



Sunday, May 3, 2026

John 8:30-59

We live in a day and age where there isn't much overlap between our culture and Christianity. But every once in a while, a phrase from the Bible breaks through into mainstream society - not because people are embracing Scripture, but because it's something that resonates on a surface level. And as we come to the second half of John 8 today, we run into one of the most recognizable statements Jesus ever made: 'You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.'

Now what's fascinating about that line is that you don't have to know anything about the Bible to recognize it. It's been quoted, reused, and redefined in all kinds of ways. But when Jesus originally said it, He wasn't talking about personal expression or situational freedom - He was talking about salvation. He was pointing to the truth above all other truths - the truth from which all truth stems. A truth that doesn't just inform your life, but transforms your soul. A truth that, when fully embraced, doesn't just make you feel better, it actually has the power (like no other truth ever has or ever will) to set you free.

If you have your Bibles with you today, I'd like to invite you to turn with me to John 8:30-58. And if you are able to, please stand for the reading of the Word of the Lord:

John 8:30-59

'As he was saying these things, many believed in him.

31 Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you continue in my word, you really are my disciples. 32 You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

33 "We are descendants of Abraham," they answered him, "and we have never been enslaved to anyone. How can you say, 'You will become free'?"

34 Jesus responded, "Truly I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin. 35 A slave does not

remain in the household forever, but a son does remain forever. 36 So if the Son sets you free, you really will be free. 37 I know you are descendants of Abraham, but you are trying to kill me because my word has no place among you. 38 I speak what I have seen in the presence of the Father; so then, you do what you have heard from your father.”

39 “Our father is Abraham,” they replied.

“If you were Abraham’s children,” Jesus told them, “you would do what Abraham did. 40 But now you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do this. 41 You’re doing what your father does.”

“We weren’t born of sexual immorality,” they said. “We have one Father—God.”

42 Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, because I came from God and I am here. For I didn’t come on my own, but he sent me. 43 Why don’t you understand what I say? Because you cannot listen to my word. 44 You are of your father the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he tells a lie, he speaks from his own nature, because he is a liar and the father of lies. 45 Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. 46 Who among you can convict me of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don’t you believe me? 47 The one who is from God listens to God’s words. This is why you don’t listen, because you are not from God.”

Jesus and Abraham

48 The Jews responded to him, “Aren’t we right in saying that you’re a Samaritan and have a demon?”

49 “I do not have a demon,” Jesus answered. “On the contrary, I honor my Father and you dishonor me. 50 I do not seek my own glory; there is one who seeks it and judges. 51 Truly I tell you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.”

52 Then the Jews said, “Now we know you have a demon. Abraham died and so did the prophets. You say, ‘If anyone keeps my word, he will never taste death.’ 53 Are you greater than our father Abraham who died? And the prophets died. Who do you claim to be?”

54 “If I glorify myself,” Jesus answered, “my glory is nothing. My Father—about whom you say, ‘He

is our God'—he is the one who glorifies me. 55 You do not know him, but I know him. If I were to say I don't know him, I would be a liar like you. But I do know him, and I keep his word. 56 Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; he saw it and was glad."

57 The Jews replied, "You aren't fifty years old yet, and you've seen Abraham?"

58 Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, before Abraham was, I am."

59 So they picked up stones to throw at him. But Jesus was hidden and went out of the temple.'

So, last week we ended on a pretty high note with the interaction between Jesus at the temple treasury declaring that not only is He the living water, the Light of the World - but ultimately the true treasure. That everything this world calls treasure - gold, silver, wealth - is nothing more than pavement in Heaven. And after all of that John tells us that:

Vs. 30

'As he spoke these words, many believed in Him.'

Now this is what is referred to in Scripture as a transitional statement. It concludes the previous section but also launches the next section. And what this statement is doing, is showing us that Jesus' words are making an impact. Generally speaking, people are listening and many are believing.

But as we move into verse 31, Jesus stops speaking to the people in general and now specifically hones in on the Jewish community. Notice John's language:

Vs. 31a

'Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him...'

So, everything from this point on until the end of the chapter needs to be viewed as a message specifically to the Jewish people at the time. But even though this is a message geared specially to the Jewish community, Jesus' words contain such powerful truths that, if embraced, will help set all people free. We'll get to that verse shortly but before we do we need to understand what Jesus is now doing to set up that verse.

Again, notice His language. Words are important for Jesus. He chooses them carefully and intentionally.

