

The Truth Will Set You Free

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[0:00] And today we're going to look in particular at verses 31 and 32 of John chapter 8. Notice them again with me. To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.

Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. We are a very privileged people to be living in a free country. We enjoy great freedoms in the land that God has given to us.

Our Declaration of Independence says we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, and that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

And liberty is what we enjoy in our country. We are a free people. And that is a great blessing. Just Wednesday night, our President referred to the author of liberty as he laid out a new plan for our strategy in Iraq.

He said at the very end of his speech, We go forward with trust that the author of liberty will guide us through these trying hours. Now, presumably that was a reference to God.

[1:16] I wish he would just come out and say his name. He is the author of liberty. And that is exactly right. God does grant these liberties to us.

And while what the President was talking about is important, freedom for the country of Iraq, it pales in comparison to the freedom that is ours in Christ.

There are millions of free Americans in this country, and there are millions of free people all around the world that live in free and democratic countries who are not truly free.

Not free according to our Savior's definition of freedom here in John chapter 8. Because true freedom, you see, is found only in Christ.

Only in the truth of Jesus Christ, the Savior, who died for lost sinners. And so, if you aren't in Christ, if you don't know the truth of Christ the Savior, then you aren't really free whether you live in America or not.

[2:22] And true freedom will come to the Iraqi people not through the establishment of some sort of Western or Middle Eastern form of a democratic government, but rather through the proclamation of Jesus Christ.

That is how freedom will come to all men in the world. Only through Christ. And so, living in the United States doesn't make you truly free.

It is a great privilege. I do not mean to demean it in the least. We are a very privileged people to have a free country, but it is not true freedom unless you are in Christ.

So, we want to notice several things about our Savior's words this afternoon. First of all, why you need to be free. Why you need freedom. Secondly, how you can be free.

Thirdly, what that freedom will look like in your life. What does the life of a free person look like? And then, lastly, the centrality of truth. Freedom, freedom, freedom, and then truth.

[3:20] So, why do you need freedom? Freedom, and maybe the thought of me telling you that you need to be free inspires several responses from you. Maybe it inspires the response that it evoked from the Jews.

I don't need to be free. I am free. We're children of Abraham. We've never been enslaved to anyone. Apparently, they were forgetting a few things, like Egypt and Babylon, some other events in their history like that.

But, sure, okay, they're free people, and even then they were under Roman rule to an extent. But, anyway, okay, there are free people, and you may be sitting there thinking, I'm free. And so, I don't need to be told about freedom.

Slavery is something that is past and gone in our country. Something that no longer takes place here. Sadly, that's a mistaken view. Slavery still takes place in this country.

There's a highly profitable trafficking in human life that goes on within our borders. Well, that's not my problem, you say. That may be very true.

[4:27] Slavery, physical slavery, is not an issue for you. Or maybe you say, I am a slave. I'm a slave to my parents. I'm a slave to my teacher.

I'm a slave to my boss. They're slave drivers, and I don't like it. And if you're going to tell me how I can be free from them, then I'm all ears. Well, that's not really slavery. That's God's guidance in your life, to keep you from running amok, and going all over the map, instead of staying on the path that He has laid out for us.

But where you are a slave, Jesus makes abundantly plain to us. Whoever sins, He says, is a slave of sin. And everyone here in this room, at one time or another, was a slave to sin.

And some of you still are slaves to sin. You see, you aren't really free if you're following your master's sin.

Sin is a deceitful master. Slave traders today will go to other countries, and they will lie, and they will promise young girls and young boys freedom.

[5:37] You will be free. I'll take you to America. And you will be free. I'll deliver you from the poverty that you live in, from the difficult situation in your home. And I'll take you to America, and you will be free.

And sin does that too. It lies. And it promises you freedom. It says, I will set you free. You'll be free from the constraints of your cruel, slave-driving parents.

