

# Who's Your Father?

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, it's lovely to see you all tonight. And in God's kindness, we've got a passage where one of the great themes in the passage is listening to Jesus speak.

And Esther was one of the great readers at St. Silas. Listening to her read was always enormously encouraging. You always felt that she read with understanding and knew the word and loved.

And so let me pray for us as we begin. So Father, we thank you for the life of Esther. We thank you that she loved to read your word, that she listened to your word.

Please help us to listen well this evening. In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, as we begin, I wonder if I can ask you a slightly provocative question.

Who is your father? Who are you a child of? And the Jews who believed in our passage tonight maintain that the only father they have is God himself.

[ 1 : 1 1 ] And this passage kind of revolves in a back and forth over this question, who is your father? Father. And how what you do and who you listen to shows you who your father is.

And fatherhood is really, and the question, who is the real son, is at the heart of that great movie, The Gladiator, that stars Russell Crowe. Maybe if you're slightly older, you'll remember it.

Set during the Roman rules of Marcus Aurelius and Commodus, the second century AD. And the practice that forms the background of the movie is, if an influential Roman citizen, an emperor or something like that, felt that their son wasn't up to the job of being a suitable ruler, didn't hold their values, didn't listen to them, then very often they would adopt someone who they thought would be better as a safeguard to a safe transition of power.

And so in the movie, Marcus Aurelius, who's the good philosopher warrior king, adopts the brave Maximus. And Marcus' son, Commodus, finds out that this is going to happen, and he murders his father before the official announcement is made.

And so the rest of the movie works around Maximus trying to avenge the death of his adopted father, Marcus Aurelius. And by way of context, in John's Gospel, we're in a little series called Truth on Trial.

[ 2 : 5 3 ] And we get part of that from where Jesus says in our passage tonight, in verse 45, Yet because I tell you the truth, you do not believe in me.

And the truth that is being put on trial is Jesus as God's messenger and as God's message. And that through Jesus, we can know true freedom and life if we turn from our sins and trust in him.

And as the back and forth in this trial has gone on in these chapters 7 and 8 and 9, it's got more and more heated until eventually we read Jesus addressing his interrogators, the Jews in this section, in verse 44.

And he says to them, You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. And he's saying that specifically in regards to their desire to murder him and to deny the truth that he speaks.

And so let me ask you slightly naughtily, slightly provocatively, who are you a child of? And Jesus says that in order to be his disciple, in order to really be a child of God, to have God as your father, then we must hold on to the truth that Jesus speaks.

[ 4 : 23 ] He speaks truth. And so the message of our reading tonight, the message of this little section, is if we hold on to the truth, Jesus' teachings, to the end, we are really his disciples, free children of God.

So if we hold on to the truth, Jesus' teachings, to the end, we are really his disciples, free children of God.

And the points that we're going to unpack this are, firstly, we're going to consider how true children are set free by the Son. In verses 31 to 36 there, and we're going to see what that freedom looks like.

Then we're going to look at how true children are shown by what they do. In 37 to 41. And then we're going to consider how true children are shown by who they listen to.

In the last little bit of our passage there, 42 to 47. So true children are set free by the Son. And the setting is the Feast of the Tabernacles, in the courts of Jerusalem.

[ 5 : 27 ] And Jesus has spoken like no one else. And the people have been divided over what he has said. But some Jews have come to believe in him.

Verse 31. And no sooner do they come out of the baptism font, I don't know if they were baptized, than Jesus gives a sermon. Verse 31. If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.

Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. And there's an awkward silence, a bit of a shifting of feet.

And then someone says, we are Abraham's descendants. We've never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we will be free? And we might ask the same question of Jesus tonight.

What do you mean the truth will set you free? I'm free already. I live in Glasgow. I've never been so free in my life. I'm free to sleep with whoever I want to. I'm free to choose my own gender.

[ 6 : 31 ] I'm free to do anything else I want to. How can you say that I am not free? And the Jews thought they were free.

