

**John:
B'nai Abraham**

John 8:31-59

By [Dr. Derek Thomas](#)

January 19, 2003

Turn in your Bibles to the gospel of John 8:31 and we'll be reading through to the end of the chapter. Hear the word of God.

Jesus therefore was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you abide in My word *then* you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free."

They answered Him, "We are Abraham's offspring and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, 'You shall become free'?" Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. "The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever. "If therefore the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed. "I know that you are Abraham's offspring; yet you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you. "I speak the things which I have seen with *My* Father; therefore you also do the things which you heard from *your* father." They answered and said to Him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you are Abraham's children, do the deeds of Abraham. "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. "You are doing the deeds of your father." They said to Him, "We were not born of fornication; we have one Father: God." 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. "Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word. 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. "But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me. Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak the truth, why do you not believe Me? "He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear *them*, because you are not of God." The Jews answered and said to Him, "Do we not say rightly that you are a Samaritan

and have a demon?" Jesus answered, "I do not have a demon; but I honor My Father, and you dishonor Me. "But I do not seek My glory; there is One who seeks and judges. "Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death." 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 shall never taste of death.' "Surely You are not greater than our father Abraham who died? The prophets died too; whom do You make Yourself *out to be*?" 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'; And you have not come to know Him, but I know Him; and if I say that I do not know Him, I shall be a liar like you, but I do know Him and keep His word. "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw *it* and was glad." The Jews therefore said to Him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?" Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am." Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

Thus far, God's holy and inerrant word. May He add His blessing to the reading of it; let's pray together.

Our Father in heaven, we ask now for Your rich blessing; open Your word to us by Your Spirit. Teach us of the truth which is Yours. For Jesus' sake, we ask it. Amen.

Now Jesus was always making claims about Himself and who He was. Claims that either rendered Him insane, of the order of a man who claims to be a "poached egg," C. S. Lewis once said; or else, He truly *was* the Lord of glory. Christianity is all about Christ. It's all about the person of Jesus Christ; His person and His work—who He is; who He claims to be—and our response to that. It's not about morals; it's not essentially about ethics. It's not a philosophy of life; it's about our relationship to Jesus Christ. This man who lived 2,000 years ago and some of the most extraordinary things that He ever said are found in chapter 8 in this particular section that we are looking at tonight. Now there are three such statements to be found here and I want to look at all three of them not in the order they are given in the chapter.

I. Jesus claimed to be perfect.

I want us to look first of all at His claim to perfection. He says in verse 46: "Can any of you *prove* Me guilty of sin?" If you have a Bible, take it out and look at it because this is Jesus' word and it is an extraordinary word. Imagine you or I saying a statement like that. "Which of you convinces me of sin?" Now perhaps we've said it to our spouses in a quarrel when we've been adamant about our righteousness and that we are right. But you only need to be married for a short space of time to know the folly of that stance. But *Jesus* can say—think about it—

the *extraordinary* audacity of it; Jesus can say, "Which of you convinces Me of sin?" It comes about in this section in a discussion that Jesus has with certain Jews in the temple precincts. It's after the feast is now over. It's about the nature of truth and falsehood.

What has sparked off this extraordinary statement of Jesus is that His listeners, Jesus is saying, wouldn't know the truth if it hit them in the face. They weren't capable of recognizing truth because essentially even though they were the sons of Abraham, the *b'nai Abraham*; they were, in fact, children of the devil. "You are of your father the devil." Imagine Jesus saying that to a group of Jews in the temple precincts. Their father is the devil. The devil is a liar. He's always been a liar. He always will be a liar. He lives in perpetual *denial*. He's blinded the eyes of his children. But Jesus, on the other hand, never lies; He is incapable of lying because He is impeccable. He's whiter than white, He's spotless; there isn't the faintest trace of transgression in Him. "I am the truth," He will say. "Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?" And Jesus is saying here, "I *always* do; I always tell the truth because I'm sinless."

