

# Freedom In Christ Jesus

Printed Text • John 8:31-38

Devotional Reading • 1 John 1:1-4

## Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will CONSIDER the double meaning of slavery and freedom in Jesus' conversation with believing Jews, PONDER the many ways people are enslaved in current society, and LIVE in the freedom that Jesus gives to those who follow Him.

## In Focus

Earl had heard many stories about his absentee father Carl over the years. As a boy, Earl had resented his father for leaving him without even saying good-bye. Earl's mother had long since remarried but still had nothing but negative things to say about her former husband.

Many people had told Earl things about his father, some were good things but some were not. Mainly what he heard was a lot of conflicting stories about his dad. Old Ms Morgan spoke about how Carl would do odd jobs for her around the house, rake her leaves and such. Earl's Aunt Ruby, however, only ever talked about how Carl would loaf around the house, not lifting a finger to help Earl's mother with their new baby. Earl just wanted to know the truth!

He often felt like a big piece of his life was missing because he didn't know the truth about his father. Now a father himself, Earl thought perhaps he could even understand his father's struggles and problems if given the chance.

Without telling anyone, Earl hired a detective agency to investigate whether his father was still alive. A few weeks later, the agency reported back to Earl that his father was alive and well, living only about 2 hours' drive away.

"That's it!" Earl said, "I'm just going to see him and ask him why he left us." Earl sighed and thought, Now I will find out the truth!

*How often do you go out of your way to seek the truth?*

## Keep In Mind

"If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." (John 8:36, KJV)

## Words You Should Know

**A. Continue** (John 8:31) meno (Gk.) — To abide or remain

**B. Indeed** (v. 32) alethos (Gk.) — Truly, in truth

## Say It Correctly

**Torah.** TORE-ah

## KJV

**John 8:31** Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed;  
32 And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.  
33 They answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?  
34 Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.  
35 And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever.  
36 If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.  
37 I know that ye are Abraham's seed; but ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you.  
38 I speak that which I have seen with my Father: and ye do that which ye have seen with your father.

## NLT

**John 8:31** Jesus said to the people who believed in him, "You are truly my disciples if you remain faithful to my teachings.  
32 And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."  
33 "But we are descendants of Abraham," they said. "We have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean, 'You will be set free'?"  
34 Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave of sin.  
35 A slave is not a permanent member of the family, but a son is part of the family forever.  
36 So if the Son sets you free, you are truly free.  
37 Yes, I realize that you are descendants of Abraham. And yet some of you are trying to kill me because there's no room in your hearts for my message.  
38 I am telling you what I saw when I was with my Father. But you are following the advice of your father."

## The People, Places, and Times

**The Feast of Tabernacles.** The dialogue in John 7 and 8 (excluding 7:53–8:11) occurs in the Jerusalem Temple during the Feast of Tabernacles (7:2, 37; 8:12). Often referred to simply as "the feast," the Feast of Tabernacles was a seven-day observance that included celebrating the Lord's protection and providence (Leviticus 23:41; Deuteronomy 16:14). This festival was celebrated at the time of the barley harvest. Many fruits are also ripening when this autumnal memorial occurs, and feasting is a major part of how it is observed. The booths, or "tabernacles," the feast is named for refer to the tents the Jews construct to live in for the weeklong festival. These tents remind them of their time wandering in the wilderness before coming to the Promised Land. Both the tents and the harvest fruits remind God's people of how He provided for them in the past and continues to provide for them now.

## Background

The tone of the discussion in John 7-8 is somewhat argumentative. Jesus preaches in the Temple area, telling His listeners many abstract theological concepts about Himself and His relation to the Father. The crowd always questions Him, answering Him with confusion or with contradiction. John makes a point of gathering these theological discussions, as Christ explains many concepts to His followers: the glory of God, following Sabbath laws, knowledge of God, the living water of the Spirit, His coming death, true light for the world, standards for judgment, and truth.

In the Bible, the essence of truth is not adherence to an external set of rules, laws, and regulations. Truth is more than accuracy. Central to the biblical concept of truth is faithfulness or reliability. God is the standard for truth. God's truth is that by which all other truth is measured. God's truth can be measured according to His unbroken promises and covenants and His unfaltering love for His people. God's truth is not just reflected in His commandments. God's truth is to be reflected in the way we as human beings live our lives.

