

Like Father, Like Son

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[0 : 00] If you have your Bible with you this morning, you can open it up to John chapter 8. For those of you who are visiting, we've been working our way through the Gospel of John kind of at a slow pace, just trying to milk it for all it's worth and learn as much as we can about Jesus and what he asks of us as his followers. So John chapter 8, we are in this morning, and we're at about verse 43. And this morning, I didn't plan it this way, but we come to a difficult passage. Difficult for a couple of reasons. First of all, Jesus is about to say something that many in the audience find offensive. And even today, people still find these words offensive and are ashamed of them. Second, this is a difficult passage to know just what Jesus means and how does this apply to us. But we're going to try to look at it anyway. We don't just want to skip over it. We know that everything that Jesus says is important and for a reason.

So John chapter 8, verse 43. And just before we read it, let me just remind us of what's going on. Jesus is still at the temple courts. He's having a heated discussion with a crowd of people there. He's told them that they must believe that he is the one sent from God and that if they do not, they will die in their sin. They will stand guilty before God. He has told them the hard truth that they are slaves to sin who need to be set free and liberated. He said that it's by his word, by the truth that he speaks, that they can be set free. And people initially seem to believe him and were excited about him. But we saw that very quickly, this was maybe a superficial belief.

And as this conversation goes on, it's coming out that many really do not believe in Jesus, at least not the hard parts of what he's saying, the part about being slaves to sin and things like that. So they begin to argue with Jesus about this.

We are children of Abraham, they said. And Jesus responded, you are in the physical sense, but in the most important sense, you are not.

[2 : 25] So they tried another angle. We are children of God. He is our father. And Jesus challenged that too. Actually, no, you are not. If you were God's children, you would love me.

Because I've been sent here from him to you. No, there's a major problem here. As Jesus said a moment ago in verse 37, he said, my word makes no progress in you. It's like it's not getting through.

And he says a very similar thing here and now again in verse 43. Why is my language not clear to you? He says. A more literal translation. Why do you not understand what I'm saying?

Now, if it were you or I that were speaking these words, I at least imagine that if I was to say them, it would be because I'm frustrated that the person I'm talking to just doesn't seem to be getting it.

Why do you not understand what I'm saying? I'm not sure that Jesus necessarily feels the same as I would. We really don't know what he's feeling as he asks this question.

[3 : 42] But interestingly enough, he answers his own question. Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear my word.

It is because you cannot hear my word, he says. And probably all of us are wondering, well, what do you mean, Jesus, that we cannot hear your word? What do you mean?

That's a strange thing to say. Why can't they hear your word? Well, everybody has some ideas about this. Some people, pretty much everybody agrees that it's not because they're physically deaf.

But beyond that, there's a number of different ideas about what Jesus means here. Some people believe that they are unable to hear Jesus' words because they are spiritually deaf.

Like in their souls. They just, they can't hear it. Some of those people would say that they maybe lack some kind of a spiritual organ that's needed in order to really hear and understand what Jesus is saying.

[4 : 50] Others would say it's because they're spiritually dead. They don't have spiritual life yet. And so they can't understand what Jesus is saying. A few people will point to the earlier chapters of John and say it's because they need to be born again by the Spirit first in order to be able to really hear and understand Jesus' words.

And some others would say that they simply choose not to hear Jesus' words. Well, which is it? What's really going on here with these people? Why can't they hear your word, Jesus? I wish I could say with certainty what Jesus means here. You see, at some point we also have to ask the question of whether they are responsible for what they are hearing or not hearing from Jesus.

Do these people know that they cannot hear his word? Do they think they can hear him and understand him? I've got lots of questions for Jesus here.

But if I had to venture a guess, perhaps it means something like this. Because you are unable to hear my word, maybe, simply means you are unable to accept my word.

[6 : 07] To receive the word that you are hearing from me. And we sometimes use the word hear or the word listen like that. I know I do with my own kids. I might tell them to do something.

And then see that they didn't do it. And I might say, why didn't you listen to me? Well, it's not that they didn't listen to me. They heard what I said. It's that they didn't do what I said.

And so maybe that's what Jesus means here. You are unable to accept the word that you are hearing from me. And that inability to accept Jesus' word, I think, is maybe rooted not so much in ignorance, but in an unwillingness.

Unwillingness. Not because they don't recognize that Jesus speaks the truth, but because they don't like the implications of the truth that Jesus speaks.

That's my best guess here. Jesus' words are not getting through because for their part, they cannot accept his word. And that this cannot accept comes from a deep down, I will not accept what you are saying.

