

**God's Big Story (John 8:48-59)**  
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I have yet to meet someone who doesn't enjoy a good story. From *Little Blue Truck Visits the City* to *The Chronicles of Narnia* to *Cry, the Beloved Country*, we're drawn to stories from our earliest years. Even those of you who would rather watch a movie than read a book are not exempt. After all, what makes a good movie? A good story.

But we don't just listen to stories for their entertainment value. We tell ourselves stories to make sense of our life and the world around us. We use them to construct our identity and determine our purpose. They are exceptionally powerful and influence us more than we realize.

I'm a gifted leader. My mission is to climb as high as possible as fast as possible in the corporate world so I can realize my full potential. I'm a good mom. Through a Joanna Gaines home and well-behaved kids, I will overcome mediocrity and settle for nothing less than excellence. I have a beautiful body. Meaning is found in perfecting my physical appearance and holding back the effects of aging no matter the cost. I'm a mistreated sibling. My goal is to prove I'm faster, I'm smarter, I'm stronger than everyone else in my family and earn the respect I deserve. I'm a worthless victim of abuse. Nobody loves me. I just get in the way. The world would be better off without me.

What kind of story are you telling yourself, friend? We all locate ourselves in a narrative of some kind to make sense of the world and our place in it. And that raises an important question. Is the story you've embraced true or not? Is it a fiction you created or someone else imposed upon you? Or does it reflect the way things actually are?

Christianity is immeasurably more than a set of moral behaviors. It's a story. A story that makes good sense of the world in which we live. And the best part of all is that it's true! Though the Bible was written over thousands of years by all manner of different people, the historical accounts it contains are not disconnected. There's a unity to them because they are all part of one big story, a story in which we discover our true identity and purpose as human beings.



The last part of Jn 8 gives us the key to grasping the meaning of the whole. Listen carefully. The story of your life and the entire world in which you live isn't ultimately about you. It's about God, the God who created us, knows us, died for us, and has purposed from eternity past to accomplish something through us that is infinitely greater than us. The Apostle Paul puts it this way.

Col 1:15-18, "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent."

You do not exist for your sake, friend. And the cosmos did not come to exist by accident. Your story, my story, your kids' story, your family's story, the story of the entire world in which we live...it's all about displaying and exalting the glory of Jesus Christ. Why? Because Jesus he is infinitely worthy of our praise as the eternal Son of God.

Opposition to Jesus grew from the moment he began his public ministry. And it reaches a new level of intensity toward the end of Ch. 8 as Jesus continues to assert his divine identity. In response, Jesus doesn't back down one bit. He doubles down, concluding with a pointed critique of why the Jews refused to acknowledge the truth of his words.

V. 43, "Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires..." Their failure to believe what Jesus said about himself wasn't due to a lack of evidence for the truth of his claims. They didn't believe Jesus because they didn't want to believe Jesus. They didn't like the implications of his words, so they refused to accept his words.

You think you're good with God. You think you're part of God's covenant people. But your attitude toward me reveals you're nothing of the sort. At the deepest level of your heart, you're opposed to God because you want to be God. And because I am of God, you are opposed to me. And that's when the gloves come off. The veneer of respectable dialogue descends into unchecked contempt. You know

what, Jesus? You're a demon-possessed Samaritan, a religious heretic taking cues from the devil himself.

Notice how Jesus responds. He reminds them who he is – the Obedient Son. He reminds them who they are – those who dishonor the Son and by extension the Father who sent him. But he doesn't linger there. He quickly directs their attention to the big story, a story that reveals his identity and purpose, and a story (for those who have ears to hear) that explains how we should respond. I'll linger on the story and end with our response.

### **1) THE STORY: THE FATHER'S MISSION IS TO GLORIFY THE SON**

Lest his rebuttal in v. 49 be misunderstood, Jesus wants the Jews to know he's not elevating himself over God or making much of himself apart from God. He's not the latest in a long line of human religious figures speaking to gain a public following. He's not living for the approval of men and has no need for the Jews to like or accept him so he can feel better about himself. Rather, as the Obedient Son, he completely entrusted himself to his Heavenly Father, the one to whom all of us are accountable.

V. 50, "Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is One who seeks it, and he is the judge." The humility and freedom in Jesus' words is remarkable. You know how exhausting it is to spend your waking hours consumed with managing the stock of your own honor, reputation, or renown? It's a crushing burden. On the back end of every perceived "success" is another mountain to climb. In contrast, what did Jesus rest in knowing? His Father would be faithful to vindicate him. He didn't have to worry about his own honor. He trusted the Father to exalt him at the right time and in the right way.

Friend, there is one perspective, one assessment, one judgment, one evaluation on your life that makes all others pale in comparison. It's God's evaluation. He's the Judge – not your spouse, your kids, your siblings, or your teammates. Listen to the Apostle Paul's words to the church in Corinth. 1 Cor 4:3-4, "But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me."



