

(4) The scandal of true freedom

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[0 : 00] We're going to be reading today from John chapter 8, starting at verse 31 through to 59. It can be found on page 1078.

John chapter 8, starting at verse 31. So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in 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 we will become free? Jesus answered them, Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits a 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 what Abraham did.

[1 : 20] 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 what your father did. They said to him, We were not born of sexual immorality.

We have one father, even God. Jesus said to them, If God were your father, you would love me, for I came from God, and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me.

Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father, the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires.

He was a murderer from the beginning and has nothing to do with 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 you 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.

[2 : 26] 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 Samaritan and have a demon?

Jesus answered, I do not have a demon, but I honour my father, and you dishonour me. Yet I do not seek my own glory. There is one who seeks it, and he is judge. Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.

The Jews said to him, Now we know 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.

[3 : 31] 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 you have 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. Thank you, Joe, for reading the passage to us. Please keep your Bibles open on page 1078, as we look at John chapter 8 together.

Let me pray for us again before we start. Father God, we do thank you for your word, the Bible. We thank you that through your word, you tell us the truth about yourself, who you are, what you're like.

We thank you that through the Bible, you also teach us the truth about ourselves, who we are, what we're like. And so we pray that this would be the case this morning. Please teach us the truth about you, about ourselves, and help us, by your Holy Spirit, to believe these truths.

[4 : 41] In Jesus' name. Amen. Now, over the past few weeks, we have heard some unsettling truths from Jesus in chapter 7 and 8 of John.

And it is just the same this morning. You're slaves to sin. Your father is the devil. You don't know God. As you heard this passage read out, you probably thought, here we go again from Jesus. These are unsettling words. You may as well find the atmosphere unsettling as you listen in on this heated argument between Jesus and the Jews.

There's controversy. There's name-calling. There's outright violence at the end, and Jesus is caught up in the middle of it. In some instances, the cause of it. And it might not be a picture of Jesus that we're used to.

It is unsettling. But most of all, I think this particular section of John is unsettling because of who Jesus is speaking to.

[5 : 49] So have a look at verse 31. Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, if you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples.

Jesus is speaking to believers here. Those who had professed faith in Jesus Christ. People like you and me.

But here, the people, by the end, are picking up stones to kill him. It's an unsettling set of events. We begin with believers. We end with killers. So what's going on?

Well, what we'll see is that Jesus is distinguishing here between true believers and false believers. Those who continue to, hold to, abide in Jesus' word.

Well, they are truly his disciples. But those who don't hold to his teaching, who reject it, like the Jews here, well, they are not his disciples. The teaching itself revolves around the issue of freedom and what we're all like by nature.

[6 : 58] And Jesus will be saying to us this morning, if you agree and accept what he says here in chapter 8, if you believe in it and abide in it, you are truly his disciple.

But if you disagree and reject his teaching here in chapter 8, then you are not. So let's take a look at Jesus' teaching now and see which side of the line we fall on.

Are we genuine disciples of Jesus? Or is the truth contained here in chapter 8 more unsettling than we originally thought? First, and actually if you turn to the reverse side of the service sheet, first you'll see, we'll look at Jesus' first comment to the Jews.

You think you're free, but you're a slave to sin. Look again at verse 31. If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.

This is a wonderful promise from Jesus, a promise of truth, truth about God, truth about ourselves. And this truth in Jesus' word will set us free, set us free to know God himself.

[8 : 13] But the Jews, they don't like this idea of being set free. So they say in verse 33, we're offspring of Abraham. We've never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you can say you'll become free?

Jews think they're okay with God. After all, they're offspring of Abraham, aren't they? God's chosen people. We don't need to be set free to know God, they think. What's all this talk of being enslaved, of being set free?

So Jesus tells them, verse 34, truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. Jesus is pointing out that they are actually enslaved to sin. If they commit a sin, it shows they are slaves to sin. They sin because they are sinners.

They can't help sinning. They are slaves to sin. So this is what Jesus means when he talks about being set free. He means setting them free from spiritual slavery, setting them free from sin.

