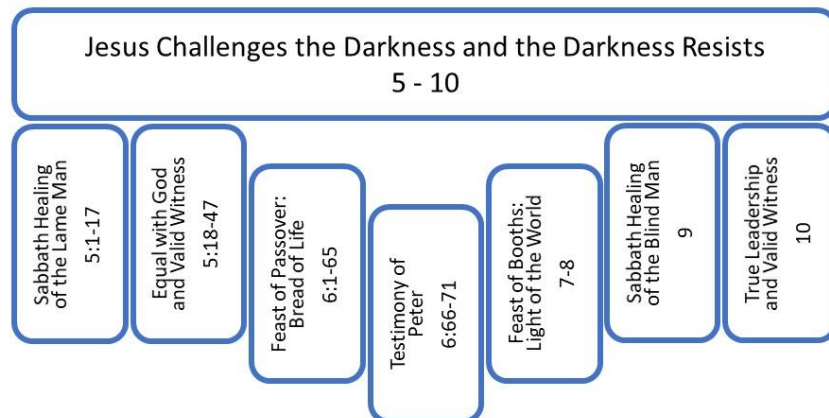


## Lesson 16: John 8:12-59 The Feast of Booths and the Light of the World

### Introduction



If we accept that the story of the woman brought to Jesus to be judged in 7:53-8:11 is a passage not original to John's manuscript, a passage in search of a home, then the text of John 8:12, "Again therefore Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the World'" continues the ongoing debate about Jesus at this Feast of Booths in Jerusalem.

So, we need to remind ourselves of the background to the Feast of Booths that we talked about in chapter 7. Nehemiah 9 was likely read aloud to the people, with reference to the Holy Spirit and water in the wilderness. Zechariah 14 was also read with reference to the future time of the Messiah when light would shine out from Jerusalem day and night and a river of water would flow from her.

By the time of Jesus these Old Testament texts had been worked into the celebration of the Feast of Booths with a procession every morning, taking water from the pool of Siloam to the temple to remind of God's provision of water and the future promise of the Spirit. And every evening four great candelabra were lit in the court of women in the temple, to symbolize that everlasting light that would one day shine in Jerusalem.

So, in this context of a daily water procession and daily lighting of great lights, Jesus stood up and declared,

If any man is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the Scripture said, "From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water (John 7:37-38)."

I am the light of the world; he who follows me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life (John 8:12).

Yes! This is Jesus. The people of Jerusalem would have heard him saying these things from the perspective of the present feast. The river of water, the everlasting light. I fulfill the symbolism of the feast!

Jesus' brothers do not need to worry about his courage to proclaim himself publicly.

But will people listen? Will they understand? Let's see.

### Structure

The text of 7 and 8 is chiastic. I am not going to follow that structure in this lesson because we are just in chapter 8. But I want you to know about it. The parallel terms of the chiasm bring order to the whole account of Jesus' teaching in Jerusalem at this particular Feast of Booths. And it shows us that chapters 7 and 8 are meant to be considered as one whole. They are meant to be considered all together.

## Chiastic structure of Jesus at the Feast of Booths in John 7 and 8

### A 7:18 Glory

B 7:19-20 Moses ... seek to kill me ... You have a demon

C 7:34 Where I am, you cannot come

D 7:36 You will seek me ... where I am, you cannot come

E 7:38 Living water

X 7:40-52 Debate regarding the nature of Jesus

E' 8:12 Light of the world

D' 8:21 You will seek me ... where I am going, you cannot come

C' 8:22 Where I am going you cannot come

B' 8:40, 48 Seeking to kill me ... Abraham ... you have a demon

### A' 8:54 Glory

So, the passage begins and ends with reference to glory. At the beginning in John 7:18, "He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who is seeking the glory of the One who sent Him, He is true, and there is no unrighteousness in Him." And then at the end in 8:54, "If I glorify Myself, My glory is nothing; it is My Father who glorifies Me, of whom you say, 'He is our God';" This idea of the Father's glory that stands out as A and A' contrasts the earthly strategy of the brothers who urged Jesus to go up and make a name for himself at the feast. Jesus is glorious. His glory will be revealed. But he does not act out of a motive for self-glorification. He acts out of a motive for the Father's glory.

