

John 8:31-38 – Free Indeed

So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” They answered him, “We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, ‘You will become free’?”

Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. I know that you are offspring of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you. I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father.”

We pick back up in John chapter 8, and Jesus is still speaking to the Jews on the last day of the feast of Tabernacles.

He has declared to them that he is the living water, and that if they come to him and drink, they will never be thirsty again.

He has announced that he is the light of the world, and that whoever follows him will never walk in darkness.

And as we heard in **v. 30** last week, many of the people believed in him.

So here we have Jesus, with a crowd of people saying, “We believe in you”. They have been moved by the testimony of Jesus to make some sort of declaration of faith in him.

This is where we pick up in **v.31**. Jesus is addressing those who have declared their faith in him.

And you might expect Jesus, at this point, to be walking around hugging and high-fiving people. Verse 30 says that many believed in him. And isn't that the point? To get as many decisions for Jesus as possible...or is it?

Jesus doesn't go around congratulating people. Instead he has some sobering words for them.

Jesus, they say, we believe in you!

Jesus replies, “you are enslaved...but I can set you free”.

So, one of my takeaways from this is that Jesus didn't read the same books on salvation and evangelism that I did growing up. Aren't we supposed to celebrate someone who makes a decision to believe in Jesus?

But let me remind you of one of the many differences between Jesus and you and I, and that is that Jesus looks at and knows our hearts.

Jesus knows what our hearts really love. He knows what we truly delight in. He knows what we have enthroned in our hearts.

Remember the story where the prophet Samuel anoints David as the future king of Israel. Saul has failed as king, so God sends Samuel to the house of Jesse in order to choose a king from Jesse's sons.

Samuel sees Jesse's first son and he's like, 'Yup, this is the guy'. He looks like a king...this must be him.

But this is how the Lord responds...

1st Samuel 16:7

Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.

Jesus stands before the crowd of people who have believed in him, and instead of saying, 'Good job, see you in heaven', he says, 'If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples'.

The implication is that they aren't truly his disciples yet. The implication is that there is a lot more to being a disciple of Jesus, than simply saying that we believe in him.

Jesus is taking this opportunity to teach the people what true salvation and true discipleship, what true freedom looks like.

So, what does it mean to be saved? What does it mean to become a disciple of Jesus?

In the modern day church we tend to see salvation as an event. We place a tremendous amount of emphasis on getting a response or a decision from someone.

Whatever you have to do, just get them to raise a hand, or walk down the aisle, or say the magic prayer. And then you've got 'em, and you can move on to the next person.

You know those door-to-door sales people who come to your house? They know just what to say to get you to let them into your house. And if they can get in your house they've got one hook in you already.

I feel like that's how a lot of us in the church operate sometimes. If we say just the right lines or if we create enough hype, we can get people to buy in.

I remember in high school talking to a young guy who was showing an interest in following Jesus, but was struggling with severe guilt. I remember thinking, if I can just get him to say the magic prayer, then he'll be saved. We stayed up all night, and finally after hours of talking and debating he "prayed the prayer". And then about 6 months later he killed himself. And I remember my dad and brother saying they didn't think he was ever truly saved. And that shocked me, because I heard him pray the prayer.

So let me be very frank with you. Jesus doesn't care if you raised your hand in a church service once upon a time. Jesus cares about you and I abiding in his word!

The people say, we believe in you Jesus!

Jesus replies:

"If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Listen, salvation always begins with a response to the gospel, and that's a good thing.

But I can't tell you how many people I've known over the years who have made a declaration of faith in Jesus, and then returned to their former lives with absolutely no evidence of transformation. And that is not salvation!

Jesus gives a very profound illustration of what salvation looks like in the gospels.

Luke 8:5-8

A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell along the path and was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air devoured it. And some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it. And some fell into good soil and grew and yielded a hundredfold.

Now some of you might be wondering what that means and how it's an illustration of salvation.

The disciples were wondering that as well, so Jesus explains it to them.

Luke 8:11-12

Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. The ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved.

These are the people who hear the gospel and remain hard hearted. Either they reject it outright or they are indifferent.

Luke 8:13

And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away.

Now these people are different. They actually receive the word with joy. Yes, we believe in you Jesus! So...case closed, right?

No! Jesus says that these people have no root. As soon as hardship comes along; as soon as their faith is tested a little, they fall away. They don't persevere. They don't produce a crop.

Luke 8:14

And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature.

Again we have people who respond to the word. But their seedling faith is eventually swallowed up by the pursuit of riches and earthly pleasures. They fail to realize that knowing Jesus is the greatest pleasure there is.

Luke 8:15

As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience. (or perseverance)

Finally we have those who not only hear and respond to God's word, but they hold it fast! They abide in it! This is what Jesus is telling the Jews to do. And those who abide in his word will produce and bear fruit to the glory of God!

So, back to our text. We believe in you Jesus!

If you want to be my disciples you **MUST** abide in my word. You must hold it fast!

Following Jesus means living a life that believes in, trusts in, hopes in, depends on, submits to, obeys and rejoices in the word of God, revealed in the person of Jesus Christ!

This is exactly what James is saying when he writes that faith without works is dead. That's been a controversial passage for many Christians over the years, even for people like the great reformer, Martin Luther.

But James is in no way saying that we are saved through works. That would be a direct contradiction to the gospel. James is saying that if your faith does not produce good works, then it is not saving faith.

John says it this way in **1st John 2:3 – And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments.**

Jesus says in John 15, 'If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love'.