And we might think we are free too. But look at how Jesus defines freedom in verse 34. Jesus replied, Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.

And what Jesus is saying is that if you sin, if you say no to God, and we all do this, then you are enslaved by that sin.

You are caught in sin, no matter how free you might be. Well, I wonder if you've heard of another late 90s movie, noughties movie called The Truman Show.

Give me a nod if you've heard it. Maybe you've watched it. I don't know. And in the movie, the hero Truman Burbank, he is the star in a reality TV show. He has lived his entire life in a reality TV show.

[ 7 : 38 ] His whole world that he knows is artificial. He's been physically sealed off from the outside world.

He knows nothing but a movie set. And he thinks that he's entirely free. He thinks he has all his desires met. He has every creature comfort he wants.

He can do whatever he wants to. But the question behind the movie is, is he really free? And then one day, through an accident, he discovers that there is a world outside.

And he discovers, lo and behold, a door to the world outside. And in the same way, we have been born into a world that is ruled by sin.

We have been cut off from the family of God and been born into a world that is against God. Everyone around us has been born into sin.

[ 8 : 42 ] And the world that we live in is broken and ruined and marred by sin and enslaved to sin. But we are completely unaware of it.

We don't know anything else. And meeting Jesus, as Jesus comes and lives in the world, he comes like, it's like discovering a door in a movie set that will lead us outside into true freedom, into a fuller experience and reality.

A freedom from sin. Maybe not eventually, maybe not immediately, but eventually. And in Jesus, sin is broken and our sins are forgiven and wiped away.

So what is this freedom going to look like? What's it going to look like to go through the door, to have our sins forgiven? And we get a little taste of it, a hint in verse 35.

I'll just read it for us. Now, a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. Now, the Jews were a very privileged people.

[ 9 : 56 ] God had revealed himself to them. He had given them a taste of what it looks like to have your sins forgiven. He had given them his law and commandments. But as privileged as they were, they were still under sin and its consequences.

They were still enslaved to sin. And they were separated from God, even though they had great privileges. And because of that, at best, although they had these privileges, they were like servants or slaves in a household.

So imagine you are a butler in the queen's household or one of her ladies-in-waiting. And you'd have enormous privileges. You'd get to go to the banquets and be able to peer over the guests' shoulders.

You might see all the grandeur of the palaces. You'd see all the beside-seen stuff. But you would still be a servant or a slave in her household.

Your role would be temporary, and it will come to an end. You'd either be sacked or you'd retire. And you were bound to keep the rules.

[ 11 : 08 ] Do this. Do that. Now imagine if you were Prince Charles or Princess Anne, and imagine the privileges they get. Imagine what they've seen and heard.

Imagine all the world leaders that they've shaken hands with. Oh, Barak, my man, I'm so pleased to meet you. Imagine that. And imagine that no matter whatever they did wrong, they would still be accepted as children of Her Majesty.

They would be a part of the family forever. And so the Jews were right to boast in their freedoms, to say we are Abraham's children.

But the freedom that they had was only a faint taste of true freedom, of what it would look like to be a son and a child of God.

They were still stuck in sin and were therefore only servants or slaves in God's household. Sin kept them apart from God, from true freedom.

[ 12 : 16 ] Jesus says that when we... But the freedom that Jesus offers is better and is forever.

And when we trust in the son, we're no longer under rules, but we get the same privileges as him, the same privileges as a son or a child of God or a daughter of God.

We have the same intimacy, the same access. We get to pray to him. We get to enjoy God. And it's longer. It's forever. Being with God forever in the new creation that is so wonderful, it's indescribable, where there will be no sin to ruin things.

And that's what Esther is enjoying now. And then what Jesus says, what he means in verse 36, is where he says, so if the son sets you free, you'll be free indeed.

That's the freedom that he's talking about. That if we trust him, we'll be a child of God. And so although the Jews claim to be descendants of Abraham and have God as their father, they thought they didn't need to hold on to Jesus' teachings.

