

**THE RADICAL RABBI:
“A RADICAL AGE”
(John 8:31-59)
March 27, 2022**

Description: *Jesus shares his most revealing words yet in trying to get his opponents to understand just who — and what — he is.*

INTRODUCTION

This is the end of the most specific, detailed and yet confrontational conversation Jesus had with his opponents prior to the cross. They will go to any lengths to prove he is anything other than what he is. And Christ likewise is going to any lengths to prove to them who he really is. Their motivation is insecurity, jealousy and hate: insecurity for the threat he poses for their privileged positions, jealousy for the way he impacts the crowds, the things he says and the things he can do, and hate for how he challenges them right down to their souls. He has only one motivation — love, even for the most unloving, all bound up in a message and mission that he is obediently determined to fulfill. So as we get into this incredible moment, **let’s begin with our own moment, in prayer.**

TEXT

We need to look at how this section begins by tying it to the final verse we looked at last week, as Jesus was continuing to do battle with the leadership. Remember that the people who Jesus had been teaching in the temple courts were still there, listening to all this. As a result, *[e]ven as he spoke, many believed in him — John 8:30.* It is to those now-believing-in-him Jews that are being referred to in these next couple of verses:

To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” — John 8:31-32.

In other words, yes, that’s great that they have now entrusted themselves to Christ’s care in the context of now believing him to be the Messiah he has said he is. But the life that Jesus desires for them goes far beyond initial belief; that’s just birth. He wants to see them grow and develop into followers that will grow to more and more reflect him in a world that simply doesn’t. That will require more — as he says, holding to his teachings. The Greek word used here for “hold” is “continue,” meaning to very literally remain in his word, to dwell and abide. He is meaning us to literally set up our home in his word, to live in his teachings. There is no other way to be recognized as truly being a disciple of Christ. If you really believe in me, then dive into my word; hold onto my teachings; make those the means by which you live. This is not some sort of academic, philosophical attainment. Holding to Christ’s teachings means that they will literally become the fiber of your being; they will become beliefs that translate into lifestyle. In other words, holding to Christ’s teachings looks like something — something that people can literally, tangibly see and hear and watch. Then, when his teachings become your life, you will know the truth — the truth that I AM. It is knowing that truth and holding that truth to the degree that it becomes who you are that it will then set you free — literally liberate you from being held in the grips of sin that you cannot otherwise escape.

They answered him, “We are Abraham’s descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?” — John 8:33.

This is an amazing statement: “We have never been slaves of anyone!” Really? Are you kidding me? Their whole history had been one long parade of humiliating enslavements — Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, among others. The OT book of Judges records seven nations holding onto various portions of their land. And, even as they spoke, a Roman garrison stood in the background of the temple

grounds, just part of an occupation force that had been ruling their nation for a little over 90 years by the time Jesus was in ministry. And specifically with the Assyrians and Babylonians, those conquests and exiles had been a direct result of a nation falling away from God — a falling away by choice. While it's a bit understandable that nobody may have wanted to talk about those dark periods in Israel's history, it was exhibiting some serious denial to say that "Abraham's descendants" had never been slaves of anyone. That was simply not true.

Unfortunately, they are also blind to the two things that Jesus has been saying: First, that their physical lineage to Abraham means absolutely nothing spiritually, and second, they are blind to the true slavery which holds them right at that moment: slavery to sin, a sin that has made them spiritually blind to their confinement and deaf to everything that God's Messiah, standing right in front of them, has been saying — precisely the things they need to hear for salvation!

Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed — John 8:34-36.

Jesus starts out with some rather ominous words. He is saying that everybody who sins is subservient to sin; in other words, sinners are obedient without question to the commanding enticement of sin — the same expectation a master would have of a slave. And we are not talking about a single sin here — "oops, I made a mistake once" — but continuous, ongoing, perpetual sinning. And what makes it worse is that sin is our "square one"; we start our lives out as slaves to sin, just as David made note of: ***I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. . . . Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me — David, Psalm 51:3, 5.*** And certainly in the NT, Paul underscores that inescapable foundation of our lives: ***[S]in entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned — Paul, Romans 5:12.*** Short conclusion: If sin is a part of who we are, then it is impossible to set ourselves free from sin because, as sinners, we cannot escape ourselves.