### **At-A-Glance**

1. Set Free (John 8:31–32)
2. Truly Free (vv. 33–36)
3. Free to Follow (vv. 37–38)

## **In Depth**

### **1 Set Free (John 8:31–32)**

Those who believe in Christ, who have faith in Him, follow a certain condition. Believers would “indeed be” His disciples only if they “continue in [His] word.” Jesus obviously saw the possibility of disciples being only partially committed in their faith. He was clear that partial faith is insufficient. A disciple who is not totally committed cannot be relied upon to follow and obey His commands. Weak, uncommitted faith keeps us in bondage to sin. Jesus offered His disciples absolute freedom from the bondage of sin. Those who “abideth” in the teachings of Jesus would know God's truth. In Christ Jesus lies the power to set people free. His words, “the truth shall make you free” (v. 32), are not a reference to an academically learned truth. It is not education or knowledge that frees us from spiritual bondage. Rather, we are freed by our spirit awakening through the power of Christ.

*What has the power of Jesus' truth freed you from?*

### **2 Truly Free (vv. 33–36)**

Even the Jews who believed in Him did not understand the kind of bondage Jesus was referring to. Any talk of bondage made them recall the experience of their enslaved ancestors. When Jesus spoke of them being in bondage, they hotly informed Him that, as descendants of Abraham, they had never been a slave to anyone. The only form of slavery they understood, however, was physical bondage. They were blind to the fact that sin kept them in spiritual bondage.

Many preachers have been heard to say from the pulpit, “Sin costs more than you want to pay and keeps you longer than you want to stay.” The power in sin lies in its ability to deceive. A person trapped in the bondage of sin probably never envisioned that he or she could be so enslaved.

Apart from Christ, no man or woman can boast of being free. According to the Master, anyone who has committed sin is a slave to sin (v. 34). But the power that lies within Him sets us free. Jesus' mission was to give eternal truth to all people. If we love truth, we love Jesus, the Son of the living God. If we love the Son, we love His Father's truth. When we accept Him, truth finds a dwelling place in our hearts.

*How does the permanence of Christ's freedom show itself in your life?*

### **3 Free to Follow (vv. 37–38)**

The freedom Christ offers releases us from sin's hold over our actions, but this does not mean we are completely free from all control. We are freed to serve God instead. When we are free from sin and hold God's message in our hearts, we are compelled to speak of it. If we are still slaves to sin, we are still compelled to speak. But then we speak from the poor understanding offered by the world and the Enemy.

Jesus already held God's truth in His heart. Because He knew the truth He was free, certainly free from sin but also free to speak boldly in the face of fierce and mounting opposition. Contemporary Christians should decide how they will follow in His steps.

*Are we willing to speak His truth, even when it is opposed by others? Are we willing to embrace the freedom He has provided for us?*

#### **Search the Scriptures**

1. Why did the Jews take offense to Jesus' assertion that they were in bondage (v. 33)?
2. Who is a servant of sin (v. 34)?

#### **Discuss the Meaning**

1. Explain how a person becomes enslaved by sin. Discuss the bondage of sin as it manifests itself in substance abuse, promiscuity and marital infidelity, dishonesty, hatred, racism, sexism, classism, and false piety. Why do people often remain in bondage when Christ has offered to set us free?
2. Spend some time talking about how often the sins that hold us in bondage seem so pleasurable and relatively harmless in the beginning. By the time we see the ugliness of our condition, we are already in bondage.

#### **Liberating Lesson**

Coming from a history of enslavement, both legal and socioeconomic freedom are especially important concepts to African Americans. Sadly, many of our people are still enslaved to a life of incarceration, addiction, violence, self hatred, and poverty. Jesus said that those whom the Son sets free are truly free. In what ways can the freedom that comes through Christ manifest itself and break loose the chains that hold so many African Americans in spiritual bondage? How might the church actually perpetuate that bondage by causing people to feel they cannot enter God's house because of their present circumstances? What are you and your church doing to help others know the truth so they might be set free?

#### **Application for Activation**

Examine your own life for ways in which you are still in bondage to sin. List at least one condition from which you wish to be set free. Pray sincerely for God to give you the desire to be led out of bondage from that issue. As you grapple with your own issues of bondage, you will be molded into a grateful, compassionate, and understanding witness for Christ.

## Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

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## Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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## More Light on the Text

### John 8:31–38

**31 Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed.**

As Jesus teaches at the Temple during the Feast of Tabernacles, He tells many about His mission on earth. He assures them that everything He does and says is from the Father, and that when He dies, they will know for certain that He is the Messiah. Many come to believe Jesus because of this sermon (vv. 28–30).

He continued and addressed these words to those in Jerusalem who believed on Him. Sometimes among non-Jewish Christians there is a tendency to believe that all Jews were against Jesus and disagreed with Him. But it should be remembered that in every community there are disagreements, and sometimes these disagreements are nasty. Here in this passage we find clear evidence that many Jews believed in the message of Jesus. To believe (v. 31) means to have faith; by implication it means to entrust (especially one's spiritual well-being to Christ).

