
LIFE IN HIS NAME

THE TRUTH WILL SET YOU FREE

John 8:31-59

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.” They answered him, “Abraham is our father.” Jesus said to them, “If you were Abraham’s children, you would be doing the works Abraham did, but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. You are doing the works your father did.” They said to him, “We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father—even God.” Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.”

The Jews answered him, “Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?” Jesus answered, “I do not have a demon, but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me. Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is One who seeks it, and he is the judge. Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.” The Jews said to him, “Now we know that you have a demon! Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet you say, ‘If

anyone keeps my word, he will never taste death.’ Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do you make yourself out to be?” Jesus answered, “If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, ‘He is our God.’ But you have not known him. I know him. If I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and I keep his word. Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.” So the Jews said to him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?” Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.” So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

This text is quite an unusual text. It begins with this statement: “Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him...” He is talking to Jewish people who at this point is said of them: They believe in Jesus. Just the previous verse, the last verse from last week’s text, verse 30 -- we ended last week with this: “As he was saying these things, many believed in him.” That connects the two passages. “As he was saying these things, many believed in him. So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him...” That’s how the passage begins. How does it end? It ends: “So they picked up stones to throw at him...” They go from faith in Jesus to preparing to stone him.

I’ve had some bad conversations in my life, but this is a bad conversation. If you were following the dialog - and I will admit to you it’s dense; it’s a little difficult to follow the train of thought -- but if you are following it, it’s got racial slurs. It’s got accusations of illegitimacy. It gets very strong.

So, what is it about? What is the explanation even for the fact that they begin with this description, then it ends with them ready to kill Jesus? Obviously, their faith is not genuine. Obviously, their faith is not authentic faith in Jesus Christ. That’s been something that John has been teaching us throughout our study -- that not everyone who likes initially part of what Jesus says, or seems to agree, or even says they believe -- faith is not always authentic or genuine. So this text is going to help us in one application to see what genuine faith is.

But the theme of the passage really connects to faith this idea of freedom. This is the theme that is set up for us in the very first thing that Jesus says. “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples...” That’s giving us some indication of what genuine faith looks like. But look at where Jesus takes it: “...and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” Then that launches them into this discussion about freedom.

So, here's our main idea: Genuine faith brings freedom. I think it would help us before I start breaking it down, I want to walk through the passage and give a simple explanation, a simple bible study in terms of exactly what's happened in this conversation. Jesus begins the conversation by saying, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." Their response to this is: "Hey, we are offspring of Abraham! We have never been enslaved to anyone!" Now, that's not really a true statement, is it? They've been enslaved through much of their history. Even as Jesus is speaking in that moment, they are not exactly independent. They are under the control of Rome. But they are correct. They are understanding that Jesus is talking about something more than literal slavery. He is talking about spiritual freedom. They immediately say, "Listen, we are children of Abraham! We are children of God's promises! We are not enslaved!"

Jesus responds and says, "I tell you, everyone who practices sin is a slave of sin." He takes the conversation to a place of saying, "You are enslaved to sin and what sin brings." He explains to them, "If you are a slave, you may live in the house and things may be going great. They may treat you like family, but you are not family, and any day the master can wake up and kick you out. But if you are a son and you are living in the house, you are secure. If the Son, therefore, sets you free, you are free indeed." Jesus begins to pull them into this conversation of enslavement and sin and true freedom, and that only freedom in Christ can set you free.

So, the first thing we learn is that freedom is much more complex than we think about it being. We think about freedom in terms of, I guess, in a very simple fashion: It's just being able to do what you want to do, right? But, the problem is, if I do what I want to do in the moment, then when tomorrow comes I'm probably going to regret what I did today. So today's moment of so-called "freedom" leads to bondage tomorrow.

We have this bilingual service coming up, as Juan has told us about. I wish I had the freedom to stand up and preach in Spanish and English. I don't. Some of you do. In fact, some of you speak multiple, not just two, but three or four languages. The reason is that you gave up certain liberties, certain freedoms at a different time in your life, disciplined yourself and learned certain things, and now you have the freedom to do things I don't have the freedom to do. Because I was using my so-called freedom in a different way back when you were learning how to speak multiple

languages. You get the picture. Well, freedom is about doing more than just doing what you want to do.

