

FREE INDEED!
John 8:31-36

8 February 2015

[Note: Preaching is a live event where God meets with His people, and that cannot be reproduced or duplicated. It is unique every time, and indispensable in the life of the Christian and the church. This is not a complete transcript; it is typically about 80% of the actual sermon. Some common abbreviations in these notes are: "NB" = *nota bene*, "note well" / "+" = an illustration / "[X]" = an application / "BTW" = By the way / "Cf." = cross-reference / "i.e." = In other words / "b/c" = because / "E.G." = for example.]

Turn back to John 8...

1 Jan. 1863 is said to be the 2nd most important day in American history. – Some would say this was the long overdue completion of what began on America's greatest day in 1776, Independence Day.

Because for some 4 million people in the States, 12% of the population at the time, there was still no independence and no freedom. – That's because they were African slaves. – It was only 87 years later, in 1863, after a long and bloody Civil War, that these slaves found their freedom. –

It came on the day that Abraham Lincoln signed his famous Emancipation Proclamation, declaring all slaves to be free. – Lincoln considered this to be the most important thing he ever did:

"I never, in my life, felt more certain that I was doing right, than I do in signing this paper". – Due to his age, his hand had become shaky at times. – So he paused for a while before signing, saying that he wanted a steady hand, so that no one in years to come would look back and question if Lincoln hesitated.

"If my name ever goes into history, it will be for this act, and my whole soul is in it."

Three African-American children from Brooklyn, NY, wrote to the president a few days after signing the Proclamation, saying: "You have added glory to the sky and splendour to the sun.... O! Dear uncle Abe, only see the Proclamation carried out and how brightly will the name of Abraham Lincoln shine through all time and ages!"

Slavery & freedom are exactly what our text is about today in John 8. – HOWEVER, here Christ speaks of a far worse slavery and a far greater freedom, won by a far greater act, of a far greater Person –

The very One who created the sky and the sun. – The very One whose Name has already been shining brightly for 2,000 years, and will never cease. – Jesus, the very "Light of the world" as He declared in v. 12....

Stand, Read & Pray:

Give title...

***FIVE QUESTIONS in Jesus' 'Freedom Exam' – to know whether you are free or are still sin's slave?**

1. v. 31, DO YOU CONTINUE?

v. 31a – NB John’s emphasis, repeating v. 30, i.e., ‘Yes, the same people who raised their hands and sided with Jesus moments earlier. What you’re about to see them do will shock you.

‘You think that professing Christians would never do this. You think that once someone decides to follow Jesus, this couldn’t happen. But watch & see, and learn and take heed.’

Some commentators do all kinds of gymnastics to get around the plain reading of this text – e.g., vv. 33a, etc.

BUT WHY should this surprise us: 2:24-25; 4:48; 6:60 (Jn. 8 is Jn. 6 all over again, from an adoring crowd to mass defection!)

vv. 31-59 = ‘How to go from believing in Jesus to hating Him in 10 minutes or less! How to discover if you are a pretend Christian, that you have a fake faith?’

☒ How to know if you are an unsaved believer (a false convert): (1) vv. 31-36, are you sin’s slave?; (2) vv. 37-47, are you Satan’s child?; (3) vv. 48-59, do you embrace Jesus as God?

+ This would’ve been a comfort to John’s hearers, probably in the church at Ephesus:

They had seen church members defect, leave the faith, and even turn against their former church, report them to the authorities, and persecute them instead. But it happened to Jesus too, so they should not despair!...

☒ The sooner we unmask false believers, the better! – LEST today’s Church be flooded with any more false converts than we have already today. (Dever, ‘false converts, the suicide of the church’)

v. 31b, ‘to those who had believed Him, ‘Congratulations, now you are a child of God! Welcome to the family! Here’s a card for you – write down on it the day & place of your decision. Every time Satan tempts you to doubt if you’re a believer, pull out that card as a reminder of your decision that you made....’

NO, that’s not what Jesus says. – Look again, v. 31b... NB, not “will be” but “ARE”, “IF” you are “continuing, holding on, abiding, remaining, living” in Jesus’ Word?

☒ True disciples are known by persevering. – Real Christians are those who endure to the end. – Fake Christians are those who give up, who fall away, who stop growing & going on in the Lord.

☒ Want to know if you are saved? – Don’t pull out some card from the past. – Look down at your feet in the present!:

Are you still walking with the Lord? – Far from perfect, plenty of struggle along the way, many highs & lows. – But are you still ON the straight & narrow, on the road?

OR have you gone astray? – Have you given up? – Have you stopped at some ‘Ultra City’ of temptation & sin, and decided to make that your home instead of getting back on the road?...