Now here's the truly devastating truth about being a slave: A slave is not truly a part of a household. He can be sold or dismissed without warning and without appeal. He cannot by himself change his status. Another slave cannot change his status. Only somebody outside the status of "enslaved" can free a slave.

Christ continues: ***"I know that you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are looking for a way to kill me, because you have no room for my word. I am telling you what I have seen in the Father's presence, and you are doing what you have heard from your father" — Jesus Christ, John 8:37-38.***

Jesus in his response to the Pharisees and others really hits the nail on the head, and has not one bit to do with any lineage, from Abraham or anybody: They want to be rid of Christ because there is no room in their lives for his word. They are not looking for what they may need from Jesus because they see no needs in their own lives. And because they see no needs, his words to them are meaningless — as they are to anybody who sees no need for salvation.

According to 19th century British pastor Charles Spurgeon, the believer passionate about growing into the image of Christ should see Christ's word in his life as: an honored place, a trusted place, a ruling place, a loving place, and a permanent place. Because the Pharisees and others never saw Jesus in terms of his Father, they never heard his word as being God's word. That was a fatal error.

Then Jesus starts to present the stark difference between himself and his opponents by focusing on the differences between their "fathers." He is speaking from the basis of his experience with his heavenly

Father — what he has seen from the one who sent him — and their experience with their “father” — what Paul referred to as *the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience* — Paul, *Ephesians 2:2 (NASB1995)*.

“Abraham is our father,” they answered. “If you were Abraham’s children,” said Jesus, “then you would do what Abraham did. As it is, you are looking for a way to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. You are doing the works of your own father” — John 8:39-41a.

Despite their protests, Jesus disputes their ties to Abraham. If they were from Abraham, Jesus said, they would act like Abraham. Instead, their actions are a far cry from the actions of that man. While Jesus reflects his Father in all he does, his opponents instead reflect another “father” in all they do. Jesus had said it himself so perfectly once before: ***“[H]is mouth speaks from that which fills his heart” — Jesus Christ, Luke 6:45b (NASB1995)***. Put another way, the words they are saying are reflecting the ingredients that make up their hearts.

“We are not illegitimate children,” they protested. “The only Father we have is God himself.” Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I have come here from God. I have not come on my own; God sent me. Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don’t you believe me? Whoever belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God” — John 8:41a-47.

Whether using the NIV “illegitimate” or the Greek “fornication,” they are accusing Jesus of being conceived by sex outside of marriage, which is meant to cast a cloud of scandal over Jesus and his whole ministry — a cold and calloused attitude that pretty accurately reflects the tenor of their entire perspective towards him. There had long been rumors concerning the birth of Jesus, since his mother Mary had been pregnant before her marriage to Joseph. That would have been considered scandalous behavior at that time (now people proudly announce such news on social media). But Jesus counters by proclaiming the truth of his origin: ***“I have come here from God. I have not come on my own; God sent me” — Jesus Christ, John 8:42b***, which carries its own implication: If he has truly come from God, they should be rejoicing in his presence, not resenting it; they should be praising God for his being in their midst, not fighting it.

And then Jesus basically tells them, “My Father is God. If he was also your father, you would get me; you’d not only understand me but join with me. But since that hasn’t happened, let’s talk about your dad for a moment.” And then he goes on to describe their “father” perfectly, identifying him in the process as the devil, the deceiver from the beginning of time.