[9 : 19] sin. And it's just the same for us. Anyone here reckon they're perfect? Never sinned? Of course not.

Lies, anger, envy, lust, pride, to name just a few. We all sin every day. And even if we think we're having a particularly good day, well, none of us loves God with all our heart and with all our minds and with all our soul and with all our strength.

We all sin every second of every day. We are sinners. Jesus says we can't stop sinning. It's because we are enslaved to it.

We're trapped, as it were, in our sin. It's true for all of us. All of humanity, by nature, is in bondage to sin. We can't help it. It's in our spiritual DNA, as it were.

Jesus says we are slaves and we need to be set free. And, marvelously, Jesus has promised to set us free if we believe in him. He adds to this in verse 35.

[10:28] Have a look at that. 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.

Just as the son in a household has authority to set slaves free, so Jesus, the eternal son, eternal son of God, has full authority to set spiritual slaves free.

So, if Jesus sets us free from sin, well, we really are free. Free to enjoy permanent residence in the household. Free to enjoy all the blessings and privileges of a relationship with God in his family.

So, the first mark of a genuine disciple is that he or she recognises their need to be set free from sin.

A genuine disciple would believe Jesus is teaching here that by nature we are sinners, that by nature we can't stop sinning, that we've tried to stop but we've failed, that we've tried to change but we keep falling into the same patterns of sin over and over again.

[11:32] might have many successes from time to time but then those old habits rear their ugly heads again. We're trapped, we're enslaved, we're not free. We're not free simply to rid ourselves of sin.

We can't do it. And so we trust in the one person who can. We trust in Jesus to set us free. This is the mark of a genuine disciple.

Is that you? Do you realise your need to be set free from sin? Do you accept Jesus' teaching that by nature we are all slaves to sin?

If you don't, well I suppose Jesus would challenge you to try and stop sinning. Jesus might say, well pick one area of your life which you yourself admit needs to stop.

Could be anything, I don't know, getting impatient in traffic jams, demeaning others, impure malicious thoughts, whatever it is, choose something and just stop it. Just never do it again. Never get impatient again.

[12:38] Never get envious again. Just stop sinning. Jesus says, can you do it? And if Jesus is right, well you won't be able to.

If Jesus is right, you won't be able to stop sinning. You may be able to suppress it for a while, but it will return. It's just a question of when. You think you're free, says Jesus, but you're a slave to sin.

We all need to be set free and wonderfully Jesus has promised to set us free if we believe in him.

Free from the penalty of sin because Jesus died on the cross in our place, taking the penalty we deserved.

Free from the power of sin as Jesus comes to live in us by his Holy Spirit, changing us daily to be more like Christ and one day in the future free from the presence of sin when we are raised again to new life with new resurrection bodies to live in a new sinless world.

Believe in Jesus and you will be set free. Now the second thing that Jesus says to the Jews concerns their father.

[13:54] You can see it there on the sheet. You think you're of God but your father is the devil. So have a look at verse 37. 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 well Abraham is our father. Jesus replies if you were Abraham's children you would be doing what 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 what your father did. So they may be physical offspring of Abraham fine but Jesus is clear they can't be genuine spiritual children of Abraham because of their actions.

Abraham believed God's word but the Jews clearly don't. They're seeking to kill Jesus God's word the word become flesh and so Jesus says they are acting like their real father.

Well the Jews try again this time claiming God as their father. Verse 41 Who are not born of sexual morality we have one father even God. But 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.

[15:30] Again Jesus points out they can't have God as their father because of their actions towards Jesus. Genuine children of God well they'd love Jesus as God's son as part of the family

but actually they're plotting to kill him.

So Abraham's not their father God's not their father who then is their father Jesus tells us in verse 44 to 47 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 has nothing to do with 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.

This is explosive from Jesus isn't it? Can Jesus really be saying this? You can see for yourself he is and he says that the reason the Jews are seeking to murder Jesus is because they're of their father the devil a murderer from the beginning in the garden of Eden.

The reason that they are rejecting the truth about Jesus is because they're of their father the devil in whom there is no truth. They are acting just like their father the devil like father like son.

