

How to Be Free

John 8: 12-59

Memory Verse: John 8:32 – “Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

Thank you _____ for the devotional.

Before we begin you may want to open your Bible to John Chapter 8 and leave that open for your reference.

Jesus said, “I AM the Light of the World!” Sounds a bit like Leonardo diCaprio in the movie *Titanic*, doesn’t it? What I love about this study in John’s Gospel is learning about the nature and character of our **triune God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit**.

It seems to me that Jesus is teaching how inclusive God and His plan is for the human race. Salvation for all is possible regardless of race, gender, or age. What salvation depends on is a choice to believe or not. In fact, Jesus sought the least of us before the best of us. This was the opposite of **the** Pharisees and Jewish leaders of the day who practiced a religion of exclusion and laws, a religion based on birthright. They expected the best and greatest to be first, totally the opposite of our Lord and His plan.

Believers are frequently referred to as “God’s children.” However, it’s been said that God doesn’t have grandchildren, He only has children. A father cannot choose for his child and each child must choose for themselves.

I think one of the most difficult aspects of being a parent is allowing your child to choose their own journey in life. It is their own choice and not our choice for them. However, as parents we do have a responsibility to help shape and mold our children’s circumstances and teach them to be responsible and productive adults in this world. There are physical, moral and spiritual lessons for children to learn to be able to survive. The same applies to spiritual survival.

I have a story to share, one that applied the principles of truth and freedom to my family. I wish I could say that my family is perfect, but it’s not. I wish my children would choose the path I hope for them, but

they don't always. We are a normal family for the most part, and we've survived our own share of challenges as well.

Today our older son is in his 30's, happily married and a partner in a small business. He is a man of honesty and principals and on his own journey to the Truth in life, but he wasn't always that way. At 17 years old he allowed himself to be influenced by questionable friends and made some wrong choices. He chose to listen to friends who told him he could get something he wanted without having to earn it. What he wanted was a better car stereo for his pickup truck. What he did was getting caught stealing a car stereo system from the electronics store he worked for.

It was a shocking phone call my husband and I received from our son's work manager that day. He was caught on surveillance tape taking merchandise from the store room over a 2 week period. The store manager was aware of our involvement as parents and offered to release our son to us without contacting the police, providing all the stolen merchandise was returned. That was a gift. Just previous to that day we grounded his pickup truck and confiscated his keys as discipline for falling grades and bad behavior at school. We had no idea that we locked up his truck with stolen goods inside.

Our son would later share that was the lowest point in his young life, seeing the hurt and disappointment on our faces. Never mind the thought of possible arrest and facing a judge, facing Mom and Dad was worse! I remember telling him that the truth found him out, but that same truth would set him free. That was a confusing riddle to him.

We followed through with discipline that seemed appropriate to us. We sold that pickup truck and limited our son's activities to school, studies and his soccer team until further notice. Without free spending money from a job and a cool truck to drive, those so-called *cool* buddies disappeared.

For a long time our son was angry; angry that he got caught and angry at our discipline. At one point he complained to one of those buddies and his mother. They were neighbors and the boys were friends since junior high. That mother was a single parent and far more permissive in her parenting than we were. She felt our discipline choices were too harsh and reported us to Child Protective Services. My husband and I had to undergo an investigation by CPS for our actions. We stood by our decision and our discipline was ruled not abusive. That was a difficult time for us.

I know from listening to small prayer groups for many years that some of you have similar stories in your families. You begin your role as a parent with certain morals and standards in mind, but the world influences your child in the opposite direction. What do you do? How do you teach your child in the way you know is right and save them from the consequences of the world? As I studied and contemplated this lesson I thought of the contrasts Jesus was teaching the people in this gospel. John Chapter 8 is about the **conversation of contrasts** between Jesus and the Jewish leaders. They debated about:

- Light and dark
- Life and death
- Freedom and bondage
- Honor and dishonor

All these points were lessons our family had to face and make choices about during that life lesson for our son. Okay, maybe not the life and death part like you would think, but losing your truck is life and death to a teenage boy.

