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Series: The Gospel of John
Message: Who's Your Father?

Transcribed Message
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John 8:37-47

I would imagine that most of you, if not all of you, have heard of something called Ancestry.com or maybe something like it. You send them some of your DNA and they tell you everything you've ever wanted to know about your family. They tell you where you came from and they tell you who is in your family line. They tell you if there's anybody famous or anybody infamous. They might, in fact, tell you more than you want to know about who's in your family. I remember seeing an extended family member do that with the name Tschetter and there was a family in, I don't know, Czechoslovakia, Slovakia, somewhere in that part of Europe. And they were experiencing persecution from the Catholic Church and this one guy named Tschetter gave up the Protestant faith and became a Catholic to avoid the persecution. So, you never know what's going to be in your family background when you go to Ancestry.com.

I would say that when we come to John 8 and this exchange that takes place between Jesus and these religious leaders and the people of his day, there's probably a good number of them that wish they had never brought up their DNA because Jesus speaks to that very specifically in John chapter 8, verses 37 to 47. So, let's look together at that. And here's what we want to see. Sincerity doesn't save anyone. You can be very sincere, and you can be very wrong in that sincerity. Believing in Jesus is the only way of salvation. All through this 8th chapter, Jesus has, in fact, been answering the question, what makes you a Christian? And so, when you look at the interchange that we've seen to this point, that behind all the other things that are going on, that's kind of the question that gets pushed to the forefront. And I suppose you could argue on some level, that's kind of the whole point of John's gospel, isn't it?

If you just ask people today, what does it take to be a Christian? Well, I think you'd get all kinds of answers like this. Probably at the top of the list, there'd be people who say, well, I'm a good person. I do the best I can. I'm a good neighbor. I don't kick

the dog. I do all the things that I need to do. I'm a good person. That would be probably one of the top answers. I'm a member of a church. I've been baptized. A lot of people would probably point to the fact that they're a member of a church. Others would certainly speak of the fact that they were born into a Christian family. Their mom, their dad, their grandpa, their grandma, their uncles and aunts, all are Christians. Somebody would surely say, well, I went forward. I said a prayer. I made a decision. All those things would often be offered. But ultimately, the question that prevails before us is, do you know, do you understand, and do you believe the Gospel?

So, we continue in what is the second longest chapter in the Gospel of John. Chapter eight is the second longest. I would suggest it's the most intense of all the chapters in John's Gospel, just because of the nature of the exchange that's going on between Jesus and these religious leaders and others that have joined them. I think you could also argue that it has some of the hardest sayings that you have in the Gospel of John.

Let's look at family matters this morning. As I just looked at this group of verses and was just trying to outline what it looked like, this is the flow of the chapter. It starts off with Jesus speaking in verses 37, 38, and then the religious leaders are going to respond in verse 39. Jesus is going to answer them back. And then in verse 40 is Jesus. Jesus is in 41 with the religious leaders, and then it closes out with Jesus speaking to them about the things that he wants them to hear. So, let's look at these family matters, and it's really a matter of one's heritage as we see in verses 37 to 43. Let's look first at what they claimed. What did they claim for themselves? And you see it back in verse 33 when you just go back a verse or two, they had said something very similar as to what Jesus says.

Verse 33, they answered him, we are offspring of Abraham. And of course, their response about being slaves or not. But it's back in verse 37 when Jesus says, I know you are offspring of Abraham. They said it in verse 33. Jesus simply repeats it here in verse 37. Inherent in that idea, in that expression, we are the offspring of Abraham. Why would they say that? Because they're basically claiming privilege, aren't they? They're claiming privilege. They're claiming something about being in Abraham's line that makes

them special. They're the chosen ones. They're the people of God. They're in a right relationship with God just simply because of biology. That's what they're laying claim to.

What Jesus is going to say is essentially, this is what self-righteousness looks like. It's still true today. This is what self-righteousness looks like, doesn't it? Nobody needs to go to a doctor when they're well. Well, I guess preventive, I don't want to make a broad medical statement there, but generally we don't go to the doctor when we're well. We go to the doctor when we sense we have a need. Well, if you have no need spiritually, you're certainly not seeking a savior. And that's what these people were claiming. They're in the line of Abraham. They're the privileged ones. They're the chosen ones. They're the elect of God. And it has all come to them by biology.

You and I both know that in conversations with people who see themselves as being religious or maybe even semi-religious, they're some of the most difficult people to talk to about the gospel, aren't they? You have family members that fall into that category maybe. And you know the challenge of bringing up spiritual conversations because after all, they think they're fine. And they think they're fine because they have some cloak of spirituality, some religious activity in their life. If you never see yourself as being in need, you're certainly not seeking someone to help you with that. So that's basically what Jesus points to here.