Then in B we get a series of three things, a reference to Moses, the charge by Jesus that the people are seeking to kill him and the countercharge that Jesus has a demon. That's in 7:19-20. On the other side in B' 8:40 and 48, we get a similar series with reference to Abraham, a repeat of the charge by Jesus that the people are seeking to kill him and a repeat of the countercharge that Jesus has a demon.

C and C' repeat the language, "Where I am going you cannot come." That is first in 7:34 and then again in 8:22.

D and D' is similar to that, repeating language, "You will seek me, but where I am you cannot come." That is in 7:36 and again in 8:21.

Then for E and E', our innermost frame, we have paralleled the two great claims of Jesus about being the source of water in 7:38 and light in 8:12. Jesus is not seeking his own glory. That was established in our outermost frame. But in this innermost frame, we recognize he is indeed glorious. From him comes water and light; life and truth.

In the center of the chiasm, 7:40-52 we find the debate by the people concerning whether Jesus is the Christ and the rejection of such an idea by the religious leaders. Who is this Jesus? Could he be the Christ? Certainly not!

So, if you have ever read these chapters and thought you noticed ideas repeating, you are correct. You did. And I am not going to follow that chiastic structure in this lesson. Since we are just focusing on chapter 8, I am going to follow the flow of just that chapter. And I have divided it into two major parts. There is a statement in the middle that many believe in Jesus, that is in verse 30, so that will be our hinge verse. So, everything up to that verse in 12-30 is part I. The first part of the conversation. And everything after is part II. In part I Jesus shines light on his own nature. In part II he shines light on those who claim to believe.

## Part I Jesus shines the light on himself (8:12-30).

I am going to read the whole text.

### John 8:12

<sup>12</sup> Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, “I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.”

<sup>13</sup> So the Pharisees said to Him, “You are testifying about Yourself; Your testimony is not true.”

<sup>14</sup> Jesus answered and said to them, “Even if I testify about Myself, My testimony is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going; but you do not know where I come from or where I am going. <sup>15</sup> You judge according to the flesh; I am not judging anyone. <sup>16</sup> But even if I do judge, My judgment is true; for I am not alone *in it*, but I and the Father who sent Me. <sup>17</sup> Even in your law it has been written that the testimony of two men is true. <sup>18</sup> I am He who testifies about Myself, and the Father who sent Me testifies about Me.”

<sup>19</sup> So they were saying to Him, “Where is Your Father?”

Jesus answered, “You know neither Me nor My Father; if you knew Me, you would know My Father also.” <sup>20</sup> These words He spoke in the treasury, as He taught in the temple; and no one seized Him, because His hour had not yet come. <sup>21</sup> Then He said again to them, “I go away, and you will seek Me, and will die in your sin; where I am going, you cannot come.”

<sup>22</sup> So the Jews were saying, “Surely He will not kill Himself, will He, since He says, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come?’”

<sup>23</sup> And He was saying to them, “You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world. <sup>24</sup> Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am *He*, you will die in your sins.”

<sup>25</sup> So they were saying to Him, “Who are You?”

Jesus said to them, “What have I been saying to you *from the beginning*? <sup>26</sup> I have many things to speak and to judge concerning you, but He who sent Me is true; and the things which I heard from Him, these I speak to the world.” <sup>27</sup> They did not realize that He had been speaking to them about the Father. <sup>28</sup> So Jesus said, “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am *He*, and I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me. <sup>29</sup> And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him.”

<sup>30</sup> As He spoke these things, many came to believe in Him.

In this first part, I have three key texts to center in on.