[7 : 21] I kept thinking back to what Jesus said earlier here in this Gospel of John. John 3, verse 19 and 20. This is the verdict.

Light has come into the world. That's Jesus. That's the word that he speaks. But people love darkness instead of light. Why? Because their deeds were evil.

Everyone who does evil hates the light and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. I think that's maybe a good explanation of what's happening here as Jesus has this conversation with the crowd.

Jesus is the light and he's speaking words that expose the truth. Truth like, you're a slave to sin and you need to be set free and I have come to set you free.

But they are not wanting to hear this. They don't want to accept that reality. We are children of Abraham and therefore we are slaves of nobody.

[8 : 26] We have God for our Father and therefore we don't need you, Jesus. Jesus already said back in verse 37 and this was something we've heard a lot of times in John that the people, some of them at least, are looking for a way to kill him.

And so if that's true, then it makes sense that at this point they are no longer able or willing to hear what Jesus has to say to them.

I mean, think of the state of their minds and their hearts right now. If they are plotting to kill him, it means that they have hardened their hearts towards Jesus.

They've made up their minds about him. They're done listening to Jesus. Maybe you've had an argument with someone and you know that there comes that point in the conversation, the back and forth, where you're not listening to them and they're not listening to you.

Perhaps something like that is happening here. Let's go on. Jesus says, Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear my word.

[9 : 40] You are of your father, the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. This is the part that is offensive.

To them, to us, I didn't intentionally choose this passage for Mother's Day. This is what Jesus said that day. You are of your father, the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father.

So why are they unable to accept, to hear Jesus anymore? Jesus says it's because they are children of the devil. And we're going to talk about what that means in a moment, but first, before we get to that, notice the second part of what Jesus says here.

He says, You want to carry out your father's desires, or you want to do the desires of your father. Notice that it's not just the devil who has desires, but Jesus says that they themselves, the people there, they want to do the things that the devil desires, which in this situation here is to kill Jesus. Verse 44, he goes on, You are of your father, the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father? He was a murderer from the beginning, says Jesus.

[11 : 12] What was the devil's desire? To kill. He went after Adam and Eve to kill them. He deliberately enticed them to disobey God because he knew that it would result in their death.

He was a murderer from the beginning, says Jesus, with murderous desires. And Jesus is saying to some of the people here in the crowd, you have the same desires that he does, that he had since the beginning of the world.

Remember back to what John said earlier. The people love the darkness and hate the light. Why? Because their deeds were evil.

So Jesus is shining the spotlight on the murderous intents of their hearts in this moment on what they are trying to do, which at this moment is very evil.

It's to kill him. To take him out. And so I think this is why they are unable to hear. They are unable to accept what Jesus is saying.

[12 : 24] They're unable to come into the light and love the light because to accept what Jesus is saying is to admit that he's right. that we really are slaves who need to be set free.

That we really are sinners who are on the hook with God. That we really need you, Jesus. And for some of them to admit that yes, we actually have been plotting to kill even though we know it's wrong.

Let's come back to this statement. You belong to your father. You are of your father, the devil. My translation in my Bible says you belong to your father, the devil.

What does that mean? You are of your father, the devil. What does it mean to be a child of the devil? Well, first of all, I don't think it means the same thing as to be a child of God.

Those who are children of God, we've heard earlier from Jesus himself. To become a child of God, you need to be born again by the Spirit into his family.

[13 : 38] You become a child of God through a spiritual birth. It's not the same with the devil and being a child of his. It doesn't mean that you have somehow been born of the devil in a spiritual sense.

It also doesn't mean that they have verbally pledged allegiance to the devil in some kind of ceremony or ritual. In fact, probably all of these people don't think that they are children of the devil. Thirdly, I don't think it means that they belong to the devil. I don't think Jesus is saying that the devil owns them or has ownership over them.

And I don't think Jesus is saying that the devil controls them or makes them desire or makes them do what they are desiring and doing. So what does Jesus mean here?

Well, the only sense in which they seem to be children of the devil that Jesus brings up again and again here, the sense in which the devil is their father is based on the fact that they desire and do the same things that he does.

[14 : 52] He is the father of those desires to murder. He is the father of those deeds to lie, to deceive because he was the first one to do them.

And if I'm reading this right, what makes a person a child of the devil is that they take after their father. They take after the devil in their desires and in their deeds.

The things they desire, the things that they do. Like father, like son. Let's see this in what Jesus says here. Back in verse 38, Jesus said this to them, I speak the things which I have seen with my father.

Therefore, you also do the things which you heard from your father. In other words, Jesus' actions and his words line up with what he has heard and seen from God, his father.

