

THE TRUTH WILL SET YOU FREE

John 8:31-59

Key Verse: 8:31,32

“To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, ‘If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’”

In today’s passage Jesus teaches us how we can know the truth. When we know the truth, the truth sets us free. We Americans like freedom, right? Let’s listen to Jesus’ teaching.

First, hold to Jesus’ teaching.

Look at verses 31-32. “To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, ‘If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’” Jesus had been at the temple, talking to the Jewish religious leaders and many others. Jesus had rescued a woman caught in adultery, revealing God’s love and saving grace for sinners. Then Jesus declared that he is the light of the world. All men are sinners who, without Christ, will die in their sins. Jesus is the promised Messiah, the only Savior sent by God for all mankind. As they listened to Jesus, many put their faith in him. They must have nodded their heads and said, “Yes, he is right. He is the Messiah.” They were like Christians who accept the word of God by saying, “Amen.” But saying “Amen” is not everything.

Jesus said that we must hold to his teaching. Then what does it mean to “hold to” Jesus’ teaching? Simply, it means to grab it and never let it go no matter what happens. We can see a good example of holding to something in the time of King David. There was a mighty warrior named Eleazar. During one battle, he stood alone against many enemy soldiers. While others fled, he stood his ground and struck down the Philistines till his hand grew tired and froze to the sword. The Lord brought about a great victory that day. It is amazing that Eleazar held on to his sword and fought so intensely that his hand froze to the sword. He held on to his sword as a matter of life and death, beyond his natural ability to do so. That is how we should hold on to the word of Jesus.

Then what word of Jesus should we hold on to? Especially, we must hold to the main point of Jesus’ teaching. St. Paul summarized this so well in 1 Corinthians 15:3,4. It says, “For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures....” Through his death and resurrection, Jesus saves us from our sins, gives us eternal life, and brings us back to the kingdom of God. Holding to this teaching requires daily struggle, even moment by moment struggle. For example, John 1:29 says, “Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” When we hear this word, we must stop looking at our sins, weaknesses, situations and enemies; instead, we must look at the cross of Jesus. As we do, we are set free from the power of sin; we live a powerful life in the grace of Jesus. As another example, Jesus said in John 14:2,3, “In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”

When we hear this teaching, we must stop listening to the gnawing voice of anxiety about our future security. Instead, we must believe Jesus' promise. When our pilgrimage in this world is over, we have a permanent home where there are no tears and no more pain. There, Jesus rules with love and peace. Jesus brings true justice and righteousness to all. There is no devil; there is no more evil. Everyone is a good neighbor who lives a holy life. Everyone looks like Jesus. When we hold to this teaching, we are free from anxiety and sorrow of all kinds. We can work hard to serve God while in this world.

In holding to Jesus' teaching, we can learn a lesson from Father Abraham. God called Father Abraham when he was 75 years old and said to him, "I will make you into a great nation...I will make your name great...and all nations on earth will be blessed through you." It seemed to be a ridiculous promise to an old man in Abraham's position. Nevertheless, for ten years Abraham held on to this promise and gave his life to please God. After that, Abraham became tired. He thought about how much he sacrificed; yet there was no reward from God—nothing in his hand, nothing at all. It was beyond Abraham's ability to hold to God's word anymore. Then God visited him and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars...so shall your offspring be." Abraham believed this word of promise and held on to it. After twenty-five years of holding to God's promise, God gave Abraham a son. Abraham continued to hold on to God's promise, even when God commanded him to sacrifice his one and only son as a burnt offering. Finally Abraham left this world and went to his heavenly home, still holding absolutely to the promise of God. By the time of Moses, his descendants had become a great nation. Then, through Jesus, God's saving grace spread to the whole world. According to

Romans 4, Abraham is our father of faith in the sight of God. We can learn from him how to hold to the word of Jesus.

The gospel is not something that we can hear one time, accept, and store away like an insurance policy. To really have gospel faith we must hold to Jesus' word through daily struggle and prayer. We must hold to the gospel until it is planted in our hearts, minds and souls. Then the gospel transforms our lives. St. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:2, "By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain." We are beginning preparation for Easter Bible Conferences. It is the time to accept the gospel more deeply and hold to the gospel more firmly.

Second, you will know the truth.

Jesus promised that when we hold to his teaching we will know the truth. What is the truth? That is a good question. For many centuries men of thought have believed that there was something called the truth which was worthy of one's life investment. They believed that the truth would be universal and would unify the disciplines of study. They believed the truth would be everlasting. Universities were established to search for the truth. Students went to universities to seek the truth. However, modern man gave up the search for the truth. Man no longer believes there are absolutes. Modern man has become totally relativistic. Modern man thinks that what is true for one person may not be true for another person. What is true at one time may not be true at another time. Now, most students attend universities to learn knowledge and skills to obtain a proper job. Yet, our Lord Jesus promises that if we hold to his teaching we will know the truth.

Then what is the truth? Jesus is the truth. John 14:6 says, “Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’” Jesus is the truth. Jesus is the truth because Jesus came from God and Jesus went back to God. Through Jesus we can know God. When we know God we can know where we came from and where we are going. Human life is not merely a matter of biology, chemicals and genes. We came from God and we will go back to God. God loves us so much that he sent Jesus to bring us back to him. For us, knowing God is like an orphan discovering his parents. When we know God, we find our source of security. We find the absolute meaning of our lives. We find our holy mission. We become stable even if we must suffer many things. The greatest treasure is to know Jesus Christ personally. When we know Jesus, we know the truth. Therefore, in terms of knowing the truth, Shepherd Chase Akins is much better than the scientist Carl Sagan. Knowing Jesus is so precious and valuable. To know Jesus we can invest our lives. To know Jesus we can suffer loss. To know Jesus we can struggle hard with a life-giving effort.

