

John 8:31-59

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[0 : 00] Again, the scripture reading is John 8, verses 31 through 59, on page 991. Please stand for the reading of God's Word. 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 of your father did. They said to him, We were not born of sexual immorality.

[1 : 20] 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.

[2 : 25] 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.

[3 : 28] This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Thank you. Thank you. Well, good morning, and welcome to Holy Trinity Church.

I've just come from the downtown congregation. Fortunately, their service begins ten minutes earlier than ours and was able to pray over all of the incoming elders and deacons that have recently been appointed and elected for the welfare of this church.

And I'll just say to you, having been in that congregation when it first began in 2001, having emerged from here, and then having left that congregation when it planted Pilsen many years ago, and having spent as a family the first 14 years of our life in two or three congregations on a given Sunday, it was with a sense of completion and joy to see what the Lord has done for our church. Just a wonderful time to see that it will be led well for decades into the future. And I know that he's given us our own path at the moment as well, not out of step with our history, but the next evolutionary step in our history.

ministry. That this congregation will, by May, with all of that leadership now in place, begin to emerge under what will actually be even a new name.

[5 : 29] That we will begin again to see the Lord multiply his greatness and kindness to the city of Chicago. Multiplication of ministry ministry is rooted in the divinely orchestrated organic growth of the gospel.

To the first man and woman, he said, be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth. Multiplication was God's way forward. When they were in Egypt, the indication is that the people were fruitful and they were multiplying.

When the sermons begin to come from Acts, the continual refrain is that the word was spreading and multiplying all the way to the ends of the earth. And we stand now, we stand now here as a family, ready to take our next steps in reuniting ourselves around God's call for our life.

And it's going to be a joy. One of the things we'll have to do first is find a name. I'm taking all suggestions. I want your input.

If you've got a name that moves us beyond Holy Trinity Church, I'm going to start having a bucket in the back and you can submit it and every name will be entertained.

[6 : 58] Some of them, I'm sure you'll add some humorous ones in there, but every name. So if you want to be a part of that future in a meaningful way, then start naming the church.

I've already received some submissions. Old St. John's, St. John's, Trinity, All Souls Church, Chicago, Christ Church, Chicago.

And you may sit there and go, oh no, none of those are working for me. Well, then let's get on board and do that together. It'll be a wonderful, wonderful thing.

I'm really, really thrilled with the way the Lord is providing for the welfare of the gospel in our midst. Well, today you heard a text that was rather lengthy in reading, but it almost divides nicely into three simple units of equal distance.

let me begin this way. Clearly, we live in a world that is increasingly viewing Christianity as a threat and followers of Jesus as the problem.

[8 : 21] That's no surprise to anybody. For a growing number of people, ridding the world of Jesus and those intent on holding fast to his word would be a good thing.

The logic is simply Christianity has had its run and it has outlived the productive sense of its life, that the run is done.

And in sense that we no longer need Jesus to become a more just society. Nor do we need religion or religious freedom to become a more virtuous people.

That all these things can be had without this historical run that Christianity has afforded.

truth. In fact, many would say that only by moving beyond Christianity, beyond Jesus, beyond an adherence to his word, will we ever be able to bend the arc of history toward a more just society, a more enlightened and enlivening world.

[9 : 41] world. Of course, I don't need to tell you that all of these recent developments caught Christians off guard, a bit behind the curve, surprised.

Because Christians have long felt, at least in the West, that it was their faith in Jesus and his word that actually provided the structural supports for all the things our society has accomplished and achieved.

And so, we live at a time when tensions are rising, religious battle lines are forming, irretractable positions are being espoused and taken up.

We live at a time when a fight to the finish, in many respects, seems to already be underway. And it's that moment in this escalated atmosphere of rhetoric that it would be well worth pausing and asking, are we clear on why the world would rid itself of Jesus?

do we know and understand the issues that have moved us from receptivity to rejection?

[11:19] And what was it exactly that Jesus put on offer to the world? With that stated, fortunately for us, we have before us in a single text, I encourage you to keep it open, John 8, 31-59, a mirroring here in the scriptures of what has taken place over the last 30 years in our own city.

Our present-day situation runs precisely along the lines of the text to a movement where culturally broad belief in Jesus has given way to a flat-out rejection of him, where people are standing with him, articulating the advantages of retaining him, all the way to actually picking up stones to kill him. I mean, look at it, in the text, it's there. Our text opens with, so Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him. And that's on the heels of verse 30, as he was saying these things, many believed in him.

But by the end of the text, take a look, verse 59, so they picked up stones to throw at him. All in the course of one text.

Just a few verses. from standing with Jesus to picking up stones to rid the world of Jesus.

[13:04] Why? Let me outline three things that go along with the three paragraphs in the next 15 or 20 minutes. They would rid the world of Jesus, and we would today, because he challenges our cultural narrative of individual freedom.

Second, because he calls out our religious assumptions on who is actually part of God's family.

