

1 - Introduction

Jesus is brutally honest. He speaks directly to the captives - unbelievers and believers - about their captivity. He speaks about the nature that enslaves us. Jesus has promised that if you believe in him and his word, you will be set free (John 8:31, 36).

2 - Sinful Nature

Unless we are born again, his word has no place in our hearts. We are unreceptive by nature. The consequence is that we do not believe.

If you believe, you are given a new lineage in Christ. If you are not in Christ, you are cut off. What did Abraham do? For what is he remembered? He believed God! Apart from God's grace, you are an unbeliever.

"We were not born of sexual immorality" (John 8:41). This was an insult to Jesus. The ugliness of their sinful nature is exposed. Jesus calmly replies, "If God were your father, you would love me" (John 8:42). Jesus continues, "You cannot bear to hear my word" (John 8:43).

3 - Father the Devil

Jesus tells them something like, "The devil is your father. Your will is to do his desires. He is a liar. He was a liar from the beginning. There is no truth in him." See John 8:44.

Right now the devil exercises power in this world because he is allowed to. There is not a dual Kingdom of good and evil. That is not biblical. The devil exists, and he exercises spiritual power on the earth. The two signs are destruction and deception.

4 - Response

How do we see and understand this reality? Through the filter of John 8:36. The good news of Jesus! We listen to Jesus describe our past reality. That should lead us to worship! This ought to call us to never look down on an unbeliever. Never look down on an unbelievers. They are waiting to be rescued and set free.

Questions

- 1) What is the reason to run to Jesus? If you are still held captive by your sinful nature, you are spiritually dead. So what is the reason to run to Jesus?
- 2) What does Jesus do for those who believe in him? Make them kinder? More generous? More patient? No. He makes them new! See 2 Corinthians 5:17.
- 3) How does the unreceptive crowd choose to insult Jesus? What is the slight? See John 8:41. Why is this a slight? Also see John 8:48.
- 4) Jesus told them, "If God were your father, you would" Do what? What would they do if God were indeed their Father?
- 5) Explain why we do not believe in dual kingdoms of equal power? Why is this important? Jamie Brown said Jesus has defeated the devil, and he will _____ the devil. [Hint:

This word starts with a d.]

- 6) The devil is a captor, liar, and _____. See John 8:44. Do you believe it? Have you known it to be true? How?
- 7) How do we listen to this teaching? Through the lens of Jesus' promise.
- 8) If you are an unbeliever, what are the reasons to run to Jesus?
- 9) If you are a believer, what are the reasons to worship Jesus? See Colossians 1:13-14.

The Claw of Grace (John 8:37-47)

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Please open your Bibles with me to John chapter 8, as we continue listening and looking to Jesus as a church. Just a few days ago, if you were with us on Ash Wednesday, we heard what Jesus said in verses 31-36. It seemed appropriate to hear those words as we began the season of Lent, that:

...if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

And Jesus makes that promise to all who will believe in him. He is the only way, the only truth, the only life, the only way to be free.

Jesus has been talking to believers for the last few verses of John chapter 8. But now it appears, as we come to verse 37 and continue on today, that Jesus is talking to unbelievers. Those who are actually refusing to believe, so they're spiritually captive.

And he came to "proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound..." So sometimes that means telling the captives who don't know that they're captives that they're captives. Jesus is always honest. He **is** the truth. But, he's brutally honest today. Jesus speaks directly and authoritatively. Truth to the captives: *that* they're captives, and *why* they're captives.

And he does all of this because he came to set them free.

Both unbelievers and believers ought to listen urgently to Jesus today. Because Jesus talks honestly about the *what* and the *why* of spiritual captivity that results from a spiritual nature in captivity.

For the unbeliever, that nature still enslaves you. For the believer, that nature used to enslave you.

So there is cause today in the words of Jesus to run to Jesus. And there is cause to worship Jesus. If you need more reason to run to Jesus, and/or if you need more reason to worship Jesus, then listen to his teaching today.

Heads up: this is a hard teaching from Jesus today. But this is the heart of Jesus: for freedom. First, Jesus deals directly with the fallenness of our sinful nature.

