

Main Idea: In John 8:42-59 we find out the surprising reality of what good, religious people often do with Jesus. Jesus encountered four responses from a group of good people.

- I. Jesus encountered the deception of good people (42-47).
 - A. They don't love Jesus (42).
 - B. They can't hear what Jesus says (43).
 - C. They belong to the devil (44a).
 - D. They want what the devil wants (44b).
 1. The devil is a murderer.
 2. The devil is a liar.
 - E. They don't believe Jesus (45-46).
 - F. They don't belong to God (47).
- II. Jesus encountered the defensiveness of good people (48-51).
 - A. They used smear tactics to avoid the truth.
 - B. Jesus gave them the truth anyway.
 1. He told them the truth about themselves.
 2. He told them the truth about Himself.
- III. Jesus encountered the defiance of good people (52-56).
 - A. The Jews used Abraham to justify themselves (52-53).
 - B. Jesus used Abraham to reveal the truth about Himself (54-56).
- IV. Jesus encountered the deadly intent of good people (57-59).
 - A. Jesus claimed to be God.
 - B. These good people tried to kill Him.

Response: What am I doing with Jesus?

Let's talk about *good people* this morning. Is it a good thing to be a good person? Sort of a crazy question, isn't it? But seriously, would you rather have a good person as your neighbor or a crook? Would you rather work for a good person, sit in school next to a good person, car pool with a good person, or do those things with someone who is *not* a good person?

It's sort of a no brainer question, isn't it? Of course, it's good to be a good person and associate with good people. God Himself commands us to be good, perfect in fact (Matt. 5:48).

But answer this. What do good people do with Jesus? They applaud Him. They quote Him. They imitate Him. They put up His pictures in their homes. They wear His cross for jewelry.

But there's something missing, isn't there? I'm not saying those responses are wrong, but they aren't the response that Jesus most desires and deserves. There's something that good people will not do with Jesus. They won't ask Him to be what the Bible says He came to be. *Savior*. No, they won't ask Him to save them, and here's why. Good people don't need to be saved, for they are *good*, and so good people don't need a Savior. Only sinners do.

My Christian friend, think back to the day God saved you. Did you pray, “Oh God, I am a good person and I've been trying to please you, but I guess I'm a little short. Would you save me now? In Jesus' name. Amen.”

That's not what I prayed. It's called “the sinner's prayer” for a reason. “Oh God, I see now that you are a holy God and I am a great sinner! But You sent Your Son to die for me and my sins. Would you save me now? I don't deserve this, but I am asking, in Jesus' name. Amen.”

See what I mean? Good people don't pray the sinner's prayer. Only sinners do.

** Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

To complicate things, a lot of good people do believe in Jesus, sort of, not with a saving faith but with a faith nonetheless. How could you not believe in Him? He was the ultimate good person! He healed the sick, fed the hungry, reached out to the poor, and was willing to pay the ultimate sacrifice. What an inspiration for a good person!

And to complicate things even more, good people are often religious people. And many of them are quite devoted to their religion. They don't just talk it, they *live* it. And it reinforces in their minds the fact that they are okay with God, for they are living a *good* life.

I agree with something Warren Wiersbe wrote, "The most difficult people to win to the Savior are those who do not realize that they have a need. They are under the condemnation of God, yet they trust their religion to save them."¹

It's not a new problem. Jesus Himself faced it again and again. He ran into good people—that was their estimation of themselves—wherever He went. And almost every time the result was a major confrontation.

That's what we're going to see as we open our Bibles to John 8. In John 8 Jesus went to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles. Now that's a great place to find some good people, and they were there. He began to teach them, and lo and behold, "many put their faith in him (8:30)."

So good people believed in Jesus. That means they're saved, right? No. They've not even admitted they're lost yet. And so for the remainder of John 8 Jesus has a special message for these good people who have just "believed" in Him. Verse 31 begins, "To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said."

And what did He tell them? In verses 31-41, He forced them to think about three subjects that are indispensable for saving faith. One, the nature of true faith. He told them in verses 31-32, if you're really Jesus' disciple, you will hold on to His teaching and His teaching will get a hold on your life.

