

THE GOSPEL OF

JOHN

In the Face of
Death, We Need
Freedom, Truth,
and the I AM

INTRODUCTION

John 8:31-59

From John Piper: “I woke up this morning. And the first thing at the top of the news list showed that a NASCAR driver died the previous night from a crash. Next thing in the news, 40 people dead in Iraq in a plane crash. I didn’t even catch whether it’s our guys trying to bring food to the trapped Christians. Daily Ebola deaths, daily Gaza deaths, daily Ukraine deaths, daily Christians persecuted all over the world. What do you mean, Jesus, you won’t see death? I see it. I mean 50,000 people die a day in this world every day. It’s not like death is a surprise.

So, what does he mean when he says, “You will never taste death”? Look at verse 51. Just see it. These are his words. He doesn’t say, “falsely, falsely will I say to you.” He says, “Truly, truly I say to you if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death or taste death” (John 8:51).

One of the most powerful moments in my seminary life a long time ago now was the funeral of James Morgan, who had been my systematic theology teacher. I think he was 36 and he had four kids. He got stomach cancer. We had played handball together. He had taught me important things. We had argued together. And when I was at his funeral, Lewis Smedes, who taught me ethics, stood up with his long flowing white hair and in his booming voice said, “James Morgan is not dead.” My 24-year-old spine just tingled. His wife and kids were sitting in the front row. He’s not dead. I’ve never forgotten that moment. It just landed on me like an avalanche of truth and power and grace.

So, my question is, “What happened if he’s not dead? What do you call it?” Jesus gives the answer in chapter 11 in front of Lazarus’ tomb. John 11:25: “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,” and verse 26 “and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.” Well, wait a minute. Come on. Though he die, he shall never die. Which is it?”¹

In the Face of Death, We Need Freedom, Truth, and the I AM.

¹Piper, John. Death Is Not the End of Life. August 10, 2014. <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/death-is-not-the-end-of-life>

OPEN IT

1. What's one way you celebrated freedom this last year?

READ IT

John 8:31-59

EXPLORE IT

2. With whom is Jesus talking according to John 8:13?
3. What does Jesus say "the truth" has the power to do in verse 32?
4. What striking accusation does Jesus make in verse 44?
5. What return accusation do the Pharisees make about Jesus in verse 48?
6. What bold claim does Jesus make about Himself in verse 59? (Hint: Read Exodus 3:14 to see what Jesus' words mean.)

APPLY IT

We Need Freedom

After Jesus tells them (8:32), “And you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free,” they react defensively by asserting that they are Abraham’s descendants and they have never been enslaved to anyone. They couldn’t be referring to political slavery, since the nation had been enslaved in Egypt for 400 years, plus to many other foreign powers, such as Babylon, Greece, and (as they spoke) Rome. So they must mean that they were spiritually free and, as Jews, always had been free.

But they were blind to their self-righteousness and spiritual pride. Their religion was externally impressive, but their hearts were far from God (Mark 7:6-7). In Matthew 23:27-28, Jesus, who knew their hearts, reams them out: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.” They thought that they were righteous, but their sin deceived them so that they didn’t see their own slavery to sin.²

7. What does it mean to be a slave to sin?

8. How does a person experience freedom from sin, according to verses 31-36? What does it mean to be free from sin?

² Cole, Steven J. True Freedom. <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-48-true-freedom-john-830-36>

9. **Read Romans 6:17-18. Do you have any examples from your own life of experiencing freedom by becoming “obedient from the heart?”**

We Need the Truth

When Abraham heard the truth, although he lived in an idolatrous, pagan world, he responded with obedience. That was his distinguishing mark. He heard the truth, took it to himself, and became obedient. But the Jews who confronted Jesus were doing no such thing. They were trying to kill the bearer of truth. They were not spiritual descendants of Abraham. The point is, we may be the descendants of a godly line, but that fact will not bring us eternal life. Have we received Christ for ourselves, and how are we conducting our lives?³

10. **There’s a big difference between being a child of Abraham and a child of the devil. How could the Pharisees be so drastically wrong about their spiritual status?**

11. **Sadly, there are likely people in our lives who think they are close to God, when they are actually far from Him. What litmus test does verse 47 give us to see if a person is of God?**

³ Hughes, R Kent. Preaching the Word. Ultimate Ancestry (John 8:37–47).

12. Jesus has more in mind than simply hearing the words. What does Jesus expect a true believer to do after hearing God's Word in a sermon or your small group study?

Jesus asks the crowd why they do not understand what he says, and then he answers his own question: "because you cannot bear to hear my word" (v. 43). The word of Jesus has no place in them (v. 37) because they are unable to hear it (v. 43). Since the crowd is hearing the sound of the voice of Jesus, we know that Jesus is talking about hearing that occurs at a deeper, spiritual level. The spiritual ability to hear comes from the Spirit, who gives life (6:63). When the Spirit gives such life, the new birth comes with a new ability to see and enter the kingdom (3:3, 5), because such persons have been born of God (1:13), enabling them to receive Jesus (1:12).⁴

13. In verse 31, Jesus says His disciples will "abide in" His Word. How can you tell if that's true in your life?

14. If you feel that you're currently falling short of abiding in God's Word, what would it look like for you to trust and obey Jesus in a greater way?

⁴ ESV Expository Commentary. Article: John 8:30–59.

We Need the I AM

The reason they were ready to kill him is that he didn't say, "Before Abraham was, I was." He said, "Before Abraham was, I am," which is weird — weird grammar and he means it to be gloriously weird. He knew what they knew — Exodus 3:14. "Who shall I say sent me," Moses asks God. When I go down there, they're going to say, "Who sent you?" He said, "Tell them I am who I am. Say I am sent you." This is the clearest declaration in the mouth of Jesus that he is God. That he is Yahweh, the God of the Old Testament. "I am."⁵

15. What's your personal reaction to Jesus' claim to be God, the great I AM? Awe? Skepticism? Gratitude? Anger? Curiosity? Worship?

16. If Jesus is God as He claims to be, what should our reaction be to His teaching and commands?

⁵ Piper, John. Death Is Not the End of Life. August 10, 2014. <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/death-is-not-the-end-of-life>

We Need Someone to Defeat our Fear of Death

The human race is enslaved to the denial of death. We just can't let this in on our daily consciousness because it is so discouraging and horrifying. We don't know what's on the other side, if there is another side, and we love our sex and we love our food and we love our family. We love our everything, and death may take it all away. We cannot let that in because it's going to ruin our lives. That's true unless you will never die. If you will never die, you are the freest people in the world like, "Make my day Mr. Martyr-Maker."

If we believe these things, so many of our little anxieties would look so foolish. So, I close by saying the world needs the Christ and the courage of Christians who believe they will never die. Wherever you live, wherever you work, you know what they need from you? They need a life of courage, risk-taking, radical, wild, crazy Christianity, and they need the Christ of a heart who knows "I will never die."⁶

17. Death threatens everything we love in this life. What did Jesus do to conquer our fear of death? Read Hebrews 2:14-15.

18. Practically speaking, what's one place in your life you'd like to fully live free from the fear of death? Spend some time in prayer, genuinely asking God to experience that freedom.

⁶ Ibid.