

# John 8:31-38 “True Freedom”

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[ 0 : 00 ] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

This morning, if you would turn in your Bibles, we're going to be looking at John chapter 8, verse 31. It can be found in your pew Bibles. I don't have the page here.

Unfortunately, usually I cheat and see it here. Oh, there it is, 894. It's on the slide. Thank you. Page 894, if you'd like to look along with us. I know that there are probably some people who are watching the live stream at home because of what I'm about to talk about.

Just reality of what we're going through in this moment is how many people have seen the flu in your house? In some form or fashion, strep maybe?

Some sort of sickness over the past, I don't know, four to six weeks in your house, right? So it's run through our house. We've had it. I think a lot of people understand it. I want to tell you a little story about someone I know who has superhero powers.

[ 1 : 08 ] I worked with a young lady many years ago. She was from Memphis. I knew her through my wife's church. And she was a soccer player at Samford University in Birmingham.

And she told me this story once. And I thought it was an incredible story about her superpowers. Her soccer team would go through these seasons and they would be practicing.

And whether it was preseason or during the season and during the season, it was much more devastating. But everyone on the team would get strep. Everyone on the team would get strep throat.

Except her. Okay. Everybody on the team. And she just thought, I'm incredible. I never get strep. My immune system is so powerful.

I have superhuman powers. Right? Wrong. We're so wrong. And what was happening is Katie, after she would take a sip from a water bottle, would pass it to her teammate.

[ 2 : 12 ] And that teammate would take a sip from that water bottle. And that teammate would take a sip from that. And what she was, was an asymptomatic spreader of strep. And so she, every year for about two and a half years, was responsible for the entire soccer team to get strep.

That is my nightmare as a parent, that that would happen in some form or fashion. But what was happening is that she actually didn't understand or know what was really going on with her.

She didn't really know the reality of the sickness she actually had. She just didn't have any of the sore throat or the pain or the sickness or the weariness. She didn't have any of that, which is, I think, a great superpower for the rest of her life.

She'll probably never have strep the way we get strep. But it meant that she was very unaware. Very unaware of something that, even though she didn't see it, was wrong with her.

And today we're going to be reading a passage where Jesus is addressing believers, people who have believed in him and are following him and are Jews who have seemed to have given themselves over to Jesus and following him and obeying him.

[ 3 : 28 ] And they seem also to not understand something about themselves. They seem to not realize something about themselves. And I think that's important because I think we equally are often, every day, daily, guilty of not really realizing something about ourselves.

The good news I do know is that having been here for a few years and having been in our denomination for years, we don't fail to preach about sin.

But that's what today's sermon is primarily about and our awareness of that. And it's also about how Jesus frees us in that. And so those are really the two points you won't see an outline if you really want to know.

It's this, it's that one, is that Jesus knows how serious our sin is. If you want that to be one of your two points we're going to talk about. But Jesus also knows how much stronger the Son of God is. So we're going to talk through that. But I also want to point out that we're in John and we have been in John. And we were talking yesterday and we were making a joke at the elders retreat, maybe it was two days ago, about how someone can tell you something a million times.

[ 4 : 45 ] And then when someone else tells you something, you're like, oh, yeah. And then, so it's like if you're a parent, maybe you've been blessed by this, where you have a child or a student and they won't listen to you and they won't listen to you and their Sunday school teacher or their youth leader or their friend tells them they need to stop doing something or because they love them and they're trying to help them.

And suddenly the parent, even though they've tried to say it a million times, it only, this other voice that comes in and says, here, this is, something's wrong. And the, you know, as a parent myself, I'm always like, why wouldn't you just listen to me?

I just want you to listen to me. I want the credit, A, that's my sin. I want the credit. I want someone to think he's a good dad. But the reality is, is that another angle, another voice always helps, right? It helps us to see things more clearly, I hope, I think. Because in John, we've seen a lot of different ways that Jesus is speaking to this similar idea, right? We've seen, you are walking in darkness. I am the light of the world. So therefore, you must be walking in darkness if Jesus is the light of the world. And if Jesus is the light, there's a problem of darkness.

[ 5 : 59 ] I am, I will quench your thirst with living water. There must be a problem. You must be thirsty. I am the bread of life.

You will not hunger and you will not thirst. There must be a problem. You're hungry and thirsty. And so there is a problem that Jesus is addressing over and over and over and over. And he's using different angles and different illustrations to help all of us understand.

And today he uses one about slavery. And I want to make sure before we read the passage, just you hear this, that Jesus is speaking about slavery in a spiritual way that is not meant to make any statements about slavery in general.

