

John: 8:21–30

From Catena Aurea:

21. Then said Jesus again unto them, I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins: whither I go, ye cannot come.

22. Then said the Jews, Will he kill himself? because he saith, Whither I go, ye cannot come.

23. And he said unto them, Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world, I am not of this world.

24. I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.

AUGUSTINE. (Tract. xxxviii. 2) In accordance with what was just, He said that no man laid hands on Him, because His hour was not yet come; He now speaks to the Jews of His passion, as a free, and not a compulsory sacrifice on His part: Then said Jesus again unto them, I go My way. Death to our Lord was a return to the place whence He had come.

ORIGEN. (tom. xix. in Joan. s. 3.) But some one will object: If this was spoken to men who persisted in unbelief, how is it He says, Ye shall seek Me? For to seek Jesus is to seek truth and wisdom. You will answer that it was said of His persecutors, that they sought to take Him. There are different ways of seeking Jesus. All do not seek Him for their health and profit: and only they who seek Him aright, find peace. And they are said to seek Him aright, who seek the Word which was in the beginning with God, in order that He may lead them to the Father.

AUGUSTINE. (Tract. xxxviii. 2) Ye shall seek Me, then, He says, not from compassionate regret, but from hatred: for after He had departed from the eyes of men, He was sought for both by those who hated, and those who loved Him: the one wanting to persecute, the other to have His presence. And that ye may not think that ye shall seek Me in a good sense, I tell you, Ye shall die in your sin. (ἁμαρτία plural in our Transl.) This is to seek Christ amiss, to die in one's sin: this is to hate Him, from Whom alone cometh salvation. He pronounces sentence on them prophetically, that they shall die in their sins.

ORIGEN. (tom. xix. in Joan. s. 3.) But I ask, as it is said below that many believed on Him, whether He speaks to all present, when He says, Ye shall die in your sins? No: He speaks to those only, whom He knew would not believe, and would therefore die in their sins, not being able to follow Him. Whither I go, He says, ye cannot come; i. e. there where truth and wisdom are, for with them Jesus dwells. They cannot, He says, because they will not: for had they wished, He could not reasonably have said, Ye shall die in your sin.

AUGUSTINE. (Tract. xxviii. s. 2) This He tells His disciples in another place; without saying to them, however, Ye shall die in your sin, He only says, Whither I go, ye cannot follow Me now; not preventing, but only delaying their coming.

ORIGEN. (tom. xix. 3.) The Word, while still present, yet threatens to depart. So long as we preserve the seeds of truth implanted in our minds, the Word of God does not depart from us. But if we fall into wickedness, then He says to us, I go away; and when we seek Him, we shall not find Him, but shall die in our sin, die caught in our sin. But we should not pass over without notice the expression itself: Ye shall die in your sins. If ye shall die be understood in the ordinary sense, it is manifest that sinners die in their sins, the righteous in their righteousness. But if we understand it of death in the sense of sin; then the meaning is, that not their bodies, but their souls were sick unto death. The Physician seeing them thus grievously sick, says, Ye shall die in your sins. And this is evidently the meaning of the words, Whither I go ye cannot come. For when a man dies in his sin, he cannot go where Jesus goes: no dead man can follow Jesus: The dead praise not Thee, O Lord. (Ps. 113)

AUGUSTINE. (Tract. xxviii) They take these words, as they generally do, in a carnal sense, and ask, Will He kill Himself, because He saith, Whither I go, ye cannot come? A foolish question. For why? Could they not go where He went, if He killed Himself? Were they never to die themselves? Whither I go, then, He says; meaning not His departure at death, but where He went after death.

THEOPHYLACT. He shews here that He will rise again in glory, and sit at the right hand of God.