☒ Starting is easy, it’s finishing that is hard! – Like Midmar yesterday...

Esp. in Christianised lands like ours – beginning as a believer is often easy. – The benefits are there: New friends, new feelings, new habits, new outlook on life, sense of meaning & purpose, etc. – Starting is easy!

UNTIL: That first wave of trials or persecution comes. – And then the next, and then the next....

+ Jesus’ most famous parable is all about this – the parable of the soils. – 2 of the 4 soils started off great, appeared to be saved, claimed to be real believers. – But never finished.

For the rocky soil – it was persecution that ended the journey for that false believer.

For the thorny soil – it was the just the seemingly innocent “cares of life” and the lure of riches that ended the journey for that false believer.

WHAT made the good soil, the true believer, any different? – He bore fruit and persevered. – That’s all. – Not his deep emotions, not his big talk, not his great knowledge. – Simply that he kept growing in Christ and running the race.

As Jesus said elsewhere, “He who endures to the end shall be saved.” (Matt. 24)

~ As we confess in our Antioch Decl of Faith (Sect 9):

We believe we are saved by faith alone, yet the faith that saves is never alone but is always accompanied by fruit which evidences the true child of God.

“So believers grow in grace, moving towards mature holiness in the fear of God, pressing on towards the heavenly life in gospel obedience to all the commands which Christ as Head and King has prescribed for them in His Word. ...repentance is to continue throughout the whole course of our lives.

☒ Those who “continue” are? – v. 31c, “true disciples, disciples indeed, really disciples” – What kind of Christian disciple are you?

A glitzy, shiny, pretend disciple wearing a Christian mask, a wolf dressed up in sheep’s clothing, or just a lost goat sporting a sheep’s outfit – trying to fit in at church, but knowing deep down that you are a pretender?...

OR are you the real thing? – Repeat: v. 31...

What kind of disciple are you? – The contrast could NOT be greater, as we’ll see in the next vss. –

It’s the difference between being a child of God vs a child of the Devil, between being a slave to sin vs being liberated.

It's the difference between Heaven & Hell. – Difference between churchianity and real Christianity, between dead religion and a living relationship, a real discipleship under the Teacher, the living Master, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Repeat: v. 31b...

Next: Being a true disciple is costly; but it also offers glorious *benefits*, some fabulous rewards!...

2. v. 32, DO YOU KNOW THE TRUTH?

v. 32 – Judaism taught that only knowing God's Law could make you free. – Yet Jesus looks the Law-experts themselves in the eye and says, 'You are actually still slaves, in horrible bondage. Only Jesus and His gospel truth can set you free.'

Christ promises a freedom no one else can give, based on a truth no one else possesses.

Jn. 17:17 – as here – Jesus' word = Truth.

+ This is why we are Christians – not just b/c it works, or b/c it worked for our parents, our culture, etc. – B/c Muslims & Hindus & Buddhists could say the same thing where they live, or more so some times.

No, we are Christians because we believe it is true, He is true!...

Jn. 1:14 & 14:6... "truth" keeps appearing constantly in John's Gospel

☒ We live in a world so desperate for truth – so cynical & suspicious, imagining a conspiracy behind every authority – hungry for reality, authenticity, genuineness. – E.g., all the marketing, 'real coffee', real food, real childcare, real banking, real clothes, real Church.

That's what "truth" = "what accords with reality".

+ Schaeffer to his wife often at L'Abri (after much witnessing to European youth backpackers) – 'It's true, Edith, really is true!'

Repeat: v. 32...

3. vv. 33-34, ARE YOU FREE?

v. 33 – Really? – What about Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Greece and now Roman? – The Jews had been subjects under the yoke of each of these kingdoms. – Had they suddenly forgotten this? –

OR was it a deeper kind of slavery they were denying? – That's probably their logic here:

'We are the chosen nation, we hail from Father Abraham, recipient of God's ancient covenant and great blessing. We have been called out of the idolatry of the heathen nations. We are the truly free people, with spirits unbroken and undefiled by paganism.'

☒ NONE are so enslaved as those who still deny it. – Their own protest is the clearest proof of their bondage to sin and blindness.

v. 34a – Jesus is about to say something really serious:

v. 34b – The Apostle Paul said the same thing, Rom. 6:16, “Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?”

So does Peter, 2 Pet. 2:19, “for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved”.

I.e., A life of sinning shows you are sin’s slave. – And the more you walk in sin, the more it enslaves you. –

Sin causes the bondage, and sin reveals the bondage. – It is a vicious, vicious cycle.

Repeat: v. 34...