And we've kind of, I think I've had to preach similarly about a subject like slavery and slavery is a very serious thing. There's still in today, there's lots of organizations you can get online and read about modern day slavery.

And it's not something that I want to gloss over for the sake of glossing over it. But I do want to make sure you understand that the realities of slavery are starkly, are awful.

[ 7 : 08 ] They're terrible. And ultimately anything, slavery included, that abuses or wounds or hurts people made in the image of God, we are starkly against it as Christians.

I mean, very much so. And it's something that is worth our time to battle against because it is so much, that's how much God values people.

And so I don't mean to gloss over it or this is not a statement about how God feels about slavery. This is about Jesus using slavery as a way to communicate one other angle about the power of sin and how it affects us.

And so I'm going to read God's word and then we're going to pray and then we'll dive in. So let's read, if you want to read along with me in John chapter 8 verses 31 through 30, did I say 38?

Oh yeah, I said 38. Sorry, the propter gave me a mild heart attack just now. Let's read 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.

[ 8 : 22 ] 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 you are the offspring of Abraham, yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you.

I speak of what I've seen with my father and you do what you have heard from your father. This is God's word. Let's pray. Jesus, thank you for your words. Thank you for the word of God.

Thank you that it speaks to us. It penetrates deep into our hearts. It changes us. It makes us more like Jesus and it sanctifies us as we walk in our lives. Lord, may that be true today of your word.

May it be true of me more than anyone else in this room so that I might cling tightly to Jesus above all else. Lord, we love you and we thank you and we pray in Jesus' name.

[ 9 : 29 ] Amen. Amen. Okay. So Jesus speaks using the imagery of slavery. And so what he's trying to communicate is that there's this major, massive, big problem that we all have.

And it's more than just speaking to this crowd that he's preaching to about their lack of self-awareness. Right? Oftentimes I feel like I'm just not very self-aware and I don't think about, you know, what I'm doing and how it hurts other people.

Or I'm not thinking about how my actions cause other people to be hurt. What it really is doing is it's pointing out just how awful and terrible and impactful sin is.

But because it's more than just a lack of self-awareness, Jesus wants us to truly be introspective for a moment. He does. He wants us to be introspective about the reality of sin in our lives.

See, because we do build these little kingdoms that I love. I do it. Where my own righteousness is built on my own actions and what I've done and what I've made.

[ 10 : 38 ] Have my little kingdoms that I make where I'm the boss. I'm the best. I'm better than this mom, dad, parent, etc. I'm a good pastor because of this. I'm a good person because of this.

I built up these little kingdoms or where I believe myself to be better than I am. And not only is it about my own righteousness that I've earned or made happen or I've built up.

But it's also about a sense of how great I am. It's not just about like doing the right things. It's about how great I am. I'm pretty great. And I tragically in many ways regret a lot of conversations and things I've said that actually may have let words like how awesome I really feel about myself come out all the time.

If you knew me in my 20s, which some of you do, I had a problem falsely of believing in myself. I had no reason to. I had no need to. But I did. I believed in myself real well. I had no problem describing the many ways that I was awesome.

[ 11 : 46 ] And I don't, it's a funny joke now, but as an adult who's now done a lot of different things since my 20s, I look back with a lot of regret, a lot of sadness, a lot of things that I've hurt people with, with those kind of things that I've done.

And so there's a sense of self-righteousness where we've earned our own, earned our own righteousness and we've done something that we've made, made ourselves to be better because of the things we've done or things we've accomplished.

There's a self-worship where I make myself God and I think more highly and I'm the center of my universe and I want to make sure everybody knows how great I am. But then just in general, we tend to on our day-to-day lives.

So it's not just this kind of overarching kind of feeling about ourselves. It's a constant self-focus. It's a constant inward look at ourselves.

And so when we become the hero of our own story and we miss the realities of the world, the realities of what it means to walk with Jesus, we really miss the picture of how good Jesus is.

[ 12 : 56 ] And so we have to, we have to, again, we have to focus on the realities of who we are as God reminds us in his word. And so we're going to, we're going to believe Jesus when he tells us he knows how serious sin is.

Right? Right? He's calling it slavery. And he's talking about not only big S sin, like our sin nature and who we are as fallen people.

From Genesis 3 on people. Right? People who are experiencing and living in a sinful and broken world. He's also talking about the average, everyday, nonchalant and terrible and awful and just incredibly bad sins that we daily commit.

He's talking about how our hearts and our minds and our lives are literally deeply connected to sin. And he wants us to take it very seriously.

And I've talked about myself a lot just now, but I think it's because a lot of us, when we think about our sin, we are not as willing to admit there's a deception of sin.

