



Sunday School Lesson Summary for January 7, 2007
Released on Wednesday, January 3, 2007

"I Am from Above"

DEVOTIONAL READING: John 14:23–31.
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: John 8:31–59.
PRINTED TEXT: John 8:31–38, 48–56, 58–59.
READ: John 8:31–59
LESSON TEXT: John 8:31–38, 48–56, 58–59.

TIME: A.D. 29
PLACE: Jerusalem

GOLDEN TEXT: "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 [make] you free'" (John 8:31–32, NIV).

HOW TO SAY IT

ABRAHAM. Ay-bruh-ham.
ASSYRIA. Uh-sear-e-uh.
BABYLON. Bab-uh-lun.
EGYPT. Ee-jipt.
GENTILE. Jen-tile.
SAMARITANS. Suh-mare-uh-tunz.

LESSON TEXT

John 8:31-59 (New International Version)

The Children of Abraham

31To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. 32Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

33They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants^[a] and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?"

34Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. 35Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. 36So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. 37I know you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are ready to kill me, because you have no room for my word. 38I am telling you what I have seen in the Father's presence, and you do what you have heard from your father.^[b]"

39"Abraham is our father," they answered.

"If you were Abraham's children," said Jesus, "then you would^[c] do the things Abraham did. 40As it is, you are determined to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. 41You are doing the things your own father does." "We are not illegitimate children," they protested. "The only Father we have is God himself."

The Children of the Devil

42Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me. 43Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. 44You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. 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. 45Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! 46Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me? 47He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God."

The Claims of Jesus About Himself

48The Jews answered him, "Aren't we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?"

49"I am not possessed by a demon," said Jesus, "but I honor my Father and you dishonor me. 50I am not seeking glory for myself; but there is one who seeks it, and he is the judge. 51I tell you the truth, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death."

52At this the Jews exclaimed, "Now we know that you are demon-possessed! Abraham died and so did the prophets, yet you say that if anyone keeps your word, he will never taste death. 53Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?"

54Jesus replied, "If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. 55Though 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 keep his word. 56Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad."

57"You are not yet fifty years old," the Jews said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!"

58"I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" 59At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.

Footnotes:

- a. [John 8:33](#) Greek seed; also in verse 37
- b. [John 8:38](#) Or presence. *Therefore do what you have heard from the Father.*
- c. [John 8:40](#) Some early manuscripts "*If you are Abraham's children,*" said Jesus, "*then*

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:

1. List some reasons that people rejected Jesus.
2. Explore passages from John 8 that reveal Jesus' ability to liberate.
3. Explain the concepts of spiritual bondage and spiritual freedom.
4. Affirm that true liberty is possible only through Jesus Christ.
5. Be challenged to live out the freedom from slavery in one area of thought or habit that his/her relationship with Christ has made possible.

LESSON OUTLINE

- I. NEEDING TRUTH—John 8:31—38
- II. SEEKING GLORY—John 8:48—53
- III. VALUING HONOR—John 8:54—56, 58—59

INTRODUCTION

In our day and age, the truth is not always well received. We know that even though people raise their right hands and swear in front of a judge to tell "nothing but the truth," many lie anyway! Corporate scandals seem to occur regularly, and some of the highest executives in the companies end up being tried and sentenced because of falsified records. It is sad that it is now commonplace for people to lie about any and everything.

While we express disappointment that the truth is so seldom heard these days, this is by no means something new to our society. History is filled with incidents in which the truth was not told. Sadly, lying goes along quite naturally with a secular society, for there is no accepted standard of truth by which people live. It is only the child of by the teachings of Jesus (His "word") can we measure our actions and attitudes in life.

"Freedom" is a beautiful word that can be applied in many contexts. To *prisoners*, freedom means release from confinement. To *nationalists*, freedom means independence from the domination of a foreign power. To a *debtor*, freedom is finally being released from a financial obligation. The word "freedom" has become a patriotic slogan associated with the democratic form of government. All of America's wars have been fought in the name of freedom—either ours or someone else's.

The concept of freedom has a far deeper meaning for the Christian. Christian liberty is not merely the release from political tyranny, foreign occupation, or the burden of debt. Christ came to set us free from sin and its consequences. This lesson deals with that kind of freedom.

LESSON BACKGROUND

The events and teachings recorded in John 7 and 8 occurred during one of Jesus' visits to the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem (reference John 7:1, 2, 37; 8:20). God instituted this festival for two reasons. First, it was a time of thanksgiving during the season of the olive and fruit harvests (the September–October time frame). Second, it was as a time to remember deliverance from slavery in Egypt (reference Leviticus 23:33–44).