Now Satan is a liar in a couple of ways: First, the obvious one is that he does indeed lie; as Jesus says, there is no truth in him. We see that right away in the Garden of Eden. After God had said to Adam, ***“[Y]ou must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die” — God speaking, Genesis 2:17***, we find Satan saying to Eve regarding that same fruit, ***“You will not certainly die” — the serpent, Genesis 3:4a***. As Jesus pointed out, Satan is a liar — always has been, always will be — quite contrary to God about whom, as the writer of Hebrews said, ***[I]t is impossible for God to lie — Hebrews 6:18a***. But the second way he lies is by presenting an imitation of what is “good” and then persuading us that his way is the right way. Paul described him this way: ***Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light — Paul, II Corinthians 11:14***. Temptation

is not only his lying, but his trying to sell us on an imitation that he promotes is a better way than Christ's way. It isn't!

Bottom line: Our parents determine our natures. So, if Christ's opponents belonged to God, their attitudes and actions would reflect God. What's more, they would hear and recognize Christ's words and his teachings as God's words and teachings. Instead, their actions reflect the nature they have learned from their "father" — the devil.

The Jews answered him, "Aren't we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?" "I am not possessed by a demon," said Jesus, "but I honor my Father and you dishonor me. I am not seeking glory for myself; but there is one who seeks it, and he is the judge. Very truly I tell you, whoever obeys my word will never see death." At this they exclaimed, "Now we know that you are demon-possessed! Abraham died and so did the prophets, yet you say that whoever obeys your word will never taste death. Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?" — John 8:48-53.

To call somebody a Samaritan was quite literally the "n-word" of its time. To call somebody demon-possessed was to declare them fully belonging to Satan. Obviously Christ was neither, but these accusations reflect the desperate state of their opposition.

Notice the clever little twist on words they use in their attempt to counter Jesus. He says, "***[W]hoever obeys my word will never see death.***" He is referring to spiritual death, to an eternity of separation from God. To show how far apart their perspectives are, his opponents jump on his words — kind of; they say, "***[Y]ou say that whoever obeys your word will never taste death*** — meaning physical death. Certainly followers of Jesus have experienced death throughout history, but all that has meant for followers of Christ has been exchanging, as Paul so colorfully put it, ***the perishable . . . with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality — Paul, I Corinthians 15:53.*** We trade our corrupted, physical, human, earthly bodies for perfect, eternal heavenly bodies which allows us, as Paul said, ***to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord — Paul, II Corinthians 5:8 (NKJV).***

Jesus replied, "If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and obey his word. Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad" — Jesus Christ, John 8:54-56.

His opponents have been bragging on their perceived connection with Abraham. Jesus does them one better, telling them that this Abraham, their father in whose name they carry such pride, actually was most filled with joy when he thought about God's plan of salvation, God's Messiah — incidentally, the guy standing right in front of them — revealed to some degree when God told Abraham: "***[A]ll peoples on earth will be blessed through you***" — ***God speaking, Genesis 12:3b.*** And beyond that, Abraham also experienced at a human level what God himself would be experiencing at a divine level — sacrificing his son — a moment from which Abraham would ultimately be spared regarding his son Isaac, but that pointed to a time about six months down the road from this conversation when that sacrifice would be completed on Calvary's cross!

"You are not yet fifty years old," they said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!" "Very truly I tell you," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds — John 8:57-59.

There is a segment of contemporary criticism that suggests that any divinity ascribed to Jesus came to him through church councils and the like in latter history, that he himself claimed no divinity at all. Our response would be two-fold: The words that Jesus spoke, "I AM," and the response of his opponents —

they picked up stone with which to stone him. His opponents knew exactly what he was saying, and they were prepared to stone him as the biblically-mandated punishment for the blasphemy of anybody declaring themselves to be God. Their response confirms their understanding to what Jesus was openly declaring. As it was, Jesus removed himself from their stones and their anger — but his point had been made. He was — and is — the one and only eternal present — present into the infinite past, and present into the infinite future. God and his Son Jesus Christ will never not be! They have no age — just presence!