1. The first is our beginning verse 8:12. “I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in darkness but will have the Light of life.” He who follows will not walk in darkness. The kind of following Jesus means is a following of submission to him as the revealer of truth. It includes following with the mind to accept what Jesus teaches and following with behavior that lives out what Jesus teaches. That kind of following results in an experience of Jesus as the light of life. The follower receives the light of truth, receives understanding that leads to life.

What we see in the following dialogue is a group of people walking in darkness who refuse to submit to Jesus. They will not go where he is leading. And so, they continue to walk in darkness.

We need to interpret the words of Jesus in this dialogue as one whose perspective comes from one vantage point and the words of the Pharisees as those whose perspective comes from a very different vantage point. Jesus’ perspective is also as the one who is with God and is in eternal relationship with God. He is the one who uniquely reveals God. He is the Son who fellowships at the table of the Father who shares close relationship. Jesus sees everything from this vantage point, so his perspective is true.

The Pharisees interpret things from the vantage point of human reason and human law and human desire. Their sight is limited and skewed. The dialogue begins as from the human vantage point of law, with the Pharisees rejecting the testimony of Jesus as untrue because of a lack of witnesses to corroborate his claims. The law says you need two witnesses. Your words cannot be true.

But Jesus is the light. He is the source of truth. He is from heaven. There is no one and can be no one to corroborate his claims. He is the one who must self-witness. A man cannot shine a light on the light to prove that it is light. The light is the light. So, Jesus says, "My testimony is true for I know where I come from and where I am going." And he points out the problem of their vantage point. "You judge according to the flesh." That includes the limits of human flesh, limited knowledge and limited reasoning ability, but also includes the twisted values of human flesh. They do not evaluate rightly because they are self-deceived. And they are certainly not objective. They cannot evaluate Jesus rightly.

When Jesus says, "I judge no one," we have to again take care to pay attention to his point. We have to remember from back in chapter 5 that all authority has been given to him to judge. He is not saying he will never judge anybody. And in verse 26, we have to notice that he says, "I have much to say about you and much to judge." That Jesus does not judge at this point of the conversation, has to be qualified with something. It may mean he does not judge from the vantage point of the world as the Pharisees do. Or perhaps it means that even though Jesus would judge that is not what he is doing at the moment. He is now not judging them. Instead, he is giving them witness to what is true.

Jesus goes on to play by their rules. He goes on to claim himself and the Father as valid witnesses. He makes the point that he is the one whose self-witness is the truth, verse 18, "I am the one who bears witness of Myself." And that is a valid point if you are indeed the light. And they sort of let that slide. I do not think they would allow that in a court of law that a person is a self-witness. But they give him that. He also says that the Father gives him witness. But here we see the refusal of his opponents to consider the spiritual reality of God as his Father. They are going to stick on the literal, the worldly. They want the witness to be produced. "Who is your Father? Show him. Bring him."

Jesus tells them, and he said this before, "You know neither Me nor My Father; if you knew Me, you would know My Father." This is a point Jesus made, and it is a point he is going to make again. Knowledge of God is tied so tightly to Jesus that if you truly know the Father then you will acknowledge the Son. There is no one who truly knows God as Father and rejects Jesus. And if in fact, you come to know the Son, then by knowing the Son, you know the Father. Rejection of the Son shows that you do not know the Father and can never know the Father until you accept the Son. If you do not see the Father in the Son, you cannot see the Father at all.

Our first key verse indicates the theme we need to recognize throughout this dialogue. Jesus is the light of the world. To see, we must follow him. If we are not willing to submit to his teachings, we will continue on in the dark.

2. We are coming up on the second key verse in verse 24. In the lead up starting in verse 21 Jesus returns to the point he had made earlier in the chapter 7, that he is going away and though they seek, they cannot follow. But Jesus adds here something that is not in chapter 7. He tells them they cannot come and because of that, they are going to die in their sins. They need to go where Jesus is going. Jesus has raised the stakes.

