

Peter Robinson - John 8:31

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[0 : 00] To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

They answered him, We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves to anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free? Jesus replied, I tell you the truth.

Everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family. But a son belongs to it forever. So if the son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

I know you are Abraham's descendants, yet you are ready to kill me, because you have no room for my word. I am telling you what I have seen in the father's presence, and you do what you have heard from your father.

Abraham is our father, they answered. If you are Abraham's children, Jesus said, then you would do the things Abraham did. As it is, you are determined to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God.

[1 : 06] Abraham did not do such things. You are doing the things your own father does. We are not illegitimate children, they protested. The only father we have is God himself.

Jesus said to them, If God were your father, you would love me. For I came from God and now I am here. I have not come on my own, but he sent me.

Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire.

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. 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? He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God.

[2 : 06] The Jews answered him, Aren't we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed? I am not demon-possessed, 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. At this the Jews exclaimed, Now we know 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?

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.

[3 : 10] You are not yet fifty years old, the Jews said to him. And you've seen Abraham? I tell you the truth, Jesus said. Before Abraham was born, I am. At this they picked up stones to stone him.

But Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds. We thank God for his faithful word. Put in your Bibles. Just quickly to say, I hope you noticed when you came in, if you came in the front, the display that's been redone again in the front of the church.

Really grateful to Samantha who does that. And it really looks good. So I don't think Samantha's here, is she? But give her our thanks because that looks fantastic.

And we're very grateful for that. So we're in John 8. We're thinking about this whole matter of fatherhood. I'm sure you've seen in recent days the TV series Who Do You Think You Are?

It's a series that traces the father and forefathers and relations of present-day celebrities. And some of them have found out, well, they've all found out surprising things.

[4 : 18] Some of them have found out that they're related to royalty. Boris Johnson, the mayor of London, is a direct descendant of King George II. Matthew Pinsett, the Olympic rower, is descended from Edward I and as far back as William the Conqueror.

That's quite astounding. Some years ago, one of my father's cousins in Guernsey traced some of the family back over 500 years and found out very tragically for me anyway that some of our earliest ancestors were from Jersey.

That's really bad if you're a Guernseyman to find that all your family were from Jersey. But whatever our ancestry, whatever our forefathers were like, the reality is if we're a Christian this morning, if we know and trust Christ as our Savior, then we have the very best of heritages of all.

Billy Bray, the Cornish preacher, a penniless man most of the time, would go around saying to people, I'm the son of the king. I'm the king's son. That's true of us if we're Christians.

This morning there's nothing better, nothing more wonderful than knowing God as our father. Here's how John describes it in his first letter. How great is the love the father has lavished on us that we should be called the children of God.

[5 : 33] And that's what we are. That's what we are. And to belong to this family, God's family, to be able to call God our father, to be confident of his loving care for us, to know that his face is always smiling upon us, is the single greatest privilege that any human being can know in this world.

The single greatest joy to know God as our father. Now in this conversation that we have, this discussion that goes on between Jesus and some of the Jews of his day, Jesus stresses the importance of having God as our heavenly father.

He speaks about this truth in verse 42 and in many other places as well. He said, if God were your father, and about the importance of not only God being his father, of course being uniquely his father, as a unique and only truly son of God, but the importance of knowing God as our heavenly father, as people.

And as he speaks with these Jews, Jews, it's clear that there are other fathers. It's not just God who is the father, but there are other fathers in this passage.

And therefore we need to recognize at the outset something quite devastating in one sense, and that says, not all people have God as their father. Not everyone has God as their father.

[7 : 00] That's clear from what Jesus says here. The Jews thought that God was their father. They said there at the end of verse 41, the only father we have is God himself. But Jesus corrects them.

If God were your father, if God were your father, no, he's not. He goes on and says later on, this God that you claim as your God, my father who you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me.

They thought that God was their father. They presumed that God was their father. Jesus says, no, he's not. How did they come to that mistaken point of view? How did they come to think that God was their father?

Well, because they were descendants of Abraham. That's what they said on two occasions. Verse 39, Abraham is our father, they answered.

Jesus. Jesus agreed with them that in fact, yes, it was true that they were descended from Abraham. Verse 37, I know you are Abraham's descendants in that physical line, but that did not automatically admit them into God's family.

[8 : 03] That did not automatically make them children of God. God had promised to Abraham, back in Genesis and chapter 12, that he would be Abraham's God and the God of his children after him.

