



“The Greatness of Jesus”

John 8:48-59

Theme: Jesus is great not only for what He has done but for Who He is.

Introduction: There is no shortage of opinions about Jesus Christ. Many admire Him as a moral teacher, a social reformer, or even a martyr. But John 8 confronts us with something far more unsettling and infinitely more glorious. In this passage, Jesus is not merely discussed—He is fiercely opposed. He is insulted, accused of being demon-possessed, and ultimately targeted for execution. What brings the hostility to a boil is not merely what He claims to do—but who He claims to be.

Greatness, in the world’s estimation, is usually measured by accomplishments. Men are called great for their conquests, inventions, and influence. Yet the greatness of Jesus Christ cannot be confined to His works alone. His miracles, compassion, teaching, and ultimately His atoning death are magnificent beyond measure. Yet in this text, the emphasis presses deeper. Jesus reveals that His greatness is intrinsic, essential, and eternal.

[Read Text]

The confrontation in our text moves from slander to stoning. Again, the Jews say to Him, “*Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?*” (v. 48). That is not a theological inquiry; it is hardened unbelief. Yet Jesus does not retreat. He does not soften His claims. Instead, He escalates them—until He declares in unmistakable language, “*Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am*” (v. 58).

That statement is not merely a claim of pre-existence. It is a declaration of deity. It echoes Exodus 3:14 —“I AM WHO I AM.” **Jesus is great not only for what He has done but for Who He is.** The One standing before them is not simply a descendant of Abraham. He is the eternal God who called Abraham.

This passage strips away every shallow notion of Christ. It forces us to deal with the absolute supremacy of His person. There are five ways that the greatness of Jesus is highlighted in this text:

1. **He is Great Because of His Unwavering Priority**—*the glory of His Father.*
2. **He is Great Because of His Gracious Provision**—*eternal life to those who keep His word.*
3. **He is Great Because of His Exclusive Possession**—*He alone truly knows the Father.*
4. **He is Great Because of His Redemptive Purpose**—*He is the fulfillment of Abraham’s hope.*
5. **He is Great Because of His Eternal Perpetuity**—*He is the “I AM.”*

You cannot, you must not, depart from this text neutral. The same declaration that comforts believers provokes sinners. And the dividing line remains the same today. The greatness of Jesus demands a response; it demands your response.

The question before us is not simply, “What has Jesus done?” The question is, “Who is He?”

And if He is who He says He is, then He is not merely admirable. He is Lord.

I. **He Is Great Because of His Unwavering Priority – 8:48-50a**

A. **The Priority of Sinners – v. 48**

1. In the previous section, Jesus had amply demonstrated the spiritual destitution and the illegitimacy of their claim that they are the children of God.
2. Instead of being the righteous children of God, they were in reality the unrighteous children of Satan – primarily demonstrated in their rejection of God’s Son.
3. In reaction to Jesus impeccable argumentation, these Jews had no legitimate response and therefore resorted to an argument ad hominem – attacking Christ Jesus Himself – *“The Jews answered and said to Him, ‘Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?’”*
 - a) *“You are a Samaritan” ...*
 - (1) The accusation of Him being a Samaritan reflected the attitude of ethnic superiority of the Jewish people, who believed that no true Jew would deny their unique privilege.
 - (2) Since Jesus was questioning their legitimate right to call themselves the children of Abraham, he could not be a full-blooded Jew but most likely a Samaritan.
 - (3) This was about the greatest ethnic insult they could give to another Jew.
 - b) *“You ... have a demon” ...*
 - (1) This was likely motivated by Jesus’ statement about them being of their *“father the Devil.”*
 - (2) In addition, in their self-righteousness, they believed that it must be an evil spirit that would cause him to denounce the good people who acknowledge no Father but God.
 - (3) Essentially, asserting that Jesus had *“a demon”* was to say that he was “out of his mind.”
4. This illustrates the priority most sinners have: to justify themselves and defend the legitimacy of their façade of righteousness, by attempting to make others inferior to them.

B. **The Priority of the Son – vv. 49-50a**

1. Jesus’ priority was much different – *“I do not have a demon; but I honor My Father, and you dishonor Me.”*

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2. Jesus didn't even acknowledge the racial slur – He went directly to the most critical issue: the test of Satanic lineage – who is the priority – God or self?
 - a) *One who is controlled by the Devil is a liar, but Christ spoke only the truth.*
 - b) *One who is prompted by the Devil flatters men, but Christ depicted the depraved nature of man in the most humiliating terms.*
 - c) *One who is moved by the Devil is inflated with pride, seeking honor and fame, but Christ sought only the honor of Another, namely the Father.¹*
3. Here we see that Jesus' denial of demon possession is certified in the fact that His priority is on the glory of God – not Himself – *“I do not seek My glory.”*
4. Jesus' argument brings condemnation on His opponents – “If I am honoring God and you are dishonoring Me, then you are dishonoring God as well” – *John 5:23*.
5. Jesus entire life was lived to fulfill the will and glory of God – cp. *John 4:34*.