Now this claim to perfection, this claim to sinlessness, this claim to impeccability has two aspects to it. In the first place, Jesus was free from actual sin; He was free from actual transgression. He has no consciousness of sin. He never prays for forgiveness. When He teaches the Lord's prayer, it is the disciple's prayer, not His prayer. He doesn't pray the Lord's prayer; He doesn't need to pray for forgiveness. He never confesses sin; He never acknowledges shortcoming. He does exactly the Father's will; He fulfills all righteousness. There is no actual sin.

But more than that, there is no inherited sin. He doesn't inherit the guilt and corruption of Adam either. He doesn't have a fallen human nature. He has no capacity for sin. There is no foothold in Him that Satan can get a hold of. There is no lust; no proclivity to sin. There is no possibility of sin arising from within Him, from within His heart. His nature is in no way corrupt; He is "holy and harmless and undefiled," and separate from sinners. His flesh was not corruptible.

It's not that He was able *not* to sin; He wasn't even *able* to sin. "Which of you convinces Me of sin?" He says, standing in the very temple precincts. It's a very extraordinary thing. Attempts have been made to find sin in Christ. Sometimes Jesus' response to the moneychangers in the temple is dragged up as evidence that Jesus may have lost His temper in the temple precincts when He overturned the tables of the moneychangers. But that is to misconstrue the nature of holiness. Holiness is intolerant of wrong. Holiness doesn't pass a blind eye to transgression. Holiness judges; impeccability condemns. And Jesus will say again and again, "If you are not for Me, you are against Me." And He will utter the words of final condemnation on the last day. "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire." Jesus is perfect. We can't even imagine what that is, can we?

You know, Spurgeon met someone once on a train station who came up to him

and said that he was perfect. So Spurgeon stomped his toe. The man yelled and screamed at him and Spurgeon said, "There, I told you; there's no such thing as perfection." But Jesus is perfect. The Bible records the confession of the sin and confession of David in Psalm 51, and it is one of the most moving episodes in King David's life. The prophet Isaiah acknowledges that he is a man of "unclean lips" and we might have said of that prophet as he labored in Jerusalem, that he had the cleanest lips in Israel as he spoke of the Lord of hosts. But his own confession was, "I am a man of unclean lips." Job, saintly godly Job, who was known throughout the world for his godliness, repents in dust and ashes. Augustine wrote of the carnal corruptions of his soul. Jonathan Edwards of the eighteenth century, the finest theologian and philosopher this land has ever known, described himself and his own heart as "like an abyss infinitely deeper than hell." That's the reality, isn't it? You and I are sinners. We've transgressed; we've broken God's law. But Jesus could say, "Which of you convinces Me of sin?" I still recoil and shudder at the arrogance of Cassius Clay or Mohammed Ali as he became known when he would say, "I am the greatest!" The sheer arrogance of it. And yet you might agree with him. And here is Jesus saying to a group of hostile opponents who are ready to take His life, "Which of you can accuse Me of sin and wrongdoing?" It is an extraordinary claim, isn't it?

II. Jesus' claim to divine origin.

The second claim I want us to look at is His claim to origination. You find it in verse 58. "I tell you the truth. Before Abraham was, I am." Now Jesus made several claims here. One, to the effect that anyone who believes in Him will never die, and the Jews took that in a literal, physical sense, "If you believe in Jesus you will never die," but Abraham himself had died, and the prophets had died, so they don't understand what it is that Jesus is saying. It's like when Jesus talks to Nicodemus, and He says, "One of the characteristics of someone who isn't a Christian, and isn't born again, is that he doesn't understand what I'm saying." And Nicodemus says to Jesus, "I don't understand what You're saying." And that's exactly what's happening here. Jesus is saying to these Jews, something that they don't comprehend.

Now, there may be some illusions here to a word in Isaiah, that from ancient of days I am He, but more than likely it is a reflection of the divine name of God, given to Moses in Exodus 3, and then enlarged upon in subsequent chapters. Regardless of whether you think that is an accurate exegesis of what Jesus is saying here. "Before Abraham was I AM." He's definitely referring to the divine name of God, even if He's not referring to the divine name. The Jews who heard Him say this regarded what He said as blasphemy. And they took up stones to cast at Him as a mark of someone who had blasphemed. They heard Jesus saying, "That before Abraham existed, Jesus had existed." He's the divine logos, He's the divine word, never was there a time when Jesus was not. He was the one who led the people out of the wilderness and into the Promised Land.