[ 14 : 12 ] Right? Sin deceives us into thinking these kind of things. Right? So when you look at this passage and you look at Jesus talking to these Jews who are, you know, believing in him, they themselves have been deceived.

Right? Because they are not seeing Jesus for who he is. And that's when my eyes are on myself, I'm definitely not going to see Jesus for who he is.

And so he's telling them, he said, if you abide in my word, you will truly be my disciples. If you hold fast to Jesus, if you continually walk in Jesus, walk with him as his disciple, you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.

And 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? They are standing before Jesus, the Jesus who has taught them repeatedly about who he is, who he is.

And told them that he is, when you, even in the previous passage, when you've lifted up the son of man, even addressing himself in a way that gives him, in the previous portion of John 8, he talks about himself as the son of man.

[ 15 : 32 ] And they don't see Jesus for who he is. They only see themselves as Abraham's offspring. They're clinging to the status of who they are and where they've come from, their national identity, their religious background.

Look, we're fine. We're the children of Abraham. We're good. We're fine. I live in a really nice neighborhood in Huntsville. We're fine. I've got, my kids are really well behaved.

We're fine. And I don't really, and we start to sound like them if we're really honest. Because we fail to realize just how deceitful sin is in our lives.

Additionally, if you think really, what I really find to be my own problem is I have the whole Bible and I continually like to paint myself as a better person than the Bible reminds me I really am.

And thinking about the people who are responding to Jesus and they're saying, well, we're the children of Abraham. And, you know, we studied the Torah. We know the law. And they also know that the heart of man is deceitful above all things.

[ 16 : 42 ] They also know that man has fallen and is broken. They also know the story of how God continually has to rescue Israel from their sin.

They've seen the patterns of the book of Judges. And they don't understand themselves. And I don't say it to be sarcastic or mean. I think I do the same thing.

I look at the patterns of Judges and I think, oh, I'm not like them. That's not me. I've seen the sin of the Bible and how it describes people.

And, oh, that's not me. And so we find ourselves deceived by these other identities and these other things we cling to that make us feel like we've got things under control.

But not only are we deceived, there's this strength that sin has when he's talking about our slavery to sin. So we can be deceived by sin, but there's also this strength, right?

[ 17 : 40 ] And that's where the whole imagery of slavery with a master and a slave dynamic, right? Who is in control of the slave? It's not the slave.

There's a clear dynamic in that relationship where the master or the slave owner and the slave have a very distinct relationship. And the power is all on the master.

And Jesus is saying, your master is sin. Jesus is saying that your master, the one who's in control of you, is sin.

And so I have to remember that it's not just about, oh, sin's a bad thing. Whoops. It's awful.

It is not the way things were meant to be. It is the very opposite of what God desires from us. But also it's the most awful and hurtful thing that we can live out.

[ 18 : 42 ] But we can seem to think it's under control. We seem to think we are stronger, that I can do more. And so when sin, when we look at this dynamic, it has power and control.

And so not only is it deceiving us and it's stronger than we're willing to admit, it actually also spreads further. The spread of sin is bigger than we think.

We often want to just say, well, I'm good now. I'm okay. I've given that up. But the struggle against sin happens our entire life until Jesus returns or he calls us home.

And that's not something for some of us. That's not something for everybody who's not a pastor. That's the struggle of every human being on the planet.

Here's where it says this in verse 34. Jesus answered them, truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. Everyone.

[ 19 : 49 ] That's a strong word, right? But the Apostle Paul tells us this about everyone as well. In Romans chapter 3, verse 23, it says this, that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

And so though we think we've got it under control, though we think we can be stronger than sin, though we think we've even figured sin out, it's every person. We'll struggle against it.

And then Jesus, in this illustration of slavery, he talks about how severe, the severity of sin.

And just think on this. This is an amazing thing that God's going to reveal so he can undo it. He's going to reveal it so he can undo it.

But 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.

[ 20 : 55 ] So if the son sets you free, you will be free indeed. The slave does not remain. The reality of the relationship between a slave and master was one of a piece of property.

And so the son, by virtue of being the son of the father, he remains. Jesus remains in his father's house forever.

Those who are caught in slavery to sin can be sent away at the will of the master.

And so there's a belonging that we lack. Both personally, every day, and then eternally if we remain in slavery to sin.

So Jesus wants us to know in this passage just how serious sin is. It's not something that we ought to mess with.

[ 22 : 02 ] Not something we ought to play with. Not something we want to take lightly. Not something we want to. And yet, all of us struggle against it. So how might there be real freedom?

How might there be true freedom for people who are caught in sin? Who are in sin? Who are sinners in need of saving? Jesus knows how much stronger the son is.