It says, you'll be free to pursue pleasure to the fullest. You'll be free to do as your friends do. You'll be free to live any way that you want to live.

That's what sin comes and says. Satan's a deceiver. He's the father of lies. That's the only language he knows how to speak. It's lies. And so, he's going to come telling you that sin will make you free.

You'll be free to do whatever you want. To live however you want. But just as that slave trader has deceived his ones that he's gathered up, and he brings them, and he sells them into slavery.

[6:41] He gives them to a new master, and the young girl is anything but free. She's forced into a life of prostitution or worse. The boy is forced into a life of drug running. That happens in our world today.

Slavery is not gone. And people are deceived. And so too, they would be far better off where they came from.

In poverty. Under their parents' roof still. Than in their current situation. And so it is with sin. It's promised you freedom, and so you've followed.

You've run after it. But you begin to find that you're not really free at all. Instead of pursuing things as you please, you've been dragged away, and you become ruled by your lusts.

They control you instead of you controlling them. Instead of sin being your servant to bring you pleasure and happiness, it becomes your master. Instead of great pleasure, sin brings you the worst of shame, and misery, and guilt weighing down on you, and there's nothing freeing about that.

[7:54] It's being enslaved. The guilty conscience torments you. Satan has you in his grasp. He himself has deceived you. And instead of the hoped-for freedom, you are a servant.

You couldn't give up your sin if you wanted to. That's not freedom. That's slavery. Anyone who sins is a slave of sin, says Jesus.

And it can be any sin that might enslave you. It might be rebellion against your parents. It could be the things that we think of as enslaving pornography, or alcohol, or other drugs.

It might be something like the lust for popularity. You know, you can get to the point where you can't live without somebody telling you how great you are, and you just crave that. That's a slave.

You're a slave to your lust for the favor of men. You can become a slave to cheating, a slave to profaning the Sabbath, and many other things. If you're indulging your sin, it's not because you're free to do so.

[8:58] It's because you're enslaved and you can do no other. Sin is a cruel taskmaster. It lies. It deceives. Oh, I'll set you free, but freedom is not what you find.

And if you're honest with yourself, right now, you know that you're not free. Oh, I like my sin, but you know deep down that it's making you miserable, guilty, and that you're not free at all.

Well, it's good that our Savior speaks then, because He tells us how to be free. You don't have to stay a slave to sin. It doesn't have to be that way. There's hope for you.

So, how can you be free? You've seen why you need to be free. How can it be? Notice verse 32.

Then, you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

Freedom comes with knowing the truth, Jesus says. The Jesus who says later in the Gospel of John that I am the way, the truth, and the life.

[10:01] You can be free from your being gripped and in bondage to sin by knowing the truth of Jesus Christ, the Savior. We've sung of Him just now. His atoning work on the cross that He's done on our behalf.

Jesus, when He was talking to Pilate, said, You are right in saying that I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world to testify to the truth.

Everyone on the side of truth listens to Me. What can you say? I need to know if I'm free. Because the truth will set you free, so do I have the truth?

Here's Jesus' test. Everyone on the side of truth listens to Me. It doesn't say just hears Me. You're hearing the words of Jesus today. You've heard them read.

It's more than just hearing the words. Are you listening to the words of Jesus? Are you heeding them? Are you living according to them? Are you obeying them? Are you following them?

[11:02] If you are listening to the words of Jesus, then you're on the side of truth. And that's the truth that will set you free. Free from that bondage to slavery and sin.

You know the Gospel truth. It's the truth about Jesus, and it's the truth that Jesus proclaimed. That's the truth that will set you free. Paul puts it in these terms in Romans 6.18.

You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. Well, hold on. Hold on. We're talking about freedom, and you say I get to be a slave to righteousness? We'll talk about that in a minute.

That sort of slavery is true freedom. But being a slave to sin, that is what you can be set free from by the work of Christ. Jesus has died for sinners like you and like me that we might not be in bondage to sin anymore.

