



Believe

JOHN

MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

Examining the text & our hearts:

1. Jesus Addresses Jews who no Longer Believed in Him (Jn. 8:31a; 6:66)

a. Jesus is not anti-semitic

- “...the Jews mentioned in 8.31 are **Jewish disciples of Jesus who are about to apostatize** in the ensuing narrative. This means that the Jews whom Jesus is satirizing in John 8.31-59 are **not Jews in general** ...” (Mark Stibbe, p. 123)
- “...[W]e must be very careful when we talk about who and what is being condemned in this episode. **Jesus is not attacking the Jewish people in general**. Far from it. **He is satirizing...those who start on the road of discipleship, but who give up when the going gets tough.**” (M. Stibbe, p. 124)
- “**John 8.31-59 is a satire of apostasy not of Judaism**. Indeed, the nationality and the race of the satirical victim is, in one sense, irrelevant. The main thing is not that the group is Jewish but that it has apostatized.” (M. Stibbe, p. 125)

b. Jesus is speaking to those who no longer believed in him

- “**8:31** gives every indication of introducing **a new group & a new dialogue** ...that leads rapidly into **the most vitriolic polemic to be found in John’s Gospel**.” [Terry Griffith, “The Jews who had Believed in Him,” in R. Bauckham (ed.) *Gospel of John & Christian Theology*, p. 186]
- “Most commonly, the expedient of a false or fickle or inadequate & suspect faith is invoked to explain this sudden transition [between 8:30 & 8:31 assuming they’re the same people]. They are not true believers at all. However, the phrase [‘the Jews who had believed in him’] (8:31) without qualification, gives every indication of a genuine response & a genuine faith, albeit capable of growth...These really do seem to be **genuine believers who have responded to Jesus’ teaching**.” [T. Griffith, *Op Cit*, p. 185]
- It is “by no means clear what the perfect participle of pisteuo [‘believe’] with the dative in 8:31 means, & whether the author has Christians in mind. **Does the perfect** have the meaning of a pluperfect & thus **refer to people who had once believed in Jesus**? (R. Bieringer, et. al.)...[Terry Griffith] argues [**Yes**] that the perfect participle refers to **those who had once believed in Jesus but do so no longer**.” [T. Griffith, *Op Cit*, p. 183]
- T. Griffith appeals to a parallel construction: “in Jn. 11:44 where two perfect participles are juxtaposed: ‘**the man who had been dead came out bound**’. The latter state of being bound remains true...but the former state of being dead does not. **Lazarus had been dead but was dead no longer** [despite the perfect tense verb]. **Likewise** ...the context of the perfect participle [‘believe’] in 8:31 ...refers to a group of apostates. **Jesus was speaking to those who had believed in him but did so no longer**.” [T. Griffith, *Op Cit*, p. 184]

- Reverting to their former religious beliefs (apostasy)

- a. **“The Jews mentioned in 8:31...are Jewish believers** who turn out, in the unfolding story, to have no room for Jesus’ [word] (8.37), to be incapable of holding on to the truth (8.44), unable to keep his word (8.51) and ultimately Christ-killers (8.59). This is **a group of Jews who were followers of Jesus, but who then, under a pressure** which is not described by the narrator, **start to revert to their former religious beliefs. Instead of holding on to the teaching of Jesus, they now claim that Abrahamic descent is sufficient for membership of the covenant community and, by implication, for salvation.**” (M. Stibbe, p. 124)
 - b. **“If one were to draw a spectrum of faith responses from John’s gospel, then Jewish believers (the disciples) would be at the positive end; the lapsed Jewish believers would be at the negative end.** The lapsed Jews would, in other words, be in an even more reprehensible position than unbelieving Jews. **They had believed Jesus but in the unfolding drama of John 8:31 forward, they fall away & turn against Jesus.**” (M. Stibbe, p. 124)
- b. Read in the context of the verses that follow
- a. **“If the antagonists are portrayed so darkly, we must be very careful to identify who they really are.** John 8.31 introduces them as ‘the Jews who had believed him’? ...The subsequent verses depict these **believing Jews** as a group who **very quickly contradict Jesus, & even want to stone him** ... (8.59).” (M. Stibbe, p. 123)
 - b. **“The opening clause seems innocuous, until it becomes apparent in the ensuing verses that the Jews who had believed him ...turn out to be, in Jesus’ view, slaves to sin** (v. 34), **indifferent to Jesus’ word** (v. 37), **children of the devil** (v. 44), **liars** (v. 55), and guilty of mob tactics, including **attempted murder** of the one in whom they have professed to believe (v. 59).” (D. A. Carson, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: John*, p. 269)

2. 3 Appeals to Paternity by the Jews who no longer believed in Jesus (Jn. 8:33, 39a, 41b)