In chapter 7, they wondered if going away meant going outside Israel to teach Jews in the diaspora. But now that Jesus has brought in the idea of death into it, they start wondering if he is talking about killing himself. Is that what he means by saying we cannot follow? And they are not far off. But it is not Jesus who is going to take his own life. They are going to take his life.

In verse 23, Jesus restates the problem of vantage point, “You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world.” They judge by the flesh as those from a lower, worldly vantage point, walking in a valley of darkness. That is why they do not get what he is saying and that is why they cannot follow him.

Now we get our second key verse in 8:24, “I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins.”

I assume you caught the key word “believe” in that text, a key word to John. But what are they supposed to believe? English translations try to clarify it by translating the text like this, “unless you believe that I am he.” But the Greek does not say it clearly like that, and it would do better to stick with the literal Greek even if it is a little ambiguous. The text should state, “unless you believe that I am” not “that I am he.” The “he” is added. The “he” is not in the Greek. And it is intended to clarify, but it does the opposite. Jesus statement is meant to stand as an absolute “I am statement.” We have already had two up to this point in the Gospel of John, and there are two more coming in this chapter. So, this is our third I am statement.

Jesus is saying, “You must believe that I am.” I am what? Simply I am. You must believe I am. Well, who is I am? The name God gave Moses in Exodus 3:14, Yahweh, means “I am who I am.” The reference here could be pointing right back to that in Exodus, especially in light of our Exodus references in the prologue regarding the name of God. Or the reference here could be pointing to several references in Isaiah 40-55 (Isaiah 41:4; 43:10, 13, 25; 46:4; 48:12), all of which, state “I am he” in the Hebrew, but in the Greek Septuagint, the official translation by the Jews of the Old Testament into Greek, the Greek uses the same language as John does here. And it simply say “I am”. This is how Isaiah 43:10 would read from the Greek version.

<sup>10</sup> “You are My witnesses,” declares the Lord, So that you may know and believe Me Before Me there was no God formed,	“And My servant whom I have chosen, And understand that I am. And there will be none after Me.
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The phrase I am would have been blasphemous to listening Jews if they understood the reference clearly. They do not here. They want Jesus to fill in the blank. You say that we must believe you are. What do you mean by that? “Who are you?”

3. We come to the third key verse in 8:28, “Jesus said, ‘When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am.’” This is the fourth absolute “I am” declaration. It is also John’s second reference to the Son of Man being lifted up. There are going to be three of those. And these statements are called the irony of John because the language to lift up is befitting a king and implies that he will be lifted up with praises and exalted in glory. And that certainly applies to Jesus. He is king and he deserves to be praised and lifted up. But the first lifting up of Jesus referred to in John 3:14 indicates that it is a lifting up on a pole, like the bronze serpent in the wilderness. The lifting up of Jesus is not a lifting up with praise, because he is going to be lifted up on a cross. The intent is to shame him. The result is his glory. And is the irony. The glory of God is displayed through the willing sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. This is where his unmovable justice meets his unconditional love. The glory of God is that he takes sin so seriously and yet is so moved by love so astounding that he himself would take our place on a cross. That our king would die for us. He is a glorious king. Unexpected glory.

So, the people ask, “Who are you?” Jesus responds, you will know that I am when you lift me up on a cross. He does not say you will know who I am. He says you will know that I am. You will know that I am God. The cross will reveal my very nature, my glory, my name. The name I am. Not all will see and know. But many will see and know.

They need a new perspective from a new vantage point if they are ever going to understand who Jesus is. Jesus is speaking as the one who was sent down from outside. From the vantage point of the Father, he takes in everything there is to see and to know. His perspective is true. He makes things known. The cross is going to be essential for us in truly understanding who he is.

Now, in verse 30 we are told, “As he spoke these things, many came to believe in him.”

At first, I just want to say, “Amen!” It seems like he is not getting through to anybody. Nobody understands what he is talking about. And at the end of the dialogue, “Many came to believe in him.”

This concludes the first part of our passage. Jesus reveals who he is. But mostly the people interacting with him are unwilling to submit and so, continue on in darkness.