Beginning in verse 37, Jesus says:

³⁷ I know that you are offspring of Abraham [*he does NOT say they're "children" of Abraham, but they're "offspring" of Abraham, and we'll get to why that matters in a minute*].... (You are offspring of Abraham); yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you.

By nature, before we're born again, his word finds no place in us. We're **unreceptive** to him. That's because our sinful nature, apart from the power of Jesus, is a dead nature. And a dead nature has no place for God's word to abide.

Jesus goes on in verse 38 to call out the fatal flaw of our fallen sinful nature, which is that we don't believe. Again – to the unbeliever – this is your current reality. To the believer – this is your past reality. Verse 38, Jesus says:

³⁸ I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father."

Jesus introduces a major theme here – about the lineage of our father. Jesus is from the Father. Jesus is **of** the Father. Therefore, by adoption, all who believe in Jesus are also **of** the Father, and are therefore the promised children of Abraham, heirs of all of God's promises that find their yes and amen in Jesus. Jesus gives us a new lineage.

BUT the unbeliever is **OF** a different father. And a different, deadly lineage. And it doesn't matter how good you've been, or how generous or successful or nice you are. If you're not in Christ, you may even be a descendant of Abraham but you're not a **child** of Abraham, so you're cut off from all of God's promises that find their yes and amen in Jesus. Verses 39 and 40:

³⁹ They answered him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children [*not "descendants" but "children"*], you would be doing the works Abraham did, ⁴⁰ but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did.

What did Abraham do? What's Jesus talking about? What are the works that Abraham did? Genesis 15:6, Romans 4:3, Galatians 3:6, and a couple of places in Hebrews 11 tell us:

Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.

The fatal flaw of our fallen sinful nature is that, apart from God's grace, we do not do what Abraham did. We're **unbelieving**. That's what Jesus means when he says in verse 41, talking to the unbeliever about their sinful nature:

⁴¹ You are doing the works your father did.”

Now, this is offensive. And the unbelievers here are offended to the point that they respond with an insult against Jesus. Which shows that they most certainly do not love him. Our unreceptive, unbelieving sinful nature is also an **unloving** nature.

We don't naturally love Jesus. We naturally come against him, like halfway through verse 41:

They said to him, “We were not born of sexual immorality...”

Notice that they're insulting Jesus. And Mary and Joseph. They're suggesting that Jesus was born of sexual immorality. This is the ugliness of our fallen sinful nature that arrogantly opposes Jesus to his face. Verse 42:

⁴² Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me.

Our unreceptive, unbelieving sinful nature is also an unloving nature towards God. But IF – and WHEN – God is our Father, when he adopts us as his own in Christ, then... (verse 42 says), then we love him.

You don't love God because you figured him out when you were in darkness. You love God because he called you out of the darkness.

Jesus then asks and answers a question of unbelievers in verse 43:

⁴³ Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word.

And that sums up his indictment on the fallenness of our sinful nature, that results in an **unwillingness** to listen to him. Why do you not understand what I *say*? Because you're unreceptive, unbelieving, unloving, and **unwilling** to listen. Quote, “you cannot bear to hear my word”. This is the WHAT of spiritual captivity. And it's tragic.

But WHY? *Why* are unbelievers spiritually captive to a fallen sinful nature? Because of the father of our sinful nature. I know this is a lot this morning, but we're committed to preaching through the Bible verse-by-verse, so we have to wrestle with teachings like this!

Verse 44:

⁴⁴You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

You may have heard the old quote that “the greatest trick the Devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn’t exist”. Jesus tells us clearly – the devil most certainly exists.

Now, let me say this clearly: The devil is and has been defeated by God, and the devil will one day, finally, be destroyed by God. But right now, the devil exists and exercises a certain spiritual power on earth, because he’s allowed to.

Jesus confirms and teaches that the devil exists – but he’s under God’s thumb. And the devil, the actual devil, is the father of our sinful nature.

Unbelievers ought to hear this teaching of Jesus with the urgency he intends it – because the unbeliever’s current terrifying spiritual reality is that their lineage can be traced to their father the devil. These are Jesus’ words. Verse 44, in black and white:

You – unbeliever – you are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires.

