

The Church of the Servant King

Survey of the Bible Series – The Gospel of John (SB_JN8C_Jesus is the Source of Freedom)

Introduction (8:31-59)

This section of John 8 is an extremely interesting section of Scripture. In this section of John's Gospel, we see Jesus in a dialogue with Jews "who had believed in Him" (v. 31). Yet, there is a struggle to comprehend His teaching. The audience struggles to comprehend the spiritual dimension of His teaching. The audience struggles with a self-righteous paradigm involving their status as children of Abraham – children of the promise. They manifest the emotional revolt present in their souls to His teaching by implying that He was born out of wedlock. They accuse Jesus of having a demon. They even desire to stone Him. With friends like these, no wonder Jesus ended up on a Cross at the hands of His own countrymen!

The question naturally arises from this passage as to whether these people were really believers in the first place. Would true believers manifest such animosity and even hatred of the Lord in Whom they had trusted?

This section of Scripture really breaks down into three major divisions. First, Jesus teaches a principle of discipleship to the Jews who had believed (vv. 31-32). Second, Jesus addresses the emotional arguments of His hearers (vv. 33-58). Third, the reaction of unbelief (v. 59).

The second section of this passage in which Jesus responds to His critics can be divided into sub-sections based upon the particular argument that is being advanced by Jesus' hearers. This section would follow the following outline:

- ❑ The first Jewish argument and Jesus' reply (vv. 33-38) – Spiritual mindset vs. worldly mindset
- ❑ The second Jewish argument and Jesus' reply (vv. 39-40) – Racial superiority and privilege
- ❑ The third Jewish argument and Jesus' reply (vv. 41-47) – Discredit Jesus' message because of His origin
- ❑ The fourth Jewish argument and Jesus' reply (vv. 48-51) – Discredit Jesus' message because of His heritage
- ❑ The fifth Jewish argument and Jesus' reply (vv. 52-58) – Denial of Jesus as the pre-existent Son of God

Jesus Addresses "Those Jews Who Believed Him" (vv. 31-32)

The audience that surrounds Jesus in this setting consists of the Pharisees and religious types who desired to discredit Jesus (8:6, 13) as well as some who believed (v. 30). In verse 31, Jesus addresses those who had believed Him. In verse 31, Jesus attempts to continue the teaching on the Temple grounds early in the morning the day after the conclusion of the Feast of Tabernacles (7:37 cf. 8:2). As proved to be the case on previous occasions when Jesus attempted to teach in Jerusalem, He was constantly interrupted. The question arises as to whether the interruption came from "those Jews who believed Him" (v. 31) or whether the interruption came from unbelievers. There are primarily two interpretations of whether these "believers" that Jesus addressed in verses 31-32 were the ones who argued with Him in the following verses or not.¹

¹ I recognize there are other interpretations of this passage; however, I believe these two to be the most acceptable theologically. I prefer interpretation #2 as I believe it to be better supported by the greater context and setting of the passage. Other interpretations either attempt to impose a view of salvation that is sometimes referred to as back-loading the gospel (i.e. true

Interpretation #1 – The Arguments in Verses 33-58 Came From the “Believers” Jesus Addressed in Verses 31-32 – We know that believers can slip into the degeneracy of the cosmic system of thinking or never repent of certain cosmic thought baggage that they carry over into their new status. If the arguments documented in verses 33-58 came from the believers Jesus addressed in verses 31 & 32, then they would represent those who had accepted a certain amount of Jesus’ teaching, yet they carried so much self-righteous baggage, they remained spiritually blind and were really not believers at all. They had “believed” Jesus’ teaching regarding the kingdom of heaven, yet they had not accepted Him as the Messiah. Furthermore, they had not manifested the repentance and humility necessary for them to possess the kingdom (cf. Matt 5-7). These were believers of that which was personally and nationally beneficial to them, i.e. the restoration of the kingdom to the Jews, yet not believers in Who Jesus claimed to be, i.e. the Son of God and their Messiah. As such, they would never possess the kingdom unless they came to grips with their true spiritual state.

Interpretation #2 – The “Believers” in Verses 31-32 Were a Distinct Group From Those Who Argued With Jesus in Verses 33-58 – This interpretation is based upon a consideration of the larger context of the setting of chapters 7 and 8, i.e. Jesus’ teaching of the common Jewish person during the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles and the following morning while being constantly interrupted by religious unbelievers. This interpretation also recognizes that there were Jews who were believing in Jesus among the commoners (7:31, 39, 40-43; 8:31) while many stood on the sidelines still weighing the evidence or personal cost of believing in the face of the unbelief of the religious leaders.