There's a self-consciousness in Jesus of His eternal preexistence. There's no self-consciousness of sin, but there is a self-consciousness of His deity, of His eternal relationship with His Father in heaven.

Do you remember how Paul would expand on this theme when he writes to the Philippians in chapter 2, speaking of Jesus, and he begins in verse 5, "Who being in the form of God." That is to say, possessing all of the attributes and characteristics of deity, that before the creation of the world, before anything else existed, Jesus had form, He had existence, possessing all the qualities and characteristics of God Himself.

And whatever precisely Jesus was saying to these sons of Abraham, they heard Him say something they regarded as blasphemous, because Jesus is attributing to Himself the quality of eternity. He's attributing to Himself a divine quality.

You see, Jesus is more than just a moral teacher. There's more to Christianity than bringing your children to Sunday School because, "They deserve it." There's more to Christianity than belonging to some religious social club. It's having a relationship with One who claimed to be God, the only God there is. And here is Jesus making these astonishing claims of sinlessness and that before Abraham had an existence, He had an existence echoing the very name of God Himself in doing so.

If you or I were to say the sort of things Jesus said, they would lock us up. They would give us a few stiff sedatives and lock the door. They would nod their heads and say that we're lunatics and they would be right. So why is it that we gather together 700 or 800 people in an auditorium on State Street in Jackson, Mississippi, on a Sunday evening to bow down and worship this Man? Because He's *God*, I tell you; because He is divine Lord.

You see, Jesus goes on in His discussion with these Jews to draw out some of the implications of that. One of the implications was that He knew God and they didn't. He knew God because He had been with Him, the Father, from all eternity. He can describe the very character of God because He knows Him. "But you do not know God," He says to these Jews. Nor do they really know Abraham either. For all their claims to being sons of Abraham, they don't know Abraham either because Abraham rejoiced to see My day. Do you remember on Mount Moriah when he was offering up his son, Isaac? Do you remember the words that he spoke to his son? They are astonishing; they take your breath away. And there he is binding up his own son and pulling out the knife of sacrifice and he's still saying to himself, "God will provide the sacrifice, my son." And yes, there was a ram that was caught in the thicket, but the true answer to Abraham's vision was the words of John the Baptist, "Behold, the lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world."

My friends, I cannot make it more serious than that. There is no more serious

issue tonight. It's about whether or not you *know* God; whether you know Him or you don't know Him. We had a wonderful testimony of adult believer's baptism. Yes, Presbyterians believe in adult baptism, too. And Jason is professing his faith and saying, "I know God, because I've come to know Him by faith embracing His son Jesus Christ as my mediator and Lord, my prophet, my priest, and my King. But you know, you can be as close as that to Jesus and still not *know* Him—like these Jews.

Jon Krakauer wrote a book published just a few years ago called *Into Thin Air*. You may have seen it in Barnes and Noble, or whatever. It's about the story of the attempt to climb to the peak of Mount Everest in 1996. And you remember, many, many of those who attempted that expedition, including two of its leaders Robert Hall and Andy Harris, died on that mountain. And there's a point in which Jon Krakauer, who writes the book, had been to the peak of the mountain, and they could only stay up there for about five minutes because they didn't have enough oxygen. And there was evidence all around that many of the men, including some of the leaders, were suffering from oxygen deprivation including Andy Harris, who on the way down from the mountain, was given an oxygen cylinder that they had left there for this very purpose; full, unused. And Andy Harris said over and over and over that it was empty, that they had used this oxygen, and they *hadn't*. You see, it was full. And rather than use it, he insisted it was empty and he died on the mountain. And there are men and women *that close* to Jesus Christ and the overtures of the gospel and are *insisting* on their own way. And my friends, *that's* how serious it is.

