

The truth shall set you free

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, everybody. It's lovely to see you, to have you worship with us, and now to hear God's word. We're going to look at John chapter 8, verses 31 to 59. And a word of thanks to Andy, to Eve, who didn't know she was playing until about 8 o'clock this morning, to Veronica.

Veronica and Ken soon to go off on their holidays, off to Australia. Wonderful. The Lord bless you on your journey. And I have to say thank you to Fiona, because Fiona was meant to be preaching this morning, and again, because of Andy's dad dying, that was passed to me.

So a lot of what I'm saying is hers, with my own little spice on it, hopefully, just to make it me. Yeah, spice is maybe not the right word. I don't know.

You might have noticed that it feels lighter at front. The organ frontage has been moved back. So there'll be no organ, but there hasn't been an organ for a long time.

It's been broken. But it'll all be put back under the window. It's all been reconstructed now. Heavy work on Friday to get it back there. And then all of this stage will open up, which will be nice. Get rid of that fence, which is good.

[1 : 30] And then it'll be... I don't think it was meant to be a fence, but... But it is a bit of a fence. The building is the shape of the building. I mean, I'd prefer a building wherever you were.

It was in a circle, and we weren't so kind of us and them. But that will come in time as things change and we get more open space. But, yeah, this beautiful building will retain the architecture at the back, but that will make that so much lighter as well, which is lovely.

Anyway, let's read together from Scripture. From verse 31 of chapter 8. It's kind of bizarre, that, isn't it?

They kind of were slaves in Egypt. That was the kind of whole point, in a way, of these feasts.

However, we can pick and mix what we choose to remember, can't we, when it comes to our past? And if we want to emphasize the positive, we can forget all the negatives. How can you say that we shall be set free? Jesus replied, I'll tell you the truth.

[2 : 56] Everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now, a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. You notice that Jesus is distinguishing between types of slavery.

They had been slaves, or in their own mind, had never been slaves, but they had. The nation had been slaves in Egypt. That was in a political and in a secular and social realm.

But Jesus is speaking about a different kind of bondage of slavery, and that is slavery to sin. Now, if you wonder if you are or have ever been a slave to sin, just try and think about those bad things that you do in your life, or have done in your life, that you couldn't break the power of it.

And then you will know that you have been, or are, still, a slave of sin. Now, a slave, verse 35, has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever.

So if the son sets you free, you will be free indeed. I know you are Abraham's descendants, yet you are ready to kill me, because you've no room for my word.

[4 : 19] I am telling you what I have seen in the father's presence, and you do what you've heard from your father. Abraham is our father, they answered.

If you were Abraham's children, said Jesus, then you would do the things Abraham did. As it is, you are determined to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God.

Abraham did not do such things. You are doing the things your own father does. We are not illegitimate children, they protested. The only father we have is God himself.

Jesus said to them, If God were your father, you would love me, for I came from God, and now I'm here. I have not come on my own, but he sent me.

Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire.

[5 : 24] You see, Jesus wasn't interested in how to win friends and influence people, was he? He's trying to impress people to say your father is the devil is not the way of going about it.

But the truth has to be preached and taught, even if it is unpalatable, and even if it is unwelcome to the hearer.

You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him.

You see, somebody who knows God and loves God and has God as his father would not want to destroy the people that God has made. the very first act of the devil and the devil, the very first act of the devil in this world in which he was given dominion was to prompt Cain to murder his brother. It was his very first act, public act. Sin was crouching at Cain's door, God said. But you must master it.

[6 : 33] But he couldn't master it because he was a slave to sin. And so in anger and in bitterness, he killed his brother. Your father has been a murderer from the beginning.

And that is how you exemplify that the father, your father, the devil, lives in your heart because you want to kill me. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him.

When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me.

Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me? He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God. The Jews answered him, aren't we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed? Poor Samaritans. You know, there's only one thing worse than being demon-possessed in the Jewish mind.

[7 : 39] You're a Samaritan. We have to be so careful of othering, don't we? It produces a kind of irrational hatred in our minds. You know, all this talk about the other and marginalizing the other.

It's becoming very prevalent in our society. People judge because of the color of their skin or the religion that they were born with or whatever else. And we treat them as if they're somehow not even human.

and for all, there are very real and strong reasons politically and socially why the country worries about immigration and all that kind of thing.

And it's part of the political discourse. Can I just counsel against hating people or marginalizing people for any reason? They are made in the image of God and loved by Him.

And instead of us getting too caught up in the politics of which I'm studiously avoiding, let us remember that they are hearts that Jesus loves and longs for their salvation.

