

The Freedom of True Discipleship

John 8:31-36

43-46

We come now to our study of the Gospel of John, and I want to encourage you to open your Bible to eighth chapter of John. If you didn't bring a Bible with you, there should be one in the pew rack there. You'll want to follow along because we're going to be examining closely what is a very, very important portion of Holy Scripture. Just about every verse in the Gospel of John is loaded with divine truth. The depths of this Gospel we have not plumbed by any means. Its range is vast and eternal because we're dealing with the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. All passages in the Gospel of John seem to be highlights, but this one in a sense rises up, maybe above even the other peaks in its importance. And what I'm speaking of is chapter 8, verses 31 to 36. We're going to be looking at this in our ongoing study of John's Gospel, so let me read these verses, and you'll quickly see the importance of this section.

We'll start actually in verse 30. "As He spoke these things, many came to believe in Him," speaking of Jesus. "So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed him, if you continue in My Word, then you are truly disciplines of mine, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free. They answered Him, 'We are Abraham's descendants and have never yet 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 commits sin is the slave of sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.'"

What jumps out of this text are the words of our Lord in verse 31. "If you continue in My Word, then you are truly disciples of Mine." This is about being a true disciple. This is an urgent and important subject. Many people profess Christ. Many people declare themselves to be believers in Christ. Many people give witness to the fact that they are Christians. In fact, that's fairly common even in our culture, but who is a true Christian? Who is a real disciple? This is an urgent and essential question. You have to be able to answer it for yourself, and you have to be able to answer it for those around you. It's not superficially answered.

Listen to the words of the apostle Paul who addresses this important matter in 2 Corinthians 13:5, "Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith. Examine yourselves or do you not recognize this about yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you unless indeed you fail the test." Paul is saying, "Test yourselves to see whether you're really in Christ. See if you can pass the test." Well, that is a similar issue to the very words of Jesus about being a true disciple of Mine. Who is a true disciple? Who is an *alēthōs mathētai*, a true learner, a true follower of Christ? True in the sense of real, genuine, authentic.

Now, this is a very important question for us and a very important question at this juncture in the Gospel of John because we have seen indications of faith and belief. We have seen them since the beginning of the gospel. We have seen true faith such as in the case of the early disciples in chapter

one. And we've seen less than true faith such as those who believed in chapter two, but Jesus didn't commit Himself to them because He knew what was in their heart and He knew their faith wasn't the real thing. It wasn't a true faith.

Nicodemus represents those people, and he articulated that they did believe that Jesus was a teacher come from God because no one could do the works that He did unless God had sent Him, but that's not sufficient to save. There were people, we've learned, all the way into chapter 6 who had called themselves disciples, identified as disciples, but turned their back and walked away from Christ. "Walked no more with Him," chapter 6, verse 66. The prototype, we've already been introduced to, is Judas Iscariot. "Judas - " Jesus says in chapter 6, verse 70 and 71, " - is a devil and a betrayer." But the disciples don't recognize that. In fact, even at the end of his life in the upper room the night of His betrayal, Jesus said, "One of you will betray Me," and they didn't all point at Judas. They said, "Is it I? Is it I? Is it I?" Were they so insecure about the genuineness of their own salvation? Were they so blind to the greed and the avarice and the deceptions of Judas? How hard is it to tell? This is an urgent issue. There were believers who turned their back and walked away from Christ.

Now, we meet another group of believers here in verse 30 who came to believe in Him. He refers to them as, "Those who had believed," in verse 31. And yet I want you to know how these people are referred to, these same people in verse 44. "You are of your father, the devil." How can it be that people who believe in Him, whose faith He acknowledges by His own words could be at the same time children of the devil? Well, we already know there is such a thing as false discipleship and false faith and defection. As I said, we saw that in chapter 6. We know something of the pathology of false discipleship, something of the being attracted by the crowd and the supernatural and wanting your needs met and being supplied with food and having miracles done on your behalf. We know the kinds of things that lead to superficial faith that's not real and genuine, but we haven't really had a definitive statement about what the test of true faith is until we come to this passage. This becomes a very critical section of Scripture.