III. Jesus' claim to offer freedom.

There's a third claim that Jesus makes. It's a claim to liberation. You see it in verse 32, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." The issue here is one of liberty, the issue here is one of freedom, these folks were in prison and they didn't know it. Freedom is a beautiful word. Liberty is a beautiful word. You speak of "Liberty and justice for all" in your Pledge of Allegiance. This is the "Land of the free and the home of the brave," after all. But what is Jesus talking about when He talks about freedom?

Do you notice that the Jews actually have the audacity to say they've never been in bondage to anyone, and yet, the sound of Roman soldiers could be heard everywhere in Jerusalem. But Jesus wasn't talking about that kind of bondage, or that kind of tyranny. He says very clearly what He's talking about, because that's what He had come to preach. His very opening message in the gospels is a quotation from Isaiah 61, that He had come to "preach liberty to the captives." Whoever sins is a slave to sin," He says in verse 34. It's liberty from the bondage of sin. It's liberty from the chains and shackles of sin and guilt, that Jesus has come to liberate us from.

Do you know where that bondage manifests itself the most? It's in our native inability to believe the gospel. People say, "I can believe in Jesus any time I want." Oh no, you cannot. No, you cannot. Do you remember what Jesus has just said, and He's said it twice: "No man can come unto Me unless My Father draws Him." You cannot come to Jesus unaided, in your own strength, by your own native ability. Unless Jesus' Father in heaven draws you to Jesus Christ, you cannot come, you cannot believe, you cannot repent. That's where your bondage is evidenced the most, and Jesus is saying, "I've come to set you free. I've come to show you the way out of that bondage, and the way out of that prison"

In Nelson Mandela's autobiography, *Cry Freedom*, he'd been a prisoner, you remember for 27 years, and then became the prime minister of the new South Africa, he talks about the day he left Robin Island Prison. "As I finally walked through those gates to enter a car on the other side, I felt, even at the age of 71, that my life was beginning anew. My ten thousand days of imprisonment were at last over."

And Jesus is saying to you and to me, I can show you the way out of prison. You may live in northeast Jackson. You may live in a fancy house. You may drive a BMW. You may have vacations in Europe and the exotic parts of the world. But if you don't know Jesus, you're in prison. You're in bondage to your sin and to your guilt. And Jesus is saying to you tonight, I can show you the way out. I can give you the key. It's the power of the Holy Spirit that will unlock the gate of that prison.

John Owen says, "We should know the answer to two questions when we're going to someone for help. Is that person willing to help us, and is that person able to help us." Is he willing and is he able to help us?

How many times have you heard people say, "If only they could know, 'Yes' or 'No' whether Christianity was true? Whether Jesus really did rise from the dead? If only that could be settled here and now, tonight, once and for all."

What do you want? What do you want me to tell you? You want someone to speak from heaven? Someone has spoken from heaven and said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Listen to Him." You want someone to turn into wine? To walk on the water? Well, there's been such a person. You want someone to rip that red curtain from the bottom, all the way to the top, and rip it in half? It's been done. What do you want? What more do you want, to know whether this is true or not? He tells us tonight, "I am the way and the truth and the life." Let's pray together.

Our Father in heaven, we thank You for Your word. We thank You especially for the Eternal Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior and our Lord, and we pray that You would bless this word to our hearts, and bless us in our relationships to

Jesus. And for anyone here tonight who's not a Christian, that by the power of Your Spirit You would give them no rest until they find that rest which is in You. Hear us, Lord, for Jesus' sake, Amen.

©2013 First Presbyterian Church.

This transcribed message has been lightly edited and formatted for the Web site. No attempt has been made, however, to alter the basic extemporaneous delivery style, or to produce a grammatically accurate, publication-ready manuscript conforming to an established style template.

Should there be questions regarding grammar or theological content, the reader should presume any website error to be with the webmaster/transcriber/editor rather than with the original speaker. For full copyright, reproduction and permission information, please visit the First Presbyterian Church Copyright, Reproduction & Permission statement.

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#) (Thirdmill). If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our *Theological Editor*.

Subscribe to *Biblical Perspectives Magazine*

BPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like BPM itself, *subscriptions are free*. To subscribe to [BPM](#), please select this [link](#).