As I wrote the points of this lesson, I so wish I could have talked about these things to my son at that time. But at 17 years old and where he was spiritually then, he wouldn't have understood. Considering his state of mind at the time, I dare say he would have been offended by what I would have said. It's difficult for me to say, but he was "a child of the devil" then. Perhaps you too have a loved one in your life who is being a child of the devil. Don't feel discouraged and keep praying. Like you, our Father wants them to be set free as well.

John relates how Jesus was speaking on the Mount of Olives in the early morning, and then moved to the treasury chamber of the Temple during the Feast of Tabernacles. There he continued to teach to the people around him and debate with the Jewish leaders who followed as well.

As a side comment, I personally find it interesting and encouraging that Jesus' discourses occurred in places where women, children and others could hear him as well. Another sign that Jesus' lessons were inclusive to all people and not exclusive to the Pharisees and Jewish leaders.

Light and Dark (8:12-20)

"I am the Light of the World" (v. 12) is the second "I am" statement in John's Gospel. The first was "I am the Bread of Life". In fact, John writes of seven "I am" statements in his gospel. The significance of knowing Jesus is to know God (v. 19). It is no coincidence that "I am" is God's name for himself (Ex 3:14).

In relating about Jesus' teachings, John used 3 wilderness images to remind the people of Jesus' connection to Israel's journey in the wilderness: the manna as the bread of life in John 6, water from the rock as never being thirsty again in John 7, and the pillar of fire as the light of the world in John 8.

Jesus was prophesied by Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, as the rising sun from heaven (Luke 1:78-79). Jehovah God is described as a sun and shield in Psalms 84:11, and as light with no darkness at all in 1 John 1:5.

"Jesus uttered the bold statement of being "the light of the world" against the backdrop of the light in the Temple and the court around it. In the Temple, a menorah, or golden candlestick, burned constantly. During the Feast of Tabernacles, four huge menorahs light up the outside court at night while men danced and sang praises to God. This light commemorated the pillar of fire that led the Israelites when they wandered in the wilderness in Moses' day. At the end of the celebration each night, or in the early morning, two priests faced the Temple and proclaimed, "Our fathers who were in this place turned their backs to the Temple of God and their faces eastward, and threw themselves down eastward before the sun, but we direct our eyes to Yahweh." It was in this context that Jesus declared, "I am the light of the world."

That short sentence set off fireworks as Jesus' use of "I am" made it clear that he is God. The Jewish people understood that light stood for God's holiness. As if that wasn't enough, Jesus claimed to be light for all people, not just Jews. As the light that pierces darkness, Jesus sheds light on God, showing people what he is like and what he does. Jesus' presence and teachings also sheds light on the darkness of people's sin and separation from God. So people who follow Jesus don't walk blindly in sin anymore. Instead, they can see their sin and need for forgiveness. [Smart Guide & menorah illustration (pg 94-95)]

Light reveals man's wickedness. Paul writes in his letter to the Ephesians, "Everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible." (Eph 5:13-14) Instead of seeing Jesus' light, the Pharisees saw red. They reacted by challenging him with the Law.

For a valid testimony, two witnesses are needed. (Deut 19:15) Jesus agreed, and his witnesses were himself and God the Father. However, the Jewish leaders would not accept Jesus bearing witness to himself.

Last weekend I spent time with family on the farm in Nebraska. My aunt and uncle live on a 12 acre farm about 25 miles northwest of Omaha. At night outside that place is dark! I saw an outside porch light on a neighboring farmhouse and it was the only thing visible in that darkness. I didn't need anyone else to testify that light was there. It's been said before in this study that light has to bear witness to itself! In total darkness the only people who cannot see the light are blind people. The light itself tells you it is there!

One of the key words in this section is "witness", it is used many times. Perhaps the Pharisees were quoting Jesus' own words from 5:31, "If I testify about myself, my testimony is not valid." The Jewish leaders were judging on externals or with mere human judgment. But Jesus judged on the basis of spiritual knowledge. Jesus had the two testimonies he needed; He gave witness and so did His Father in 5:37, "The Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me."