We ought to be surprised that many believe. We might ought wonder about their belief. In the second part of the dialogue Jesus is going to shine light on these who claim to believe.

### **Part II Jesus shines the light on those who claim to believe (8:31-59)**

Part II is 8:31-39. It consists of 7 statements by Jesus, each with a response from the crowd. Rather than read this back and forth dialogue through all at once from 31-59, instead, I am going to comment as we go.

*1<sup>st</sup> statement and response*

The first statement is well known, John 8:31-32,

<sup>31</sup> So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, “If you continue in My word, *then you are truly disciples of Mine;* <sup>32</sup> *and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.*”

This is one of those verses that we love. I love this verse. We should. Jesus clarifies this truth about true faith that has come up before. Those who really believe seek to know the Word of Jesus, so they can live by it. That point was made with the Samaritans who asked Jesus to stay and teach them. It was made in chapter 6 when Jesus taught about eating his flesh and drinking his blood but many refused to abide in his word, so they left. They were not true disciples. But Peter, testifying, “Where are we going to go? You have words of eternal life.” And he stayed along with twelve and eleven of them were true disciples. The light of Jesus makes us free when we receive his word and do it.

We love this verse. But the crowd, not so much. It is surprising, because he is talking to those who said they believed. But when he implies that they need to be set free, they don’t like it. We quote this and expect people to like it. They offense. The more Jesus reveals about the state of their hearts the more offended they are going to become. Are these the ones who just believed? Or is this the crowd gathered around? Who is getting so offended at Jesus? And I think John leaves that ambiguous on purpose. He has Jesus speaking directly to those who believe. But I think we can imagine, it is these who believe plus the crowd that is around them. And so, some of those who believe certainly do not truly believe.

In 2:23 when many believed and Jesus recognized the belief as spurious he did not entrust himself to them. Here, Jesus also notices a problem with those who claim to believe, but instead of pulling back, he pokes into their heart.

The truth will set you free. But it is not just any truth. It is hard truth about you. It is a truth that jabs deep into the heart. It jabs at your self-made identity. It brings into question that which you consider good about yourself or that valuable about yourself. Whatever words that you use to identify who you are, your denomination, your country, your state, your last name, your best achievements, your gifts, abilities, personality, all that is secondary and beside the point. That is not your true identity. Jesus reveals who you truly are, and it is really not pleasant.

This group does not want to receive the truth Jesus has for them. They hold on to their own ethnic, religious identity. And so, in the end, they are not set free.

Their first response is in 8:33.

<sup>33</sup> They answered Him, *“We are Abraham’s descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, ‘You will become free?’”*

So, they take offense that he said the truth will set you free. They are like, “We don’t need to be set free. We are free. What do you mean we need to be set free? Are you calling us sinful? What are you saying about us?” It sounds like an ironic response. The most important historical moment celebrated in the history of these Jews is their release from 400 years of slavery in Egypt. “We have never been enslaved!” Really? It is also part of their current identity since for the past 600 years they have been under a series of rulers, Babylon, then Persia, then Greece, and now Rome. The end of the Psalm in Nehemiah 9 – I found this interesting – the Psalm I have been saying that was read out at the Feast of Booths laments this very fact,

<sup>36</sup> Behold, we are slaves today,  
And as to the land which You gave to our fathers to eat of its fruit and its bounty,  
Behold, we are slaves in it.

<sup>37</sup> Its abundant produce is for the kings  
Whom You have set over us because of our sins;  
They also rule over our bodies  
And over our cattle as they please,  
So we are in great distress.

So, they know they are slaves. But what do they mean by insisting, “We have never yet been enslaved to anyone”? Whatever they are saying is connected to their self-identity as children of Abraham. They know they have been slaves. But they may be saying, but not really or not by nature. This was an idea that some people are born naturally as slaves. But they are saying, “That is not us. We are children of the promise. We are descended of Abraham. We have high blood. We are children of special status.”