ORIGEN. (tom. xix. in Joan. s. 4.) May they not however have a higher meaning in saying this? For they had opportunities of knowing many things from their apocryphal books or from tradition. As then there was a prophetic tradition, that Christ was to be born at Bethlehem, so there may have been a tradition also respecting His death, viz. that He would depart from this life in the way which He declares, No man taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. (c. 10:18) So then the question, Will He kill Himself, is not to be taken in its obvious sense, but as referring to some Jewish tradition about Christ. For His saying, I go

My way, shews that He had power over His own death, and departure from the body; so that these were voluntary on His part. But I think that they bring forward this tradition which had come down to them, on the death of Christ, contemptuously, and not with any view to give Him glory. Will He kill Himself? say they: whereas, they ought to have used a loftier way of speaking, and have said, Will His soul wait His pleasure, to depart from His body? Our Lord answers, Ye are from beneath, i. e. ye love earth; your hearts are not raised upwards. He speaks to them as earthly men, for their thoughts were earthly.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. liii. 1) As if to say, No wonder that ye think as ye do, seeing ye are carnal, and understand nothing spiritually. I am from above.

AUGUSTINE. (Tract. xxxviii. 4) From whom above? From the Father Himself, Who is above all. Ye are of this world, I am not of this world. How could He be of the world, by Whom the world was made?

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. liii. 1) Or He says, I am not of this world, with reference to worldly and vain thoughts.

THEOPHYLACT. I affect nothing worldly, nothing earthly: I could never come to such madness as to kill Myself. Apollinarius, however, falsely infers from these words, that our Lord's body was not of this world, but came down from heaven. did the Apostles then, to whom our Lord says below, Ye are not of this world, (c. 15:19) derive all of them their bodies from heaven? In saying then, I am not of this world, He must be understood to mean, I am not of the number of you, who mind earthly things.

ORIGEN. (tom. xix. in Joan. s. 5.) Beneath, and, of this world, are different things. Beneath, refers to a particular place; this material world embraces different tracts, which all are beneath, as compared with things immaterial and invisible, but, as compared with one another, some beneath, some above. Where the treasure of each is, there is his heart also. If a man then lay up treasure upon earth, he is beneath: if any man lay up treasure in heaven, he is above; yea, ascends above all hearers, attains to a most blissful end. And again, the love of this world makes a man of this world: whereas he who loveth not the world, neither the things that are in the world, is not of the world. Yet is there beyond this world of sense, another world, in which are things invisible, the beauty of which shall the pure in heart behold, yea, the First-born of every creature may be called the world, insomuch as He is absolute wisdom, and in wisdom all things were made. In Him therefore was the whole world, differing from the material world, in so far as the scheme divested of the matter, differs from the subject matter itself. The soul of Christ then says, I am not of this world; i. e. because it has not its conversation in this world.

AUGUSTINE. (Tract. xxxviii. 6) Our Lord expresses His meaning in the words, Ye are of this world, i. e. ye are sinners. All of us are born in sin; all have added by our actions to the sin in which we were born. The misery of the Jews then was, not that they had sin, but that they would die in their sin: I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sin. Amongst the multitude, however, who heard our Lord, there were some who were about to believe; whereas this most severe sentence had gone forth against all: Ye shall die in your sin; to the destruction of all hope even in those who should hereafter believe. So His next words recall the latter to hope: For if ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sin: therefore if ye believe that I am He, ye shall not die in your sin.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. liii. 1) For if He came in order to take away sin, and a man cannot put that off, except by washing, and cannot be baptized except he believe; it follows, that he who believes not must pass out of this life, with the old man, i. e. sin, within him: not only because he believes not, but because he departs hence, with his former sins upon him.

AUGUSTINE. (Tract. xxxviii. 8) His saying, If ye believe not that I am, without adding any thing, proves a great deal. For thus it was that God spoke to Moses, I am that I am. But how do I understand, I am that I am, (Exod. 3) and, If ye believe not that I am? In this way. All excellence, of whatever kind, if it be mutable, cannot be said really to be, for there is no real to be, where there is a not to be. Analyze the idea of mutability, and you will find, was, and will be; contemplate God, and you will find, is, without possibility of a past. In order to be, thou must leave him behind thee. So then, If ye believe not that I am, means in fact, If ye believe not that I am God; this being the condition, on which we shall not die in our sins. God be thanked that He says, If ye believe not, not, If ye understand not; for who could understand this?

