

Who is your Father?

HN/SS 15/05/05 am

Reading: Genesis 18:27-47, I John 3

Study Text: John 8:37-47

Sing Psalms 1, 136:1-6, 20:1-6, 20:7-9

Genealogical studies have become very popular these days. Almost every family has a member who is piecing together the family tree. I was surprised to find that in Scotland it is a thriving business – there are shops where you can go and search family records. Many people go there looking for details of their ancestors.

We all like to know our heritage, but this recent surge in interest is remarkable. Have we become insecure, wanting to know more about just who we are? Are we looking for VIPs in our past? Do we find comfort in knowing our great, great grandfather was a minister of the gospel?

Abraham's Children

The Jews were acutely aware of their ancestry. Maybe living under Roman occupation made them feel insecure and stimulated a pride in their heritage. As soon as Jesus spoke about being made free they reacted *we are Abraham's descendants and have never been in bondage to anyone* (8:33). Abraham is our father they said.

This boast was not because Abraham was a great king or ruler – they could have boasted in David or Solomon. Abraham was the man who God called to go to the land of Canaan and the one to whom he gave the promises. They were indeed the biological descendants of Abraham. Jesus granted them this much. But he questioned their attitude towards him – specifically their desire to kill Jesus.

Abraham listened to the word the Lord spoke to him and obeyed his voice. Abraham welcomed the messengers of the Lord (Genesis 18). He took them in and treated them well. He listened to what they had to say. He sought mercy from them with regard to his nephew Lot.

But these Jews refused to listen to Jesus who was sent by God to tell them the truth. *If you were children of Abraham you would do the works of Abraham* (8:39). Jesus said 'you would listen to me for I am sent by God the Father'. You would believe what I say. You would accept the truth, *the truth which I heard from God*, and be set free. Jesus refers to himself as a man (8:40) for he had come down from heaven and become a man that he might communicate the truth to them. He humbled himself, and *was found in appearance as a man* (Philippians 2).

It was possible for them to understand his message, it was a message for men, but they **willed** not to hear. *Why do you not understand?* said Jesus. And he answered himself – *because you are not able to listen to my word*. Their hearts were hardened as they resisted and rejected the word of God. They claimed to be children of Abraham but their behaviour revealed otherwise. They were not spiritually related to Abraham.

Having ministers or missionaries of the gospel in your family tree gives you no claim to a place in the family of God. Being baptised, being good and trying to keep the law, being as regular churchgoer, does not allow you to claim a place in the kingdom of God.

Accepting Jesus Christ as the Son of God, loving him and believing he died and rose from the dead – this is what you must do if you are a true child of God. My sheep hear my voice; I know them and they follow me Jesus would later tell the Jews (10:27).

God's Children

Jesus questioned their claim to be children of Abraham because of their deeds. They wanted to murder him. *You do the deeds of your father* he said. We all have a father but just who is that father. Jesus opens up possibilities even as he closes their claim to Abraham as their father. They were offended by his assertion, maybe even alert to what he was getting at.

We were not born of fornication they retorted. 'We are not illegitimate having a father we do not know about'. As Jesus continued his logical argument they found themselves on shaky ground. This mention of illegitimacy may have been a barbed comment about Jesus own birth.

We have one Father – God they claimed. They gave up on the argument about Abraham. If Jesus was going to question them about who their father was, their spiritual father, then they would claim God as their father. We have the Law of Moses, we are doing the works of the law, and on that basis we can confidently claim God as our father.

But Jesus did not allow them this claim either. If God was their Father then they would love Jesus, the Son of God, whom he sent to them. What Jesus spoke was what he saw and heard from God. He spoke the truth from God. He who loves the Father will love the son also. It is inconceivable that someone could hate the son and want to kill him, while claiming to love and obey the father.

In the eyes of Jesus it was not possible then and neither is it possible today. Many people think they can worship God without believing in Jesus Christ. They think there are many paths to God and that Jesus and Christianity is just one way. This is the great deception of new age and other religions. They teach that all religions know God is some way and that if people sincerely believe in God they will be saved. 'We must not be so narrow and dogmatic as to claim that Jesus is the only way!'

This is what many will tell you. But it is not what Jesus tells us. The Bible proclaims loudly and clearly that Jesus is the only way to the Father (John 14:6, Acts 4:12). Jesus told these Jews that if God was truly their Father they would love his Son, for he came from the Father. *He who is of God hears God's words* (8:47). God said *this is my beloved son, listen to him*.

Jesus had already given them witnesses proving that he was who he claimed to be. He performed miracles and they were impressed. They were impressed by his words also – so long as he did not speak about sin and being slaves to sin.

Jesus challenged them to convict him of sin (8:46). As the one sent by the Father, as the Son of God, he claimed to be without sin. Let them or anyone else examine him and prove otherwise. They could not. He never spoke a lie – so why do people not believe him?

Satan's Sons

The Jews did not welcome Jesus. They would not listen to him and in fact wanted to kill him. Abraham would not have countenanced such action. Like father, like son they say. They were nothing like Abraham. On the contrary their desire to murder Jesus showed they were following in the footsteps of another father – Satan or the devil.

Not Abraham, not God, but *you are of your father the devil* concluded Jesus (8:44). He had alluded to this earlier but now he states it plainly. By logical elimination, and now by direct association, Jesus came to this conclusion. It was a terrible thing to say, a stinging rebuke to these people, but it was the inescapable truth. Is it still true today?

Years ago I was sharing this passage with a young believer. We were praying for her friend who was not a believer. She suddenly realized her friend who rejected Christ was in fact a child of Satan. This is the truth is it not? You are either a child of God or a child of Satan. *In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest...* (I John 3:10).

In comparing these Jews with the devil, Jesus refers to two features of the character of the devil- features that match well with the character of these Jews.

Firstly he is *a liar and the father of lies*. It was with a lie that he tricked Eve and led her to sin- *you shall not surely die*. There is no truth in him. If he does speak the truth it is for the purpose of doing evil (Luke 4, Acts 16:16f). Jesus never sinned – he never lied. So if you say something or do something based on a lie you can be sure it is from the devil. You are listening to the devil and not to Jesus.

Secondly he is a murderer, and was so right from the beginning. Cain murdered his brother Abel. Sin, or we can say Satan, desired to have him. Satan entered Judas and he went out to betray Jesus (Luke 22:3). Satan delights in murder. He has no power to give life – only to destroy. The Jews hated Jesus and wanted to kill him. Satan was pleased with them. They were his loyal sons.

Adam and Eve became children of Satan when they believed his word rather than the word of God. They subjected the whole human race to the fatherhood of Satan. *Whoever commits sin is a slave to sin* said Jesus (8:34). *Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother* (I John 3:10).

Born in sin, we are slaves to sin unless and until Jesus sets us free. Only Jesus can transfer us from the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God. He has the power because he came into this world; he died in our place and rose again victorious over death. *Who is he who overcomes the world*, and the ruler of this world? *He who believes that Jesus is the Son of God* (I John 4:5).

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