Now, it's not a new issue. If you go back to the Gospel of Matthew, which in the purposes of the Holy Spirit appears first in the New Testament, we read in Matthew these words. Chapter 7, verse 21, the Sermon on the Mount. "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven. But he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' and then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you. Depart from me you who practice lawlessness!'" These are people who are believers. They say, "Lord, Lord." They say, "We prophesied in your name. We acted as agents on your behalf, cast our demons, performed miracles." He says, "I don't know you." And there weren't a few; there were many. There will be many who say such things.

In Matthew 13, our Lord gives us a picture of the kingdom, and it's a fascinating picture as He describes the nature of the kingdom. Perhaps the most memorable of all his parables in that chapter is the parable of the soils in which we find out that there will be people who make a superficial commitment to Christ such as the rocky soil and the weedy soil. It's superficial. It's temporary, and when tribulation or persecution comes along or because of the love of riches or the cares of this world, they never bear fruit. They wither and die. In fact, Luke 8:13 describes such people as, "Those who believe for a while. Those who believe for a while." And then they don't believe, and like those in chapter 6, verse 66, they walk away.

The apostolic writers including John make much of this important issue. Listen to John, the writer of the gospel when he writes his first epistle. He says this in chapter 2, verse 19, "They went out from us. They were not really of us, for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us. But they went out so that it would be shown that they all are not of us." John is saying, there are going to be people who are going to be part-time, superficial, shallow, who won't last, who will go out from us and demonstrate that they really are anti-Christ. That's the term he uses in the previous verse. The writer of Hebrews addresses this multiple times, but at the end of chapter 10 he says in verse 38, quoting from Habakkuk, "But my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul." And earlier he said, "You have need of endurance." There are people who endure, persevere, remain faithful to the end, and then there are those who are defectors. Again, the prototype of all spiritual defectors, all false disciples is none other than Judas himself.

So how do we tell? We've all had that experience. We know Jesus in Matthew 13 also told the parable about the wheat and tares growing together, and that we would be unable to tell them apart in every case. Some cases clearly we can. By their fruits we can know them, but sometimes it will be hard to distinguish and the only distinguishing will come at the end of the judgment when the angels do the work of God and separate the wheat from the tares. We also know the parable of the dragnet. The kingdom is like a dragnet that drags the bottom of the Sea of Galilee, for example, and pulls in all kinds of things useful and useless. And the kingdom is going to collect all kinds of things. We also know the parable of the mustard tree, that the kingdom is going to grow out of all proportion to its real life, and it's going to be full of all kinds of birds.

So how do we know who's real? We all have this experience. There's not a week that goes by in my life in which there's not a discussion about, is this person saved? Is this person not saved? Is this a true Christian, a false Christian? How do we know? How do we tell? It's constant. You have the same conversations. You may be asking about your spouse. You may be asking about your children. You may be asking about a neighbor, somebody that you know. You may be asking about a person who is at work and talks about being a Christian, but you are wondering if it's legitimate because you see the behavior. You may be asking about a person you see occasionally at church who is here less than not here, so you kind of wonder. We all have this.

Going back in my life, my best friend in high school, we did gospel evangelism together as high school kids. Went away to college and declared himself an atheist. My best friend in college, we were co-captains of the football team, was headed for seminary. He essentially denied the faith and walked away. One of my best friends in seminary, his father was the dean of the seminary. After he graduated, he set up a Buddhist altar in his house. So we all deal with this. We all are asking the question all the time who is real? Who is genuine? Now, we don't ask the question necessarily about everybody, but there are some people that we're asking the question about, and we might even be wondering for our own condition.

There are many who believe, but may not be real. We need to know that. Why do we need to know that? Because we need to know their true condition, right? So that we can call them to true repentance and salvation. We need to know. We don't want to take this for granted just because somebody says they believe in Jesus. You can't take that for granted. You don't want to just with all good intentions and good will, just settle on that whether it looks legitimate or not. Judgment begins

at the house of God. You've got to start with the people who are making the profession. So here we meet some Jews who, according to verse 30 and 31, had believed in Jesus. They believed because initially it's kind of easy to believe. You're drawn by the crowd, as we saw in chapter 6, fascinated by the supernatural. He's healing people. He's casting out demons. He's giving free food, wonderful meals. The battle for bread, of course, occupied everybody's life. He's doing all those kinds of things that provide amazing benefits. It all seems so wonderful. He's promising forgiveness of sin. He's promising heaven, all of that.

