

John 8:31-47 Set Free by Paul Hudson 8/7/22

Good morning, we are continuing in the Gospel of John this morning, focusing on freedom, Christ setting us free. This passage this morning is quite strong and can be easily misunderstood, but in truth, I think it really speaks to the heart of the Gospels— to the heart of the good news of Jesus Christ and the incredible freedom that those who believe in Jesus have been given.

Before we read the passage for the morning, I want to share a quick story— many years ago I used to go into the jails regularly to minister to the inmates. Each time going in, I was always struck by how earnest and eager the inmates were as we worshiped God. I never saw the inmates dozing off during the services, never saw them disengage from the message or worship- they were always so attentive, so vibrant and alive. They didn't act like they were caged up behind bars, they seemed FREE! Well, I remember sitting down chatting with one of the inmates and he told me that even though he was inside (meaning, in jail), he was actually free on the inside— he said he had never felt so free in his life. He was referring to what Jesus was doing in his heart while he was locked up. This was a prisoner who came to a realization of the true bondage he was in while free outside of prison. It took prison to wake him up, but as a prisoner, he came face to face with the truth of Christ and God's forgiveness, and he said, "even though I am a prisoner, I am a free man." I know that story was true for all those inmates who came and worshiped so earnestly with us. Well hopefully, no one here will need to go to prison to find freedom, instead, I pray that you will hear this message this morning and that you will find true freedom by drawing near to Christ, committing yourself to his teaching, and being his disciple. Let's read the passage for this morning- this is from John 8:31-47, you can follow along on the screen or open your Bibles, this is from the NIV version-

John 8:31-47

³¹ 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, “Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. ³⁵ Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. ³⁶ So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. ³⁷ I know that you are Abraham’s descendants. Yet you are looking for a way to kill me, because you have no room for my word. ³⁸ I am telling you what I have seen in the Father’s presence, and you are doing what you have heard from your father.”

³⁹ “Abraham is our father,” they answered.

“If you were Abraham’s children,” said Jesus, “then you would do what Abraham did. ⁴⁰ As it is, you are looking for a way to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. ⁴¹ You are doing the works of your own father.”

“We are not illegitimate children,” they protested. “The only Father we have is God himself.”

⁴² Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I have come here from God. I have not come on my own; God sent me. ⁴³ Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. ⁴⁴ You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires. 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. ⁴⁵ Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! ⁴⁶ Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don’t you believe me? ⁴⁷ Whoever belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God.” [\[1\]](#)

Let’s pray....

At the beginning of this passage, John makes a distinction that Jesus is talking directly to the Jews who *had* believed in him. Now, it is clear that Jesus is talking to Jews that were once believers but who no longer believed in him because he says some pretty pointed things about their inability to hear him: they have no room for his word, they're looking to kill him, and so forth. So evidently, these Jews were part of the crowd that was persuaded by the religious leaders to reject Jesus as the Messiah— if you remember earlier in the previous chapter, we saw how the crowd was divided and the religious leaders were spreading false rumors about Jesus when he was teaching in temple grounds. Well in this passage, Jesus is still in the temple grounds teaching, he is still speaking in spiritual terms, and his focus turns toward those who were once believing in him but no longer believed.

So right from the start this morning, maybe someone listening right now feels that way— maybe you feel yourself slipping away from your belief in Jesus- you heard rumors that Jesus wasn't real, that he's a fake, or maybe you heard people bringing up bad things about Christianity or the church, trying to persuade you to stop believing, to stop coming to church. Maybe in your own studies you came across some difficult things about God, or you read persuasive arguments against God that has you wondering whether you want to believe in him anymore, whether he is real or not. If that is you and you feel you're fading away from belief, I encourage you to listen to what Jesus said to a people who once believed but then rejected him. This message is not just for anyone who has faded away in their belief but for everyone, regardless of how strong you may feel your faith is.

So, Jesus, speaking to those who had believed in him, said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples- then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." This is a power-packed statement here that identifies the reason why these Jews stopped believing in Christ. The revealing side of this statement is that he was telling them that they were not really his disciples, they did not actually care about his teachings, so they didn't follow him, and as a result, they were not

able to recognize the truth. Ultimately they were not free as they supposed, they were actually slaves to sin.

Now the positive side of this statement is that Jesus was reaching out to them with an amazing offer for freedom, which comes in four progressive phases each producing faith-filled results. Now, I want you to look at the progression of Jesus' statement here, there is clearly a progression of faith leading to the God kind of freedom! Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples- then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." The first phase of the faith progression is: hold to Jesus' teaching— that is, listen to and obey his teaching- that is the first phase.

The second phase is a result of the first phase— you become a true disciple of Jesus. So, if you listen to and obey Christ's teaching, the result is you become a true disciple of Jesus. True disciples of Jesus follow Jesus' teachings. Now this is a progression, I don't mean that Christianity is a hierarchy where you work your way up to higher levels, that sounds like Mormonism. However, faith really does have a progression to it, so think of this as a linear progression of growing and maturing in your faith. Faith in Christ has a progression to it, it is not static, faith grows.