[16 : 55] And together with verses 45 to 47 this highlights just the huge gulf that exists between the Jews and Jesus. Look at verse 45.

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.

We're slaves to sin but Jesus is free from sin. Jesus lived a perfect life. Never lied. Never had a sinful thought. Even before Pontius Pilate the Roman governor.

He says I find no guilt in this man. Jesus is sinless and he says well why don't you believe in me? Because we're not of God. Jesus free from sin of God are slaves to sin of the devil.

Our real father is the devil by nature. Now this may sound harsh to you and it does to me perhaps a tad grotesque to speak of people as children of the devil.

[18 : 03] But Jesus is being deadly serious here. And the Bible is quite clear that all of us by nature follow the father's desires. Sorry, follow the devil's desires. The reason we lie and we all do is because our father is the father of lies.

The reason we get angry, plot revenge, have murderous thoughts, and we all do from time to time, is because we are of our father the devil, a murderer from the beginning. Our slavery to sin shows that by nature we follow the father of the devil's desires.

By nature we serve the devil. He's our father. It was Bob Dylan who sang, but you're going to have to serve somebody. Yes, indeed, you're going to have to serve somebody.

Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord, but you're going to have to serve somebody. And he was right. You're going to have to serve somebody. What he didn't get quite right is that by nature all of us choose to serve the devil.

We're not born children of God. We are born children of the devil. But Jesus promises to set us free if we believe in him, if we abide in his word, to set us free from the devil and bring us into relationship with God.

[19 : 25] We may be born into the family of the devil, but Jesus allows us to be born again into the family of God. If the son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

So the second mark of a genuine disciple is that he or she admits that by nature this is who we are, that we follow our father the devil's desires.

It doesn't matter if you've been brought up in a Christian home with Christian parents, years of Sunday school under your belt, this is who we are by nature. It doesn't matter if we can remember a time when we didn't believe in Jesus.

By nature we are following the devil's desires. It doesn't matter how good we think we are, or how many times we've been to church, or whatever spiritual privilege we think we have.

Jesus says, by nature you are of the father, the devil. Now you put these first two points together and we see Jesus' damning verdict on human nature.

[20 : 30] Slaves to sin, slaves to the devil, not born good, born sinful, not born free, born enslaved. It's terrifying, isn't it?

This is the world we live in, says Jesus. This is the people we are by nature. This is what humanity is like. And it certainly pierces the bubble of respectability here in Dulwich.

These are humbling truths from Jesus. It certainly removes any pride we may have in ourselves or our salvation. It should bring us to our knees. We can't save ourselves.

Humanity can't save itself. We're trapped. enslaved to sin, following the devil. Humanity needs a saviour. And by the grace of God we have a saviour.

Because Jesus says if you abide in my words, you will know the truth and the truth will set you free. Now finally, the third thing Jesus says to the Jews concerns his own identity.

[21 : 38] You think I have a demon, but I am God. So have a look at verse 48. 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 honour my father, and you dishonour me. Yet I do not seek my own glory, there is one who seeks it, and he is the judge. Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.

So we've got to the stage where the Jews have had enough of this talk about the devil and being enslaved, and so just resort to insults at Jesus. You're a half-caste Samaritan, you've got a demon. You often find that, don't you, when someone's life is exposed, turn to insult if you don't want to accept the truth, try and slander the other person.

Well, this is what's happening, but Jesus says these insults are a bit ridiculous, given he's just challenged them to point out any sin in his life, which they failed to do. It's dishonouring to Jesus for them to speak like this.

Nevertheless, Jesus continues to offer out this promise of freedom. If anyone keeps my word, he will never see death. He will never see spiritual death.

[23 : 01] Keep my word and you'll be free from sin's penalty. You'll be safe on judgment day. You will have eternal life. You will live forever in perfect relationship with God.

True freedom. If you keep my word, if you trust in me. But these gracious words of rescue that the Jews so desperately need, well, they're the very words which turn them even more so against Jesus.

Verse 52. do. 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?