[ 13 : 32 ] But Jesus says something altogether bigger and greater is here. And you'll see who your real father is by what you do.

And so that's our second point. Then we're going to look at the true children are shown by what they do, verses 37 to 42. And so verse 39 we read, if you are Abraham's children, said Jesus, then you would do what Abraham did.

Well, growing up, I remember with my dad, you've never met my dad, he's passed away many years ago, but you'll learn a lot about him from me. And the two great loves that I got from him were body surfing.

He loved to go body surfing at the beach. And the other one was backyard cricket. I can't go body surfing in Glasgow, but if you ask me what I do on Saturdays, I'll tell you it's probably backyard cricket somewhere.

I do what my father does. I fall straight down from the tree. And so the believing Jews claim to be Abraham's children.

[ 14 : 44 ] And Abraham was someone we know from the Bible who was righteous by faith and who took God at his word. But look at what they do in verse 37.

They want to murder Jesus, to kill him, even though he tells the truth. And in 59, we read how they pick up stones to do that.

And so they prove what Jesus has said about them. And they don't listen to him, even though he speaks the truth from God. Just notice how many times in this passage, Jesus tells them that he speaks the truth.

John makes this absolutely emphatic for us. Verse 38, I'm telling you what I've heard in my father's presence. It's God's word to them. I have told you the truth from God.

I tell you the truth, verse 45. He has been completely truthful, beyond doubt. And then notice how many times in this passage he says, he comes from God.

[ 15 : 49 ] John wants us to get this absolutely clear. Verse 38, I tell you what I've seen in my father's presence. 40, I tell you the truth. I heard from God.

42, I have come here from God. God sent me. And so in John's gospel, Jesus claims to speak the truth.

He claims that he is sent by God. He does things. Only God can do signs. And he speaks like no one else. And the response of the Jews, the believing Jews in this passage is, they want to kill him.

And they reject what he says, even though he speaks the truth from God. And they say they are Abraham's descendants, and that God is their father.

But their actions speak a complete different story. And so Jesus' verdict comes in verse 44 on them.

[ 16 : 51 ] You belong to your father, the devil. You want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, but not holding to the truth.

For there was no truth in him. And when he lies, he speaks his native language. For he is a liar, and the father of lies. And I wouldn't want to draw a direct line from them to us, but I wonder if I can ask you, what do the things that you do say about who your father is?

I know we don't always get this right, but as a pattern, what actions and deeds are the things that are going to govern or rule our life?

What are the things that are going to qualify us and show people around us who our father is? And although John seems hard on these believing Jews here, he writes this for their benefit because he wants them to believe.

He's not writing to condemn them, even though it seems hard, but he's writing to convince them, to persuade them, to draw them on side of the truth about Jesus.

[ 18 : 12 ] He is writing to evangelize and encourage the Jews, the believing Jews of his day and our day. And he writes, so that we and they may be completely free, enjoying the Father through the Son.

And what he's doing is, he's pulling back the spiritual curtain of the world so that we may know the truth, however awkward it is, and be free.

That outside of Jesus, we are enslaved to sin. That there's another force at work. The things that I want to do, I don't do.

And the things that I know I should do, I don't. And that outside of Jesus, we follow in the footsteps of the devil. We think murderous thoughts.

We're unkind to people. And we tell lies. But the message of this passage and the thing that John wants us to understand and leave here tonight and remember is that if we hold on to the truth, Jesus' teachings, to the end, then we will be rarely his disciples.

[ 19 : 22 ] We'll be free and children of God. And the final way that we see how true children are shown is by who they listen to.

Verse 43 to 47. And in 41, the believing Jews claim, the only father we have is God himself. But Jesus speaks for God.

He speaks as one sent by God. And yet they reject his teachings. They have no room for his word. And in many ways, we do the same thing.

It's popular for us to claim, well, we're all God's children. But ignore Jesus' teachings. We don't hold on to them. We don't give them any credit.