The conversation continues. "We are children of Abraham." They are offended at what Jesus is saying, and saying, "Abraham is our father." I'm in the section that begins in verse 39, just giving you a summary explanation. Jesus' explanation is this: If you were children of Abraham, then you would do what Abraham did. There would be a likeness. But you don't do what Abraham did. You see, God came to Abraham and gave him his word, gave him his promise. And Abraham left everything to follow God. Now you have me, a greater revelation than even Abraham had. You have the word of God standing before you. I'm coming with the very word of God, and you are not believing it. You are not responding to it. In fact, you want to kill me! You're not children of Abraham. You don't look anything like Abraham!" That's the line of thought that Jesus gives. He says, "In fact, you're not doing the works of Abraham, you're doing the works of your father, the devil."

Now this conversation has really taken a turn, hasn't it? If you think that Jesus is just escalating and Jesus is just tit for tat being mean in response to their meanness, he is actually doing something very loving. In a very stern way, he is confronting them with the truth and he explains to them that Satan is a liar in his very nature. He is a liar from the beginning. He lied to Adam and Eve about the promises of God and the goodness of God. And Jesus gives us two basic characteristics of Satan. He is a liar and he is a murderer. He brought death.

If you're here and you're not a Christian, or you're not used to biblical teaching, you may be wondering about this teaching that there is a devil. Scripture is very clear that all that we are cannot be explained by the physical. It does not apologize for saying that there is a spiritual dimension to who you are -- you are a living soul -- and that the world cannot be explained strictly in terms of that which is material. I won't take the time this morning to go through a whole explanation of why that's obviously true, but I'll just give you two thoughts to consider.

One is if you look at your own life, can you honestly say all that you are can be explained by the physical? Can you say that your deepest desires and affections, what makes you tick can be just explained by cells? Secondly, just a thought before we move on in the conversation that is recorded here in John 8. The second one would be this: If you look at your world, the daily activities, even the last few weeks, do you have an explanation for the evil that is taking place on a

moment by moment basis better than the existence of supernatural evil? Really, the events are horrifying that we hear about all the time, and I would suggest to you that scripture's explanation is by far the best explanation. If you believe God's word when it tells you there is a God, and there is heaven, why would you not believe God's word that tells you there is a hell and place of judgment, and personal supernatural evil?

Jesus, assuming those biblical truths, confronts them and he tells them basically, "Listen, you don't believe me because you are encased in lies. Your father, the likeness that you follow, is the devil. So, of course you reject the truth." Their response is this: "Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan?" That's a racial slur. They hate the Samaritans. It doesn't speak very well of their religion, does it? They are so puffed up in their own ethnicity and religion that they don't see others as made in the image of God. They put the slur out there and then they tell Jesus he's just crazy. He has a demon. "Are we not right in saying you are a Samaritan? You have a demon?" Jesus answered, "I don't have a demon. I'm honoring my Father."

Now he's building on this whole idea of "You are in the likeness of your father, Satan, lies, death." And he puts out this bold promise in verse 51: "Truly, truly, I say to you, anyone who keeps my word will never see death. I am the truth. I am the life." Jesus is giving these glorious promises and teaching on the nature of freedom in the middle of this intense conversation. Now, it builds. They say, "We now know that you are crazy. You are just crazy. Abraham died. The prophets died. The greatest people we know died. You are promising that we'll escape death? That there will be no death? Are you greater than Abraham? Are you greater than these prophets?"

Jesus then brings us back again to this theme in John. He says, "Listen, I'm not elevating myself. I'm not seeking my own glory. I'm seeking the glory of the Father. The Father glorifies me. I'm just here doing the Father's business. So, no, I'm not trying to make some claim that isn't right," even though he could make that claim. He has come to serve. Then he says, "If I tried to act like I didn't know God, then I would be the liar."

Alright, we are getting to the climax of the conversation. Jesus is saying very clearly, "You are of your Father, the devil. He has spoken lies. He is a murderer. I come in the name of my Father, seeking his glory, doing his will. I come bringing life. I come bringing the truth. Lies. Truth. Death. Life. Of course, you don't believe me. And that means," and they really don't want to hear this, "that means you don't know God and God's word has no place in you."

He has kind of removed Abraham now from the whole conversation. They are coming back, “We are children of Abraham. Abraham died. How are you not going to die?” Well now he reintroduces Abraham back in and he says this in verse 56: “Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.” What is he saying there? He is saying, “By the way, just so you don’t misunderstand me, Abraham was looking for my day. He was looking for me. He saw me and rejoiced.” And what is their response? “You’re not even 50 years old! Abraham lived 2000 years ago! You are crazy!” Right? He ends the conversation saying, “Truly, truly I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.” And he confesses the covenant name of God, Yahweh. He is claiming divinity. They pick up stones. They are ready to kill him and execute him. Because his hour has not yet come, he slips away.