People still seek Jesus on the basis of that. They still come after Him initially on that basis, people who are seeking personal fulfillment, people who want a better life, people who want answers, people who are tired of their weakness, tired of falling to temptation, people who are weary of bad habits, who want more out of life, people who want to escape fear, want to feel secure, people who want some hope in the life to come, afraid of death, seeking heaven, desiring spiritual help, wanting to belong to a loving group. For all those reasons, starting to believe in Jesus is easy. A lot of people do that, but when they start in that direction and the world, the flesh, and the devil fully empowered by their own fallen nature starts to pull hard against Christ; the half believer, loving sin because half believers still love their sin, and unwilling to yield to the hard demands of true repentance and humble submission to Christ falls back. It may take a little while. It may take a long time.

Shallow, temporary, half faith is an important reality, and it's all the time an important reality in John's day and in our day and all in between. So, again, we come back to this question. How do we know who is a true believer? Now, back into the setting, our Lord is in the city of Jerusalem. They have just been celebrating the Feast of Booths. We know all about that where He declared Himself to be the Living Water and the Light. He's there with those Jewish people in the same setting in Jerusalem 6 months before his death. He has been rejected by the leaders. They want him dead. In fact, the last verse of chapter 8 indicates they picked up stones to throw at Him to try to stone Him on the spot, something they had tried previously; not only in Jerusalem, but even as we shall see in His hometown of Nazareth.

So the leaders have rejected Him. They wanted Him dead. He exposed their hypocrisy. He confronted their false and deceptive religion. They wanted Him dead, but while their hostility was escalating and would escalate all the way to the cross, there were people who were attracted to Him and they were believing. They were believing in Him. And our Lord directly confronts that beginning belief, the nature of that initial belief speaks directly to them.

I was reading this week J.C. Ryle, and he had an interesting little paragraph in the part that I was reading in which he said, "This is the most dangerous spiritual condition any person can ever be in where you're halfway to Christ; inclined to Jesus, inclined to the truth about Jesus, wanting what Jesus provides and what He offers, but not willing to give in to the full demands that He lays on the sinner of repentance and faith in Him, declaration of His lordship, turning from sin toward righteousness." He says, "That is the most dangerous position to be in because that's the path of apostasy and if you go down that path and you reject Christ in the end, you could be an apostate." And it's impossible to be renewed again to repentance, and you're guilty of trampling under foot the blood of the covenant. And that is going to bring about the severest judgment in hell. So, Ryle is right when he says, "This is the most dangerous place to be." You'd be better off to be a pagan in some foreign land who never heard about Jesus than to be halfway to Christ, exposed to the truth, and unwilling to let go of the world. To hang on to carnal pleasure in the face of all that Christ offers – very dangerous, very dangerous. Reaching out toward Jesus not letting your grip go on the

pleasures and the comforts of the world; these are believers at the beginning of this section who turn out to be nothing more than the children of the devil. Wow. These are people who are slaves of sin, as our text says. They are children of Satan. They are haters of truth. They are blasphemers and they are murderers. Look at verse 44. “You are of your father the devil. You want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning. He doesn’t stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature. He is a liar, the father of lies, but because I speak the truth, you do not believe me.”

He stopped there long enough to say they believed He was from God. They believed He was very – some of them did, that He was likely the prophet of Deuteronomy 18. Some of them said, “He is the prophet. He is the Christ, the Messiah.” They believed that, but His words were what turned them off. They were far too indicting and far too demanding. And because He speaks the truth, “You do not believe Me. You do not believe Me.” Verse 47, “He who is of God hears the words of God.” It always comes down to the words, always comes down to the words. These people who believed like many others that Jesus could be the prophet, could be the Messiah, was sent from God, was a teacher, was a miracle worker, all of that – were still the children of Satan, the haters of the truth. And at the end of the ministry of Jesus, they’re right there screaming, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” with everybody else.

And by the way, when He came into the city of Jerusalem in Passion Week, they had affirmed Him as the Messiah, threw palm branches at His feet. And masses, tens of thousands of them had done this, but by the time you get to the upper room and true believers, there’s 120. False faith is everywhere, very common and very dangerous.