We might say, I believe in Jesus. I'm a child of God. I just don't believe what the Bible says. It's slightly awkward. And the general rule is that you can tell who a person is a child of by who they're listening to.

[ 20 : 26 ] So I don't have children, but I imagine the general rule is if you go up to a little child and you speak to them and they generally ignore you.

But if their parent speaks to them, I think this is right. The parents can correct me afterwards. The child listens up and they pay attention, hopefully more times than not, because they understand who their parent is.

And it's not here, it's not that Jesus here doesn't speak clearly. Look what Jesus' verdict is in verse 47.

Or look what he says in verse 43. Why is my language not clear to you? Jesus speaks absolutely clearly. But the issue is, look at what his verdict is in verse 47.

Whoever belongs to God, hears what God says. And the reason that you do not hear is that you do not belong to God. Jesus says they don't belong to God.

[ 21 : 32 ] They're not listening to him because they are not God's children. And therefore, they don't listen. And this is something that we all know. 95% of listening comes down to relationship.

If you know and trust someone, then you will listen to them. You'll pay them more credit. You'll be more interested in what they're saying. If you think they are sincere and have your good at heart, then you're going to listen to them.

But they have no relationship with God. And therefore, they reject God's words to them. They don't know the kind of things that God is passionate about. That God is kind to people.

That he wants the whole world to see him. And therefore, they don't listen to Jesus when he speaks to them. So let me ask you, slightly naughtily, slightly cheekily, what are the influences around us that we are listening to?

What are the things that are capturing our hearts? What are we... Do we try to figure out the things that God is passionate about? And what he is saying to us in his word?

[ 22 : 42 ] Have you said that you are trusting in Jesus, but you play down some of the harder things, he says, and choosing instead to listen to the world or your friends or social media or whatever it is.

But the message of this passage is, and it's written to encourage us, is that if we hold onto the truth, Jesus' teachings, to the end, we are really his disciples, free children of God.

And so the thing that qualifies us as a child of God is are we doing the things that our Father does and are we listening to God? And so although this passage starts off with the Jews believing in God, they show by their actions and by who they listen to that they don't really believe in Jesus.

And so in verse 48, John simply calls them the Jews and then in 59, they pick up stones to kill Jesus. And the promise that Jesus gives us is that if we believe in him, then we will know the truth.

Then we'll be truly free. The door will be opened. God is for our freedom. He wants us to know the truth. He doesn't want us to believe the lie.

[ 24 : 07 ] He's not against us. And we'll get all the privileges of a son, a son of God. We'll be adopted into God's family through Jesus.

If we hold onto Jesus' teachings and make room for his word in our lives, trusting him, not because it's immediately obvious, or it's convenient, or it's popular, but because he has said it and because we love God and we want to be Jesus' disciple.

But if you give up on listening to Jesus, no matter what you say about him, don't be surprised if you give up on Jesus entirely.

But if you want to be Jesus' disciple, if you want to know Jesus and know God and be truly free, then we must listen to him. And John writes this because he wants us to listen to Jesus.

He wants us to know Jesus and know God the Father. And the great joy and confidence of this passage is that if we listen to Jesus, if we hear what he is saying and humbly accept what he says, and if we hold onto that truth, even though our peers at work and at school and at university think we're slightly mad for doing it, then we can be confident that we are Jesus' disciples and we'll be completely free and we'll know God.

[ 25 : 37 ] And not because we're particularly good listeners, trust me, I know I'm the worst listener in the world, but because God is a faithful God who has sent his Son to die for us in our place, to set us free so that we can be his brothers and sisters and that God can be our Father.

Let's pray. So Father, we thank you for these challenging words from John. We thank you that if we listen to your Son, if we hold onto Jesus' teachings, then we can be free and be disciples of Jesus to the end.

We thank you for these words, for pulling back the curtain. Please help us to listen more carefully. Please help us that we love you by what we do.

Please help us to draw nearer and nearer to you each and every day. In Jesus' name, amen.