

SUNDAY
SCHOOL *Superintendent*



Spring Quarter

March | April | May 2024

Sunday School Superintendent

SPRING QUARTER

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Editorials

BY BRIAN BURKE

What Manner of Man Is This!

The dignity of man as God's grandest creation is seen in Jesus Christ come in the flesh. While the humiliation of Christ is seen in His coming down from His exalted place in heaven, it is also the beginning of the restoration and, in a sense, exaltation, of man. All of this hinges on who Jesus was (and is). Was He just a wise man or a prophet? Was He a blasphemer or a madman? Or was He who He said He is when He spoke to the agitated Pharisees in John 8 (lesson 1): the Son of the Father and the great I AM, who has existed before the patriarch Abraham?

The beginning lessons (2-5) get right to the heart of the matter by highlighting Jesus' ability to raise the dead—culminating in His own resurrection. Before raising His friend Lazarus from the dead (lesson 3), Jesus comforts Martha, Lazarus's sister, who told Jesus He was too late. But He disabuses her of her unbelief, saying, "I am the resurrection, and the life" (John 11:25). He consistently links faith with the use of His divine power, as with the woman suffering from a lifelong bleeding problem in Luke 8:48 (lesson 2) and with His promise of paradise to the criminal on the cross in 23:43 (lesson 4).

Since the success of Jesus' mission was connected so closely with who He was, demonstrations of His

deity were not given to show off, but to indicate His supremacy and that He was the "right man" for the job, the man God chose to be on our side against sin and death. The New Testament culminates in a heavenly ceremony in the book of Revelation where His sonship is validated and His reward, the nations, is meted out (2:26-27; 12:5; 19:15; 22:2).

Christ is the one who is worthy of our worship and praise (Rev. 5:9 [lesson 12]), not only because He is the divine Son of God, but also because He is the Lamb of God who was slain to take away the sin of the world (vs. 12). The Pharisees and scribes, unable to accept who Jesus was, failed to understand or accept His mission to forgive sins (Mark 2:7, [lesson 10]). They questioned His authority to forgive sins and despised Him because He made Himself greater than Abraham (cf. John 8:33, 53).

But the Only Begotten of God is indeed greater. His greatness is explicitly stated in the introductory chapter of the book of Hebrews (lesson 11). And He is superior not only to Abraham, but also to the angels, to Moses, and to the *temporary* Levitical priesthood. Jesus is the Mediator of a greater and better covenant (Heb. 8:6; cf. 9:15).

Our journey this quarter encompasses all of the various ways Jesus

PLEASE NOTE: Fundamental, sound doctrine is the objective of LifeStone Ministries, Union Gospel Press Division. The writers are prayerfully selected for their Bible knowledge and yieldedness to the Spirit of Truth, each writing in his own style as enlightened by the Holy Spirit. At best we know in part only. "They received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11).



definitively demonstrated His deity. Sadly, some said His powers came from pernicious sources (Matt. 12:24), and the crowds of people that followed Him ran the gamut from convinced to partly convinced to skeptical. Some even left from following Him. Even His twelve disciples were scared straight, in a sense, when Jesus walked on water and stopped a violent storm threatening to capsize their boat on the sea of Galilee (lesson 9). Their expression on another storm-stopping occasion, "What manner of man is this!" indicated they had not yet "gotten it" (Matt. 8:27; Luke 8:25), as would be the case for them in many instances until His resurrection.

Jesus' miracles were not always as outwardly spectacular as stopping a storm or raising someone from the dead. John records His first miracle at a wedding, of all places, where Jesus rescued a reception that threatened to end too soon when the host family ran out of wine (lesson 6). By turning water into wine—the best wine of the night—Jesus demonstrated His power over the elements. His first miracle is the precursor to many more spectacular events that highlight His deity. The miracles that follow eclipse this first one, culminating in His own resurrection from the dead.

Even the demons bow to Jesus, as

we see in lesson 7 when He casts out a dumb spirit from the son of a forlorn father. When Jesus again links faith with His divine act, the man cries out, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief" (Mark 9:23-24).

Jesus' healings of physical diseases are sometimes linked with other spiritual truths about Him that challenged the worldview of the scribes and the Pharisees. For instance, the Healer was also the Forgiver (lesson 10). His authority even extended over the Sabbath ordinances, which God instituted for man's benefit rather than bondage (lesson 8). In a Sabbath healing, He purposely has the man with the withered right hand stand up in front of the skeptics and stick his hand out in front of them just so He could highlight their hardness of heart in putting their legalism before mercy (Luke 6:8, 10).

In the end, mankind's delegated, yet failed, dominion is restored in Jesus' exaltation where we truly rule and reign with Him (Heb. 2:8-9; Rev. 5:10). This is seen in our final lessons covering lesson texts in the difficult book of Revelation. One of the highlights of Revelation is a coronation ceremony where the eternal King is crowned and given His kingdom.

In lesson 12 (Rev. 5:6-14), we view the beginning of the coronation ceremony where the redeemed share in the King's glory and restored dominion. The quarter's final lesson looks into Revelation 22, the final chapter of the Bible. There, our Lord and King comforts His servants (vs. 6), affirming that His coming to mop up His enemies and reward His friends is an imminent reality. The language used in this final prophecy, "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last" (vs. 13), leaves us without doubt that Jesus truly is God.

Jesus' Claim to Deity

Lesson Text: John 8:31-38, 48-56, 58-59

Golden Text—"If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32).

OPENING MOMENTS

Suggested Song (Adults)

"The God of Abraham Praise" (Ben Judah)

Suggested Song (Children)

"At the Name of Jesus" (Noel)

Icebreaker

Can people be spiritually healthy if they reject Jesus' claims about Himself? Explain.

LESSON OUTLINE

1. **Jesus' discourse on spiritual freedom from sin (John 8:31-38)**
2. **The true heart attitude of Jesus' listeners (John 8:48-56, 58-59)**

KEY ISSUES

One holiday, a man and his family decided to go white water rafting on the Kaweah River, which is located in California at the southern entrance of Sequoia National Park. When they started out in calm water, it seemed as if they were in complete control of the raft. When they came to the first rapids, however, they realized things had drastically changed.

Big waves threatened to engulf them as water swirled around, pushing and pulling. No matter how hard they paddled, the family had no choice. They had to go down the river through the rapids (www.elbourne.org). The family realized there was a spiritual lesson

to be learned from their experience. Fallen man is not really in control of his life. Sin and evil are in control, plunging mankind toward destruction. The only true freedom from sin happens when a person confesses his sin and trusts in Jesus as his personal Saviour.

The topic of freedom comes wrapped in many packages: individual freedom, economic freedom, social freedom, and religious freedom. Personal, eternal freedom, however, is found only in the Person of Jesus Christ.

John recorded Jesus' teachings about freedom that were delivered to "those Jews which believed on him." This phrase probably was descriptive of an assemblage of Jewish people who had declared an initial faith in Jesus as their hoped-for Messiah. Jesus' teachings would help identify and solidify their true commitment and—if accepted—would ultimately free them from the bondage of Jewish legalism.

When confronted with Jesus' claims about spiritual freedom from sin, His listeners revealed what was really in their hearts. Their main concern was being set free from the political bondage of men. Jesus continued to show that their professed faith was a pseudo commitment. He was infallibly able to discern the murderous intent of their hearts, which laid bare the emptiness of their claim to be related to Abraham.

Jesus' challenging and convicting words were necessary to dismantle His