ORIGEN. (tom. xix. in Joan.) It is manifest, that he, who dies in his sins, though he say that he believes in Christ, does not really believe. For he who believes in His justice does not do injustice; he who believes in His wisdom, does not act or speak foolishly; in like manner with respect to the other attributes of Christ, you will find that he who does not believe in Christ, dies in his sins: inasmuch as he comes to be the very contrary of what is seen in Christ.

8:25–27

25. Then said they unto him, Who art thou? And Jesus saith unto them, Even the same that I said unto you from the beginning.

26. I have many things to say and to judge of you: but he that sent me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I have heard of him.

27. They understood not that he spake to them of the Father.

AUGUSTINE. (Tract. xxxviii. s. 11) Our Lord having said, If ye believe not that I am, ye shall die in your sins; they enquire of Him, as if wishing to know in whom they are to believe, that they might not die in their sin: Then said they unto Him, Who art Thou? For when Thou saidst, If ye believe not that I am, Thou didst not add, who Thou art. But our Lord knew that these were some who would believe, and therefore after being asked, Who art Thou? that such might know what they should believe Him to be, Jesus saith unto them, The beginning, who also speak to you; not as if to say, I am the beginning, but, Believe Me to be the beginning; as is evident from the Greek, where beginning is feminine. Believe Me then to be the beginning, but ye die in your sins: for the beginning cannot be changed; it remains fixed in itself, and is the source of change to all things. (Tract. xxxix. 1, 2). But it is absurd to call the Son the beginning, and not the Father also. And yet there are not two beginnings, even as these are not two Gods. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Father and the Son; not being either the Father, or the Son. Yet Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one God, one Light, one beginning. (Tract. xxxviii. 11). He adds, Who also speak to you, i. e. Who humbled Myself for your sakes, and condescended to those words. Therefore believe Me to be the beginning; because that ye may believe this, not only am I the beginning, but I also speak with you, that ye may believe that I am. For if the Beginning had remained with the Father in its original nature, and not taken upon it the form of a servant, how could men have believed in it? Would their weakly minds have taken in the spiritual Word, without the medium of sensible sound?

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. liii. 1) See here the madness of the Jews; asking after so long time, and after all His miracles and teaching, Who art Thou? What is Christ's answer? From the beginning I speak with you; as if to say, Ye do not deserve to hear any thing from Me, much less this thing, Who I am. For ye speak always, to tempt Me. But I could, if I would, confound and punish you: I have many things to say, and to judge of you.

AUGUSTINE. (Tract. xxxix) Above He said, I judge no man; but, I judge not, is one thing, I have to judge, another. I judge not, He says, with reference to the present time. But the other, I have many things to say, and to judge of you, refers to a future judgment. And I shall be true in My judgment, because I am truth, the Son of the true One. He that sent Me is true. My Father is true, not by partaking of, but begetting

truth. Shall we say that truth is greater than one who is true? If we say this, we shall begin to call the Son greater than the Father.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. liii. 1) He says this, that they may not think that He allows them to talk against Him with impunity, from inability to punish them; or that He is not alive to their contemptuous designs.

THEOPHYLACT. Or having said, I have many things to say, and to judge of you, thus reserving His judgment for a future time, He adds, But He that sent Me is true: as if to say, Though ye are unbelievers, My Father is true, Who hath appointed a day of retribution for you.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. liii. 1) Or thus: As My Father hath sent Me not to judge the world, but to save the world, and My Father is true, I accordingly judge no man now; but speak thus for your salvation, not your condemnation: And I speak to the world those things that I have heard of Him.

AUGUSTINE. (Tract. xxxix. s. 6) The coequal Son gives glory to the Father: as if to say, I give glory to Him whose Son I am: how proudly thou detractest from Him, whose servant Thou art.

8:28–30

28. Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things.