True belief is always accompanied by obedience!

That's because salvation is not the result of "believing in God". James says that even the demons believe in God! Salvation is a miraculous transformation in which the old, dead man is made into a new creation, is regenerated, through the power of the Holy Spirit!

And the new man, the new woman has no greater joy than believing in, trusting in, hoping in, submitting to, obeying, rejoicing in and abiding in the living Word!

And Jesus says that if we abide in his word, we will know the truth and the truth will set us free.

v.33 - They answered him, “We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, ‘You will become free’?”

Jesus tells the Jews they need to be set free and they're like, Jesus, I don't think you realize who you're talking to. We are the offspring of Abraham.

We're a big deal Jesus! We're already free. We're not slaves and we've never been slaves. And we certainly don't need a carpenter's son from Nazareth to set us free.

The irony here is that they have in fact been slaves many times. Egypt, the period of the Judges, the Babylonian exile, and of course as they speak they are occupied by the Roman Empire.

But the point is that they're blinded to their need for Jesus, because they're too busy resting on the laurels of their ancestry. They fail to see that Jesus is talking about a different kind of freedom...real freedom.

I come from a Christian family; I never miss a Sunday; I read my Bible every day; I give money to the poor; I raised my hand in a church service once; I've raised my hand like 8 different times in church...

The hope of the Jews was in their nationality. They believed they were saved because they were the physical descendants of Abraham. And they were blind to the fact that they were slaves!

v.34

Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.”

This is a huge statement, and we don't have time to explore what all this means today, so let me say this.

We live in a culture that more and more likes to minimize sin. It's not that big a deal. As long as you're trying to be a good person it doesn't matter.

Jesus, on the other hand, repeatedly warns against the destructive power of sin. And he says here that living in sin makes us slaves.

When you live in sin, you become obedient to your sinful nature (Romans 6). Sin owns you. So, sin is not just a bad action you commit; sin is the overflow of a heart that's enslaved. That's why you can't take care of your sin problem on your own.

And sin is birthed out of deception. Adam and Eve sinned when Satan deceived them.

And here's the deception...that sin will make us happy, that sin will bring fulfillment.

Having more money will make you happy. How many of us have believed that lie?

Living your entire life being married to the same person is boring. Having sex with only one person is boring. Waiting to have sex until you're married is old fashioned and boring and less fulfilling.

Getting revenge, lashing out, gossiping will make you feel better.

All sin is deception.

But Jesus says if we abide in his word, we will know the truth, and the truth will set us free.

And here's why. Only the truth of the gospel will make Jesus more glorious to us than our sin! That's what real freedom is.

So who wants to be free this morning? A lot of you, like the Jews, might respond 'I'm already free'.

Freedom is something we value so highly in this country. We fight for it. We sacrifice for it. We campaign for it. We live for it. Freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of choice...

But that is not real freedom. Jesus says in **v.36** – **So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.**

To be free indeed, that's what we want!

My prayer, pastor Marc's prayer, the Elder's prayer, is that you would be free indeed!

Only Jesus can free you from your slavery to sin, because only through his death can the old you be put to death. And only through his resurrection can the new you be raised to life.

And when Jesus raises you to new life he raises you as a Son, not a slave! A slave can never be free, because he has no legal standing in the household. But a son will remain in the household forever. A son is free indeed!

So let me finish with a few thoughts this morning, and then we'll pray together.

First, make sure you are saved!

Slavery is real! Hell is real! And Satan is happy for you to grow up in rocky soil. He's happy for you to grow among the weeds! He's happy for you to raise your hand in church and make a decision for Jesus as long as you're not abiding in Jesus and living in obedience to him.

Make sure you're saved! Charles Spurgeon puts it like this.

Beware, I pray thee, of presuming that thou art saved. If thy heart be renewed, if thou shalt hate the things that thou didst once love, and love the things that thou didst once hate; if thou hast really repented; if there be

a thorough change of mind in thee; if thou be born again, then thou hast reason to rejoice; but if there be no vital change, no inward godliness; if there be no love to God, no prayer, no work of the Holy Spirit, then thy saying 'I am saved' is but thine own assertion, and it may delude, but it will not deliver thee.

- **Charles Spurgeon**

Second, trust only in the person and work of Jesus for your freedom!

The world will offer you a thousand pseudo-freedoms. Satan will do everything he can to convince you, like the Jews, that you are free.

But religion can't set you free, good works and moralism can't set you free, church attendance can't set you free, giving away everything you own can't set you free, being a nice person can't set you free, being an American citizen can't set you free, having a general belief in God can't set you free, a raised hand and a verbal declaration of faith can't set you free!

The word of God will set you free, because the word of God, through the Spirit, opens our eyes to the reality and glory of Jesus. And when we see the glory of Jesus and run to Him as our all satisfying treasure and joy, then we will truly be free from sin!

We will know the truth, Jesus is the truth, and he will free us!

If this Bible is a rule book, or a history book or a book of stories to you, then you're a slave. If it's the true revelation of the glory of Jesus Christ who came to save sinners, then you're free!

Finally, remember that you don't produce a harvest overnight.

Spurgeon says:

Final perseverance is the necessary evidence of genuine conversion.

The call to follow Jesus is a call to persevere. But the glorious promise of the gospel is that if you're a son, Jesus himself will cause you to persevere.

Philippians 1:6

And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Christ Jesus.

As our friend Tom Hall says, If you don't give up, you win!

There will be hardship, there will be suffering, but the promise is that if you abide in Jesus, you will be free indeed!