Jesus now says (to the Jews that had started to believe):

Vs. 31b-32

‘If you continue in My word, you are My disciples indeed. 32 And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.’

The word continue is an interesting word and we’ll dig into that in a moment, but in many translations, the word abide is used instead and I feel like that is a more fitting word here.

So, if you’re paying attention it can seem like Jesus is saying that salvation has multiple steps that if you believe and abide in His Word, then you shall be free. When in fact, if we go back to John 3 we see clearly that Jesus says:

John 3:16

‘For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.’

So which is it? Everyone who believes will not perish but have eternal life, or those that believe and abide in His word?

You see, the keyword here is the word abide. As students of the law, these Jewish people would have already known the Word. Since their youth they would have studied it, memorized it and known it inside and out. So by using the word ‘abide’ now, Jesus is quietly challenging their new-found belief. You see, in the Greek, the word for ‘abide’ is the word ‘meno,’ which means to be present and to tarry. Which is interesting language because this is the same thing that Jesus instructed his disciples to do – to tarry in Jerusalem – while they were waiting for the Holy Spirit to come after Jesus’ ascension. During that time, the disciples, devoted themselves to prayer and the reading of the word of God.

So, what Jesus is saying to these Jewish believers now, is that if your belief in Me is real, then you will continue in My Word - but it won’t just stay a cerebral experience. It won’t just be head knowledge anymore. It will actually begin to change you. Something will start to happen in your heart as the words of Jesus bring truth... life... and freedom through relationship with Him as the Word. And when that kind of belief takes root, and that relationship begins to grow, that’s what true discipleship is all about. It’s the natural outflow - not a second step in salvation. They are not saved by abiding in

His Word, rather they abide in His Word because they are saved. This is what salvation produces.

We are not saved by abiding in His Word, rather we abide in His Word because we are saved. Abiding isn't what makes you a disciple - it reveals that you are one.

It's the same concept as Romans 10:9 where Paul says:

Romans 10:9

'If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.'

Again, it's not too separate stages of salvation. If you truly believe in your heart that Jesus is Lord, then everything that flows out of your life - your words, your actions, your thoughts - will begin to reflect that confession. This is what real belief produces.

And I think that this is actually the point for Jesus in His words to the Jews that started to believe. He wanted them to see that real belief is not just cerebral, it is active and it moves...right into relationship.

Which is where the concept of abiding really comes into play. And as I was looking at the definition, the word tarry kept standing out to me because this is exactly what Jesus instructed His disciples to do before He ascended - He told them to wait, to remain, to tarry. They didn't just sit in a corner somewhere and do nothing. No, they continued with purpose, they lingered in the Scriptures and they devoted themselves to prayer.

And if we're being honest, we can often approach the Word - the Bible, and even Jesus Himself - the same way these Jewish believers did. For them, it was knowledge. Information. Simply cerebral. Something to study and understand. But when Jesus says you shall know the truth and the truth will set you free, He's not just talking about knowledge....He's talking about knowing.

That you can know Him and be known by Him. And because He is the way, the truth and the life, when we come to know Him, it becomes more than just the freedom He offers from sin and death but about the freedom to live and dwell daily in His presence in the here and now. Again, that you can know God and be known by Him! And that doesn't come through rushing through a five minute devotional at morning or night. It comes through lingering in His Word, tarrying in worship, steeping in His presence. He desperately wants to meet with you. He loves you - He adores you. And He is

the One who can truly set you free.

This is why Paul would later say in Hebrews that the word of God is living and active:

Hebrews 4:12

‘For the word of God is living and effective and sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating as far as the separation of soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.’

We often like to focus on the double-edged sword part in this verse, but notice what Paul says first and foremost - the Word of God is living and effective.

And because the Word is living, it doesn't just inform us - it reveals truth to our hearts. And it has the power to set us free. And the greatest freedom that we could ever experience is salvation - which is exactly what Jesus is referring to when He uses the verse, ‘you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free.’

This is why the Jewish believers reacted so strongly. In their minds, they didn't need to be set free. Everyone else, yes, but not them. They were Abraham's descendants and they believed that because they were the chosen people of God, that they were automatically in right standing with Him.