29. And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him.

30. As he spake these words, many believed on him.

AUGUSTINE. (Tract. xl. 2) When our Lord said, He is true that sent Me, the Jews did not understand that He spake to them of the Father. But He saw some there, who, He knew, would believe on Him after His passion. Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then ye shall know that I am. (Exod. 3:14) Recollect the words, I am that I am, and ye will know why I say, I am. I pass over your knowledge, in order that I may fulfil My passion. In your appointed time ye will know who I am; when ye have lifted up the Son of man. He means the lifting up of the cross; for He was lifted up on the cross, when He hung thereon. This was to be accomplished by the hands of those who should afterwards believe, whom He is now speaking to; with what intent, but that no one, however great his wickedness and consciousness of guilt might despair, seeing even the murderers of our Lord forgiven.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. liii. 1, 2) Or the connection is this: When His miracles and teaching had failed to convert men, He spoke of the cross; When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then ye shall know that I am He: as if to say, Ye think that ye have killed Me; but I say that ye shall then, by the evidence of miracles, of My resurrection, and your captivity, know most especially, that I am Christ the Son of God, and that I do not act in opposition to God; But that as My Father hath taught Me, I speak these things. Here He shews the likeness of His substance to the Father's; and that He says nothing beyond the Paternal intelligence. If I were contrary to God, I should not have moved His anger so much against those who did not hear Me.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. xl. s. 3. et seq.) Or thus: Having said, Then shall ye know that I am, and in this, I am, implied the whole Trinity: lest the Sabellian error should creep in, He immediately adds, And I do nothing of Myself; as if to say, I am not of Myself; the Son is God from the Father. Let not what follows, as the Father hath taught Me, I speak these things, suggest a carnal thought to any of you. Do not place as it were two men before your eyes, a Father speaking to his son, as you do when you speak to your sons. For what words could be spoken to the only Word? If the Father speaks in your hearts without sound, how does He speak to the Son? The Father speaks to the Son incorporeally, because He begat the Son incorporeally: nor did He teach Him, as having begotten Him untaught; rather the teaching Him, was the begetting Him knowing. For if the nature of truth be simple, to be, in the Son, is the same as to know. As then the Father gave the Son existence by begetting, so He gave Him knowledge also.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. liii. 2) He gives now a humbler turn to the discourse: And He that sent Me. That this might not be thought however to imply inferiority, He says, Is with Me. The former is His dispensation, the latter His divinity.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr xl. 6) And though both are together, yet one is sent, the other sends. For the mission is the incarnation; and the incarnation is of the Son only, not of the Father. He says then, He that sent Me, meaning, By whose Fatherly authority I am made incarnate. The Father however, though He sent the Son, did not withdraw from Him, as He proceeds to say: The Father hath not left Me alone. For it could not be that where He sent the Son, there the Father was not; He who says, I fill heaven and earth. (Jer. 33) And He adds the reason why He did not leave Him: For I do always those things that please Him; always, i. e. not from any particular beginning, but without beginning and without end. For the generation from the Father hath no beginning in time.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. liii. 2) Or, He means it as an answer to those who were constantly saying that He was not from God, and that because He did not keep the sabbath; I do always, He says, do those things that please Him; shewing that the breaking the sabbath even was pleasing to Him. He takes care in every way to shew that He does nothing contrary to the Father. And as this was speaking more after a human fashion, the Evangelist adds, As He spake these words, many believed on Him; as if to say, Do not be disturbed at hearing so humble a speech from Christ; for those who had heard the greatest doctrines from Him, and were not persuaded, were persuaded by these words of humility. These then believed on Him, yet not as they ought; but only out of joy, and approbation of His humble way of speaking. And this the Evangelist shews in his subsequent narration, which relates their unjust proceedings towards Him.

From Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture:

8:21–22 Seeking Jesus and Dying in Sin

Will Unbelief Seek Jesus?

Origen: Someone will object: If he said this to those who persist in unbelief, how does he say to such people, “You will seek me”? It is good to seek Jesus, since it is the same as seeking the Word, the truth and wisdom. You may answer that “seeking” was also said of those who plotted against him.... There are differences between those seeking Jesus. Not all seek him legitimately for their salvation or benefit. People seek Jesus with countless motives that fall short of the good. Only those who seek him in a right way find peace. They may be said to seek him in a right way who seek the Word that was in the beginning with God, who seek him that he might lead them to the Father. Commentary on the Gospel of John 19.71–74.