That we might not be living in it and unable to do anything else anymore. He's died so that we can be free from that and walking in the way of truth.

[12:07] Freedom comes from Christ who has redeemed these purchased men for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. And so instead of having sin as your master, you can freely follow the Savior, serving Him.

Well, how is that true freedom, you ask? Living by Jesus' rules. Okay, you trust in Jesus. That makes you free. But I'm going to live by His rules? That's another form of slavery.

No, Jesus gives the freedom from the guilt of sin. He releases you from that guilt. Taking the punishment, He frees you from the fear of punishment. The judgment of God because He takes that judgment in your place.

He frees you from the bondage of corruption. He makes you free to serve God. Free to enjoy the privilege of being a son of God who gets to stay in the house.

His status isn't temporary and uncertain, Jesus says. The son's position is certain. There's freedom. And being a son of God, free to be His child. Man was made to honor God.

[13:13] And only in honoring God, only in living according to His Word, can we be truly free. Listen to where your servitude will end you. Say, well, that sounds like slavery to me.

Well, listen to where your slavery to sin will end you. Look up at verse 24. I told you that you would die in your sins. If you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins. If you don't believe the truth about Jesus, you will die in your sins. That's where your slavery will land you. And that is not freedom. Jesus makes you free to live.

And to live eternally. That is freedom. D.A. Carson says, true freedom is not the liberty to do anything we please. That's sin's lie to us.

It's 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 pleases us.

[14:14] God changes our heart and He makes us want to live according to His Word. And so it's not slavery. We're glad to do it. We're eager to obey our Master. The Lord Jesus Christ.

And so you run to this Jesus and you trust Him to set you free because if the Son sets you free, you will be truly free. You will be free indeed. No slavery about it.

So you run to Jesus and you throw yourself on Him today. You listen to the witness of the Holy Spirit testifying that He is the Son of God, the King, the great Emancipator, the One who is able to liberate, to free you.

How can you be free? You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free. And the truth is, Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the worst. That's the truth.

And you believe in this Jesus and you will be free. Well, what will that freedom look like? What does the life of a freed person look like as opposed to the life of a slave?

[15 : 15] Well, it's more than just an initial interest. That's what Jesus was dealing with here in this passage. Look at verse 30. Even as He spoke, many put their faith in Him. Many believed in Him.

But this wasn't a genuine faith. You notice that's who He's talking to in verse 31. To the Jews who had believed, had faith. They believed the words that Jesus spoke. There was a moment where they believed Him, but you heard the rest of what Jesus said.

These people still wanted to kill Him. They weren't following the will of the Father in Heaven, but of their father the devil. This wasn't a genuine faith these people had. And so they weren't living the life of a freed person.

They were still enslaved. So Jesus says, it's not something that's fading. The life of freedom isn't just something like in the parable of the sword that springs up briefly and then is choked out by the cares of the world or when it meets trouble and tribulation, withers away.

No, true faith is something that endures. And so, a free person will continue in Jesus' Word. Notice what he says in verse 31. If you hold to My teaching, you are really My disciples.

[16 : 25] That's if you abide in My Word. If you remain in My Word. If you dwell in My Word. If you stay there. It's more than just spending one night and moving on. It's abiding there.

It's setting up camp there in the words of Jesus. If you abide in My Word, you are truly My disciples. And so, true freedom, someone that's truly free is someone that is abiding in the Word of God, remaining in it.

Not just a passing thing, not just a passing interest in God's Word, but abiding, remaining in it. That means living according to it. Romans 6.22 But now that you have been set free from sin, what's going to happen if you're set free from sin?

Now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness. And the result is eternal life.

The life of a freed man will be a holy life. A life lived according to God's Word. A life lived abiding in God's Word. A life of faithful service to God, obeying His commandments.

[17 : 33] We've probably beat this illustration to death, but we're going to use it again. If you've got a great big train, big locomotive, and a whole bunch of boxcars strung out behind it, that train is free to travel on the tracks that were made for it.

