

A Child of Who?

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Preacher: Rev. Jordan Senner

[0 : 00] Well, you probably recognized fairly quickly after Sophia read our passage that the Jesus we encounter in our passage today is not gentle Jesus, meek and mild.

Far from it. This is one of the most intense passages in the Gospel of John. Jesus does not mince a single word and he puts his finger on the very areas of our lives that we would rather not talk about or bring up.

And yet, Jesus in all of his intensity does this for our good. He does it because he's determined to set us free. Jesus wants us to be free and flourishing human beings.

We see this in verses 31 to 32 right at the very beginning of our passage. If you abide in my words, you truly are my disciples. And you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.

Jesus is talking to a group of people in the temple, thousands of people around, but a specific group have decided that they're going to start believing in Jesus' name and trusting his word.

[1 : 08] And so in verse 31, we see that Jesus turns to those Jews who had believed in him particularly and he starts to teach them about the dynamics of discipleship. He starts to tell them what it means to be his disciples and he says to them, if you abide in my word, you truly are my disciples and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.

It's interesting that the language of freedom is front and center in Jesus' teaching on discipleship. This is the only time in all four gospels where Jesus directly teaches on freedom.

And it's as if in this passage he's saying freedom and genuine discipleship go together. Now the natural question is, what is freedom? What is genuine human freedom that Jesus is talking about? And this has been a really important question, not just for us, but for a massive part of the 20th century, especially in the wake of World War II. In World War II, the world witnessed one of the most horrible offenses against human freedom that has ever come across the stage of world history.

And in the aftermath, they were asking themselves, how in the world do we rebuild? What does it mean to be free human beings and for that never to happen again? And interestingly, in this context, a Swiss German theologian named Karl Barth was asked to give a lecture in 1953 on the nature of human freedom.

[2 : 36] He's Christian, asked to give a lecture on the nature of human freedom. Yeah, that's good. Some kids are feeling very free right now. That's nice. Karl Barth, I won't explain all that he said in his lecture, but there's two things I want to tell you.

I think they're very helpful. First is this. Karl Barth said, First thing we need to know is that human freedom is a gift from God. Not something we create for ourselves.

Something we receive. Gift from God. But here's the real thing. Number two. He said, Human freedom is only secondarily freedom from limitations and threats.

Only secondarily freedom from. But he says, Primarily it is freedom for. So notice the two things that Barth points out for us.

He said, It's only secondarily freedom from, but it's primarily freedom for. And I want to suggest to you that that actually articulates perfectly the heart and center of Jesus' teaching in John chapter 8.

[3 : 41] He's come into the world to set us free. But we've got to understand, first of all, what that freedom is for. And according to Jesus, that freedom is for nothing less than a deep, satisfying relationship.

Look at verses 31 to 32. If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples. And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

Jesus gives us freedom for relationship. Now the key to understanding this is understanding what the truth means in verse 32. In our culture, verse 32 gets depersonalized really, really quickly.

Verse 32 gets taken out of its context in John chapter 8, and it's painted on the walls of libraries, and it's made the mottos of universities. I think that's really good.

That's not bad. You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. But what happens in that context is that the word, the truth, gets depersonalized.

[4 : 42] It becomes something that we can control and master in the library, and that we can be tested on in the university context. It becomes something that is a principle for life or a rule for education.

But in verse 32, I think the truth is not primarily an abstract concept. The truth is deeply, deeply personal. It is a person. Because only a person can set us free.

Let me show you a couple clues to this. Look at verse 32. At the end, it says, the truth will set you free. And then if you skip down to verse 36, it says, so if the Son sets you free.

It's the same exact language used, but in verse 32, it's the truth. In verse 36, it's the Son, as if those are one and the same thing. And you know throughout the Gospel of John that Jesus goes on in chapter 14, verse 6, and he makes a famous statement that we all know.

He says, I am the way, the truth, and the life. The truth in this context is the person, Jesus Christ.

[5 : 55] The living Lord, come in flesh. the glory of the everlasting Father. And that's why that in order to know a person, you have to come to know his words.

