

# John 8:39-59 “Life-or-Death Distinction”

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[ 0 : 00 ] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

We've been studying John's gospel to encounter Jesus, to know who he is, what he says, what he does, how he impacts us.

This is someone that nearly everyone agrees is one of the most influential people in all of human history. What does that mean for me, for my family, for my neighbors?

We're going to encounter Jesus again today in Jerusalem for the Feast of Booths. He's been there, as we've studied, offering himself as the solution to the thirst of the hearts of the people there, as the light of the world shining in their darkness, the deliverer to set them free from their bondage to sin.

And the response has been split. Some talking of killing him. Others, we're told, believing in him at some level. Now he's finishing up this interaction with people in many ways like us.

[ 1 : 26 ] People interested in Jesus, gathered in the temple talking about God. And Jesus has some really challenging words for them, for us.

We're going to pick up the reading of God's holy word in John 8 at verse 39, reading just the first portion of this now and the rest of the chapter later.

The people have just said, Jesus, we are children of Abraham, so we don't really need to be set free. And Jesus has responded, I know you come from Abraham, but you're trying to kill me.

You're doing what you have heard from your father. Verse 39, they answered him, Abraham is our father.

Jesus said to them, if you were Abraham's children, you would be doing what Abraham did. But now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God.

[ 2 : 32 ] This is not what Abraham did. You are doing what your father did. They said to him, we were not born of sexual immorality.

We have one father, even God. Jesus said to them, if God were your father, you would love me. For I came from God and I am here.

I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. 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.

He was a murderer from the beginning and has nothing to do with the truth because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me?

[ 3 : 35 ] Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God. Pray with me.

Father, would you give us ears to hear? To hear your voice. To hear words that could even feel like words of death to us.

Would they be by your spirit this morning? Words of life. Speak, Jesus. And help us to listen. We ask in your name.

Amen. Amen. I was getting my hair cut a few months ago when it came out that I was a pastor. Happens sometimes.

My stylist asked, what kind? I love that question. The kind that needs Jesus a lot. That kind. It's awkward, yeah.

[ 4 : 39 ] Yeah, but like do you have a church nearby? Oh, yeah. Yeah, it's just over the hill. Southwood Presbyterian. Oh, that was the answer he was looking for.

You know, my grandfather was a Methodist pastor for many years. Several different churches here in Alabama. In fact, I was just at one of them not long ago.

So I said, oh, that's so cool. You're a Christian too? He looked at me as though I had three heads. I think that what he was thinking was, are you not listening to me?

I just told you that I lived in Alabama, that my grandfather was a pastor, and that I've been in a church building recently. What are you not hearing?

How could I make it any clearer to you that I'm a Christian? I think the crowds in this passage are feeling something very similar.

[ 5 : 42 ] Jesus, are you not listening? Abraham is our father. We're good. And then Jesus presses more, and they say, okay, listen, we have one father, even God.

It's another version of what we'll call this morning natural Christianity. I'm good with God because of my proximity to the things of God.

Near the temple, being near the promises, near the people of God. Abraham doesn't get any closer than that, right?

I came by this naturally. I'm born into it, they're saying. Natural Christianity claims God by association.

We run in the same circles, so to speak. It's a cultural Christianity based largely on being around the right sorts of things and the right kinds of people.

[ 6 : 50 ] And I don't think I have to tell you, this is all around us still today in Huntsville, Alabama. How did you become a Christian?

Just naturally because you started hanging around some church people? How would you describe your relationship with God?

Has it just been in the family for generations? Listen to what they say to Jesus, verse 41. Hey, it is your heritage, not ours, that's questionable.

Do you hear what they're saying? We are okay on our own with God. Just like we don't need to be set free, we don't need help to get in with God.

We are already associated with Him. Maybe you just don't know us well enough. Maybe when I ask how you are a Christian, you think, I'm connected to the right political party.

[ 7 : 58 ] I mean, I send my kids to the right school. Listen, pastor, of course I'm a Christian. I'm not a Muslim or a Hindu.

I don't even look like... Watch out. Watch out, Jesus says. Being in with God is not about appearances.

It's not about associations. It's about your heart. Verse 42. Jesus said to them, If God were your father, here's what would happen.

You would love me. Natural, okay on my own Christianity, talks about God, but doesn't love what God loves, especially whom?

Jesus. You can't even bear to hear His word, He says. To submit to His direction. You're not doing the works of Abraham.

