

INTRODUCTION

It is good to be in the House this morning. As Pastor Tony and others have mentioned, it is always a great time to jump into this study of the John's Gospel with us. If you are unfamiliar with the Bible, you'll find the book of John about three quarters into a hard copy of Scripture.

John states the purpose of his gospel chapter 20 verse 31 and it is seen all throughout today's passage. John says:

"but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

Our passage drives home what *"life in his name"* is all about. In this text, Jesus describes the prism of the gospel with the concept of freedom.

We'll not only encounter the beauty and depth of freedom, but we'll also have an encounter with the source of freedom himself, namely, Christ.

The challenge in this text is that people have been inoculated to their need for Christ because they've received just enough religion (or tradition) to satisfy them.

This particular scene takes place in the middle of the Feast of Booths (also called the Feast of Tabernacles) which includes celebrating the Day of Atonement. These participated in religious meetings, they have prayers, gather for feasts, and are part of Abraham's family. Because of all of this, they assume that they have all of their religious "ducks in a row," and then they go toe-to-toe with Jesus.

In this text, in the lives of these religious people, we see that the tactics of the Adversary are sly. He is out to destroy us, but if he showed up with horns and a pitch fork, surely we'd know to run for the hills. But he has mastered his craft. One of his best tactics for keeping us from Christ himself is by distracting us with the trappings of religion (which often amounts to being enamored with the accessories of worship or piety and not Christ himself).

All of this reminds me of a time I took my girls to get flu shots. When you get a flu shot, they give you a bit of the virus so your body develops the ability to fight the real thing. I wish that our medical technician took a few pages from the Adversary's book about subtly/discreetly introducing you the inoculation. She walked into the room as I was holding my two daughters who were shivering with fear and plopped these two huge needles down on the table for them to see. Needless to say, my daughters went crazy!

This is not how the Devil does his work, he is a Master of disguising destruction with the veneer of joy and pleasure. He is out to keep you in bondage and when he has you and you can't escape in your own strength. But we know the "escape artist," we know the "the truth that sets the captives free" so let's dig in and find Him.

SERMON BREAKDOWN

- Freedom and Bondage (vs. 31-32)
- Children of Abraham (vs. 33-41a)
- Children of the Devil (vs. 41b-47)

FREEDOM AND BONDAGE: vs. 31-32

³¹ So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, *"If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."*

Fickle Faith

The opening line of this text seems to be referring to 'many' Jews who put their faith in Jesus in v. 30. But Jesus seems to be making a distinction between those who were in v. 30 and v. 31. The linguistic clues in the text introduces these "believers" to be those with "fickle faith" or "sign seekers" (i.e. those who believed in Jesus when they saw miraculous signs, but their faith turned out to be misshapen).

Perhaps some of us resemble these "stubborn saints" who approached Jesus with all sorts of issues including being:

- Slaves to sin (v. 34)
- Indifferent to Jesus' teaching (v. 37)
- Children of the Devil (v. 44)
- Liars (v. 55)

We should find this encouraging today because it demonstrates the longsuffering of our Savior as he continues to pursue those who are trying to wrap their mind around the Truth.

Throughout John's gospel, we know that this is not Jesus' first interaction with people like this. John chapters 2, 4 and 6 Jesus engages those who seemed to have trusted, not in Jesus, but in His miraculous signs.

In this text, Jesus lays bare exactly what separates counterfeit faith from genuine faith, Jesus said, *"If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples."*

Abide ("continue" or "remain")

This word *abide* is important because it denotes remaining with Christ and walking continuously with Him. We often prone to reduce the Gospel to freedom from sin for the purpose of going to heaven, but it is far more! Salvation is an event, it begins a process, and it offers us eternal hope:

- Event: Saved from the **penalty** of sin (justification)
- Begins a Process: Being saved from the **power** of sin in our lives (sanctification)
- Offers Hope: One day will be free from the **presence** of sin (individually, relationally, and socially) (glorification)

So “abiding” or “remaining” assumes that we are able to:

- Rejoice in the event of our salvation
- Participate in the process of sanctification, and
- Look forward to a future sinless hope of glorification.

It is important to ask ourselves the question, “Are we abiding today?” Posed differently, “In what ways is God working to sanctify you today?” These are questions that every believer must have an answer to.

Truth

Another key word in these verses is “*truth*.” In comparison to other churches I’ve been part of, the theological IQ at Imago Dei is quite high. This comes with both strengths and liabilities. One of the liability is the tendency to view:

Truth as information to be stored, stacked, and shelved and not directives to be followed, practiced, or enacted. We need to ensure that Christian discipleship is the practice of doing the faith and learning the way of life that is in Jesus Christ (Dallas Willard, paraphrase).

My fear is that many learned Christians have misconstrued the acquisition of information/knowledge about God for relational intimacy with Christ.

It is difficult to “abide” in information, is it impossible to have a personal relationship with facts, but when the subject of “Truth” is a person (as it is in this text), our exploration of truth requires us to stop and stay for a while (to abide).

Truth in Contemporary Culture

In our broader cultural moment, it is important to note that truth is specific.