So, as we come to this text, this is a very important portion of Scripture for us, and I want you to see two clear realities, just two. One, the benchmark of true discipleship. Two, the benefit of true discipleship. The benchmark and the benefit. Mental assent to Jesus, not enough, not enough. “The devils believe and tremble,” James 2 says. They have orthodox theology. Mental assent is not enough. What is the benchmark? Go to verse 31. Here it is: “So Jesus was saying to those Jews - ” Remember, whenever John uses Jews, he’s talking about prominent leaders primarily, but it would also encompass those who followed them. “Was saying to those Jews who had believed Him – ” here’s the benchmark, “ – if you continue in My Word, then you are truly disciples of Mine.” What is the benchmark? Perseverance, or if you want another word: endurance, endurance. Perseverance, endurance. That’s the issue. How can you tell a true believer? Perseverance, endurance. That’s the benchmark. If you continue in My Word.” That simple statement ought to be underlined in everyone’s Bible and everyone’s mind. “If you continue in My Word.” What does that mean? Obedience to everything He has said, a life pattern of obedience. That’s why the Great Commission, Matthew 28:19, 20 is, “To go into all the world and teach them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.” That’s part and parcel of being saved.

What happened when you were saved is you confessed Jesus as what? As Lord, Jesus as Lord. That’s the great Christian confession. Jesus is Lord, *kurios*, I am *doulos*, His slave. He is my Master, my Lord, and that essentially defines what it means to be obedient. He is the Master. I’m the slave. He is the Sovereign. He is the Ruler. He gives the orders and the commands. I respond in loving obedience. Now, that is the distinction that our Lord made on the Sermon on the Mount. Remembering how He ended that sermon in Matthew 7, He said, “Everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them, does them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and slammed against that house,

and it didn't fall for it had been founded on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, the floods came, the winds blew, slammed against that house, and it fell, and great was its fall."

The storm is judgment, and the house that falls is the house of the one who said but didn't do. It's not about profession. It's about continued loving obedience. This becomes clear through really all the gospel records, but listen to Matthew 12 and verse 50, "Whoever does the will of My Father – " Jesus said, " – whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is my brother and sister and mother." That is another way of saying, "He has a relationship with me, whoever does the will of My Father." Same thing as what was in the Sermon on the Mount. That may not be easy to do that. Listen to chapter 10, verse 22, "You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved." Enduring not only the good times, but persecution, hatred, even martyrdom. This marks a true believer. A true believer is marked by perseverance, by endurance. His faith does not fail. His faith does not fail. Matthew 24:13, "The one who endures to the end, he will be saved." The one who endures to the end.

Now, this is a major theme for John and it's most opened up for us in the upper room the night that Jesus met with His disciples to share the Passover. So turn to John 14 for just a minute because it's important to get this, and this is language you're very familiar with. We're just pulling it all together around this text, John 14, verse 15. "If you love me – " this is not a request. This is a statement of fact. "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." Down in verse 21, "He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me, and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him." Verse 24, "He who does not love Me, does not keep My words and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me." When you obey the Word of God, you are giving evidence of love that is the product of true regeneration.

Romans 5 says, "God has shed His love abroad in our hearts." Those that are genuine believers are literally filled with love. The fruit of the Spirit is love and all its manifestation. So love shows itself, first of all, in eager, willing, joyful obedience, even under duress, persecution, suffering, and facing death. In the fifteenth chapter of John there is the same statement made in different words. Verse 10, John 15:10, "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in His love." How do we know the Son loved the Father? How do we know the Son loved the Father? The Son says, "You know I love the Father because I obeyed the Father, because I did what the Father commanded me to do. I did only what the Father commanded me to do."

As the Son demonstrates obedience and love to the Father, we demonstrate obedience and love to the Son. That's the pattern. That's how we demonstrate the genuineness of our conversion. Verse 14, "You're My friends if you do what I command you." By the way, this is what it means to abide. Go back to verse 7, "If you abide in Me and My words abide in you, you ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you." What does it mean to abide in Christ? It means to be in a true, saving union with Christ. How do you know that's a reality? Because you know His Word and you are lovingly and eagerly obedient to it. Not perfect. You fail. You sin. You stumble, but you hate the sin and you hate the stumbling. You're motivated by love to endure.