How tragic that the Jewish leaders, considered experts in the law, did not even recognize their own Messiah as he stood before them! They claimed to know the law of God, but they did not know the God of the law.

Life and Death (8:21-30)

Jesus had already warned the Jews that he was going away. The first warning was in Chapter 7 that he was leaving them and they would not be able to follow him. They misunderstood and thought he was going to another land where they couldn't follow him.

In Chapter 8 Jesus told them they would die in their sins! Again the leaders misunderstood and thought he was talking about suicide. Jesus said he was returning to his Father and they could not go there. Jesus and the Jewish leaders were going to different destinations because they had different origins. Jesus came from heaven and they belonged to the earth.

“The true believer has his citizenship in heaven (Luke 10:20; Phil 3:20-21) His affection and attention are fixed heaven ward. But the unsaved belong to this world; in fact, Jesus called them “the people of this world” (Luke 16:8). Since they have not trusted Christ and had their sins forgiven, their destiny is to die to their sins. The Christian dies “in the Lord” because he lives “in the Lord” (Rev 14:13), but the unbeliever dies in his sins because he lives in his sins.” [Weirsbe commentary]

Offended and indignant, the Jewish leaders demanded to know, “Who are you”? Jesus boldly claimed to be deity in 8:26. He would judge and judgment, to the Jews, belonged only to God. Jesus claimed to be sent by God and he claimed to have heard from God the things he taught. The response of Jewish leaders was that they did not understand! God reveals his truth to the “babes” and not to the “wise and prudent” (Luke 10:21).

Now Jesus spoke about his own death and being lifted up (John 3:14; 12:32). The word translated as “lifted up” has dual meaning: “lifted up in crucifixion” and “lifted up in exaltation and glorification”. Jesus was sent by the Father. The Father was with him and he always did what pleased the Father (8:29).

Salvation is a matter of life or death. People who live in their sins and reject the Savior must die in their sins. There is no other alternative. Our choices are salvation by grace OR condemnation under God’s law, to walk in the light to have eternal life OR to walk in darkness and experience eternal death.

Freedom and Bondage (8:31-47)

Freedom begins with a relationship with Jesus. As a result, we know the truth that will set us free spiritually.

True disciples are believers that continue in the Word – that is discipleship – which is proof of true salvation. When we obey His Word, we grow in spiritual knowledge, and as we grow in spiritual knowledge, we grow in freedom from sin. Life leads to learning and learning leads to liberty.

Now, I need to confess to a misquote. “The truth will find you out ...” is a saying I always heard growing up and even said to my own children. For this study I decided to search and verify this saying. I could not find the source of this quote anywhere, on the Internet, and most of all, not in Scripture. However, Scripture has many references to “seeking the truth”, and of course, our memory verse about “the truth will set you free.”

In the process I found online a blog by a Christian gentleman from Australia named Graham Pockett at www.anointedlinks.com/truth.html. He posted:

“We glibly use the expression ‘the truth will set you free’, but this may not be correct in all circumstances. It isn’t just the truth that sets you free, it is knowing the truth and then applying it that sets you free.

The truth is there at all times – whether or not we recognize it – but unless we know the truth, and apply it, truth itself is powerless.

It is knowing the truth, and then applying it, that sets us free.”

Spiritual freedom then is a conditional state due to Jesus’ use of “if ... and then...” Jesus said in 8:31-32, “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 emphasis is mine.) To understand the truth of the Gospels you must:

- First, Believe that Jesus is the son of God, the Messiah, the Savior and
- Second, Hold to the teachings of Jesus so you become His followers. That is being more than just a student who learns about His teachings, but a follower who emulates Him in all you do.

“Hold to” is a verb that means *to abide* or *to continue*. Here it is used of holding to Jesus’ teachings. This is an active, not a passive, activity. To “hold to” the Word means not only knowing the truth, but living it. (Dana Gould)

I’m not sure that I would pass this litmus test of spiritual freedom myself. Personally I believe, but have I transcended the level of being a *student* of Jesus’ teachings into being a *true follower* of the Word who emulates the Savior in all I do? I don’t think so, or at least not yet in my life. However, it is certainly something I am striving for.