*2<sup>nd</sup> statement and response*

But in the second statement Jesus pokes deeper. Verses 34-39,

<sup>34</sup> Jesus answered them, *“Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. <sup>35</sup> ‘The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever. <sup>36</sup> So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. <sup>37</sup> I know that you are Abraham’s descendants; yet you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you. <sup>38</sup> I speak the things which I have seen with My Father; therefore you also do the things which you heard from your father.”*

Jesus clarifies, “I am speaking about the slavery to sin, and it does apply to you. You are not by nature good or by nature extra special. Because you do sinful things. Because of that you are a slave to sin. You need the free Son to set you free.” His specific example of sin is their hatred of him. And, at first, that does not seem to apply to those who have just believed. They believe. They want to follow. They don’t hate him. Well, do they not? Wait until we get to the end of the chapter. They believed in a definition of Jesus that is not Jesus. And as Jesus reveals himself further, the more clear the biblical truth becomes, the more offensive that truth becomes to sinful man. As long as that truth is kept at a distance and is screened through worldly values... You know for example this idea that Jesus never judges. And the world loves Jesus as long as we can say he never judges. Jesus doesn’t judge homosexuality. Jesus doesn’t judge adultery. Jesus doesn’t judge whatever I am doing. Because Jesus would not do that. Because Jesus came to save, and Jesus forgives. Well of course there is no

opposition to that kind of Jesus, the Jesus who permits me to do whatever I want and then forgives me for it. That is a great Jesus for the world. It is in line with the values of the world. It is just not Jesus. And so, when we reveal what Jesus truly believes about our sin, then he becomes more offensive. And here Jesus is telling them, “Your true nature, you are a slave by nature, not in the way the world classifies it that there are low born human beings who are slaves and high born human beings who are not, that is totally false, you are all slaves. Because you all sin. And you are slaves to that sin. Yes, you are descended from Abraham. But that does not change anything. You ultimately have a different father.” And when he says that, he draws forth a simple response.

<sup>39</sup> They answered and said to Him, “Abraham is our father.”

*3<sup>d</sup> statement and response*

To that Jesus makes a third statement.

Jesus said to them, “If you are Abraham’s children, do the deeds of Abraham. <sup>40</sup> But as it is, you are seeking to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God; this Abraham did not do. <sup>41</sup> You are doing the deeds of your father.”

Jesus had similarly challenged their claim to follow Moses in chapter 7. If you do you will receive me. If you follow Moses, you are going to rejoice in me. It is the same with Abraham. Abraham was given a promise that through his seed all the nations would be blessed. Abraham had his own struggles but concerning this he never wavered. He held on to the promise. If you are following the example of Abraham, if you really are his children, you should receive me as the one who fulfills the promise. But again, Jesus indicates that your true nature reveals that you really follow a different father.

To this they respond,

“We were not born of fornication; we have one Father: God.”

I am pretty sure this is making it personal. This sounds like a reference to the questionable birth of Jesus. Mary became pregnant during her betrothal. And if Jesus wants to talk about having a father and a different father and he claims that Abraham is not really our father, “Well, you were born of fornication. We have one Father: God.” They are getting upset and they are getting personal. They even raise this importance of their own self-understanding. “Not only are we descendants of Abraham, our Father is God.” And presumably they are depending on the biblical texts that speak of Israel as God’s son. So, they have got Bible to back them up.

*4<sup>th</sup> statement and response*

But in his 4<sup>th</sup> statement Jesus rejects that claim.

<sup>42</sup> Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me. <sup>43</sup> Why do you not understand what I am saying? *It is* because you cannot hear My word. <sup>44</sup> You are of *your* father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *nature*, for he is a liar and the father of lies. <sup>45</sup> But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me. <sup>46</sup> Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me? <sup>47</sup> He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear *them*, because you are not of God.”