Two, He told them in verses 33-38 that they needed to admit the painful truth about themselves, that they are not good people but sinners. And what's true of sinners? According to Jesus, the sinner's problem is that he can't stop sinning (34). The sinner's need is to become a son (35). The sinner's hope is to experience the power of the Son (36). The sinner's deception is that he trusts in something other than Jesus' word (37). The sinner's root problem is that he belongs to another family (38).

Three, Jesus challenged them to face the inadequacy of their religion in verses 39-41. Religion can't save a sinner. To the contrary, religion blinds a person, as we see in verse 39, and then religion turns a person against Jesus, as we see in verses 40-41.

How did these good people respond to Jesus' message? Were they convinced? To the contrary, Jesus' teaching only reinforced their conviction about their own goodness.

In the final scene of John 8 (which we'll look at today, John 8:42-59), there's an intense dialogue between Jesus and these good people. It goes back and forth, from Jesus in verses 42-43, to the Jews in verse 48, to Jesus in verses 49-51, to the Jews in verses 52-53, to Jesus in verses 54-56, to the Jews in verse 57, to Jesus again in verse 58, and then back to the Jews in verse 59. To put it simply, Jesus encountered four responses from these good people, their *deception*, their *defensiveness*, their *defiance*, and finally their *deadly intent*.

I. Jesus encountered the deception of good people (42-47).

Listen to the Jews in verse 41, "The only Father we have is God himself." They are convinced they belong to God's family. They claim to be God's children. But they're

¹ Warren Wiersbe, p. 323.

self-deceived, as Jesus tells them in no uncertain terms, and He gives six evidences to support.

A. They don't love Jesus (42). Notice verse 42, "Jesus 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.'"

Once again, we hear Jesus making amazing claims about Himself. *I came from God. I have not come on my own. He sent me.* And He identifies *God* with the One they call their *Father*.

You say that God is your father, but that's impossible. How could you not love the One that your Father has sent into the world if you really belonged to His family?

Please notice something. True believers, those who exhibit saving faith, don't just believe in Jesus. They *love* Him. It's not that these are two separate activities, for believing in Jesus includes loving Him. Saving faith isn't just academic. It's not just agreeing mentally with some information about Jesus. It involves a person's affections and devotion.

The tragic reality is that churches today are filled with good people who have signed doctrinal statements about Jesus but do not love Him. And Jesus says, "If God is your Father, you will love Me." Here's a second evidence of their deception.

B. They can't hear what Jesus says (43). "Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say."

Have you ever shared the good news of Christ with a friend, and then offered to share more if they're interested, only to hear them respond, "No thanks, not interested."? Have you then found yourself thinking, "How could they not want to know more about Jesus? Didn't they hear what I just said about the forgiveness and eternal life He offers?" And the truth is, no, they didn't hear.

Oh, they heard the words, but those words went no deeper than the eardrum. "You have no room for my word," Jesus told them in verse 37. Leon Morris explains, "They are so wrapped up in their preconceptions that they cannot perceive its truth."²

We read about the same problem in Jeremiah 6:10, "To whom can I speak and give warning? Who will listen to me? Their ears are closed so they cannot hear. The word of the Lord is offensive to them; they find no pleasure in it."

When the Holy Spirit regenerates a sinner's heart, a key evidence is that the person's response to Jesus' word changes. The person begins to hear and find pleasure in the words of His Savior. And so he opens his Bible in his home and reads it, and he looks forward to church services so he hear it taught, and he thinks about what His Savior has said when he makes decisions throughout the week.

But there's a reason why sinners can't hear what Jesus says. The reason is simply that there's too much noise in the room. It's true. Men, if you were sitting at the speedway watching a sprint-car race, and your daughter called you on your cellphone, you wouldn't have much of a conversation, would you? You wouldn't hear her voice because of the competing noise.

There's another sound, another voice that prevents the sinner from hearing Jesus. To put it another way, sinners aren't interested in God's family because they already belong to a family. That's what Jesus told the Jews in verse 44, "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire." There's a huge contributing factor to the self-deception of good people...

C. They belong to the devil (44a). "You belong to your father, the devil," says Jesus. So they are under demonic ownership. That's why they don't hear Jesus' voice.

² Leon Morris, p. 463.