These believers needed to be encouraged by Jesus. So Jesus tells them to “continue” in His “word” (v. 31). In other words, it is the Word that leads to true discipleship. In the Samaritan woman episode, her testimony to her own social group led them to believe, and they decided to “remain beside” Him. The word to “continue” (Gk. *meno*, MEH-no) in Christ is the same as for “abiding” in Him. His disciples are to remain in Jesus' Word, to continue to live there. “Continuing” in Him strengthens the believers' faith. It deepens their commitment to Jesus as they learn to know Him better as “the Savior of the world” (4:39–42). Those who believed in Jesus would “remain” with Him, and their faith would deepen its roots so that those who were opposed to Jesus would not be able to move them. Jesus' disciples must always continue in His Word; determining to be His disciple is a lifetime commitment.

Jesus' audience has just decided to trust Jesus and now needs to know how to go about being His disciples. Jesus has also cautioned that not everyone who claimed to be His disciple would actually enter into His Kingdom, since they were not truly His disciples. Jesus tells them that remaining in Jesus and His Word is the best way to act as His disciples. Jesus later lays this out clearly for the Twelve at their final Passover meal together: “If you love me, you will obey my commands.” You cannot truthfully claim to follow Jesus and then not actually follow His lead as revealed to us in His

Word. To be a “disciple” (Gk. mathetes, mah-thay-TAYS) literally means to learn from someone, so we must pay attention to Jesus’ words and actions and learn from them to be His disciples.

### **32 And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.**

Living in Jesus’ Word would make them disciples “indeed” (Gk. alethos, ah-lay- THOCE), which is also translated “truly” or “in truth.” Speaking of the truth, Jesus assures His new believers that they will know and be set free by the truth of His Word. The Word would lead them to the truth, and the truth would make them free. Setting the captive free was one of the key goals of God’s Suffering Servant, which Jesus identified as Himself. Paul adopts this language of freedom in Christ versus slavery to sin in his letter to the Galatians. The young Galatian church must accept the doctrine that they are freed from slavery to sin, and freed from bondage to the Law, and are instead free to walk in the Spirit.

Truth and freedom are ideals that many seek, and which are only found in Christ. One great promise for Christians is to know the mind of Christ, and to know as we are known. Other religions might secret away their supposed religious insights, only revealing them at increasingly difficult stages of initiation. Christianity, however, freely provides truth for all who believe and seek it. From your first day as a Christian, you are privy to the full revelation of God in the person of Christ, as recorded in the Scriptures.

Today, many are held in bondage to the many lies Satan whispers into our hearts. Perhaps you hear the lie that you are not enough, or that you are unlovable. He spreads lies that we would be better on our own, apart from the faith community, and that we cannot survive without our vices that make us live in shame. He tries to convince you that some groups are inherently better than others, and that you must make sure no lesser person tries to horn in on your turf.

Jesus offers us the truth. Sometimes that truth is hard to hear and even harder to accept. Sometimes we will accept the truth, but then forget and live our lives in the habits we had developed before we knew better. No matter how far you had fallen into Satan’s lies, if you have believed in Christ, you are delivered from that sinful lifestyle and have the power to live henceforth and forever more free.

### **33 They answered him, We be Abraham’s seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?**

### **34 Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.**

Showing immediately how hard the truth of our imprisonment is, Jesus’ new followers deny being in bondage at all. The skeptics want to affirm their heritage and their privileged status as members of the Chosen People first. It is odd that they bristle so quickly at the implication of their servitude, and think that claiming Abraham as their father must mean they are free. Abraham’s descendants were, after all, slaves for generations in Egypt, a cultural heritage that is enshrined multiple times in their law. As Jews of Jesus’ day, they were not likely to be classified by their Roman governors as “slaves” or even “freedmen.” However, all Jews felt the limitations of Roman rule, as they were almost never considered full citizens and mistrusted Roman governance because of it.

Even though their objection is false, irrelevant, and made in fear, Jesus answers them honestly. He begins His statement with the affirmation “Verily, verily.” This word means “truly.” In John’s Gospel, Jesus usually says it twice, doubly promising that His Words are Truth.

Jesus truly encourages them to give up their inherited pride. It is like the Samaritan woman (ch. 4) who was told that true worship took place in neither Samaria nor a Judean "holy mountain." No cultural inheritance saves from sin. It is the challenge that every believer must face. Loyalty to our fathers and to heritage of the dominant group does not count when it comes to salvation. Even if you grow up in the church and your father is the pastor, this does not mean that you are automatically saved. Jesus is not interested in a person's relationship to other people; He is interested in building a relationship with each individual. The actions of the ancestors do not determine, for good or ill, the fate of the descendants. Each is responsible for their own actions.