That's why we have to abide in words. How we come to know a person is through conversation, through hearing somebody speak, through engaging in dialogue. That's why in relationships, we often feel so hurt when somebody hasn't heard us correctly.

Or when we feel like we're not being heard very well at all. Because it makes us feel like we're not being known. Or we don't know the other person.

Because the way we come to know people is through words. That's why Jesus says in verse 31, if you abide in my word, if you live in my word, if you make your home in my word, if you spend lots and lots of time living in my word, you will know me, the truth.

And I, the Son, will set you free. I think we see a further insight into this relational emphasis if we skip down to verse 42. Jesus is responding to those who are questioning him.

[7 : 09] And he says, if God were your Father, you would love me. Notice how in verse 31, it's you will abide in my word. Now in verse 42, you would love me.

For Jesus, abiding in his word and love are intimately bound together. Because the way we come into intimacy is through his words. So skip over to chapter 14. And Jesus unpacks this a little bit more for us.

Chapter 14, verse 21. Jesus says, Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me.

And he who loves me will be loved by my Father and I will love him and manifest myself to him.

Then skip down to verse 23. If anyone loves me, he will keep my word and my Father will love him. And we will come to him and make our home with him, dwell with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. What Jesus is describing here is that it's through dwelling in and keeping and abiding in his words that we are brought into intimacy with the person Jesus.

[8 : 25] And as we're drawn into intimacy with Jesus, we are then drawn into his relationship with the one he calls Father. And all throughout the Gospel of John, this is what salvation looks like.

All the way back in chapter 1, John told us in verse 12, to all who receive Jesus and believe in his name, what will God do? Or what will Jesus do? He will give them the right to become children of the living God.

He will give them the freedom for relationship. Truly, truly, if you abide in my words, you truly are my disciples. And you will know the truth and the truth will set you free for that.

Now, at first glance, these words seem like nothing but good news. I mean, what invitation could be better in the whole entire world? Yet, interestingly, the rest of our passage from verses 33 to 59 are nothing but conflict.

Nothing but hostility. So the question we have to ask ourselves is, why? Why would there be such conflict and hostility to this? And I think it's because in order to set us free for this relationship, Jesus has to come up against everything in our lives and in the world that keeps us from that primary freedom.

[9 : 47] He has to go to battle with everything that keeps us from being free for that relationship.

And there's a whole bunch of things that threaten our freedom. And so what we see throughout the

passage, the rest of the passage, is that Jesus gives us freedom from, in order that we may have that freedom for.

And it's freedom from three things. It's freedom from sin, death, freedom from sin, the devil, and death itself. First, let's take a look at sin. Verse 33.

They respond to his offer with hostility. The people say, we are offspring of Abraham, the father of the covenant, of the promise. And we've never been enslaved to anyone.

How is it that you say, Jesus, you will become free? There's this aspect of the human heart that right when we're told you will become free, we resist the fact that that implies that we're enslaved and need to be freed.

We resist it right away. Let me give you a personal example of this. In the early years of our marriage, well, in the early months of our marriage, it's only been three years.

[11:03] So we'll go with early months. Anyways, in the early months of our marriage, my wife is gracious as she, she's just this gracious, wonderful woman, and she decided she needed to tell me that I had a bit of an anger issue that needed to be dealt with.

She's very Canadian, so she did it in a gracious way, framed it in a question somehow, and came up to me and said, Jordan, don't you think that you need to be set free from this anger issue? Seems to have a grip on your life. And right away, I was offended by the fact that she thought I didn't have control of it. I was offended by the fact that she thought that because I had sinned, I didn't have control.

Somehow I was just enslaved. So I got angry at her. So how dare you think I'm a slave to anger? And there's just this deep irony in that.

This deep irony that Jesus tells us in verse 34. Truly, truly, he says, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.

[12:08] And this is hard truth for us to swallow. It's especially hard for us to swallow in our particular culture, our moment in time and history. Because in our society, more than any other, we value freedom.

And we like to believe that we are the most free human society that has ever existed in many respects. It's our greatest cultural value, I'd even submit. Freedom of religion.

Freedom to vote. Freedom of press and speech. Freedom of choice. Freedom of exchange. Free markets. Free healthcare. Freedom is what we long for, what we work for, what we fight for.