They're captivated by the voice of a rival. Yet they're not passive robots. Jesus makes it clear that they are doing what they are doing because they *want* to do so.

D. They want what the devil wants (44b). “You want to carry out your father’s desire,” says the NIV. The ESV reads, “Your will is to do your father’s desires.”

And what does their father desire? One primary thing, to *kill*. Listen to what Jesus says about the devil at the end of verse 44, “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.”

This is one of the most insightful verses in all the Bible into the nature of the devil. Jesus reveals two things about this rebellious angelic creature.

1. *The devil is a murderer.* What murder is He talking about? I always thought of Cain’s murder of Abel, and surely the devil was behind that first murder on planet earth. But in reality, that wasn’t the first murder. When the devil approached Eve in the garden, he had murder in mind, the murder of the human race. He knew what God had told the man, “When you eat of it you will surely die (Gen. 2:17).” The devil hates God, and so he set his eyes on God’s image-bearers with the intent to bring about their death.

But how would he ever convince God’s image-bearers to violate the direct command of their God, since they knew the suicidal consequences of such rebellion? Jesus tells us how. He says, “He was a murderer from the beginning, *not holding to the truth*, for there is no truth in him.” There’s how he did it. He threw truth out the window. When he approached Eve, he had absolutely no intent on telling her the truth.

“You will not surely die,” the serpent said to the woman. Why did he say that? Was it true? No, but that doesn’t matter to him.

“For God knows you will be like God, knowing good and evil” was his next ploy. Was that true? Friends, the devil doesn’t hold to the truth. That’s what Jesus just said. The devil uses the truth, and twists it, but at the core, he could care less about the truth. And so, Jesus concludes...

2. *The devil is a liar.* “When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”

Listen to William Hendriksen, “The devil, then, is the very wellspring of lies, the creator of falsehoods...When he lies, he is original. When he does not lie (Acts 16:16, 17), he quotes or even plagiarizes; but even then he gives the borrowed words a false setting, in order to create an illusion. He ever strives to lie and deceive, and this he does in order to murder.”³

Friends, we hear him all the time. We hear him when he says...

“What you’re doing isn’t sin. It feels right, doesn’t it? Go ahead, God won’t care.” But that’s a lie, a lie with the intent to kill. So is this...

“God wants you to be happy, and He knows you’re not happy. That’s why He sent you a new friend at work. She understands you, unlike your wife. You owe it to yourself to spend some more time with her.” But that’s a lie, a lie with the intent to kill. And so is this...

“Hell isn’t forever. God would never let His creatures suffer forever. Love wins in the end. You can be sure of that.” But that too is a lie, a lie with the intent to kill.

The devil is a murderer and a liar. By the way, remember what John said about Jesus in John 1:17? “Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” There’s a contrast here. Do you see it? Jesus is the source of grace and truth. That’s the opposite of the devil. The Lord is a giver—that’s what grace does, it gives. The devil is a murderer—he takes and

³ William Hendriksen, p. 61.

destroys what he takes. The Lord is the source of truth. The devil is the source of lies, and indeed, is the father of lies.

Friends, remember why Jesus is saying this. He is talking to good people, good people who are refusing to believe what He just told them about their faith, about themselves, and about their religion. And now He's pulling back the veil and exposing why they won't listen. There's another voice that's captured their attention, and he's a murderer and a liar.

But there's more. Jesus gives a fifth evidence of their deception in verses 45-46, "Yet because I tell the truth, *you do not believe me!* Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, *why don't you believe me?*"

E. They don't believe Jesus (45-46). They believe the voice of the liar, but that's because he tells them what they want to hear ("You *want* to carry out your father's desire"). But they refuse to believe the One who insists He is telling them the truth.

He even offers them a challenge, "Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?" Can you imagine any other person in human history saying those words and *not* getting a challenging response? But the Jews couldn't come up with one legitimate proof of sin. So if the Jews couldn't find any sin in Jesus, then they should have believed in Him, right? Why didn't they? Here's the bottom line. Jesus tells them...