Alright, the third and fourth phases are really the fruit of the first two phases, we don't even have to do anything, we are simply propelled into truth and freedom. The third phase happens as a result of listening to and obeying Jesus and becoming his disciple— through this, you come to know the truth. The truth is, we cannot really know the truth until we have passed those first two phases. Let me clarify what I mean, as you listen and obey, as you become a true disciple, you are already starting to know the truth and that results in the fourth phase where you are set free. So first and second, hold to Jesus' teaching and become a true disciple, third, you will come to know the truth, and fourth, you will be set free by the Truth. This progression of faith leads to the God kind of freedom, and it truly is all by faith and through God's gracious work within us by His Holy Spirit, not by our own

strength— thank God! Faith is never static, faith works within you to bring the fruit of truth and freedom, if you carry on with your faith in Christ.

Let's unpack this a little further... what sets us free? The truth sets us free. How do we find the truth then? Through coming to Jesus and obeying his teaching and being a real disciple— don't forget that part because a lot of people come to Jesus and then fade away because they never grow in faith- they never actually listen to him or become a real disciple. Next, what exactly is the truth that sets us free? Not what... who? Who is the truth that sets us free? Jesus! Alright, when we are talking about truth, we have to ask the right question here. I think people get tripped up and confused because they try to find out *what* the truth is, or they believe the lie that truth is whatever is true for you— well truth is not whatever is true for you. There is truth and truth is not a what, truth is a Who!!! Don't ask *what* is the truth, ask, *who* is the truth? Who is the truth? Jesus! Jesus will lead us to the truth— we find out what truth is by first going to the one who is the truth- Jesus, and *he is the one who sets us free*. Finally, what are we set free from? What does Jesus set us free from? We will get to that in a bit.

The Jews answered Jesus, saying they are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves to anyone, which was not really true. At the time they were under Roman rule, and in their history, they were enslaved by the Babylonians and Egyptians— though Jesus does not point that out, he does begin to point out their self-deception. Basically, the Jews are responding to Jesus' offer of freedom by saying, "set free from what?" And this kind of response to Jesus is exactly the type of responses we hear from people today who refuse to believe in Jesus. The response I hear all the time is, "I don't need to be set free from anything," or how about this one, "what is sin? I don't believe in sin, so I don't need to be set free from it." This is self-deception that comes because people have made up their own truth apart from Jesus' word— when truth is looked for outside of Jesus, it only leads to self-deception. That is why we always need to ask first who is the truth and not what is the truth. Then Jesus will lead us to what is true.

Jesus, in his reply in verses 34-44, points to the cause of self-deception by pointing out three truths —first, “everyone who sins is a slave to sin,” there is no way around this truth. The term sin was clearly understood in Jesus’ time, so for the sake of our time where sin has been turned into a religious term and kicked aside, let’s change the word sin to darkness because that is what sin is, darkness.

Everyone with darkness in their mind is a slave to darkness— and I think every single person who is honest would agree that they have dark thoughts leading them into some nasty things. That darkness inside— I know you feel it— is a trap.

Darkness entices you with its mystery, it excites you with curiosity, but in the end it invades every part of your soul and leaves you blind and lost in self-deception. That’s the first truth, all who sin are slaves to sin. Jesus is the light that leads you out of it, and if Jesus sets you free, then you are free indeed.

The second truth is in vs 37, “you have no room for my word.” Self-deception comes when the word of God is pushed out. One thing I have really noticed since I have come back into western culture after living in Thailand for 17 years is that life in America is FULL and FAST. There really is not alot of room because it is far too easy to completely fill your life with activities and things and technology and hobbies— speaking of hobbies... I don’t think I’ve ever had so many hobbies in my life since I’ve come back to the US— woodworking, painting, fishing, skateboarding, photography, making GoPro videos, tinkering with my truck, looking at my phone, playing games... and part of the problem is I don’t have enough time for all of my hobbies because life is too full! And for alot of us, not all, but alot of us, there just is not alot of room for God’s word— I know some of you are shining examples for filling your life with God’s Word- thank you and please help us! The less room we have for God’s word, the more likely it is that we will fade away and stop believing in God altogether- I want to encourage you to clear out your life schedules and make more room for God’s Word.