Third, because he confronts our corporate aversion to seeing Jesus as one who comes to us from the Father.

These are the reasons they would rid the world of Jesus, and they mirror our day. There will be no great road to travel between John 8, 31-59 and Kimbark and the street upon which you will leave from this very place.

31-38, Jesus challenges a cultural narrative of freedom. Freedom in our day is the single most absolute value in Western society.

The idealistic formulation of the American Revolution rests on freedom. It was FDR who actually espoused a multitude of freedoms, four in number, that are irrefutable, irrevocable, and belong to every citizen.

[14:56] And if you don't know the history of the country because you're seven years old or 17 here, you might know the voice of Elsa in the movie Frozen, who articulates it at the kitchen table level when she's saying it's time to see what I can do to test the limits to break through, no right, no wrong, no rules for me, what?

I'm free. Yeah, nobody wanted to admit you knew that song. Look what Jesus says in the text, verse 31.

So Jesus said to the Jews who 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're offspring of Abraham, and have never been enslaved to everyone.

How is it that you can say you will become free? Interestingly, Jesus seems to articulate that we are not as free as we would think we are.

Stephen Hawking is right, but incomplete when he stated that while he cannot move, and he cannot speak without a computer, in my mind, nevertheless, I am free.

[16:30] Even the statement itself indicated an understanding of freedom that was with severe restraints. The individual who plays Bach or Beethoven and looks as though they can do it with pristine freedom, or to sit here on a Sunday and view the back of the piano where there is no music at all on it, and to watch somebody play with purported freedom comes at a great expense of hourly restriction.

You're free to choose the discipline and the vocation of your life, but when you arrive at the pinnacle of it and you have ultimate freedom, it will be because of all the things you were not voluntarily free to do.

Freedom is by nature a world of multitudes that we restrict. Think of the slave in American colonialism that was subjected to horrific conditions people who made it through simply on the strength and assertion of will to say while you take everything from me you will not take my dignity and in that I am free.

Because this assertion is necessary given all of the proliferation of problems in the world but it is inherently limited.

Indeed this relationship that Jesus brings between freedom and slavery is fascinating to me because we now know that a white nationalist bigoted worldview is truly enslaved to a protection of

inherited privileges that don't square with reality and the imago dei and one of the great disasters of the world is that those who are in power and ultimately free are in actual fact enslaved to protecting their own interests and the problem often in overthrowing all of that is that the one who is oppressed becomes merely like the oppressor and this is the problem of the human condition in truth our cultural narrative toward autonomy is limited that's in the physical realm we're not as free as we really think and in the spiritual realm according to

[20 : 09] Jesus verse 34 everyone who practices sin is a slave and a slave to sin and the slave does not remain in the house forever the son remains forever and the son is here to set you free and if he does you will be free indeed what Jesus is saying and why the world would rid ourselves of him is that while you and I want freedom on the spiritual plane he's indicating humanity is by nature enslaved to sin you are held by a power that is greater than yourself that will lead you in your own interest to the exploitation of others every single man and woman according to

Jesus are in spiritual chains acting out in life ways that protect our interests and what he has to offer to the cultural narrative of freedom is simply abiding in his word this is really interesting look back to the beginning if you abide in my word you are truly my disciples in other words they believed in him but that was kind of a superficial belief an initial belief think of the parable that Jesus tells in other gospels about a seed that falls into the ground and it's starting to bear fruit but when persecutions come or when dangers come all of a sudden it's quickly dried up it had no real root to it and what Jesus is saying is yeah you may believe in me but let's talk about those who believe what they believe and the ones who believe what they believe are the ones who will abide in my word this is the great challenge that rather than living life in your own word you would submit yourself to the word of

Christ that's what he offers that to the best of my ability I will read the scriptures understand the words of Jesus and give myself to abiding in that word in other words I will place myself under the authority of the word of Christ and to that them their world and our world says may it never be but at least now we know we would rid the world of Jesus because he challenges us on freedom second he calls us out on a religious assumption that we are already in God's family don't you think you're in God's family haven't we all been schooled since the middle or early part of the 20th century that all of humanity is made in the image of

God which they are and therefore we all share a familial connection to the father but we go further than to say that given the fact that we're in the family we're all inheritors of his goodness in other words that humanity has no true rebels in the hallway or in the home that there are no sons or daughters who of their own volition were born into a family but have now left the family let me let me put it to you in the way that they spoke of it look at what they say in verse 38 they say Abraham is our father in other words they're laying claim that they have a presumed good relationship with God because they were born into a Jewish family what are they appealing!

they're appealing to bloodline they're appealing to some shared belief that gave us lineage they're appealing to religious ethnicity as authentic signs of relationship they're appealing to an ancestry and a heritage that gives them inherited privileges they are saying that I come from a family tree therefore I am of true faith they are saying that since I was born into God's family I am a member of God's family all of these things are there now think of what's happened in our world in the biochemistry which believe me you'll see in about two minutes I know very little if anything about but from what I understand there's been some significant discoveries in the last 50 or 60 years this thing called