F. They don't belong to God (47). "He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God."

How would you respond if someone said that to you? If someone told you that you don't love Jesus, that you can't hear what He says, that you belong to the devil, that you want what the devil wants, that you don't believe Jesus, and that you don't belong to God, how would you respond? And what if that person talking to you was Jesus Himself? You'd be devastated, wouldn't you? You'd say, "Tell me why you think that," wouldn't you? And then you'd make sure it wasn't true, wouldn't you? Not if you were already convinced that you're a good person. In that case, you'd respond the same way these good, religious people responded, with *defensiveness*.

II. Jesus encountered the defensiveness of good people (48-51).

How does defensiveness show up? In this case...

A. They used smear tactics to avoid the truth. Verse 48—"The Jews answered him, 'Aren't we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?'"

What's that have to do with what Jesus just said? Not much. He gave them truth, and they responded with deception and character assassination. Remember, they're just like their father.

Hendriksen says that calling Jesus a Samaritan was about the meanest thing the Jews could think of.⁴ They're calling Him a renegade half-breed, which certainly wasn't true. And demon-possessed? On what basis could they accuse the One who cast out demons of being demon-possessed? There is no basis, for the purpose of the mud-slinging is simply to avoid the truth.

So how did Jesus respond?

B. Jesus gave them the truth anyway. Not about the Samaritan slur, for that doesn't even deserve a response. But He does comment on the demon-possessed charge. That's in verses 49-51, "'I am not possessed by a demon,' said Jesus, 'but I honor my Father and you dishonor me. I am not seeking glory for myself; but there is one who seeks it, and he is the judge. I tell you the truth, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.'"

⁴ Hendriksen, p. 62.

You'll notice that Jesus didn't reply as they did, for as 1 Peter 2:23 puts it, when He was reviled, He did not revile. Instead, He gave them more truth about two subjects.

1. *He told them the truth about themselves.* "You dishonor me," He said. You may think you believe in me, but the truth is you are dishonoring me. And then...

2. *He told them the truth about Himself.* I am not demon-possessed, and what possesses me is the desire to honor My Father. I am not seeking my own glory, but My Father is. And if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death. Believe it or not, that is the truth.

Do you see what just happened? Jesus just told some good people the truth they desperately needed to hear. But they resisted it. In fact, they tried to turn the conversation away from the truth, but Jesus wouldn't let them. He gave them more truth.

Friends, we need the truth, painful as it may be, and especially the truth regarding where we stand with God. Do you belong to God? Are you sure? Do you love Jesus? Do you love His Word? Do your children?

Parents, let's be careful not to play the role of the Holy Spirit with our children. Kent Hughes tells the tragic story of a father who went beyond his God-given role with his son. He writes: "Edmund Gosse, the famous Cambridge professor, in his autobiography *Father and Son*, tells how he finally rejected the godly heritage and faith of his parents. In one particularly sad chapter he recounts how his loving father was so desirous that his ten-year-old be baptized that he convinced the elders to interview Edmund, who says, he '...sat on a sofa in full lamplight and testified my faith in the atonement with a fluency that surprised myself (so that my interviewer)...was weeping like a child.' It was a perfect performance, but Edmund Grosse did not have grace in his life."

Then Hughes adds, "We too need to examine ourselves. Some of us have well-meaning friends who have spoken in soothing tones about our baptism or our being in the covenant, and we have appropriated false assurance and thus have fallen into the same pit as these ancient Jews."⁵

Friends, let's not be defensive, not when the eternal soul is at stake. Let's listen to the truth that Jesus is speaking to us. Sadly, that's not what these good people did. It went from deception, to defensiveness, to defiance.

III. Jesus encountered the defiance of good people (52-56).

Take a look at verses 52-53, "At 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. Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?'"

In their defiance...

A. The Jews used Abraham to justify themselves (52-53). "Our father Abraham," they said. They keep talking about Abraham because Abraham is their ticket to God. "We are Abraham's descendants," they had said in verse 33. "Abraham is our father," was their defense again in verse 39. We're okay with God because we've got Abraham. He is "our father" (verse 53).

But of course, having Abraham's blood in your veins doesn't mean you have Abraham's God in your heart. Abraham was saved by grace through faith, as Paul makes clear in Romans and Galatians, and so must any person be if he is to join Abraham's family, and more importantly, God's family.

