

“Are we emigrating to New Zealand?” Tamara was asking, being humorous. Those were the words that greeted me a few weeks before our cruise to New Zealand when I got back from work. Emigrating to New Zealand? What was she on about? It was like a bolt from the blue. Yea, we are going to New Zealand on a holiday, on a cruise to New Zealand and back. Am I right or am I right!?! To my horror, I was dead wrong. I had booked a ONE way holiday cruise from Sydney to Auckland. The ship finishes up in Auckland and we had no way back. Poor Tamara been stressing out that day after she checked the itinerary. This was our 5th cruise. We were going to be cruise veterans. I could have written something for Trip Advisor. You would think that I would have checked! But no, I assumed that the cruise was going to come back to Sydney. You think I would have known what I was doing as this was our 5th cruise!

Similarly, you would think that the Jewish religious leaders would know what was going on. They said, “Abraham is our father.” “We are Abraham’s descendants and have never been slaves of anyone.”

The Jews claim they are Abraham’s descendants. They’ve got the right genes. They’ve got the Old Testament. They’ve got the mark of God’s promise. The men and boys are circumcised. They’ve got it all. By right they should well be on their way.

BUT YET, YET, they were looking for a way to kill Jesus. Their actions don’t measure up to who they are.

They should be embracing Jesus. Yet they want to kill him.

They should be listening to Jesus. Yet they to continue to be slaves to sin.

They should have recognized Jesus. Yet they can’t see God’s Son when he is right in front of them.

Let us examine the Jewish claim. ‘Abraham is our father. God is our Father.’ Their special status before God, their ‘freedom’ status. Does it ring true? Romans 9 says NIV “For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham’s children... in other words, it is not the children by physical descent who are God’s children, but it is the children of promise who are regarded as Abraham’s offspring.” Remember Abraham had 2 sons, Ishmael and Isaac. Both were physical descendants of Abraham but only through Isaac was the children of the promise!

Also, Isaac had twins. Esau the older and Jacob the younger. However, Isaac’s wife was told “the older will serve the younger.”v12 NIV. Further Romans 9:13 says, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.” God made an executive decision to love Jacob. He chose Jacob. Wasn’t he the deceiver? The one grasping at the heel. Yet God chose Jacob over Esau.

You see, God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy on. God has compassion on whom he has compassion on. At the end of the day, being the children of the promise is not dependent on “human desire or effort”v16 but entirely on God’s mercy and grace. God chooses us. We don’t choose him.

Therefore, the Jews in Jesus day can’t just claim special status or claiming God as their father simply because of their genes. Our outward externals don’t matter to God. It doesn’t matter your race, your descent, or if you come from a great Christian family. They don’t guarantee you are God’s child. Only God can choose and save us. Therefore, my first point is that, only the ones the Father chooses are God’s children.

Now, for any of you out there sitting on the edge of your seats wondering what happened to the trip. You know with my one way ticket to New Zealand and what not!? I'm happy to announce that we scored 2 nights at the Hilton hotel at Auckland and 4 Qantas tickets back to Sydney for the grand sum of 300 dollars. You see, my sister had lotta points travel points that she bestowed graciously on us. It was an act of grace! We didn't earn it but she showered this act of mercy on us. It was like a get out of jail card for me!

Similarly, we should be thankful, and humble that it is by God's grace that he chose us. Plucked us from obscurity into a loving relationship with him. Today, we must renounce all other means of being right with God. Only by God's mercy and grace can we be saved.

This now leads me to my second point. Our actions show us where our loyalties lie. Whom our real father is. They thought their forefather was Abraham and by inheritance, God is their Father. Sadly, they were dead wrong!

Their actions gave them away. Their loyalty, their hearts belonged to another. It wasn't to God but their father was the devil, the father of lies. The apple doesn't fall far from the tree. The litmus test for Jesus is a simple one. You behave just like your father. Your behavior points to who your father is. All their proud words, their descendance from Abraham... all of that means little to Jesus. What you do shows where your heart is.

The proof is in the pudding.

The Jews here were looking for a way to kill Jesus. They should be loving. Instead they hated him, denied him, tested him, looking for a way to trap Jesus. They wanted him dead. Why? Probably because Jesus was threatening to turn their lives upside down. The leaders got it good. Never mind the poor masses. The cream were getting the mullah. Many in Jerusalem were happy. They didn't need a messiah. They already had a money making machine with the temple in Jerusalem.

Jesus litmus test is simply one of ethics and morality. One's actions show whose father the Jewish leaders had. Jesus charged them of belonging to their father, the devil. They wanted to "carry out your father's desires." Satan "was a murderer from the beginning." (NIV V44) He tempted Eve. Told her how she certainly won't die if she ate the fruit. Not only did she and Adam die but the entire human race now face certain death. The devil is responsible for humans losing their cherished standing before God. Not only that, he is a natural liar and father of lies. Everything that emanates from him is a lie. Perhaps the worst kind of lie are lies that have a strand of truth in it but been twisted so that it is a deformed 'truth.'

Just like the devil lied, so did these Jewish leaders.

Matt 26:59 NIV "The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death. But they did not find any, though many false witnesses came forward."

Just like the devil murdered, so did these people.

Matt 26:4 NIV "they schemed to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him."

They were looking for a way to trap him to set him up on trumped charges.

In John 8:40-41 NIV, Jesus put the Jews through the morality ethics test and they were found wanting.

“You are looking for a way to kill me, a man who has told you the truth... Abraham did no such things.” They were following the footsteps of their father, the devil.

In John 8:42 NIV: “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I have come here from God.”