Our freedom therefore requires that IF we believe that Jesus is our Savior, and hold to his teachings in all things, THEN His truth will set us free. (again, emphasis mine)

But free from what? – Free from the bondage of sin and eternal death. The Jewish leaders debating with Jesus in the temple didn’t understand what He was talking about. As sinners in bondage they didn’t have the ability to understand. Today, being reminded of that life lesson with my son and his stealing incident, he wasn’t capable at the time of understanding what I meant as TRUTH anymore than these Jewish leaders could. My son’s understanding of the truth and his choice for freedom had to be in God’s time and not in mine.

Jesus talked about the Jews as being slaves of sin and the need to be set free. John refers to “they” in verse 33. But who was represented by “they”? If 8:37 is any guide, “they” probably refers to the same unbelieving Jewish leaders who opposed Jesus throughout this conversation. Again, *they* did not understand Jesus and their thinking was on a whole other plane.

Jesus was speaking about true spiritual freedom, freedom from sin, but *they* were thinking about political freedom. Instead the Jewish elite falsely claimed Abraham’s descendants were never in bondage. Denial and twisting the truth again! In fact, the Jews at that time were under the iron heel of Rome. How difficult it is for proud religious people to admit their failings and needs.

What about you? Are you a proud religious person? Are you so wrapped up in religious rhetoric that you fail to see your own state of bondage? Or are you able to understand spiritual freedom as Jesus is explaining it?

Jesus called the Jewish leaders “the devil’s children”. The Jewish leaders turned the debate around the word “father.” Jesus identified with the Father in heaven, but he identified the Jewish leaders with Satan. The Jews claimed Abraham as their father. But Jesus made a clear distinction between “Abraham’s seed” as physical descendants and “Abraham’s children” as spiritual descendants because of personal faith.

Paul writes in Galatians (3: 7, 10-14) – “Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. ... All who rely on observing the laws are under a curse, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.’ Clearly no one is justified before God by faith. The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, ‘The man who does these things will live by them.’ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.’ He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

The actions of the Jewish leaders make it clear that they are of the family line of Satan rather than the family line of Abraham. It wasn’t merely a matter of not understanding Jesus’ words; it was a matter of the heart and will. Their hearts belonged to the devil, who is a murderer and a liar.

Nature is determined by birth and birth is determined by paternity. If God is your Father, then you share God’s nature. (2 Peter 1: 3-4 – “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”)

If Satan is your father, then you share in his evil nature. The Pharisees and other “counterfeit” believers were the children of the devil. The characteristics of religious leaders who belonged to the devil included:

- They rejected the truth (John 8:40) and tried to kill Jesus because he spoke the truth.
- They did not love God (8:42).
- They could not understand what Jesus taught (8: 43, 47).

Satan’s children may be well versed in their religious traditions, but they have no understanding of the Word of God. The worst bondage is the kind that the prisoner himself does not recognize. He thinks he is free, yet he is really a slave. The Pharisees and religious leaders would not face the truth, and yet it was the truth alone that could set them free.

What is the bondage that might be holding you back from freedom? Do you recognize it? Are you able to see the truth that alone can set you free?

Honor and Dishonor (8:48-59)

By this point in the temple debate, emotions must have been running high! The leaders could not refute Jesus' statements so they attacked his person by calling him a Samaritan devil. For a Jew to be called a Samaritan was the grossest of insults, and then to be called demon-possessed only added further insult.

Jesus made it clear that it was impossible to honor the Father without honoring the Son (5:23). The leaders were seeking their own glory (5:41-44), but He was seeking glory that belongs to God. Tradition-centered religion, without Christ is often a "mutual admiration society" for people who want the praise of men. Jesus warned that they would die in their sins because of their unbelief, and now He invited them to trust His Word and "never see death" (8:51).