- a. **“We are Abraham’s descendants”**
 - a. **“The Jews’ words can be read...as a statement that their descent from Abraham already guarantees their spiritual freedom,** so that they have no need of what Jesus offers.” (Gail O’Day, *TNIBC: John*, p. 542)
 - b. **“Jesus’ listeners object that they do not need to be made free because they are children of Abraham and have never been in bondage to anyone** (8:33). Historically, of course, their comment is not true. Abraham’s children were repeatedly in bondage. The first time was in Egypt, where they were enslaved by the pharaohs. Later, they were taken captive by the Babylonians, who conquered Jerusalem and exiled the people from their homeland. Finally, the Romans had conquered the land, and Jesus’ listeners were living under Roman domination. **Those claiming never to have been in bondage cannot see the truth about their own history.** In this context **their unwillingness to acknowledge slavery in the historical sense reflects an inability to recognize slavery in the theological sense.**” (Craig Koester, *The Word of Life: Theology of John’s Gospel*, p. 73)
 - c. **“It is unlikely that the objection means the Jews have never been in political subjection to anyone.** That would be absurd: there was scarcely a major power whom the Jews had not served: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Greece, Syria and Rome had all held the Jews in political captivity... **It is much more probable that the Jews are talking about spiritual, inward freedom and privilege.**” (D. A. Carson, *Op Cit*, p. 271)
 - d. **“The final sentence of this verse, ‘How can you say that we shall be set free?’, has an ugly, challenging tone to it ...These ‘believers’ are already demonstrating their unwillingness to hold to Jesus’ teaching** (v. 31), **for their sense of inherited privilege is so strong** they can’t...acknowledge their own need...Their very words demonstrate their slavery...” (D. A. Carson, *Op Cit*, pp. 271-2)
- b. **“Our father is Abraham”**
- c. **“We have one Father – God.”**
 - a. **“...if Jesus will not allow them Abraham as their father, surely he cannot deny them God . Had not the LORD himself declared, ‘Israel is my firstborn son’** (Ex. 4:22), and **‘I am Israel’s father’** (Je. 31:9; cf. Dt. 14:1–2)? In one sense, **this is, for the Jews** in this context, **both a proud claim and the ultimate defiance ...**” (D. A. Carson, *Op Cit*, p. 273)

3. 3 Rebuttals to Paternity by Jesus (Jn. 8:34-38, 39b-41, 42-47) – Actions speak louder than words

- a. **“A slave to sin means unable to escape from sinful patterns of conduct** without the help of Jesus to set a person free.” (ESV Study Bible)
- b. **“... [S]in is a form of power that can hold people in its grasp . It...takes away human freedom...The Gospel sometimes speaks of sin as a form of slavery or bondage. At one point Jesus tells a group of people in the temple, ‘if you continue in my word you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free’** (8:31-32). The saying **presupposes that people need to be made free, which means they are currently not free .**” (C. Koester, *Op Cit*, p. 73)
- c. **“Jesus replies, ‘Very truly I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin’** (8:33-34). The idea is that **actions reveal a person’s character . Those who commit sin show that they are not freely acting on the basis of what is true, but have been taken prisoner by falsehood and are now forced to live on the basis of untruth.**” (C. Koester, *Op Cit*, p. 73)
- d. **“You are trying to kill me...so then, you do what you have heard from your father.”** (vv. 37b, 38b)
 - a. **“The desire to kill Jesus** has been a constant part of the fabric of chapters 7 to 8, and Jesus now identifies that desire with **the absence of any relationship to his word .**” (Gail O’Day, *TNIBC: John*, p. 542)