Wonderful covenant promise. One of the promises that we enjoy as Christians as well, in this wonderful truth, God as our father and his blessings. And God dealt with the descendants of Abraham, that's really the whole of the Old Testament, dealt with the descendants of Abraham in a wonderful way, in a unique way, a special way.

He acted as a loving father to them, delivering them and rescuing from Egypt, caring for them, providing them through the wilderness, giving them a new home in the land of Canaan, and so on. He gave them his laws and ruled over them and directed them.

All these things were wonderful blessings that they had. But being a descendant, a physical descendant of Abraham, never gave automatic entrance into the spiritual blessings of knowing God.

And many, of course, of Abraham's descendants did not live as those who had God as their father. They acted wickedly and wrongly. Paul makes it very clear that it is only through faith.

[9 : 18] Only those who had faith, like Abraham's faith, were those who were his real children. He says here in Galatians, in chapter 3 and verse 7, Understand then, that those who believe are children of Abraham.

Those who believe are children of Abraham. And so through the Old Testament, we have, within the people of Abraham's children, we have this ongoing division. We have those who truly had faith in the Lord God and were true Israelites, true descendants of Abraham, truly knew God as their father, and many others as well who didn't.

They had all the blessings, the physical blessings, of being in God's family, but they did not know God as their father, and they lived sinful and wicked lives of unbelief.

Now today, there are many people who will say that everyone is a child of God. Many people will say God is the father of all people in the world.

But that simply isn't true. It can't be true if what Jesus says here we have to take seriously and real. What is true is that all people are one family because we are all direct descendants of one forefather, Adam.

[10 : 34] Every one of us is related in that sense. Every one of us can trace our lineage back to Adam and Eve, real people, the first people that God created. And it's true that God is the father of humanity in that sense because he's the creator of humanity.

That does not make us automatically children of God in the way that Jesus is speaking about. But then of course there's other folk particularly perhaps even folk here this morning say well yes I'm a child of God because I was christened in a church when I was a baby.

That makes me a child of God. Or I'm born in England or Scotland or somewhere else in the United Kingdom and of course the United Kingdom is a Christian country so that must make me a child of God and God my father.

No it doesn't. To presume that we are automatically God's children by something that has been done to us whether it's baptism or christening or because of where we were born or even who we were born to is wrong.

That's the same argument that the Jews were making here in respect to Abraham. But to those people and to us as well he makes the same declaration you do not belong to God he says in verse 47.

[11 : 48] You do not belong to God. And one of the great sadnesses one of the great terrible tragedies of our day and age is that many people if they are asked even today in what is a militantly atheistic country which pushes against God there's still probably 70 or 80% of people will say yes I think God is my father I'm a Christian or I believe in God.

But the reality is that very very few of those people actually know God as their father are children of God and can pray that wonderful prayer Jesus taught us our father.

Well there's the question then if that's the case if that's true what Jesus is saying and we believe it is true and I think we can see the reality of it anyway in the way that people live.

If God is not our father the question is who is? If God is not our father who is? And this is when Jesus says properly the most shocking the most upsetting things and I have to say this is Jesus' words so let you know people say loving Jesus meek and mild let's hear what he has to say about people who don't have God as their father.

You belong to your father the devil. Wow. That's a real kick in the head isn't it? You belong to your father the devil. If you do not have God as your father then the devil is your father.

[13 : 17] He says ah of course people like to find ways to wriggle out of Jesus' words and so they'll say well of course Jesus is only talking to these people here these people who are going to murder him and kill him because we see at the end of the chapter don't we they pick up stones to stone it.

So really we can wriggle out of it and we can say well actually Jesus just meant these people who were murderous really nasty and evil people but the reality that the Bible goes on to show us is this it's not just the really evil people or just these people who were the ones that Jesus means and declares to be the children of the devil but everybody who sins.

Here's what John writes later on in his first letter we looked at the wonderful truth when he said about what it is to be a Christian and have the love of God lavished on us and be his children but this is what he says as well he who does what is sinful is of the devil because the devil has been sinning from the beginning he who sins is of the devil.

