

DEVOTIONAL 4



CHRIST
CHURCH

JOHN 8:31-59

³¹ So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” 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’?”

³⁴ Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. ³⁵ The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. ³⁶ So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. 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. ⁴¹ You are doing the works your father did.” They said to him, “We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father—even God.” 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. 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. 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.”

⁴⁸ The Jews answered him, “Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?” ⁴⁹ Jesus answered, “I do not have a demon, but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me. ⁵⁰ Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is One who seeks it, and he is the judge. ⁵¹ Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.” ⁵² The Jews said to him, “Now we know that you have a demon! Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet you say, ‘If anyone keeps my word, he will never taste death.’ ⁵³ Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do you make yourself out to be?”

⁵⁴ Jesus answered, “If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, ‘He is our God.’ ⁵⁵ But you have not known him. I know him. If I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and I keep his word. ⁵⁶ Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.” ⁵⁷ So the Jews said to him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?” ⁵⁸ Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.” ⁵⁹ So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

DAY 1

JOHN 8:58

Jesus said to them,
“Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.”

As we begin this week, we begin with a statement that captures Jesus’s essence, “Before Abraham was, I am.” In reasoning with the religious leaders Jesus is emphasizing his preeminence over anything else that they would put their confidence in. As we will be reminded later in the week, the Jews put inordinate confidence in their ethnic heritage and religious system. Jesus is establishing that He is above all that, he fulfills what their religious system has been pointing to.

Today we are invited to contemplate the preeminence of Jesus. There is no other like him and he is worthy of all honor, glory and fealty. Contemplate the testimony of John, Paul and the writer to the Hebrews as they point us to the preeminence of Jesus:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. John 1:1-3

He [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. Colossians 1:15-17

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. Hebrews 1:1-3

Do we dare put anything before Jesus?

PRAYER

Lord Jesus you are preeminent in the universe and we would have you be preeminent in our hearts and lives. Forgive our stubborn, foolish hearts that so easily latch on to lesser conveyors of meaning, affection and truth than you. Thank you for humbly revealing yourself to your creation. We praise you for the glory that is belongs to you alone. Accept our worship today, Name that is above all names. Amen.

DAY 2

JOHN 8:31-32, 36

³¹ So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” ...

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

I am enthralled by the progression in these verses. First of all, Jesus is speaking to the Jews who had believed, and he starts by saying “If.” So something is possible for those who believe, but not certain; there’s an “if.” So is there an “if” for those of us who believe also? What is the “if” and what’s the possible outcome? Let’s jump to the end: it’s freedom. So the question is, how is this freedom attained? Verse 36 tells us that Jesus is the one who sets us free, so it’s given to us. But what is so exciting to me is that Verses 31 & 32 show us how it happens. Let’s consider:

Jesus follows his “if” with “you abide in my word.” Abide is an evocative word. In the hymn “Abide with Me” we’re the ones longing and asking the Lord to be with us. One verse that’s not in the Trinity Hymnal goes: “Not a brief glance, I beg, a parting word; but as thou dwellest with thy disciples, Lord. Familiar, condescending, patient, free, come, not to sojourn, but abide with me!” The lyricist goes deep to say in effect, “Lord, we need your gaze not your glance; to be part of your family and not a visitor who goes home at the end of the day. In your patience, come all the way to us. And please stick around forever, beyond even this temporary journey of life.” Perhaps those images can help us hear Jesus say “If you abide in my word.” Stick with the Bible. Live with it. Abide in it.

Ok, so then does it follow that if we read the Bible a lot that we’ll somehow be free, whatever that means? Well, no, it’s not a checklist. It turns out it’s more like a description; a process: those who abide in his word are truly his disciples. As people who push keys down on a computer keyboard are typists or people who talk about their lives with a counselor are in therapy. It’s a description. We could know about “asdf<space>jkl;<space>” and hear stories of how people use that exercise to learn to type (at least we all used to learn that way!), but we’re only actually typing when we’re pushing down those keys. Likewise we can believe sorting through our situations and struggles with a trained professional is a good practice, but we’re only said to be “in therapy” when we are actually speaking with a therapist. So too, people can believe in Jesus (as the Jews in these verses did), but being a disciple means abiding in his word.