APPLICATION

There are at least four major points to take away from this intense confrontation between Jesus and his opponents:

First, don't be surprised if you encounter opposition in your witness for Jesus Christ. For Exhibit A, I give you Jesus Christ. This is literally God standing right in front of the religious leaders, and what do they do with Christ's witness of himself? Rejected! If Jesus himself found such opposition, don't be stunned if it happens to you. But also don't forget we are not the "Saviors"; we are the seed-planters, God's "ambassadors." And even after this kind of intense, antagonistic pushback, what do we read in Acts as the new church began and grew? ***So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith — Acts 6:7.*** Who knows how many came to faith as a result of this Temple confrontation with Jesus? The more important point: A large number of priests eventually found their way to salvation. Praise God!

Second, kids reflect their parents. We talk about it all the time: "Oh look, she has her father's nose. Yeah, maybe, but she has her mother's chin." But more than physical appearance, we also see how kids reflect their parents in their natures — giggly, smiley, quiet, outgoing, inclined to be solitary, inclined to be social. Jesus makes such a profoundly valid spiritual point as well: We spiritually reflect who we claim as our heritage — God or Satan. As Christians, we are called to be reflections of our Father. Our attitudes and actions should testify to those around us of who's in charge in our lives. Both testaments of the Bible call us to be that reflection. In the OT, God himself called us to that standard in Leviticus: ***"I am the Lord your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy" — God speaking, Leviticus 11:44a (quoted by Peter, I Peter 1:14-16).*** In the NT, Paul reminded us of that same standard in his letter to the Ephesian church: ***[P]ut on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness — Paul, Ephesians 4:24.***

Third, Satan lies. It's not only his best thing, it's his only thing. It is the only "card" he has to play in trying to disrupt God's plans for his people. So if you find yourself swimming in guilt from long-ago sins that you know were nailed to the cross, those sins are gone — forgiven and forgotten. So to keep throwing them up in our faces is a lie! And, as a Christian, if you find yourself similarly awash in fear and anxiety, you are falling for a lie! To a Christian, that's all he can do. But we also can never forget, as John wrote so accurately: ***[T]he whole world lies in the power of the evil one — I John 5:19 (NASB1995).*** That's a whole lot of people outside the kingdom to whom we are called to present the gospel — the only thing that can save them. But we also know Satan's end: ***[T]he devil . . . was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur . . . [and] will be tormented day and night for ever and ever — Revelation 20:10.*** Does that sound like a winner to you? Me, neither! Don't listen to him. He's already lost!

CONCLUSION

And last, as we close, there is no way to reflect Christ without knowing Christ — and that begins, continues and ends with his word. It was actually one of the minor prophets from the OT that caught

God's angst at people not embracing his word: ***"[M]y people are destroyed from lack of knowledge" — God speaking, Hosea 4:6a.*** That was a result of a choice his people made — and it ruined them.

But again, both testaments of scripture call us to a lifestyle of embracing and cherishing the words that we find in God's word. I love these words from Solomon: ***[I]f you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding — indeed, if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding. He holds success in store for the upright, he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless, for he guards the course of the just and protects the way of his faithful ones. Then you will understand what is right and just and fair — every good path. For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul. Discretion will protect you, and understanding will guard you — Solomon, Proverbs 2:1-11.***

And equally powerful and inviting are these words from Solomon's father, David: ***The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The decrees of the Lord are firm, and all of them are righteous. . . . By them your servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward — David, Psalm 19:7-9, 11.***

And from Paul comes these words in the NT: ***But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work — Paul, II Timothy 3:14-17.***

These scriptures encapsulate so clearly why we do what we do here — Sunday School, Bible Blast, Bible studies, Biblical sermons. This isn't about being "churchy" or religious. This is about getting to know him — Jesus Christ, our "radical rabbi." This is about being continually exposed to what Jesus said, and what it means for us as we prepare to be missionaries in the places in which he has put us. If it is true that "people need the Lord," then it is just as true that those people need people who know the Savior intimately, and are able to follow by example because they know the Master's example. The world has not changed from the days of the Pharisees, nor has our mandate changed either: Go to all, preach to every. Let's pray!