The reality is that in this world in which we live we are one humanity but that humanity is divided into two sections and only two sections it's divided between those who are the children of God and those who are the children of the devil this is what John immediately says following in that letter 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 a child of God now that's pretty plain isn't it and it's very offensive isn't it extremely offensive but if Jesus didn't say it I wouldn't say it the truth is this dear friends if you do not know God as your heavenly father if you are not part of his family if you have not come to faith in him then Jesus says that your father is the devil now by that he does not mean that the father produced the devil produced you or that the devil gives life to you or even that you're possessed by the devil that's not what he's saying what he's saying is this is that like the devil you imitate him like your father now if you hopefully you might meet my father sometime later in the year they're planning to come across and you'll see some similarities between us often I pick up the phone when I'm over there because mum and dad are out and saying and they'll say oh Chris let's start going on and on and on because I sound just like my dad he's got a far more receding hairline than I've got and you'll see there's similarities and in fact as I'm sure all of you find as you get older you start to say the things your parents said to you and it's really disconcerting and you start to have the same habits and inflections and everything else we imitate our father if I'm put that way and so that's what

Jesus is saying here that when the devil is our father as is true of the world that we do the things the devil does as Jesus says he's sinful so why are people sinful because they imitate they're like the devil in that way why do people speak in the way they speak and act in the way they speak well ultimately because the devil is at work in this world Jesus makes it very clear not only are people those who have the devil as their father the one who in one sense influences the way they behave but actually he is the one who rules over the world in which they live again John makes a very very powerful statement he says we know that we are children of God and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one he doesn't mean the whole world is under is somehow wrenched from God's hand he means the people of this world are under the influence and the control of the enemy the devil the devil is at work in this world he's real he's a very real being and he's very much at work now in this world just as much as he has been all through history he's not a naughty but nice character as the world has made him that's one of the great great and clever schemes the devil has done he's managed to make himself appear naughty but nice and so you'll have people even dressed as the devil at fancy dress parties you'll have little people with tattoos with a little devil or demon on their arms you'll have people with these cuddly toys with devils but dear friends he's not anything like that he is the source of everything that pollutes and poison and destroys human life he is the one from whom ultimately everything of misery and pain and wickedness flows he is the plague and the curse upon this world and has been ever since

[18:15] Adam and Eve listened to him and chose to reject God and do what he wanted and let me say this to you dear friends this morning if you don't think that the devil has control over your life if you don't think that he is in authority and rules you then why aren't you a Christian this morning why isn't it you haven't trusted in Christ this morning why is it that everything that I'm saying to you are saying I wish I could put my fingers in my ears I don't want to hear this I'm a good person I'm a nice person that's his lie the reason that you are that you do the things you do why is it that you lie why is it that you are selfish why is it that you are greedy why is it that you are unpleasant towards people why are these things so real in your life it's because the devil is the one who you are following why is it the people of this world act in the way they do why is it what's going on in Iraq and Syria and around the world and on our doorstep why are these people acting in such evil ways if evil isn't real how can evil be there the devil is real very real but but this is the very reason the Lord Jesus Christ came into the world he came into the world for this reason here's what again

John is saying in his letter he who does what is sinful is of the devil because the devil has been sinning from the beginning the reason the son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work that's the wonderful truth that Christ came into this world to destroy the devil he came into this world to deliver and rescue people from the devil's influence and control to set them free that's what he says again and again doesn't he in the passage we read you will know the truth and the truth will set you free I tell you the truth whoever sins is a slave to sin it's if the son sets you free you'll be free indeed truly free freedom is the reason Christ came in to bring us into the freedom of being a child of God the freedom of knowing God as our heavenly father the freedom yes from sin's guilt and sin's power from the oppression and rule of the devil that's why lives are changed when Christ comes in that's why when you're a Christian you become a different person new creation because you're brought out as Paul says to the Colossians out of that kingdom of darkness and brought into the kingdom of God's son whom he loves brought into a place of freedom one of the lies again of the devil has been to say to people if you become a Christian then you might as well put on a pair of handcuffs because everything that God says to you means it's going to spoil your fun everything that God says he wants you to to be restricted and bound in and brought under rules and law oh when you are not a Christian you can do what you like and you're free absolute codswallow absolute rubbish when you are not a Christian then you are enslaved that's what Jesus says whoever commits a sin is a slave to sin who's never committed a sin here of course you have you know you have you know that you're a sinner you know that and we see it again and again we see the extreme versions of it of course when we see people who are so caught up in evil and in sin they just cannot break free people who are caught up in alcoholism or in drug addiction or in all sorts of violent behaviour or in bitterness a circle of bitterness and resentment or unforgiveness and we see these people they are trapped in making money and in greed they're trapped but so are you dear friend if you're not a Christian you're trapped you're not free to do what you want alright you think that you're free ok well tomorrow