[8 : 47] And let us pray for their salvation and be bold in our witness to all people, whatever their labels. The Jews answered him, Aren't we right in saying that you are a Samaritan demon-possessed?

I am not possessed by a demon, said Jesus, but I honor my Father and you dishonor me. I am not seeking glory for myself, but there is one who seeks it and he is the judge.

I tell you the truth, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death. At this, the Jews exclaimed, Now we know that you are demon-possessed. Abraham died and so did the prophets.

Yet you say that if anyone keeps your word, he will never taste death. Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?

Again, you've got to kind of ask yourself, haven't you, what kind of religion these people had? They believed in the resurrection to eternal life. They believed that when a person died, they would dwell in the presence of the Lord forever.

[9 : 52] And now they seem to be denying the possibility of that and criticizing Jesus because he believed it. Over the years as I have studied theology, I'm always amazed at what clerics deny.

Well, they deny the existence of the virgin birth or deny the possibility of miracle or deny the possibility of the physical resurrection of Jesus.

So I'm never surprised when on the odd time I read of a cleric who doesn't believe in God either and I think, why do you bother? Go and do something else instead of infecting the church with such unbelief.

But here it is. Religious people can be the worst. Jesus replied, if I glorify myself, my glory means nothing.

My father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and keep his word.

[11:01] Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day. He saw it and was glad. You are not yet fifty years old, the Jews said to him.

And you have seen Abraham? I tell you the truth, Jesus answered. Before Abraham was born, I am. And they knew exactly what he was saying.

At this, they picked up stones to stone him. But Jesus hid himself slipping away from the temple grounds. I will go back over the I am statement.

I said that last week. It is crucial to the gospel of John that you understand that Jesus is God manifest in the flesh. That he is the word of God who has come among us.

And he is revealing himself as the great I am to the Jews. And yet he's saying, I and the Father are one. For we believe in a Trinitarian God of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

[12:03] All right. The truth shall set you free. You've had a kind of a rotten running commentary. I'm just going to focus really on the 32nd verse. If the Son sets you free, you shall be free indeed.

You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free. Next slide, please. This famous quote from one of my historical heroes, Martin Luther King.

You'll all perhaps recall it on Martin Luther King Day if we were American in January. But a wonderful statement speaking about the bondage that the colored race in America suffered with the repression of coloreds in the United States.

And he had a dream. And in his dream, he said that one day everybody, regardless of their color or their gender, their creed, will be free.

Free at last. Free at last. Thank God Almighty, we are free at last. This was his final sermon.

[13:15] It was a speech or sermon delivered on the day he was executed by assassinated in America.

April 4th, 1968, was it? Looking to Eve yesterday. April 4th, 1968, when he was assassinated. Thank God Almighty, free at last.

And as a believer in Christ, his freedom was not just a freedom that would reside in the United States, and it's arguable that it still doesn't really exist perfectly there for people of color, but a freedom that all of us can know through Jesus.

freedom from the bondage of sin, and a freedom from death, the consequences of sin. A freedom that will lead us to eternal life in Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Freedom from sin and its consequences is really important. I've talked about bondage already. Next slide, please. But free, what does it mean to be free?

[14:30] Next slide. Well, there are examples of what freedom means. We talk about free speech. We all have the freedom to say whatever we think.

Ah, well, actually, we don't. There are some restrictions. For example, famously, you cannot shout, fire, in a crowded cinema. And the reason you can't cry, fire, or bomb at St. James's Park is because, that's just me bringing it up to date, that's because it would lead to a stampede and the possibility of people being killed in the crush.

So there are restrictions on human freedoms, even on freedoms of speech. America calls itself the land of the free in order to escape the repression of the aristocracy and the monarchy of the United Kingdom and other nations in the old world in Europe.

People went to America to get rid of kings and cardinals and aristocrats. Aristocrats. Aristocrats. Aristocrats would be good, but aristocrats not so good.

And they get their freedom by all being equal. But is America an equal society? Yeah. There is the old money still in America and of course freedom is great for those who can afford it.

[15:57] But the concept of freedom, well that's a good idea. The idea that regardless of who you're born to or the riches you inherit, you can become president one day, that is a good idea.

Freedom does not mean you're at liberty to do whatever you want. You're not free to drive on the wrong side of the road. You're not free just to beat somebody up because they happen to look at you the wrong way.

You're not free to defraud people or hurt people. Your freedom is always within limits, within the boundaries of the law. So by freedom, the dictionary definition suggests not under the control or in

the power of another.

Freedom without limits yet, but not under undue control. However, what is the purpose of law when it comes to freedom?

It's not to restrict you. It is to give you boundaries. Yes, there is restriction, of course, but within boundaries.

