

A son by imitation.

My talk today comes from John's Gospel account, in chapter 8.

This takes place in Ancient Judea under the rulership of the Roman empire. We meet Jesus teaching in town at the tail end of the seven-day festival of booths. This event is when the Jewish people remember how Yahweh guided their people in the wilderness after their exit from Egypt. We enter as Jesus says that some of the listeners have been trying to get him killed. Not cool at all. It also doesn't help if they want to get in good with God. The people tell him that Abraham, the Jewish patriarch, is their Father. Jesus reminds them that they wouldn't be trying to have him killed if they were Abraham's children. The only crime he has committed is telling the Truth. Abraham wouldn't be pleased about his children's behaviour. So they changed their mind. They decide that they're children of God. Jesus replies that if God were their Father, they would love him, but instead, they follow a different father—the Father of lies (a.k.a. the Devil).

There is a lot there...we have jumped into the middle of a heated debate. All this talk of conspiracy to commit murder, genealogy and ancestry, lies and deceit and the Devil being someone's daddy. Lots of drama here on Father's Day. But for our time here today, we will explore my only point, true sons of the faith imitate the Father of faith.

Have you ever had a legitimate rivalry? Conflict might be too pretty of a word; I mean, you don't like them, you don't like what they stand for. On everything you love, you don't mess with them at all. It could be someone that talked bad about you, and I mean absolute slander. And you got tired of being that punching bag, and you hit back by telling them the truth about themselves. If I may quote Kenya Moore Daly, "Don't come for me unless I send for you" Some of you have been perfect from birth, so you would not know what I am talking about but for those that do... I know you feel me on a near-spiritual level.

I remember back playing football with my High School. We beat up many teams, many of them did not like us, but it didn't matter, as far as we were concerned, they were just upset they could not hang with the big boys. But there was this one school in our conference... man, The Donald A Wilson Gators... every game we played against them was a must-see one because they were good, but two we detested them, and they loathed us in return. Once you became a student of our school, you became indoctrinated in the religion Antigatorism, for the uninitiated, is a faith system that believed

anything associated with the Wilson Gators was the worst of evils and should be seen as an abomination. The teachers were just as passionate. Before games, we would frequently hear encouragement to take bottled-up frustrations with school work and unleash it on our enemy. Even their school colours were seen as ceremonially unclean. If any student or teacher was seen donning the orange and blue, especially on game day, they were met with ridicule and threats. You might think that it is a bit overboard, but it was the way of life to us. It's us vs them, the familia vs the ops, there are only two sides, and if you aren't with us, you are against us.

There is a similar, perhaps more severe rivalry going on in John between Jesus and a select few of the crowd we mentioned at the beginning called the Pharisees. The Pharisees were an influential religious sect within Judaism in the time of Christ and the early church. They were known for their emphasis on personal piety, their acceptance of oral tradition in addition to the written Law, and their teaching that all Jews should observe all 600-plus laws in the Torah, including the rituals concerning ceremonial purification. The Pharisees were mostly middle-class businessmen and leaders of the synagogues. Though they were a minority among their peers, they seemed to control the decision-making of the Sanhedrin courts because they had popular support among the people. This is a group with a very specific way of thinking and how to do things.

Now, these Pharisees have seen this virtual nobody from a small and insignificant town called Nazareth in the region of Galilee, become this lightning rod of personality that has a following. They heard words about Jesus like "he does not teach like our spiritual leaders, He speaks like he has authority!" His disciples don't keep to the rules and laws they have shaped and followed for generations. He healed a paraplegic man and told him to pick up his mat and walk on the sabbath. You don't carry anything on the sabbath. That is against the law. To them, Jesus is problematic for their authority, status, perceived relationship with Rome, everything. He speaks in riddles and calls them names in front of their people—someone totally different in their approach, and what they see as important. We have two sides, two ideologies, two families.

With this in mind, the back-and-forth argument between the Pharisees and Jesus kicks off. When you spend some time in your word this week you can read it, but I want to spend time on when the debate took a sharp turn when Jesus says in verse 37

37 I know you are descendants of Abraham, but you are trying to kill Me because My word is not welcome among you.

38 I speak what I have seen in the presence of the Father; therefore, you do what you have heard from your Father:"

39 Our Father is Abraham!" they replied. "If you were Abraham's children," Jesus told them, "you would do what Abraham did.

