

# ANYONE WHO KEEPS MY WORD WILL NEVER SEE DEATH

## John 8:48-59

If you consider yourself to be a student of human behavior as we do, you may find it consistently odd, as we do, that people who have no reason for doing so, often make themselves and their families out to be the salt of the earth even when it is obvious by their behavior that they are more like the refuse of the earth. That is exactly the type of behavior these Jews in chapter 8 were demonstrating.

Most people want to be somebody and few people want to be nobody. So if you behave like a fool but do not want others to believe you are a fool, you will probably try to convince them by what you say that you are something better than what you actually are. So let us read about what was going on in

John 8:48-59 NAS:

*48 The Jews answered and said to Him, “Do we not say rightly that You are a **Samaritan** and have a demon?”*

*49 Jesus answered, “I do not have a demon; but I honor My Father, and you dishonor Me.*

*50 “But I do not seek My glory; there is One who seeks and judges.*

*51 “Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he will never see death.”*

*52 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.’”*

*53 “Surely You are not greater than our father Abraham, who died? The prophets died too; whom do You make Yourself out to be?”*

*54 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’;*

*55 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.*

*56 “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.”*

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

*58 Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, **I am.**”*

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

This is a tremendous passage which, using terms the Jews understood, clearly affirms the deity of Jesus Christ. You and I may not see it so clearly at first, but as we walk through the passage, you will see how Jesus was communicating His deity to them telling them He was God.

As we look at verse 48 we see that the Jewish leaders start off immediately by attacking Jesus and accusing Him of being possessed by a demon. Now, whenever the Jewish leaders wanted to make themselves feel that Jesus was a troublemaker they would accuse Him of either being a Samaritan or being possessed by a demon. Here they accuse Him of both.

**Samaritans** were a mixed race with a religion the Jews refused to accept. To call Jesus a **Samaritan** was an insult referring to a heretic, an unbeliever. Their charge that Jesus was **demon-possessed**<sup>1</sup> suggested they thought He was mad, unclean, and evil. What caused them to make this accusation?

If we look back at the preceding verses, we see that Christ had just told them that they were of their father the devil because they did not believe Christ's words and did not love Him. So they decided not to take this sitting down so to speak. They turn it right back on Christ and call Him demon-possessed. They go on the defensive here. They reason that anyone who could compare themselves with Moses must be demon-possessed. They just do not seem capable of understanding the truth. Jesus' behavior was most certainly not that of a demon-possessed man. And had they been willing to set aside their pre-conceived beliefs for a while they might have been able to see some truth in what Jesus was saying.

So how does Christ answer their accusation? With truth, as He always did. He simply states He does not have a demon and that once again, as always, He seeks only to honor and glorify God without any kind of personal agenda whatsoever. And if they continued accusing Him of these false charges, the truth would ultimately be decided by the heavenly judge knowing that if the people were to judge Him falsely, His Father would reverse the verdict and exalt Him. Christ's answer only intensifies their anger because the implication is that Jesus is deity, that God is His Father. He is also saying that they are more interested in their own glory.

God in His bountiful wisdom has established a variety of ways to prove the validity of one's faith, and what we see here is one of them. God sent His Son into the world equipped with enough credentials to prove He was the Son of God. You would not be able to present a logical argument against Jesus being who He claimed to be. The evidence was overwhelming, and it still is today for anyone who is willing to examine it.

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<sup>1</sup> They also make this accusation in John 7:20; 8:52; and 10:20.

You cannot study the Bible and come away without a clear understanding of who Jesus is.

Here in these verses from John 8, Jesus is proving that if these Jews were truly God's children, then they would love Jesus. Jesus once again explains that He did not come on His own and that everything He has taught them has come from God the Father. He is stating that His aim is to glorify God (verse 49). Jesus has at no time sought after anything for Himself and that attitude should be evident to them. Jesus was sent by God. He came from God as an ambassador to the world of mankind. He did not *come of himself*.

Jesus' repeated emphasis that He came from God, that He was sent by God, as we see in the following passages.

John 8:42 NAS:

*42 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."*

John 13:3, NAS

*Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God, and was going back to God,*

John 16:28 NAS

*"I came forth from the Father, and have come into the world; I am leaving the world again, and going to the Father."*

Jesus had both his credentials and his instructions from God. He came to gather the children of God together in one body.

John 11:47-52 NAS:

*47 Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, "What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs. 48 "If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." 49 But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all, 50 nor do you take into account that it is expedient for you that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation not perish." 51 Now he did not say this on his own initiative, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation, 52 and not for the nation only, but in order that He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.*

Jesus would not only unite the Jews but both Jews and Gentiles, in order to bring all the sons of Abraham to glory. Jesus came to unite all mankind together in Christ.