[25 : 56] DNA which was observable in the late 19th century anyway was codified by way of understanding in the early 50s through Crick and Watson at the University of Cambridge and they find this double helix ability to explain that there actually is within us this self replicating material that genetically goes on and is a carrier from generation to generation to generation what they were appealing to hear when they spoke to Jesus is that they had a certain spiritual DNA based on the religious grouping into which they had been born and what Jesus seems to call out is that just because you were born into God's family that doesn't make you a member of God's family look what he says to him if you were Abraham's children you'd be doing the works Abraham did but now you seek to kill me a man who's told the truth

I heard from God this is not what Abraham did you're doing the works your father! did! or religious heritage confirmed you as a member of God's family Genesis 15 6 Abraham believed God and it was credited!

to him as righteousness Genesis 21 verses 9 and 10 Abraham knew that not all of those who were circumcised would be of the circumcision in other words to be a member of God's family is to be related to him by faith not by works by belief not by birth if you think that you are necessarily in a good place with God because you are made in the image of God as is all humanity if you think that all of humanity which comprises his children has no rebel members within it

Jesus would call you out and say not everyone is in the family which was completely at odds with their own sense look at how they read that we're not born of sexual immorality we have one father even God to which Jesus says if God were your father you would be loving me I mean this is a stunning movement here look at what he does by verse 44 if you really want to talk about your bloodline your spiritual DNA you are of your father the devil now what is he meaning by this and why does he go all the way back into the beginning of time and the fact that there were murderers and liars why this allusion to

Genesis and the fall of humanity and the murdering of Abel by Cain and the lying that took place among men and women what he's going back to say is if you really want to know your your ancestral line you got to go back through Adam not Abraham you got to go back and really acknowledge that you're a rebel on this planet you got to go back to understand that you actually are resistant to a belief in the word you've got to go back to a sense that you actually hold your inherited privileges without bases

[30 : 32] Jesus calls them out basically the truth of the matter is while we are all made in the image of God and in that sense children of God we are not born into God's family I suppose this is why that first century preacher John the Baptist was so compelling to hear if not to believe when he says do not presume to say to yourselves we have Abraham as our father for I tell you God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees every tree therefore that does not bear fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire

God let me to the God let me get it clear if you're five years old 15 years old you've heard nothing else here today you're 21 years old and you believe that you are assuming a proper relationship with God by way of family let me be clear you cannot bank on your folks faith and you cannot presume!

on our universal understanding that we are all good with God because we are all children of God Jesus says it's not the case everyone would need to be born again to become a member of God's family and the only way to be born again is to have some spiritual revolutionary change that takes place in that paragraph what does Jesus have to offer in the first one he was talking about the word abide here he keeps talking about what we hear from him look at verse 43 it's because you cannot bear to hear my word verse 47 whoever is of God hears the words of God the reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God verse 40

I've told you the truth that which I heard from God you have ears you're hearing me this morning but are you hearing me are you hearing me are you hearing what you hear or will you leave to say I would rid the world of Jesus if it means that I am not necessarily born into his family and have to hear his word to be so third Jesus confronts our corporate aversion to thinking of him as coming from the father that last paragraph is stunning take a look at just verses 52 and 53 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 in other words if you claim to precede Abraham you are making a God claim in our midst that you come to us from the father that you are somehow united to the father hey this is why the world will rid itself of Jesus not merely because he confronts you on freedom not merely because he calls you out on family you will reject him you will move from standing with him to picking up stones on him because he claims to be one with the father he claims to come from God he claims to know God now what does our culture actually hold we we are committed academically and otherwise to agnosticism we are committed to not ultimately knowing and so to hear from

[35 : 33] Jesus that he is one with the father is a truth claim beyond anything we would reasonably make we let me put it to you this way in the ironic richness of a New Testament illusion which some of you may get we are committed to learning and yet never arriving at the truth this is our this is our value of humility this is what makes a true academic truly great it's the humility of spirit of saying there are many things that I do not know and they are right to say so but Jesus says there's something that I know look at verse 55 I know him I know him I would be a liar to tell you that

I was just like you but I'm not like you what he's saying is I am utterly completely individually unique in the world and that Abraham he actually rejoiced to see the day that I would come to the earth truly truly I say to you before Abraham was I am stunning if you don't want to become a Christian at least know the reasons why one tell the world you are not a Christian because Jesus challenges your conception on freedom two tell the world

I will not be a Christian because Jesus is offensive to me on who is and is not a member of his family three I am not a Christian nor will I become one because he claims to be one with the father but to the one who abides hears keeps his word well John has already told us but to all who did receive him who believed in his name he gave the right to become children of God who were born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man but of

God we can pick up our stones but just beware according to Jesus on the last day he's carrying the big stick our heavenly father we we confront again this this immense figure Jesus the Nazarene help us to know what to do with him in Christ's name amen let's stand and we'll sing together