Jesus explains He is not speaking of slavery in terms of servitude to another person. He is speaking of slavery to sin, of which no human being can claim freedom (v. 34). It is sin that stirred their pride as to their heritage. They discriminate against the Samaritans, their Temple cult is corrupt, they oppress the poor because of greed based on their interpretation of the Torah, and finally they plot to kill Jesus. Jesus reminds His hearers that no one can escape from slavery to sin. We might think that by breaking God's law we are freeing ourselves from stodgy, old-fashioned rules designed to keep people from having fun. When we commit those sins, however, we realize that one sin will lead to another and that we will be forever indebted, unable to repay our debt to society. It is not freedom to step away from God's Law, but slavery. They might think that by following the Law they could earn their own freedom from sin, but this too reveals that they can never pay enough to buy their own freedom.

**35 And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever.**

**36 If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.**

Jesus seems to mix His metaphor in this verse. He has already identified Himself as the Son (v. 28), but He has just identified His audience as slaves. But they are not the Son's slaves, for Jesus certainly is not the son of the sin that enslaves the Jews, but the Son of God. This is reading too much into the metaphor, though, and would be a bad-faith reading of the text. Jesus only means to label the Jews' position as servitude and His position as heir.

In verse 35 Jesus reminds them that a slave is a functional element of the household. They are bound to dismissal when their services are no longer needed. They are not a permanent part of the household, and therefore cannot make any lasting decisions for the house. On the other hand, the son is a blood member of the family. By virtue of being a full member of the household, he is bound to remain in the house forever. If one identifies with the Son, they have security and permanence. Identifying with the servant, however, means living in constant fear of being forced from the shelter of the house.

Reading the passage another way, Jesus is giving them hope amid His message of the bondage of sin. Even though Jesus' audience is enslaved to sin, slaves are not bound to their masters forever. They may be freed by the word of the son. In other words, the status of the Judeans as children of Abraham does not make them children of God so long as they are enslaved to sin. Freedom from sin can be attained only through Jesus. Members of Jesus' or God's household are only those who have decided to remain in Jesus' word. It is Jesus' word that sets people free.

Jesus' freedom is multi-faceted, depending on what freedom His believer needs. He is able to free from service to sin. He is able to free from service to the Law. He is even able to free from citizenship of an earthly kingdom and grant heavenly citizenship. This freedom is freedom "indeed," which translates a different word than it translated previously (v. 31). There the word *alethos* was related to

the word for truth. Here the word (Gk. *ontos*, ON-toce) is based on the word "to be." Those whom the Son sets free are freed in their very beings. They are freed in the reality of all things that are.

**37 I know that ye are Abraham's seed; but ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you.**

**38 I speak that which I have seen with my Father: and ye do that which ye have seen with your father.**

Jesus affirms that the Jews listening to Him are indeed flesh-and-blood descendants of Abraham. Sadly, though, they are not acting the way proper children of Abraham should act. Jesus will soon tell them they are actually children of the devil (v. 44). Jesus speaks axiomatically in verse 38, saying that child will imitate the actions of their fathers. Just as one can tell what kind of tree it is by its fruit, one can also examine fruit to tell what kind of tree it came from. Jesus imitates His Father by speaking everything He has shown Him and instructed Him to say. The Jews, in turn, are following their father (the Father of Lies) by seeking to kill Jesus. Even though earlier in this sermon, the Jews scoffed at the idea of Jesus dying (v. 22), by the end of this very discourse, they will pick up stones to throw at Jesus to kill Him (v. 59).

In his letter to the Ephesian church, Paul will pick up on this imagery and encourage the believers to "be imitators of God, as beloved children" (Ephesians 5:1). We see this still today as little toddlers will stand by their fathers while he is shaving in the bathroom and want to shave their own chins, or how teens will consider following in their mother's profession as they think about their future. When we are God's children, we must make room in our hearts for His words. We cannot crowd Him out with feel-good affirmations or with shameful lusts. We must clear such things away so that only God's truth remains.



# Daily Bible Readings

## **MONDAY**

Remember You Once Were Slaves  
(Deuteronomy 15:12–15)

## **TUESDAY**

Children of the Free Woman  
(Galatians 4:21–31)

## **WEDNESDAY**

Anointed to Proclaim Liberty  
(Isaiah 61:1–3)

## **THURSDAY**

The Light of the World  
(John 8:12–20)

## **FRIDAY**

Jesus Is from Above  
(John 8:21–30)

## **SATURDAY**

I Shall Walk at Liberty  
(Psalm 119:41–56)

## **SUNDAY**

Jesus Brings True Freedom  
(John 8:31–38)