As something of an object lesson, many who celebrated this festival would live in tents ("tabernacles") outside the city to reenact the 40 years that the Israelites had lived in tents while wandering in the wilderness. It is against this backdrop of deliverance from physical bondage that Jesus proceeds to demonstrate the way to deliverance from spiritual bondage.

QUESTIONS

I. NEEDING TRUTH—John 8:31—38

1. How did Jesus point out that true belief could be determined? (John 8:31—32)

In this lesson, Jesus—being the all-knowing God—already had the ability to know who believed (and worshipped) Him in spirit and in truth (reference John 4:20—24), so it was an easy task for Him to answer the Jews with certain conviction in the following way: "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free," (vss. 31—32).

Jesus told those who believed that there was a way to determine whether their belief was sincere and genuine. It was not enough to verbally state belief in Jesus. What really mattered was whether those claiming to believe would live by His teachings. That fact remains true today. Christ changes us. A person claiming belief in Jesus but exhibiting no change in his life was still unsaved.

2. What did Jesus mean when He told the Jews to continue in His word (John 8:31)?

To continue in Jesus' word meant *to abide* or *to remain* in His word. A believer who continues to obey the Word of God is a true disciple or learner. Jesus' word is truth to be lived; it is not merely academic information. As someone lives by the teachings of Jesus, he/she will experience a spiritual freedom never known before, a freedom the Mosaic Law could never give. It is not enough to make a mental commitment to the teachings of Jesus without truly receiving Him as Saviour and living according to His will.

3. How did they react regarding Jesus' offer of freedom, and was their statement true? (John 8:33)

The Jews were quite indignant when Jesus offered them "freedom." For Him to do this meant that they were somehow not free—which they disagreed was the case. Their response was that they had not been in bondage and thus had no need for the freedom Jesus offered. They felt that their genealogy alone secured their right relationship with God.

Right off the bat, most students of the Bible know that what the Jews responded is not true at all! Their ancestors had been slaves in Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon and at various times in their history had been conquered by enemy nations around them. Furthermore, at that very time they were under the control of the Roman Empire.

But because this was not the kind of slavery Jesus had in mind, He chose not to address these historical facts to the Jews. Jesus was speaking of spiritual slavery rather than physical slavery. Again, Jews who did not believe Jesus' words were in reality also guilty of being in spiritual bondage.

4. What does the presence of sin in a person's life do to him/her?

The presence of sin in a person's life will place him/her in a position in which he/she will have to answer to sin, or allow sin to dictate to him/her what to do. Sin is like a taskmaster who makes unusual requests. A person living apart from God does not have the spiritual strength to live apart from sin, and is therefore a slave to it.

5. What contrast did Jesus draw between Himself and Abraham? (John 8:37–38)

The Jews had pointedly reminded Jesus of their lineage from Abraham, believing that this status automatically put them into a right relationship with God (vs. 33). Jesus reminded them that He was well aware of their genealogy, however, Abraham was known for having faith in God, and these Jews obviously did not have that faith. This was proved by the fact that the Jews wanted to kill Jesus.

Jesus told them that if they were the descendants of Abraham, they would live or act like it by honoring Jesus as God. He said that instead they were trying to kill Him—at the urging of their "father" (John 8:39b–41a), referring to Satan.

In verses 42–47, Jesus continued saying that if God were their father, they would have love for Jesus. He said that He had been sent by God and that He (Jesus) did not come on His own. He commented that the Jews could not understand what He was saying because they were not able to listen to truth. He told them that they listened to and followed lies because they desired to follow their father who was the father of lies.

II. SEEKING GLORY—John 8:48–53

6. What two accusations did the Jews fling at Jesus, and why did they do so? (John 8:48)

When Jesus once again told the unbelieving Jews they were not hearing God's word because they did not belong to Him (vs. 47), they replied back, "Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?"

The Jews said this because usually when people cannot come up with an intelligent argument to refute or counter what has been said, they often resort to name-calling.

To call a Jewish person a Samaritan was meant as an immense insult because Samaritans were thought of as being *half-breeds*. Samaritans in fact were people who resulted from the mingling of nations brought about by Assyria when the northern nation of Israel was taken into captivity (reference 2 Kings 17). They were therefore viewed by Jews as impure and of a lower class.

The Jews said this to offend Jesus. They were throwing back to Jesus what He had said to them—that they were not true children of Abraham but instead were of the devil. Earlier in verse 41b, they said, "We were not born of fornication; we have one Father—God."