Third, the truth will set you free (32-58).

The last part of verse 32 says, “...and the truth will set you free.” The truth has great power, the power to set us free. We Americans love freedom. However, the freedom Jesus is talking about may be different than what we generally think of as human freedom. At the outset of the Revolutionary War in 1775, Patrick Henry said, “Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it Almighty God! I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty or give me death.” This expressed the attitude of many.

Historically, Americans have been willing to fight to the death to obtain freedom, and in some cases, to purchase the freedom of others. But this freedom is largely political and economic freedom. Jesus is telling us about another kind of freedom. It is spiritual freedom. It is freedom from sin and death. It is the freedom to love and serve God without hindrance. Man had this kind of freedom as a gift from God in the beginning. When God put man in paradise, he said to him, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden.” This freedom was not absolute, however. This freedom existed only within the sovereign love of God. To keep this freedom, man had to obey God’s word and keep the spiritual order. If man values freedom more than God, he will fall into the devil’s trap and into the power of sin. Of course, this is what happened to mankind. Through the sin of disobedience, man lost freedom. Now it can be given only at the cost of blood. It cannot be purchased with a patriot’s blood. True freedom can only be purchased by the blood of Jesus.

Look at verse 33. When Jesus’ listeners heard the word “free” they suddenly became very upset. They said, “We are Abraham’s descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?” In spite of the fact that the nation Israel had been in bondage to Egypt, Babylon, Greece and Rome, they denied that they had ever been slaves. Their self-righteousness blinded them to reality. Jesus did not correct their obvious mistake. Instead, Jesus focused on his spiritual point. Look at verse 34. “Jesus replied, ‘I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.’” The bondage Jesus was talking about was spiritual bondage; it was slavery to the power of sin.

Many seemingly free men and women are slaves to the power of sin. They sin again and again, not because they want to, but because they cannot help

themselves. One young man falls under the shadow of his inner despair again and again. Whenever this happens, he does the things he really does not want to do. Jesus knows our problem. Jesus says to us, "So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (36). Jesus came to set us free from bondage to sin. Just as no slave can pay the price of his own redemption, so sinners cannot save themselves from their sins. But Jesus, the Son, can set us free. 1 Peter 1:18,19 says, "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect." Jesus' blood has the power to save us from the life of sin and to give us a new life that is holy and pure. Jesus enables us to break free from the bondage of sin completely.

Many seemingly free men and women are slaves to the power of death. The thought of death haunts them like a bad movie all the time. Because they are fearful, they cannot do anything useful. Though they have many dreams and aspirations, they waste their time in futile pleasure-seeking activities. It is the power of death that drives the people of the world to say, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." But Jesus sets us free from the power of death. Jesus said in verse 51, "I tell you the truth, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death." Jesus' word of promise assures us that we have eternal life. When we have eternal life, we are no longer afraid of death.

Here we learn that true freedom is freedom from the bondage of sin and death. Those who have Jesus are free indeed. They are free to love God and to love and serve others. They are free to sacrifice without any sense of burden. Though they face relationship problems and difficult situations, they are never overcome.

Rather, they overcome everything and render glory to God. One senior woman missionary had to struggle with a difficult and painful problem recently. In addition, she had to prepare the environment for the Members Meeting and serve many precious coworkers who were coming and going. But she did not look bound by anything. She fixed her eyes on Jesus and had true freedom in Jesus. Then she was so gracious to everyone and mindful of everyone. Those who have this kind of inner freedom that Jesus gives are always victorious in the work and history of God.

Those who know the truth love God, knowing that Jesus came from God. But those who do not have the truth are devils who want to carry out their father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. Those who do not hold to the truth are devils. When they lie, they speak like the devil (42-45). They are liars because they do not belong to God (47). They are not free at all because they are bound by sin and death.

On the other hand, those who know the truth are free indeed. In India there is Missionary Jimmy Lee. He first went to India as a worker in a prosperous Korean company. He enjoyed many privileges working for the company. Yet in his heart, he was free to quit that job and start his own business in order to better serve the work of God in India. In the course of working hard to support his family, he taught the Bible very diligently. God worked through him to raise up shepherds and Bible teachers for India. Now some have gone out as missionaries to other nations, such as Abraham Lincoln, Moses Lenthang, Matthew Singh, Dr. John Angam. Many others have remained in India to establish a fruitful gospel work. Missionary Jimmy Lee loves his children dearly. Yet in Jesus he was free to send

Maria, Paul and Deborah to Chicago, where they have become a blessing. Now Missionary Jimmy Lee runs a company in India which has over 200 workers who are all Hindu. At Christmas time, he stopped production work and gathered them together and shared his Christmas message about baby Jesus with them.

Missionary Jimmy Lee is free to challenge Hindu people with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Without Jesus we are under the power of sin and death. But Jesus sets us free to serve God and do great things for God.

The Jews could have learned a great truth from Jesus and been set free. But how did they respond? They insulted Jesus (48). Still, Jesus reached out to them in love by telling them about the faith of Abraham. When Abraham held on to the word of God's promise, he could see the kingdom of God, and he longed to see the Messiah. What was their response? "You are not yet fifty years old," the Jews said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!" (57) They had no spiritual understanding. Look at verse 58. "I tell you the truth,' Jesus answered, before Abraham was born, I am!" The bottom line is that Jesus is the Son of God.

In today's passage we learn how we can know the truth and be truly free. Let's accept Jesus' word, hold to it, and let it take root in our hearts. Then we can be children of God, and we will be free indeed.