And if anyone implies that we are not free, including the Lord Jesus himself, then he or she must be resisted. That's how we often feel. I saw a really sobering example of this a couple years ago when I had the opportunity to visit Paris.

I was visiting the great cathedral Notre Dame and so I decided I'd read up on a bit of its history. And I discovered that during the French Revolution, the revolutionaries actually took over the cathedral in Notre Dame and they made it their hub and their base for all their operations.

[13:22] And what they did when they, the first thing they did when they took it over is they went to the Lord's table which the Catholics call the altar. They took down the candles that represent the Old and New Testament.

They took off the bread and the wine that represents Jesus' body and blood and they took the cross down which is the heart and center of Christianity and of the world and what did they do?

they took a statue of Lady Liberty and put it up on the altar because they worshipped the freedom that they were achieving for themselves.

It's a sobering picture of how we can search for freedom so deeply and yet it can end up being our very bondage because it takes us away from the living God the only one who actually can give us freedom.

And we all know the experience of feeling this bondage in our lives the experience of repeated failure in our life. It may be anger for you like me maybe it's addiction maybe it's lust maybe it's envy or maybe it's resentment just can't forgive that person.

[14:35] You name it whatever it is we have our moments of self-delusion when we think we have it under control and then eventually it dawns on us the reality of our sin and our self-delusion bubble is popped and we're tempted to despair because we realize all of a sudden that we can't do anything about it and that we're helpless in the face of our slavery.

Jesus cuts through all our pride and self-delusion in verse 34 but he also cuts through all our despair and hopelessness in verses 35 and 36.

The slave does not remain in the house forever says Jesus the son remains so if the son sets you free you will be free indeed.

That word indeed can be translated really. Jesus is saying if the son sets you free you really will be free. Like I really can change your life says Jesus.

I really can set you free. Jesus has come to set us free from sin. Second, Jesus has come to set us free from the devil.

[15 : 46] Look at verse 41 there. The people respond by clinging to their identity saying we have one father even God.

Of course we're free. Jesus in verse 44 says not so much. 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.

This is the most descriptive verse in the whole Bible regarding the devil's activity. It's intense. It's not meant to be spooky. It's just meant to awaken us to spiritual reality.

Jesus wants us to know that we're caught up in a spiritual battle and he wants us to be aware of the fact that there's someone who does not want humans to be free and his name is the devil. He can hold us in bondage not by brute force as if we're robots.

[16 : 55] He can hold us in bondage through his deceptive lies and words. Through the way he takes God's words about God's goodness and generosity and distorts them so that we no longer think God is trustworthy anymore.

And Jesus points us to the fact that this has been the devil's tactic from the very beginning. He says in verse 44 he was a murderer from the beginning. I think what he's pointing to is Genesis chapter 3 where the devil speaks lies to Adam and Eve so that they turn away from God and murder death enters into the world for the very first time because a fundamental relationship has been broken. In chapter 2 God said to Adam and Eve here's the whole garden of Eden you can have all you can eat of all the trees in this garden except for one just one tree you can't eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil which I think represents autonomy from God.

And what does the devil do in chapter 3 verse 1 he slithers up and he whispers in the ears of human beings and he says did God really say you can't eat of any tree of the garden?

Notice what he does. Something that was an offer of generosity and goodness the devil now twists it and makes it look like God is holding out on us. He's a shady figure and we should not trust him.

[18 : 23] And there's a whole bunch of ways in which the devil lies to us in our lives and Jesus wants to come into our lives and set us free by telling us the truth about who God really is.

John chapter 1 verse 18 told us this was going to happen. No one has ever seen God but Jesus who is at the Father's right side has made him known.

Jesus comes to tell us the truth about God. And brothers and sisters over and over and over again in our lives we have to return and listen to the words of Jesus and let him tell us about who God is. Because there are a whole lot of lies we're tempted to believe. Tempted to believe that God doesn't love you and he's not really for you. And you need to listen to the words of Jesus.

John 3 16 For God so loved the world that means you everybody that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

[19 : 22] And then there's the lie that God has no power to intervene in your life. Well you need to hear the words of Jesus in this passage. If the Son sets you free you really really will be free.