Two Ways of Pursuit.

Augustine: “I go away,” he said, “and you shall seek me,” not from any longing for me but in hatred. For after his removal from human sight, he was sought for both by those who hated him and those who loved him; by the former in a spirit of persecution, by the latter with the desire of seizing him.... Accordingly, because the former sought it in this wrong way, with a perverted heart, what did he add next? “You shall seek me, and”—not to let you suppose that you will seek me for good—“you shall die in your sin.” Dying

in one's sins happens to those who seek Christ wrongly. It happens to those who hate the one through whom alone salvation could be found. For while those whose hope is in God should not render evil even for evil, these men were rendering evil for good. The Lord therefore announced to them beforehand and in his foreknowledge uttered the sentence that they should die in their sin. And then he adds, "Where I am going, you cannot come." He said the same to the disciples also in another place. And yet he did not say to them, "You shall die in your sin." But what did he say? He said the same as he did to these men: "Where I am going, you cannot come." He did not take away hope but foretold delay. For at the time when the Lord said this to the disciples, they were not able to come where he was going, yet they were to come afterwards. But these men would never come. And so in his foreknowledge he said to them, "You shall die in your sin." Tractates on the Gospel of John 38.2.

The Word Threatens to Depart.

Origen: If the Word is not received when present, he threatens to go...

As long as we preserve the seeds and principles of truth that have been sown in our souls, the Word has not yet departed from us. But if we utterly destroy them with a flood of wickedness, he will say to us, "I go." And then, even if we seek him, we will not find him but will die in our sin, overtaken in our sin and swept away by it...

And we must not pass over without noticing the expression "you will die in your sins." If it is taken in the ordinary sense, it is clear that sinners will die in their sin and the righteous in their righteousness. But if "you will die" is taken in relation to death, the enemy of Christ, since the one who dies has committed a sin that leads to death, then it is clear that those to whom this is spoken have not yet died...

Those to whom the Word had not yet come had not committed sin that leads to death. Still, they were spiritually sick, a sickness tending toward death. The Physician, seeing that they were deadly ill, after he had despaired of healing them, said, "I go, and you will seek me, and you will die in your sin." ...

Perhaps the statement "where I go you cannot come," attached to "you will die in your sin," will be clearer. For whenever someone dies in his sin, he cannot go where Jesus goes, for no one who is dead can follow Jesus: "For the dead do not praise you, O Lord." Commentary on the Gospel of John 19.74, 78–81, 83.

8:23 Of This World or Not of This World

Those from Below Learn from Him Who Is Above.

Clement of Alexandria: We are those who bear about with us, in this living and moving image of our human nature, the likeness of God. It is a likeness that lives with us, takes counsel with us, associates with us, is a guest with us, feels with us and feels for us. We have become a consecrated offering to God for Christ's sake. We are the chosen generation, the royal priesthood, the holy nation, the peculiar people who once were not a people but are now the people of God. We are those who, according to John, are not of those who are beneath but have learned all from him who came from above; who have come to understand the dispensation of God; who have learned to walk in newness of life. Exhortation to the Greeks 4.

Who Is from Below?

Origen: But pay attention, if you also desire to learn from Scripture who it is who is from below and who it is who is from above. Since each person's treasure is where his heart is, if someone stores up treasure on earth, by the very act of storing up treasure on earth he is from below. But if someone stores up treasure in heaven, that person is born from above and assumes "the image of the heavenly." And in addition, when this person has passed through all the heavens, he is found to have reached the most blessed goal. Commentary on the Gospel of John 19.138.

How Could the Creator Be of This World?

Augustine: How could Jesus be of the world when he made the world? Tractates on the Gospel of John 38.4.

Divine Wisdom Is Not of This World.