Yet Jesus is doing far more here than giving us an example to follow in conflict. He's directing our gaze to the big story, namely, that the God with whom we have to do is seeking something. He's resolved from eternity past to accomplish something. God the Father is passionately committed to magnifying the supremacy of his glory in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Your existence is not an accident. The circumstances of your life are not an accident. A great and glorious purpose governs it all. The Father is on a mission to display the infinite worth and beauty of his Son.

And because he is a sovereign God, what he is seeking will surely come to pass! Jesus will be glorified! That much is guaranteed. The question is whether you will align yourself with God's story or attempt in vain to write your own. Ten days ago, my wife and I hiked through a section of Hawaii filled with thundering waterfalls. It had been raining for weeks. The water level was high. The river was raging in all directions. I was tempted at one point to try and swim to the other side of the stream, but if I had jumped in the current would have overpowered me in a matter of seconds.

Friends, that's a picture of the futility of living for your own glory instead of living to glorify Jesus by trusting and obeying him. In the end, it won't work. Either you willingly submit to him now or you will be crushed under the weight of his glory on the day he returns. Isa 45:23, "By myself I have sworn; from my mouth has gone out in righteousness a word that shall not return: 'To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance.'" Whether through judgment or salvation, Jesus Christ will be glorified through your life.

So how then should we live? V. 51, "Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death." Jesus isn't talking about moral perfection or earning deliverance from the judgment we deserve on account of our sin. He's urging you and me to embrace the obedience of faith, to "keep" the word of Jesus, the word of the gospel, by trusting him as the One who obeyed in our place, who died in our place, by living in submission to his authority. We do not add good works to saving faith. We express the faith by which we are saved through good works.

On the day you die, the Lord will not take an inventory of your professed beliefs. He will review the record of your life. Did your thoughts, affections, and actions reflect the obedience of faith or not? Only those who keep the word of the gospel, who live in faith-fueled submission to King Jesus will be delivered from condemnation. Living



a life characterized by obedience to God's Word isn't about becoming a "serious" Christian. It's the dividing line between life and death.

The Jews didn't realize Jesus was speaking about eternal death on the day of judgment, not physical death in this life. So they mocked him. V. 52, "Now we know you that you have a demon! Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet you say, 'If anyone keeps my word, he will never taste death.'" What gives, Jesus? "Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do you make yourself out to be?"

The reality, of course, is that he wasn't "making" himself to be anything. He was simply testifying to who he actually was. As the Eternal Son of God, he was in fact, infinitely greater than Abraham and the prophets. He was the One to whom they all pointed, the fulfillment of all the promises of salvation God made to his covenant people from Abraham onward.

Jesus doesn't explicitly answer their mockery. Instead, he returns to the main issue at hand – his place in God's big story. V. 54, "If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing." Think about the significance of Jesus saying those words as a man like us. If you invest your deepest affections, the first and best of your time and money, in satisfying the desires of your flesh, making much of yourself, what you want, and what you feel like doing, you will have devoted your life to what is of no consequence whatsoever.

It doesn't feel like that, does it? It feels like glorifying ourselves, doing whatever we feel like doing, is the path of joy. Jesus says it's "nothing." Why? Because the most educated, wealthy, and beautiful among us are nothing compared to the infinite majesty of God. Every one of us is, as Isaiah says, like the grass of the field. Here today. Gone tomorrow. The glory we seek for ourselves, even when we achieve it, is nothing in comparison to the glory of God.

As a man, Jesus did not seek an honor or glory for himself apart from God. Rather, he sought and lived for the honor and glory that comes from God. V. 54, "It is my Father who glorifies me..." The Father didn't glorify the Son in the sense that he added to his intrinsic worth or increased the weight of his majesty. He glorified Jesus, he exalted Jesus, by displaying his manifold perfections for all the world to see. How did he do that? By sending in the Son to die on a cross for sinners like us



so that through glory of the gospel the world might behold just how sovereign, loving, and wise God really is.

Phil 2:8-11, "And being found in human form, [Jesus] humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." The hour of his humiliation in the eyes of men was the very hour of his glorification in the kingdom of God.

None of us are glorious in the way Jesus is. Nor does the Father glorify us in the way he has glorified his Son. There is only one Savior of the world and it's not you or me! And yet, Christian, if you are united to Christ by faith, the Savior's story is your story. The Father's mission to glorify the Son isn't a behemoth that passes us by like a whale swimming past a minnow. It's the story in which we are caught up as the people of God. Rom 8:30, "And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified."

