

The truth sets us free

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- [0 : 0 0] So, we have two short readings this morning. The first reading is found in John chapter 8, verses 31 and 32. So, John chapter 8, verses 31 and 32.
- These are familiar words in many ways. So, now hear God's word. John 8, verses 31 and 32.
- 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.
- If you'd like to turn to 1 John, which is right near the end of the New Testament, just before Revelation. So, I'm going to read from 1 John chapter 1, verse 5, to chapter 2, verse 2. In other words, it sounds quite a long distance, but it's really not.
- So, 1 John chapter 1, verse 5, through to 1 John chapter 2, verse 2. This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.
- [1 : 4 7] If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another.
- And the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.
- If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us for our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.
- My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.
- He is the propitiation for our sins, and not only for ours, but for the sins of the whole world. Amen.
- [2 : 5 0] Well, they are, as you can tell, just by the sheer verses themselves, they're weighty. They're very, very weighty and heavy verses that fall heavy upon the soul, but have a way of lifting us out of our sin.
- As we come back to those readings, we'll do so after this next hymn together, and to the message. Thank you. So, if you have your Bibles open, I will know that you're trusting God and not me, which is really important, because it's easy to deceive ourselves, and this is one way of not doing it.
- We're going to be spending our time in both these passages, but if you kept it open at 1 John, this will be the text that I'll be referring to the most, bearing in mind that hopefully you'll be able to keep in mind what Jesus said in John 8, that the truth sets you free.
- That if you abide in his word, that is, walk according to his word, then the truth will set you free. Well, as we come this morning, as I said, we come to a weighty piece of scripture, but it's weighty for the purpose of lifting us out of our sin.

Imagine it like a set of scales, where we're weighed down on one side, and the scripture is put on the other side. It's able to lift us out by the sheer weight of its message. And this is what's happening here in 1 John.

[4 : 25] Now, every Sunday when we come to church, we confess our sins, or at least the opportunity is there to confess our sins. Now, I've been doing this regularly for the past two, maybe three years now, I forget.

At first, people were taken back by it. This was because they were unused to confess in their sins, but they were unused to the regularity of it on perhaps a Sunday morning.

And I explained that the reason for doing it is because, you know, we all sin in thought, word, and deed. And if we don't confess our sins, it actually affects our fellowship with God.

And the knock-on effect of that is that it affects our fellowship with everyone. Last Sunday evening, I began addressing the issue of blessing in the church. And if there's one thing that can destroy blessing in the church, then it's sin.

So we must confess our sins. And this is what the text actually encourages us to do. But also here, we begin to see that God is holy, that God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all.

[5 : 35] We begin to see that if we are to have fellowship with God, that it must be conducted in the truth and in the confession of sin. That's how fellowship works, even between people.

It has to be conducted in the light. It has to be conducted in truth. It has to be conducted where there is no sin. But the moment sin arises anywhere, it just destroys anything.

And it doesn't take much sin to destroy relationship with God or fellowship with God, because it can actually destroy the relationship with now, and fellowship with each other.

Here in John 8, Jesus tells us that the truth sets us free, but he's making the point that only the truth can set you free. Okay? I want to address that this morning, that only the truth can set you free.

So, the issue that we have in both of these passages is not essentially the truth. It's not essentially the confession of sin or fellowship with God. The actual issue underlined in both of these is your freedom.

[6 : 41] Your freedom. How free are you? The truth sets us free. And so the issue is, is how free are you? And what is that freedom for?

Okay? So, as people, you have a lot of freedom to do a lot of things, but it doesn't mean that you can use that freedom to do those things, especially if they're illegal or immoral or, you know, contrary to God's word.

So, let's begin with a summary of what we find here. What does it mean for you to be set free by the truth that Jesus proclaims? What does it mean? What does it look like and why is it important for you to understand?

Well, if a person is set free by the truth, then it follows that if a person has not received the truth, then they have not been set free. This means that if they've not been set free, they are bound to something that only the truth can set them free from.

So, what Jesus is saying is that a person can hear his words and not receive it and still be bound, or a person can hear his words which are true, and then the truth, upon receiving that truth, will set them free.

[7 : 56] And so Jesus is naturally assuming, of course he would because he's the creator of the universe, that people are not free. They're free. Their freedom is a freedom, or the freedom that they don't have means that they have no freedom to worship God.

They have no freedom to be able to do what God wants. Okay? Without Jesus, I cannot do what God wants me to do. I just cannot do it.

Okay? Proverbs clearly points out that even you can have two farmers, one belongs to God and the other one doesn't belong to God, and they both plow the field. They're doing exactly the same job.