John can't let go of this, so in his first epistle, as he writes, he says this, chapter 2, verse 4, "I have come to know Him. The one who says I have come to know Him and does not keep His

commandments is a liar.” Wow. You say you know Him, but you don’t keep His commandments, that’s a lie. The truth is not in him. Pretty simple. “But whoever keeps his Word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this, we know that we are in Him.” That’s what it means to abide, sharing life in Him. “The one who says he abides in Him, ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.” And how did Christ walk? In obedience to the Father, and if you say you belong to Christ, then you walk in obedience to Christ as Christ walked in obedience to the Father.

So what is the mark of a true believer? It’s not a profession. It’s not some past event. It is a continuing loving obedience. Obedience out of love. You can’t separate keeping commandments from love. They’re all mingled in those passages in the upper room. John also is important. It says its important for us to acknowledge that part of obeying is obeying the truth as sound doctrine. So in 2 John 9, he says, “If anyone goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, he doesn’t have God. The one who abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.” If you have an errant Christology, if you err regarding who Christ is, and a lot of people say, “I believe in Christ,” but it’s the wrong Christ. It’s the wrong Christ, not the Biblical Christ. You don’t know God either. Sound theology and sound practice go together.

This is an urgent issue with the apostle John so much so that in his first epistle, if I can go back there for just a moment in chapter 3 and verse 24 he says it again. “The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him and he in Him.” And then in chapter 5 he says it again. In chapter 5, verse 3, “This is the love of God that we keep His commandments, and His commandments are not burdensome.” So we are marked by our perseverance in loving obedience to the Word of God. That’s how you know a true believer. That’s how you know, and in the midst of persecution, persecution will not destroy his faith. Persecution will reveal the legitimacy of his faith, Peter says, and that will be the proof of his faith, which is a gift. You should pray for persecution. You should pray for difficulty. You should pray for suffering if you have doubts about the legitimacy of your salvation. Pray for suffering. Pray for dire circumstances, and you will be given the greatest gift. If your faith survives, you’ll know it’s the real thing. So where there’s no perseverance, there’s no salvation.

So if you’re asking yourself, “What about so-and-so? They don’t come to church. They don’t show an interest in the things of Christ – pretty easy to answer the question. The benchmark is enduring faith, and that’s a heavenly gift that cannot die because enduring faith, saving faith is a gift from God, Ephesians 2:8 and 9. That’s why the devil tried to destroy Job’s faith and couldn’t do it. The devil tried to destroy Peter’s faith and couldn’t do it. The devil assaulted Paul and couldn’t destroy his faith because saving faith cannot be destroyed. The kind of faith that Judas had collapsed just on the prospect that he wasn’t going to get as much out of this deal as he thought he deserved.

So what is the benchmark then of true discipleship? It is perseverance and endurance in loving obedience to the Word of God. Now, secondly, I want to talk for a few minutes about the benefit of true discipleship, the benefit. We talked about the benchmark. Here is the benefit, and the benefit is clear, and it’s in one simple statement, which is then expanded in the conversation, but the statement is in verse 32. “You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” Those are powerful concepts aren’t they? You hear a lot about truth and freedom, truth and freedom. It seems like that’s what people exist to find out, to find the truth and be free. Very popular, very pursued realities. Truth and freedom.

Nobody is looking for ignorance. Nobody is pursuing ignorance. Nobody is pursuing bondage. You

know any people who are looking for bondage? You know any people who are trying really hard to get into prison and you know people who are trying to be stupid all their life and avoid information? No. People are looking for truth and freedom. The heart is driven in that direction. The unfortunate reality is they're looking in all the wrong places. They want the truth that frees them from their confusion, their lack of wisdom, their struggles, their troubles, their dissatisfactions, their unfulfilled dreams and ambitions. They want the truth that frees them from fear, fear of disease and death and the mystery of life and eternity. And the search goes on in every library and every university, in every school and every classroom, every courtroom. And deep, deep down in the souls of men, the search goes on for truth and the freedom from the bondage of ignorance.

