

LESSON #14 CHAPTER 8:31-59
Christ, Abraham and Israel

Divine Attribute: Eternality

Theological concept: Jesus is God the Son

Geographical location: Jerusalem Temple

Chapter Structure

8: 31-47 Freedom and Bondage

8: 48-59 Honour and Dishonour

Spiritual Principles:

P1 God's approval is good enough for us

Today's lesson...

After the feast of the Tabernacle, Jesus remained in Jerusalem and continued to teach the people. Chapter 8 is a long confrontative dialogue between Jesus and the opposing Jews.

The Pharisees challenged Jesus on who he really is. The Lord Jesus gave five contrasts to rebuke them and help the people understand the truth so that they may not die in their sins. We have learned the first three contrasts in the last lesson: Grace and law (1-11), light and darkness (12-20), life and death (21-30). Today we shall learn the 4th and the 5th lesson: freedom and bondage (31-47) and honour and dishonour (48-59). In this lesson we will cover the last two contrasts which have Abraham in the line of argument.

A. 8: 31-47 Freedom and Bondage

31 So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Jesus was speaking to the new believers. To believe in Jesus is to be his disciples, and discipleship is a way of life. While justification places us as saints before God, set us free, discipleship sanctifies us for God. To be a Jesus' disciple is to walk in Jesus' way (*abide in my word*), showing that he is no longer a slave of sin but a freeman of God.

"33 They answered him, "We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, 'You will become free'?"

To the Jews at that time, their ancestors' slavery labour in Egypt and captivity in Babylon were temporary chastisements. If Abraham's offspring were a race of slaves, then God's promise to Abraham as a blessed people would be pointless.

Verse 33 is a universal phenomenon: even though every man experiences inner struggles in his conscience between good and evil constantly, he fails to see that he is born into sin and is a slave of sin.

“³⁴Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave [a] to sin. ³⁵The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. ³⁶So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”

Jesus reminded them that there is another kind of slavery than social or economic slavery: spiritual slavery, where sin is the master. Jesus illustrated the concept of spiritual freedom and slavery by contrasting the difference between a slave and a son. A slave has no permanent standing in his master's household. He can be sold to someone else anytime, he is then in bondage to his new owner. But a son has a place in his father's house, and once a son, always a son.

Jesus said that He, being the Son in the Father's house, has the supreme authority to liberate slaves from sin because *“the Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands.”* (3:35) He also brought them into the divine household as the adopted children of God. (Eph 1:15; John 1:12)

The conversation was heated up in vv.37-40.

“³⁷I know that you are offspring of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you. ³⁸I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father. ³⁹They answered him, “Abraham is our father.” Jesus said to them, “If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing the works Abraham did, ⁴⁰but 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.”

(Verse 37 shows that at this point, it is no longer the new believers of Jesus but the unbelieving Jews who Jesus addressed.)

“Abraham, our Father” is the regular Jewish way of referring to Abraham, just like ‘Moses, our teacher’ and ‘David, our king’. The Jews prided themselves on being the progeny of Abraham, for it entitled them to claim to be children of the heavenly Father. This is because God told them, *“Israel is my firstborn son”* (Ex 4:22) and *“I am a father to Israel”* (Jer 31: 9) However, Jesus pointed out that, not only did they refuse to believe that the Father sent Jesus and reject his teaching, they even wanted to kill him. This is something Abraham or his children would not do.

What did Abraham do? God himself testified for Abraham, *“Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.”* (Ge 26:5)

Therefore, the Jews who wanted to kill Jesus were the offspring of Abraham by blood but not by spirit. Jesus pointed out their nature: they belonged to another father, *“⁴¹You are doing the works your father did.”*

The Jews felt insulted, and they protested, *“We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father—even God.”* And they attacked Jesus in verse 48, *“Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?”* There was a background to this. The Jews and the Samaritans disputed each other as genuine Israelites. The Jews had their account of Samaritan's mixed origin (2Ki 17); on the other hand, the Samaritans charged the Jews with being descendants of Cain, not of Seth (Adam's only son who is said, according to Ge 5:3, to have begotten in Adam's own image) and based their account on a legend that viewed Cain as the fruit of the devil's seduction of Eve.

Life application

When the light of the truth pierces into the dark part of a heart, it often causes pain and shame. Some respond in repentance, while others in resistance. At this point, most Christians stop speaking the truth in order to avoid making an enemy and fear that our own transgressions may be exposed as a result. Dear saints, it depends on the state of our hearts to decide whether to continue or to stop. Is my heart filled with the aggression to place myself as a victor or the desire to restore my friend from sin? If it is the former, I must stop. If it is the latter, I must continue and not flinch. In the case of our Lord Jesus here, it was the latter.

Jesus told them outright: your father is no other than the devil!

42 Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. 43 Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. 44 You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. 45 But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. 46 Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me?"

Why is the devil "*a murderer from the beginning*"? The fall of mankind has caused every man to die. It was the greatest genocide, evil and the most long-lasting suffering the devil caused. "*he is a liar*" because he tempted Eve with deception, "*You will not surely die*". Lies flow out of the lips of the devil so naturally and spontaneously. Since "*It is impossible for God to lie*" (Heb 6:18) is a truth, it is also impossible for the devil to tell it.

Verse 45 confirms that they belong to the devil. Jesus did not say, "Even though I tell the truth, you do not believe me." He said, "*Because I tell you the truth, you do not believe me*". They could not accept the truth, and that was why they rejected Jesus. Their rejection of the truth attests that they do not belong to God (v.47). Whoever is of God would obey the words of God. This is what Jesus said to Pilate, "*Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.*" (18:37)

In short, the devil is the life-destroyer and father of lies; God, on the other hand, is the life-giver and the fountain of truth.