If we do not follow this closely, we might think that Jesus is also getting personal. They say he is of fornication, and he says your father is the devil. But Jesus is serious. Jesus is saying, “Your father really is the devil.” He rejects the presumed relationship they have on God. They might rightly look to God as the originator of Israel and that Israel came about by the promises of God and exist under the promises of God. But Jesus rejects past history as a basis for present relationship. The question is not about the



history of Israel or even the future promises to Israel, but the state of each Jewish heart towards God. No one who truly knows the Father rejects the Son. And yet, that is what they are doing. Jesus tells them, "You are self-deceived. Your behavior implies that you belong to a different kind of spiritual father." And then he just comes out and names that father. "You look a lot more like Satan than God. Your twisting of the truth, your desire to have me killed that matches Satan's plan for Jesus."

Satan hated God's plan for humanity from the beginning. He tempted the first couple away from God, murderously initiating death through the first Adam. He is a deceiver. He is a murderer. And then when Jesus came as a second Adam to set right the failure of the first, Satan tries to deceive him, to tempt him in the wilderness by twisting the word of God in order to maintain a reign of death over mankind. He is a deceiver. He deceives in order to kill. And in their opposition to Jesus, these Jews are acting in line with Satan's agenda. They want to hold on to their perceived freedom so much that they are willing to twist the words of Jesus, but the result is death.

Jesus ends this statement challenging his opponents to make a reasoned objection against him. Don't make it personal. If I am not from God, "which one of you convicts me of sin?" Bring forth your accusations. Bring witnesses. Let us reason together. Put me on trial. What sin have you seen me commit?

But being beyond reason they respond with an even more personal attack.

<sup>48</sup> The Jews answered and said to Him, "Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?"

Jews and Samaritans both made up stories to disparage the origin of the other people. D. A. Carson writes that these Jews may be referring to a Samaritan slander that Satan seduced Eve to bear Cain from whom came all the Jews. And that was the Samaritans putting down the Jews. And it may be that in this exchange, hearing Jesus tell them their spiritual father is Satan, that some Jews linked this to the false charge of Samaritans. And so, by labeling Jesus as a Samaritan, they don't have to pay any attention to anything he is saying. They just disparage him with this label. It is like calling somebody a Nazi. You call them a Nazi you don't have to talk about what they are talking about. You just give them this really negative label and it kind of puts them off to the side. So, they are like, "Okay. You are a Samaritan and you have a demon."

*5<sup>th</sup> statement and response*

There is a fifth exchange.

<sup>49</sup> Jesus answered, "I do not have a demon; but I honor My Father, and you dishonor Me. <sup>50</sup> But I do not seek My glory; there is One who seeks and judges. <sup>51</sup> Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he will never see death."

As Jesus said from the start, "Follow me, keep my word, and you will be set free, set free from sin and death."

<sup>52</sup> The Jews said to Him, "Now we know that You have a demon. Abraham died, and the prophets *also*; and You say, 'If anyone keeps My word, he will never taste of death.' <sup>53</sup> Surely You are not greater than our father Abraham, who died? The prophets died too; whom do You make Yourself out to be?"

They hear Jesus. And Jesus is saying that he has the power to free them from death. And in this case, their response makes sense from their vantage point. Yes, Abraham and the prophets all did die. But Jesus is not speaking of physical death. He is speaking of spiritual death. And yes, in fact, Jesus is greater than Abraham and the prophets. You heard right. His claim indicates that he is much greater than these.

*6th statement and response*

Moving on to the sixth statement,

<sup>54</sup> Jesus answered, “If I glorify Myself, My glory is nothing; it is My Father who glorifies Me, of whom you say, ‘He is our God’; <sup>55</sup> and you have not come to know Him, but I know Him; and if I say that I do not know Him, I will be a liar like you, but I do know Him and keep His word. <sup>56</sup> Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw *it* and was glad.”

<sup>57</sup> So the Jews said to Him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?”

So, they push him. They want to say, “Who are you making yourself out to be?” And Jesus is completely comfortable with his own self-identity. “I am not making myself out to be anybody. I am not lifting myself up in glory. I am telling you the truth. Accept it our not. This is the truth. And the truth about you is that you are not honest about who you are. Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it and was glad.”