[17:07] Only necessary restrictions in order to keep the whole of society as happy as possible. You will never, of course, have perfect freedom because you may want to respond to somebody unkindly.

You may want to say what you think and you may be frustrated that the Lord does not allow you to do so. There is not unrestricted freedom and so freedom will always be something that escapes us fully in this world.

to be free from unnecessary restriction. But then there is a different kind of freedom, the spiritual freedom that Jesus speaks about.

If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed. Now, he was speaking, remember, to a religious group of people, to the most religious people in society.

And he was speaking to them about the problems of their religion. Their religion did not set them free. It bound them. And it bound them in such a way that it made them unbelieving and judgmental.

[18:21] They spent all of their time questioning, deciding which truths they would accept and which truths they would conveniently ignore, deciding what was palatable and believable as opposed to those things that they just were rather embarrassed about and pushed to the side and never spoke about.

And then, of course, because they decided there was a set of religious principles that they must follow to earn eternal life, they then judged others who did not meet the standards of the principles that they had established or did not say the kinds of things that they found acceptable and so they were dismissed as heretics not worthy of belief or confidence in.

And that is what they were doing with Jesus. They were rejecting him. They were calling him a liar. They were saying that he was demon-possessed.

They were absolutely convinced that he was a fraud. And Jesus was saying to these religious people, I have come to set you free from the shackles of your religion.

You see, if your faith, your religion, does not give you a clear conscience, if it does not give you an answer to the consequences of your sin, if it does not grant you atonement, forgiveness for your sin, or absolution, that knowledge that when you die, you will not be answerable for your sin, but you are set free by the grace of God who accepts you because of your faith in Jesus, then your religion is not doing you any good.

[20:01] It is just presenting you with a different type of bondage. See, the person who says, I cannot get through the day without a fix, whether that fix be drugs or alcohol, is under a kind of addiction.

But the person who worries that they've not said their prayers right, who worries that because they've messed up again, God may well condemn them, has a different kind of addiction, but it's addiction nonetheless.

The addiction of fear and doubt that religion is not dealing with. When Jesus says, if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed, He is speaking to your conscience.

He is saying, look, I have paid the penalty for your sin. I have answered for it. You are no longer under its weight or its judgment or under its condemnation.

You are free from it so that you can face death in the knowledge that because the Son has set you free, all will be well with your soul.

[21:06] I remember years ago meeting a man who was converted to Jesus Christ from a life of crime. He'd spent a lot of his life from a young boy stealing stuff and he'd been to prison a number of times.

and he told me that when he first read the commandment, you shall not steal, he took it as a promise. Great! I've been stealing all my life.

Jesus has set me free. I'm never going to steal again. Now, it's not a promise. It's a command. But he took it as a promise because he felt a freedom in his heart.

Jesus had set him free and he knew he was a changed man and he knew he no longer needed to steal because Jesus had set him free. He no longer needed to commit adultery because he was set

free from those lusts and desires.

He no longer needed to sin because Jesus was his Savior. Now, I remember thinking to myself, what do I do here? I don't want to disabuse the poor guy.

[22 : 13] He was misinterpreting the Scripture but he was in possession of a great truth. that Jesus breaks the power of sin in a person's life and sets you on a new trajectory and course.

Now, he will learn, of course, that he doesn't immediately get the whole package here. He will still struggle with sin. Jesus is not saying, you will be sinless in this world.

He is saying, I have set you free from the consequences of sin. But one of the things he does as he sets us free from the consequences of sin is he produces a hatred and loathing of sin in us which is why we struggle still with it and why we feel guilty when we do wrong.

See, when we come to know Jesus, we kind of start to feel guilty about things we never felt guilty about before and we think, why do I feel guilty and uneasy about that? And then we think, well, this is a bit disturbing, Lord.

I really came to you for peace and comfort. I didn't come to you to get feeling guilty. Please set me free. And then scriptures like the blood of Jesus, God's Son, will cleanse you from all sin.

[23 : 26] Wonderful comfort. John says, I'd rather you didn't sin. But if you do sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous one, who is the propitiation or atoning sacrifice for your sin and not only for yours but for the sin of the whole world.

Thank God, every day the blood of Jesus cleanses me. And that's a demonstration, you see, of not being under the power and dominion of sin.

It's not because I now have tried really hard and got rid of all those bad things I've ever thought of or done. It's because always there is an answer to the power of sin in my life.

It's always the blood of Jesus. It's never New Year's resolutions. As much as I try, every year I try to be fitter, healthier, all of that.