II. He Is Great Because of His Gracious Provision – 8:50b-51

A. The Peril of Sinners – v. 50b

1. Jesus indicated that He is not seeking His own glory, but the glory of the Father; however, the Father IS seeking His Son's glory – *“there is One who seeks [My glory] and judges [those who reject it].”*
2. While they sought to dishonor Christ, the Father sought to honor Him, vowing to bring His fullest displeasure on those who opposed Him- *John 3:18; 3:36*.
3. As we can see below, the judgment for those who reject the Son is death – that eternal separation from the grace and mercy of God that shield and protect men while the patience of God endures.
4. The day is coming when judgment will be revealed, and His grace and mercy will no longer protect a sinner.
5. However, Christ has provided the solution to God's wrath.

B. The Provision of the Son – v. 51

1. Jesus informs His enemies that the ability to avoid the judgment of God was directly before them – they didn't have to know God's wrath.
2. He says, *“Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word, he will never see*

¹ Taken from Pink, *The Gospel of John*, p. 460

death.”

3. This is a reference to what He had already stated that keeping His Word is the mark of a genuine disciple – cp. [vv. 31-32](#).
 - a) *The word used here for “keeps” [τηρήσει]- means “to watch over or to guard.”*
 - b) *The grammar in this sentence is a 3rd class condition – meaning that it is a real and possible condition, presenting a genuine opportunity, not some hypothetical fantasy.*
 - c) *The subjunctive mood used here presents a contingency – one must be willing to keep His Word.*
 - d) *Thus, Christ has in mind more than mere casual cooperation with peripheral issues of religious observances – He is addressing a heart that becomes diligent in protecting the Word from infraction in the person’s daily life.*
4. Such a person will never know the wages of sin, the eternal separation from God in the torments of Hell.
5. By implication, all who reject Him and refuse to *“keep”* God’s Word will indeed die.

III. He Is Great Because of His Exclusive Possession – 8:52-55

A. The Protest by Sinners – [vv. 52-53](#)

1. Citing their most esteemed “hero of the faith,” they confront what they believe is Jesus’ impropriety – *“The Jews said to Him, ‘Now we know that You have a demon. Abraham died, and the prophets also ...’”*
2. Their reasoning is that no one can “cheat death” – obviously forgetting about Enoch and Elijah.
3. So they ask – since no one can defeat death, how is it that *“... you say, ‘If anyone keeps my word, he will never taste death?’”*
4. They continued to have no idea about the issue of spiritual death, understanding only physical realities and therefore remaining oriented on the physical.
5. They then attack Him for what they think is His arrogance – *“Surely you are not greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died too; whom do you make Yourself out to be?”*
6. Who do you think you are?

B. The Possession of the Son – [vv. 54-55](#)

1. The glory of a vain pretender is empty and meaningless – *“Jesus answered,*

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‘If I glorify Myself, My glory is nothing ...’

2. However, what Jesus has is not something that He merely asserts but is something He possesses as an inherent element of His relationship with the Father – *“It is My Father who glorifies Me, of whom you say, ‘He is our God.’”*
3. Hence, God the Father is ever engaged in the exaltation of the Son – His esteem of the Son is evident in the place of honor to which He is exalted.
4. The Jews’ own spiritual liabilities are heightened because of their profession to have a relationship with God, while showing absolutely no signs of the spiritual life that is inextricably the result.
5. Their profession is empty because while boasting of their supposed relationship with God, they have not even become an acquaintance of the Father- *“and you have not come to know Him ...”* – [ἔγνώκατε] – Perf. Act. Ind – have not ever – at any time in the past – become personally and intimately related to God through personal experience.
6. Jesus uses a different word for *“know”* in referring to His relationship with the Father – [οἶδα] – to gain a full knowledge or complete comprehension.
7. He does not say that He “came to know Him” by gaining personal exposure and experience, but that He intrinsically knows the Father completely.
8. The primary matter of Christ’s uniqueness is that His knowledge goes way beyond mere casual acquaintance; He possesses a personal, experiential knowledge of God – *“but I know Him”* - οἶδα
9. Whereas by professing to know Him, you are a liar, but Jesus states, *“if I say that I do not know Him, I will be a liar like you”* in your professing that you do know Him.
10. What distinguishes Jesus from these Jews is that *“I do know Him and keep His word.”* (Pres. Act. Ind.) – the mark of a true believer and what characterizes all who are true followers of Christ – cp. [8:31-32](#).