But he says that their actions and words line up with what they have heard and seen from their father, the devil. Verse 39, Abraham is our father, they answered.

[16 : 08] Jesus said to them, if you were Abraham's children, you would do what Abraham did. You would do the works that Abraham did.

He goes on there to say, no, you're looking for a way to kill me. You are doing the works of your own father, the devil. In other words, it's their deeds, it's their works, it's their actions by which they are either children of Abraham or children of a different father.

And their deeds, he says, don't match up with Abraham. So you are not truly his children, rather, you're trying to kill me. Your deeds, your actions, your behavior matches up to a different father, the devil.

Again, in verse 44, he says, you are of your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires.

We read this already, but it's not only their deeds by which they are children of the devil, but it's their desires. They have the same desires as he does, and so are children, of him.

[17 : 29] Like father, like son. He wants to kill. He is a murderer. He has the desire to harm people. You have that desire in your heart right now, says Jesus.

Verse 44, he talks about how the devil is a liar. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth.

goes on to talk about how the devil lies all the time and how he is the father of lies, but his basic point coming down to verse 45 is, you are like him, like father, like son, just as the devil did not hold to the truth and stand firm in it, in the same way, here I am speaking the truth to you, confronting you with the truth and yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me, says Jesus in verse 45. You know it's the truth and because you know it's the truth, you do not want to hear it. So to be a child of the devil, the way that Jesus describes it is to have the same desires and deeds as the devil.

It doesn't mean that you worship Satan. In fact, these religious leaders in the crowd, I mean, they're here at the temple courts in the temple of the Lord and they do many religious things.

[19 : 06] Being a child of the devil is something that probably everybody would deny and that's why these words of Jesus are so offensive to people and yet it's almost impossible to escape just how black and white a picture Jesus paints for us with these words.

In his words, there are ultimately only two families that you can belong to. You can belong to God and have him for your father or you can belong to the devil and have him for your father.

You can take up the desires and the deeds of one or the other. You can take up the family business of one or the other. Let's bring in one more key passage that sheds some light on this because we still might wonder, is there really nothing in between?

Am I a child of the devil by default until I'm saved? Isn't there some kind of neutral in the middle before I make my choice?

Let's look at 1 John chapter 3 verse 8. John was listening that day. This is what he wrote in his letter. He said, the one who does what is sinful is of the devil.

[20 : 34] Same language. Because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. Down in verse 10 he says, this is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are.

Anyone who does not do what is right is not God's child. Nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister.

So John confirms for us in his letter that yes, we are hearing Jesus correctly. It is black and white. you are either a child of God or a child of the devil.

And what marks the difference between the two is the overall way of life that a person has. As we see in these words of John, doing what is sinful marks the life of someone who is of the devil.

not doing what is right marks the life of someone who is a child of the devil. But doing what is right marks the life of those who are of God.

[21 : 47] Loving your brother and your sister marks the life of a child of God. Now this, of course, doesn't mean that a true child of God never blows it, never sins or makes mistakes.

Abraham did, King David did, Peter did, and many more. But it means that the overall way of life of a child of God is that they generally do what is right and not what is sinful.

They love their brother and their sister and not just live to please themselves at all costs. So if the mark of a child of the devil is that they generally do what is sinful like the devil does, then yes, by default, we all start out as children of the devil.

As Paul said in Romans chapter 3, verse 23, familiar verse, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. That's where we all start. This is why we need Jesus to come, to help us, to save us. because from the start, we are all children of the devil. But listen, this is the hard truth that Jesus speaks to them that day, but there is also good news that Jesus brings.

[23 : 15] And we've been hearing this all throughout the gospel of John. He has come to give life. He has come to speak to us the truth by which, believing it, we can become children of God and

have a change of family.

He has come to set free those who are slaves to sin. Listen to these words from the beginning of John's gospel again. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. That's Jesus. He was in the world. And though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet, to all who did receive him, here it is, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

There is a way to have a change of family, to get a new father, a different father, a better father, to become a child of God.

[24 : 34] And it's through believing in the name of Jesus. It's believing in him, that he is who he says he is, and believing the things that he said and has come to speak, the truth he comes to speak.

the crowd here in the temple courts is doing the opposite. They are not listening to Jesus. They are not believing in him.

They are not receiving him. Back to John chapter 8, verse 45. Yet, because I tell you the truth, you do not believe me, says Jesus.

Can any one of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me? Quite the statement.

And I think that we really need to ponder these words. Jesus is appealing to their consciences. My actions, he says, and my conduct match with what you know is good and right.