Then there's the lie that God can't satisfy your deepest needs and desires so why not just go look elsewhere. We need to hear Jesus' words from chapter 6. I am the bread of life.

Whoever comes to me shall never thirst and whoever believes in me shall never hunger. And then there's the lie that God has no use for us.

That we're weak and we're worthless and we're empty and God can't really use us for his purposes. And we need to hear Jesus saying as he does in chapter 7.

If anyone's thirsty let him come to me and drink and out of his heart I will cause rivers of living water to flow out to other people. Jesus came to set us free from sin friends but he also came to set us free from the lies of the devil.

[20 : 33] And finally Jesus came to set us free from nothing less than death itself. The last great enemy. Verse 51 Truly, truly I say to you if anyone keeps my word he will never see death.

See our modern society puts a lot of time and a lot of money and a lot of energy into avoiding and ignoring death. We don't want to think about it. Because we all know that our lives will eventually come to this screaming halt and all the freedoms and accomplishments and joys that we've experienced in this world will all of a sudden end in the worst kind of slavery.

Death. We fear death. So we want to forget about it because we realize that we're powerless to do anything about it. And we're scared that it may have the last word in our lives.

I think one example of this is just that our city planning doesn't have any room for burial spaces anymore if you notice it. In the ancient world if you walked up to a church there would be burial grounds all around the church.

And then you would go in the church and there would be tombs all along on the sides as well and under the ground. And it reminded you constantly of your mortality as you went to hear the words of Jesus proclaimed that he has power over death.

[22 : 02] Truly, truly I say to you if anyone keeps my words he will never see death. I don't think Jesus is saying that we'll never experience physical death because we are.

I think what Jesus is saying is that physical death will not interrupt the spiritual and relational life and freedom that we have been given with the living God. Death cannot touch that anymore because the words of Jesus have set us free forever.

truly, truly I say to you if anyone keeps my word he will never taste death. If you abide in my word says Jesus you are truly my disciples and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.

It's a wonderful wonderful claim. It's audacious it's outrageous it is absurd and that's what the crowds believe when they hear Jesus.

They start questioning them because they go how in the world do you think you could offer this?

Who do you think you are Jesus? You must be a lunatic or a liar. Your claims must be hollow and thus your believers must be the people most of all to be pitied because nobody can do this.

[23 : 22] And so we see this whole passage comes to a head on this one question who is this Jesus and can he hold true to his claims? And it comes to a head in verse 58.

Jesus says to them and this is where we're going to finish truly truly I say to you before Abraham was before he ever existed and his feet touched the earth I am I am it's a statement of God's unique and unrivaled identity and you know the first time that we hear this great statement in the Bible it's in Exodus chapter 3 Moses is tending his sheep doing his day job and all sudden boom God appears in a burning bush and says Moses take off your shoes you're on holy ground and he says to Moses Moses I want you to deliver my people from slavery and I want you to set them free and Moses says God what am I going to say to your people when they ask what your name is and God says to Moses I am who I am doesn't sound very helpful but it's

God's major identity marker and throughout the Old Testament we see that when God comes to intervene and save his people from slavery this word I am shows up all over the place and so now Jesus has the audacity to stand in front of these Jewish crowds and say I am is standing right in front of you in flesh and blood and when somebody pulls out the I am statement there's only two possible responses you can have you either bow down and worship or you pick up stones and you throw and we see that the people in this passage pick up stones and throw in verse 59 it seems like a failure doesn't it but we know that these stones that are being thrown are not going to go away the opposition is just going to get more and more intense until these same people put Jesus up on the cross and it's on that moment that the cross which is the greatest symbol of human slavery actually becomes the greatest symbol for the rest of history of human freedom because it's on the cross where

God's grace reigns victorious where Jesus takes our sins where Jesus defeats the evil one and where Jesus buries death once and for all time it's on the cross that Jesus takes away everything that hinders true human flourishing and freedom and he did it all as John said in the beginning of his gospel so that all who come to him to receive as we are now going to do as we come to the table to all who believe in him he gave them the right the freedom to become children of the living God in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit Amen