But true spirituality, he is going to say, is not about externals. It's always about the internal, isn't it? He points to how they lived. Look at verses 37 to 39. I know that you are the offspring of Abraham, yet you seek to kill me because my words find no place in you. I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father. They answered him, Abraham is our father. Jesus said to them, if you were Abraham's children, you would be doing the works Abraham did. In effect, Jesus starts off this dialogue by saying, you people are a walking contradiction. You're laying claim to one thing, but you're living your life in a totally different way. And Jesus begins by saying, okay, if we're going to talk just physical, if we're just talking on the physical level, yes, I understand what you're saying. He concedes that in the physical, yes, they are in the line of Abraham. I see your birth certificate. I see that in your ancestry.com family tree. It traces it back to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Joseph.

And so, from that standpoint, I see your great grandpa was a rabbi. You're Jewish in your ethnicity. You're a part of that group that God called out to bring the light to the world. So, biology, yes, you have it. But in terms of sonship, no, because sonship comes by believing. And then he points to the spiritual sense. And in the spiritual sense, he's going to say, no, there is no connection.

Now in verse 38, when Jesus said, I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father. It's like Jesus drops this little nugget right in the middle of this dialogue. He just drops this little comment and it's really not a little nugget. It's a bombshell. But he just drops it in there without further comment. I would imagine if you were back there, a lot of these people would not even have connected with what he said, but he's going to develop that thought very specifically later in these verses. But notice in the spiritual sense, no, there's no connection. You're not a part of this family that you lay claim to.

The contrast that he points to then is what did Abraham do and what are you doing? And so just think with me. What did Abraham do? What did Abraham do that would in some way establish a true connection between himself and God? Well, you could start off in Genesis 15:6. Abraham believed God, right? And it was counted to him as righteousness. Abraham's claim was not in his own lineage and in his own spirituality, but it was in fact, he was declared righteous before God by believing.

When God says to Abraham in Genesis 12, Abraham, I want you to leave your family. I want you to leave everything behind. I want you to go to a land that you've never seen before. Abraham obeys. Abraham does what God calls him to do. And then when you think through Abraham's life, his encounter with Melchizedek and just the blessing that took place there. Or the willingness of Abraham in Genesis 22 to take Isaac and literally offer his son in obedience to what God called him to do.

But I can't help but wonder when Jesus says, yeah, let's look at Abraham. You speak about your father, and about your family connection. You speak about your lineage. Did you speak about ancestry.com and, and yeah, physically we can tie you to Abraham, but spiritually we can't because Abraham walked with God. Isaiah 41:8. Abraham was called the friend of God. I can't help but wonder when Jesus is in this conversation, if in his mind in pointing them to Abraham and saying, you don't have

anything in the way that you're conducting yourself that even reflects on Abraham, that he didn't have Genesis 18 in mind.

Remember in Genesis 18. It's a beautiful day. Abraham's hanging out and suddenly there are three guests that present themselves to him. This is right before the whole interchange regarding Sodom and Gomorrah. Do you remember what happened in that? There was a Christophany. There was an appearance of Christ. We call it a Christophany in that it is a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ. In Genesis 18, most certainly one of those three that presented themselves, the other two probably being angels, one of them was Jesus himself. And he comes and presents himself to Abraham. And how does Abraham respond in that initial encounter that he has with Jesus? He welcomes him. He's hospitable. He's engaging. All of the things that the Pharisees are not is what Abraham was. That's the point that Jesus is making.

Later in this chapter in verse 56, what is he going to say? Abraham looked forward to seeing my day. Now that's an amazing statement that Jesus makes – that Abraham looked forward to the day when the Messiah would come through his family line, just as God had promised. So, it's an incredible expression of faith on the part of Abraham.

Jesus continues. Not only are you guys a walking contradiction, notice he says their heart is full of hate. Their hearts are full of hate. I know you are the offspring of Abraham, yet you seek to kill me because my words find no place in you. Verse 40. The first part of verse 40, but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Verse 41, you are doing the works of your father. They said to him, we are not born of sexual immorality. We have one father, even God. So, their heart is so full of hate that Jesus can literally point to them and say, you want to kill me. He's not speaking hyperbole here. This is not figurative, right? He's not just stretching something here in that realm. No, they physically wanted to kill him.

We talked about John chapter five, verse 18. After Jesus heals the lame man, the religious leaders literally get together, and they want to kill him. They began to plot to kill Jesus. They literally want to take his life. Now, when Jesus calls them out and he literally says to them, your heart is so full of hate towards me that you want to kill me.

