

# John 8:30-47

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Date: 04 July 2019

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[ 0 : 00 ] So I'm going to read our passage today which is on the sheets that were on your chairs. It's from John, John's Gospel, John chapter 8, beginning at verse 30.

Now let's hear God's word. As he was saying these things, many believed in him. So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, if you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples.

And you will know the truth and the truth will set you free. They answered him, we are offspring of Abraham and we've never been enslaved to anyone.

How is it that you say you will become free? Jesus answered them, truly, truly I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.

The slave does not remain in the house forever, the son remains forever. So if the son sets you free, you will be free indeed. I know that you are offspring of Abraham, yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you.

[ 1 : 09 ] I speak of what I have seen with my father and you do what you've heard from your father. They answered him, Abraham is our father. Jesus said to them, if you were Abraham's children, you'd be doing the works Abraham did.

But now you seek to kill me, a man who's told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. 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. 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. Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word.

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.

[ 2 : 19 ] When he lies, he speaks out of his own character. For he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. Which one of you convicts me of sin?

If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.

Let's join in a short prayer before we look at this together. Great God of heaven and earth, we thank you that you reveal yourself to us in your word through the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And we pray for your help now to be able to hear what you are saying to us. Help us not to harden our hearts. Today we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

If you have been around these lunchtime talks over the last six months or so, you will know that we were going through John's Gospel. We took a break for five months and I thought we would come back to John's Gospel for a while.

[ 3 : 25 ] And I want to talk to you this afternoon about the offer that Jesus Christ gives in this reading here. Jesus Christ offers you freedom.

As he speaks to his audience here, do you remember what he says? If you abide in my words, you are really my disciples, then you'll know the truth and the truth will set you free.

He offers freedom. But I want us to see three things about this freedom offer that Jesus gives us this afternoon. The first thing that I want us to see is that it's an unwanted freedom.

It's an unwanted freedom. The freedom that Jesus offers is not wanted. The story goes of a street that was very concerned at the sound of a man crying for help in one of the houses on that street. This man was clearly in a great deal of pain. It was a kind of shrieking sound. A desperate cry for help came from his window in the top of his house.

[ 4 : 34 ] So the neighbours around him immediately phoned 999 and they got the police round. The quick response unit came round. They heard the crying. So they had to smash down the front door

to get to this man.

Only to find that the distressed man was actually in the shower singing the Beatles classic, Help! He was just a really bad singer. Help! I need somebody!

Help! Just anybody! You know I need someone! Help! Help! The embarrassed man, the Paul McCartney wannabe, he sheepishly had to turn away the rescuers.

I am so sorry officers, it was a false alarm. I don't need rescuing after all. It was an unwanted rescue. Now that's a really corny story isn't it?

But, in a way, it illustrates how Jesus' audience received this offer. Do you remember what they say in verse 33?

[ 5 : 38 ] We've never been slaves of anyone. How can you say, Jesus, that we shall be set free? In other words, sorry Jesus, false alarm.

Actually, we don't need rescuing from anything or from anyone. We're fine as we are. And as you hear this offer, maybe you're hearing it for the first time today, maybe you might think along the same lines.

Sounds like a great offer, doesn't it, freedom? But the first response might be, oh, sorry Jesus.

Thank you so much for coming, but actually, I don't need you.

I definitely don't need Jesus to make me into a free person. I do what I like. I live my life in the way that I choose. I don't live in prison.

I'm not a slave to anyone or anything. I'm quite free enough. So, thank you, Jesus, but no thank you. False alarm. They say, we don't need your help, don't they?

[ 6 : 43 ] And maybe for us, that would be crazy. But what about them? Because actually, when you look at the audience in this passage, they could be right.

Did you notice who these people are? Who is the audience that Jesus is speaking to? Look at verse 31. These are people, John tells us, who had already believed in Jesus.

They were, verse 33, offspring of Abraham. So, hang on a minute, maybe they don't need a rescue from Jesus. Not everybody can claim the things that they can claim about themselves.

Such a typhal offspring of Abraham. They were part of God's chosen, rescued people. And actually, to be children of Abraham, by definition, meant that you'd already experienced a kind of rescue.

That's what happened, isn't it? A rescue from Egypt. We all know the story of how the Israelites were rescued from slavery. That is what defined the children of Abraham.

[ 7 : 58 ] They were rescued people, weren't they? And so, maybe this is an unnecessary rescue that Jesus offers. It is not wanted, because actually it's not needed.

Maybe Jesus needs to rescue somebody else. Jesus says to them, you need my freedom. But they say, oh Jesus, we're different. We're already part of God's rescued people.

We've got connections with the church, don't you know? We've got the signs of rescue, circumcision. We've got the law given to God's rescued people, the Ten Commandments.

We've got the festivals and the sacrifices that remind us of that rescue from Egypt. We are family of God's rescued people.

So we don't need your freedom, Jesus. But Jesus knows something about them here. They are the religious thoroughbreds of the day, aren't they?

[ 9 : 04 ] But there is a dark side. There is a dark side here in presuming upon signs and laws and festivals and family connection.

