

Luke 22:67-70 12/8/13 (Red Letters #13) **LETTERS FROM GOD**

So... I really feel like in some ways, all of the Red Letters so far have been leading up to this section – so that we don't get confused about where the Red Letters of Jesus come from: Every single one of these Red Letters come **straight from God**. And Jesus knows that. He is not at all confused about who He is or why He came. And that in itself is reason enough to focus on the Red Letters, just the words of Jesus in the Bible, even in this Advent and Christmas season, so that we do away with some of the confusion about Jesus and put together Who He really is.

Slide: Christmas Connection clip

“It's almost as though we need to stop seeing Christmas as an isolated event and see it as more of a continuous story of our salvation.”

The Real story – His-story. And folks, trust me: that little sample of confusion is not at all unusual in the way people see Jesus today. The fact is they haven't put it all together, and one of the key reasons is that they simply haven't paid attention to what Jesus actually said. Now the next example is almost too easy, but I kind of feel that way **any** time we reference our atheistic, evolutionary friend, Richard Dawkins... but it serves to illustrate this idea that somehow Jesus was just a wise teacher:

Slide: Jesus would have been an Atheist clip

Of course typically, Dawkins takes it to the extreme –

Slide: “Jesus would have been an atheist if He knew what we know today.”

What utter nonsense! Jesus of course is God and knows all things. He didn't need Dawkins to come along and teach Him anything. But this idea about Jesus being just a great moral teacher is also nonsense – if you just listen to what He actually **says**...particularly what He says about Himself. In the first reading, Jesus is having a long-running battle with the Pharisees all through John 8. In this part of the chapter He warms up to His subject with the statement:

Slide: **“If you knew me, you would know the Father also.”** (John 8:19 NIV)

Now folks, we know – again from Jesus - that **“God (the Father) so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son...”**, and we've been seeing that all along in the Red Letters, but in the letters today it simply jumps off the page: Jesus referring to God the Father as His Father, not in a generic sense, (“He is the Father of us all...”) but in a very personal sense. And then the **conversation** gets very personal as Jesus confronts the Pharisees:

Slide: **“You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world.”** (John 8:23 NIV)

Folks, does that sound like someone who thinks of Himself as just a “great moral teacher”? And it gets worse. He said:

Slide: **“I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am [the one I claim to be], you will indeed die in your sins.”** (John 8:24 NIV)

Folks, Jesus wasn't proclaiming a good teaching there, like some Buddhist philosophy, He was proclaiming Himself. In fact, He was proclaiming Himself with a capital H!

Now, the translation here adds words **“the one I claim to be”**, because otherwise it doesn't really flow in English. But it doesn't flow because Jesus is literally saying, “I Am”. We go over this in the Fit for Life in Christ class. Remember in the Old Testament how Moses tried to squirm out of being God's deliverer for His people? After other excuses didn't work, he finally complained that he didn't even know God's name. So God told him! **“I am who I am!”** **“Tell them, ‘I am’ sent you.”** That's what the name “Yahweh” means: “I am.” And isn't that a cool

name for God! He isn't just the God of the past or a God to worry about in the future, He is your God right now, this very minute – every day of your life. But that name became for the Jewish people so holy that they wouldn't even speak it. Instead, when they came to it they would substitute the name “Adonai”, for “Lord.” Folks, when Jesus said, “...if you do not believe that I am...” He was literally claiming the name of God for Himself. And claiming that salvation was in Him. He said it again in v. 28

Slide: “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am...” (John 8:28 NIV)

Of course, there He was talking about being lifted up on the cross. Often the “great moral teacher” crowd assumes that somehow Jesus just got caught up in a Messiah frenzy and got martyred by accident. No way. Again and again Jesus foretold His death. He knew who He was, He knew what He was doing and what He was going to do, and He knew where He was going afterward. He came from heaven and was going to heaven.

Then if we were to follow the discussion in John 8, Jesus repeats His claim to be the Great “I am” one more time.

