



SERMON TITLE: Live Free  
SCRIPTURE: John 8:31-59

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PASTOR: Charlie Boyd

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"These things are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ" (John 20:31). This is how John concludes his own biography of Jesus. He wanted the young, the old, the sick, the well, the despairing, the hopeful, the skeptics, the faithful, and whoever reads his account of Jesus to believe and trust him more fully. But what did John want them to believe? He wanted them to believe that Jesus alone brought eternal life into the present, broken world. And for all who enter this eternal life with God right now, we—like John—are exiles. For all who enter a relationship with Jesus, we will very likely be marginalized and dismissed because we follow him. So, what does it mean to believe? And how do we mature in believing? What does it mean to remain faithful to God when the pressure is on? These are the things that John will help us explore by showing us the glory and beauty of Jesus.

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#### READ John 8:31-59

The phrase, "The truth will set you free" is probably the most misquoted Bible verse of all time. You see it plastered on plaques and on walls of college campuses and universities. You hear it quoted by politicians and in movies and by motivational speakers. It's a slogan for all kinds of religious causes—it's a rallying cry for social justice. No question about it—the search for *truth* and the search for *freedom* occupies center stage in human history. There's nothing more important than *truth* and there's nothing more important than *freedom*. The question is—*What is the truth that Jesus is talking about here?* People search for truth in all kinds of different ways. Or, they say that truth is relative. They say there is no such thing as a "truth" that is true for everyone. "It may be true for you, but that doesn't mean it's true for me." So, *what is the truth Jesus says sets us free? And what is freedom?* When we hear the word freedom, we tend to think about *political freedom*, as in "*Liberty and justice for all*" or the "*Give me liberty or give me death*" kind of freedom that our country was founded on and for which we have fought to defend. *But what is Jesus talking about here when he says the truth will set you free?* —and— *What's the relationship between truth and freedom?*

Before we answer those questions, there's a debated problem in the passage we need to think through. Verses 30-31 tells us that Jesus is talking to the believers in the crowd. But then starting in v33, the angry attacks on Jesus that we've seen all the way back to chp5 begin again. Many commentators say that these "believers" were not true Christians. They say they had a "head" knowledge, but not a "heart" knowledge of Jesus. So, when Jesus said something they didn't like, they turned on Jesus, showing their true colors. The problem with that interpretation is that John says over and over that belief in Jesus results in eternal life. He does not distinguish between a "head" belief and a "heart" belief. Those categories do have some validity for us, but for John, believing in Jesus is saving faith, resulting in eternal life (see John 1:12; 3:15-18; 5:24; 6:28, 40, 47). So, Jesus is speaking to true believers in this divided crowd and he's calling them to abide in his words/to stay true to his teaching and, he promises that if they do, they will experience freedom from the slavery to sin. But as he's speaking to these new believers, the religious leaders interrupt and attack Jesus. They begin debating with Jesus, and the back and forth arguing goes on all the way to the end of the chapter. (BTW—I am focusing mainly on vv31-36 b/c much of the argument from v33 forward concerns things we've discussed in earlier messages.)

**1. What Jesus says about truth (8:31-32a)** — The truth as Jesus defines it is Someone to be encountered, experienced, and followed. "Knowing" the truth is not about knowing facts and information and propositions about Jesus. The Greek word for "knowing" here refers to knowing something *personally* and *experientially*. When you come to see the truth that's in Jesus, it doesn't happen all in one magic moment. It's a *process*. As you hold on to Jesus, as you continue to see life through his eyes, you begin to look at yourself differently. You begin to see other people differently. You listen to the news differently. Your whole value system changes. The same John who wrote what we are reading here wrote this in a letter to his Christian friends. "And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may *know* him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life" (1Jn5:20). *Isn't that good? Doesn't that make the point?* To those who believe in Jesus and follow Jesus, *God gives understanding so we can know him who is true and abide in him who is true. Who's that? Jesus Christ, God's Son, the true God and eternal life.* (cf 7:17). Jesus says, "If you hold to my teachings—if you put what I say into practice—you are really my disciple and you will know—personally and experientially—the truth."