[ 9 : 03 ] What did Abraham do? He believed God. Right? And he followed after God, even when he was called to go to an uncertain future in a land that he'd never seen, he believed and followed God, even when it seemed crazy.

Do you love following Jesus, even when it's hard? Finding comfort and life in God's word. See, it's not merely a natural association.

Something has to change about what you love. Kids, I want to talk to you for a couple of minutes this morning.

You can listen the whole time, but I especially want you to listen right now. Especially if you've grown up in the church. Many of you have been baptized like little Jimmy was here this morning.

A whole bunch of you have just recently finished the communicants class. And so you're spending a lot of time right now thinking about your own relationship with God.

[ 10 : 09 ] And that is awesome. I'm so excited about that. You need to remember that Jesus loves you.

And Jesus wants a relationship with you where it doesn't just happen in one moment, but where it continues growing every day the rest of your life.

You learn more of how he loves you. And he grows in you a love for him. That's what Jesus wants for you this morning. But that's not just automatic.

That doesn't just happen automatically because you sit in this church building or because you get water poured on your head or because you know lots of information and sit in a class and learn stuff about God.

I want you to imagine that you're born into an Auburn family, okay? Some of you don't even have to imagine. Your parents love Auburn and they tell you stories of the kick six and how great Auburn is and they teach you to say war eagle.

[ 11 : 14 ] But then as you grow up, you become an Alabama fan and you start yelling roll tide during the Iron Bowl. Can you imagine?

That can happen, doesn't it? Just growing up around Auburn stuff doesn't automatically make you love Auburn, does it? Being born into a Christian family and around Christian stuff doesn't automatically make you love Jesus.

Okay? Kids, you have been brought up in the story of the God who loves you so much that he sent his only begotten son to save you so that you could be with him forever.

What a great gift it is. Praise Jesus that you've been born into this family where you don't have to wonder what to do when you fail or does anyone love me or is there a group that I can really belong with?

Is there any hope in this world? You've been living in that your whole life. You know someone loves you. You know you belong here in the family of God.

[ 12 : 37 ] But being born into this family doesn't automatically make you love Jesus. God doesn't have a relationship with you because of how many times you've gone to Sunday school or how many answers you can give to Bible questions.

That's not how it works. He is calling you, not your parents, he is calling you to trust him, to follow him and we celebrate when you follow Jesus yourself, when you trust him, when you confess your sins and receive his forgiveness, when you read his word, when you shine his light, we celebrate that with you.

You know that? Oh, Father, keep working in our children. Keep working in their hearts that they might see you and love you and know more tomorrow than they do today how much you love them. Please, Father, for Jesus' sake, show them more of yourself. Give them joy in following you. Sorry, I didn't mean to pray that long and a false end to the sermon tricked some of you.

No matter how old you are, Jesus is not trying to scare you off from him with strong words this morning.

[ 14 : 08 ] He is about to tell the same crowd hearing these hard words how they can know life forever. So language like, verse 44, you are of your father, the devil, should never be weaponized against Jewish people specifically as it sadly has been.

It is about any who reject Jesus, who lie about him in order to kill him. That's what he's talking about.

It's just in this conversation they also happen to be Jews that he's talking with. What we need to hear is that Jesus is actually calling all of us to consider our hearts.

That's my desire this morning. It's not to create crippling doubt in those of you who already know and love and trust Jesus, but to push all of us to Jesus so that we talk with him honestly about whether or not we are Christians.

He and I are pushing us not to be good enough or to check our associations with God and see if they're strong enough and up to date, but rather to come to Jesus and look at what he says is true Christianity.

[ 15 : 34 ] The strong warnings here that we need to hear are to expose false hope. And so when they do that, they show us how much we need the real thing, which is what Jesus offers.

Okay, that's why he speaks so directly. If we're going to call ourselves Christians, what does Christ say that means?

I'll call it supernatural Christianity in contrast with the born into it by association version that we've been talking about.

Listen to the rest of this interaction as the crowd turns its focus on Jesus and his identity. Verse 48. The Jews answered him, Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon? Jesus answered, I do not have a demon, but I honor my father and you dishonor me. Yet I do not seek my own glory. There is one who seeks it and he is the judge.

[ 16 : 41 ] Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death. The Jews said to him, Now we know that you have a demon.

Abraham died, as did the prophets. Yet you say, If anyone keeps my word, he will never taste death. Are you greater than our father Abraham who died?

And the prophets died. Who do you make yourself out to be? Jesus answered, If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing.

It is my father who glorifies me, of whom you say, He is our God. But you have not known him. I know him. If I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you.