- b. "Jesus concedes their claim to be of Abraham's line. But over against that he sets their attempt to kill him, which stamps them as **being of another spirit than Abraham** (cf. Luke 3:8)." (Leon Morris, *NICNT: John*, pp. 408)
- c. "At one level...Jesus can happily acknowledge that the Jews are 'Abraham's descendants', but it is the level of least...importance. Far more significant is their fickle mob psychology that can **believe Jesus only** (vv. 30, 31) **when his teachings do not clash with their prejudices, and can turn murderous when their fundamental religious biases are called into question** (7:32; 8:20, 37, 59)." (D. A. Carson, *Op Cit*, pp. 272-3)
- e. "You are trying to kill me...You are doing what **your father** does." (vv. 40a, 41a)
- a. "...[A] claim to Abrahamic paternity is held up to the **standards of one's works** ..." (Gail O'Day, *TNIBC: John*, p. 543)
- b. "Their reply is to reiterate their relationship to Abraham. God called Abraham 'my friend' (Isa. 41:8)...**T he Jews are implying that they are aligned with Abraham** as well as friends of God. **Jesus' reply is that deeds count for more than impressive ancestry** (cf. Luke 3:8; Rom. 9:6-7). If they were really Abraham's children they would do the kind of deeds that Abraham did." (Leon Morris, *NICNT: John*, pp. 408)
- c. "Jesus had just agreed that they were physically descended from Abraham (v. 37), but now he denies that they are truly Abraham's children, for **their behavior contradicts their claim**. This implies that Abraham's true children are only those who believe in Jesus. What Abraham did most prominently was believe God (Gen. 15:6). Similarly, the Jews who are speaking here should believe in Jesus, for he comes from God & is speaking the very words of God." (ESV Study Bible)
- d. "In verse 40, **the Jews' attempt to kill Jesus is measured against two standards. First**, it is measured against **God's truth**, which Jesus speaks. Verse 40 thus returns to the theme with which the debate began in verse 31, remaining in Jesus' word and knowing the truth, and it shows once again that the Jews do not meet the conditions Jesus set for them. **Second**, it is measured against **the model of Abraham himself**. The reference to Abraham's actions **recalls the faithfulness of Abraham to the truth of God**, but it may also intend a more specific contrast between the murderous actions of the Jews and **the hospitality for which Abraham was renowned**." (Gail O'Day, *Op Cit*, pp. 543-4)
- e. "Jesus...responds by... **highlighting the peculiar aspects of their conduct that are diametrically opposed to Abraham's**. Abraham obeyed God's voice & followed his requirements, commandments, decrees & laws (Gn. 26:5). By contrast,... **they have no real heart for God, no sensitivity to his voice**. Their 'father' must therefore be someone else." (D. A. Carson, *Op Cit*, p. 273)
- f. "Jesus repeats that his enemies do the works of their father, but again he does not say who this father is. It is plain, both from this verse & from v. 38, that he is thinking of someone other than Abraham... **The implication...is that the evil deeds of his opponents are the result of their paternity: there is a family likeness**." (L. Morris, *Op Cit*, p. 409)
- f. "You are of **your father** the devil, and want to carry out his desires." (v. 44)
- a. "Now comes Jesus' **explicit assertion of the kinship of his enemies with Satan**. He has previously hinted at it, but now he affirms it in set terms. They take their origin from the devil, their father. Consequently **they set their will on doing his evil desires**. They **voluntarily choose to do his will**. 'To carry out' is continuous & points to an attitude." (L. Morris, *Op Cit*, pp. 410-11)
- b. "Jesus has already established that if God were the 'Father' of these Jews, they would love him (v. 42). Since they do not, another paternity is attested. **For the first time, the father of his opponents is specifically identified: You belong to your father, the devil**." (D. A. Carson, *Op Cit*, p. 274)
- c. "**For Jesus, the devil is not a fictional villain** from a Harry Potter novel; he is **a real and cunning source of evil** and the most influential creature on earth. (John Mark Comer, *Live No Lies*, p. 9)
- d. "For Jesus, **the devil** is the archetype of a villain who **is hellbent on destruction**. He just wants to watch the world burn. His motto: 'Tear it all down.' **Wherever he finds life, he tries to stamp it out. Beauty? Deface it. Love? Corrupt it. Unity? Fragment it into a million pieces. Human flourishing? Push it to anarchy or tyranny; either will do. His anti-life, pro-death, pro-chaos agenda is an insatiable fire**. (John Mark Comer, *Op Cit*, p.16)
- e. People 'become' children of the devil
- a. "At one point Jesus says his opponents have **the devil as their father** (8:44). **This does not imply that some people are created by God and others by Satan**. The Gospel assumes that all things come into being by the word of God, not by some other power (1:3). If **people are not created as children of the devil, they become children of the Devil by allying themselves with evil** in opposition to God. People can become children of Light by believing in the light 12:36. By way of contrast, **[people] can become children of the Devil by embracing falsehood, hatred, and the desire to impose death on others**. (Craig Koester, *Op Cit*, p. 77)
- f. The devil bends our will to carry out his desires
- a. "John calls this transcendent power of evil **Satan** (13:27), **the devil** (13:2), **the evil one** (17:15), & **the ruler of this world** (12:31)...**In John, ...the devil...lurks in the shadows, carrying out his designs through human agents** ...John recognizes that there is a power that...aligns itself with human sin in opposition to God. **People have a will of their own but Satan bends it toward his own ends**. Jesus tells a group of hostile listeners, who seek to kill him, that 'your will' is to do what the devil desires (John 8:44)." (C. Koester, *Op Cit*, pp. 74-5)

- g. He was a murderer from the beginning (Gen. 4)
 - a. “The Devil was a **murderer from the beginning** ...he incited Cain to kill Abel (1 Jn. 3:12).” (ESV Study Bible)
- h. His nature is to tell lies (Gen. 3)
 - a. “[The Devil] does not stand in the truth, i.e., it is not the realm that he lives & acts & thinks in. He is the **father of lies** : at the fall, the Devil blatantly contradicted God’s word (Gen. 3:3-4; 2:17).” (ESV Study Bible)
 - b. “ **Lies** ...in the form of deceptive ideas, **are the devil’s primary method of enslaving human beings** & entire human societies in a vicious cycle of ruin that leads us further & further east of Eden.” (J. M. Comer, *Op Cit*, p. 40)
 - c. “The devil’s lies are evident from the Garden of Eden on; for in the Garden God said, ‘You will surely die’ (Gn. 2:17), while the devil promptly retorted, ‘You will not surely die’. Either God or the devil was lying; John accepts the given that ‘it is impossible for God to lie’ (Heb. 6:18). Just as God inevitably speaks the truth, **the devil spontaneously gravitates to lying**: When he lies, he speaks his **native language** (lit. ‘he speaks out of his **own nature or essential characteristics**’).” (D. A. Carson, *Op Cit*, p. 274)
 - d. “ **[Deception]** is a **principal characteristic of Satan’s activity** ...Falsehood is a form of power, for **by convincing people to believe a lie the devil can move people to carry out his designs** ...Jesus speaks the truth he received from God. In contrast, **the devil spins a web of deception, seeking to trap people with the idea that Jesus is misleading them & that they do not need the gifts God offers.** (C. Koester, *Op Cit*, p. 75)
- 4. Jesus’ Remedy Repeated 3 Times (Jn. 8: 31b-32, 37, 43)
 - a. Continue in Jesus’ word and be freed from slavery
 - a. “ **The key word here is ‘abide’**. It is easy enough to be superficially attracted to Jesus, but the test is ‘abiding.’ It is only those who continue who are genuine disciples.” (L. Morris, *Op Cit*, pp. 406)
 - b. “If the truth gives people freedom, then falsehood holds them captive. These words – ‘the truth will make you free’ – have been etched on the walls of universities and great libraries, inspiring students to pursue various fields of higher learning. But in the Gospel **this saying has to do with Jesus’ words concerning himself and his Father, and with the truth that overcomes human estrangement from God** .” (C. Koester, *Op Cit*, p. 73)
 - c. “The truth of which John writes is **the truth which is bound up with the person and work of Jesus. It is saving truth** .” (L. Morris, *Op Cit*, pp. 407)
 - d. “The liberating power of the truth is unknowable apart from being Jesus’ disciple, which in turn depends on one’s relationship to Jesus’ word. The truth and freedom that Jesus promises are not abstract principles, but... are bound to the word. Freedom’s...root context is the exodus to freedom out of slavery in Egypt.” (G. O’Day, *Op Cit*, p. 541)
 - e. “ **Verse 32 is frequently quoted out of context** , but the connection with verse 31 shows that **Jesus is only talking about one way to know the truth, and that is by continuing to believe and obey his word.** ” (ESV Study Bible)
 - b. Give room to Jesus’ word within you
 - a. ‘My word finds no place in you.’ It was not the persuasiveness or power of Jesus’ words that **determined how people responded** to him, but **the spiritual condition of their own hearts** .” (ESV Study Bible)
 - c. Listen to Jesus’ word
- 5. Jesus Brings us the freedom we Cannot Get Without Him (Jn. 8:32-36)
 - a. “Jesus draws attention to the difference between the slave’s relationship to the home and that of the son in order to show that **he can bring people the freedom they need but cannot procure for themselves** . The Jews held themselves to be sons in God’s household. They **presumed** accordingly **on rights that, being really slaves, they did not possess**. The slave’s **position is temporary** . He may in fact remain in a particular house all his life, but he has **no rights, no security** . **At any time he can be sold or transferred to another part of the property.**” (L. Morris, *Op Cit*, pp. 408)
 - b. “...[B]ecause...[Jesus] is what he is [the Son], he is able to give real freedom.” (L. Morris, *Op Cit*, pp. 408)
 - c. “ **True freedom is not the liberty to do anything we please** , but the liberty to do what we ought; and it is genuine liberty because doing what we ought now pleases us.” (D. A. Carson, *Op Cit*, p. 272)
 - d. “In verse 36, Jesus repeats the promise of freedom (v. 32), substituting ‘Son’ for ‘truth,’ & thus makes explicit the link between truth & Jesus’ identity. **If one recognizes the truth of Jesus’ identity, that he is the Son, then freedom is possible.** ” (G. O’Day, *Op Cit*, 542)
 - e. “ **Facing the lies we have come to believe can be terrifying** . As **T. S. Eliot** put it, ‘**Human kind cannot bear very much reality.**’ The **illusions** we cling to **become part of our identity** and, with it, **our security** . They make us feel safe even as **they imprison us in fear** ...As David Foster Wallace put it, ‘The truth will set you free. But not until it is finished with you.’ It’s only in coming face to face with reality as it actually is before God that we find peace.” (J. M. Comer, *Op Cit*, 39-40)