In 1883, there was born a Jewish German man by the name of Franz Kafka. If you've studied philosophy or literature, European literature, you know about Franz Kafka. He was an existentialist. He was also what we would call, I guess, a surrealist. He created an existential world of his own making, of his own musings, of his own realities that was surreal. It was disconnected from normal people's thinking so that when you read Kafka you feel like you're – and he died in 1924, when surrealism as a view in itself was only in its insipient years. Now, almost everything in our world is a chase for what is surreal and fantasy world has trumped almost, in our time, reality.

But in his day being a surrealist was kind of a novel thing, and he wrote these stories and these books and portrayed this surreal world that was in some way, his answer to the confusion of life. Of course, Kafka was on a relentless search for truth, and my favorite thing that he wrote, I'll just give you the condensed look at it. A solitary stranger picking his way through rubble of a city that's been completely destroyed. Everywhere there is rubble, scorched earth, total disaster, death. He wanders around in this and finally finds a building, one solitary building standing. It's a very tall, cement apartment building. So he goes in the door and he goes up the concrete stairs all the way to the top, and it's totally dark and he finally gets to the top floor, trying to find someone. He sees a long, dark hallway, and he goes down that because he can see a flickering light at the very end of the hallway. He comes to the flickering light at the end; he turns in and finds it's a little bathroom.

He walks into the little bathroom and there to his amazement is a man sitting, fishing in the bathtub, and the bathtub, he observes, is empty. The visitor says in Kafka's words, "You're not going to catch anything." And the defiant fisherman says, "I know," and he keeps on fishing. This is Kafka's view of higher education. Looking for what's not there while the world is being blown to bits, trying to find truth in all the wrong places. This would be 2 Timothy 3:7, "Ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." That's humanity's futile effort, and eventually they want to include religion in their search, and, of course, that's where the Jews were. They thought they were coming to the truth; they had come to the truth and knew the truth. The problem is that for unbelieving people, even when the truth shows up, they reject it.

Romans 1:18 says, "It is characteristic of fallen people to suppress the truth in unrighteousness." That's what they do. They suppress it. You can pick the university of your choice. Go there. Mingle among the tens of thousands of students who are searching for the truth and offer them the truth, and see how well you are received. Go to the philosophy department. Tell them you want to lecture on the truth, that you know the truth. You know the truth from top to bottom, side to side; you're here to reveal completely the truth. See how welcome you are. Talk about Jesus Christ and the truth. Talk about the Gospel and the truth. Talk about sin and judgment. Talk about righteousness and heaven. You will not be welcome because it is the nature of fallen man to suppress the truth even when it shows up, and it was true of the Jews.

But verse 32 says, here is the benefit of believing, true belief, true discipleship. "You will know the truth. You will know the truth." It's not so bold to say, "I know the truth." You will know the truth. Well, what truth is he talking about? Well, he's talking about spiritual truth, eternal truth, salvation truth. I love the phrase in Ephesians 4:21, "Truth is in Jesus," Paul says. "Truth is in Jesus." That's the only place you're going to find it. That's the only place. If you don't look to Jesus for the truth, you will not find the truth that sets you free. Jesus is the truth, John 14:6. He said, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life." "The Holy Spirit is the source of truth," John 16:13 and 14. Jesus says, "I'm going to send the Spirit of truth, who will teach you about Me." "Scripture," John 17:17 "is truth." "Thy Word is truth." "Jesus is the truth." "The Holy Spirit is the truth." "The Scripture is the truth." And all of it represents the God of all truth.

So he's talking about spiritual truth, and to prove that they suppress it, even people who are exposed to it, who believe to some degree, all you have to go back to is verse 45, "Because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me." If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me? "He who is of God hears the words of God. For this reason, you do not hear them because you are not of God." Only the people of God can hear and believe the truth. Everybody else suppresses it. This is the challenge we face.

John makes much of the truth as he wraps up, of course, his writings before the Book of Revelation. Second John he talks about the truth and knowing the truth and loving the truth and walking in the truth; and he says that in 2 John and 3 John. He made much of the truth. The truth is in Jesus. That's what our Lord is talking about. Salvation truth, kingdom truth, eternal truth. And he says, "This is the truth that will make you free, make you free."