But I do know him and I keep his word. Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad. So the Jews said to him, You are not yet 50 years old and have you seen Abraham?

[ 17 : 45 ] Jesus said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am. So they picked up stones to throw at him.

But Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple. Two key questions there in verse 53, from the crowd.

Are you greater than the prophets? Who do you make yourself out to be? It's a good question. Supernatural Christianity focuses on Jesus.

Jesus. His association with, even we'll see, identification with God. And says, that's what it's all about.

That's how Jesus can say in verse 51 that anyone connected to him is connected to God.

[ 18 : 49 ] Listen, friends, please don't miss this. This is such good news, especially if you're not particularly religious or churchy. If that's how you wouldn't describe yourself, you don't even need association with God by birth, by culture, by morality.

That's not what's required. Christianity, focused on Jesus, says if anyone, anyone, keeps my word, believes in me, he will never see death.

What a promise. What amazing hope if you came in with none and thought you were going to have to find some somewhere, some relative who used to do something for God. No. You find Jesus to be the only one you need.

See, what Jesus is saying is that supernatural Christianity, Christianity focused on Jesus, claims God only by adoption. We don't deserve to be in.

We don't naturally belong in God's family, even if we hang around a lot, but he graciously welcomes us in because of our relationship with his one and only true son.

[ 20 : 06 ] That's how it works. This true Christianity not only focuses on Jesus, but also loves the Jesus that the Father loves.

What I mean by that is a Jesus who is the divine, eternal son of God. It's not just who he makes himself out to be, it's who he is.

Friends, look at the miracles, the signs, the loving, pure, righteous life. He says, you can't even convict me of sin, so why would you suspect that I'm lying to you now when I say these things? He's so good. Whom else could the Father himself seek to glorify? Verse 54, can you believe it? The Father and the Son here are clearly not the same, but clearly equal in glory. The Father is glorifying the Son.

[ 21 : 13 ] That's how Jesus can say that Abraham rejoiced at seeing his day. He's the promised seed to bless the nations. Abraham heard about him. This is the one to fulfill all of God's promises.

And Jesus says, let me tell you how that's possible. Before Abraham was, not I was, he could have said that, but what?

I am. As the crowd clearly recognizes, Jesus has taken him all the way back to Exodus, to Exodus 3, the name of Yahweh, God's personal name by which he introduced himself to his people.

This guy is claiming equality with God and the crowd says, blasphemy. They're now hearing Jesus clearly, aren't they?

He is tying together everything that he's been telling them at this feast that we've been talking about the last few weeks. This feast where they have gathered to celebrate God's deliverance in the past, to celebrate God's promise of a deliverer coming in the future.

[ 22 : 24 ] And Jesus stands and says, not only am I the bread of life more fulfilling than anything your fathers ate in the wilderness, not only am I the source of living waters pictured by the water flowing out of that rock that Moses struck, not only am I the light of the world to guide you like the

pillar of fire in the dark wilderness, but also I am Yahweh himself.

God has come to be with you. The one who appeared in the burning bush to Moses who powerfully delivered his people across the Red Sea who tabernacled with them as they wandered who finally brought them all the way to the promised land.

I am the one you're gathered here to celebrate Jesus says. God come to you tabernacling now in the flesh. Do you hear what I'm saying?

truly, truly I am the one who gives life. God the Father is glorifying me. Truly, truly before Abraham was, I am.

The divine claims Jesus is making could not be clearer. Are you hearing what he's saying? What he's telling you is that he existed in perfect relationship with the Father and King of the universe before the world began, before time began.

[ 23 : 58 ] He's telling you that he is the one who spoke the universe into existence, who shaped the sun, who called the stars out by name, who breathed life into mankind.

And then he entered this creation so that anyone who believed in him would become a child of God, brought into the family not by natural association, but by supernatural intervention, born, remember, of God.

Not by human achievement, but by divine adoption. There is now no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.

Praise the name of Jesus. There's something about that name, the only name whereby we must be saved.

Give me Jesus. Oh, how I love Jesus because he first loved me. Without his love I am lost.

[ 25 : 03 ] I am lost. What Jesus does here intentionally is leave us with very few options in regard to him.

His claims to deity are so clear and so fantastical that the response of this crowd is what? Kill him. And he slips away. We already know when his hour comes he will be lifted up to die. But as Pastor Tim Keller often said echoing centuries of theologians it's kill him or crown him.

There is no middle ground with Jesus. No natural cultural Christianity option remaining to us because cultural Christianity rejects this Jesus.