But wait, there’s more! There’s an “and.” The disciples of Christ--defined as those who abide in his word--will know the truth. I mean what? Know the truth? Like THE truth? Truth itself? That

sounds great. There seem to be two parts to knowing the truth. First, the place truth will be found is in the word of Christ. That's where it's at. And second, those who abide in Christ's word (aka disciples) will indeed find the truth--full stop. Like, it's possible. Have you ever been in a conversation with someone about whether truth is discovered or defined? Jesus here says that he is truth and that truth is discovered, indeed WILL be discovered, through abiding in his word.

Finally there is one more "and." Jesus told those listening to him that the abiders (aka the disciples) would discover truth, and that that truth would set them free. So what is this freedom? That will be the focus of tomorrow's devotional! (it has to do with sin and how that affects everything!) We'll also see later this week how the Jews responded to Jesus's offer of freedom (they didn't think they needed it.)

Remember Verse 36? It's the Son who sets us free. Jesus is not offering a self help plan for people to follow to have a better life. He is sharing his heart, and inviting us into an abiding relationship, and saying that he sets us free through his word. And it's in that Christ-bought and Christ-given freedom that we work out our day-to-day callings: How do I parent a lonely child? How do we share the gospel with those who have been hurt by the church? What do I do when I'm misunderstood? Will the laundry ever get completed? How can I foster excellence in my work crew? Am I forgiven (even for those unspeakable things)? Jesus invites us to abide, to stick with him, to be his disciple, to receive the truth, to receive his forgiveness, to be set free and in that freedom to continue to abide. As we do he will make things clear. We will move from belief only into being a disciple. It's a process, and he's in every bit of it.

PRAYER

Jesus, you are so beautiful. Make me your disciple. Oh freedom over me. No more running. Jesus is Lord! He died, his life he gave, now he lives my life to save. Sin shall not have dominion over me. I am free. May my freedom not stop with me. Use me, Jesus, for your beautiful kingdom. People are so lost. Guide us to your truth. Amen.

DAY 3

JOHN 8:34-38

³⁴ Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. ³⁵ The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. ³⁶ So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. 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.”

Life on earth was forever changed when Satan, the Deceiver, encountered Eve in the garden. He appeared as a beautiful creature, masking his true motive (hatred of God), his mode of operating (deception and manipulation), and his goal (lordship and worship). He came as a friend. His charm and flattery clouded her mind, and made him appear more generous than God. He appealed to her desire for self-realization by promising she could be free to make her own choice without negative consequences. Evil was presented as good, darkness as light, slavery as freedom. Eve was bewitched. She did not pause to remember what God had said, or consult her husband. She took the bait, and invited Adam to join her. Sin entered the world.

Sin is first an offense against God, a revolt against His sovereignty and authority that puts me at war with reality. Sin feels like freedom, autonomy, but actually brings me under the mastery of Satan. When I entertain his lies, I give him direct access into my mind, where he sets up a stronghold from which he controls with his crafty lies. Sin is deceptive, seductive, addictive. It is a gate that puts me on a path toward destruction. And Satan is not content just with individuals, but insinuates himself into systems...families, churches, institutions where sin is encoded and fortified by groupthink. His cleverest deception is using religion to cover the refusal to bow. The religious leaders Jesus confronted could not see they were enslaved.

Life on earth was forever changed when Jesus, the second Adam, entered our experience. He came as the Divine Warrior to rescue helpless hostages. He came to destroy the works of the devil, and to “*deliver all those who through fear of death, were subject to lifelong slavery*” (Heb. 2:15). He came as Light to expose lies, Life to regenerate dead souls...Jesus, Son of God! And if Jesus, the Son, sets us free, we are truly free!

What lies of Satan most tempt you?

Think about how Jesus has brought freedom in specific places in your life. Ask your family and friends to help you identify those changes.

Choose a psalm today that expresses your thanks to God for His salvation.

PRAYER

Dear Father,

How sweet the name of Jesus sounds in our believing ears!

We are longing for someone whose word we can trust.

We are longing to belong to a loving family where goodwill reigns.

We are longing for a strength that can bear our weakness.

We receive you again today, Lord Jesus, as our Savior, our Life.

We receive you, Holy Spirit, as our Teacher and continual anointing for whatever you call us to today as we offer ourselves to you.

In Jesus name, Amen.

DAY 4

JOHN 8:33, 37-39

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?’” 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.”