The Popular belief in some Jewish circles is being a descendent of Abraham virtually guaranteed salvation except for the most wicked of people. In three of the major world religions, Abraham is a significant person. In the Torah, he is the Father of righteousness. Genesis 15:6. In the Koran he is the upright one, Surah 2:35. And in the New Testament, he is the example of how we as Christians are justified by faith alone. Romans 4:3-5. The Pharisees say Abraham is their literal ancestor. Jesus acknowledges this, but the wordplay in the original language is what is most revealing. In verse 37, the koine greek word for descendants is sperma, and in verse 39 the word for children is teknon. Both talk about being the progeny of someone. These words are related but point to different things. Sperma already sounds like what we know as sperm a gamete for reproduction, showing blood relation. You are the "Sperma" of your Father, and your Father is the "Sperma" of your grandfather; what also is true is you are the "Sperma" of your great great great great grandfather. Whether you know them or not, You are tied together by blood. Teknon, on the other hand is different, this is not just a relation by blood, but one of imitation. Here is an example: James Brown is known as the Godfather of Soul. His style innovated his genre, and he inspired many people from his staccato rhythms to his dance moves. One young musician was so inspired by James' approach that he copied much of what he did, implemented it, and it launched him to fame. This musician I am talking about is the late great Michael Jackson. At James Brown's funeral Michael said this

"I've never seen a performer perform like James Brown and right then and there I knew that that was what I wanted to do for the rest of my life."

We all know that Mike was not the biological child of James Brown, but he was indeed his "Teknon" because he imitated him. Jesus pointed this out when the Pharisees claimed Abraham is their Father. The DNA might be a match, but the imitation was not there. Abraham's children should be able to produce Abraham's works. He acted on revelation from God. Romans 4:3-5 says Abraham believed in God, and it was credited to him as righteousness. Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation. However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness. But these Jews felt that as natural descendants of Abraham, they were blessed by God. They felt that salvation was not about their actions but their heritage. But Jesus continues to dismantle this in the coming verses.

40 But now you are trying to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do this!

41 You're doing what your Father does." "We weren't born of sexual immorality," they said. "We have one Father--God."

42 Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, because I came from God and I am here. For I didn't come on My own, but He sent Me.

43 Why don't you understand what I say? Because you cannot listen to My word.

44 You are of your father the devil, and you want to carry out 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 tells a lie, he speaks from his own nature, because he is a liar and the Father of lies.

Jesus makes claims in this exchange that are noteworthy. First, Jesus said that he told the truth that he heard from God. At the beginning of this gospel account, John pens these words.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. All things were created through Him, and apart from Him not one thing was created that has been created. Life was in Him, and that life was the light of men. The Word became flesh and took up residence among us. We observed His glory, the glory as the One and Only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:1-4, 14

See Jesus is the embodiment of Truth. Not just because of what he said but who he is. And when Abraham was confronted with the Truth, he believed it. But these Pharisees, These men of honour could not accept this Truth. Although they knew the Torah by memory and taught about the God they claim as their Father, adhered to the dietary laws and kept the sabbath. They somehow missed the Truth.

Nothing makes a man so virtuous as belief of the Truth. A lying doctrine will soon beget a lying practice. A man cannot have an erroneous belief without by-and-by having an erroneous life. I believe the one thing naturally begets the other. C.H. Spurgeon

Somewhere between the revelation Abraham received and believed, to the spiritual leaders confronting Jesus, the doctrine of the Truth was lost. From trust to murder, how does this happen? That brings us to the next claim Jesus stated, that their true Father is the Devil. To Jesus, the evidence is in. "You want to murder me. In the beginning, the Devil tempted Eve to kickstart humanity's demise of spiritual death. What's the difference between you and the Devil? He was in the presence of God yet he rejected the Truth and held to the lie that he could be like the most high. And you are in the presence of the Truth, the fullness of the Godhead bodily, yet you grasp for the lie? What's the difference between you and the Devil? You imitate his nature, not Abraham or God. You are the teknon of the Devil.". The minds of these Jewish leaders were so deceived that the Truth was impossible for them to believe. Jesus spoke only the Truth. He asked Which one of you convicts Me of sin? No sin or falsehood can be found in Christ or his works. Stepping back Jesus' strong dualism becomes apparent here: if one does not perceive the Truth that comes from God, then that person is not really from God. Rather than being part of the light, that person is exposed as part of the darkness, of which God has no part.