Regardless of how one chooses to interpret the “believers” of verse 31, Jesus knew that He needed to bring to light any unbelief and hardness of heart that was still present in their lives that would keep God from presenting them with the earthly kingdom after Jesus’ propitiatory death predicted by the earlier writers of Hebrew Scripture (Psa 22; Isa 53 cf. Acts 3:19-21). The kingdom of heaven was “at hand” for the Jewish people if as believers in the gospel of the kingdom they would humble themselves to become disciples of Him. Discipleship would have been manifest by abiding in Jesus’ word (v. 31) which would set them free of spiritual slavery to sin.

Principle: A sound grounding in the Word of God is essential to escaping slavery to sin.

Application: How aggressive are you in your pursuit of the Word of God?

Jesus Addresses the Emotional Arguments of His Hearers (vv. 33-58)

The first Jewish argument and Jesus’ reply (vv. 33-38) – Spiritual mindset vs. worldly mindset

Each of these arguments progressively intensify as Jesus’ responses have the effect of squeezing the poison of cosmic thinking out of their souls. The first interchange merely reveals the cosmic mindset or paradigm within which these religious unbelievers operated. They fail to understand the spiritual perspective from which Jesus taught. Furthermore, their objection is fraught with error, even from their perspective. In their past, the nation of Israel and the Jewish people had been slaves in Egypt, slaves in Assyria, slaves in Chaldea and were presently under the yoke of the Roman empire. In their self-righteous mindset, they clung with pride to the provisions of the Law which provided them, among other things, a vision of freedom that was very rare among ancient cultures (e.g. Lev 25:39-42). They possessed an independent spirit that

belief is manifested by works of discipleship) or reflect an Arminian theology that a believer can lose his salvation. In the former case, the “believers” of verse 31 were not truly believers at all since they did not manifest subsequent works of discipleship. In the latter case, the “believers” of verse 31 lost their salvation due to the subsequent unbelief manifest in their antagonism towards Jesus.

even Rome respected and took great pains to appease. To refer to a Jew as a slave was therefore a great insult.

Of course, Jesus was not referring to physical slavery. Jesus was referring to spiritual slavery – “Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.” We are all born in the slave market of sin. Jesus paid the price to redeem us from the slave market of sin. Only when we accept His work do we have the potential to escape the bondage of sin. Each time we sin, we manifest that we still have a sin nature that dwells within us and we thereby re-subject ourselves to its influence in our lives (Ro 7:14-23). These unbelieving Jews remained in the slave market of sin since they had never accepted Jesus as their redeemer.

In verses 35-36, Jesus used an analogy to illustrate His point. He drew upon the history of the Jews to emphasize the temporary nature of their status of privilege in time. Abraham had a child by Sarah’s handmaiden or slave, Hagar, whose name was Ishmael. He enjoyed residence in Abraham’s house until the promised son from God came – Isaac by Sarah. Once the promised son came, the slave and slave-child were banished from the house of Abraham. In like manner, those who did not have the faith of Abraham were not children of Abraham (v. 39 cf. Ro 9:7-8). Jesus descended directly from Isaac and is sometimes called the seed of Abraham (Gal 3:16). Jesus was warning these Jews that while they may have been physically descended from Abraham and believed that they belonged in God’s house forever, in reality, they were merely slaves and not true children of Abraham because of their unbelief. As such, they would be rejected when the true Son came into His full inheritance, i.e. the Messianic kingdom (cf. Matt 21:33-44; 22:1-14; 23:1-39).

In verses 37-38, Jesus acknowledges that the Jews physically descended from Abraham, but makes the point that this alone doesn’t make them children of God. No true child of God would seek to kill God’s Son. Therefore, their father was not the same as His Father (v. 37).

The second Jewish argument and Jesus’ reply (vv. 39-40) – Racial superiority and privilege

In their self-righteous paradigm, they clung to their racial status as Jews, the children of promise and privilege. Their immediate reaction to Jesus’ statements was rooted in their temporal paradigm.