Let me give you, based on that explanation of the text, seven statements about freedom. I’m just going to roll through them and list them out for you. If you are taking notes, you can take them down.

1. You won’t know freedom until you admit you’re enslaved.

They are in a condition of spiritual bondage, but they don’t know it. They don’t understand that condition. There is a blindness to it. I don’t know which is worse. I suppose you could make an argument to say if you’re enslaved and you know it, you are conscious of your suffering, and that’s bad in a certain way. But I would argue, to be enslaved, to be suffering, and not know that you are enslaved is a more dreadful condition.

2. Freedom is not about the absence of a master, but about having the right master.

Jesus isn’t offering you a freedom where you are not under a master. He is offering to be the master of your life. He is saying and he is teaching the clear scriptural teaching, in the words of Bob Dylan, “You’re gonna serve somebody.” Tim Keller does a great job if you want to go deeper on this. I would recommend some of the writings of Tim Keller. He does a good job of talking about the nature of freedom. The book *The Reason for God* would be an excellent resource, if you find the right chapter on that. It has influenced my thinking. But the idea here is: In order to exist, in order for our souls to have any sense of dimension and health, we need purpose. We need significance. We will either find that in God with God as our master, or we will seek it in something created. We will commit idolatry.

Many of us have known what it is to be workaholics or be enslaved to our careers or a relationship or a pleasure where we are investing in those things for our happiness, our ultimate satisfaction. Jesus is teaching here that really in the spiritual realm it comes down to one of two masters. You are either a son of the first Adam with Satan at its head, or you are a child of God with Jesus at its head. The key to freedom is about choosing the correct master.

3. The truth sets you free.

Freedom is a matter of knowing the truth about yourself, the truth about God, the truth about what God has done for you, and abiding in that truth: Jesus. All of this is summed up here as knowing Jesus, abiding in Jesus. Those that are arguing with Jesus in this passage are bound in slavery and they are in trouble, but they reject the truth, and because of that they remain in bondage.

4. Your master will give you either life or death.

According to your master, you will experience either life or death.

5. That means that freedom is a matter of identity.

You see, the whole conversation about who is your father is a conversation of: Is your identity in Christ? Your sin is forgiven? You are experiencing life and eternal life in him? Or is it a matter of: You don't know God? You are bound in this way of thinking and you don't know that it's based on lies?

Let me just take a break here from running through these statements. My wife has this practice of saying to our five sons - this is her philosophy and admonition in terms of finding a wife. She tells them this because we are praying for them to find a wife and become financially independent. It's a regular prayer of ours. She has this little image. She says, "Guys, all you have to do is: You run for God, and one day you'll look and there will be someone running beside you." I think it's funny and I always say, "Yeah, and in my case she was chasing me." But we all know that's not really true. Yeah, I don't know why she married me, but thank God she did.

I will then at certain times pull them aside and say, "Listen, Mom is right. But you do know you have to hunt, right?" I'm sorry. I know some of you are offended by that whole image, but the truth is that both hold an important truth. If you invest your life in a relationship: "I've got to find someone. I need the meaning and purpose." You may not articulate it in such a mundane way, but if that is the focus of your heart, it's not only idolatry leading to death, but it then spoils the very thing that you long for. So her advice to just run after Jesus is very good advice! Give God your heart and trust him with everything. Right? It's very good biblical advice. My advice is also good biblical advice, because when you run after God, you are going to tell him your desires. "God, I don't want to live with Mom and Dad and the dog. I want a wife!" I'm sorry, guys. I have no idea what you are thinking. I'm sure this is humiliating for you, but just pretend this is all hypothetical.

After you give your desires to God, there is biblical truth that speaks to this. A man then has the strength in God to say, "Hmmm, look! I like her!" He goes and he initiates, and if she says no he doesn't say, "Oh no, I'll be undone!" No. No. If she says no, hopefully she is a godly woman and she treats him with respect. She doesn't act silly and immature and make him feel embarrassed. In other words, my point is that when our hearts are set on Christ and we pour out our desires to him, he begins to give us instruction on how to live that out. What we find is, it's not just about a need being met, but it's about the development of my character and strength and preparation and so much more that's wonderful, right?