Abraham was a man who was concerned with hearing and obeying God’s commands. Instead these Jewish leaders were breaking Moses’s commandments to not murder, to not bear false witness.

Who then do these Jews belong to? Who is their father? Their actions is the best paternity test. Here were the cream of the religious fraternity. The ones supposed to be the shepherds of the flock.

Jesus doesn’t hold back. It’s like ripping off a hard crusted Band-Aid over a festering wound. V44 “You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires.” He is showing things just as it is. He doesn’t offer them a tempered message. He exposes their lies and sinfulness to show them where their heart is. Corrupt and evil. Festering and completely in the hands of Satan.

Friends, no one is above scrutiny. If God’s temple housed a bunch of ministers who were the devil’s henchman and children, we shouldn’t think we are above reproach. I am not saying that we should question our salvation. But I think we should allow God’s Spirit to search us. Because if God’s supposed people of the promise could backslide so badly, we should consider our actions, our thoughts, our inner compass.

We need to be cautious as the devil is like a roaring lion. He waits for any opportunity to try to catch us off guard. We need to be watchful but continue to look to Jesus. We need also to be mindful that our right actions don’t flow from self-striving to be good. It’s not me striving to show God... I am doing enough good to be called God’s child. I’m going to show how good I am. I’m gonna wash the dishes 25 days in a row. That should put me on road to sainthood, right? I’m not gonna murder anyone for the next 6 months. No... that’s not what God wants. God is not looking for a circumcision of the flesh.

But rather as Romans 2 NIV says, “A person is not a Jew who is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by written code.”

God looks for a circumcision of the heart. A heart that’s Spirit filled with the love of the Holy Spirit. It is only because the Father has reached out and changed our hearts that a disciple cannot help but act rightly. They reject murder and false testimony. You see, it’s an inside out job, not an outside in job! Our external righteous actions are a natural result of an inward righteousness from God the Father.

Next we turn to next and final points. The source of unbelief and its cure.

I like to tell you a little story about our bunny. We call it Cuddles. It’s a cute pet which likes being petted and apples. Before we left for the cruise, we let the bunny out in our garden. When it came time to find it, Cuddles could not be found. Our family searched high and low. We checked all its favorite spots and hideouts but to no avail. Where was Cuddles? Cuddles.... Cuddles... Cuddles...

Despite calling out to him, there was no sign of him. There was no response. Tamara tried to think like a rabbit, looking at things from a rabbit's perspective. Looking down and around the bushes. Finally, Tamara saw something white under the slide. It was dear lost Cuddles. She scooped him up and cuddled him in her arms.

Cuddles could hear strange sounds but he couldn't understand its meaning because he wasn't tuned in to the right frequency. He couldn't hear to come out from its safe place. The Pharisees and these Jews too were tuned out, unable to respond accordingly. Let's look at this passage for 2 reasons for their unbelief.

In v 37, Jesus points to the first cause. "you are looking for a way to kill me, because you have no room for my word." No room for God's word? What? Many were well versed with the law. If anything, they should have information overload with things of the Scripture. Instead, they had no room for Jesus's words.

I believe Jesus is talking about room in their hearts for God's word. Their hearts have been corrupted. We have seen Jesus rebuke the Pharisees.

Listen to Matthew 23:27 NIV "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean." They have been seduced by greed, by their grand standing, by their important place in society. So much so, that when the real Son of God came, they missed it because their hearts was so full of the things of the world.

How about us? Do we make room for Jesus? Are our hearts crowded out with things of this that we have no room left for Jesus? Our prayer is that he continues his work of refining us, cleaning us up and restoring rightful his place in our hearts. That we make room for Jesus.

In v 45, Jesus delivers a stunning cause for their unbelief. "Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me!" Look at verse 45. There is even an exclamation mark at end v45. As if Jesus is bewildered and confounded at the state of their hardened hearts. Ponder for a moment! These Jews do not believe, cannot believe.... Why? Because Jesus told them the truth! What? Because Jesus told them the truth, they don't believe. Doesn't it say ... "know the truth and it will set you free."

The sad truth is that the truth of God cannot penetrate their hardened hearts because ... they don't belong to God. They might have all the head knowledge in the world... but they cannot hear. V47... "the reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God."

The word 'hear' in v47 is not just an audible hearing of words but it has the sense of hearing with intention to obey. A posture of listening to God to heed his word. Disciples like us can hear to obey only because God has tuned us into his voice frequency. These people can't hear Jesus because they are tuned out. No matter how hard they try, they cannot hear and obey God's words.

This passage doesn't tell us the cure for this unbelief but other passages in John show the way.

Listen to John 15:19 NIV "If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world."

6:65 "No one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them."

The Jews can hear the words but they cannot hear to obey because they don't belong to God. Only those the Father has chosen and enabled ... can believe. To become a disciple of Jesus, it is simply one of pure grace and mercy. The Father chooses us, draws us in, circumcises our hearts through his Spirit. What's more he continually cleansing and purifying us. This changing of our minds and actions is not us striving to be something we're not.... But rather, our ability to have the right loving actions is a continuing work of the Holy Spirit as we surrender more and more of our lives to Jesus - as we make more and more room for Jesus in our lives.

Let us now come to a time of prayerful response to our Father.

Father, we are humbled that you have chosen us. We cannot come to you unless you have drawn us. Lord, search our hearts and actions. Show us where our hearts and loyalties lie. Lord, if we have squeezed you out and made little room for you, please forgive us. Please help us to make room for your word. Help us through your Holy Spirit to push away the things of this world that crowd in, that tempt us to tune you out. Help us Lord to be true disciples who hear to obey. Amen.