And I'm battling a 63-year-old body that says, you're not 21 anymore, John. You can't go in the garden for eight hours and not feel the aches and pains. And as much as you try not to do those things that your eye turns to, your heart loves, as much as you try, you can't do that without the Holy Spirit.

[24 : 40] only He has the power to break sin in my life. So Jesus is speaking about a spiritual freedom. Next slide, please.

We are slaves to sin, He says. We are controlled by earthly passions and desires. And we are unable to redeem ourselves if the Son sets you free.

You shall be free indeed. Not if you do it. Not if you learn the right words or say the right prayers or have the right mantras. Not if you try to do it.

Not if you get all of the wisdom that men collectively have put together. Not if you understand the philosophers or the sages or the religious thinkers. None of those things will set you free.

Jesus says, I alone set you free. If the Son shall set you free, if I shall set you free, Jesus says, you shall be free indeed.

[25 : 40] And once you are in Christ, you are no longer under the dominion of sin. You are not under law, Paul says, but under grace. And because you are not under law, the punishment of the law cannot apply to you.

For the law says, the soul that sins shall die. But Jesus says, I have set you free from the law of sin and death. So you are no longer under the law's condemnation.

The law has nothing to do with you. Grace has set you free. And the reward of grace is eternal life.

Now, of course, this does not mean that you're free then to practice sin. You see, if you love somebody, and I hope you love somebody, let's say, you know, you're a married couple and you love your spouse, you wouldn't wake up in the morning saying, how am I going to annoy her today? I'm trying to avoid my wife's eyes. How am I going to hurt her today? How am I going to make her life a misery today?

[27 : 02] And then see her hurt and upset and miserable and think, ha, that feels great. What a lovely day I'm having. If you heard that or even thought that I was thinking that, you would think, what a horrible person he is.

I don't want anything to do with him. Quite rightly so. But a man who loves his wife or a woman who loves her husband does not seek to hurt them at all. They would not dream of it.

Sometimes they will. But because love resides in their heart, it influences the way they behave. If the love of God is in our hearts, if the love of Jesus is in our hearts, we will wake up seeking to please him, not seeking to hurt him or upset him or disregard him or let him down or defame him or dishonor him.

We would never do that. And Paul asks this question in Romans 6, Shall we go on sinning that grace may abound? Shall we sin to try and get glory to God?

He says, God forbid. How can those who know the love of God in their heart think like that? How can those who die to sin, he says, live any longer in it?

[28 : 13] That is not now our nature because we have been set free. not freedom in a vacuum but freedom to love God and freedom to live for the honor of Jesus Christ.

We are spiritually free from those things. Next slide, please. The truth sets us free.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whoever believes in him, that whoever includes you, shall not perish but shall have eternal life.

Put your name there because that's true. When you die, yes, not when you die. Now, when you believe, you shall have eternal life.

The principle of eternal life lives in your heart. The knowledge that you are born for another world, that this world is not your end, that you don't have to fear death because you go to a better world.

[29 : 17] I know Andy won't mind me sharing this but last week as he visited his father in hospital, his father said to him as he kind of woke from sleep, he looked at him, he said, am I dead?

And Andy says, no, this is a hospital ward, dad, it's not heaven. Heaven will be much better than this. But what struck Andy and what struck me when he said it was, that was a man prepared.

As casually as you like, am I dead? Those who come here know that I'm a great lover of Dallas Willard. He's somebody I read but actually somebody I seek to model my life on that quiet assurance he had as he was dying with pancreatic cancer.

And his granddaughter said, Papa, I'm going to miss you. And he said, well, I'm sorry to say I won't miss you because he said, unfortunately, when I open my eyes, I will not realize I'm dead.

I will think, oh, this is death. It was that easy. And they say that when he died, he was looking at the wall, they thought, but looking somewhere that people said he wasn't really in the room.

[30 : 42] And his last words were, thank you. Thank you. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

That is our great hope. The gospel message sets us free from the fear of sin and death. And this truth is about knowing Jesus. Jesus setting us free.

Not knowing about Jesus as anybody can know about Jesus, like we can know a person, but it's about knowing Jesus. And when we accept the truth of Jesus, we can experience the freedom of Christ.

Now, the Jews couldn't accept this because they were stumbling blocks, stumbling blocks to their believing. Next slide. The stumbling blocks. There were no room, he says.

There was no room for God in your hearts. I want to ask you if Jesus would say that to you today. If he was reading your heart and looking into your heart, would he be saying to you, there is no room I know for God in your heart.

[31 : 50] You might pull the wool over other people's eyes, but you can't pull the wool over God's eyes. He knows what's in your heart. Can you examine your heart now and say, Lord, there is room in my heart for thee.