6. The truth is self-authenticating.

What do I mean by that? You shall know the truth. Jesus says this. He says, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth." What happens is you embrace Christ. You hold on. You remain. You center your life around Christ and you shall know the truth. Jesus is promising here that as you follow him, as you put your faith in him, as you trust in him, as you invest all that you are in all that he is, your eyes are opened. You are now moving out of that sphere of lies and death into the truth and the life and the abundance of God.

I'll give you teachings on tithing and encouragement to give at times. We have been in a season since just before Easter where I have been challenging you to tithe and to give 10%

of all your increase to God, and to pray about what you would give. Then, to also pray about God's provision, about being out of debt and walking in financial freedom.

That came to me as I was away in Colorado praying. I was on a little retreat. I was in an upstairs room. I wanted to really make it dramatic and say I was in the upper room praying, but it was just an upstairs room. I was seeking God and I was praying for this church to be out of debt, just because I had longed for us to have greater funds to do missions and to do the work of God. I truthfully was feeling financial pressure for myself and I was praying. I was praying, "Lord, I want to be debt-free. I want the church to be debt-free. I know you have the resources." I'm calling out to God and I was feeling great faith for this. As soon as that happened, as faith is rising up in my heart, I'm giving God all the reasons why he should say yes to this prayer. I'm reasoning with God. My faith level is going up.

Then you know what God says to me? He didn't speak to me, but in my heart God says, "Okay, you're telling me you have faith for this, so let's put your faith into practice. Let's talk now about your giving." I said, "Lord, we're not talking about my giving, we're talking about debt! We're talking about you getting rid of debt!" "No, I want you to look at how the church spends all its money. I want you to look at how you spend your money. I want you to now seek me about what you should give." Before I left that upper room, I had a whole new expression of faith in terms of our giving. I came home, met with my wife, and said, "Honey, I believe this is the amount we're supposed to give every week to God." She is an amazing woman. I don't know why she trusts me in that, but she says, "Okay, let's do it. I think you're crazy, but let's do it." She didn't quite say the crazy part, I don't think.

Oh, I didn't give you the punch line. Okay. I wish I could say to you at this moment that I'm debt free. That has not happened yet. It was a year that the Lord just put on my heart, and I don't even know that that's actually the promise. I just know that the Lord put this on my heart. I wanted to illustrate to you the self-authenticating part. Some of you have never settled this issue in your life. You have never settled that your money is not your money. It's God's money. You may say that, but it's not settled, and it's reflected in what you do with the money. But when you settle it and you say, "Okay, God. It may be a battle the rest of my life, but it's true, and I'm going to start with this principle of the tithe. I'm going to

give it to you. You just start there and every time Brian brings it up, I'm not going to get mad at him, because it's yours," and you walk that out.

You know what? You start to experience the fruit of that. You have now turned. You are walking in this reality of Christ and his abundance. You are leaving the whole idea that money is your God. You are breaking that idolatry. You are living in the truth and it's self-authenticating. You begin to experience the freedom of it. Then, what happens is, you have a conviction. You may be in some bible study or home group and someone says, "Oh, I don't believe about tithing. I don't believe about that. Pastors talk about that too much." You say, "Yeah, pastors probably do talk about that too much and the church doesn't always get it right," but you're not swayed. Because why? You have conviction. God has done a work of grace in your life.

We could go back to the whole dating theme and talk about temptation to sexual immorality and how that plays itself out in terms of seeking identity and seeking significance, and the fear of not being able to get someone unless that's a part of your life. When you settle that your sexuality belongs to God, and though you do it imperfectly and though you lack the strength, you confess your sin. You get over here and say, "God, this is who I am. This is my identity in you." Sex now is not THE thing in your life, and you begin to experience freedom.

7. Abiding leads to freedom, to authenticity, intimacy, and joy.

I've given you three words here that I think help unpack for us what spiritual freedom looks like. Let me just put up for you the promise that begins the passage. "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.'" What's promised here is: We abide, we hold onto Jesus and increase in knowledge. As we abide in his word, self-authenticating, we grow in the truth and we experience freedom.

