

Sermon Series: “The Gospel for Life”
Who Is Your Father?
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Who is your father? Have you ever been asked that question? That may be a question you want to answer, or perhaps don't want to answer, depending on who your father is. E.g., I recall the actor Jim Carey talking about his Dad as someone who really inspired him to be a comic and made him laugh; his Dad had a really good sense of humor, but he did not try to capitalize on that but played it safe and became an accountant, and when Jim was 12 his Dad lost his job, and Jim thought that it would be better have a hard time with something you really liked than something you really did not; his Dad encouraged him to use his talents in humor and to see where it would take him. E.g., I love hearing Laura Smith talk about her Dad, who passed away a little while back, because she clearly had a special relationship with him— she talks of how he was a loving, kind Dad who was very well-educated with a Ph.D. and was very well respected in the education field, who provided well for the family and loved the Lord. Who is your father? The answer to that question— whether positive or not so positive— probably says a lot about who you and I are. This is true on a personal level, and on a spiritual level.

READ John 8:39-47 (pp. 101-102)

CONTEXT: Jesus has just instructed the new believers on Discipleship 101— to follow Him one must abide in Him and become His disciple/learner, then that person will know the truth, and then that person will know the truth and be set free from sin. Not everyone is on board with Jesus— He experiences some resistance that continues into our passage this morning.

READ vv 39-42. “According to Jesus, in our passage, a person has ultimately one of two fathers. The first is God the Father, whom Abraham obeyed (v 39; cf. Genesis 15:1-6) and from whom Jesus was sent and on whose authority Jesus spoke the truth (vv 40,45), and thus those who follow God—i.e., His children— will love Jesus (v 42).” One of the key figures in Judaism is Abraham, who is known as the Father of the Jews, and for good reason. For one thing, there is a song about that— you probably remember it! “Father Abraham, had many sons/and many sons had Father Abraham/and I am one of them/and so are you/so let’s all praise the Lord!” Remember? Another reason is because before that in the Old Testament, there was no people known as God’s people. We had the creation account and Adam and Eve in Genesis 1-4, genealogies in Genesis 5, Noah and the Flood in Genesis 6-9, genealogies and the Tower of Babel in Genesis 10-11, and then Abraham in Genesis 12 onwards. On one particular occasion, Abraham really pleased God, and it happened in Genesis 15. God tells Abraham not to be afraid, for He will be Abraham’s shield and will reward him; Abraham asks for a child, especially since God had told him in Genesis 12:1-4 that He would make a great nation of him. God takes Abraham outside and tells him to look at the stars of the sky and count them— so will his dependents be. Abraham believed God, and God “reckoned it to him as righteousness” (Genesis 17:6). Paul is so impressed with this precursor to salvation by grace through faith that he cites it in Romans 4:3. Jesus is saying here that true sons and daughters of Abraham are obedient to God like Abraham was. Have you ever seen someone who listened to the message of Jesus and became obedient to God? E.g., I recall

Dr. Paul Lim, a professor at Vanderbilt University's Divinity School, went from an atheist to a Christian at Yale University where he did his undergraduate degree in economics. Changes started coming in his life when his sister, a Christian, decided to marry a pastor. Paul Lim thought, what a waste of a life! But Paul's mother was a Christian and close to him and kept on him; his father was not a big part of his life spiritually. His mother asked Paul for a favor— to go to a retreat his future brother-in-law was helping to lead and represent the family. So he said ok. He told his sister before the retreat basically, “Look, I am going to make a lot of money, I've got my future mapped out, so I can help y'all financially.” He goes to the retreat and he is bored and finds all of the gospel messages irrelevant to his life. Finally, toward the end of the retreat, they start singing in worship a Christian contemporary song by Keith Green called, “To Obey Is Better than Sacrifice”, and in the song he sings “To obey is better than sacrifice/I don't need your money/I want your life/and I hear you say that I'm coming back soon/but you act like I'll never return”. Paul Lim was immediately cut to the heart by the phrase, “I don't need your money/I want your life”. He recalled what he a bit arrogantly told his sister— I can support y'all in this industry life— and that message broke his heart and he realized God did not need his money, He wanted his life. And he broke down in tears and gave his life to Jesus. He went on from there after Yale to go to seminary at Princeton and then got his Ph.D. from Cambridge University in Church History and is living a life of obedience to the message of Jesus and knowing Him. He recognized that Jesus is the truth. That is what the opponents of Jesus simply would not do.

