

"How To Be Free"
John 8:12-59
Dan Leppo

To help put some context around the events of our lesson's reading, the Feast of the Tabernacles has just concluded. This feast is when the Jewish people gather together in Jerusalem not only to remember God's provision in the wilderness, but also to look ahead to that promised Messianic age. Can you feel the irony Jesus must have felt during His dialogue with the alleged religious leaders? Here they were, fresh from celebrating a feast that was supposed to have them looking ahead for the Messiah – and, yet they didn't know He was right in front of them!

Chapter 8 began with one of my favorite sections in Scripture – the story of the woman caught in adultery. Seeking to trip up Jesus for Him to show the woman mercy or have her stoned, He turns the situation back on the men telling them he who has not sinned can throw the first stone. Not one stone was thrown – one-by-one, the woman's accusers walked away. While I'm not sure, it appears they come back to Him after Jesus forgave the woman and told her to sin no more. What ensues in our reading is an exchange that is completely controlled by the Lord and is focused on who He claims to be. I see it as a progression of the declaration of Jesus as the Son of God through four types of witnessing:

- His Self-witness
- His Kingdom witness
- His witness is true
- His "seed" witness

As we get into His self-witness, my friend Steve Mood covered the first of Jesus' "I am" statements in John's gospel – "I am the bread of life" – from John 6:35. We open today's lesson's reading with His *second* statement in verse 12, "*I am the light of the world.*" There are seven of these "I am" statements given to us, and this is significant because the number seven in Scripture is a number of completion. In other words, Jesus provides us with as complete a description of an infinite God that our finite minds can comprehend.

As I thought about Jesus being the light of the world – I wondered why He felt compelled to make the notion of being "the light" a portion of His complete description of God? As I mentioned in my last lecture covering lesson two, Jesus' messages far more often than not had a primary, or at least, a secondary spiritual meaning. Here in verse 12, He is speaking to the spiritual realm – "walking in darkness." We must take this comment from Jesus as truth – there is a portion of the spiritual world that is dark – void of light.

The Apostle Paul spoke pretty clearly to not only the truth of a dark portion of the spiritual realm, but also there is a hierarchy of power in its rulership, *“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places”*. (Ephesians 6:12) These powers, rulers of darkness, spiritual hosts of wickedness are Satan and his evil army.

For those of you who might be intimidated by the influence of spiritual darkness or maybe even struggling with the darkness, please listen to the truth of the far-greater power of the Light of the world – Jesus Christ.

- 1 John 1:5: “This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.”
- John 1:5: “And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend, or overcome, it.”
- Colossians 1:13: “He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed *us* into the kingdom of the Son of His love,”

Finally, we have the glorious promise of Jesus’ greater power to deliver anyone who believes in Him from spiritual darkness in the second half of verse 12, *“Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”*

In verse 13, the Pharisees challenged Jesus in His self-witness, *“Here you are, appearing as your own witness; your testimony is not valid.”* With their statement in this verse, the Pharisees revealed a lot about themselves. They completely missed the spiritual light vs. darkness issue but zeroed in on what their real problem with Jesus was. I’m convinced it was the words, *“Whoever follows me.”* In these words, there’s a leadership, or power, connotation. The Pharisees cared more about protecting their power and influence than they did the souls of the people to whom they were supposed to be ministering. This is one of the main reasons Jesus had such an issue with these men. As representatives of God, we are to be reflections of His character and directives. When we divert our actions to self-serving motives, we are stealing the glory of God and misrepresenting His heart and mindset which is that of self-sacrificing love and care.

So, the Pharisees are trying to invalidate Jesus’ claim as one to be followed, by accusing Him that His testimony is worthless because it is *only* Him testifying to the truth of His position as a leader. Jesus responded to their complaint of self-witnessing in verse 14, *“Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going. But you have no idea where I come from or where I am going.”* Did you see what truths Jesus proclaimed that validated His testimony to who He was? He knew where He came from, and where He is going. The same can be said about the believer’s testimony. Both the “where we are from” and the “where we’re going” claims are gloriously pronounced by the Apostle Peter in 1 Peter 1:3-4,

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,” How about an amen to that?!