I'm out of time. I'm so sorry, but I'm going to try to summarize. I'm really only about a third through the message. I want to try to summarize this. I want you just to look at what Jesus says at the end of the text. He says, "Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad." You remember, a lot of the conversation has been about Abraham, and Abraham being their father, and Jesus saying, "No, you're not in the likeness of Abraham at all." I told you he

kind of moved on in the conversation. He comes back at the end, just so there's no mistake, and he reintroduces this idea. I want to end with this -- how Abraham really illustrates the freedom that comes as a result of genuine faith, and that Jesus as the master teacher isn't just arguing with them, but he is weaving this theme throughout the conversation to teach us something.

Let me just give you a quick overview. Do you remember Abraham is promised a child? He is promised two things, really, that are the tangible, physical expression of a seven-fold promise. He is given seven promises: "I am going to bless you, I'm going to bless those who bless you, I'm going to curse those who curse you. Abraham, you are going to be a blessing to all the families of the earth. A tangible expression of that is going to be the land that I will give you, and your descendants. Your descendants are going to be like the sand on the seashore, like the stars in the heaven." He gives this promise to Abraham. There's just one problem. Abraham doesn't have any land. He is actually told to leave everything and follow God. He goes his whole life without this land, and he and Sarah don't have children.

So, you remember if you know the story, at 100 years of age, when he is 100, Sarah is 90, they have Isaac. They are given this child. It's obviously a miracle, but the year before this famous scene that happens, Sarah is 89, Abraham is 99. God sends some messengers and there tells them: "Next year at this time you are going to have a baby." What does Sarah do? She laughs. Scripture actually says she laughed to herself. There is this dramatic encounter where the Lord confronts her and says, "You laughed, but you are going to have a child." She denies it. "I didn't laugh." But God knows her heart and says, "No, you laughed."

If you've read the whole narrative, it looks a little sexist to be honest, because a few chapters earlier Abraham laughed. In fact, Abraham has this whole encounter with God where God comes and gives him all these promises. Abraham is an old man now and God says, "Alright. Let me just rehearse my promises to you. You are the father of a great nation -- all these things that I am going to use and do through you." And Abraham is like, "God, can we just get real for a moment?" I have this son by my servant, Hagar. I have this son Ishmael. I know he's not the fruit of the union that you promised to Sarah and me, but could you just bless this? Could you just bless my Ishmael and we could get on with this?" God says, "No, no, no, no. I'm giving you a new name. I have made a covenant with you. No, it's Sarah." And Abraham laughs.

Now, I don't know. I've often speculated that I think Abraham's laugh was the laugh you have when you are losing your mind. He has left everything. He has followed God for these promises and he's an old man! Every time he asks God, "Give me these promises," God just repeats the promises. Right? "I'm ready!"

The theme in the narrative is this theme of laughter. At 100 years of age, Sarah has a little boy. God tells her, "Name him Isaac, which means laughter." He laughs. And then Sarah -- can you imagine the unbridled joy she feels? She is 90 years old! She has lived with the shame of barrenness in a culture where a woman's significance was attached to her fruitfulness. She says, "I've got Isaac. Others will laugh with me. Can you believe what God has done?!"

Now Jesus, 2000 years later is saying, "I am the fulfillment of all that Isaac represented, and I am the fulfillment of all the promises given Abraham. And to be a child of Abraham, though I am a physical descendant of Abraham and a fulfillment of those promises, to be a real child of Abraham is to be in the likeness of Abraham and to leave everything to follow me. It is to abide in me. It is a genuine faith where you cast all to come and follow me and know life. Abraham longed to see my day and he did see it. He saw it in Isaac and he experienced me in the fulfillment of that promise in his life."

The reason that's significant - I told you this was a picture of freedom. Here is how I will end. In the very next chapter in Genesis, Genesis 22, what does Abraham do? He goes to the mountain in obedience to God and God says, "Put Isaac on the altar." And what does he do? He does. Why? He's free. You see, if your dream is the same as Abraham and Sarah: "I just want a child. God, just give me a child. I'll be happy." Your next chapter after God gives you a child is the fear of losing that child, because that's your hope.

In Abraham's experience he's learned: "My God raises the dead. My God gives life. Do you know what my God did? My wife was 90 years old and barren, and we had a son. I was 100. That's right. I had a boy at 100!" He's free. He's free because Abraham is abiding in the word of God. So Jesus leaves us with this place of saying, "Listen, I want to bless you. It's not that I want to make you miserable in life, but if you don't know me as the center of your life, you'll take all that stuff and you'll twist it and you'll try to make it God. It can't be God, and you'll spoil the very things that are precious to you. So, come and follow me. You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."