Any of the Jews in this group who claimed to believe in Jesus, certainly did not believe in him according to who Jesus claims to be. They may have believed him as an earthly, human Messiah, Son of David. But when he starts talking about Abraham rejoicing in his day, their response shows that they have a very limited view of who he is. “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?” They do not get what he is talking about, because they don’t get who he is.

*7th statement and response*

This leads in the 7<sup>th</sup> and final exchange.

<sup>58</sup> Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.”

<sup>59</sup> Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple.

“Before Abraham was born, I am.” This is the only place in my English translation of John where the absolute “I am” statement comes across loud and clear. Jesus is making a claim to predate Abraham. And even then, it is a strange thing to say. He does not say, before Abraham was born, I was born. Or before Abraham was born, I was. No. He says, “before Abraham was born, I am.” Jesus is the one who always is. He is eternally I am. The same yesterday and today and forever. Depending on no one. Self-existent. Equal to God whose name is I am who I am.

Do the Jews get what he is saying, now? Yes, they finally do get it. And that is why they pick up stones to kill him. They finally understand what he is saying. And they want to shut it out. Jesus saw this in their hearts all along. Some already had murder hatred for him, others, when they finally understand the truth that he was revealing about himself, they see the light Jesus is shining on himself, they want to shut it out. They are moved to kill him. They do not fall down and worship. That would be a sign of true belief. When he says, “Before Abraham was, I am,” true believers worship. Amen. He is the I am. That is not what they do. They pick up stones to kill him. And so, just as the truth is revealed about Jesus, so also the truth is revealed about them.

**Conclusion**

This is what happens whenever people claim to believe in Jesus and make all these kinds of statements about Jesus, and they work the Bible to justify their own lifestyle or their own viewpoint or their own theology. And then when the Bible is preached and they truly see Jesus, who Jesus is, it reveals what is true. If they rejoice in the preaching of the word of God, even in the weird parts and the hard parts and the mysterious parts and the hard to take parts, but you rejoice in it because it is the word of God, it is Jesus revealed, it shows that you believe. But when you hate the word of God and parts of the word of God and you reject it and you call it evil and you try to twist it, it shows that you do not know Jesus at all.

Here is the hard truth for us. Another hard truth. Prior to coming to know Jesus Christ, we are all the same as these Jews. We might love all kinds of things about Jesus, especially from a distance. But when he reveals who he truly is, and when he reveals who we truly are, and we are given the choice to give up who we are in submission to him, we all try to eliminate him. The darkness cannot tolerate the light.

We are children of wrath. We are all spiritual children of the devil. That is the hard truth. We want to be independent of our Creator. We want to be free. We want to do it our way.

And we desperately need God to open the eyes of our heart, so that the light can come in. We do not come to God unless he has turned something on to make it possible for us to yield to him. Jesus teaches that your supposed freedom is actual slavery to sin. So, he says, yield to me. Submit yourself to the authority of my word. And then, in your submission, you will become free indeed; free from sin, free from death, free to truly live.

### **Reflection questions**

1. Read John 8:12-30. What stands out to you as interesting, important, strange or confusing? What are some questions that come to mind?
2. Looking over the back and forth dialogue between Jesus and the Pharisees, how does verse 8:12 serve as a summary of the what is going on? What specific examples in the dialogue draw out the reality of 8:12 (in a positive or negative sense)?
3. What is a specific, concrete example from some area in your life that you have experience the reality of 8:12?
4. Read John 8:31-59. What stands out to you as interesting, important, strange or confusing? What are some questions that come to mind?
5. Following through the back and forth dialogue between Jesus and the so-called believers of 8:31-59, how does verse 8:31-32 summarize the reality of the dialogue (in a positive or negative sense)?
6. What is a specific, concrete example from some area in your life that you have experienced the reality of 8:31-32?