In verses 18 & 19, Jesus continues to make His case that His witness to Himself is not singular. He has the best witness to Him one could ask for – God the Father. I hear both snark and cruelty in the Pharisees' question, *“Where is your father?”* It is believed by most scholars, Joseph – Jesus' earthly father, had died, so that makes this question so hurtful. Jesus concludes this exchange with words no true believer in Him will ever hear, *“You do not know me or my Father,” Jesus replied. “If you knew me, you would know my Father also.”* Pulling from John 10:27-30, we should be comforted by the Lord promising to all who believe in Him, *“My sheep hear My voice, and ...neither shall anyone snatch them out of My or the Father’s hands. I and My Father are one.”* This lines up with Jesus' words in verse 19, *“If you knew me, you would know my Father also.”*

Now we move into what I call Jesus' Kingdom witness. In this portion of the dialogue – Jesus is pointing out that the physical realm is not the only realm. In verses 21-25, the dialogue continued between Jesus and the Pharisees. The Lord hammered home some tough truths to these alleged religious leaders:

- “I am going away... Where I go, you cannot come.”
- “You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world.”
- “I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am he, you will indeed die in your sins.”

These are heavy words but, more importantly, heavy truths. Jesus was drawing the proverbial line in the sand with these guys. Their lack of faith would seal their unforgiven state and permanently separate them from God for the rest of their lives and on into eternity. What can we take away from this exchange? It is *only* through faith in Jesus as God's only begotten Son as well as his willingness and power to forgive sins that we can follow Him today and go where He went after His ascension. Namely, heaven.

Jesus said in verse 29, *“The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him.”* Perhaps in all of Scripture, this verse cuts me to my deepest core. It starts out great – the Father has not left Him alone. We all want to hear that, right? God will not leave us alone. But Jesus completes the statement, *“for I always do what pleases him.”* Those are the words that do the cutting in my soul. Can you say that you always do what pleases the Father? I cannot – not even close. There's a potential trap in this verse that Satan and his minions will use if you're not rooted in Scripture. He could turn this verse around such as, *‘Since you do not always do what*

pleases the Father, He will leave you alone.' This is a legalistic approach to faith whose end game is, at a minimum, discouragement, shame, and condemnation.

The Biblical truths are this. We've all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God – we are all guilty. However, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. *None* of us are always going to do the things that please the Father. Our sin nature will rear its ugly head and tempt or distract us. This is why Ephesians 2:8-9 should be one of every believer's life verses, "*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.*" Yours and my salvation and relationship with God would never be secure based on our repeated failed attempts to always do the things that pleases God. Yours and my salvation and relationship with God are only secure in the finished and Father-accepted works of Christ crucified and resurrected. Should we strive to always do the things that please God? Of course! However, when we don't, we must remind ourselves we live in an age of grace. I'll add to this point in a little bit.

Next, anchored by our memory verse, we move into the truth of Jesus' witness. "*Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.*" This verse is one of the cornerstone Scriptures of my faith. Why? Well, to start, the word "truth" is used 217 times in the NKJV of the Bible. In John's gospel alone, "truth" is used 23 times – more than any other book of the Bible other than the Psalms. Back in chapter 1, John described the Word of God as "full of truth" as well as "truth came through Jesus Christ." Jesus, Himself, called Himself the truth in John 14:6. All of this focus on truth would seem to me that truth is, indeed, very important to God. If it is important to Him, then it should be important to you and me. Absent all this Biblical support of the importance and source of truth, why should it be a cornerstone of one's faith?

If there is not a singular truth, then, in my opinion, you open the door to chaos. The more untruth, the more chaos. Just look at our world today – how infested is it with lies, half-truths, and deceit? When it comes to faith, if there is not one singular belief system, or God, then you have chaos in the area of faith. People who have no faith see this chaos and are either so confused by which one to choose or are so put off by the fighting between the faiths that they want no part of coming to know God. This is so tragic because people who truly want to know God already recognize that life without Him is pretty miserable. They want a change. They want a foundation of truth to move forward. They want hope. But it's tough to find hope in chaos.

If there is absolute truth, then those who are seeking to dismiss it are using lies as their weapons. The key issue, then, is how do you determine what is the truth? Why is this so important – especially in the realm of faith? Because once you know the truth, you will recognize the lies. What makes Jesus different from the other key figures of their faith is He invites people to inspect Him, to quiz Him, to challenge Him. He welcomes the interrogations, and He can do this because the truth isn't afraid of being found out. One of the primary reasons Jesus went to the cross was to destroy the lies

about God and reveal the truth that He loves us to the point of dying for us to save us. This truth is what both believing, and even non-believing people can find a firm foundation for their faith.