Jesus is saying, there is a bondage worse than political oppression or economic oppression. – There is a captivity deeper than Caesar or Nebuchadnezzar or any slave traders ever enforced. – There is a prison more terrible than any magistrate, or any amount of debt, ever confined you to.

HOW is that possible? – How could anything be worse than a human being put in chains, or thrown into the hold beneath a slave ship or denied their most basic freedoms? – How?....

Answer: Slavery to sin is worse because its consequences are eternal, not temporal. – Bondage to sin can ruin you forever, not just in this short life.

Plus, slavery to sin is inescapable, humanly speaking. – Every other form of earthly bondage can and has been overcome, at least by some. – Some slaves have escaped the cruelty, by their own efforts or the efforts of other liberators.

Not so with sin’s slavery. – Left to ourselves, there is no release, no hope, no possibility of freedom whatsoever. – All of man’s best schemes cannot free one soul from sin. –

When you are sin’s slave, you may run away as far as you can. –

You can flee to the ends of the earth, or settle on the far side of the sea. – But even there, your master sin is with you, and still you are shackled by his chains. – You cannot escape.

No bondage is more evil and damning than slavery to sin. –

This is why Christ refused to be co-opted by any earthly kingdom. – Jesus refused to be hijacked into some political Messiah or prosperity liberator and life coach. –

Christ knew better than that, and loves us more than that. – He came to bring true freedom, ultimate release, a lasting liberty and a God-given freedom!

NOT some shallow, temporary and fleeting little manmade freedom.

+ HOW ironic & tragic it is every time when we see great earthly leaders and heroes who are slaves to sin in their private lives. –

The Tiger Woods' and Lance Armstrongs' who can discipline themselves to achieve almost superhuman goals publicly – YET privately, they are in total bondage to sin. –

The Martin-Luther Kings who cried out, 'Let freedom ring!', yet in their private lives they were prisoners of immorality and knew no freedom.

~ Ryle, "There is no slavery like this. Sin is indeed the hardest of all task masters. Misery and disappointment by the way, despair and hell in the end – these are the only wages that sin pays to its servants."

*Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fastbound in sin and nature's night.*

Next: Christ came not just to set slaves free, to go and do as they wish. – Christ came to turn slaves *into sons*:

4. v. 35, ARE YOU A SON?

v. 35 – Think about it:

+ Many homes today have enjoyed generations of maids or gardeners serving them faithfully in their home. – But at the end of the day, they are still not sons or daughters. –

Their master may love them dearly, but they will never enjoy the rights & privileges of children. – Their master may give them many gifts, but he will not include them in his will. –

He may praise their diligence, but he will not adopt them and give them his surname. – And always that servant knows there is the threat of them being retrenched or replaced. – They have no ultimate rights or security.

NOT SO with your own child. – They may rebel against you and squander your wealth. – They may hate & despise you.

Yet still they are your own, they bear your name, they are your flesh & blood. – They cannot be retrenched or replaced. – Their sonship is irrevocable, their place in the family is secure.

BUT HERE is the shocker: The Jews understood this household analogy, but swapped the characters. – In their proud minds & self-righteous hearts, they were the sons, and Gentiles were the slaves.

But Jesus says the opposite – ‘You Jews are the slaves to sin; you are not part of God’s household! Unless you repent and receive Christ, you have no rights and no eternal security. You are slaves, not sons.’ –

Ouch, double ouch.

☒ The Father does not want any of His children in doubt about who they are! – We can know if we are His sons:

Jn. 1:12-13...

Gal. 4:1-7...

~ J.I. Packer in *Knowing God*:

What is a Christian? The question can be answered in many ways, but the richest answer I know is that a Christian is one who has God as His father.

...You sum up the whole of NT teaching in a single phrase, if you speak of it as a revelation of the Fatherhood of the holy Creator.... If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God’s child, and having God as his Father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all.

For everything that Christ taught, everything that makes the NT new, and better than the Old, everything that is distinctively Christian as opposed to merely Jewish, is summed up in the knowledge of the Fatherhood of God. ‘Father’ is the Christian name for God.

Rom. 8:14-17...

1 Jn. 3:1-3...

...Only through the gospel can we be liberated from the domain of darkness, and brought into God’s family to enjoy the full rights & delights of the children of God (cf. Col. 1:13).

Then Jesus adds yet another twist:

5. v. 36, DO YOU KNOW THE SON?

v. 36 – I.e., ‘There is only ONE perfect, beloved Son of God with all the ultimate rights and privileges inherently belonging to Him.

Outside of Him, no one can be free. Outside of Christ, God’s eternal Son, there is only bondage and slavery to sin, forever.’ –

Repeat v. 36...