There's a freedom in him. He talks here in verse 31. He says, if you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples.

And he's talking about what does it look like to follow and cling to and be in Jesus truly. And abiding in my word sounds like if you do the right things.

If you just listen. If you just listen to what I'm telling you to do and do that. But it's if you cling to the Jesus who transforms and daily walk as his disciple.

[ 23 : 07 ] It is not about doing. It is about the one whom you are clinging to. It is not about us doing more. But about by clinging to Jesus and being his disciple.

It will make us desire to walk with him. It will change us into people who abide his word. In his word. And so we're set free when we are in the son to live as we were meant to live.

See we have to go all the way back. Right? We you know we talk about the narrative of the scriptures and the creation was how we were meant to be. And we were fallen and broken and everything got messed up and everything has been messed up.

And Jesus has come to bring redemption and save us. And one day all this will be made new and right and perfect again. And in this story we have to look back and see what was it like for Adam and Eve to walk with God in the garden.

What was it like? What was that relationship? And it was the way we were meant to be in perfect and right relationship with the God of the universe. And so the son is the one who has shown up to bring that redemption.

[ 24 : 27 ] To bring that salvation. To bring that transformation. That brings us back to the place that we were meant to be in relationship with God. And he gives us freedom to live in him and with him now and forever.

It's not a one time thing that we engage in and then move on. It's this ongoing relationship with the God of the universe who sent his son so that we might know what real freedom to live as we were meant to live would look like.

And so real freedom is found only in the son and only the son can be the one to set you free. Why? Because he's coming to operate in the strength of his father. He's coming to operate in the will of his father and do the business of his father who has sent him.

And so freedom means more than just, oh, I'm kind of can do whatever I want. It means freedom to know that our righteousness does not come from me. And the things that I try and achieve and do every day.

It means that my saving, I cannot even attempt to save myself or do enough to win to perhaps outweigh the bad that I've done today.

[ 25 : 47 ] Freedom means that I change my focus and fix my eyes no longer on myself and my things that I'm trying to achieve or how I identify myself, but identify myself and keep my eyes fixed on Jesus, the one who brings real freedom from sin.

Because he's the one who pays for our sin. We can look to Jesus because the son is so much stronger than any sin we could ever imagine.

So much so that he defeated death and rose again. We can trust in the son because he's the one who will find a way, make a way for our sins to be cleansed, our sins to be forgiven, our sins to be as far as the east is from the west, our sins to be dealt with so that we no longer walk in them. Now, I'm not saying we can walk perfectly in this life. I will not say that. I don't believe it. I don't think the Bible tells us we can walk perfectly in this life.

But I think freedom means clinging deeply to Jesus as we walk in this together. You and I. It means that we are now free as we, you know, Will read this this morning.

[ 27 : 15 ] I'm trying to throw my pen. Will read this morning. It's people who are weary and need rest, people who mourn and long for comfort, people who feel worthless and wonder if God cares, all who struggle, who sin and need a savior.

This is the reality of what God has brought us together as we walk in him, that we might walk together and support one another and point one another back to the things that we ought to focus on.

The very God of the universe, keeping our hearts and minds in line, knowing that God desires our relationship with him. Our relationship.

Let me say that again. Our relationship with him. Not just my relationship with him. That's true. But us as God's people, as we walk together to help one another and love one another and point one another back to the son who gives freedom.

And so you and I will walk together as much as we can imperfectly. Remind each other to fix our eyes, to put our eyes on the Jesus who gives us real freedom.

[ 28 : 27 ] As we seek to abide in him and walk with him and serve him in this church and in this place here in Huntsville. And I know at different points in the course of our John sermons, we've touched on the connections between Exodus and Jesus' preaching.

And you can't hear the words about slavery and not think about Exodus and Egypt and the Israelites. And how good God has shown himself to be as someone who sets his people free.

And we know that God in Egypt, he sets his people free from physical slavery. But in Jesus, he is setting us free from sin and our slavery to sin.

And I want to read to you from Exodus 19 really quickly because I think it's important to remember this is what God has done.

He has saved his people. He's brought them out of Egypt. He's brought them through this and he's covenanting with them. And in Exodus 19, this is what, this is Moses went up to God in chapter 19 verses 3 through 6.

[ 29 : 44 ] And the Lord called him from the mountain and said, This is what you are to say to the descendants of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel. You yourselves have seen what I did in Egypt, what I did to Egypt.

And how I carried you on eagle's wings and brought you to myself. Now, if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all the nations, you will be my treasured possession.

Although the whole earth is mine. You will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites. The God of the universe sets his people free from slavery and reminds them that they belong to him in relationship.