Now if that train starts looking around and going, I don't like this so much. I can only go where the tracks go. I want to go over there, out in that field. And so the train derails and goes off in the field, and how far does it get?

Not far. It gets stuck in the field because a train was made to go on the tracks. And that train is free as long as it's on the tracks that were made for it.

And that's what God has designed us to be. Like that train. The tracks are His Word. It sets out the path for us where we ought to go, where we ought to walk. And as long as we're on that track of God's Word, we're free.

But as soon as we start looking, oh, my lust is pulling me over there. I'd like to go in that field. If I was really free, I would be able to go over there. But as soon as you start over there, you see that that's not freedom.

[18 : 40] That's going back to slavery to sin. I'd really like to be able to not report all of my income on my taxes. I'm going to go off the track over there because I want to be free to do that sort of thing.

That's not freedom. You're going back to bondage to sin. You're free to stay on those tracks. True freedom is living according to God's Word. It's a life of holiness. It's a life of discipleship.

This is what discipleship is. If you hold to my teachings, if you abide in my Word, you are truly my disciples. A life of freedom is a life of discipleship.

A life of following Christ and His words. Not a life of living however you want to live. That's not freedom. But living according to God's Word. It's abiding in His truth.

It's denying yourself, taking up your cross and following Him. And so if He says, this is my day. One day in seven is mine. Then you don't say, you know, I'm free to do whatever I want on the Lord's day.

[19:38] No! I'm free to keep His day holy unto Him. A life of freedom will look like a life of obedience.

That's what it is. And so, you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free. Set you free to abide in the Word of Christ. To live according to that Word.

And to not stray from it. And so, in the last place this afternoon, we see the centrality of truth. The great importance of truth for every area of life and godliness.

We've talked about how it ought to govern our lives. It's the tracks on which we must stay. The truth of God's Word is how we must order our life. Let's talk about some other ways that truth must be central.

Why it occupies the place it does in our church. Truth must govern the worship of the church. What we aim to do here each Lord's day is to ensure that the truth of God's Word is proclaimed.

[20:37] We want it to be read. We want it to be prayed. We want it to be sung. We want it to be preached. The truth of God's Word is central to everything that we do here. Why is that the case?

Well, the truth is what sets men free. And every week, every week, people walk through the back doors of our church who are not free. Slaves walk through the doors of our church every week.

And if it's the truth that sets slaves free, then we want them to hear the truth. We're not going to feed you a bunch of pop psychology and self-help garbage that's not going to help anybody.

We're going to tell you the truth that's able to set men free. We're going to preach God's Word.

We're going to take it book by book and chapter by chapter. And summaries of the truth that are in there.

And we're going to proclaim the truth because that's where freedom is found. Not in seven steps to a happier life. And so, as long as slaves are coming through the doors of this church, the truth will be proclaimed by the grace of God here.

[21:39] Because it's the truth that sets men free. It's what saints must have if they would be growing in grace. Every week, through the doors of this church, come freed men.

Men who have been set free by the work of Christ. And how is it then that they are to be living?

They're to be abiding in the Word. Abiding in Jesus' Word. Living according to that truth.

And so, every week, what are we going to do? Tell you what I think? My best shot at it? My ideas? The most popular thing in bookstores today?

No. The truth. The truth of God's Word because this is how we must live. This is how freed men live. This is what will set men free and it's what will enable freed men to live as they should.

And so, as long as God blesses us here, the truth is what will be proclaimed here. It's central. It's vital. We must live according to it. The truth must govern the outreach of the church.

[22:37] It's not social work that sets men free. It's not a false gospel that sets men free. It is the truth. And so, the primary task of a missionary is to proclaim the truth.

It's why we're very particular in who we support on the mission field. We believe the truth is vital and so we support people that believe what we believe the Bible teaches. The truth.