Remember we don't need him there. We're in naturally by association. So at best we're kind of okay with Jesus. But thinking about him is mostly a Sunday activity.

[ 26 : 17 ] Only fanatics would follow after him in daily sacrifice. Oh yeah and if you want to find God and hope and life some other way with other religious associations that you have more naturally no problem Jesus is cool with that.

No big deal. No. No. That is not a Christianity that Jesus or the Bible recognizes. If we don't kill Jesus for his blasphemy we must crown him king.

Bow at his feet and in humble worship live by his word for his glory. That is the first difference that supernatural Christianity makes.

It removes the option of our being okay on our own finding the God of the Bible apart from Jesus some other way. Now if we stop to think about that question what difference does it make?

I'm gods by association versus I'm gods by adoption. The answer is all the difference in the world. It's life or death difference.

[ 27 : 33 ] There's so many ways that we could talk about the difference it makes but Jesus highlights one in this passage that I want to reflect on briefly as we close. It's verse 51. Truly truly I say to you if anyone keeps my word he will never see death.

What's Jesus promising those who come to him? that what we think of as death life ending will never happen to those who receive the life that he gives us.

The life he's been talking about because that life is now defined by Jesus as knowing God. Living in relationship with him being free from the power of sin to live the way that we were created to live and when our hearts stop beating here in this world that life doesn't stop.

Instantly that life continues with Jesus forever absent from the body present with the Lord alive forever never more to die. And that makes all the difference in the world now because we know what it's like to live with the fear of death don't we?

to be anxious about the next cancer scan to worry about gun violence to try desperately to forestall aging in a hundred ways anything we can come up with.

[ 29 : 11 ] The Bible says we all fear death and Jesus frees us from it. Hebrews 2.14 Jesus took on flesh he actually came so that through death he might destroy the devil and deliver all those who through the fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

Lifelong slavery because we fear death all of us specifically so sweet in light of our passage the offspring of Abraham need to be set free us listen it is the truth of Jesus that sets us free when the son sets you free you are free indeed that is the only way to true freedom from this universal fear because Jesus conquers death on our behalf you got that right in Hebrews 2 the only way is that through death he could conquer it naturally on our own death haunts us the only way he can guarantee that we won't see death is that he takes it for us so that we can live with the confidence of people who know that no matter what happens our life our true life our abundant life our eternal life goes on oh death where is your victory oh death where is your sting now listen of course we also grieve the loss of loved ones here so does

Jesus by the way we're getting to that in a few weeks but what he's saying is that those left behind are the ones who grieve the one who dies keeps living with me forever you will never see death you'll see the lamb who is the light of the heavenly city you'll taste divine delight and a perfectly restored creation you'll see a restored body and all those tears will be wiped away forever by the hands that stretched out on the cross to conquer death to free you from the fear of death forever so look what he's offering us freedom from that big fear the fear of death and therefore all the smaller fears beneath it today now I am freed from safe self-centered self-protective living where I cling desperately to every day

I can keep myself safe and alive and looking young freed to live boldly and adventurously and risk taking for Jesus to fail and still find hope I'm freed to slow down with God and be with him since he made me to live with him I don't have to rush around to find something else before it's too late and I miss out on real life no I've got it freed to sacrifice in ways that inspire to give generously to others it's two for one orphan year Southwood did you forget if the father has adopted you into his family your resources of life are endless you will never taste death your resources of time are endless it doesn't feel that way but it is true and you can use some of your time to listen to to love to point others to this glorious divine eternal

Jesus see if you know Jesus then you find yourself as a part of his church whether you like it or not and so you're going to find yourself surrounded at times by people who know Jesus only by association they see themselves as Christians by association and they're going to keep showing up in your life all the time and you can point them to the one who truly sets us free and gives us life can't you what a joy friends some of you here today need to be set free by this supernatural Jesus there's a life or death distinction between being assuming that you're in God's family by association and being in God's family by adoption a distinction so significant that the only one who ever earned life tasted death himself so that he could give us life those of us facing death fearing death could actually live forever he has already been killed lifted up to die he's already been crowned risen to the highest place won't you bow and be free and live let's pray amen to the

[ 34 : 50 ] Lord oh Jesus help us hear your voice calling to us calling us out of darkness into your marvelous light setting us free from the bondage of sin and fear of death oh we need you we love you work that love in our hearts afresh we ask in your name amen for more information visit us online at [southwood.org](https://southwood.org) güncü allowed to nawet