Notice what Jesus says about them. And he gives us a clue, doesn't he, if you look at verse 31 again. The author comes with this sort of caveat. If you abide in my word, and here's the bit, here's the key bit.

You are truly my disciples. You are truly my disciples. There, Jesus effectively makes a separation between two types of disciples, doesn't he?

A true disciple and a false disciple. And they fall into the second category. They don't seem to oppose Jesus.

John even says that they had believed in him. And they are part of God's rescued people in some outward sense. And yet, you are not truly my disciples, Jesus says.

[ 10 : 12 ] Jesus' offer of freedom comes to these people because religious pedigree is not enough. It is not enough to have the connections that they have for them to be able to say to Jesus, we don't need you and your freedom.

It is not enough to be able to say, I've got the ceremonies, I've got the signs, I've got the sacraments, I've got the family connections and the laws and the knowledge. They are all really good things. They're provisions from God for them. They were good things for the Jews. But those privileges, and any privilege that we might have as believers, if we are, can so easily turn into presumption, can't it?

We can be steeped in religious activity and say to Jesus, thank you but no thank you because I'm different. And I wonder whether that might be the greater risk for some of us.

It might be an unwanted freedom that Jesus offers you today because you don't feel enslaved, you're living your life and you're quite happy. But I wonder, for some of us, we don't think we need Jesus in a strange way because in some sense, and I want to be careful here, but in some sense we've got the trappings of Jesus.

[ 11 : 40 ] We've got the signs and the seals and the law, the Bible. But privilege can lead to presumption.

Where disciples can merely be disciples by connection or by proxy. And we haven't actually come to Jesus and received his freedom for ourselves.

We might think that religious pedigree alone is enough. Jesus, I'm different. And so it's an unwanted freedom. It's an unwanted freedom.

And secondly though, Jesus says, despite that, it is a vital freedom. It's a vital freedom. Jesus responds to his audience here and he says, actually, you know, you've got this offer all wrong. This offer of freedom that I'm giving you, it's not an optional thing. It's not for some and for others. For non-religious people and not for religious people.

[ 12 : 40 ] It is vitally needed. And he gets to the heart of the problem. Listen to what he says in verse 34. Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.

See what he does there. He generalises the issue, doesn't he? It's not just religious people who need this freedom. Or non-religious. It is all people.

Did you notice the word everyone there? This is universal now. Here is the reason everyone needs the freedom that Jesus offers.

And he explains that there is a slavery that everyone is under that is associated with what he calls sin here.

That is the root cause of this slavery. It is turning your back on God. The chains that Jesus comes to break.

[ 13 : 50 ] Get their power and strength from this sin that he talks about. From turning away from God and from living as if he's not there and living for yourself.

And the cruelty of this slavery is that its power comes from a life we think is freedom. As we turn away from God.

Just imagine for a moment a goldfish in a goldfish bowl. Imagine him swimming around and around. Goldfish, they have a two second memory, don't they? So it's always new.

But imagine the goldfish in the bowl. Ask yourself as you see it there. Is it free as it swims around in the bowl?

Imagine one day it's a very intelligent goldfish. And it thinks to himself, do you know, I am sick of this bowl. I'm sick of the slavery of this goldfish bowl.

[ 14 : 50 ] I'm going to get out of here. I'm going to make myself free. So he uses up all of his energy. And he makes an escape. And dives out of the bowl.

And he makes a break for freedom. And he's in the air. And he's crying out, yes, I'm free. But then as he falls down onto the living room carpet. He very quickly realises that what he thought was freedom really made him into a slave.

And his break for freedom is the power of his slavery. And he's trapped on the floor.

And he's in great danger. He thought that it was a bid for life. But it brought death. Jesus is saying that at the core, everyone needs freeing.

Because that is what we are like in our lives. The slavery we need freeing from gets its power over us from our attempts to get away from God.

[ 15 : 54 ] That's what he calls sin. And when we do that, when we live that kind of life, oddly we believe, like the goldfish, that that lie, that that life is freedom.

Any behaviour that says no to God, it feels good at first, doesn't it? That's why temptation is tempting. I rebel against God because at first it feels good.

And that includes religious pride. That was their main problem. But Jesus shows here that living like that is a slavery. Turning away from God, it may seem pleasant, but in the end it enslaves.

And this is life without God. It beckons you. And it calls you like a master and it says, serve me. And I'll reward you. I'll make your life fantastic without God.

I'll give you what you desire. You'll feel good about yourself if you live for yourself. God will make you miserable. So give me what I want and I'll reward you.

[17:07] Sin says. But Jesus tells us the reality here. The only relationship, the only way that you can interact with that life is in a slavery to it.

The only doing of sin and of turning away from God is to be a slave of that kind of life. You can't indulge sin and turn away from God and keep any ounce of freedom.

Sin will take your freedom. He makes demands of you. And offers you great pleasure. But actually in the end he will never deliver your heart's desire.

He is a cruel master. Doesn't want the best for you. We think naturally to live without Jesus is freedom.

To break away from him. That's what people think, isn't it? To live for myself. That makes me free. Jesus says no. That is to enslave yourself.