That's why we support missionaries that are about the business of proclaiming that truth.

Establishing churches that will continue in and continue to proclaim that truth. And training men who will be able to lead those churches in the truth.

That's what the nature of the outreach of the church, the mission work of the church, is about proclaiming the truth. I've been in a communist country.

I've looked into the face of people that have never heard the gospel in their life. And the government wants it that way. They're slaves to their own sin and their own passions and their own musts.

[23:40] But they're also slaves to a government that doesn't want them to know the truth. And I've had the privilege of knowing that my friend had just put a Bible into their hands and then been able to look at them and say, you find the truth and the truth will set you free.

And that's the only thing that can help them. I can do all sorts of things that are good and fine to do. I can teach them English. Good. That's fine. And that's a legitimate thing to be doing.

I can give them a cup of cold water. That's good. That's fine. But if I'm not proclaiming the truth, I'm not doing them any good at all. So the truth must govern what goes on in the church, the outreach of the church.

And we've already said that it must govern our daily lives. We must be in the Word. If you would know the truth and how to live as a freedman, you better be studying this Word, reading it, learning from it, ordering your business, your schoolwork, your household according to that Word, following Christ in each area of your life that this Word speaks to.

Does your life show that you are abiding in the Word of Jesus? Does your life show that you are truly free? Not living the way you want to, but living the way that God tells you to.

[24 : 56] You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free. To forsake the truth of God's Word is to embrace slavery. And nobody would, knowing we do that, say, oh yeah, I want to be a slave.

No. Oh, as long as you're rejecting this truth, you're embracing slavery. You're a servant to your sin, to Satan who is seeking to lead you astray. The Emancipation Proclamation was a declaration of freedom for all persons held as slaves within any state or designated part of a state in the United States.

It was a declaration of freedom made by Abraham Lincoln to free the slaves from the country. And it promised that the executive government of the United States, including the military and naval authority thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of such persons and will do no act or acts to repress such persons or any of them in any efforts they may make for their actual freedom.

The government will maintain the freedom of these slaves that we're proclaiming the freedom of here. That's what the Emancipation Proclamation said. And in a measure that declaration did some good for slaves held in the United States.

But even the government of our great land, even the military of our great land that does continue this day to protect our freedoms for which we should be extremely grateful.

[26 : 28] Even then, those words are written by fallible men. Our military, our government, our country is not invincible. Our freedoms in this land could be taken away.

That's possible. Unlikely as it may seem to us, that's possible. Because we're men. We're humans. But listen to what God says. The freedom that God gives is not fallible.

It cannot be taken away. Isaiah 61, where in the Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to blind up the brokenhearted to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners.

That's what Christ said and that's what He came and did. He proclaimed freedom for the captives and if the Son has set you free, you are free indeed. And no one can take that away from you.

Satan can't take it away.

Our government can't take it away. No one else in the world can take it away. Jesus, God can perfectly protect the freedom that He has given to you. And so far greater than the Emancipation Proclamation is the declaration in Isaiah 61, that Jesus came to proclaim freedom for the captives because when He proclaims it, it is so.

[27 : 47] If the Son shall set you free, you will be free indeed. And so if He has set you free today, you give Him thanks. You give Him praise. Thank Him that you live in a free country and then thank Him all the more that Jesus has set you free because that is true freedom.

And if you're here today and you know you're still a slave to sin, know you're still dwelling in it, in your sin, and you're trying to convince you, no, I really am free, be honest with yourself and admit that you're a slave to your sin and say, God, have mercy on me.

Show me the truth of Jesus. Help me to trust in Him and to run to Him. And God will begin a work in you when you come to Him in genuine faith. And you know from this morning that if He begins a work, He's going to continue it.

And then He's going to finish it. And what a comfort that is for us. We can't lose the freedom that God has given us. And so take great delight in it today that God, through His Son, Christ, has set us free from our sins.

And He's going to finish it.