Does that seem harsh? Does that seem that that's really what's in the heart of man? Is it true that in the heart of one man towards another, there can be a level of such hatred that they literally want to kill another person? Well, of course we know that to be true, but just listen to what scripture says. When Paul speaks in Romans chapter 8 verse 6, for to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God for it does not submit to God's law. Indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

We also see something similar in first John chapter three and verse 10. By this it is evident who are the children of God and who are the children of the devil. Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother. So, they, first of all, want to kill Jesus.

And now secondly, you notice they attack his character in verse 41. You are doing the works of your father. They said to him, we were not born of sexual immorality. We have one father, even God. Now this is almost certainly a pejorative attack against his character, right? They're all most likely saying, yeah, we've heard the rumors. We know the stories that are going around about Joseph and Mary, and we know there's a lot of questions about paternity and whose child you really are. They're making a clear attack against the character of Christ. And it's almost as if they're saying to him, you want to bring up paternity? You want to bring up the matters of who's our father. Whose line are we in? Well, why don't you look at yourself? How do you know? Because of all the things that were being said, who is your father?

Jesus continues on. The third thing that he says, they have no room for the truth. They're a walking contradiction. They have hate in their heart. They have no room for the truth. Verse 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. Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. So, they have no room for the truth.

There's a lot in these verses that Jesus says towards these listeners. There's a lot that he says about himself. There's a lot that he says here about his relationship with his Father. And the first thing we notice, he says, I am sent from the Father. I'm sent by the Father. This is the relationship in eternity past between the Father and the Son. I

mean, you talk about stepping back into eternity past and just into the mystery of the Trinity. There is the aspect of that here when Jesus says that he's been sent by the Father. It speaks of the progression of the Son from the Father. The Father is always the sender. It never says that Jesus or the Son sent the Father. No, it's always the Father who sends the Son. It's the Father who has sent Jesus as he says, I came from God and I am here.

Literally, that expression says, I am out of God. I came out and I have come. And Jesus is basically saying, while his birth in their mind may be somewhat irregular, yeah, he was born by means of virgin conception. But the reality is he is God and he has been sent by God. Very same thing that John will say in 1 John chapter 3, right? The Father sent the Son to be the savior of the world. So, we have this beautiful truth about the relationship between the Father and the Son.

But Jesus is also laying something else out here. He is also taking us back, I think, to what John does at the beginning of the gospel in the first chapter. And he's again saying, yeah, I'm the preexistent one. I am the self-existent one. I'm the co-existent one. That's what he's laying claim to here. Very God of very God, very man of very man, standing before them. This is the incarnation, right? God himself standing before them, presenting himself as being the sent one from the Father. John 1:14, and the word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory as the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. We beheld that glory only if our eyes were open to see it.

Verse 37 will lead into my next comment. When he said back there that my words have no place in you, right? You don't have any room for truth. David Wells wrote a book many years ago, *No Place for Truth*. And you know what the subtitle was? The subtitle was *What Happened to Theology in the Evangelical Church*. He was basically saying we don't have the desire for, we don't have the heart for the deep things of God, the truths of God, the way that we're called to. Jesus is saying to them, you don't want truth. You have no place for truth. Your heart isn't open to truth. I'm standing before you as the incarnate one. Amazing, amazing.

And then, then Jesus does drop the hammer. He tells us why. Why have they no place for truth? Why do they have no interest in truth? Look at verse 44. You are of your

father, the devil. When he said back in verse 38, you do what you have heard from your father. I would imagine now they re-hear those words and it begins to connect, right? You 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. Now, it's just a matter of who you belong to, isn't it?

That's what he's saying here. It's a matter of who you belong to. This does not fall into the category of seeker-sensitive material. This is not what you learn at today's modern church conference setting in which we're told: Say nice things. Don't be too hard on people. Don't talk so much about sin. Don't ever bring up hell. Don't talk about condemnation, all those things. Be seeker-sensitive. Be seeker-friendly, all of that.

Jesus starts off verse 44, you, it's emphatic. He's like looking at them and saying, you, yeah, I'm talking to you. I'm talking to all of you right here in front of me. You. You are of your father, the devil. There are two families. See, here we are again. How many times have we seen this? Jesus comes back and he himself reinforces this truth that in the world of humanity, there are two families, and there are only two families. Jesus is going to divide the human race into those who have God as their Father and those who do not. He uses this expression about God being his Father over a hundred times in the Gospel of John. Thirty-four times he talks about God as my Father. So, you get in the Gospel of John as strong a presentation of God and his relationship, of Jesus and his relationship to the Father as you find anywhere in any of the Gospels. It's like another one of John's central underlying themes.