That they belong in relationship. They were meant to be in relationship with him eternally, forever. That they would have a new identity.

It's not that they are slaves anymore, but that they are a treasured possession among all the nations. That God's people who have been rescued out of slavery have been given a new identity.

[ 30 : 55 ] And they are more valuable than they could ever imagine to the God of the universe. You are more valuable than you could ever imagine.

Though despite your sin, right? This is what we need to hear. That for while we were still weak at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly.

For one will scarcely die for a righteous person. Though perhaps for a good person, one would dare even to die. But God shows his love for us. And that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Jesus, though he knows our sin, though he knows our struggle, though he knows the reality of it. He willingly gave his life in order that we might have real life in Christ.

Jesus sets us free from sin. And as we seek to honor and glorify and walk with him all of our lives, we can remember that he has considered us his treasure.

[ 32 : 18 ] So that we might know him. So that we might walk with him. So we might tell our neighbor about him. So we might share with one another. We might encourage one another. We might hold one another up.

Not for the sake of ourselves. Not for the sake of our own self-righteousness. Not for the sake of our own self-focus.

But so that we might walk in the true relationship with God we were meant to. See this table that we're going to partake in today.

It's a reminder to us of how Jesus was willing to go to the cross to set us free from the slavery of sin.

It's a reminder of Jesus' sacrifice. And how valuable he considered you his people.

[ 33 : 22 ] And how much he thought sin must be destroyed. So that he might be with those who he loves. He sees his people as a treasured possession.

And so this is the reality of the table. Is that this is a table for sinners. Who know and understand that they trust.

They hold fast. They abide in Jesus. Because Jesus is the only one who has the strength. The ability. The power. To make us right before the God of the universe.

And this sacrament is a wonderful and a beautiful. But it's a serious thing. The way we take and understand our sin is a serious thing. We take this sacrament seriously.

And it's a meal that we observe in remembrance of Jesus. Remembering his death till he comes again. And it's more than that. It's a means of grace. And one of the things that my seminary professors that I try and say every time we come before the table.

[ 34 : 31 ] Is that it's not something simple. It's not symbolic. Something actually happens. It's a means of grace where God meets us here. And so that's why we take it seriously.

Because we're drawing near. We're drawing near to Christ through this table. It paints a picture physically with the bread and the wine. It encourages us against our sin.

It moves us to one another. It allows us to love one another with zeal. And it grows us in our faith as we pursue holiness. As we seek to abide in Jesus and cling fast to him.

As much as we can. As much as we're able. Because by the power of the spirit we are clinging to him. And this table is a picture of God's grace and love for his people. And it's a table of welcome for God's people.

It's kind of a family meal. I know that sounds weird to say. And I say that so we understand it. That this is a table for believers. People who are abiding in Christ.

[ 35 : 34 ] Clinging to Jesus. It's not Southwood's table. It's not our denomination's table. It is Jesus' table. It is the Lord's table. And for all those who possess true faith in Christ.

Who are clinging to him. Abiding in him. And are. Whether you're visiting from another church. And you are in good standing with that church. And your church believes the truth about Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

And his atonement for our sins. Then this table is for you. And the other thing is. If you're still questioning. Or you don't yet believe. Or you're figuring this out.

Or you have questions. And we. The pastors and any of the elders would love to talk about that. And then I would ask you to not partake. Simply because this table is for God's people.

Who are abiding in him. And so if you have not yet done that. And you'd like us to pray for you. We'd be glad to pray for you. And talk with you more about that. And so if you would.

[ 36 : 31 ] This table is for God's people. And for those who have placed their faith in Jesus. I want to make sure you. There's a couple of stations with gluten-free options. Wines. For the bread.

And on the inner circle is wine. And on the outer circle is grape juice. So when you come and take the Lord's Supper. When the elders and the deacon.

And the ushers come to prompt us. Just as a reminder that those things are there for you. So you might know. And then now I'm going to invite the elders.

And the ushers to come on down while I pray for us. Father would you use these common elements. Would you use your word. Would you by your spirit. Would you be at work.

Help us to see a clear picture of Jesus. Knowing him. Abiding in him. Clinging to him. Loving him. Father may we see that in this bread. In this wine.

[ 37 : 28 ] As we partake in this. Lord strengthen us. Encourage us. Point us to you. May we cling tightly to the God. God. Who has given himself to us.

Who has sacrificed on our behalf. And who has made us his treasure possession. We pray this in Jesus name. Amen. For more information. Visit us online at southwood.org. And we're also glad to recognize that in the movie scene. You always will remember if you're 19 ■■■■■■■■■ DHL. utility card. And I will ask to you. We pray this out.