[25 : 43] does anybody want to come up and convict me of sin? Have I done anything wrong to anyone? Have I said anything wrong to anyone?

If I lack integrity, tell me specifically what I have done or what I have said. They've already made a few accusations throughout, but Jesus has answered all of those so well to show that he is not guilty of anything.

And so if I've been speaking and doing what is good and right and you know that, then you know that I am from God. You know that I speak the truth.

So why won't you believe me? believe me? What a question. Jesus is appealing to their consciences.

Why don't you believe me? What's keeping you from accepting what you know to be true about Jesus? Jesus? I think we all need to think about these words and answer for ourselves.

[26 : 56] But Jesus goes on. He actually answers this question too. He says, why don't you believe me?

And then down in verse 47, whoever belongs to God hears what God says. The reason why you do not hear my words is that you are not of God.

This is quite the statement. And I think that we should think about the word hear that Jesus uses here in the same senses above. The reason why you do not accept the word of God is that you are not of God.

Now there's a whole discussion and debate around this. I'm not going to get into that this morning. There's a temptation to want to change these words around.

What do you mean the reason why we do not hear is because we are not of God? Well, which comes first? Belonging to God or hearing and believing? Save that for another day.

[28 : 09] either way, we are at the mercy of God because we have all sinned.

We need a change in family. We need to become children of God is what Jesus is saying to them there that day. As we've been going through this series, we've seen some of the marks of being a true disciple or a true child of Abraham, a true child of God.

We've heard some really good things from Jesus. To be a true follower of his, we must remain in his word. We must continue to hold to his teaching and not move on from it.

To be a true child of Abraham, we must do the things that Abraham did. Believe and accept and obey the word of God when it comes to us like Abraham did. To be a true child of God, we heard last week, we should love and love his son, the one that he has sent.

And this morning, we saw the marks of having a different father. A child of the devil desires and does what the devil does, like father, like son.

[29 : 26] A child of the devil refuses to believe Jesus because he speaks the truth. A child of the devil will not hear or accept or listen to what God says just like the devil won't.

But a true child of God will hear and will accept and will listen to what God says. Jesus has been shining the light of truth on these people.

He's been exposing their desires and their deeds, giving them the hard truth they need to come face to face with, whose family they're in. And next week we'll see how they respond and as you can imagine it wasn't good.

They were very angry. But for this morning what about you? Whose family are you in? Jesus only gives us two possibilities.

Do you love Jesus? Do you believe in him? The words that he has spoken, do you accept them? do you endeavor to obey them as all true children of God do?

[30 : 39] Or do you love certain other things more? Do you have it in your heart to continue doing some of those things that you know are wrong?

Do Jesus' words make you angry? Do they provoke you because of things that you might have to surrender or give up if you were to believe in him?

Is it possible that you have been quite religious just like these people and yet your heart is far from God? Far from loving Jesus?

If it is, I want to encourage you with Jesus' own words to repent and believe, to humble yourself before him, to admit, yes, I have blown it, I am a sinner.

Will you forgive me? God is in the business of forgiving sins. That's why he sent Jesus. He is compassionate, he is gracious, and he will forgive you if you ask him.

[31 : 47] And it will cost to become a follower of Jesus. There's no denying that. Jesus himself said, for whoever wants to save their life will lose it.

But whoever loses their life for me will save it. It will cost. It costs everything. He said, what good is it for someone to gain the whole world yet forfeit their soul?

The cost is well worth it for what we receive from Jesus. Eternal life. That's what's at stake here.

Life and death. Many of you here this morning are children of God and you love Jesus.

I want to encourage you to keep listening to Jesus, to stay in his word, to continue to hold tightly to his teaching, and as Peter said, to make every effort to obey his commands, to do what's right, to love your brother and your sister, as all true children of God should and do.

And as a last thought, God, these words are offensive. We're not going to pretend that they're not.

And so I want to encourage you to take care about talking about being children of the devil to people in our world, in our community, people who don't know Christ.

[33 : 11] If you take these words upon your lips, I want to encourage you to do it with the utmost humility and gentleness, and never with the intent to insult or deride or to give somebody a spiritual slap in the face, you're a child of the devil.

I don't believe that's the way Jesus spoke these words and I don't think we should either. Let's pray. Father in heaven, thank you for sending Jesus.

Lord Jesus, thank you for speaking these words to us. We don't necessarily like these words. They are uncomfortable, they are hard, and yet we know that they are true and we need to hear them.

Thank you that you have made a way for us to become children of God. It's a wonderful gift. We praise your name for it.

Amen.