Freedom was the reason Jesus came. – Luke 4, at the very outset of Jesus' public ministry, at the synagogue in Nazareth, He opened the Isaiah scroll and read:

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me,
Because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor.
He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives,
And recovery of sight to the blind,
To SET FREE those who are oppressed,
To proclaim the favourable year of the LORD.*

And then throughout Jesus' ministry in the Gospels – it becomes clear what kind of captives He came to set free. – There is *not one instance* in all the Gospels that Jesus set an earthly prisoner free. –

But He set countless *spiritual* prisoners free – by calling them to “repent and believe the good news” of the kingdom, a kingdom only Christ could bring to the hearts of men & women!

+ Have you ever seen, in movies or books, the images of Allied forces when WWII finally ended (V.E. Day). –

E.g., prisoners of war in Japanese prison camps, after some 2 yrs of torture & hard labour & isolation & misery. – Then, on that last day, taken out to the ocean, expecting that their guards were about to execute all of them as a final punishment –

Instead, their guards suddenly withdraw their rifles and look to the sky - an allied bomber plane does a low fly-by and salute, signalling to all the prisoners that the war is over and they are set free! –

‘We’re going home boys! Home to our loved ones and our country! The war is over. Our freedom has been secured, by the loss of many lives.’...

☒ Want to know a scene even more moving than that? – Want to hear about a freedom even more priceless, won at a far greater cost, with far more lasting results? –

Just listen to our next baptism. – Or recall your own salvation testimony. – That is ultimate liberation!

+ As Tiaan described this past Wed. in our small group, giving his testimony of that drive from the Bluff up to Hillcrest with a co-worker who witnessed to him, being broken over his sin and crying out to God for a whole new life!...

Repeat: v. 36...

☒ Many have given their lives for our precious earthly freedoms – freedom to vote, free trade, a free market, a free press, etc.

But Christ gave His life for the greatest freedom from all. – What can compare to this? – Freedom from sin's penalty & sin's power! –

Liberated from all the curse & guilt of sin, forgiven & justified in the sight of a holy God & Judge. – Who now becomes our Father & Friend!

Liberated from all the dominion & mastery of sin over us – free now to walk in newness of life. – 2 Cor 5:17...!

Thus liberated also from the fear of death – ready to die, assured of eternal life, free from Hell, promised Heaven forever!

The Christian is a free man if ever there was one! – The Christian is the freest man alive, the most liberated soul on the planet!

☒ Friend, do you know this kind of freedom that only the Son of God can give? – Has Christ truly set you free, or are you still a slave to sin?

NOT asking do you still struggle and fight against sin. – We all do. – But does sin own you, is it still your master? (e.g., sins of..??)...

☒ For many unbelievers, and many unsaved believers, bondage to sin is all they've ever known. – It's hard for them to imagine it could ever be any different. –

With Paul they cry out in Rom. 7, “O wretched man that I am, who can deliver me/ set me free from this body of death?!”

But they forget the next verse, “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”

As Paul then goes on to say in Rom. 8 – “Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has SET YOU FREE from the law of sin & death...!”

☒ This is why Paul can speak as confidently as he does earlier in Rom. 6 about the normal Christian life. – He declares that we are:

“NO LONGER slaves to sin. ...How shall we who died to sin still live in it?! ...Consider yourselves to be DEAD to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus!

...having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. ...having been freed from sin and enslaved to God...!”

Repeat: Jn. 8:36...! (Cf. Gal. 4:6-7; 5:1; Isa. 53:5; 2 Cor. 3:17)

The truest and sweetest freedom of all! – A freedom that a slave or pauper can enjoy! –

A spiritual liberation that the most oppressed and underprivileged can still experience. – While the world's strongest and richest (and most influential) are often still shackled by sin's chains.

*Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fastbound in sin and nature's night
Lord, Your eye diffused a quickening ray
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light.*

*My chains fell off, my heart was free
I rose, went forth and followed Thee!*

*No condemnation now I dread
Jesus and all in Him is mine.
Alive in Him my living Head
And clothed in righteousness divine!
Bold I approach the eternal throne
And claim the crown through Christ my own!*

*Amazing love, how can it be?!
That Thou my God shouldst die for me?!*

CONCL.

+ After Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation – it was another 2 yrs or more before many slaves were actually freed. – They had been declared free, but were not living free. – Christian, you can be free, but not live free!

Gal. 5:1, "It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and not be subject again to a yoke of slavery. ...For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another."

1 Pet. 2:16, "Acts as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God."

Repeat: Jn. 8:36...

+ Two men falling from plane – one with parachute, one without. – Who is more free?!

True Christian freedom – a freedom under authority, under Christ!...

PRAY