But what they failed to understand is why they were chosen. They were chosen to be the people through whom the Messiah would come. And the Messiah came into the world to bring salvation - to all humanity - because all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

So when Jesus looks at them and says that they need to be set free, it confronts everything they believed about themselves. And it doesn't just challenge their thinking - it exposes their unwillingness to surrender. Because nothing tests the authenticity of belief quite like being told you're wrong.

If you're a parent here, I'm sure you can attest to that in raising strong-willed kids!
Example believing that elf on the shelf was real...

And so....the rest of the chapter describes the resulting dialogue as Jesus tells them that their father really isn't Abraham because they're acting nothing like him, but in fact a more appropriate father for them is the devil because they're doing exactly what he is trying to do to Jesus - trying to kill

Him. They continue to push back, and things escalate to the point where they accuse Him of being demon-possessed. But Jesus combats that with one of the most powerful statements by saying,

John 8:58

“Truly I tell you, before Abraham was, I am.”

Bad grammar, right?? Shouldn't Jesus be saying, before Abraham was, I was - past tense? Nope. This is yet another one of His 'I am' statements that He has been using throughout the book of John - meant to draw them back to the wilderness where Moses asked God who He was and God responded with, 'I AM.'

And by using the exact same language as God, Jesus is showing the disciples, that He is the One that split the red sea in the days of Moses...that He is the One who spoke to Moses on the mountain as smoke and fire.

That this is Jehovah. This is the Great I AM, the Creator of Heaven and Earth, the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End....now in their midst. Not just a man with a divine nature. Not an angel sent by God. But this is God.

And so what is their response?

Unbelief. But not just mild unbelief, unbelief that was so strong that it drove them to try to kill Jesus....again. Because that's what unbelief does. It rejects truth and ultimately produces death.

Which is such a bizarre twist in the story when you think about it! We were all so hopeful at the beginning of the reading when we read that there were Jews that believed! So what in the world happened to turn their belief into unbelief?

It was just head knowledge for them. They were just interested in Jesus - curious about His teaching, drawn in by what He was saying.

But when the truth was presented, and it did not line up with their way of thinking, instead of submitting and surrendering to the truth, they resisted it and rejected it.

They didn't want heart-change. They were determined that they had it all figured out - that they were right and He was wrong. It was pride. And we know this was pride, because when the truth is

right in front of you, and everything adds up, and yet you still refuse to respond and submit - it's not an information problem... it's a heart problem. They had believed the lie that the father of all lies had been feeding them all along. The same lies that were spoken to Adam and Eve in the Garden - that perhaps God was wrong and they were right.

And make no mistake, this is the same story that's been unfolding ever since the beginning. The same lie that was whispered in the garden is now taking root again in their hearts. A lie that says you don't need to submit, you don't need to surrender, you can define truth for yourself.

And that lie always leads to the same place....death.

Because that's what unbelief does. It rejects the truth and (maybe not right away) ultimately produces death. Which is the devil's goal isn't it? He is a thief and in just a few short chapters we'll read that:

John 10:10-11

'A thief comes only to steal, kill and destroy. I have come so that they may have life and have it in abundance.'

3 Points to consider as we close and prepare our hearts for communion:

1. Some of you sitting here today have been doing exactly what the Jewish believers are doing in our story today. They wanted to believe Jesus, but only on their terms. I'm telling you right now that is not going to work out well for you. History dictates that this is absolute. My encouragement to all of us here today is as hard as it may be difficult and challenging as it can be for some of us let it go let it go and submit and surrender your heart and your mind to him.

2. Which leads me to my next point: Do you know him? Or do you just know about him? Now, this doesn't mean we abandon our intellect and just live by emotion. There's a deep connection between the mind and the heart. But Jesus is reminding us that our intellect can only take us so far. After all, how can the human mind - limited, finite, and frail - fully comprehend the mind of God, who is infinite and perfect?

3. At some point, knowledge has to move beyond understanding... and into trust.

This is where the heart comes in. Not as a replacement for the mind, but as the place where we yield to Him. Where we trust Him - not just because we understand everything - but because we know Him. And how do you get to know him? As Jesus says in verse 31, by abiding in his word. Lingering in His presence. Walking with Him in prayer. Because this is where that relational component is

strengthened.

Although the phrase: you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free is specifically used for salvation in this context, it doesn't mean that the general idea of truth setting us free isn't relevant because it is. Jesus goes on to say that the enemy is the father of all lies and so it begs the question: what lies of the enemy are you still believing?

Communion

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

'For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: On the night when he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." 25 In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, and said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.'

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