Verse 36 builds on verse 32, "*So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.*" What is it that the only begotten Son of God sets us free from? This is a long and wonderful list. Please allow me to offer just a few things that Jesus sets us free from:

First, He said back in verse 34 that everyone who sins are slaves to sin. Through faith in His crucifixion and resurrection, we are permanently forgiven from every past, present, and future sin. That forgiveness frees us from the power, the rule, and the dehumanizing fruits of sin. There are few words that are more dehumanizing than the word "slave." Jesus also hated it. So, part of the joy that was set before Him to endure the cross was to deliver people from the evil of slavery to sin.

Secondly, prior to being forgiven, we were separated from God. If you remember the temple in the Old Testament, the innermost portion of the temple was known as the Holy of Holies – the place of God's presence. A veil separated everyone but the high priest from gaining access to this sacred place. Upon the Father's approved sacrifice of His Son for our sins, the veil in the temple was torn from top to bottom by God Himself. This gives free access to God's presence at any time for all who believe in Jesus' work on the cross and resurrection. Hebrews 4:6 promises that we can come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Thirdly, Jesus sets us free from our old identity as lost sinners. 2 Corinthians 5:7 gives us the glorious proclamation, "Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." We are free to discover ourselves as new creations – a new identity that can neither be separated from the love of God, nor taken away out of His nail-pierced hands. The following are all Biblical truths of your new identity, and they will set you free from the lies you may be believing:

- You are forgiven. (1 John 1:9)
- You are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. (1 Peter 2:9)
- You are accepted. (Romans 15:7)
- You are His workmanship – created in Christ Jesus for good works (Ephesians 2:10)
- You are a child of God. (John 1:12)
- You belong to Jesus. (1 Corinthians 3:23)

One more thought as to the freedom truth buys you and me – it allows us to do God's will without reservation. Think about the identity statements we just listed. If you

are forgiven, chosen, royal priests, accepted, created to good works and belong to Jesus, can you at least imagine such a secure place? This is how we find the peace that passes all understanding within God's will – we are so safe in our identity in Christ. That certainty brings a freedom to fully surrender to our Lord our anxieties that come from our painful circumstances. This surrender allows Him to be exactly that – our Lord – the One who takes complete responsibility for our well-being and care. This should allow us to be at peace as a child of God whether we are rich or poor, healthy or sick, popular or alone. I'll be the first to admit this sounds easier than it is to live, but I do believe it to be true because God cannot lie.

This brings us to the fourth witness – Jesus' seed. In verses 37-40, Jesus' dialogue with the Pharisees shifts to the topic of fatherhood. The Pharisees are claiming Abraham is their father. Jesus, of course, is attempting to reveal that the Father they should be following is God the Father. This is the beginning of a discussion that will conclude with a powerful statement of who He is that will enrage the Pharisees and give them further incentive to kill Him. In verse 39, Jesus lays out a historical truth of Abraham – his descendants did what he told them to do – to follow God. Jesus is telling the Pharisees their desire to kill Him invalidates Abraham as their father.

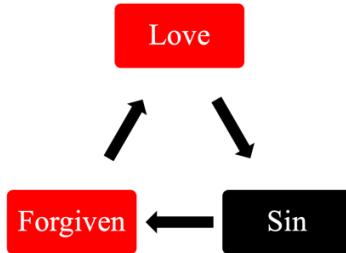
This accusation that their murderous desire invalidates Abraham as their father must have hit home to the Pharisees as in verse 41, they shift to now claiming God is their only Father. In verses 42-44, I hope you can see how Jesus is controlling this conversation – He's steering them to the folly of their beliefs to the truth. Jesus makes it very clear in verse 41, "*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.*" This is one of the more blatant Holy Trinity statements in Scripture. Jesus turns up the heat on the Pharisees as He pinpoints who their real father is – Satan. How does Jesus describe Satan? 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. The primary emphasis of Satan's description is that of a liar. I hope you can now understand why truth is so important to God. A life led in deception is life led in eventual destruction. A life led in truth is a life led in freedom and a firm foundation.

In verse 48, the Pharisees, desperate to find something to accuse Jesus of that will stick, resort to making stuff up - they accuse Jesus of being demon-possessed. With all the good He has caused so far; they have to know this is a lie. As I mentioned earlier, they're coming from a place to defend their precious position in the community. It's interesting that instead of offering a defense of their own piety and holiness, they choose to attack Jesus'. Perhaps they were feeling the conviction of Jesus' pure and righteous character that was exposing the flaws in theirs? I think a lot of us can get to this point. We feel pretty good about the way we are conducting ourselves until we are convicted by the Word of God or encounter a truly godly person. We then have a choice to make. We can either humble ourselves, ask for forgiveness for our prideful personal assessments, and repent; or we can become defensive and find some way to dismiss

the Word of God as irrelevant to today's world, or discredit or dishonor the very ones we should be honoring.