Life application

The doctrine of predestination for salvation is implied in these words. Those who belong to the devil will resist the truth; those who belong to God will obey the truth. Let us not be disheartened when the gospel we preach is not well received. Be mindful to proclaim faithfully that Jesus is the Son of God, the Eternal Word Incarnate, the only perfect man and the sole Redeemer for mankind!

B. 9: 48-59 Honour and Dishonour

48 The Jews answered him, "Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?" 49 Jesus answered, "I do not have a demon, but I honour my Father, and you dishonour me. 50 Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is One who seeks it, and he is the judge."

In this passage, Jesus pointed out that while they dishonour him, the Father honours him. Jesus' birth was honoured by the Father with angelic hosts proclaiming the good tidings to the shepherds in the field of Bethlehem; Jesus' public ministry was honoured by the Father with the visible descent of the Holy Spirit on him and an audible proclamation from heaven, *"this is my Son whom I love, with him I am well pleased"*

But the Lord was not disturbed by the adverse judgment, for he does not seek his own glory but the Father's glory. He knows that the Father will vindicate him hence *"When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly."* (1Peter 2:23)

Praise of oneself is no praise, and even in a community of mutual admirers one may wonder if the admiration is entirely unprejudiced. (5:44) For Christ, so long as he enjoys his Father's approval, he is well content.

P1 God's approval is good enough for us

Life application

Many of us live by the approval of others, especially youths who spend build their lives on social media where there are constantly competition for followers or thumbs up. If we seek our own honour then we will be driven to follow the latest trend and appease friends, losing our identity in the snare of depression. Let us seek God's approval instead, like Jesus did. Not only will our souls be satisfied, we will be honoured by God himself, *"For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer."* (1Peter 3:12)

"51 Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death."

The Jews knew Jesus was referring to eternal life, not physical death. But they purposely twisted the meaning to accuse Jesus,

52 The Jews said to him, "Now we know that you have a demon! Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet you say, 'If anyone keeps my word, he will never taste death.'

Their point is: Abraham and the prophets were obedient to God and they all died. If God's words do not keep them from tasting death, by what authority did Jesus make the claim? If Jesus thinks that his words are medicine that prevents death, then, they reasoned, he is the victim of an illusion, a demonic illusion, to be sure. They are saying to Jesus, "We know you. We saw you working with your father, Joseph, the carpenter. We know the city, Nazareth. *53 Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do you make yourself out to be?"*

Their question is: who are you?

55 But you have not known him. I know him. If I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and I keep his word. 56 Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad."

Jesus' rebuke: You claim to be God's children, but you do not know God. I know God, and I obey His words.

Then, he moved on to reveal who he was by making reference to Abraham. Abraham, said Jesus longed to see my day, which refers to the coming of the Messiah. The fathers of faith in the Old Testament kept their hope in God's promise of a Saviour who would crush the head of the Serpent in Genesis 3:15.

When did Abraham see the day of Christ? There is no specific record of Abraham seeing the day of Christ. By Jesus' words here, we know that Abraham saw it. Perhaps it was in Genesis chapter 12 when God gave him the promise to be a blessing nation to the world, or in Chapter 15 when God made a covenant with him, or in Chapter 22 when he offered Isaac as a burnt offering on Mt. Moriah...

What did he see? Perhaps he saw the Word Incarnate, or the liberation of people from sickness and demon possession, or the settling of debt of sin on the cross, or the empty tomb and the resurrected body of Jesus, or what Enoch saw, "*Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his holy ones,*" (Jude 14)

What is truly amazing is that even though Abraham could not wait till the coming of Christ, seeing the day of Christ made him rejoice and be glad!

Life application

Dear saints, where do you place your hope? When you hear God's call to serve him in a challenging ministry, or when you face an irresistible temptation, or when you lose something or someone very dear to you, where and who do you look to for deliverance and comfort? The Day of the Lord brought about great joy to Abraham. The Day of Christ's return will surely bring indescribable joy to us. Do you agree?

57 So the Jews said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?" [c] 58 Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am."

Jesus was not saying that he was older than Abraham. "*Before Abraham was, I am*" is a powerful statement on who Jesus is. Every man lives in the linear time flow of this temporal world. No one can remain 'is', it is 'will', 'is' and 'was'. The future will become the present, the present will become the past. But God who transcends the temporal world, who dwells in eternity and who is the eternal God says, "I am who I am".

When Jesus said, Jesus said, "*Before Abraham was, I am*", he is saying, I am not just the Son of God, I am God the Son.

C. Closing

59 So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

Woes to these people who had the stones in their hands, for they were stoning God!

This is the response of the Jews to Jesus' honest and merciful revelation of who he is. It kept happening, just as John said in 1:11, "*He came to his own, and his own people [b] did not receive him.*" It is also what the psalmist saw under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, "*they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion.*" (Ps 22:13)

Not one stone fell on Jesus because his time has not come. Jesus hid himself from those who had stones in their hands. This is their greatest misfortune. Verse 59 repeats itself whenever God's children

are persecuted for preaching the Gospel. Yet we know, woe to them from whom Christ hid because their hearts are like stones towards their one and only Saviour!

O Lord, had you not changed our stone hearts into hearts of flesh, we would still be holding stones against you! Be merciful to our family members as you have been merciful to us. Open their spiritual eyes to see the immensity of your salvation, that the eternal God came to be a man personally, heal the sick personally, and repay our debts personally!