Once again, the leaders lacked the spiritual insight to understand what He was saying. They demanded of Jesus, "Who do you think you are?" By claiming to be the Lord of death, Jesus was claiming to be God (5:21-29). This was an honor given to him by the Father. Abraham, whom the leaders claimed as their father, saw Jesus' day and rejoiced! Instead of rejoicing, they were revolting and trying to kill Him.

How did Abraham "see" our Lord's day, that is, His life and ministry on earth? The same way he saw the future city: by faith (Heb 11:10&13). God did not give Abraham some special vision of our Lord's life and ministry, but He did give him the spiritual perception to "see" these future events. Certainly Abraham saw the birth of the Messiah in the miraculous birth of his own son, Isaac. He certainly saw Calvary when he offered Isaac to God in Genesis 22. In the priestly ministry of Melchizedek, Abraham could see the heavenly priesthood of the Lord (Gen 14:17-20). In the marriage of Isaac, Abraham could see a picture of the marriage of the Lamb (Gen 24).

Jesus' statement in 8:58 can be translated, "Before Abraham came into being, I am." He had once again made Himself equal to God (5:18), and this was the sin of blasphemy, worthy of death (Lev 24:16). But Jesus was divinely protected and simply walked away from the Temple because his hour had not yet come.

The most difficult people to win to the Savior are those who do not realize they have a need. They are under the condemnation of God, yet they trust their religion to save them. They are walking in the darkness and not following the light of life. They are sharing a "living death" because of their bondage to sin, and they are dishonoring the Father and the Son. These are the people who crucified Jesus Christ, and Jesus called them the children of the devil. So, whose child are you?

Back to my story:

Allow me to go back to the story about our son and his consequences for stealing the car stereo from his job. About 6 months following the incident it was time for his high school graduation. Because he focused on his studies, his grades improved and he earned his graduation. Those cool buddies that earlier influenced his bad choices, no longer hung out with him.

On graduation day the family gathered at our home to attend his school ceremony and celebrate his accomplishment. Our son walked out the back door of our home to go to the school and almost

instantly came running back inside. He was emotional hugging me around the neck and crying into my shoulder, “You were right. You and Dad were right and they were wrong!”

As he went to the car to go to the school, there he stood in the alley behind our garage dressed in his cap and gown. Across the alley in his friend’s garage sat those same 3 buddies on an old sofa watching a discarded television. They were not dressed in caps and gowns. They were not graduating from high school. It was that ah-ha moment when our son felt the full impact of his wrong choices and the necessity of the discipline by his parents. I know he must have been struggling with this realization as the time for his graduation was approaching. After the ceremony and the family celebration at home, he gave my husband and me a card. This card has become a treasured possession for me and has lived in my Bible since that time, for nearly 18 years now. Please allow me to share a portion of it with you.

Dear Mom and Dad,

In my solitary moments I often take the time to reflect on you, and I realize that being a parent is a lifelong commitment to selflessness. I think that parenthood must be the most difficult commitment to pursue, as more often than not, it requires much more giving than receiving. The rewards of this commitment seem to be very slow, and the demands so great. Few children, and I am one of them, ever take the opportunity to view the realities of parenthood.

Often times, I am so caught up in my own life that I fail to realize that I am never alone in any emotion. For each moment of joy I experience, there is a silent joy shared by you, my mother and father, along with a silent prayer of thanks to God for the blessing he has given me, your child. Behind each tear shed and each hurt felt, there is a silent tear and silent hurt felt deep inside your heart. It’s strange that these silent emotions are never readily apparent, but they are always behind your words of encouragement, wisdom, understanding and faith that there will be a better tomorrow awaiting me.

As I researched and wrote this lecture, I considered that this letter, written by a 17 year old young man, has words that any of us could write to our Heavenly Father as His children. How often are we caught up in our own lives that we fail to realize the depth and power the Heavenly Father has, and how deeply he loves us? Do we resist the discipline and testing the Father may impose upon us when we make wrong choices? Or are we able to know the Truth and hold to the teaching necessary to bring us into a closer relationship with him? If we truly know the Truth, then the Truth will indeed set us free!

References: