

# John 8:48-59

by St. John Chrysostom

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*Jesus teaches that He is greater than Abraham and is eternal, being the same as the Father, and that He honors His Father and seeks to do His will.*

**Scripture:** John 8:50-51, John 8:56, John 8:58, Hebrews 3:13

**Topics:** "Divine Authority", "Eternal Life"

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## Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the encounter between Jesus and the Jews, highlighting their insults towards Jesus, calling Him a Samaritan and accusing Him of having a devil. Despite the insults, Jesus responds with meekness, emphasizing His honor for the Father and His lack of concern for personal glory. He challenges the Jews to believe in Him and keep His teachings to attain eternal life, revealing His superiority over Abraham and the prophets. The Jews, blinded by their pride and disbelief, fail to recognize Jesus' divinity and attempt to stone Him when He declares His eternal existence before Abraham.

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## Transcript

Then answered the Jews, and said to Him, Say we not well that you are a Samaritan, and hast a devil? Jesus answered, I have not a devil; but I honor My Father.

1. A shameless and a forward thing is wickedness, and when it ought to hide itself, then is it the fiercer. As was the case with the Jews. For when they ought to have been pricked by what was said, admiring the boldness and conclusiveness of the words, they even insult Him, calling Him a Samaritan, and saying that He had a devil, and they ask, Said we not well that you are a Samaritan, and hast a devil? Because when He utters anything sublime, this is thought among the very senseless to be madness. Yet nowhere before did the Evangelist say that they called Him a Samaritan; but from this expression it is probable that this had been often asserted by them.

You have a devil, says some one. Who is it that has a devil? He that honors God, or he that insults Him that honors Him? What then says Christ, who is very meekness and gentleness? I have not a devil, but I honor Him that sent me. Where there was need to instruct them, to pull down their excessive insolence, to teach them not to be proud because of Abraham, He was vehement; but when it was needful that He being insulted should bear it, He used much gentleness. When they said, We have God and Abraham for our Father, He touched them sharply; but when they called Him a demoniac, He spoke submissively, thus teaching us to avenge insults offered to God, but to overlook such as are offered to ourselves.

John 8:50

I seek not My own glory.

These things, He says, I have spoken to show that it becomes not you, being murderers, to call God your Father; so that I have spoken them through honor for Him, and for His sake do I hear these reproaches, and for His sake do ye dishonor Me. Yet I care not for this insolence ; to Him, for whose sake I now hear these things, you owe an account of your words. For 'I seek not My own glory.' Wherefore I omit to punish you, and betake Myself to exhortation, and counsel you so to act, that you shall not only escape punishment, but also attain eternal life.

John 8:51

Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep My saying, he shall never see death.

Here He speaks not of faith only, but of a pure life. Above He said, shall have everlasting life, but here, shall not see death. John 6:40 At the same time He hints to them that they could do nothing against Him, for if the man that should keep His saying should not die, much less should He Himself. At least they understood it so, and said to Him,

John 8:52

Now we know that you have a devil; Abraham is dead, and the Prophets are dead.

That is, they who heard the word of God are dead, and shall they who have heard yours not die?

John 8:53

Are you greater than our father Abraham?

Alas for their vainglory! Again do they betake themselves to his relationship. Yet it would have been suitable to say, Are you greater than God? Or they who have heard you than Abraham? But they say not this, because they thought that He was even less than Abraham. At first, therefore, He showed that they were murderers, and so led them away from the relationship; but when they persevered, He contrived this in another way, showing that they labored uselessly. And concerning the death, He said nothing to them, neither did He reveal or tell them what kind of death He meant, but in the meantime He would have them believe, that He is greater than Abraham, that even by this He may put them to shame. Certainly, He says, were I a common man I ought not to die, having done no wrong; but when I speak the truth, and have no sin, am sent from God, and am greater than Abraham, are you not mad, do ye not labor in vain when you attempt to kill Me? What then is their reply? Now we know that you have a devil. Not so spoke the woman of Samaria. She said not to Him, You have a devil; but only, Are you greater than our father Jacob? John 4:12 For these men were insolent and accursed, while she desired to learn; wherefore she doubted and answered with proper moderation, and called Him, Lord. For one who promised far greater things, and who was worthy of credit, ought not to have been insulted, but even admired; yet these men said that He had a devil. Those expressions of the Samaritan woman were those of one in doubt; these were the words of men unbelieving and perverse. Are you greater than our father Abraham? so that this (which He had said) makes Him to be greater than Abraham. When therefore you have seen Him lifted up, you shall confess that He is greater. On this account He said, When you have lifted Me up, you shall know that I Am. John 8:28 And observe His wisdom. Having first rent them away from Abraham's kindred, He shows

that He is greater than Abraham, that so He may be seen to be very exceedingly greater than the Prophets also. Indeed it was because they continually called Him a prophet that He said, My word has no place in you. John 8:37 In that other place He declared that He raises the dead, but here He says, He that believes shall never see death, which was a much greater thing than not to allow believers to be holden, by death. Wherefore the Jews were the more enraged. What then say they?

Whom makest you yourself?

And this too in an insulting manner. You are taking somewhat upon yourself, says one of them. To this then Christ replies;

John 8:54

If I honor Myself, My honor is nothing.

2. What say the heretics here? That He heard the question, Are you greater than our father Abraham? and dared not to say to them, Yea, I am greater, but did so in a covert manner. What then? Is His honor nothing? With respect to them it is nothing. And as He said, My witness is not true John 5:31, with reference to the opinion they would form of it, so also does He speak here.

There is One that honors Me.

And wherefore said He not, The Father that sent Me, as He did before, but,

Of whom you say that He is your God.

John 8:55

Yet you have not known Him.

Because He desired to show that they not only knew not His Father, but that they knew not God.

But I know Him.

So that to say, 'I know Him,' is not a boast, while to say, 'I know Him not,' would be a falsehood; but you when you say that you know Him, lie; as then ye, when you say that you know Him, lie, so also should I, were I to say that I know Him not.

If I honor Myself. Since they said, Whom makest you yourself? He replies, If I make (Myself anything,) My honor is nothing. As then I know Him exactly, so ye know Him not. And as in the case of Abraham, He did not take away their whole assertion, but said, I know that you are Abraham's seed, so as to make the charge against them heavier; thus here He does not remove the whole, but what? Whom ye say. By granting to them their boast of words, He increases the force of the accusation against them. How then do ye not know Him? Because ye insult One who says and does everything that He may be glorified, even when that One is sent from Him. This assertion is unsupported by testimony, but what follows serves to establish it.

And I keep His saying.

Here they might, if at least they had anything to say, have refuted Him, for it was the strongest proof of His having been sent by God.

John 8:56

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

Again, He shows that they were aliens from the race of Abraham, if they grieved at what he rejoiced in. My day, seems to me to mean the day of the Crucifixion, which Abraham foreshowed typically by the offering of the ram and of Isaac. What do they reply?

John 8:57

You are not yet forty years old, and have You seen Abraham?

So that we conclude that Christ was nearly forty.

John 8:58-59

Jesus says unto them, Before Abraham was, I Am. Then took they up stones to cast at Him.

Do you see how He proved Himself to be greater than Abraham? For the man who rejoiced to see His day, and made this an object of earnest desire, plainly did so because it was a day that should be for a benefit, and belonging to one greater than himself. Because they had said, The carpenter's son Matthew 13:55, and imagined nothing more concerning Him, He leads them by degrees to an exalted notion of Him. Therefore when they heard the words, You know not God, they were not grieved; but when they heard, before Abraham was, I Am, as though the nobility of their descent were debased, they became furious, and would have stoned Him.

