



# IMMANUEL BAPTIST CHURCH

**SERIES: JOHN (GOSPEL OF TRUTH)**

**LESSON: ULTIMATE ANCESTRY**

**JOHN 8:39-59**

**JUNE 20, 2021**

## MAIN POINT

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Jesus is the Great I AM. Anyone who keeps his word about himself, will not see death.

## JOHN CONTEXT

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Every lesson's purpose: "but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." John 20:31

Our lesson today, picks up mid-conversation between Jesus and some Jews. John identifies these Jews as those who seemed to "believed in [Jesus]" (8:31). However, Jesus appears to probe into the nature of their belief. It seems like Jesus questions whether they believe the true nature about Himself. Do they really know who Jesus says he is? Will they really abide by everything that he says about himself?

It makes sense that Jesus would question the true nature of their belief. After all, on numerous occasions the Jews have sought to kill Jesus (John 5:18; 7:1). In fact, Jesus referenced the desire for the Jews to take his life in John 8:37, a few verses prior to our passage today.

Yet the way the discussion unfolds with the Jews may seem strange to us. The dialogue centers around whether the Jews are true descendants of Abraham or not. In many of the Jews' minds, they considered themselves saved because they were *physical* descendants of Abraham. After all, in their minds, they were God's chosen people through a promise made to Abraham (Gen. 12:2; 15:5-6). However, Jesus draws a distinction between *true* children of Abraham versus *perceived* children of Abraham. In Jesus' thinking a person is a true child of Abraham if they act like Abraham. In this sense, Abraham is not just a *physical* father, but a *spiritual* father. Jesus concludes that since the Jews are seeking to kill Jesus, then Abraham must not their true spiritual father, since Abraham looked forward to Jesus' coming (8:56).

Having this conversation between Jesus and the Jews about true fatherhood will help us understand our passage today. If Abraham is not the true father of the Jews, then who is their spiritual father?

## INTRODUCTION

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Who is Jesus?

On two occasions in John 8, Jews ask Jesus, "Who are you?" In John 8:24, Jesus warns some Jews if they do not believe in him, then they will die in their sins. In response, the Jews asked, "Who are you?"

At the end of the chapter in John 8:53, some Jews antagonistically asked Jesus, "Who do you make yourself out to be?"

These two questions help us frame the purpose of the chapter. Who really is Jesus?

**So. Who is Jesus? Can you try to answer that question succinctly in 2 or 3 sentences?**

**Can you list different names or titles that we associate with Jesus? As a group could you list 10? Maybe 20?**

What I am about to say may seem like hyperbole or exaggeration, but the question, “Who is Jesus?” is the *most* important question. And finding the answer to this question has the most significant of consequences.

## **EXPLANATION // ...believe Jesus is the Christ...**

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Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says.

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 8:39-47**

What follows between Jesus and the Jews is a question over who is their father? The Jews claimed Abraham as their father. And with that came a sense of perceived spiritual entitlement. But Jesus chose to distinguish between two understandings of fatherhood. In one sense a person has a *physical* father or ancestor. This physical father is biological. But Jesus added another perspective about fatherhood, that being spiritual. And Jesus questioned them on whether Abraham was really their spiritual father. Now... physically, these Jews were indeed descendants from Abraham, but spiritually they were acting opposite of Abraham.

Jesus reasoned with them, “If you were Abraham’s children, you would be doing the works Abraham did, but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did” (8:39-40). So, instead of doing the works of Abraham, Jesus tells them they are doing the works of their father, that is, their “true” spiritual father. But even as he refers to their “father,” he does not tell them who he thinks their father is. In essence, Jesus sort of leave them with a cliffhanger.

Sensing that Jesus was alluding to spiritual fatherhood, the Jews defend themselves by claiming sonship from God himself. They say, “We were not born of sexual immorality, we have one Father—even God” (8:41). This may seem like an odd statement to us. What are they trying to claim?

Most likely they are claiming that God is their spiritual father on the basis that they have honored the biblical command to not commit sexual immorality by intermarrying with other nations. In the Jews’ minds, they honored God by not intermarrying as opposed to Samaritans who were a mixed race. This understanding makes sense in light of the Jews calling Jesus a Samaritan in verse 48. As has been described in both Dr. Smith’s sermons and in the curriculum, the Jews and Samaritans shared animosity between each other. One of the biggest reasons for the strife was because Samaritans were a mixed race of Jews and other nations. In the Jews’ minds, the Samaritans were not considered true descendants of Abraham. So, when on the topic of who the Jews’ father was, they thought they could claim God as their spiritual father because they avoided intermarrying with other nations.

Yet Jesus directs their focus to something greater than intermarrying. More essential for claiming God to be their father is in how they treat the Father's Son. It is here that Jesus drops a condemning blow to the Jews. Jesus says in verse 43-44, "Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil and your will is to do your father's desires. . ." Ouch!!!

Jesus pointedly reasoned with them that because they are trying to kill him, their behavior follows that of the devil, the one who was a murderer from the beginning.

