

Exegetical Notes, John 8:30-47

“Abraham’s Children”

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Verses 30-36

Even as he spoke, many believed in him.³¹ To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.³² Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”³³ They answered him, “We are Abraham’s descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?”³⁴ Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.³⁵ Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever.³⁶ So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

- The debate between Jesus and the religious leaders of Israel had continued for many days. Even though the intention of the religious leaders was to show Jesus to be the fraud they knew him to be, their every attempt to do so had failed. Many believed in Jesus because of his answers to the religious leaders’ questions.
- Jesus spoke to those who had “believed in him” telling them that if they held onto his teachings they would become his true disciples. He told them that he would teach them the truth and that the truth would set them free.
- The use of the word “free” was offensive to them. They considered themselves free from bondage to any man because they were descendants of Abraham, good religious Jews. They were offended because Jesus said his teaching would free them from bondage.
- Jesus explained that every person who sinned was in bondage to sin unless the Son, the Messiah, set him free. He said that if the Son frees you, then you are free indeed.
- Jesus knew that the use of the word, “free,” would offend their religious sensibilities. He knew that their profession of faith in him was not deep enough to survive. He used the word to challenge and expose their true lack of faith.

Verses 37-38

³⁷ I know that you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are looking for a way to kill me, because you have no room for my word. ³⁸ I am telling you what I have seen in the Father's presence, and you are doing what you have heard from your father."

- Jesus went on to tell them that he knew they were good religious people, Abraham's descendants. But he pointed out their sin. They were seeking to kill him. According to the moral law given by Moses this was sin. Therefore, according to Jesus' argument, they were slaves to sin.
- Jesus pointed out that he was telling them truth, what he had "seen in God's presence." He pointed out that they were following in the sinful way of their own Fathers.

Verses 39-41a

"Abraham is our father," they answered.

"If you were Abraham's children," said Jesus, "then you would do what Abraham did. ⁴⁰ As it is, you are looking for a way to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. ⁴¹ You are doing the works of your own father."

- They insisted that they were good Jews, true descendants of Abraham.
- Jesus told them that if they were true descendants of Abraham they would not be trying to kill him, for all he had done was tell them the truth.
- He implied that, since they were behaving in a godless way, they were following the example of their true Father, Satan. (See verse 43)

Verses 41b-47

"We are not illegitimate children," they protested. "The only Father we have is God himself." ⁴² Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I have come here from God. I have not come on my own; God sent me. ⁴³ Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. ⁴⁴ You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. 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. ⁴⁵ Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! ⁴⁶ Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me? ⁴⁷ Whoever belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God."

- They insisted that they were the legitimate children of God, Jews.

- Jesus told them that if that were so, they would listen to him, because he had come from God.
- He said that they could not understand what he was saying to them because their true father was Satan and he had stopped up their ears and closed their eyes to the truth. He told them that they could only do the will of their Father.
- Jesus said that those who knew God would know and understand him.

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