He saw My day, and was glad. He shows, that not unwillingly He came to His Passion, since He praises him who was gladdened at the Cross. For this was the salvation of the world. But they cast stones at Him; so ready were they for murder, and they did this of their own accord, without enquiry.

But wherefore said He not, Before Abraham was, I was, instead of I Am? As the Father uses this expression, I Am, so also does Christ; for it signifies continuous Being, irrespective of all time. On which account the expression seemed to them to be blasphemous. Now if they could not bear the comparison with Abraham, although this was but a trifling one, had He continually made Himself equal to the Father, would they ever have ceased casting stones at Him?

After this, again He flees as a man, and conceals Himself, having laid before them sufficient instruction: and having accomplished His work, He went forth from the Temple, and departed to heal the blind, proving by His actions that He is before Abraham. But perhaps some one will say, Why did He not paralyze their strength? So they would have believed. He healed the paralytic, yet they believed not; nay, He wrought ten thousand wonders; at the very Passion He cast them to the ground, and darkened their eyes, yet they believed not; and how would they have believed if He had paralyzed their strength? There is nothing worse than a soul hardened in desperation; though it see signs and wonders, it still perseveres in retaining the same shamelessness. Thus Pharaoh, who received ten thousand strokes, was sobered only while being punished, and continued of this character until the last day of his life, pursuing those whom he had let go. Wherefore Paul continually says, Lest any of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Hebrews 3:13 For as the callosities of the body, when formed, become dead, and possess no sensation; so the soul, when it is occupied by many passions, becomes dead to virtue; and apply what you will to it, it gets no perception of the matter, but whether you threaten punishment or anything else, continues insensible.

3. Wherefore I beseech you, while we have hopes of salvation, while we can turn, to use every means to do so. For men who have become past feeling, are after that in the blind state of despairing pilots, who give up their vessel to the wind, and themselves contribute no assistance. Thus the envious man looks to one thing only, that is, to satisfy his lust, and though he be like to be punished or even slain, still he is possessed solely by that passion; and in like manner the intemperate and avaricious. But if the sovereignty of the passions be so great, much greater is that of virtue; if for them we despise death, much more for this; if they (sinners) regard not their own lives, much less ought we to do so in the cause of our salvation. For what shall we have to say, if when they who perish are so active about their own perdition, we for our own salvation manifest not even an equal activity, but ever continue wasting with envy? Nothing is worse than envy; to destroy another it destroys itself also. The eye of the envious wastes away in grief, he lives in a continual death, he deems all men, even those who have never wronged him, his enemies. He grieves that God is honored, he rejoices in what the devil rejoices in. Is any honored among men? This is not honor, envy him not. But is he honored by God? Strive and be thou like him. You will not? Why then do you destroy yourself too? Why do you cast away what you have? Can you not be like him, nor gain any good thing? Why then do you besides this take for yourself evil, when you ought to rejoice with him, that so even if you be not able to share his toils, you may profit by rejoicing with Him? For often even the will is able to effect great good. At least Ezekiel says, that the Moabites were punished because they rejoiced over the Israelites, and that certain others were saved because they mourned over the misfortunes of their neighbors. Ezekiel 25:8 Now if there be any comfort for those who mourn over the woes of others, much more for those who rejoice at the honors of others. He charged the Moabites with having exulted over the Israelites, yet it was God that punished them; but not even when He punishes will He have us rejoice over those that are punished. For it is not His wish to punish them. Now if we must condole with those who are punished, much more must we avoid envying those who are honored. Thus, for example, Corah and Dathan perished with their company, making those whom they envied brighter, and giving themselves up to punishment. For a venomous beast is envy, an unclean beast, a deliberate vice which admits not of pardon, a wickedness stripped of excuse, the cause and mother of all evils. Wherefore let us pluck it up by the roots, that we may be freed from evil here, and may obtain blessings hereafter; through the grace and lovingkindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom and with whom, to the Father and the Holy Ghost, be glory now and ever and world without end. Amen.

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