Our culture assumes freedom is located in the ability to express our feelings and desires without being in habited.

“I need to express my ‘truth.’”
People end up saying stupid things like “follow your heart.”

Our hearts are fallen and in need of redemption. The last thing we ought to do is follow our hearts because they will lead us into a cell of bondage.

To lovingly insist that Jesus is the way is not a message of cold exclusivity, but a message of love.

The Essence of Freedom

I love watching the jazz grates like Duke Ellington, John Coltrane, Thelonious Monk and others. It seems that when they are improvising a solo (i.e. playing a solo with no written music), they are completely free. They are able to express any emotion through the universal language of music, and they invite us to take a journey into the depths of their soul through song. This is true freedom right?

The reality is that their artistic expression is only beautiful to the listener because they've mastered the design of the artform. While we experience the sounds of beauty in our ears, the artist is keenly aware that in order for the sound to bespeak freedom, they are constrained to:

- Time signature
- Key signature
- Musical genre
- Tempo
- etc.

The freest expression in music (and in life) are only achieved when we are committed to a design (standard or truth) outside of ourselves; our submission here is to the designer of beauty Himself in whom we find freedom.

CHILDREN OF ABRAHAM: v. 33-41a

The People's Response (v. 33)

From this point forward illustration of family lines is used through the rest of today's passage.

³³ *They answered him, "We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, 'You will become free'?"*

They are convinced that they are already free!

This crowd does what people have consistently done throughout John's gospel—they minimize what Christ has deemed an eternal matter to having only human/earthly consequences. As a result, they insisted upon using their family credentials to explain away Jesus' admonition to abide in Him does not apply.

Their assumption that Jesus was referring to "one person owning another" was wrong, Jesus was trying to unveil a reality that is even more menacing than the horrors of human slavery. This bondage seizes people with no respect to their family ties and is often far more sinister.

What they missed is that Jesus was referencing how their sin destroyed their relationship with their Creator, and because of that, something far greater than an earthly antidote is necessary to fix it.

Jesus' Response (vs. 34-41a)

Ultimately they have to answer the question, "Whose line are you in?" Jesus insists that they are not in Abraham's line as they claim. So the question remains, "whose line are you in?"

In these verses, Jesus confronted them at the points where they found their security (or we could say, religious inoculation to Jesus). First he attacks:

1. *Their earthly perspective of slavery (34-36)*
2. *Their reliance on being a descendent of Abraham (37-41a)*

First Argument (vs. 34-36): Their earthly perspective of slavery

Let's walk through this verse by verse:

³⁴ *Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.*

Jesus got their attention with the double amēn – Truly, Truly.

Then Jesus called into question their concept of freedom. Jesus insisted that they were not free, but slaves (slaves to sin).

Jesus was trying make them understand that their Jewish heritage (they mentioned in v. 33) was no guarantee that they could avoid divine condemnation for their sinfulness.

In fact, Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), had just passed, so they should have been keenly aware of their sinfulness!

We too can Become Slaves to Sin

How does this happen? We know that bondage to sin is out there, and we have warning signs of sin's dangers throughout scripture like:

1 Peter 5:8 that reminds us to, *"Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."*

James 1:15 says, *"Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death."*

Despite these stern warnings, our hearts are prone to wonder away from God's plan.

We know this in our minds, but as philosopher Blaise Pascal once said, *"The heart has its reasons, which reason does not know."*

I'm convinced that when we sin, we are looking to fulfill a need that God has intended to be met a different way. To say it a bit differently, sin is often the result of a *legitimate need being met by an illegitimate means*. Or you could say, we have God-given desires that we try to meet outside of God's provision.

For example: In our **desire is to find purpose** we press ourselves into our work, family life, and ministry in hopes of finding what we can only find in Christ himself. When we look to something to offer what it's incapable of delivering, it often leads to sinful actions.

When we are faced with sin, we always have to remember that it promises more than it can deliver, and we will never fully meet our needs by sidestepping God's plan. Those earthly wells will only leave us thirsty.

Slave vs. Sonship (v. 35)

The interplay between slavery and sonship. (Don't worry ladies, this passage is talking about you too, but it centers on sonship because in those days inheritance was passed through the sons).

³⁵ *The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever.*

Slave	Son
Temporary	Permanent
Economic Relationship (based on what you can do)	Familial Relationship (who you are)
No Long-term Status	Receives Inheritance

While there are more distinctions between the slave/son relationship (humanly speaking). Suffice it to say, eternally speaking, we mistake the sweetness and hollow pleasure of our sinfulness for sonship. What I'm trying to say that our sinfulness (or even our religiosity) tricks us into assuming that we are sons or daughters of God.

But for those who are actually sons receive an everlasting inheritance, and that inheritance is found in the next verse.

The Freedom of Sonship (v. 36)

³⁶ *So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.*

As we struggle with sin, it is important for us to remember that this battle will not last forever. There is a place where our struggles will be no more. We must endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning.

This verse is the culmination of Christ's first argument.

The eternal "Son" in v. 36 contrasts with the temporal sonship in v. 35.

"Son" in v. 36 insists that it's Christ alone who sets us free from our bondage (not our deeds, and not being part of Abraham's line), but Christ.