Chrysostom: Here again he speaks of their worldly and carnal imaginations. It is clear that "I am not of this world" does not mean that he had not taken flesh on himself but that he was far removed from their wickedness. Homilies on the Gospel of John 53.1.

Christ Is Not of This World or Any Other.

Cyril of Alexandria: Here he clearly shows what he means by “above” and “below.” The Pharisees would have understood what he said in a bodily way, thinking the “above” and “below” were localities. That is why our Lord clarifies what he had previously said so obscurely. For he says, “You are of this world,” that is, from beneath; “I am not of this world,” speaking of what is from above. For God surpasses all that is created. His superiority is not a localized kind of exaltation (as if the incorporeal could be conceived in any way as local, except by the foolish and utterly uninstructed). Rather, he surpasses derivative beings because of his own most excellent and ineffable nature. It is of this essence that the Word says he is. He has not been created by it. He is its fruit and offspring. For notice how he does not say, “I have been created and made from above” but instead says, “I am,” in order to show both where he came from and also that he was always and eternally with his own progenitor. For he is even as the Father too is...

But the enemy of the truth ... will say that by adding “this,” Christ has shown that there is another world, the spiritual world, from which he might have come, implying the Son is a creature ... in the same class as angels who ... if he is not part of this world, is part of another.... But the word this or “of this” is a demonstrative pronoun that does not necessarily imply comparison with another.... Therefore when Christ says, “I am not of this world,” he is not saying that he is part of some other world but is ... putting the Jews in the place of things that have an origin, saying, “You are of this world” while he severs himself altogether from things created and connects himself instead with that other place, and by this I mean the Godhead, when he says, “I am not of this world.” In this way, he contrasts the Godhead with the world so that we can understand. Commentary on the Gospel of John 5.4

8:24 Unless You Believe, You Will Die in Your Sins

Believers in Christ Will Not Die in Their Sins.

Origen: Now, if the one who does not believe that Jesus is the Christ will die in his sins, it is clear that the one who does not die in his sins has believed in the Christ. But he who dies in his sins, even if he says that he believes in the Christ, has not believed in him so far as truth is concerned. And if faith is mentioned but it lacks works, such faith is dead. ... For one who believes in [Christ’s] justice does not do injustice. One who believes in his wisdom would not say or do anything foolish.... And if we collected the remaining attributes of Christ, we will easily discover that whoever does not believe in Christ will die in his sins

because he comes to be the very opposite of what is seen in Christ. The sins themselves kill him. Commentary on the Gospel of John 19.152, 155, 158.

Believing Versus Comprehending the “I AM.”

Augustine: What is this, “If you do not believe that I am”? “I am” what? There is nothing added. And because he added nothing ... there is much implied in his only saying “I am,” for God had used the same words with Moses, “I am who am.” Who can adequately express what that I AM means? ... For all excellence, whatever kind it is, if it is changeable, it does not truly exist. There is no true existence wherever nonexistence also has a place. For whatever can be changed, so far as it is changed, it is not what it was: if it is no longer what it was, a kind of death has therein taken place. Something that was there has been eliminated and exists no more.... For in all actions and movements of ours, yes, in every activity of the creature, I find two indications of time, the past and the future. I seek for the present, but nothing stands still. What I have said is no longer present. What I am going to say is not yet come. What I have done is no longer present. What I am going to do is not yet come. The life I have lived is no longer present. The life I have still to live is not yet come. Past and future I find in every creature-movement. I do not find either past or future in what is abiding. There I only find the unchangeable present that finds no place in the creature. Analyze the idea of mutability, and you will find was and will be: contemplate God, and you will find the is where was and will be cannot exist.... And so, by these words, “If you do not believe that I am,” I think our Lord meant nothing else than this, “If you do not believe that I am” God, “you shall die in your sins.” Well, God be thanked that he said, “If you do not believe” and did not say: If you do not comprehend. For who can comprehend this? Tractates on the Gospel of John 38.8, 10.

8:25 Even What I Have Told You from the Beginning

Jesus Has Been Consistent About Who He Is.