IV. He Is Great Because of His Redemptive Purpose – 8:56

A. The Potential for Sinners

1. In contrast to those who have not become acquainted with God, Abraham is an example of one who truly grasped the knowledge of God.

2. In fact, we are told that long before Christ was ever provided, Abraham had such faith in God that he considered the promise of God as sure as if it had already happened – *“Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.”*
3. This is the potential for any sinner – if they will believe God and His Word, the realities God’s Word can provide them with a knowledge that will bring them into direct fellowship with God – cp. *1 John 1:1-4*.
4. How was it that Abraham saw Christ’s day?
 - a) *First, he saw it by faith – granting credibility to the promises of God – cp. Hebrews 11:13.*
 - b) *Then, he saw it in the typology of his own son, Isaac, the object lesson of Isaac’s sacrifice – cp. Genesis 22:5-8.*
 - c) *Finally, he saw it in special revelation – cp. Psalms 25:14.*

B. The Purpose of the Son

1. We are told that Abraham *“saw it and was glad”* – the tremendous provision of God that brought the sinner true joy –
2. God had promised Abraham that through him and his seed all the families of the earth would be blessed – cp. *Genesis 12:3*.
3. This blessing has always been primarily spiritual, and Abraham anticipated the accomplishment of this in the day of Christ
 - a) *In one sense, the day of Christ anticipated by Abraham included the arrival of the Son of God at the first Advent.*
 - b) *However, the New Testament clearly clarifies that the Day of Christ includes the future point when the Lord Jesus Christ will bring all things into subjection and reward the faithful – cp. 1 Corinthians 1:8; Philippians 1:6; Philippians 2:16.*
4. Thus, the greatness of Christ Jesus is due to His purpose of bringing blessing upon those who were previously alienated from God, by reconciling them to the Father – cp. *Colossians 1:19-22*.

V. He Is Great Because of His Eternal Perpetuity – 8:57-59

A. The Perception by Sinners – vv. 57-58

1. Jesus’ comments about Abraham seeing and rejoicing in Jesus can only be understood in light of Jesus being the focus of the prophetic Scriptures.
2. These men failed to even believe that Jesus was God’s Son, let alone accept that He is the object of revelation and therefore cannot understand Jesus’ comments about Abraham.

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3. They said: *“You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?”*
4. They could not process how there could be any connection or contact between Jesus and Abraham – *“If Abraham has seen you and your day, they you must have seen Abraham?”*
5. For their natural state, they could not accept the things of God and thus scoff that Jesus had lived the necessary 2,000 years since Abraham was alive.”
6. The notion of comprehending something by faith was an absurdity to them.
7. Clearly, the unbeliever views Jesus as bound by the same temporal constraints that are upon them; however, Jesus is eternal.

B. The Perpetuity of the Son – v. 59

1. The Jews made the mistake of ascribing to Jesus a merely temporal existence.
2. Jesus response to the perspective of these unbelievers confirms His eternal nature – *“Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am’.*”
3. This statement is one of the clearest passages that demonstrate Jesus’ awareness of who He is and what He is – He affirms His eternal, timeless, absolute essence.
4. He emphasizes Abraham’s temporal limitations by using the simple past tense to reference his life – Abraham had a beginning and an end –
5. However, Jesus uses the present tense to refer to Himself in comparison to Abraham – *“I am.”* [ἐγὼ εἰμί]
 - a) *Essentially, this is a direct claim by Jesus to be Yahweh (the Jehovah) of the Old Testament – cp. [Exodus 3:14](#).*
 - b) *Thus, Jesus is eternal – not subject to the same chronological issues that we face – cp. [John 8:24, 28](#).*
6. Their reaction demonstrates that they understood it as a direct claim to divinity by Jesus – *“Therefore, they picked up stones to throw at Him ...”* – cp. [Leviticus 24:16](#).
7. They were going to stone Him to death, but *“Jesus hid Himself [among the crowd] and went out of the Temple.”*

So What?

1. **What situations this past week exposed whose approval you truly seek—and how does that compare to Christ’s single-minded pursuit of the Father’s glory**
2. **Where have you allowed temporary concerns to eclipse eternal hope?**
3. **Where might pride be subtly competing with your professed desire to exalt Christ?**

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