"From ancient times, this has been interpreted as a sneer, as if to say, 'We are not illegitimate children, but *You* are.' Apparently gossip had followed Jesus for many years, alleging that He had been conceived out of wedlock." ["The Nelson Study Bible," New King James Version, Thomas Nelson Publishers, p. 1778, © 1997, Nashville, TN]

As a side note, Jesus knew that the Samaritans were just as valuable in God's eyes as anyone else. Today, Jesus' offer of eternal life is open to all people—regardless to what their ethnic background is, what their economic status is, what their sex is, or what their social level is. *Jesus is an equal opportunity Saviour!*

7. Why did Jesus say He was not seeking His own glory? (John 8:48–50)

Jesus said that He sought to honor God, but the Jews were dishonoring Jesus by claiming that He had a demon. For them to call Him demon-possessed was a dishonor to the Godhead.

Jesus was not about to be associated in any way with the devil because Jesus' intent was to honor God. He was not seeking glory for Himself. He told them that, "There is One who seeks and judges" (v. 50). To this, He referenced God.

In response to their question about who He made Himself out to be, Jesus also said in verse 54 that if He tried to honor Himself, it would mean nothing. He was not trying to honor Himself; He was being honored by God, His Father. Jesus was indicating that no matter what the Jews thought of Him, He did not have to vindicate Himself. His Father would do the vindicating. To justify Himself meant nothing; justification from God meant much.

8. What did Jesus mean about never seeing death? (John 8:51)

When Jesus said that those who keep His word would never see death, He was referring to spiritual death, not physical death. Obviously, we all die physically. Only those living at the time of the rapture will escape physical death.

In the Bible, death is separation, and only those who reject Jesus will be separated from Him forever by eventually being cast into the lake of fire (reference Rev. 20:15).

III. VALUING HONOR—John 8:54–56, 58–59

9. What was the conclusion the Jews came to about Jesus' claim of deity? (John 8:54–56, 58–59)

When Jesus said in verse 58 that “before Abraham was, I AM,” the Jews immediately realized that Jesus was claiming to be God. This quote comes, by the way, from the Old Testament when God proclaimed His eternal existence (reference Exod. 3:14). The Jews knew this scripture and assumed that either Jesus was a madman for saying this, or a blasphemer—one who speaks or acts disrespectfully of sacred things as related to God.

Their response to Jesus' claim of deity was to pick up stones in order to stone Him to death. This practice was acceptable and in accordance to Old Testament law. (Reference Lev. 24:16)

10. What is the only conclusion we can come to today about Jesus' claim to deity?

Either what Jesus said is truth, or He was self-deceived in His claims. Scripture, however, is consistent in presenting Jesus as the Son of God and truly God Himself. Since He is divine, he does have the power to set us free from the slavery of sin. Those who have received Him and live by His words understand this truth.

CONCLUSION

The lesson began with certain Jews who professed belief in Christ. As Jesus told them of the truth that could set them free, it became clear that they had not experienced the freedom of which Jesus spoke. As Jesus revealed more, the crowd, previously sympathetic, turned ugly! When Jesus identified Himself clearly as God, they tried to kill Him.

Some imagine that freedom is freedom *to* sin. However, those who accept Jesus for all that He is are set free from the slavery *of* sin. Those who the Son sets free are free indeed! Start living a life of victory today—victory of the power of sin's clench.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. True freedom comes only from surrender to God (John 8:31–32).
2. We are not always good judges of our own spiritual condition (vss. 33–36).
3. Our actions reveal our true spiritual heritage (John 8:37–38; reference Matt. 7:15–20).
4. In their spiritual blindness, unbelievers often draw wrong conclusions about Christ's followers (John 8:48–50).
5. People are often quick to reject the gospel even without understanding it (vss. 51–53).
6. Self-honor is no honor at all (vss. 54–56).
7. Sometimes the best response to an argumentative person is to walk away (vss. 58–59).

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

When facing temptation, ask yourself: *Did Jesus come to earth so I could do this or be free not to do it?* [The answer, of course, is that Jesus *did* come to earth to free us from the bondage of sin. We have the strength—from the Holy Spirit who dwells within—to overcome and resist any temptation. James 4:7 says, “Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”]

PRAYER

Holy Father, we live in a world full of doubts and temptations. Very often we don't understand why we do the things we do. We want to do what's right, but we fall back into our old, bad habits and patterns.

Please give us both the power to believe Your Word and the faith to follow it at all costs. Then we can experience the freedom that Christ promised us. In Jesus' name, amen.

ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

In preparation for next week's lesson (January 14, 2007), you should study John 5:19–29. The time is A.D. 28, and the place is again in Jerusalem. The Golden Text is John 5:24, and the subject is “Jesus Is Authority and Judge.” In Matthew 28:18, Jesus told the disciples that, “All authority has been given to Me [Jesus Christ] in heaven and on earth.” This lesson will teach the unity of the Father and Son—specifically in issues of life and judgment. *Good studying!*

LESSON SUMMARIZED BY

Kimbley Y. Baker-Richardson