Was there a context for that? Of course there was a context. They were part of a religious legalist system. You remember back in Matthew 11 how Jesus characterized that system, really in a very unforgettable way. He said this, "Come to Me all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." What were they weary from and what were they heavy-laden with? Legalism. Religious legalism. "Take my yoke on you and learn from Me. I am gentle and humble in heart. You will find rest for your souls. My yoke is easy. My burden is light." They had put a burden, a pile of burdens on you you can't carry, you can't bear. Matthew 23, He describes the leaders of Israel as putting a burden on people, which they didn't help them carry and they couldn't carry it anyway.

In Matthew 23, He says, "You produce sons of hell," with your legal system. The Jews weren't free. They wouldn't admit that. They were in horrendous bondage to sin, false religion, but they don't see that. So verse 33, they answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say you will become free?" Now, some folks have said, "Well, boy, that's selective memory. Don't they remember the bondage of their past?" Sure. They were in bondage to Egypt. They were in bondage to Babylon. They were in bondage to Medo-Persia. They were in bondage partially to the Greeks. They were in bondage at the time as this was going on to the Romans. But they're not talking about that. They're not talking about some kind of a political situation. They're saying, "We are spiritually free because we are Abraham's children." I think they associated bondage with a bad position, with a position of sin and a position of impending judgment. Spiritually, they didn't buy that for a minute. They didn't think they were lost.

In fact, Jesus describes them this way. "I didn't come to call the righteous to repentance, but sinners." They were the righteous in their own minds. But the truth was, they were in horrendous bondage, but they wouldn't admit that. Go back to Luke 4. There's a really powerful illustration of this

that happens in Nazareth. Most of you will remember it. Jesus goes back to Nazareth, his home town, and He teaches in the synagogue. He meanders after doing miracles in Galilee and they all are excited to have their hometown boy back after all that has transpired and everything they've heard about Him. As a visiting rabbi, He is asked to speak, to read. So, verse 17 of Luke 4, the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. He opened the book and found the place where it was written, and this is Isaiah 61. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me because He anointed Me to preach the Gospel to the poor. He sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord." He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant, sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were on Him, and He began to say to them, "Today the Scripture has been fulfilled in your ears."

That's a Messianic passage. They all knew it was speaking of Messiah. Messiah is the anointed One. He is the One anointed. So He anointed Me to preach the Gospel. Messiah will come and bring good news. Messiah comes to bring good news. Amazingly, the text says, He will bring that good news to the poor, prisoners, blind, and oppressed. Okay, the poor, prisoners, the blind, the oppressed. Well, at first they were speaking very well of Him, and then He began to apply that. What obviously happened is He told them, "You are the poor, prisoners, blind, and oppressed." What was their response? Verse 28, "They were filled with rage. As they heard these things, they got up, and drove Him out of the city, and led Him to the brow of a hill in which their city had been built in order to throw Him down the cliff. But passed through their midst, He went on His way."

They tried to kill Jesus after His first sermon in Nazareth. They tried to throw Him off a cliff. Why? Because He said, "You are the poor, prisoners, blind, and oppressed, and you will not acknowledge it." It's the same as your ancestors. God couldn't heal any widows in this country, had to go to a widow in Baal's world. God couldn't do wonders among Jewish people in the past. He had to do a miracle for a border terrorist named Naaman from Syria. God's never been able to work with you legalistic self-righteous people because you will not admit you're the poor, prisoners, blind, and oppressed.

So that's exactly – go back to John 8 – that's exactly their attitude here. They're saying, "We're Abraham's descendants. We've never been enslaved to anyone. Why are you saying we will become free. We are free." They see themselves as free. They are not. So what kind of freedom is Jesus offering them? This is so important. What kind of freedom is He offering them? Go to verse 34, "He said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin.'" Oh, now we see. Freedom from what? Slavery to sin. They were not free. They were slaves to sin. How do you know they were slaves to sin? Because the pattern of their life was to commit sin, present tense. You all continually commit sin, demonstrating that you're the slaves of sin. Their sin was religious sin. They had corrupt religion.