It must be said, that when Christ sets us free from our spiritual bondage, it is incumbent upon his children to be illustrations of Christ's freedom in earthly ways by living lives that reflect the justice and righteousness of our Father.

Second Argument (vs. 37-41a): *Their reliance on being a descendent of Abraham*

Jesus attached their assumption that their lineage would grant them Life.

³⁷ *I know that you are offspring of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you.*

³⁸ *I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father."*

³⁹ *They answered him, "Abraham is our father."*

Jesus said to them, *"If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing the works Abraham did,*

⁴⁰ *but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God.*

This is not what Abraham did.

Jesus acknowledged that they may have been Abraham's "seed"/"descendants," but their desire to kill Jesus indicated that they had another father other than the Heavenly Father.

In those days, the debate over an authentic lineage or ancestry was common among Jewish people because slaves and "illegitimate children" would claim to be physical descendants so they could receive part of the inheritance.

In these verses, Jesus flipped the conversation on them from a debate about being the physical seed of Abraham to being identified with Abraham's actions. So, for Jesus, to be a "son of Abraham" was to identify (or mimic) what he did.

If I wanted to be "cute" with language, we could say that the fruit that comes from the seed of Abraham is not a desire to kill Jesus.

This begs the question, "What did Jesus identify in Abraham that was not in them? Romans 4 helps us understand.

Romans 4:1-4

¹ What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? ² For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. ³ For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness."

Romans 4:9-11

*⁹ ??? Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? For we say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. ¹⁰ How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. ¹¹ He received the **sign** of circumcision as a **seal** of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised.*

It was Abraham's belief in the promise, not his circumcision that made him righteous.

Jesus shifted their salvation economy by answering the question, "Who is part of the family?" in a radically new way.

- Not those from a particular family line.
- Not those who practice the cultural customs dictated by the Law.

Who is in the family?: Those who *abide in Christ* (v. 31)!

CHILDREN OF THE DEVIL: vs. 41b-47

This is when the gloves come off and it starts to get real...

(vs. 41b)

^{41b} *They said to him, “We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father—even God.”*

The Jews do not appreciate Jesus’ insistence that their conduct/actions disallow their claim to Abraham.

In fact, they dealt Jesus with a low-blow. It is very likely the claim “*We were not born of sexual immorality*” was a jab because Mary was not married to Joseph when He was born.

I can’t help but imagine a group of guys standing around roasting each other (or I should say, making jokes about each other), and the “funny guy” hits Jesus with the insinuation that “yo mama was a fornicator,” and his boys went nuts.

The irony is that Jesus’ conception validates His divinity and justifies his insistence upon their belief in Him. Jesus continues by arguing for his heavenly street cred(it) by explaining the significance of his sent-ness.

Christ’s being Sent (v. 42)

⁴² *Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me.*

The significance of this verse is lost on us because if someone knocked on my door saying “I come with a message from Tony Marida” my first inclination would be, why didn’t he tell me himself? Why not use Voxer, text message, Snap Chat, direct message, email, or (if he got desperate) even a phone call.

In contemporary society, we not only disassociate the sender from the person delivering the message, we assume that the sent one is less than the sender (hints their humble station of delivering someone else’s messages). During this time, the messenger is standing in the place of the sender and is therefore of equal value to the sender.

By appealing to “God as the one who sent him,” Jesus is claiming to be God.

Like Father, Like Son (vs. 43-45)

Jesus continues with this pattern of intensifying his language throughout the passage:

- He began with the abstraction of bondage and freedom
- He moved to addressing slavery vs. sonship
- He questioned their relationship to Abraham (insinuating that they are slaves)
- Now Jesus lays bare the source of their bondage and unbelief

⁴³ *Why do you not understand what I say?*

It is because you cannot bear to hear my word.

⁴⁴ *You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do 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 lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

⁴⁵ *But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me.*

Jesus “one-ups” everyone by saying, “if my mom’s a harlot, your daddy is the Devil!” If you think that is intense, he continues down in v. 58 Jesus, “*Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham, I was.*” And because no good roast ends without a fight, in v. 59 it says, “*So they picked up stones to throw at him...*”

Because Jesus already shifted the economy of salvation away from family heritage, Jesus was saying that they could no longer claim Abraham because of their lack of faith. Their actions aligned more closely with the source of all error and lies: the Devil.

Conclusion (vs. 46-47)

⁴⁶ *Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me?* ⁴⁷ *Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.*”

Have you heard the words of God today? He is calling out to us declaring:

“If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

Are you free today? This is the key to “*Life in His name.*”

To those who do not believe: Whose line are you in? The line of Adam (characterized by bondage) or are you in Christ (characterized by freedom).

Today could be the day that you could be completely free from the weight and the guilt of your sin, by placing your hope and faith in this Jesus who died and rose from the grave to free you from that bondage.

To those who are believers: Are you struggling with being free from the power of sin over your life? Do you ever feel hopeless that you will never feel the freedom that Christ has purchased for you? My challenge is to press into:

- The Word
- The Body
- The Spirit

Beloved, let’s be free!