The claims of the gathered Jewish group here ring ironic to our ears. At first we wonder if they have forgotten their place under Roman occupation, or that they were sojourners without a land for many years, or before that in fact actual slaves in Egypt. So why would they say to Jesus that they have never been enslaved to anyone? Their protest to Jesus did not rise out of a sense of an actual enslavement, but out of a religious superiority as the sons of Abraham. In other words, they were trying to fit Jesus and his teachings; namely his claim to be the Messiah (see John 7:25-40; 8:12-24) into their already existing Jewish boxes.

- In what ways do you try to squeeze Jesus into your own tightly held beliefs? Reflect on a time when the teachings of the Bible have rubbed up against a value, belief, tradition, etc that you have held.

Jesus wants to uncover for the Jewish believers that they are misplacing their trust. They trust in their ancestral heritage. In the truth (Jesus acknowledges it!) that they are descendants of father Abraham. Yet as the Messiah, sent by the Father their trust should be in Jesus. They are seeking salvation through Abraham. Yet only Jesus can offer that. They are seeking forgiveness and purpose through Abraham. Only Jesus can offer that. They are seeking a place in the story through Abraham. Only Jesus can offer that. The benefits that come from the gospel are offered through Jesus our saving king, and no one else.

- Consider how you can offer all you have to king Jesus. Looking for purpose in your work or calling? Only through a relationship with Jesus will you find satisfaction in these desires. Longing to be a part of a family or community? Through Jesus you are offered a place at the family table.
- Consider today trusting in Jesus with everything. Repeat this simple prayer ahead of meetings, conversations, tasks to be completed, reflections, dealing with kids, planning a meal, etc.

PRAYER

Father, trusting in you means looking outside of myself and my circumstances for a sure footing. Remind me of your love, your mercy and your promise to never leave nor forsake me in this moment. Give me a heart of trust in Jesus. Amen

DAY 5

JOHN 8:50, 54-59

⁵⁰ Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is One who seeks it, and he is the judge...

⁵⁴ Jesus answered, "If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, 'He is our God.' ⁵⁵ But you have not known him. I know him. If I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and I keep his word. ⁵⁶ Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad." ⁵⁷ So the Jews said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?" ⁵⁸ Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am." ⁵⁹ So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

An important theme in the Gospel of John is the idea of glory. John is concerned that one should seek the glory of God versus the glory of man. We see this in John 5:44 "when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?" and in verse 50 of our current text. The glory of man is of little value but the glory that comes from God is of ultimate value.

But what does John mean by "glory." In the Old Testament it conveys the idea of "weight" or "heaviness." In other words that which has weight is worthy of honor or splendor. God is most worthy of honor and glory, and so God is the best judge of who is deserving of glory. Therefore, Jesus who comes from the Father and does the Father's will is most worthy of receiving the glory of God. Ultimately, it is in Jesus's obedience through his death on the cross that he receives the most glory. In John 17, Jesus is preparing to go to the cross and his first concern is that God will glorify him so that he can glorify the Father. Jesus keeps the word of the Father by his suffering and death on the cross because he is fulfilling the mission given him to bring about the redemption of his people from sin. The Father then reveals that glory given to Jesus by raising him from the dead and giving him all authority in the ascension.

"And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name" Philippians 2:8,9

As the Son is given glory he passes that glory onto us.

The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one. John 17:22

What does it mean for us to be glorified? We too are glorified because through Jesus we both know the Father and keep his word. When we are doing what the Father has called us to then we will be identified with the Son and the glory given to the Son. The Jews that confronted Jesus revealed their hearts and who they were identified when they picked up stones to murder Jesus.

The temptation is to ignore the last line as merely a description of events, but the descriptive language is intended to remind the reader of Old Testament events. In the Old Testament the glory of God was manifest in the glory cloud which was present in the tabernacle or temple. The Jews that pick up stones are identified with the first generation of Israel, as they attempted to stone Moses.

Then all the congregation said to stone them with stones. But the glory of the Lord appeared at the tent of meeting to all the people of Israel. Numbers 14:10

Furthermore, Jesus hides and departs the Temple. This evokes images of the times when the glory of God is either hidden or departs from Israel. So as these Jews reveal their hearts, the glory of God, manifest in Jesus, hides and departs from Israel.

PRAYER

Father, King of glory, thank you for the sending of your son that we may be freed from sin. Thank you, for the glory given us through your son. Give us wisdom so that we may know how you have called us to live. Strengthen us so that we might know as your children. Amen.