Jesus’ response differentiates between true sons of Abraham (those who shared the same spiritual faith in God’s promises) and false sons of Abraham (those who were physical descendants of Abraham, but who refused to share Abraham’s faith). The faith of Abraham in God’s promises was the work of Abraham (Gen 15:4-6; 22:18; Ro 4:17-22). The promised seed of Abraham was the Messiah Who the Jews sought to kill. Therefore, they could not be Abraham’s spiritual descendants.

The third Jewish argument and Jesus’ reply (vv. 41-47) – Discredit Jesus’ message because of His origin

The unbelieving Jews attempt to discredit Jesus’ message by discrediting Jesus’ origin. Their logic in effect – “if you say that Abraham is not our father and Abraham is your father, how can that be true since you were born out of wedlock?” Then they call upon their great spiritual insight into their heritage – “we have one Father – God.”

Jesus replies by stating that not only was Abraham not their father, but God was not their father either. Satan was their father because neither Abraham nor God would incite them to kill Abraham’s and God’s Son. This passage is one of Jesus’ most poignant statements regarding the existence and modus operandi of Satan. Jesus acknowledges the devil as a living being with a distinct personality (Lu 4:1-13; 10:18; Jn 14:30).

The fourth Jewish argument and Jesus’ reply (vv. 48-51) – Discredit Jesus’ message because of His heritage

By accusing Jesus of being a Samaritan, they were questioning His claims to be a true child of Abraham. As we have seen in our study of the woman at the well, the Samaritans were despised by the true racial Jew.² In addition, they accused Jesus of being demon possessed. Thus, they had concluded that He was a lunatic Who had delusions of grandeur.

The fifth Jewish argument and Jesus' reply (vv. 52-58) – Denial of Jesus as the pre-existent Son of God

The unbelieving Jews now are certain that Jesus is delusional. Jesus claimed that if they believed in Him, they would not die. Yet, even Abraham and the prophets who they so revered, had died. In reality, even their ancestors had persecuted and rejected the prophets.

Jesus indicates that Abraham would have rejoiced at seeing Jesus' day. In fact, Abraham did see it in faith (Heb 11:17-19). In faith, Abraham had responded to God's promise of a seed (Ge 15; 22:18). Abraham realized that the promised seed of the woman in Genesis 3:15 would come through His lineage as a result of the promises Yahweh had given him. It is possible that when God put Abram a deep sleep (Ge 15:12) and reiterated His promise to Abram that Abram was given a vision of the future Messianic kingdom that included the expansive boundaries of the promised land described in Genesis 15:18-21 which was to be possessed by his descendants. Thus, Abraham did see the Messiah's day through faith and rejoiced (Jn 8:56).

Jesus concludes his response with a clear declaration that He was and is God. Jesus was not just claiming to have lived before Abraham. Jesus was claiming His eternal pre-existence of Abraham. The words "I AM" uttered in such a fashion as Jesus did in verse 58 was a claim to eternal existence. These words were used by Jesus on many occasions; however, on this occasion, there is absolutely no doubt as to His intended reference to God's reply to Moses in Exodus 3:13-14.

Then Moses said to God, "Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they say to me, 'What is His name?' what shall I say to them?" And God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM," And He said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

The Reaction of Unbelief (v. 59)

The religious unbelievers took Jesus' statements to be tantamount to blasphemy. In accordance with the Mosaic Law's provisions for blasphemy (Lev 24:16), they took up stones to kill Him. They proved no better than their ancestors (cf. Matt 22:1-14). Furthermore, many of the same group would probably be part of the same crowd that would stone Stephen (Acts 7:57-58).

² The Jews despised Samaria so much that they avoided it if possible by going around it along the Jordan River on the east side. Samaria was the central region between Judea in the south and Galilee in the north. When the northern kingdom was exiled to Assyria in 722 B.C., Samaria was repopulated with captives from other Gentile nations (2 Ki 17:24-34). The Jews who had been left behind in the land intermarried with these Gentiles. The result was a half-breed race that remained and became despised by the Jews of the captivity who later returned in the days of Ezra. These Jews even refused to allow the Samaritans to participate in the rebuilding of the Temple at Jerusalem (Ezra 4). This resulted in the Samaritans' development of a syncretistic mixture of worship of heathen gods, Yahweh, and the Law of Moses (2 Ki 17:41). Sources consulted include J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 130-139; Charles F. Baker, *Understanding the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Grace Publications, 1978), 53-57; Earl D. Radmacher, *The Nelson Study Bible* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997), footnotes 1765-7.