Slide: “I tell you the truth...before Abraham was born, I am!” (John 8:58 NIV)

Now in v. 30 the text says that “Even as he spoke, many put their faith in him.” But after his last “I am” statement, everybody else “picked up stones to stone Him.” Because if He isn't God, saying He's God is blasphemy, punishable in the Old Testament by stoning. And I would say both responses are logical, embracing Him or rejecting Him. But what is not logical is this weird tepid response that Jesus might have been a great moral teacher, but nothing more. One of the many things I've been wondering as we keep walking through the Red Letters, is Why don't people see Jesus as arrogant and egotistical or even as a megalomaniac for the types of things that He says? Because that's the kind of person He must have been, if He wasn't all that... if He isn't God.

In the second reading it's more of the same. Just look at the absolute authority claimed by Jesus in this reading!

Slide: “The miracles I do in my Father's name” (John 10:25 NIV)

Slide: “I give them eternal life” (John 10:28 NIV)

Slide: “No one can snatch them out of my hand” (John 10:28 NIV)

Slide: “I and the Father are one.” (John 10:30 NIV)

Slide: “I am God's Son” (John 10:36 NIV)

Slide: “The Father is in me, and I in the Father” (John 10:38 NIV)

Folks, no question: if He isn't God He is a blasphemer, because He's making claims to be God.

There is a story that has been passed down concerning President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Apparently FDR was so tired of smiling the expected presidential smile and saying the usual expected words at the many White House receptions, that one evening he decided to find out whether anybody was really listening to what he was saying.

As each person came up to him with an extended hand, he flashed that big smile and said, "I murdered my grandmother this morning."

People would automatically respond with comments like "How lovely!" or "It is nice to meet you mister President!"

Nobody listened to what he was actually saying.... except for one foreign diplomat.

When the president said, "I murdered my grandmother this morning," the diplomat responded softly, "I'm sure she had it coming."

Well folks, without question, when Jesus first spoke His **Red Letters** on earth, everyone in His presence was listening. That's why they either picked up stones to stone Him, or they were willing to **be** stoned for Him. Unfortunately many people today are not listening. I pray that you are – and that you'll also be willing to speak about what you have seen and heard. Because the wonder of all this, is not that Jesus Christ is Lord, but that He is willing to be your Lord, the One who didn't just send a letter, He sent Himself - to be punished for your sins, to die on a cross and to rise again – to live in your hearts through faith and to come again to take you to Himself in glory.

Finally the Luke 22 reading, again is much the same as the one we just looked at.

Slide: 67 “If you are the Christ,” they said, “tell us.” Jesus answered, “If I tell you, you will not believe me, 68 and if I asked you, you would not answer. 69 But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God.”

70 They all asked, “Are you then the Son of God?” He replied, “You are right in saying I am.””

(Luke 22:67–70 NIV)

The church leaders, questioning Jesus at their illegal midnight trial demanded to know if Jesus was the “Christ”, a special term for the Promised Messiah. And Jesus gave them the right answer: “If I tell you, you will not believe me...” Right? You're not interested in the truth. You can't handle the truth... “But from now on,” he said, “The Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God.” Which is to say that Jesus was once again claiming all the power of God, exercised at God's right hand.

And then I just love how Jesus sort of makes them say who He is... They all ask: “Are you then the Son of God?” and He replied, “**You are right in saying I am.**” Even when He is seemingly completely in their power, He isn't. He is the Son of God and the Savior of the world. Your Savior and mine. By the way, there's that “I am” again. He's doubling up on His answer. Just as He wants to double up on His grace and the power He would give you to lead an abundant life.

Folks, I hope and pray that you will stay with us all through the Advent and Christmas season. Take a break midweek and come to those Wednesday services as well. Listen, learn, read these Red Letters, they are like no other letters you've ever seen, because they come to you straight from God. Let's pray:

Dear Lord Jesus, We thank You for Your Red Letters, we know that they come from God because You are God. And yet in love You still came to us, to Your people in person. You didn't just send a letter. You came. Bless our celebration of that coming, even as we look forward to the time when You will come again in glory to take us to our eternal home with You. Amen.