But when God looks at them at work, one he considers righteous and the other he considers wicked. Why? Because it's not the motion that they go through that makes it true or not, makes it worthy to God or not, it's the condition of their heart by which they conduct their lives and what they do.

Now, this is crucial, because the freedom that we have to follow God is a freedom that only Jesus can give us. Secondly, the freedom that Jesus gives us sets us free initially, but it also keeps us free.

[9 : 08] Okay? The truth sets us free and keeps us free. I want you to think about it this way just for a moment. That if you're bound in prison, and Jesus is the truth, and he has this truth key, he's able to come into that prison and set you free.

Now, the truth key that Jesus has is the accomplishment of the cross. His shed blood. That's the key that opens the locks, that undoes the chains of you being bound to sin.

But it's that same truth that stops you returning to prison. It's that same truth of Jesus' accomplishment in his life, death, and resurrection that stops you being put back in prison.

This is why, when you die, you get to go to be with God. You don't go anywhere else, because the truth has set you free, set you free forever. Now, sin means that we don't have the ability to leave the prison all by ourselves.

Sin is like the chain that keeps us in the dark prison. Sin will not let us go. It will let us see the light through the window, but it won't let us go.

[10 : 22] We just can't get anywhere. And this is where we need to understand that our limitations are not God's limitations. So imagine it like this. You are chained to a very dark room.

Now, you don't know what's in this room, but you are aware that there are other things in this room. They might be chained there also. And you begin to take comfort in some of these things, even though you have no idea what they are.

You begin to take comfort in some of these things in this dark room that you are chained to. Now, it's obvious that you cannot get up in the dark room and walk too far over to the prison guard, take the keys off him, unlock your shackles, and unlock the prison gate, the door, and walk out.

You can't do that because you're chained. But it doesn't follow from that that the prison guard can't walk into the cell, unlock the prison door, unlock you, and let you go free. In other words, your limitations are not his limitations.

Okay? Your limitations are not his limitations. And so the issue that you have here is that sin shackles me and gives me no freedom to follow God.

[11 : 33] But my limitations are not God's limitations. The cross is God coming into this world, unlocking the prison door, unlocking the chains, and setting us free.

That's what the cross achieves. My limitations are not God's limitations. I can't let myself go free, but God can set me free.

The issue here, though, is the issue of truth. Only the truth can set us free. And so the illustration has to change just a little bit.

So imagine it like this. Again, you're in a dark cell, chained to a wall, and you can see nothing, and you begin to take comfort in some things that are in there, whatever they may be.

If Jesus is to set you free with the truth, what does that look like? Well, it looks like this, that Jesus comes in, and he turns the light on. And suddenly you realize what you're chained to, and suddenly you realize that all these things that you have been taking comfort in are not actually that pretty.

[12 : 39] Okay? Repentance is thanking God that he's turned the light on, and then confessing your sin, and then Jesus sets you free. Unrepentance is asking for the light to be turned back off.

Okay? Truth is light. Truth allows us to see what sin actually is, and then we repent of it.

But those who don't want to repent of it are those who say, can you please turn the light back off? I'd rather not know. Just leave me alone. And how many people do we meet like that in relationship, that you bring them truth, you bring them light, and they receive your truth, like light in a room, of which they go over and turn the light back off?

Don't want to face it. Leave me alone. I was, I was, I didn't know what I was comforting in the dark, but I was happier then, than I'm happier now that the truth has come out. Now that's unrepentance.

That's unrepentance. Unrepentance is being able to see, because the light has been given to you, and then asking for the light to be turned back off. People who don't want to face the truth are people who are saying, can you leave me alone?

[13 : 57] Can you leave me in the dark? So when Jesus says, I am the truth, and the truth will set you free, okay, a rejection of the truth is a rejection of Jesus, but it's also a rejection of the truth of everything.

Everything that you are taking comfort in, apart from Jesus. It's also the truth that you are chained to the wall from which you can escape, and you reject the one who can actually set you free.

So when Jesus comes into people's lives, and he begins to show people, like me, like you, okay, the type of things that chain us, the type of things that stop us having fellowship with God, that stop us from coming to God, that stop us from, you know, having any enjoyment in the life and love of God, he's turning the light on.

And unrepentant people, okay, people who don't want that, say, go away. They're just, they'd rather be in the dark. Now that is a shocking thing, but it is a thing to consider.

That sin binds you, and it binds you in such a way that you can escape. Only Jesus can set you free, but some people would rather sit in the dark than sit in the light with Christ.

[15 : 20] Now why is that the case? Well, it's the case because some people cannot accept the truth concerning themselves. Okay, that's the issue. Some people cannot accept the truth concerning themselves.

That's the root of all unrepentance. In other words, what you think the issue is, I don't think the issue is. And therefore, there is no reconciliation.

I want you to think about it in a slightly different way now, and that is, relationship with God and relationship with anybody else must involve the truth, or there can be no relationship at all.

Okay? Relationship with God and relationship with each other here must be true, or it cannot be a true relationship. So over in John 8, Jesus says that having a relationship with him, abiding in his word, being one of his disciples, means that you must walk in the truth.

You must follow him. You're not allowed to just say, well, I believe. Well, remember what James says, even the demons believe and shudder. Okay, belief is not the qualification for belonging to Jesus.

[16 : 30] Belief is included in the qualification for belonging to Jesus, but belief alone doesn't qualify you to belong to Jesus. Not even close, because the demons believe and they shudder.

So that's pretty simple and straightforward. We understand that. What qualifies us to belong to Jesus is abiding, is relationship, is living out his word, following him, is repentance rather than asking for the light to be turned back off.

So when we confess our sins, we do so in the light. Okay? When we confess our sins, we confess it in the light. The truth comes into our life and we go, yeah, okay, you found me out, I confess, and then relationship begins with God.

And those who belong to God know that they can't hide anything before a God who can see everything. Now we try, okay, we try quite a lot trying to hide things from God who can, who sees everything.

Why we do it, it's a mystery, but it's a pretty obvious one. But these are the same type of people who try to cover up sin in the same way they do a coffee stain on the carpet.

[17 : 44] Okay? And the way these people will cover up a coffee stain on the carpet is by using the nearest table and pulling it over. There. No one sees it. Okay? You are like a child playing hide and seek, thinking that everybody can't see you because you have your hands over your own eyes.

That if they can't see me, if I can't see them, they can't see me. And that's what you're like with God. Right? You ever seen a child do that? They stand in the middle of the room where everyone can see them and they go, I'm hiding.

They're not. But they assume that if they can't see, then nobody else can see. Well, that's what people, Christians, even grown-up Christians can do before God.

They cover that and go, well, I'll put a coffee table over the stain and if I can't see it, then it's not there. Well, it is there. It's out of sight and it may be out of mind, but it's still there.

And God, who is light, wants us to move the table and remove the stain. Well, we can't remove the stain. Jesus does it. Now, we can see this same type of difficulty in human relationships.

[18 : 57] How difficult is it to have a relationship with somebody else that you are closely connected to? Husband, wife, son, daughter, auntie, uncle, you know, think of whoever it may be, even your very best friend if you have a very best friend.

And you present them with the truth, but they, they don't receive, they don't see that truth as the truth. And you begin to realize that actually, here we are trying to reconcile a relationship and it doesn't happen because neither of us can agree on what the issue is.

And that's a big problem. When two people can't agree on what the issue is, reconciliation can never take place. Okay? When two people cannot agree on what the issue is, reconciliation cannot take place.

And the reason it cannot take place is because you want me to say sorry for this, but I don't think that's the issue. You want me to ask for forgiveness for this, but that's not the issue. This is the issue.

And then what you end up with is you end up with some kind of mediocre, half-hearted attempt at reconciliation and so the husband or the wife or whoever it is, the auntie or the uncle, says sorry for something that actually isn't the issue and then expects everything to be better.

[20 : 15] But I've said sorry. But I've asked for forgiveness. Yeah, but you've asked it for the wrong thing. You've asked it for the wrong thing. That's not the issue.

And it's the same with God. You know, we confess these sins over here that we know that God knows about that are easy to confess, but we don't want to confess those over there. And we think that we can somehow sort of get by with God by doing that.

No. if we claim to walk in the light with God, then we have to admit that God sees everything. Even the things we try and hide behind our back.

Just the other night where I had cheered out a tin of mandarins between two of my daughters because they were eating. One decided that she had a couple and didn't like it and gave it to the other daughter who now had two bowls, but she continued to eat her own until the other sister said, no, actually, I want them back.

But the bowl that she got back was not the bowl that she gave away. The bowl that she got back was the one that the other sister continued to eat. Deception. Of course, they don't recognize it like that.

[21 : 27] They recognize it as an appetite for mandarins. But actually, what it really was is deception. And the thing is, children will be as adults what they learn to be as children.

Future men will be the future men that they are as a child. That's there in Proverbs in Deuteronomy and elsewhere. And so, these lessons that we learn early on that are cute, isn't that funny?

No. It's funny when you're four. It's not quite so funny when you're 14. It may be a little bit funny when you're 14, but it's a serious issue when you're 24.

Okay? So, these sins have a way of growing and they have a way of growing in such a way where it appears to be cute and not a big issue before God. No. God is light. And God wants to deal with it because it ruins your fellowship with him.

It completely ruins your fellowship with God. God will not accept you saying sorry for something that's not the issue. God will not ask, God does not want you to ask for forgiveness for something that is not the issue.

[22 : 41] God calls you to confess your sins but he calls you to confess the sins. Okay? That's the issue. So, the truth sets us free and the truth sets us free to enjoy a real relationship with God but only the truth can do that.

Okay? Only the truth can do that. Not some truth of the past, not some half-truth but only the truth. Sin wants to separate us from God. Sin doesn't mind if we tell lies to God often but only the truth can set us free.

John says here if we claim to walk in the light then walk in the light. Okay? If we claim to walk in the light then walk in the light. Don't claim it and do something different but rather walk in the light and then the truth will keep you free.

The truth will keep you in fellowship with God. Now you already have a relationship with him because of the salvation achieved in Christ Jesus. Okay? So the relationship can't be broken but the fellowship can be hindered by sin.

Does that make sense? In other words you imagine a marriage that can never divorce as all marriages should be but I recognize we live in a sinful world but imagine a marriage that can never go through a divorce.

[23 : 55] Okay? Ever. Now you okay? You recognize that even though the marriage could never break down the fellowship could. Okay? And that's the issue here. That the issue here with Jesus is not that our relationship with God is at stake.

Well it may be if we don't have one to begin with but what's at stake is our continuing fellowship with God who walks in the light. So let me tell you a little bit about sin.

Sin has a brilliant way of making you feel better. sin is self-medicating. It is brilliant at what it does.

Sin doesn't want you to confess your sin. Sin doesn't want you to be honest. But the way that it does this is very simple but very deceptive.

Sin causes you only to look backwards and never forwards. Okay? Never it can even sin can even convince you that because God is forgiven because God will forgive then you can go ahead and do this thing because God will forgive.

[25 : 00] That's what sin convinces you of. God is forgiveness so go ahead eat joy be merry commit the sin because God will forgive you. That's how sin motivates the mind and the heart.

But generally speaking sin only ever causes us to look backwards. It causes us to look at what is worse rather than what is better.

Now I need you to understand this. Sin causes you to look at what is worse rather than what is better. So let me think about it this way. As you've committed a sin and the truth is revealed your sin what sin then does sin has got its own defense counsel sin is a brilliant lawyer that he'd be very expensive if he was in court.

What sin does is it comes along and says yeah that's pretty bad but do you remember do you remember that sin that was committed in America or that sin in Norway or that sin down south do you remember that type of immorality at least you're not that bad.

And all of a sudden you feel better because sin causes you to look backward to other things that are worse so that it makes your thing doesn't look quite so bad. Okay sin gets us to look backwards not forwards and the reason it does this is because it doesn't want us to look forward to the holiness of God and sin doesn't want us to look at the holiness of God and neither does it give us any motivation to be holy.

[26 : 28] Sin would just rather get us to look back and go well at least it's not as bad as that and then you're satisfied with where you are rather than getting you to look forward to God and God's holiness and go man I'm a long way off that I'm a long way off that.

Now if you struggle with that you'll be able to understand it in the form of a relationship and it works something like this in human relationships this is how it normally works you have an argument and it turns up and it turns out that in the argument you have done something wrong and then the first thing that sin does in your mind and in your heart is it runs a little personal history on the other person right?

Let's get the encyclopedia out a little personal history and then you begin to think of all the worst things they did and there it comes you know we thought Facebook was a problem well sin in your life is equally as bad isn't it amazing how you never seem to forget when you've got an argument to make in your defense and against the other person your memory is brilliant at that point and that's how sin works it does a little personal history on the other person and it looks for something worse rather than holiness and truth which looks for forward momentum it looks to mend a relationship rather than make the relationship and the fellowship worse okay?

so only the truth can set a relationship free only the truth can mend where sin only seeks to devour and destroy and that will always be the case this is why we confess our sins because we don't want things to be destroyed I don't want the church to be destroyed by our sin for a moment I don't want your relationships with each other to be destroyed by your sin but sin will do that I don't want even in your homes for sin to destroy what you have in your homes but it will do it and it will do it if sin isn't confessed and of course if you're if you're in a if you're in a relationship where you're around people who are not saved then that is a problem because you've got one half confessing their sins and the other half not even seeing it as a sin and so the problem is only going to get worse unless it's just buried under the carpet for a couple of years until it raises its head again so the issue is quite plain here the truth and only the truth can set us free and the truth and the only truth can keep us free to enjoy fellowship to enjoy fellowship in the relationship that we have now often when I've preached at marriages

I always use the illustration of the piano that the piano has white keys and black keys and the only difference between me and Ian is that he can play them in the right order that's it I can play them in any order I choose but you're able to tell the difference why because it takes huge amount of skill huge amount of skill to bring harmony out of unity okay the black keys and the white keys are united completely united on the keyboard but they're not harmonious it takes skill to bring harmony out of unity and truth walking in the truth walking in in fellowship where you're seeking the truth however hard it may be that's the skill that's needed to bring a harmonious sound out of a unit whether it be a marriage or a church or whatever it may be if you're seeking harmony then there's skill there's truth it has to be played this way this is the order of how it's to be done so as we conclude

[30 : 24] I want us to conclude with the most uplifting message here of all and that is Christ as our advocate now an advocate is someone who speaks on your behalf an advocate like in a law court is someone who speaks in your defense and what we see here in 1 John 2 verses 1 and 2 is this my little children I am writing these things to you so that you do not sin that's the purpose for writing okay here is a church who's sinning or Christians who you know are going to be tempted to sin and he's writing this letter so that they don't but then he says this knowing the reality of life but if any of you does sin if any of you do go ahead and sin we have an advocate with the father Jesus Christ the righteous now an advocate is someone who speaks on their behalf but an advocate must say what's true okay the advocate speaks on the defendant's behalf behalf but what the advocate says must be truth it must be the truth the advocate can't lie it has to be the truth and so what we read here in chapter 2 verse 1 is that we're sinners if any of you sin and then

Christ is our advocate who's going to speak the truth about us sinning but then read verse 2 that Christ our advocate he is the propitiation for our sins and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world and what that means is this that Jesus Christ paid the price of all sin ever committed against God that means all your past sin all your present sin and all the sin you will commit in the future the cross of Christ has doubt with all of it and so as God the father stands and hears and sees your sin knowing that in him there is no darkness of all because he is the light what is the son saying to the father what does Jesus Christ our advocate say to the father when we sin he says this my blood speaks

Jesus speaks with his blood and he says I've paid for that I've covered that you can no longer hold that against them it's been redeemed it's been forgiven and I choose to remember it no more so all the lies of the devil that go up to God before you this is what this person is really like Christ is your advocate stands before God at this very moment you've committed a sin this morning or yesterday or whenever it may be Christ at this very moment stands before God and says you can't hold that against him he's forgiven can't hold that against her she is forgiven why because the blood of Christ cleanses us from all unrighteousness okay the blood of Christ cleanses us from all unrighteousness when Christ speaks to God the Father he speaks with his blood and his blood as it says in Hebrews is better than the blood of Abel's okay it speaks of righteousness it speaks of payment being made it speaks of you being free never having a charge leveled at you ever again okay you are redeemed forgiven forever forever in relationship with God because of what Christ

Jesus has done so don't mess it up don't mess that fellowship up by sinning now it's understandable that you will but don't go ahead and do it on purpose don't sin here's the exhortation you need to realize that only the truth can set you free only the truth can set you free and lies will always catch up with you repentance repentance is Christ turning the light on in the room and accepting the truth unrepentance is asking Christ to turn the light back off leave me alone I'm quite happy with my own personal little deception going on here last Sunday evening I spoke of the Sunday school teacher who I can't remember her name but I'm sure she loved me and she used to say Daniel be sure your sins would find you out and she used to say this a lot be sure your sins would find you out and I used to think to myself walking home from

Sunday school how does she know how does she know where was she when I was how does she know and then I began to realize as I got older that she didn't know she had no idea but the word of God that she spoke to me spoke to me the word of God that she spoke to me spoke to me and God was telling me that he knew God was telling me that he knew and he knew that only that truth could set me free so if you want a relationship that's honest it has to contain the truth if you want fellowship with God to be blessed and not hindered then it has to be in the truth so we confess our sins in this church on a regular basis every Sunday morning because it matters it is the only way a church can be kept together it is the only way blessing in the church can flourish God knows we sin and he provides the means by which we can enjoy fellowship with him as we continually sin sin is a problem but God forgives us sin is a problem but God forgives us so the truth will set you free and the truth will keep you free so walk in the truth walk with

[36 : 35] Christ amen