2. *What Jesus says about freedom* (8:32b-35) — “I tell you the truth, everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin” (v34). Sin manifests itself in what we call “hang ups”—hang ups like fear—being afraid, worried, insecure, jealous—and anger—You ever wake up in the morning and you're angry with life, you're just out of sorts—you don't feel like talking to anybody and there's this *subterranean* anger in your heart and you're on edge with the people that you live with and work with and go to church with—*Ever feel that way?*—or guilt—a sense of failure or shame about something in your past that leads to despair or depression—or pride—a self-sufficient, aggressive spirit that causes you to think you are better than other people—that you deserve more than other people—a pride that causes you to be demanding, manipulative, controlling, maneuvering to get your way. *See it?* These are the kinds of things that Jesus says his truth can free you from. He's talking about freedom from sin's power in your life. When we sin we become slaves of sin, but there is great freedom in putting what Jesus says into practice. *True freedom is not the freedom to do whatever you want.* True freedom is the freedom to become all that God created you to be and there's only one Person who can make that possible. There's only one Person who can set you free from slavery to sin.

3. *What Jesus says about himself* (8:36) — Jesus tells us that only he can set us free. He tells you that when you believe in him and when you hold on to him and his teaching—*he makes you into what he is*—he makes you a son, a daughter of God. You become a child of God that abides in the Father's house forever. What an awesome promise!!!

*Application — To experience freedom from sin's slavery requires more than saving faith.* ...Saving faith sets you free from the penalty of sin, but only a growing faith can set you free from the power of sin. Abiding in Jesus means allowing all that Jesus is and all that Jesus says to be central to who I am. Living free in Jesus is a process. It doesn't happen overnight, but over time. Jesus says, “If you continue in my teaching, you will know the truth (personally and experientially) and the truth will set you free. And if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”

#### Discussion Starters:

Read John 8:30-59

Icebreaker—If an unbeliever asked you what Jesus meant when he said, “The truth will make you free,” how would you explain it to him in a way that he/she could understand?

Ask: What is something that you learned or that stood out to you from this sermon or this passage? Why is it significant? What did you hear that resonated with you? What new thoughts and insights did you have?” When someone volunteers an “AHA,” ask follow up questions to dig deeper into that “AHA” to keep the discussion going. Ask the group, “*Anyone else have this same thought or have other thoughts about that? Or ask: What do you think about this insight?*” After you've exhausted that topic, throw the original question back out to the group, “*Who else had an “AHA?”* —Repeat the pattern above. If someone says, “*I didn't really have an “AHA,” it's more that I don't understand.*” Then go that direction. Ask follow-up questions to help them clearly articulate the issue. “Anybody else think about that/struggle with that?” Ask the group for input, “*So, how would you answer that question?*” Whoever answers, ask follow up questions, ask for input from the group on that answer (*What do you think about that?*), etc. The repeat the same conversation pattern by asking—*What's your “take-away” from the message and our discussion? What is one thing you can take-away and put into action.*

#### Additional Questions:

1. Are the “believers” Jesus addresses in vv30-32 true believers or false professors? How can we know?
2. What is the difference between knowing facts and information about Jesus and knowing him personally and experientially?
3. How did Sue's story (from *Out of the Salt Shaker*, by Rebecca Manley Pippert, pp. 89-91) make the point about knowing Jesus personally and experientially by putting into practice what he said about being generous?
4. Do you have a story where you were impressed by something you read in Scripture and then you were able to put it into practice the very same day? Maybe something from you CBR Journal reading?
5. Jesus said, “You are my disciples if you abide in my word”—(meaning, if you put into practice my truth and reject the lies the world tells you or you tell yourself)—How well are you abiding? What prevents you from in your daily life?
6. How do we become slaves to sin?
7. According to Jesus, what is the process of becoming free from sin's power in our lives?