Our Lord is saying to them, the Gospel truth will give you spiritual freedom, which is freedom from slavery to sin, from sin's total power, total control, freedom from spiritual blindness, spiritual oppression, Satanic dominion, freedom from the fear of death, the fear of judgment, the prospect of eternal hell, freedom in the purest and truest sense. Galatians 5:1 says, "It is for freedom Christ has set us free." Boy, they just didn't want to buy into that. That infuriated them. I'm surprised that it took until verse 59 before they picked up the stones this time. They did the same thing in Nazareth, tried to throw Him off a cliff. Here, they tried to crush Him under stones. Why? Because they would not acknowledge their sin.

This is where we come when we talk about true salvation. The true disciple, the real disciple comes to the Word of God, penitently, submissively embraces the Word of God, lovingly obeys the Word of God, it's theological truth, it's assessment of his own condition, and it's mandates and commandments. The false disciple want what Jesus offers without giving up any of his own carnal pleasures. The false disciple is unwilling to take the diagnosis of his own wretchedness that is necessary to true salvation. Our Lord then says something to them that was really shocking, verse 35, "The slave doesn't remain in the house forever. The son does remain forever."

They were thinking, "We are sons of Abraham. We are sons of Abraham. We're Abraham's seed. We're the elect covenant people. We have the law, the prophets, the covenants. It's all ours. We belong to God because we belong to Abraham." This is blind pride. Jesus is indicting them as being sinners and not only that, but slaves of sin. They're not about to accept that. Then He takes it a step further and says this shocking thing, "You are slaves, not sons." Now, He may have had on His mind the whole story of Abraham. Since this is talking about Abraham, He may have been talking the same way that Paul talks in Galatians 3 and 4. You remember Paul says there are two possibilities here. There is the possibility of Hagar and Ishmael. Remember the metaphor there? And there is the possibility or the reality of Abraham and Isaac.

Ishmael was a slave. Ishmael had no inheritance from Abraham. Ishmael and his mother, the slave, sent away. Sarah and Isaac stay in the house. Isaac receives the inheritance. Jesus is saying to them, "You think you're Abraham's son, but if you are, you're Ishmael. You're a slave, and you're not an heir. And the slave doesn't stay in the house forever. Only the son does, and you are slaves; not sons. You will be left out of God's inheritance." The language here could not be stronger, and again, we understand why they reacted the way they did trying to kill Him. Listen to Matthew 8:11, "I say to you, many will come from East and West and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, but the sons of the kingdom, the Jews, will be cast out into the outer darkness in the place that will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." There are going to be people at the table with Abraham. It's not going to be you. They will be the sons of Abraham, by faith, Galatians 3. Sons of Abraham by faith.

There's some prophetic implications here as Israel is being set aside and set aside as a nation of slaves, Hagar and Ishmael-like. And Abraham's true children, his children by faith made up of Jew and Gentile are the heirs to God's possession. The heirs to God's possession are those who are sons or those who come to Christ that we learned in the first chapter, verse 12, "As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name." You become a child of God with true saving faith.

So what is the benefit? Freedom from the bondage of sin, freedom from slavery, freedom to become a son and an heir. And he culminates it with this, "So if the Son makes you free, you will really be free," not the false freedom to which you claim. Total freedom from sin's deception, power, punishment, penalty, and presence, forever free, forever free. This is our Lord's message. "There will be no condemnation to those who are in Christ - " Romans 8 says " - because the Spirit of life in Christ has set us free."

Who is a true disciple then? A genuine follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, the one who perseveres in the faith, one who endures through blessing and suffering, faithful to the end and lovingly obedient. That's a true believer, a true disciple, and that soul is a son and not a slave. And that soul has been set free from sin's bondage to the freedom of complete forgiveness, complete forgiveness and the

promise of eternal glory. Very important to know this and to proclaim it.

Father, we now ask that You would confirm to our hearts this truth and may it find a place in our conversation and in our witness and our testimony. May we realize that the whole world is engulfed in suppressing the truth and many would have an initial attraction to Jesus, but when confronted about the reality that, as our Lord said in the earlier passage, “You will die in your sins and where I go, you cannot come unless you repent and believe in me,” – they turn and flee. But make us faithful to speak the truth to remind them that that truth is the only thing that will set them free, really free to become sons and not slaves. Use us to that end we pray in the name of Christ.

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