Whenever Jesus began a statement with "Very truly," we need to pay extra attention to it. He said in verse 51, "*whoever obeys my word will never see death.*" There's a lot to cover in this statement – probably a lecture in itself. I'll attempt to contain my comments to the following:

- Obedience matters to the Lord. What, exactly, is the word He is asking to obey? I believe it is summed up in Matthew 22:37, 39: "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*" What's the common denominator of these two commandments? – Love. Therefore, to obey the Word of God is to love God and love others – all the time.
- When Jesus said, "*will never see death,*" He was, once again, speaking of the spiritual realm. Physically, we are all going to die (unless the rapture should happen before). For the believer who has been born again with a new spirit, that spirit, upon our last physical breath, is immediately transported into the presence of the Lord. A born-again spirit cannot die.
- There may be a concern in this statement – what if I'm not always obedient to God's Word? I've got news for each of you – you're not. However, we live in the age of grace that slowly molds us into the image of Jesus. The below diagram is an attempt to depict this beautiful gift of grace.



We start with the goal to obey Jesus' commandment to love. In our weakness, we fail and sin. Yet, thanks be to God, we are forgiven of all of our sins, which frees us to get back to loving better as opposed to wallowing in our guilt and shame. The more we go through this process, we develop a deeper appreciation of the love-driven amazing grace of God's forgiveness. With the ever-present assistance of the Holy Spirit, this empowers us to become more and more able to deny the temptation to sin. This is an admittedly crude representation of the process to being molded into the image of Jesus, but I hope it helps you visualize the sanctification process.

Jesus' words of "never seeing death" are what the Pharisees have been looking for – or so they thought. Again, with them being void of the ability to comprehend the spirit world, they immediately go to the reality of the deaths of the Nation of Israel's patriarch

– Abraham as well as the prophets. They then ask in verse 53 a question that every single human being needs to ask himself/herself, “*Who do You think you are?*” In other words, each of us needs to answer the eternal destination establishing question, ‘*Who do you think Jesus is?*’ Other than a confession that He is the only begotten Son of God who was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, paid the price for all my sin through His crucifixion, and was resurrected and lives to this very day, then every other response to the question of who Jesus is, is a ticket to eternal separation from God. I know that is heavy, but it is biblically true.

Jesus has been in complete control of this dialogue, and through it, He has been speaking to His identity as the Son of God. He sets the stage for His grandest proclamation of who He is. In verse 56 where He says He personally met Abraham. God is eternal – He is always in existence – He spans all of time. Only God can make this claim, so the Pharisees are no doubt blown away by this claim and cannot comprehend the possibility of Jesus’ claim of meeting Abraham. The Lord then hammers home a statement He knows the Pharisees will understand, “*before Abraham was born, I am!*”

In Exodus, chapter 3, Moses meets God in the burning bush. When Moses asked for His name, the Lord said, “And God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And He said, “Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” (Exodus 3:14) The phrase “I AM” in Exodus 3:14 is connected to the Hebrew term YHWH, which is often seen as LORD, Yahweh, or Jehovah. Jesus, no doubt, knew the Pharisees would get this message, and their reaction in verse 59 was a sad conclusion to the choice of whether or not to believe Jesus is who He says He is, or not. They wanted to throw stones at Him and kill Him. Because the time was not right to allow the Pharisees to achieve the fulfillment of their death wish on Jesus, the Lord slipped away.

In summary, as we look through the verses in in today’s lesson, Jesus provided 4 ways to witness to who He was:

- His Self-witness
- His Kingdom witness
- His witness is true
- His “seed” witness

What I see as my lesson to learn and, hopefully, yours as well, is what my life should look like if I truly believe Jesus’ witnessing methods. What should change in my life to reflect the truth of who Jesus is? Change isn’t easy for most of us, but it if you’re going to follow Jesus, you better be ready for change. He never leaves us in the place we first meet Him. He loves us too much to do that. He takes each of us on a customized life-long journey of discovering Him, His love for us, His purpose for our lives, and an eternal loving relationship with our Creator, Savior, and Friend. His four witnessing statements paves the way for us to believe that He is who He says He is and, therefore, frees you and me to receive the following truths:

- Permanent forgiveness of sin.
- Access/Acceptance to His presence at all times.
- A new identity that you can neither lose nor have taken away.
- A security to surrender to His will

The question each of us need to ask ourselves is, "Do we really believe this?" What I can assure you is this, the more you believe, the more you will receive. Let's stand and sing.