The third truth that Jesus points out to them is very harsh and quite difficult to swallow, but Jesus is never afraid to tell it like it is. He told them in vs. 41 that they are doing the works of their father, and in verses 43 to 44 he says, “you are unable to hear what I say because you belong to your father, the devil...” This is a pretty strong word, but we need to understand that Jesus is speaking in spiritual terms and he is describing the true origin of sin and self-deception, which is the devil. Then in verse 44, one verse, Jesus describes everything we need to know about the devil. Let’s read it, second sentence of v. 44— “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.” This is all we need to know about the devil- he was a murderer from the beginning, so he never was any good— his goal is to bring death. And look at how many ways Jesus describes him as a liar— he doesn’t hold to the truth, there is no truth in him, his native language is speaking lies, he is a liar and the father of lies. My friends, the devil likes to lurk around in darkness and his goal is to keep you in your darkness by deceiving you and eventually destroying you. That is all we need to know about the devil, he is the lie and the death, but Jesus is the truth and the life. The devil is the lie and the death, but Jesus is the truth and the life. Don’t let yourself fall into self-deception, listen to the Word of God, don’t let the devil blind you, resist him. Jesus offers freedom to all who will believe in him and become his own, amen? Come to Jesus and be his real disciple, and you will experience true freedom.

To finish, we’re going to look at what Jesus meant when he said he would set us free. What exactly does he set us free from? In the Gospel of John, Jesus mentions five different times what he has come to set us free from.

First in the context of this passage, Jesus is clearly speaking about setting us free from the bondage of sin— he said all who sin are slaves to sin, and in v. 35 he says something a little odd: “Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever.” What he means is a slave has no part in the family inheritance, a slave does not benefit from the family like a true child of the family

does. So those who are slaves to sin and outside of God's family will never benefit from what the Father has stored up for his children. They are in bondage in their slavery to sin, enslaved by sin, and that is how we were before we came to Jesus. But the Son, Jesus, adopts us into his family and sets us free from our slavery to sin- he brings us out of our darkness where we were stuck in lies and chaos, and adopts us into his eternal family where truth reigns, so that we will be truly free from all the lies, confusion, chaos, and death of this temporary world.

What else does Jesus set us free from? John 5:24 says, "very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes in him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life." Jesus sets us free from the condemnation that we were under because of the darkness that we held in our hearts, which is very deserving of spiritual death. Now for those who are living in self-deception, none of this makes sense, but as you follow Jesus and listen to his word your spiritual eyes are opened and you come to realize that sin, and God's wrath because of it, is real. You come to realize the truth that sin really is death. God is fully just and righteous to let us die in our sin— it would be unjust for God to not bring judgement for sin, think about that. But his grace and mercy came with the offer of new life, to set us free through his Son Jesus. He has given us the way to be set free from judgement that must come because of sin, so that we will have eternal life. It is by his grace alone and that is good news for us! Romans 8:1 says, "there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ, Jesus." Amen!

Third, Jesus has set us free from wandering around in darkness, John 8:12 says, "whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." If we aren't following Jesus, then we are wandering around in darkness. Jesus has come to shine the light on our darkness to set us free from it. You know, we never truly know just how dark the darkness is until we come to Jesus— he is the only one who can lead you out of your darkness. Will you let Jesus shine his light on the deepest, darkest areas of your life? He will set you free and you will look back and

realize just how dark your darkness really was. His offer of freedom is here for you right now.

Fourth, Jesus has set us free from the harm and destruction of the devil— John 17:15, Jesus prayed that we would remain in the world but be protected from the evil one. We still have to be in the world, but God protects us from the evil in the world. We are still in the world, but we are not conformed to the world, and Jesus protects us from the devil's snares. 1 John 5:18 says, "anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the One who was born of God (which is Jesus) keeps them safe, and the evil one cannot harm them." Now, ultimately, I think this is talking about spiritual harm and destruction— the true followers of Christ cannot be destroyed spiritually by the devil- it is impossible. 1 Jn. 4:4 says, "greater is he that is in you than he who is in the world," we have been given the Holy Spirit and the devil cannot beat him, amen?

Fifth, and I'll finish here, Jesus sets us free from death. John 8:51 says, "whoever obeys my word will never see death." Again, Jesus is speaking in spiritual terms as he most often does. Though we may die, we will not die. This, to me, is the real hope that Christ give us, eternal life—freedom from death, but it's not eternal life in our current state where darkness, evil and sin reign, I think that would be horrible. In fact, I think it would be hell to live forever in a place where sin, evil, and darkness rules, forever stuck in this present body— maybe that is hell! However, as I just showed you, Jesus sets us free from all of that including the shame, sorrow, pain, depression, anger, sickness, and everything else that comes hand-in-hand with darkness, death, and evil. Jesus gives us new life, a new spirit, and eventually, after we die, a new body in his presence where all the mess of this world never messes with us again. Amen? Whoever Jesus sets free is free indeed. All these spiritual benefits of freedom, freedom from the bondage of sin, condemnation, wandering around lost in darkness, freedom from the harm of the devil, and freedom from death, belong to those who come to Jesus by faith to listen to his word and become his true disciples. My friends, come to Jesus, never stop

coming, put your faith in him, let it grow as you listen to his word, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

Let's pray.