Yes, that's the point. But the prophets died. Who do you make yourself out to be? So they're saying even the prophets kept God's word and they died.

So you're saying you keep your word and you'll live forever. Talk about bigging yourself up. You've got to have a demon. If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing.

[24 : 08] It's my father who glorifies me of whom you say he is our God. But you've 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.

Jesus, he's not bigging himself up. Otherwise he'd be a fraud. It's his father who glorifies him, bigs him up as it were. Jesus really is who he says he is and he can't back down. He can't deny it because he can't lie.

Jesus keeps God's word. And then in verses 56 to 59, Jesus brings this controversy to its climactic finale. Let me look at verse 56.

verse 56.

Abraham was, Abraham was, I am. Before Abraham was, I was. Before Abraham existed, I existed. Before Abraham was, I'm God.

[25 : 26] I am God. Do you think I have a demon? I'm God himself. But verse 59, the Jews, who had believed in him, picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

Now, is that not a tragic end to the passage? Here are the Jews face to face with God himself, face to face with their Lord and rescuer, face to face with the only one who can set them free, but they can't see it.

They're blind, enslaved to sin, enslaved to the devil. They just can't accept the truth about themselves or Jesus. So they do just what children of the devil do.

By nature, they plot to murder him, just like their father the murderer. They pick up stones to kill him. And their only means of rescue is gone. It's a tragic set of events, but it is important that we see it, because it shows what our natural reaction to Jesus is too.

If we're in denial to our spiritual slavery, if we're in denial to our spiritual parentage, we will push Jesus away, just like it happened here. It starts with a denial. We don't need to be set free. So it ends with them killing Jesus, picking up stones to kill him.

[26 : 47] Unless you admit you're a slave, you will kill God. Let me illustrate this with an article I read this week. The article was about treating people with addictions, be it alcohol or drugs or

gambling, and in particular the phenomenon of denial, which is where you don't see the truth about yourselves.

And it's observed that this denial kicks in as soon as the addiction starts. The addicts will just simply lie about his addiction. I've not got a problem, nothing wrong with me, don't need to be set free from this.

And as the addiction worsens, so do the lies. The addict will try to hide it from those close to him, from his family, from loved ones. And if people try to confront him with the addiction, well, he or she will just simply refuse to talk about it, dismiss it as not being a real problem, even start to get a bit hostile and angry.

And in extreme cases, the addict pushes away the very people who are trying to help him. So enslaved to their addiction, they can end up refusing all help, destroying families, can end up isolated, homeless, penniless, ruined, and still not prepared to face up to their addiction. whether there's this cycle of addiction and denial, hostility leading to ruin, that we've just seen before us in John chapter 8, a cycle we all belong to.

[28 : 15] And this is what the genuine disciple of Jesus recognises and realises about himself, that by nature we are all slaves to sin, the worst addiction of all.

We're in denial, we couldn't see it. What do you mean I need to be set free? What do you mean I need Jesus? In denial of the problem, in denial of the solution? We're probably hostile to Jesus, and we're on the path to spiritual ruin.

And if it weren't but for the grace of God in our lives, we would all still be on this downward cycle, slaves to sin, following the father's desires, the devil's desires, facing eternal ruin.

Praise God for setting us free. Praise God for setting us free from slavery to sin. Praise God for setting us free from following our father the devil.

Praise God for opening our eyes to the truth about Jesus and the truth about ourselves. Let's praise God together now in prayer. Let's pray.

[29 : 21] Father God, you have unsettled us again this morning with the truth about ourselves. we confess, Father, that by nature we are slaves to sin. We realize that by nature we were following the devil's desires.

Didn't realize it. We're in denial to this truth about ourselves and denial to the truth about you. But how we praise you afresh this morning for setting us free. Praise you for setting us free from this slavery to sin.

Setting us free from the devil's grasp. We praise you for opening our spiritual eyes to see the truth about you and ourselves. Our need for rescue and trusting in Christ is the only way of being set free.

We ask, Father, that you would please keep us abiding in these truths as we wait for Jesus to return and take us home to perfect, complete, fulfilled freedom. For his name's sake.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.