

Lectionary Gospel Commentaries

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Based on the Lectionary Pericope Covering:

John 8:31-36

SOLA-LSB (Lutheran Service Book): Years A, B, and C - Reformation Sunday, Text: John 8:31-36
RCL (Revised Common Lectionary): Years A, B, and C - Reformation Sunday, Text: John 8:31-36

In the context of Reformation Sunday, preachers might note that both Paul and Luther went through eye-opening experiences when they learned to understand that salvation is never by works, but always by grace. The commandments were never given to enable people to effect a relationship with God; they were given as guidelines for reflecting a relationship with God.

In John 8:31–36, Jesus scraps the idea that genetic descent from Abraham makes one a child of God. John points out that some of Jesus’ hearers were so angry with Him that they were plotting to kill Him. Without a doubt, God’s desire is to open ever more widely the eyes of each and every one of us to the wonder of Jesus’ Person and to the radical implications of following Him as Servant King.

Verses 8:31–33: Abraham is mentioned no less than 11 times in the rest of this chapter. He was chosen by God to become the father of a great nation (Gen. 12:21). The Jews were proud to be called the children of Abraham, and proud of their status as God’s specially chosen people. Little wonder, then, that they bristle at Jesus’ invitation to them to become His disciples and to accept the truth — His truth that will set them free. No doubt His hearers think, “What an insult to suggest that we are slaves and not free!”

The contents of 8:31 are significant. They refer to “the Jews who had believed in Jesus.” However, in 8:37 Jesus refers to His Jewish hearers/opponents as those who want to kill Him! In Verses 31–32, Jesus states that what He teaches is true and will free people from sin. It would seem that some of Jesus’ Jewish hearers interpret His message as having to do with political freedom, and boast that while other nations have dominated them (as Rome was doing at the time), they have never been willing subjects of any foreign power. They take great pride in being “sons of Abraham.”

Verses 8:34–36: However, Jesus is talking about people’s slavery to sin; see Romans 6:31. Sin is a terrible

master to work under. It drives us more and more into seeking our own will, and all along the way brings us into a collision course with God. Jesus uses an image to show what freedom means; for other images, see John 3:8, 29; 4:35–36; 10:1–15; 11:9–10. A slave can always be tossed out of his master’s house; not so the son. Jesus is the Son in the household of God. If His hearers believe in Him, He will make them free children of God. As His forgiven brothers and sisters, they will find freedom in devoting life to glorifying God by serving others. Only when they do that will they be true children of Abraham.

Indeed, Jesus is the only real Son of God! Only He can emancipate spiritual slaves by delivering them from the power and consequences of sin. Physical descent from Abraham is of no avail!