Hebrews 2:10 NAS:

*God, for whom and through whom everything was made, chose to bring many children into glory. And it was only right that he should make Jesus, through his suffering, a perfect leader, fit to bring them into their salvation.*

So here in chapter eight of John we see that when the Jewish leaders called Christ a Samaritan, they were also continuing to make the point that they had made earlier in the chapter, that they were descendants of Abraham. These Jews to whom Jesus is speaking wanted all the status, rewards, and recognition that went along with being descendants of Abraham. So over the years they changed God's Law to suggest that if one was born of Jewish parentage they participated in all the benefits and promises that God gave to Abraham and his descendants. They believed that they were saved and were a part of God's family simply because they were born into a family where their ancestors were Jewish. So even though they pursued satisfaction of their fleshly desires and idolatry, they still believed they were part of the family of God just as Abraham had been. But they were wrong because one cannot be part of the family of God unless they are obedient to God's commands both in the way they behave and in the way they think. They were seeking glory and verse 50 shows how Jesus is a major contrast to them because He is not seeking glory for Himself.

Jesus had just finished making it clear (verses 39-47) that these Jewish leaders were seeking their own glory and that they preferred living their lives according to the doctrine of Satan and of the world. Their heritage therefore is not of God but of Satan and they demonstrate that heritage by behaving in a manner that is similar to the behavior of Satan. Therefore, they are not worthy to be called Jews or of inheriting the covenant that God made with Abraham and his descendants.

Even today many people tend to look to their heritage to give them status and glory. They think they rate because of their ancestors or the country they were born in. Individuals can boast about themselves and their family. They can massage the truth until it takes a form that makes them feel somewhat comfortable, but at the end of the day or the end of a life, it is not what you say about yourself that defines you but rather what you are. Jesus tried to explain this to them in as gentle a manner as was possible so that they might come to see this truth for themselves and make the necessary changes to bring them to true salvation and righteousness. Just as the Jews could not call themselves children of Abraham because of what they were really like, we cannot call ourselves followers of Jesus if we do not take a strong position against the evil that goes on in this world.

Did you vote in Illinois' primary on February 5<sup>th</sup>? Whom did you vote for and why? It is not the purpose of the Church to tell people how to vote but we can tell you this. You cannot claim to be a follower of Jesus Christ and knowingly vote for political candidates who are openly corrupt or who do not support biblical values such as life, family, and purity. You cannot claim you are within the family of God and Jesus Christ and be tolerant of homosexual behavior and the mass murder of little babies who are in the final stages of development prior to birth. In the same way a candidate for a major political

office cannot support abortion and homosexuality on the one hand and then expect me to believe he or she is a Christian. Those things do not go together and they can be nothing more than a bold-faced lie on the part of a dishonest candidate who will do whatever is necessary to get my vote.

You too have a father whose deeds you do and whose example you choose freely to follow. Be honest with yourself in a quiet time sometime today and identify who your father is, whose spirit you belong to, and whom you resemble. How does the saying go? *“To thine own self be true.”*<sup>2</sup>

Christ goes on in verse 51 to say, *“Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he will never see death.”* What does Christ mean by *“keep My word”*? He means believe all that He taught and obey what He commanded. Then there is a tremendous promise: if you keep His word you will never see death. By this Christ means spiritual death. A person who obeys Jesus will not be eternally separated from God (John 3:16; 5:24). But as usual the Jewish leaders misunderstood.

Be sure you do not misunderstand.

Pay attention to Christ’s call to repentance if you know you have made the wrong decision. Do something about it before it is too late. Make sure you have the right father and are in the right family by changing your heart and your direction if necessary. One who repents and accepts God’s provision for forgiveness will have forgiveness and be guaranteed salvation and eternal life that can never be lost.

Earlier, in verses 42 and 43, Jesus had told these Jews why they have no right to call God *“Father.”*

*42 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.*

*43 “Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word.*

First, they did not love Christ: *“If God were your Father, you would love me.”* Jesus proved their relation to Abraham was not true because of their intent to kill Jesus (verse 40). Jesus also proves, however, that their relationship with God is meaningless because they have not loved Christ and embraced Him as the promised Savior.

Anyone who truly loved God in Old Testament times would have been students of the Scripture and would have recognized Jesus from what the Scripture said about Him. They would have known He was from God.

<sup>2</sup> Shakespeare

If these Jews were applying for jobs as temple priests and this was their interview with the true God, their chances of being hired would become less likely every time they opened their mouths. It would have been obvious to God that they did not love Him because of the way they treated the Son He had sent to save them.