If God were your father, he says, you would love me. They didn't love him. Their actions and their attitudes betrayed their hatred of him. He who belongs to God hears what God says, and you're not listening.

And Jesus' desire was to honor his father, and the evidence, and his evidence, they were more concerned with defending their traditions than they were in honoring God or listening to God's word. The stumbling blocks to their belief can still be stumbling blocks today in your heart and in my heart. But Jesus is challenging us to let those go that he might set us free.

Next slide. Jesus sets us free. If the Son sets you free, he sets you free from the penalty of sin through faith in Jesus. If the Son sets you free, he sets you free from the power of sin so that it no longer has dominion over you.

[33 : 10] You are not under law, but under grace. If the Son sets you free, he sets you free from the fear of death because Jesus conquers death, and eternal life is yours.

And if the Son sets you free, he sets you free from the bondage of shame and guilt. You don't peddle in that. You don't listen to that. See, the devil is very clever.

If he cannot stop us from coming to Jesus, he'll keep us depressed by reminding us constantly of our sin and our waywardness and making us feel guilty and living under the guilt and weight of that. Jesus said, I came to set you free from that. Don't live as if you are under bondage any longer. And that's why that passage is there. To Christian people, Paul says, it is for freedom that Christ has set us free.

Stand firm then, and do not let yourself be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. Again, religious people coming to Christian people and saying, if you are going to be a really good Christian, you're going to have to be circumcised, you're going to have to adopt the Jewish law, you're going to have to live as if you're a Jew, I'm going to put all of these kinds of rules and regulations that tell you how you should live, and only if you fulfill them will you deserve any kind of peace of conscience or any happiness.

[34 : 33] And Paul said, that is another gospel, and the one who preaches it needs to be a cursed anathema under the consignment and judgment of hell.

That's very strong. It's another gospel. The only requirement for eternal life is to believe in Jesus. It's got nothing to do with whether you've been baptized, how often you read your Bible, whether you attend your church weekly, whether you give a tithe in the offering.

It's nothing to do with those things. Now, you may do those things out of love for Jesus and out of freedom, but you never, ever need to be compelled by another who says, unless you do those things, you are not accepted by God.

I read of a Christian man, I'll not mention the details, a Christian man who I've read to great profit and great help.

[35 : 35] He struggled massively in his personal life, but he's been very open about that, and he has fallen in some way. It appears to me to be a fairly minor way, but he came under the condemnation of some on internet.

And they do the classic thing that Christians sometimes do when a Christian falls. Say, oh, well, I always question the genuineness of his conversion.

You can't take him seriously. We must never read anything he says ever again. And, of course, we've got to be careful that he doesn't lead others astray. He says, written off.

Why? Because he doesn't believe in Jesus? No. But because he morally fell. Well, hey, David morally fell. Have mercy on me, oh God, have mercy on me.

I'm really grateful, not for his falling, but for Psalm 51. And I know I'm a sinner. I may fall, but my Savior will never fall, and he will pick me up.

[36 : 42] And Paul doesn't say in Galatians 6, if anyone sins, condemn him and throw him out of the church. He says, you who are spiritual should restore him gently, watching yourself that you may not fall.

Jesus sets us free. We may well trip up on the way, but that does not alter our salvation. It does not alter the fact that if the Son sets us free, we are free indeed.

We are free at last. But here's a warning from Paul. You must make it last. And you make it last by ensuring that you do not allow yourself to come under the bondage of others who want to control your life.

The only person who controls your life is Jesus. Next slide, please. Recognize the significance of your spiritual freedom and never let it go.

And that's also true if the thing that holds you in bondage is your own mind. It's also true if the thing that holds you in bondage are your own anxieties and fears.

[37 : 55] that's not to say that they're not strong, but let them not become spiritual strongholds that rob you of the joy of Jesus. It's also true if the thing that holds you in bondage are your own desires and lusts or your own addictions.

And it can be as simple as food and alcohol. Anything that controls other than Jesus is a dominant force that can become a stronghold.

Even legitimate things like your money or your car or your hobbies, even those things, if they have central place in your life, if they defrone Jesus, may become a bondage that you must break the power of.

So I think that includes us all. But if the Son sets you free, you shall be free indeed. This is a call to put Jesus at the center and at the heart of your kingdom, of your life.

Jesus, we used to have a display on the wall. Jesus is the head of this home. What was it? The unseen guest at every meal, the silent listener to every conversation.

[39 : 31] Jesus, be the center. Be my life. Be my hope, Jesus. Maybe we could sing that. Maybe we could sing that. Amen.