I want you not to sin ok tomorrow you're not to sin by that I mean that every thought you're to have is to be completely pure and loving towards God and towards every other person ok you're not to even consider doing something which is wrong you're not even to consider a wrong thought or a wrong word can you do that well no of course you can't you know you can't even if we try hard we can't but Jesus came to set us free there's two things two wonderful blessings here that I want us to consider this morning so many more but here two of the things that Jesus sets us free to do and they come out in this passage the first is he sets us free to love verse 42 if God were your father you would love may you see the reality the reality is that when we are those who are the children of the devil when we sin and go our own way we are enemies of God Colossians 1 we're going to think about that tonight this reality that we are enemies of God we are against God and one of the things that we find hard to do is to love oh yeah we can love people that we like we can love people who are nice to us but we find it really impossible to love people that aren't nice to us we find it impossible to love God of course as well perhaps like these men here we were insulting of Jesus maybe even now we are insulting in the way we think of him or speak about him even if we don't speak it verbally we might have in our minds some attitude of contempt towards God a dislike for what Jesus says and stands for in fact these words of Jesus that say you are the children of the devil we hate that we hate him saying that we hate him saying that we are sinners we hate him speaking about hell we hate him telling us what we are really like and that we are in real danger we hate being faced with our own wickedness but the reality is of course that comes out we see that as we have already thought about in the wars and the conflicts and the terrorism why are these people so full of hate why is hate really a part of who we are but because we're bound we've not been set free when Jesus comes into our lives when we know God as our father we are those who know what it is to love because we receive love we receive wonderful love the love particularly for the one who first loved us and gave himself for us

Paul makes this wonderful statement he says the life I live I live by faith in the son of God who loved me and gave himself for me John in his letter speaks about the fact that we love because God first loved us when we know the love of God our father in our lives then we are set free to love others to love those who are unlovely as well to love those that we find hard to love to forgive them see love particularly for Jesus is the greatest and most significant birthmark of being a child of God love for Jesus it's not about keeping laws and rules it's about love we've been brought into a kingdom of love into a law of love into a life of love and Jesus doesn't say you've got to love me because it's your duty to love me if you're a Christian the Christian loves Jesus because they instinctively and automatically love him those of us who are fathers why do we love our children even when they drive us up the wall even when they drive us around the bend parents why do we love our children we love them because we love them it's not a Jew don't say well I'm going to love my children it's written on my you know when I went and got the birth certificate for my child it said you must sign this agreement that you will love this child no don't need that now of course we know there are very many imperfect all of us are imperfect parents but we don't love because we have to we love because we want to and the Christian loves Christ because he wants to and the Christian loves other believers because it's instinctive to do so yes it's not always easy to do so but it's real so we're set free to love we're set free from hate and set free to love when we come into the family of God and know him as our father we're also set free to listen verse 47 notice how this argument is going this discussion between Jesus and the people there he says why don't you listen verse 47 he who belongs to God hears what God says these people heard God's voice through Jesus but they couldn't accept it they wouldn't receive it as

God's voice they kept accusing him of being possessed by a demon they were deaf to the voice of God the reason they were deaf Jesus says was this because you belong to your father the devil Paul says in 2 Corinthians that the God of this age that's the devil has blinded the eyes of people but he's not only blinded the eyes of people he stopped the ears of people why is it that people can hear about Jesus and it's just like poker face no effect no change how can they hear about the love of God how can they hear about the wonderful reality of his salvation in Christ and yet be so unmoved because it's just they're just deaf we were deaf like that as well we were blind like that as well but when we become a Christian then there's a complete reversal a quick transformation he who belongs to God hears what God says instead of being deaf to God's voice we hear him for the first time we hear what he's saying to us through Jesus we hear and we accept and we receive we're able to understand the language that previously was foreign to us pilgrim's progress pilgrim's progress

[28 : 25] Christian and faithful go to Vanity Fair and they speak to the people but the people can't understand them because they're speaking a different language John Bunyan calls it they spoke the language of Canaan and the people said what's this strange word they're speaking it's this strange voice they're speaking they couldn't understand it and so it is perhaps for those of us who are not Christians we can't understand can't hear what are you talking about when you talk about God what are you talking about when you talk about Christ and about sin about heaven and hell but when we become a Christian the Bible becomes an open book to us we begin to be those who want to devour and to read what God has to say and to listen to what he has to say there's a meaningful communication that takes place between us and God a relationship that's because God has made us his children by an incredible work of his Holy Spirit we have been born again we have become new creations we have become those who are born of God here's how