You see, all who truly embrace God as their Father would also have a true love for Jesus Christ. You cannot have one without the other. The kind of love they have for Him is in response to the gracious and merciful love Jesus has shown them. Because of this love that God both allows them to give and feel in return, there is a genuine commitment on the part of believers to His cause and kingdom. Perhaps most important of all, there is a devotion to keep His commandments, which is the clearest evidence of all of our love for Him.<sup>3</sup>

When Jesus said that anyone who kept His word would never see death, the Jewish leaders thought they had Jesus and came right back at him: *“Abraham and the prophets were holy men of God, but they all died; and you say if we obey you, we won’t die! That’s absurd!”* But they did not understand that Christ was speaking primarily of spiritual death. He is once again saying that the person who believes in Him has eternal life. If you look at the Greek grammar, their first question in 8:53 expected a negative answer: *“You are not greater than our father Abraham who died, are You?”* The irony is that of course He is. But He had not come to proclaim His greatness.

Everyone except Christ who has ever been born into this world has been born with a sin nature. We therefore find ourselves, according to law, under a sentence of death if we are not pardoned of that sin. That pardon, as we have repeatedly learned, can only be granted by the grace of God to the person who has confessed their sin and asked Christ to be their Savior. God knows our hearts and bases our pardon on that knowledge alone. However, when a person’s faith is real and sincere, it is going to be demonstrated in the values they hold and in the life they live. Unbelievers see these values lived out and know whether or not a person is a true believer. Christ taught His disciples this principle when He said,

Matthew 7:16-21, NAS

*16 "You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles, are they?"*

*17 "Even so, every good tree bears good fruit; but the bad tree bears bad fruit.*

*18 "A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit.*

*19 "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.*

*20 "So then, you will know them by their fruits.*

*21 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven.*

So when someone sees a person who claims to love God yet who supports a woman’s right to have an abortion, they can see there is inconsistency between the words and the values actually held.

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<sup>3</sup> Henry, Matthew: *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible : Complete and Unabridged in One Volume.* Peabody : Hendrickson, 1996, c1991, S. Jn 8:38.



If you see a bishop in the Church claiming that he/she wants to teach you the truth found in the Bible and you soon discover that he/she supports same sex marriages, you can know that the bishop is a hypocrite because you cannot love God and support something God calls sin (Leviticus 18:22; Romans 1:26-32). Now you may be saying, “Well I don’t support that so I guess I’m OK.” This principle applies to many things in scripture including pornography (Job 31:1; 2 Corinthians 12:21), drunkenness (Romans 13:13; Ephesians 5:18), stealing or pilfering from your employer (Romans 2:21; Titus 2:9, 10), and gossiping (2 Corinthians 12:20; 1 Timothy 5:13). Truth can always be tested by the Bible because it is the one and only source of complete truth in this world. If a statement cannot be supported by the Bible’s “truth test,” it cannot be considered reliable.

These Jews to whom Jesus has been speaking are being tested to see who and what is the object of their love. During this time of testing it will be determined how they will respond to the object of their love. Jesus is about to show them whether or not their faith is real and whether they believe in the one and only God or an imposter, and He is going to use their very own Scripture in order to do so.

John 8:54, 55 NAS:

*54 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’;*

*55 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.*

We can see in these closing verses of John chapter eight, that these Jews have no love for God the Father because they have no love for His truth or for His Word, which promises the coming of His Son to offer salvation and eternal life. The only love they have is for themselves and they are willing to deny both God and Christ in order to attain their own wants and desires. They cannot accept the deep intimacy reflected in Jesus’ relationship and union with God. Christ could not deny this intimacy or else He would have been lying.

This would be a good time to look back to the words of God in John 3:31-36 NAS:

*31 “He has come from above and is greater than anyone else. We are of the earth, and we speak of earthly things, but he has come from heaven and is greater than anyone else. 32 He testifies about what he has seen and heard, but how few believe what he tells them! 33 Anyone who accepts his testimony can affirm that God is true. 34 For he is sent by God. He speaks God’s words, for God gives him the Spirit without limit. 35 The Father loves his Son and has put everything into his hands. 36 And anyone who believes in God’s Son has eternal life. Anyone who doesn’t obey the Son will never experience eternal life but remains under God’s angry judgment.”*

The people who pretended to believe they were the people who belonged to the kingdom of God, knew nothing about the real kingdom of God nor its true nature. Rather they were more like strangers to the kingdom of God, and rude ones at that, because rather than embracing the message of God, which was in the form of Christ, they ridiculed it. By ridiculing the messenger of God they were at the same time ridiculing the message of God.

The ingrained refusal in the hearts of people to hear the Word of God through the messenger of God, Jesus Christ, is simply a reflection of the power Satan has in controlling the hearts and minds of unsaved people. Where there is no willingness to even hear the truth, there is little possibility of ever understanding the truth. Where a person has a sense that they do not want to even hear what God has to say, they have formed preconceived ideas that would not let them believe the truth even if it landed on the tip of their nose. Preconceived ideas of disbelief associated with Christ or Christianity or the doctrine of Christian faith is the true reason behind one's ignorance of it. They do not like it or love it, and therefore they will refuse to consider it.