[18:10] It is to flap around on the carpet. To be in great danger. So the unwanted rescue is actually a vital rescue for everyone. Religious people included.

And thirdly and lastly. It seems like a contradictory rescue. It seems like a contradictory rescue. The way that Jesus brings this freedom.

That he claims to be able to give us. Actually is totally upside down. It's the opposite of what we expect. Freedom, he offers, comes in a way that actually seems on the face of it quite off-putting. How does it work? Do you remember what he said? In verse 31. If you abide in my word. You are really my disciples. Then the truth.

You will know the truth. And the truth will set you free. The word abide there. In the original language that John wrote in. It has the feeling of remaining. Or holding to.

[19:17] Or sticking with. Jesus. So think about it. It's weird. Jesus is saying. A truly free person.

Is someone who is. Attached. To Jesus. A liberated person. Is someone who is. Enslaved to Jesus. And his words. Who abides in him. And what he says. So hang on a minute. The freedom that he offers here. Sounds a bit like slavery. Doesn't it?

It's like being chained to him. Holding to him. Abiding in him. And his truth. Exclusively. To be the slave of Jesus.

And that is what turned. These so called believers. Against Jesus. It was the exclusive claim. That living for him. Was the only way. For freedom. And that was the line.

[20:18] That they just weren't prepared. To cross. And that was what was so unexpected. About the offer. So contradictory. About it. Because. Holding to Jesus. Being his slave.

Will free you. Being held by Jesus alone. Captive to him. Being constrained by him. Will set you free. I was reading the story.

Of August. August. Cyprus. Cyprus. I can't say his name right. August. Cyprus. Cyprus. He. Survived. A massive volcano eruption. In the town of. Saint Pierre. In 1902. You might have heard the story. Mount Pelé. Was the volcano. In that town.

And. It erupted. In 1902. And it killed. An estimated. 40,000 people. In that town. It was devastating. But. Cyprus. Survived.

[21:18] Cyprus. Lived. Because. During the eruption. He wasn't a free man. He was a slave. Cyprus. Was locked.

In the underground. Cells. Of Saint Pierre. Jail. And when the immense. Heat. Of the volcano. Reached him. He was protected. By the thick stone walls.

Of the prison. It's really ironic. Isn't it? The very thing. That he felt. To be a prison. To him. Freed him. And gave him life.

For many people. The Christian life. Seems the oddest. Of all. Doesn't it? It seems the most. Constraining. Of all lives. The most. Exclusive.

The most. Close. Of all. To be the slave. Of one Lord. And one master. Jesus Christ. But he is a.

[22:14] A master. Who frees you. In every. Conceivable way. To be imprisoned. To Jesus. Is to be liberated. The volcano.

Illustration. Is a really bad. Illustration. Because actually. What frees you. Is not knowing. Sort of. In an inanimate object. Like a prison. It is knowing. A person. Jesus says.

The truth. Will set you. Free. And that. That is Jesus. Code language. For talking about. Himself. Not. Not just a body. Of data. But. But a person.

The truth. Has. Has come down. From heaven. To reveal. What. What God is like. To human beings. To show you. Who you were made for. And the only.

Way. To be free. From the slavery. Of our. Our. Our sinful. Appetites. Is to know. Somebody. Far more. Satisfying. Somebody.

[ 23 : 15 ] Even more. Pleasant. Somebody. More wonderful. Someone who can. Free you. Augustine. Puts it really. Well. On this. Strange.

Thing. Of a. Of a. Of a. Slavery. That frees. With Jesus. He says. Any other. Burden. Oppresses. And crushes. You. But Christ.

Actually. Takes weight. Off you. Any other. Burden. Weighs you. Down. But Christ. Gives you. Wings. All of that. If you take.

A bird's. Wings. Away. He says. You might. Seem to be. Taking weight. Off the birds. But the more. Weight. You take off. The more. You tie it. Down. To the earth. There it is.

On the ground. And you wanted to. Relieve it. Of weight. Give it back. The weight. Of its wings. And you will see. How it flies. That is the Christian life.

[ 24 : 13 ] To be. A slave. Of Jesus. To be weighed. Down. By Jesus. To be held. Captive. By him.

And if you. Feel like. That is going to be. A burden. For your life. Then. I just want to say. You don't know. The real Jesus. You don't know. The Jesus. Of the Bible.

And you need. To meet him. Let me finish. As we. As we leave this room. In a few minutes. There is really. Only one or two. Things that we can do. With this offer.

Of freedom. Isn't there. You could. Pretend. You don't need it. And say to Jesus. It's okay. False alarm. I'm different.

And it is really. Really easy. To do that. This afternoon. To look at your life. And think. I'm not a slave. To anyone. I'm not a slave. To anything. Especially. If I call myself.

[ 25 : 10 ] Religious. It would be so easy. To do that today. Or. You could listen. To Jesus here. Who would not.

Have offered you. This freedom. If it weren't. Absolutely vital. And you could. Turn away. From living for yourself. And hold on to him. And be held captive.

By him. And if you do that. You will discover. That Christ gives you wings. To be a slave. Of Jesus. Is to be truly free.

Let us pray.