The sad reality is that people use all kinds of things to justify a relationship with God that does not exist. Some point to their Christian service, others to their church

⁵ Kent Hughes, p. 253.

membership, others to some religious experience in their past (like walking an aisle or getting baptized), and still others to their connection to a good family, in this case, to Abraham's family.

But again, they're just using something, even something good, to justify a relationship with God that does not exist. The Jews used Abraham to justify themselves. Watch what Jesus did...

B. Jesus used Abraham to reveal the truth about Himself (54-56). "Jesus replied, 'If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. Though 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. Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad.'"

Notice that Jesus doesn't deny that Abraham is their father. "Your father Abraham," He says in verse 56. But He makes a contrast between *your father* and *My Father*. "My Father" is the one "you claim as your God," but the truth is, "you do not know Him."

That's a stunning charge. *You do not know God who is My Father*. You may have Abraham, but you do not have Abraham's God. You don't even know Him. But I do. And the truth is, He glorifies me.

Jesus talks a lot about His Father in John's gospel, as we see once again here. My Father loves me. My Father sent me. My Father told me what to do and say. And My Father glorifies me.

And then Jesus mentions something else that's stunning. Abraham lived 2,000 years before Jesus came, but listen to this. *Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad*. That's astounding. Abraham knew the Christ was coming and rejoiced at the thought. But that's not all. Jesus says that Abraham *saw* my day and was glad.

How did Abraham see Jesus' day? Apparently, the same way he saw the city of God as described in Hebrews 11, *by faith*. Listen to Hebrews 11:10, 13-16, "For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God...All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them."

As you can imagine, that claim, saying that Abraham saw my day, didn't sit well with these good people in John 8. In fact, it moves us to the fourth and final response.

IV. Jesus encountered the deadly intent of good people (57-59).

Verse 57—"You are not yet fifty years old," the Jews said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!" They don't buy it. These good people may say they believe in Jesus, but the Jesus in which they believe certainly isn't someone who saw Abraham.

In His response Jesus takes His claim a step further. Verse 58—"I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" He didn't say, "I was." He said, "I am," using the divine name from Exodus 3:14, where God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

Jesus is the I AM. As such, He had no beginning and will have no ending. He is the eternally existent One and equal with God the Father. He is the One whose day Abraham saw and He says He existed before Abraham. He is the One who spoke to Moses in the

burning bush, and then delivered Israel from bondage. He is the I AM. Let there be no misunderstanding. By using the divine name of the Old Testament...

A. Jesus claimed to be God. And the Jews didn't miss the claim, as evidenced by their response in verse 59, "At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds." Interesting, isn't it? These good people who put their faith in Jesus in verse 30 tried to kill Him in verse 59.

B. These good people tried to kill Him. That's not what you would expect from believers in Jesus. To want to kill Him? But that's the point. These aren't genuine believers in Jesus. They don't have saving faith. Good people never do.

I'll say it again. The Lord doesn't save good people. He saves sinners. He saves people who admit the painful truth that they are not right with God and in fact are under His wrath. He saves people who stop trusting in their imagined goodness and cast themselves totally on the One He sent to save them, His beloved Son, Jesus the Christ.

"Christ died for *sinners*," says Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:3. "Christ died for the *ungodly*," says Romans 5:6. "For a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrated his own love for us in this: While we were still *sinners*, Christ died for us."

Leon Morris says the reason they found stones so easily is because the building operation of the temple was still in progress. And the reason they couldn't use the stones is because God protected His Son. The text says that Jesus "hid himself," but the Greek is actually passive, "was hidden." It wasn't His time to die, not yet. Six months to go, at Passover. That's when the Lamb of God will be slain for the salvation, not of good people, but of *sinners*.

My Christian friend, it's important for us to remember who we are. We are not good people that deserve a place in God's family. We are rebel sinners that deserve eternal punishment. Yet He chose to love and save through the death of His own Son.

Ask yourself this question...

Response: What am I doing with Jesus?

Good people believe in Him, sort of, but not sinners. There's no sort of. Sinners who truly put their faith in Jesus love Him with all they've got, for indeed, He is all they've got, and He is enough.

Friends, let's do what Isaac Watts did. He said...

*When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.*

*Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ my God!
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.*

*Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.*