READ vv 43-47. “The second father is the devil, who is a murderer (vv 40,44) and the Father of Liars/Lies (v 44), and those who are the devil's followers— i.e., his children— do the devil's deeds (v 41) and don't believe in Jesus (vv 46-47). Cf. Genesis 2:15-17; 3:2-5; 4:8; Hebrews 6:17-18.” In these verses we find out things about the devil that fill in his character for us. He is a

murderer— as can be seen from what happens shortly after the fall in Genesis 4:8 where Cain kills his brother Abel— and he is a liar, even the Father of Liars/Lies— literally it says in the original language, “for he is a liar and his [the liar’s] father”. We mentioned last week that the noun “truth” (ἀλήθεια) is used 25 times in John’s gospel, more than any other New Testament book. That noun is used five times in our present passage. Jesus’ message is one of truth, and Satan’s message is one of lies. And the purpose of Satan’s lies is our death and destruction. Have you ever met a liar? E.g., I recall during my early years at Lake Vista UMC a man with a foreign accent came to the church and said he just flew in from out of town and took a taxi to his friend’s house in Lake Vista but the friend was not there, and he needed a ride to go to an ATM and could I give him a ride? I was a bit befuddled by him, but said ok, and then said, but first let me tell my wife. So I called Elena, and she was not hip on the idea of my going with him, but I was insistent and she said, well ok, but get a copy of his passport. So I go outside to the guy and say, “I’ll take you, but I need to get photocopy of your passport before we go”, so he hands it to me, and I start to walk back to inside the church and he grabs it out of my hand and says angrily to me, “You call yourself a Christian!” and he storms off. I didn’t know what to think, but apparently this guy was up to something. Fast forward a few months later and I am talking to a minister friend of mine who served uptown in New Orleans by the river and I am talking to him about how he handles people who come to his church asking for help. He told me the story of some guy asking him to drive him to an ATM to get money and he had a foreign accent. I said, “Wait— I had the same guy come to Lake Vista UMC! What happened?” He said his ATM card did not work, so he just asked me for money, and I gave him some. So the whole situation was a lie where this guy was going from church to church. That is the way Satan works-- he will befuddle you and me with a lie. He may try to make you think you are too dumb to do something in school, or you are not up to it, that you cannot have a

fulfilling life without romance and sex, or if you share the gospel no one will believe you and no one will like you. E.g., I recall talking to someone about giving his life to Christ, and he said if he gave his life to Christ he might have to live under a bridge some day, so he believed the lie from Satan and didn't give his life to Christ. E.g., I recall when I was 16 and I accepted Christ, the biggest obstacle was a lie from Satan that I could not give the dream to the Lord of my dating life, because He wanted me to date Christians and marry someone who followed Jesus, and I thought that meant I could well never get married and stay celibate and my life would not be a success without that type of romance. But that was lie! Jesus is my treasure, and I can trust Him with my dreams for my life—and give them, surrender them, to Him. That was such a big issue for me that when I was in college with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship someone actually told me that some people thought I was choosing to be celibate—and I said no! But I trusted the Lord with my dating life and marriage hopes—and that was a big deal for me, a big struggle for me. E.g., I recall when I was at one church to serve as a pastor, before Lake Vista UMC, I was driving around the neighborhood in the first days I was there, and there were a lot affluent houses in the area of the church, and I kind of heard a voice in my head say, “You can't offer these people anything. They have all their needs met, and many of their wants. They have no need for the gospel.” That was the lie Satan was trying to plant in my brain. Emotionally, I could agree with the lie—I could not see what I had to offer them—but I sensed God was calling me there and I would serve Him there. By God's grace, people at that church really responded to the gospel, and wanted to be saved and their children to be saved—there was truly much to offer these people who seemed to have everything!

“The most important question every answers, regardless of whether he or she knows it, is this: Who is my Father?” To follow God and be His children means obedience and love for Jesus and blessing, and to follow Satan and be his

children means lies and doing bad things and death. My hope and prayer is that everyone listening would choose God the Father, and at the end of our lives people would be able to say, "Truly, that person was His child!"