Without the Word of God no one can be saved. If a person is allowed to follow the dictates of their self-will from birth without any guidance from the Word of God, they will never have salvation and eternal life. That can only come from hearing and accepting the Word of God under the power of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 10:17 NAS

*So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.*

Hebrews 3:13 NAS

*But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.*

Sinful practices and behavior will harden a person's heart to the truth of God. But when that same person allows their heart to be open to the truth and will listen to the truth, then that person opens their heart and mind to the power of the Holy Spirit who offers salvation.

Romans 10:8-15 NAS:

*8 In fact, it says, "The message is very close at hand; it is on your lips and in your heart." And that message is the very message about faith that we preach:9 If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.10 For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by confessing with your mouth that you are saved.11 As the Scriptures tell us, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be disgraced."12 Jew and Gentile are the same in this respect. They have the same Lord, who gives generously to all who call on him.13 For "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." 14 But how can they call on him to save*



*them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them? 15 And how will anyone go and tell them without being sent? That is why the Scriptures say, "How beautiful are the feet of messengers who bring good news!"*

Returning to John 8 we see that having therefore disproved their relation both to Abraham and to God, Jesus tells them plainly whose children they were: *"You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father"* (verse 44). If you do not belong to God, you belong to the Devil. Those are the only two families and all mankind belongs to one or the other. The question you have to answer for yourself is, which family are you going to be part of?

John 8:56-59 NAS:

56 *"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad."*

57 *So the Jews said to Him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?"*

58 *Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am."*

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

The unbelieving Jews were not Abraham's descendants spiritually (verse 39). But here when Jesus referred to *"your father Abraham,"* He meant they were physically related to him. Christ affirmed that, *"Abraham rejoiced to see My day."* By that He meant the messianic salvation which God promised (*"all peoples on earth will be blessed through you"*--Genesis 12:3). Abraham by faith was granted a son Isaac, through whom the Seed (Christ) would come. How much of the messianic times God revealed to His friend Abraham is unknown. But it is clear that he knew of the coming salvation and he rejoiced in knowing about it and expecting it.

The unbelievers objected that one so young (not yet 50 years old) could not have seen Abraham. (Nothing should be inferred about Jesus' age from this remark.) They could not understand how Abraham and Jesus could have possibly had any visual contact. Jesus then affirmed His superiority over the prophets and Abraham. Abraham came into being; but when he was born, Jesus already existed. *"I Am"* is a title of Deity.<sup>4</sup> Again the Jews understood that Jesus was claiming deity by using this title of Himself. They were horrified because they considered this to be blasphemy of the worst sort. That is why they picked up stones so that they could kill Him. Stoning was the normal punishment for this sin. Yet they could not succeed, because no one would take Jesus' life from Him until it was the right time for Him to lay it down for Himself (John 10:16, 18). The words, *but Jesus hid Himself,* could refer to a supernatural means of escape. Once again His time had not yet come.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Ex. 3:14; Isa. 41:4; 43:11-13; John 8:28

<sup>5</sup> Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An

As we reflect on this passage that so clearly describes the deity of Christ it reminds us of a story about a man named Rob Cutshaw who owned a little roadside shop outside Andrews, North Carolina. Like many in the trade, he hunted for rocks, then sold them to collectors or jewelry makers. He knew enough about rocks to decide which to pick up and sell, but he was no expert. He left the appraising of his rocks to other people. As much as he enjoyed the work, it didn't always pay the bills. He occasionally moonlighted, cutting wood to help put bread on the table.

While on a dig in the late 1960s, Rob found a rock he described as "purdy and big." He tried unsuccessfully to sell the specimen, and reportedly, kept the rock under his bed or in his closet. He guessed the blue chunk could bring as much as \$500 dollars, but he would have taken less if something urgent came up like paying his power bill. That's how close Rob came to selling for a few hundred dollars what turned out to be the largest, most valuable sapphire ever found. The blue rock that Rob had abandoned to the darkness of a closet many years ago -- now known as "The Star of David" sapphire -- weighs nearly a pound, and could easily sell for \$2.75 million.<sup>6</sup>

Rob Cutshaw had a treasure in the middle of his house and never realized it.

It is so sad that here in their midst, the Jews had this wonderful treasure and they refused to realize it. God incarnate, God Himself in the form of Jesus Christ, was walking and talking with them. What an opportunity to glorify God and exalt His name for all the marvelous things He was doing through Jesus Christ. But what did they do? Instead they condemned Christ and tried to kill Him. But His time had not yet come. He had more to do before the Cross. Oh, how much He loved us!

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Exposition of the Scriptures. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:306

<sup>6</sup> John MacArthur, *Grace to You Newsletter*, April 15, 1993.