John describes it he speaks about Jesus to all who received Jesus to those who believed in his name he gave the power or the right to become children of God children born not of natural descent nor of human decision or a husband's will but born of God's God gives us life just as he created us and gave us that life to begin with that brought us into physical life so he gives spiritual life to bring us into spiritual relationship with himself Paul says this to the Romans wonderful truth we did not receive the spirit that makes us a slave again to fear but you receive the spirit of sonship by him we cry Abba father that's why we pray not only do we listen and hear what God has to say but also in one sense our tongues are loosed to speak to him we have this liberty to pray and to speak to God again think of the reverse as fathers we naturally love our children but when a baby is born do you have to teach the baby to cry when it's hungry do you have to teach the baby to cry to its parents when it needs its nappy changing no you don't it just does it naturally when it's thirsty or when it's tired the child of God cries out to our heavenly father in prayer nobody has to teach you to pray we just pray that's what it is to be a child of God to have

God as our heavenly father we are set free to love we're set free to listen we're set free to cry and to speak with God we're set free into this amazing relationship with the living God that's just the tip of the iceberg that's just the beginning that's just the things that we can pick out here in John 8 but as we go through we find more and more countless blessings Paul says to the Ephesians chapter 1 you've been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms in Christ God's not a tight-fisted father he's not a one with moths in his wallet he's a generous giving liberal wonderful supplier this is God this is the God and father our Lord Jesus Christ this is the God who sent his son into the world this is the God that we can know as our heavenly father and be in a relationship with now and always and so it comes to the last thing the question is who is your father dear friends this morning who do you think you are is God your heavenly father are you still under the rule and the tyranny of the devil well if you want to be a child of God you can that's the wonderful thing you don't have to stay where you are these people of Jesus day didn't have to continue as they did they didn't have to take up those stones and reject him that's what we'll do if we turn away from what

Jesus says this morning if we turn away from his call to us to come into the family of God then we're as good as those men picking up stones and throwing them at Jesus because we're saying we will not have you you either love him or you hate him and if you don't love him then you hate him but here we can as we read before in John chapter 1 it's very simple to become a child of God it's very simple to enter into this wonderful relationship with a heavenly father here's what again it says those who received him that's Jesus those who believed in his name he gave the right to become children of God to receive Jesus means that we must turn away from our sin means we must turn away from following Satan and the devil it means that we must recognize that we have sinned and that Jesus is the saviour who came into the world for us we must receive him as our saviour but receive him as our lord of our lies as the one who rules over our hearts receive him as the one who took our sin upon the cross and thank him that he's done it all for us and taken the punishment that we deserve need to receive him and believe and ask him to make us new children of God to make us members of his family to bring us under his father's house and care will you do that have you done that why won't you do that there's nothing greater and more wonderful than knowing

God as our father well let's sing together our final hymn it's going to come up on the screen behind us I don't think we know it but we'll know the tune great father of glory how rich is your grace so let's stand and sing this together great mother Father of glory, how rich is thy grace.

[34 : 57] What wonderful love is displayed in thy face. In Jesus' thy image, with brightness renew.
And hope to be formed in that likeness of you. O wonder of wonders, astonish thy days.
Dicey in the angel, the ancient of days. From sin to release us, that young soul of God.
My God, my creator, all Mary was born. For unworthy sinners, my Lord, now is dead.

For unworthy sinners, he suffered and bled. My spirit rejoices, the work is all done.

[36 : 12] My soul is redeemed, my salvation is won. Great Father of glory, how rich is thy grace.

What wonderful love is displayed in thy grace. In Jesus' beloved, we're washing his blood.

And with confidence come to the throne of God. Great Father of glory, we thank you for your wonderful grace that has made us to be your children and brought us out of captivity and slavery to sin and to the devil and into the freedom and the joy of being your children.

O Lord, help us, we pray, to follow you, to love you, and be good children of our Heavenly Father. The children, O Lord, that reflect the image of him whom we love and who loved us first.

Grant us again, O Lord, to know your nearness, that we may no longer be afraid or fearful, that, Lord, we may know the Father's love and care which is ever with us. We ask again, O Lord, that in our lives we may be like our great elder brother, the Lord Jesus Christ, and that we might live lives of love.

[37 : 43] For we ask these things in his name and for his praise. Amen. Thank you.