Here lies one reason why the Jews had such a hard time understanding Jesus' claims about himself. Throughout the Gospel of John, Jesus has made explicit statements about his relationship to God the Father. Yet the Gospel of John records often the inability of the Jews to really understand Jesus' claims. These verses in John 8:43-45 explain the reason many Jews were unable to understand—they were just like their father the devil. Just like the Satan denies the truth, so too the Jews were denying the truth of Jesus. Just like the devil is a murderer, so too, the Jews were seeking to kill Jesus.

**To you does Jesus' words seem harsh or gentle? Antagonistic or truth in love?**

**If you were in the audience the day Jesus spoke these words, do you think you would have been receptive? Why or why not?**

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 8:48-59**

The sharp words of Jesus must have been hard to swallow for the Jews. Admittedly, I'm not sure how I'd react if someone told me my father was the devil.

As expected, the Jews pushed back against Jesus. They respond by accusing Jesus of being a Samaritan and demon possessed. Their language almost comes across as a childish response: "No I am not, but you are!" Jesus had told them their father was the devil and they replied by saying that he must be demon possessed. Simply put, they are calling the Son of God a demon. They are exchanging the truth about God for a lie (Rom. 1:21-23).

Evidently, the devil had a secure hold on them. After all, they called the Christ demon possessed, perhaps the equivalent of saying that the devil was His master/father.

In response, Jesus affirms to them he is not demon possessed, nor is the devil his master/father. Quite the opposite: Jesus honors the Father and in turn the Father honors him. The Father too seeks to glorify the Son.

Jesus adds that his Father “is the judge [and] if anyone keeps [his] words, he will never see death” (8:51). In essence Jesus says his Father will judge the Jews based on whether they believe the words of his Son. The judgment, Jesus says, will be death for those who deny the Son.

Yet, Jesus’ words did not convince the Jews. The Jews understood the implications of what Jesus said. They realized Jesus implied that he will never die. So they further solidify their conclusion that he was demon-possessed or crazy. In their minds, how could Jesus say “if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.”? Following the statements logical conclusion, the Jews realize that if Jesus could allow others to escape death, then he must be claiming to be better than Abraham and the prophets, because they experienced death. So they asked antagonistically “Are you greater than Abraham, who died? And the prophets who died! WHO DO YOU MAKE YOURSELF OUT TO BE?” (8:53)

Within the dialogue, it feels as if Jesus has them right where he wants them.

Jesus does not immediately answer the question. Prior to answering, he first clarifies that his answer will be supported by his Father and that he cannot lie. His Father, Jesus communicates, gives evidence for the answer he is about to give. Thus, Jesus says, that he doesn’t glorify himself, but his Father does glorify him. This would had been done through the miracles Jesus was performing. Jesus also explains that he cannot lie. If he did lie, Jesus explains, then he would be like the Jews themselves, who claimed God as father but who contradict themselves by lying.

In verse 56, Jesus leads the Jews on with one final comment before explicitly answering who he is. Jesus says, “Your father rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.” By using the word “father” Jesus is referring to Abraham. Here he is using “father’ in the sense of physical not spiritual. And in a temporal sense, he told them that Abraham looked forward to Jesus and indeed, saw him and was glad.

Being led on without realizing it, the Jews responded, “You are not yet fifty years old. And have you seen Abraham?” (8:57). In essence, the Jews question how Jesus could have seen someone who lived a few millenniums prior.

Having set the Jews up, Jesus now answers explicitly: “Truly, Truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am” (8:58). This statement’s significance cannot be overstated. With it, Jesus is claiming to be God. He identifies himself as the Great I Am—the name that God gave to Moses when Moses asked, “What is [you] name?”(Ex. 3:13). And God replied, “I AM WHO I AM.” And he said, ‘Say to the people of Israel, I AM has sent me to you.’” Indeed, Jesus was calling himself God!

And the Jews understood exactly what he was saying. For “they picked up stones to throw at him” (8:59). In the Jews’ minds, Jesus was committing blasphemy which was punishable by death. At the end of the day, the Jews by desiring to kill Jesus further proves his point—that they are children of the devil. Just as the devil is a murderer, so too, the Jews were attempting to murder Jesus. Ironically, even in their disagreement with what Jesus was saying about himself and them, they prove that Jesus was right by throwing stones at him.

**Jesus made a distinction from a physical father and a spiritual father. How does one get to have God as their spiritual Father?**

**Do you think a person can say they believe in Jesus and also deny that he is God—the Great I AM? Why or why not? Do you know any religions who esteem Jesus but do not consider him to be God?**

## **APPLICATION // ...have life in His name.**

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Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**People may reject Jesus for a variety of reasons. One reason according to our passage is stated in verse 47: “The reason why you do not hear [my words] is that you are not of God.” What do you think enables a person to truly hear?**

**In conjunction with the previous question, is there anything you can do to help someone truly hear?**

**If a five-year old were to ask you, “Who is Jesus?”, how might you answer?**

## **PRAYER**

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Close in prayer, asking God to press this truth that was studied.