This is the one who was with God. This is the one who is sent from God. This is the one who says and does only what the Father tells him to do. That's another thing that Jesus had repeatedly said, right? But now, on the other hand, that's one family, all right? So, we have the family of God. There used to be a song, right? I'm so glad I'm a part of the family of God. Well, I don't know that there's a counter song because that wouldn't be too popular, would it? But here it is. You could have the devil as your father. You could have the devil as your father.

When I was a teenager, yes, there was a time when I was a teenager. There was a guy, a comedian and a speaker that would go around to public high school campuses

and he would do assemblies in public high schools. His name was Don Loney. And I remember listening to Don Loney on one occasion talking about the devil as your father. He told this story about little Johnny at school and little Johnny was having a tough day. Little Johnny was kind of out of control. This was back when the teacher-student interaction was a little bit more what we call hands-on. The teacher grabbed ahold of little Johnny by the shoulders, gave him a couple of good shakes and said, Johnny, I think the devil's got a hold of you. And little Johnny looked up and said, I think so too. So that's here, that's here. I don't recommend that on either level. But Jesus has already said you don't have God as your Father. You have no place for the truth.

But it gets worse because he could say you're just spiritual orphans. We don't know who your father is, but he doesn't. He says, in fact, your father is the devil. Your father is Satan. Now, don't miss who he's saying this to. He's saying this to the most religious people of his day. And he's saying to them, you hate me, you want to kill me, you have no place for truth, and in fact, I just need to tell you the truth, that you are of your father, the devil. This underscores the reality that there is no universal brotherhood of man, or there is no universal fatherhood of God, and there is no universal brotherhood of man. That's standard liberal theology, that all of humanity has one father, and of course it's God. And we're all going to the same place, and we all choose different paths, but we're all going there. And so, there's the universal fatherhood of God and the universal brotherhood of man.

Well, in one limited sense, that is true, right? Because there is, within the matter of creation, yes, we can all look at Ancestry.com and go back to Adam and Eve. So, in that sense, yes, there is a universal brotherhood of humanity, but not as it relates to salvation, not as it relates to spiritual things. That is not the case.

So just stop with me here for a moment, and let's just point out, in Jesus making this statement, there are four things that he, I think, would want us to understand about Satan and about the devil, and about this truth. And I think the first one is simply that Satan exists. Satan exists. I would imagine if you went and did a man and woman on the street interview, you'd get a very mixed reaction as to whether they believe if there is actually someone called Satan, the devil. But Jesus is teaching us about Satan. He's saying he's real. He exists. He's a person. He has intellect, emotion, and will. He's not

just a force or an it, or a thing. Satan is a real person. In fact, Scripture tells us that he was the highest of all of God's created beings. He was an archangel, until he decided one day that he, too, wanted to be God. And so, Satan exists. Satan is a person. Satan is the opposer of God in all things good. That's what Jesus is laying bare here.

Satan is not equal with God, is the fourth thing, right? He is a created being. We don't ever want to think in terms of duality – that it's God and Satan in this great cosmic battle, and they are equal forces against each other, and we hope that the good guys win. But, again, that's not what the Bible teaches at all. God is sovereign over all the details of life. He is sovereign over all his created beings. Satan is one of his created beings, ask Job. Job knows that God ultimately is sovereign, even over the hardest things of life. And so, here we understand Jesus believed in the reality of Satan as a person who was the opposer of God in all things good.

Here's what J.C. Ryle said about this. His great aim, (that is Satan), his great aim and object is to ruin us forever, to kill our souls, to destroy, to rob us of eternal life, to bring us down to the second death in hell. These are the things which he is unceasingly working toward. He is ever going about seeking who he may devour. Never underestimate the power of Satan to bring heartache and destruction into your life. That's his life goal.

And so, Jesus puts them on notice, and I think all of us to be alert as well. And he says of the devil, he has two desires. Your father is the devil, and he has two desires. He specializes in two things. The first one is he specializes in murder. He specializes in murder. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning. He had just told them, you have so much hatred in your heart, you want to kill me.

John recorded in John 5, 18. They got together after that event, and they said let's try to find a way to kill him. Jesus is just going right to the heart of the matter, and he says Satan in his ultimate desire is a destroyer. He wants to kill he says here. It's from the beginning. And someone says oh, yeah, well Cain killed Abel. That's not the beginning. Where's the beginning? The beginning is the beginning. You go back to the garden. God creates Adam and Eve, puts them in the garden and says what? Eat of every tree of the garden except one. You've got the full run of everything in this garden.

There's one tree I don't want you to eat of –the tree of knowledge of good and evil. If you eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, you will die. Satan comes in the form of a serpent because he is a murderer from the beginning and says I have an opportunity to introduce death into humanity. He comes and he says has God really said this? Do you really think God is trustworthy on this? I think he's holding out on you. I think he knows that if you eat of this tree of knowledge, you'll be like God. Of course, we know how that story unfolded, and that's what Jesus is pointing back to. He says yeah, he was a murderer from the beginning because with disobedience, with this sin came death, spiritual death. Separation from God in time and then of course physical death.

Just think in this last Sunday of the month of November. This is the month of remembering and praying for the persecuted church Just think of the destruction and death that Satan wreaks upon this world and upon the church of Jesus Christ every day in various parts of our world. He's still a destroyer. He's still a murderer. He's still a killer. He is relentless. He is a liar.

He loves to mix truth with error, doesn't he? He doesn't come and just lay a bald-faced lie in front of us. No, he mixes it in with truth and that's what he does. He mixes it together with just enough truth to confuse and to deceive. Don't do the devil's work. Be truthful. When we're not truthful, we're literally entering in to what Jesus says is the very work that Satan himself does. Bonnie and I used to tell our kids The most precious commodity we have in this family is truth. Tell us the truth. If we can't trust each other because we're not being truthful, then the relationship can't be sustained in a healthy way. So, Jesus lays this before them.

And then he goes next to simply say in verses 45 through 47, this truly is a matter of truth. It's a matter of truth, isn't it? Verse 45. Truth rejected. But because I tell the truth you do not believe me. He said back in verse 37 there's no place for truth here. Here is the revealer of your ancestry, right? Children of God love truth. They want to walk in truth. They want to walk in the light. They want to walk and to abide in the Word. The devil doesn't accept the truth. He rejects it. He doesn't want anything to do with it.

He doesn't want us to believe it. He doesn't want us to understand it. Somber and sober words from our Lord.

Look at verse 46, truth revealed. Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? The idea of convicting of sin is more the idea of proving it. Which one of you proves me of sin? They are making all kinds of accusations against him, aren't they? They're accusing him of breaking the sabbath there. They have accused him of blasphemy. They aren't believing anything. He's saying because they have rejected him. He's not saying you aren't accusing me \but you have no way of validating your accusations. You can't prove them. They all fail in the light of the truth.

And then verse 47, truth received. Whoever is of God. Here are the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God. We're right back where we started in verse 37. My words find no place in you. My truth is not received by you. Holy Spirit of God, open our hearts to the truth, right? That's what we need. That's what we desperately need. So, the question that we started with is the question we end with – who's your father? That's where Jesus is ultimately taking this.

What do we take away? There are only two families. There are only two families in the world. Everyone is a member of one or the other. We said this a few weeks ago. There are only two kinds of people in this auditorium. There are only two kinds of people watching and listening. You're either in the family of God, or you're in the other family, the family of Satan. Everyone is a member of one or the other.

The greatest gift that you and I can ever receive is to understand the truth, is to receive the gospel and become a part of God's family. And then guard your love for Christ. Guard your love for Christ. If you've never put your faith and trust in Jesus as your savior, if you can't look to a point in your life where you understood what the Bible says about every one of us – that we're all born into this world as sinners. We're all born into this world separated from God. The Bible makes abundantly clear all the things we listed out at the beginning – being a good person, going to church, being baptized, taking communion, being in a Christian family. Oh, those are all commendable things, but they do not equate to the forgiveness of sin before a holy God.

What God requires is that we be perfect. We have to be perfect to go to heaven. The only people in heaven are perfect. You and I will never achieve perfection. It can't

be done And so we need somebody who was perfect to take our place. That's the story of the Bible. A perfect man, Jesus, came. He lived a perfect life, and he died that terrible death on the cross for you and for me. If we will believe that and leave everything else aside, believe and trust in what Jesus did, God says I will give you the forgiveness of sin and I'll give you eternal life. Would you believe that this morning? Ask simply that God would give to you the forgiveness of sin and the gift of eternal life through his Son. Jesus.

Let's pray. Gracious Father, it truly is the greatest gift that we can ever receive to be in your family and to be in that family by faith and by faith alone. Lord, it is all of grace. It is not what we do. It is not by works of righteousness. But it is simply and totally and completely a gift that you give to us. We do thank you again for that. We pray that your Holy Spirit would open hearts and minds to the truth that Jesus has spoken so clearly to us this morning. Cause someone to trust and believe and turn to you in faith and receive this life-changing gospel. We pray in Jesus's name, amen.