Chrysostom: They ask, “Who are you?” Such a lack of understanding! After such a long time with all of his signs and teaching they still ask, “Who are you?” What then does Christ say? “The same that I told you from the beginning.” What he is saying is: You are not worthy to hear my words at all, much less to learn who I am. For everything you say is an attempt to tempt me. But you have not even listened to one of the things I have said. And all these things I am now able to prove against you. Homilies on the Gospel of John 53.1.

Jesus Calls Himself the Beginning.

Augustine: "Who are you," that we may believe? He answered, "The beginning." Here is the existence that [always] is. The beginning cannot be changed. The beginning is self-abiding and all-originating, that is, the beginning, to which it has been said, "But you yourself are the same and your years shall not fail." ... Believe me to be the beginning so that you may not die in your sins. By saying, "Who are you?" they had said nothing else than this, "What shall we believe you to be?" He replied, "The beginning," that is, Believe me to be "the beginning." Tractates on the Gospel of John 38.11.

In the Beginning Was the Word.

Augustine: "In the beginning was the Word." That through which he made things already was. That is how he made what as yet was not. We can understand it, and rightly understand it, in the sense that heaven and earth were made in the only begotten Word itself. They were, you see, made in that through which they were made. This can be, and be understood as, the beginning in which God made heaven and earth. This Word, after all, is also the wisdom of God, about which it is said, "You have made all things in wisdom." If God made all things in wisdom and his only begotten Son is without a shadow of doubt the wisdom of God, let us not doubt that whatever we have learned was made through the Son was also made in the Son. The Son himself, after all, is certainly the beginning. When the Jews were questioning him and saying, "Who are you? He answered, "The beginning." And there [in Genesis] you have, "In the beginning God made heaven and earth." Sermon 223a.1.

8:26–27 Much to Say and Judge

A Future Judgment.

Augustine: Remember when he said, "I judge no one"? Now he says, "I have many things to say of you and to judge." But "I do not judge," is one thing, "I have to judge" is another. For he had come to save the world, not to judge the world. When he says, "I have many things to say of you and to judge," he refers to a future judgment when, after he ascended, he would come back to judge the living and the dead. Tractates on the Gospel of John 39.6.

True Judgment.

Augustine: When he says, "He that sent me is true," it is as if he said, Therefore I too shall be true in my judgment, because as the Son of the true One, I am the truth.... The Son is the Truth, the Father is true. I inquire which is the greater, but [when I inquire, I] find equality. For the true Father is true not because he contained a part of that truth but because he begat truth in its entirety. Tractates on the Gospel of John 39.7.

Judgment Guards Against Contempt.

Chrysostom: He says this so that they may not think that he allows them to talk against him with impunity, or from inability to punish them or that he is not aware of their secret thoughts and contempt. Homilies on the Gospel of John 53.1.

8:28 Lifting Up the Son of Man

Jesus Foretells Conversion of His Killers.

Augustine: What does this mean? For it looks as if all he said was that they would know who he was after his passion. Without doubt, therefore, he saw that there were some there, whom he himself knew, who would believe after his passion.... We are here speaking of those three thousand and those five thousand Jews whom now he saw there, when he said, "When you have lifted up the Son of man, then shall you know that I am." It was as if he had said, I am not allowing you to recognize what happened until I have completed my passion. Tractates on the Gospel of John 40.2.

"Lifting Up" Is His Suffering, Not Glorification.

Augustine: When it is appropriate, you shall know who I am. Not that all who heard him were only then to believe, that is, after the Lord's passion. For a little after it is said, "As he spoke these words, many believed on him," and the Son of man was not yet lifted up. But the lifting up he is speaking of is that of his passion, not of his glorification, of the cross, not of heaven. For he was exalted there also when he hung on the tree. But that exaltation was his humiliation, for then he became obedient even to the death of the cross. This required it to be accomplished by the hands of those who should afterwards believe and to whom he says, "When you have lifted up the Son of man, then shall you know that I am." And why so,

except that no one might despair, however guilty his conscience, when he saw those forgiven their homicide who had slain the Christ? Tractates on the Gospel of John 40.2.