Now listen again to Jesus absolutely expose the devil. And Jesus exposes the devil because it’s one of the ways he demonstrates that he’s defeated the devil and will one day destroy the devil. Jesus exposes the devil because it’s how he neutralizes the power of the devil.

And Jesus exposes the devil because he came to tell captives THAT they’re captives and WHY they’re captives. And *why* they’re captives to their fallen sinful nature is because the devil is the father of that spiritual nature. And the two things to know about the devil – is that he’s a murderer and a liar. Jesus says in verse 44:

He was a murderer from the beginning [because he motivated Cain to kill Abel], and (he) does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies [because he questioned God’s goodness to Eve].

The devil exists. And although he’s defeated and will one day be destroyed, he exercises a spiritual power on earth – (and in unbelievers) – and he is hell-bent on murder and lies. Destruction and deception. Those are his desires. And Jesus is brutally honest with the unbeliever, saying (again at the beginning of verse 44):

You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires.

Jesus is crying out, as the light of the world, exposing the devil for who he is: a captor. And exposing unbelievers for what they are: captives.

Why does he do this? Because sometimes he has to tell the captives who don't know that they're captives that they're captives.

Unbelievers aren't bad people. They're captive people.

In verse 45 Jesus says to the unbeliever: "...you do not believe me". Because you're a captive. In verse 47 he says to the unbeliever: "The reason why you do not hear (the words of God) is that you are not of God." Because you're a captive.

So... how do we listen to this teaching from Jesus today? Through the filter of the gospel. Through the filter of the cross. Jesus is **freedom from our sinful nature**.

So listen to all of this through the filter of Jesus' proclamation in verse 36 that "...if the Son [if Jesus!] sets you free, you will be free indeed". That promise in verse 36 is for all who will believe in him.

Jesus isn't brutally honest with unbelievers in order to push them away, but in order to set them free!

Remember what I said at the beginning: If you need more reason to run to Jesus, and/or if you need more reason to worship Jesus, then listen to Jesus' teaching today.

If you're an unbeliever, listen to Jesus describe your present terrifying spiritual reality. Because he alone can set you free from this! And he's promised to set you free from this!

Any unbelievers listening today: run to Jesus! Be born again into a different lineage! You are right now a child of your father the devil. In the next five seconds – and then for forever – you can be a child of God.

And if you're a believer, listen to Jesus today describe your past reality. Hear the depths of the grave from which God has rescued you in Christ, all by grace, not by your own efforts.

This ought to call you to worship Jesus all the more passionately, all the more freely, all the more gratefully. He has not saved you from being a bad person. He has saved you from being a dead person, an unreceptive, unbelieving, unloving, unwilling person, a captive to the devil!

O praise the one who paid my debt and raised this life up from the dead!

And, believer, this ought to call you to never look down on an unbeliever. It's hard to look down on an unbeliever when you're looking up at the cross.

Just last night it was about time for dinner. The kids had just gotten home, and we were going to make something, but instead I said, "you know what... let's go to Denny's!" I've never taken my kids to Denny's... We have four kids they've never been to Denny's. (That's my failure as a father!)

So we got out of our minivan, and were walking up, when I said: "Guys... when I used to come here in college, inside the door there was a 'claw machine'. I wonder if it's still there". Sure enough, it was still there.

So there are all of these poor little stuffed animals sitting in there. They're captives! And what are those poor little captives waiting on? They're waiting on the claw of grace to pull them out. To set them free. To give them a new home, a new lineage!

Now, would any of those little stuffed animals ever look back on their former colleagues with derision and scorn? No! They would look back on them with longing for them also to be free.

We praise God, fellow former captives, for the claw of God's grace that set us free. Not by our own efforts! We were just sitting there in Denny's! God set us free.

Let me close with a final word of assurance, for the believer – even a baby believer.

You can listen to Jesus today, and be assured that if Jesus has set you free, then you are free indeed. In Colossians 1:13-14, Paul prays for believers to have that kind of assurance. That we would know that:

¹³ (God) has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

And once a believer is transferred from the domain of darkness and transferred to the Kingdom of Jesus, that believer can't be re-transferred back to darkness. God is not a government bureaucracy. God is not the DMV. You're not always getting passed around with God. Once he has transferred you out of darkness into his marvelous light, **you are free indeed.**