

Exegesis

Vs. 33-36 – In response to Jesus' claims that they needed to be set free, the Jews said that they had never been "in bondage." Strictly speaking, this was false. Weren't they currently living under Roman rule? And were they not in bondage under the Babylonians before them? Or, to go back even further, what about the Exodus? Did they deny the Israelite's four hundred years of slavery in Egypt? This is unlikely. Just as Jesus had been doing, it seems that the religious were using metaphorical language so that when they spoke of "bondage," they, too, were referring to their spiritual condition.¹ But far from agreeing with Jesus, they rejected the notion that they were spiritually enslaved to their sin (cf. vs. 24). And they based this belief on their heredity; after all, they were of "Abraham's seed." This is the same fallacy that John the Baptist openly condemned (cf. Lu. 3:7:8). Interestingly, Justin Martyr, a second-century Christian apologist, made this same point when he debated Trypho the Jew.² So prevalent was this belief that Rabbis would dogmatically proclaim, "The circumcised do not go down to Gehenna...."³ In evangelical circles, this notion of salvation grounded in one's ancestry is dispelled early in one's walk. But to the Jew who found not only nationalistic pride but salvific assurance in their genetics, Jesus asserting that they were still yet "in bondage" would've been hard for them to grasp. "Freedom was considered to be the birthright of every Jew."⁴

But the security that is *not* found in Jesus is a *false* security. This is why Jesus tries to dispel the Jew's misplaced faith by saying that the one who commits "sin is the servant of sin." The Lord even uses a strong asseveration—"verily, verily"—to underscore this principle's importance.⁵ And, once again, Jesus' words have a double meaning (cf. 3:3). On the one hand, when one sins, that person serves sinful agendas (i.e., pain, disunity, death, etc.); but, on the other hand, to commit sin also makes that person a slave to sin (i.e., will, thoughts, desires, etc.). And while both interpretations are valid, it seems likely that Jesus was more or less emphasizing the latter of those two explanations, for he goes on to say, "the servant" does not remain in their master's "house." That is an honor reserved for the "the Son" alone (cf. 2:16; 14:2). Yes, they were indeed the children of Abraham, but Jesus was the Son of God. Being descended from Abraham held little bearing on one's spiritual state than one who was "descended" from God

¹ Carson (1991), p. 349.

² Kruse (2017), p. 239, records Martyr's words: "And you [Trypho the Jew] deceive yourselves while you fancy that, because you are the seed of Abraham after the flesh, therefore you shall fully inherit the good things announced to be bestowed by God through Christ."

³ Beasley-Murray (1999), p.134.

⁴ Köstenberger (2008), p. 262.

⁵ Carson (1991), p. 349-350.

Himself. Abraham might've been a man of faith, but he was still just a sinner, and his children's children would be no different. This meant that the Jews were as much slaves to their sin as any gentile. "What is the nature of these bonds?" Wright asks, "[It] is that the loss of freedom is evidenced, not by political fetters, but by moral fetters."⁶ All are sinners because all have sinned (cf. Rom. 3:23).

A comparison can be made between the Jews here and those of today who are told, for the first time, that they're actually sinners. They will often respond by saying they're a "good person." And while that person might, at times, do good things, it would not take long before an observer notices how "not good" that person truly is. Their actions will prove contrary to their claims at virtue, just like Jesus will point out that Jews' desire to kill him disproves their goodness (cf. vs. 37). In fact, they were, to borrow Jesus' metaphor, so enslaved to their sins that they could not even call the Master's house their own. The irony is that the Jews knew this at some level. Every year they would bring their offerings on Yom Kippur—the Day of Atonement—to be cleansed from their sins. Their problem was that they thought of God's forgiveness as something that was owed to them through ritual sacrifice when it has *always* been a free gift attained through faith. Abraham wasn't justified through sacrifice but through putting his faith in God (cf. Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:3). And, likewise, those who put their faith in God's Son will also be justified (cf. Rom. 4:22-25).