Now you may be a Christian hearing this and this might just be the 47th time you have heard this scripture preached on. You might even think this is not for me. I will ask you to consider if the same descent from Truth to lie has happened to you. We are walking testimonies of this awe inspiring revelation of the Truth, that the creator of the universe has made provision for us to live free of our sin, and the burden of our brokenness. Has the old rugged cross become normal to you? Or even worse than the Truth has not found a place in you. A person's character is shown through their actions, not where they sit on a Sunday. As believers, we are carriers of the Truth; it's a seed that should bear the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. We must be imitators of Abraham if we are to truly be the children of the promise. We live by faith and not by sight. We have gotten so caught up in being Christian, rather than fulfilling the meaning of that word. Being like Jesus. The command to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind and love your neighbour as yourself moves from being a well quoted axiom to every portion of our lives flowing from them. Well, in case you haven't noticed Sunday focused Christian living is dead. And only the believer that chooses to be the Teknon of Abraham, the imitator of Jesus will truly experience the fulfilling, deep, joyous life of the spirit. When people see you, see your family, see your marriage, they don't just see someone that knows how to follow the rules and know right from wrong. Its not only about being moralistic, or a nice neighbor or citizen. but an obvious outpouring of Jesus, And Jesus said himself when you see me you see the Father. So every encounter

with you is an encounter with God. But we are too busy building our Kingdoms and our own agendas. We will lose sleep stressing over bills we accrued by our lack of discipline. Swiping our credit card to keep up with what society says where we should live and wear the brand we drive. How much happier would you be if you lived in the freedom you claim to have in Jesus. Where material possessions don't embody who you are. Some of us say our sacrifices are for our children. Is it? Or are you living vicariously through them because of your own trauma and unresolved issues. You can save every dollar you earned for them, and they will spend it on vices, you can send them to the best school, and they will enter a job market that is saturated and nearly impossible to find proper employment. Spoiler alert, your best will not be enough. But Our saviour's sacrifice was enough, he didn't just come for you stress about not sinning, but his suffering, death and resurrection came for an abundant life where you can trust that you and your families' lives are taken care of by God.

Maybe you aren't a Christian. This sermon might seem strange or even slightly offensive because it does not fit neatly into our boxes of hyper individuality, do whatever you want because you can. Any truth that agrees with everything we do and does not call us to our better selves is destructive. If we travel to the North Pole and wear what we want regardless of the objective Truth of the temperature, hypothermia, frostbite and possible death can ensue. We are all in the same boat. You must see something is wrong with our world. and education won't help us unlearn it; politics won't help us outlaw it, technology won't help us solve it. Justice is the talk right now, social, racial, sexual, and economic. I want to ask, where do you get that standard from? If there is something that is good or bad, there has to be a measure of the ultimate good. It can't be whatever our social construct says because if you move into another context, it would change. It can't just be what some science ideology says, that we are random pieces of matter that came from a random explosion. That means there is no meaning to any life and there is no value in the human experience. What only makes sense is an all-loving creator that is perfectly just created wanted you to be like him. That's why we put a value on someone's life, and we are willing to call out individuals or systems that don't comply with what we know in our hearts to be true. Whatever we come up with in our generation can be easily undone in the next.

Because the real issue is spiritual and the hardness of the human heart. Our creator sent his son over 2000 years ago to disarm the spiritual powers and show us the way back to our heavenly Father. If you are actively seeking the Truth, I encourage you to read the gospels for yourself. And you will see a movement that is not left or right, Marxist or capitalist; it's a Kingdom in which justice, love, charity, community, equality and truth reign. In our family, there is no male or female, poor or

rich, slave or free, black or white, gay or straight, no matter what you may identify as, we are all on the same playing field, no one is better in any sense than the other because when we accept Gods grace through faith are made new and one in Jesus the Messiah. Now we don't always get everything right. Lord knows I don't. But I am a work in progress, And we want you to be part of our family of imitation, the true teknon of Abraham, the children of Yahweh.