As believers, we have been glorified, brought into the kingdom of God with all the privileges of adoption as sons and daughters of the King. As believers, we are being glorified. The Spirit is at work in us even now conforming us more and more into the image of the Son. And as believers, we will be glorified. One day, we will be completely free from the presence of sin, welcomed into life with Jesus in the new heavens and new earth, with bodies no longer subject to disease and death.

And as we wait, with all our hope fixed on our coming King, we are, like Jesus, misunderstood, maligned, and marginalized. But we don't try to vindicate ourselves or spend all our energy convincing people we're right. When reviled we refuse to revile in return, entrusting ourselves to him who judges justly. Nor do we spend our life chasing the vanities of this world as if what we see is all there is. We wait for the vindication, deliverance, and glory that will be ours on the day Jesus returns. We say with our Savior, "It is my Father who glorifies me," knowing the end of Jesus' story is the end of our own.

The Father is on a mission to glorify the Son. Therein lies a sober warning for all who seek to glorify themselves. And therein lies a tremendous comfort for all who

devote themselves to making much of Jesus. Nothing glorifies Jesus more than his saving work on behalf of the people of God. The wonder of the gospel is that the Father's devotion to the glory of the Son is the measure of his devotion to the salvation of his people. That's the big story. The Father is on a mission to glorify the Son. Here's how we should respond.

## **2) OUR RESPONSE: TO KNOW THE FATHER IS TO REJOICE IN THE SON**

The Jews listening to Jesus were convinced they knew God. Jesus knew the truth (v. 55). You don't know him at all. Why not? Because unlike Jesus, they refused to keep the Father's word. Knowing the Father and obeying his word are two sides of the same coin. You can't have one without the other. And you certainly cannot claim to know the Father if you refuse to honor and submit to the Son who speaks on his behalf.

You might check the church attendance box. You might check the "I believe in God" box. You might even check the "I put money in the offering basket" box. The Jews did all of those things and countless more, friend. But if you refuse to obey Jesus, to wholeheartedly follow him in every area of life, you don't know God at all. The lack of obedience in your life proves as much.

When the Jews compared Jesus to Abraham and found him wanting, Jesus initially refused to take the bait. He focused on the bigger story. In v. 56, however, he circles back to the example of the patriarch's life. If you're going to keep bringing up your father Abraham, let's remember what made him great in the first place! "Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad."

Abraham died in faith, waiting, longing, and rejoicing in anticipation of the day Yahweh would bring his descendants into the joy of life in God's dwelling place. It was a promise the Lord fulfilled thousands of years later when Jesus was born. In 1:14, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." But the Jews were not persuaded. How can you possibly know what Abraham anticipated or rejoiced in when he lived thousands of years ago and you're not even 50 years old?

Jesus' reply in v. 58 is one of the "mic drop" moments in John's gospel. For an entire chapter, Jesus has been asserting the truth of his divine identity. And now it's his turn to take the gloves off. "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am." He's not claiming to be as old as Abraham. If that were the case, he would have

said, "Before Abraham was, I was." No. He uses the present tense, "I am," describing the reality of his eternal existence and claiming to be the very same God who appeared to Moses at the burning bush.

Ex 3:13–15, "Then Moses said to God, 'If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?'" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations."

Jesus could not have made his divine identity any clearer. Listen to me, believe me, obey me, because I am God. He doesn't leave us room to decide who we want him to be. He's not a customizable religious figure like some kind of Starbucks drink. Either we trust and obey him as God, delighting in him by faith as Abraham did. Or we functionally join the Jews in assaulting his authority through our apathy and rebellion.

They immediately tried to physically kill him, convinced he had committed blasphemy. We do the same thing in a spiritual sense whenever we refuse to submit to Jesus as our rightful King. We say through our actions, "Jesus, I wish you were dead and I'm going to act like you are by living as if I am god and you are not." If you know the Father, like Abraham, you will rejoice in the Son. But if you don't rejoice in the Son, you don't know the Father. There are not multiple paths to God. There is only one, the road of obedient faith in Jesus.

## **CONCLUSION**

We must give careful thought to two questions, friends. First, is the story you're telling yourself reflect the truth of God's big story? Are you living to make much of Jesus or something else? Second, if you believe you have exchanged living for your glory for living for the glory of Christ, does your life confirm as much? Do your thoughts, words, and deeds reflect a pattern of obedience to Jesus as the Son of God or not? What does your story reveal about your place in God's big story?

The question is not whether Jesus will be glorified in your life but how. Will he be glorified in your judgment or glorified in your salvation? The joy of the latter is not a





roll of the dice when we die. It's the sure reward of choosing to trust and obey King Jesus, the great I AM, who lived and died to make you right with God. "Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death."

It's the greatest story ever told, brothers and sisters. The story of Jesus. The gospel of our salvation. And for the truth of that story, the story of our Matchless Redeemer, let us turn now to give him praise.