The Cross and the Resurrection Will Reveal Jesus' Divinity.

Cyril of Alexandria: Here Jesus is saying, "Since you are looking only to the flesh, you believe that I am merely a man, and you suppose that I am just like you. But the dignity and the glory of the Godhead does not even enter your mind. However, you shall know that I am God of true God and Light of light through your dreadful and lawless act—my death on the cross. For when you see your mad foolishness come to nothing and the snare of death crushed in pieces—for I shall surely rise from the dead—ultimately you will be forced, even against your will, to agree with what I said, and you shall confess that I am God by nature. Commentary on the Gospel of John 5.4.

How the Son Is Taught by the Father.

Augustine: Already the Sabellian, i.e., the Patripassian, was beginning to rejoice over the discovery of a ground for his error, but immediately ... he is confounded by the light of the following sentence. You thought that he was the Father, because he said, "I am." Hear now that he is the Son: "And I do nothing of myself." What does this mean, "I do nothing of myself"? I am not of myself. For the Son is God of the Father, but the Father is God yet not of the Son. The Son is God of God, and the Father is God but not of God. The Son is Light of light; and the Father is light but not of light. The Son is, but there is [one] of whom he is; and the Father is, but there is none of whom he is.

Do not then let what follows, "As the Father has taught me, I speak these things," suggest a carnal thought to any of you.... Do not place as it were two men before your eyes, a Father speaking to his son, as you do when you speak to your sons.... How did the Father speak to the Son, seeing that the Son says, "As the Father taught me, I speak these things"? Did he speak to him? When the Father taught the Son, did he use words, as you do when you teach your son? For what words could be spoken to the only Word?... If the Father speaks in your hearts without sound, how does he speak to the Son?... The Father speaks to the Son incorporeally because he begat the Son incorporeally. He did not teach him, as though having begotten him untaught. Rather, the "teaching him" is the "begetting him" knowledge. ... For if the nature of truth is simple, to be, as regards the Son, is the same as to know.... As then the Father gave the Son existence by begetting, so he gave him knowledge also. Tractates on the Gospel of John 40.3–5.

8:29 The Son Always Does What Pleases the Father

The Father Is with the Son.

Augustine: And though both are together, yet one is sent, the other sends. For the mission is the incarnation. And the incarnation is of the Son only, not of the Father.... He says then, "He that sent me," meaning by whose Fatherly authority I am made incarnate. Tractates on the Gospel of John 40.6.

Father and Son Always Together.

Augustine: The Father sent the Son but did not withdraw from him. For there is no way that the Father was not wherever he sent the Son. For is there anywhere the maker of all things could not be who said, "I fill heaven and earth." ... And Christ adds the reason why his Father did not leave him: "For I always do those things that please him." That equality always exists: not from any particular beginning and then onwards, but without beginning and without end. For divine generation has no beginning in time since time itself was created by the Only Begotten. Tractates on the Gospel of John 40.6.

Humility of Jesus' Discourse.

Chrysostom: He means it as an answer to those who were constantly saying that he was not from God because he did not keep the sabbath. "I always do," he says, "those things that please him," showing that even the breaking of the sabbath was pleasing to him.... He takes care in every way to show that he does nothing contrary to the Father. Homilies on the Gospel of John 53.2.

8:30 Many Believed in Jesus

Christ's Humility Persuades Them.

Chrysostom: When he brought his speech down to a more human level, many believed in him. Do you still ask why he spoke so humbly? And yet, the Evangelist clearly alludes to the reason [here], all but proclaiming aloud: Do not be disturbed at hearing so humble a speech from Christ, for those who had heard the greatest doctrines from him and were still not persuaded that he was from the Father were persuaded by these more humble words so that they might believe. This explains why he spoke these things in such a humble way. These then believed on him, yet not as they ought but only because they were pleased with the refreshing humility of his words. The Evangelist, in fact, shows their imperfect faith

in his subsequent narration, which relates their unjust proceedings against him. Homilies on the Gospel of John 53.2.