the eternal God is your refuge, keep *"leaning on the everlasting arms"* (Deut. 33:27)

6) Peace - God's *"mercy is everlasting"* (Ps. 100:5). *"His mercy endureth <u>forever</u>"* (Ps. 136).

7) Fear - Since God is eternal, eternal damnation will exist as long as God exists (Mt. 25:41, 46; Jude 7)