If God was able to justify Abraham because Abraham put his faith in God, reason dictates that God's Son will also be able to justify anyone who puts their faith in him. This is why the Lord says, "If the Son, therefore, shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." Jesus—the Son—has as much authority to forgive sins and has as much power to set sinners free as God—the Father—has (cf. 5:19-29; Lu. 7:36-50). Interestingly, at that time, a few heirs to households were known to set free those slaves that they had grown up with.⁷ The enslaved person, of course, could not free himself; at the very least, they had to wait until the son of the house was old enough to do so. And while it wasn't unheard of, neither was it a common occurrence. In this way, Jesus's words alluded to a messianic passage in which God says in 1 Chron. 17:13-14, "I will be to him [the Messiah] a father, and he shall be to me a son. I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from him who was before you, but I will confirm him in my house and in my kingdom forever, and his throne shall be established forever." Jesus, as the Son, will live in God's house—His kingdom—forever. And any who believe in the Lord Jesus will be

⁶ Wright (1950), p. 216.

⁷ Keener (2012), 1:752.

promoted from servanthood status to sonship status (cf. 1:12; Gal. 3:26).⁸ And then, they, too, will abide in God's house for all eternity. What a remarkable Son who would try to make sinners like these into fellow sons.

37-38 – Jesus now acknowledges their parentage by saying, “I know that ye are Abraham's seed....” This fact cannot be denied. After all, it is the very reason why Jesus came to them in the first place and not to some other nation (cf. Mat. 15:24; Rom. 1:16). However, a non-Jew who does the will of God is a far more genuine Israelite than a Jew who does not do the will of God (cf. Rom. 2:28-29; Gal. 4:21-31; 1 Jn. 3:10).⁹ This is Jesus' point when he says that the religious leaders “seek to kill” him. What sort of Israelite would presume to be called a child of Abraham when they were actively seeking the life of God's only Son (cf. Matt. 21:33-41)? This majorly contradicts their claim.

What's more, Jesus says their aim was homicidal because the Lord's “word” had “no place in” them. The Word came to those who should've made room for him but, upon arriving at their doorstep, the Lord found a sign which read “no vacancies.”¹⁰ They would not believe the truth that Jesus tried to tell them because they were already filled to capacity with too many false truths. Just as it is hard to be told you need a doctor if you believe you're healthy (cf. Mr. 2:17), it is hard to think you have to be set free if you've thought you've been free your entire life.

Jesus now makes the distinction between *his* father and *their* father. Jesus explains, “I speak that which I have seen with my Father: and ye do that which ye have seen with your father.” Remarkably, in a way, Jesus was admitting that they were both being obedient to their respective fathers.¹¹ To Jesus, God was his Father. This much is clear. But, if in the Lord's mind, God was his father, who did Jesus think that their father was (cf. vs. 44)?

⁸ Carson (1991), p. 350, “Jesus not only employs inalienable rights as the unique Son of God, but exercises full authority vested in him by the Father, to liberate slaves. Those whom Jesus liberates from the tyranny of sin are really free. True freedom is not the liberty to do anything we please, but the liberty to do what we ought; and it is genuine liberty because doing what we ought now please us.”

⁹ Carson (1991), p. 351.

¹⁰ Morris (1995), p. 408.

¹¹ Beasley-Murray (1999), p.134

VIDEO DESCRIPTION

Wednesday Night Live | John | Week 7

Text: John 8:33-38

Sad to say, many believe that they are secure because of their ancestry. The Jews, for instance, thought their eternal security was locked in based solely on the fact that they were descended from Abraham. Any student of the Bible knows this to be wrong. But before we judge them too harshly, while it may look different, this same fallacy is alive and well today. Too many believe themselves deserving of Heaven simply by being a "good person." They feel that they shouldn't be punished because they've done the best they can with the best they had. But when Jesus is the standard, it doesn't matter whether you're descended from Abraham or the best person who ever lived; everyone is a slave to sin. And unless God's Son set us free, we will remain the servants of sin for all eternity.

Pastor's manuscript can be found here: