

John 8:31-34 “Whose Slave are We?”

JOH 8:31-34 To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. 32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." 33 They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?" 34 Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin."

As we come to this section of Scripture our Lord Jesus continues His discourse with many of the Jews who are less than enthusiastic about His ministry and His teachings. This is undoubtedly a mixed crowd of people; some who are sympathetic to Jesus, while others have a flat out hatred of Him.

As to those who are sympathetic to our Lord verse 30 seems to confirm this.

JOH 8:30 Even as he spoke, many put their faith in him.

And yet, even those who seem to be persuaded by Jesus are not necessarily sold out to the idea of following a man whose instruction is going against the stream of popular teachings by the Pharisees as Jesus now begins to define what type of faith He's looking for.

JOH 8:31-32 To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. 32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Now, to you and me who would find ourselves in a position of having people embrace what we were saying we would probably begin rejoicing in that fact. And yet Jesus does a very interesting thing here. Instead of confirming their faith He challenges it, and by implication questions it.

Part of the reason for this is that Jesus knows the hearts of people, unlike you and me who only see what people do in relation to what they say. And in that way we get a glimpse of people's hearts.

And so, the type of faith these people possessed does not appear to be a saving faith, and Jesus knew this. And by the way, this is not the first time He has to deal with people who appear to be followers of Him who professed a type of faith in Him.

JOH 2:23-24 Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name. 24 But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men.

And knowing the hearts of these people in our text Jesus makes sure they understand what it means to place their faith in Him. And so, He confronts their understanding and the veracity of their faith.

JOH 8:31-32 To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. 32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

You'll notice here that Jesus qualifies what it means to have faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Saving faith is not a matter of merely agreeing to a set of teachings and principles. Saving faith demonstrates that it is real by what it produces in the life of the one believing.

But simply following a set of rules and regulations with your actions doesn't necessarily produce life either. Life doesn't come from someone's teachings alone, life comes from believing the One who not only teaches the truth, but who is the truth.

This is why it is not enough for the Jews to follow the Law of Moses, even if they do it sincerely. This is why it is not enough for any person in any religious group to assume they have eternal life simply because they are following the rules and regulations of their particular group.

I can show you Mormons who, for all intents and purposes, seem to be following the teachings of Jesus on one level. They appear to be holy, and sincere and moral people. And yet, they would not meet the qualifications Jesus points out here when He says, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples."

So, what is Jesus really saying? We begin with what He is not saying. He is not saying that we can somehow earn eternal life by keeping the teachings of Jesus. And by the way, when the NIV uses the phrase, "If you hold to my teaching," it could be better translated, "If you abide in My word."

The word for teaching in the NIV is the Greek word *logos*, which simply means word. This is the exact same word which is used to describe the Son of God in the very beginning of this gospel.

JOH 1:1 In the beginning was the **Word**, and the **Word** was with God, and the **Word** was God.

So, let's look at our text again in light of what Jesus is trying to accomplish here, which is to establish what these people are really doing with the Son of God who is in their midst, as it relates to their salvation.

It is one thing to identify yourself with Jesus Christ by making the claim that you believe on Him. It is quite another thing to stay and walk with Jesus till your dying breath. As A.W. Pink puts it in his commentary on John, "It is not how a man begins, but how he continues and ends."

Remember, that up to this point many people have been open to what Jesus was teaching and even many were willing to follow Jesus. On one occasion, after Jesus fed thousands of people fish and bread, when they couldn't find Him the next morning since He walked on the Sea of Galilee and went to the other side, they got into boats and followed Him.

That appears to be real commitment. That appears to be true disciples who will follow Him anywhere because they trust Him and the hope He brings. And yet, what do we read of that incident?

JOH 6:25-26 When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?" 26 Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill."

Following Jesus Christ is not merely tagging along for all the wrong reasons. Following Jesus Christ is not merely holding to a set of rules and principles, even if that is the word of God, as a guide for your life.

Following Jesus Christ is trusting the person who is guiding us with His word. Following Jesus Christ is abandoning any effort on our part to obtain eternal life, thereby placing our faith in His atoning sacrifice on our behalf, and then out of thanks and gratitude obeying Him to the very end in the power of the Spirit as we follow in His steps.

These Jews, and most people today, would be much more comfortable coming up with a set of rules they can follow, which may be connected to a particular person; be it Brigham Young, Mohammed, Ellen White, or even Jesus Christ.

But when it comes to having life our Lord makes it clear that life isn't something we receive by merely identifying ourselves with teachings about that life. Rather, life is something we receive when the person who offers that life takes up residence in our lives as we trust Him and receive His life by faith in who He is and what He did on our behalf.

This is what Jesus is pointing out to these Jews in our text. He is essentially saying that if you claim to be My follower, then you will follow Me and abide in My word all of your days.

And the reason a person can actually accomplish this, is because the one they are identified with, is the very One who will make sure they will abide and follow because His very life abides in and with them.

John 14:16-17 ¹⁶ "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; ¹⁷ *that is* the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, *but* you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you.

It is this life that the Father has given to us who are in Christ that assures we will persevere to the end when Christ Himself will raise us up to resurrection eternal life.

John 6:39 ³⁹ "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.

But if we have His life in us it should demonstrate itself in the way we follow Christ as we abide or walk in His word, not simply for a season, but until we go home to be with the Lord.

Now, how do we recognize a true faith in our own lives or in the lives of others? Simply stated it will show itself in the way we follow our Lord. Are we committed to Him when all others are walking away from Him? Are we taking on His life, His characteristics, or are we continuing to follow our own path.

Now, as I said earlier, and by implication in the parable Jesus told of the one lost sheep, it is certainly possible for a true believer to get off the path periodically. But that is different from having the desire to spend most of our time on the path of our own choosing instead of Christ's.

Now, Jesus doesn't do an exhaustive study on what it means to follow the Lord and abide in His word. He makes it very simple for

these people and only makes a broad distinction between true faith in Christ and a faith of convenience, and so this morning we're not going to go into an exhaustive study into all of the nuances of the fruit of the Spirit, though it should be noted that particular fruit only comes from particular trees.

The question we need to ask of ourselves is what tree are we plugged into? What branches and roots supply us with our life? And what fruit do we possess? Are we claiming to be apple trees and yet are producing lemons?

GAL 5:22-25 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. 24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. 25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

But as we come back to our text we are also told that following Christ not only produces a life which is consistent with the life found in Christ, but that this life will set us free.

JOH 8:31-32 To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, [or, if you abide in My word], you are really my disciples. 32 ***Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.***"

Knowing the truth and being set free is dependent upon following Christ, which means trusting Christ by faith. And once one has trusted Christ by faith he finds that his freedom comes in the truth of who Christ is.

Again, truth alone sets no one free. Unless you abide in that truth, unless you trust the One who is truth there is no freedom. People identify themselves with Jesus Christ all the time. The Jehovah's Witnesses do this. The Mormons do this. Lots of these types of groups do this. But are they free? Absolutely not. They are bound, they are slaves, they are lost in their sin.

And so, when Jesus says that you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free, it is in the context of abiding in the truth of who Jesus says He is, very God in the flesh; and what He accomplished on our behalf as He died on the cross for our sin, and rose bodily from the dead the third day.

Now, obviously these Jews had no clue that Jesus was going to go to the cross for their sin at this point, but they had every clue that

He was the Son of God who told them in no uncertain terms that unless they believe He is the Messiah, the only Savior, they would be lost forever. This is precisely what we saw last week.

JOH 8:24 I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins."

And so, when Jesus speaks of truth and freedom in our text He is speaking of the kind of truth which leads to freedom; that freedom which frees us from the bondage of sin. But it is a truth which must be embraced by faith, and it is the kind of truth which is not merely words written on paper but truth who is a person whose life is demonstrated in our hearts.

Now, the Jews had a problem with this whole concept because they were not listening with spiritual ears or seeing with spiritual eyes. They were still carnal in their approach to this man who is claiming to be sent from God the Father and who has just told them that unless they believe in Him they will die in their sins. And so, their approach to freedom is not what Jesus was talking about.

JOH 8:33 They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?"

The one thing they did understand Jesus to say was that whatever type of freedom He may have had in mind they knew He was accusing them of being in some kind of bondage. They just didn't understand it as spiritual bondage. That's why they respond the way they do.

The first thing they point out to the Lord is that they are descendants of Abraham. And by this they mean that they are specially chosen of God since they are physically related to Abraham who was given the covenant promise by God that through him his descendants will be blessed.

And so, they are pointing out to Jesus that their very physical connection to Abraham is the means by which they will be assured a place with their Father in heaven. But here's where their understanding of the truth becomes clouded, and one of the reasons that they are not free because they have no truth in them.

JOH 8:33 They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?"

Now, it has to make one wonder at their response, in light of the fact that Jesus is addressing their sin and their need to be set free from it. And then to make such a statement about their freedom and their never having been slaves of anyone, when their entire history as a nation started in slavery?

It's true that Abraham was not a slave, but his grandson Jacob was the one who ended up in Egypt as he and his family was eventually reunited to Joseph whom the sons of Jacob sold into slavery.

The family of Jacob, whose name was changed by God to Israel, spent some 400 years in Egypt. Most of that time was spent in slavery.

EXO 2:23-25 During that long period, the king of Egypt died. ***The Israelites groaned in their slavery*** and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. 24 God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. 25 So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them.

This would be enough to question the thinking of these Jews in our text, but we know that even after Israel was delivered by God from Egypt their history shows that they continued to rebel against God and they were punished by the Lord as He led them into captivity.

They became the slaves of the Assyrians and the remainder became slaves of the Babylonians. And by the time Jesus comes on to the scene the Jews are essentially under the yoke of Rome.

They haven't been free in hundreds of years and yet they can make this statement, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?"

What is instructive about this response is that people who deny the truth will often make up their own truth and distort what truth they have. What we see here is a group of people who are not reasonable. And most of us have talked with people who are not reasonable, and in many cases are not even rational.

This is why it is often so difficult to get through to people because their hearts are so hard that they cannot even think clearly. This doesn't mean that they don't have the capability to reason as

intelligent human beings, it just means that in their denial of the truth they have deceived themselves to believe a lie.

And I might add that this is not limited to unbelievers. This is a human condition called sin. And when anyone chooses to avoid the truth of God's word and not walk in that truth they necessarily place themselves in a position to be deceived.

This is precisely what James tells the church in his epistle.

JAM 1:22 Do not merely listen to the word, *and so deceive yourselves*. Do what it says.

We've all had encounters with believers who are not willing to walk in the truth of God's word. And invariably they justify their sin and their wrong thinking with a truth they create in their own minds, which is no truth at all.

They can look you in the face and deny they are not walking according to God's word, just as these Jews in our text can say they've never been slaves of anyone.

Deception is very deceptive. This is why it is so important to not only study God's word but to walk in that word and to live in the truth of who Christ is. It's not enough to say we believe, we must show ourselves to be alive as we live the life of Christ whom we claim to know and follow by faith.

JAM 2:17-18 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. 18 But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.

The Jews in our text were trying to earn their salvation by what they did instead of trusting Christ for life and then doing those things that please God out of gratitude, which is what James addresses.

But instead of arguing with these Jews about their history of slavery and making such silly statements as they did, our Lord just gives them the truth in love. He points out what kind of slavery He had in mind as He gives them the hope of being set free.

JOH 8:34 Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.

Again, as we said over the last couple of weeks Jesus doesn't avoid the bad news before giving them the good news. The bad news of

their sin is that they will die in it if they don't trust Christ as Lord and Savior.

And He repeats that truth in a little different way here in our text. "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin."

Now, what Jesus has just done here is to discretely call these Jews sinners. He doesn't point out their individual sin and culpability. But what He does do is to lump all people into one group, which of course would have included the Jews.

Everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Well, who doesn't sin?

But this statement from Christ is very profound, because He is saying that all men, without exception, are born into spiritual slavery, and remain in spiritual slavery until someone sets them free.

Whether we want to admit it or not all of us are slaves. We are either slaves of this world and will die in our sin, or we are slaves to Christ which leads to life, as Paul puts it in Romans.

ROM 6:16 Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey -whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?

And the obedience Paul speaks of there is the obedience to repent of our sin and embrace Christ by faith.

But slavery can find itself crossing boundaries as believers sometimes place themselves into situations where they become bound to things which do not honor Christ, instead of being bound to life and righteousness.

The apostle Peter touches on this in his second epistle.

2PE 2:19 They [the false teachers] promise them [the church] freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity - for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him.

The last thing we want to do is to go back into the slavery from which we've been delivered. After all, we can only really be a slave to one master. We are not to try and serve the master of sin while at the same time claiming to be servants or slaves of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

ROM 6:6-8 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no

longer be slaves to sin - 7 because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. 8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.
9 For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him.

The Jews in our text were slaves to sin and they did not or would not acknowledge it. And until a slave admits he is a slave he will remain the slave of the master he serves.

As Paul says, “you are slaves to the one whom you obey -whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness...”

Whose slave are we? And if we claim to be the slave or servant of Christ are we being faithful to do His bidding, or are we lapsing back into a slavery which cannot do anything but harm us and dishonor Christ?

It's a great privilege which carries awesome responsibility to be a servant of our Most High God, but like any ambassador our Lord expects loyalty, allegiance, and a love which responds to Him first loving us.

The Jews in our text were following the proverbial King with no clothes who thought himself to be normal. The fact is all people are naked in their sin in the sight of God and must be clothed with the righteousness of Christ.

We need to tell the world they are spiritually naked, and we as believers must walk in the blood soaked garments which has covered our nakedness and made us whiter than snow, and show ourselves to be slaves to a new master, the One who gives us life.

Freedom in Christ is freedom from the penalty of sin and the power of sin. But it is also freedom to follow and serve and glorify the one who purchased our freedom with the blood and life of our only risen Savior, Jesus Christ.