

Freedom In Christ Jesus

Printed Text • John 8:31-38

Devotional Reading • 1 John 1:1-4

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will CONSIDER the double meaning of slavery and freedom in Jesus' conversation with believing Jews, PONDER the many ways people are enslaved in current society, and LIVE in the freedom that Jesus gives to those who follow Him.

In Focus

Earl had heard many stories about his absentee father Carl over the years. As a boy, Earl had resented his father for leaving him without even saying good-bye. Earl's mother had long since remarried but still had nothing but negative things to say about her former husband.

Many people had told Earl things about his father, some were good things but some were not. Mainly what he heard was a lot of conflicting stories about his dad. Old Ms Morgan spoke about how Carl would do odd jobs for her around the house, rake her leaves and such. Earl's Aunt Ruby, however, only ever talked about how Carl would loaf around the house, not lifting a finger to help Earl's mother with their new baby. Earl just wanted to know the truth!

He often felt like a big piece of his life was missing because he didn't know the truth about his father. Now a father himself, Earl thought perhaps he could even understand his father's struggles and problems if given the chance.

Without telling anyone, Earl hired a detective agency to investigate whether his father was still alive. A few weeks later, the agency reported back to Earl that his father was alive and well, living only about 2 hours' drive away.

"That's it!" Earl said, "I'm just going to see him and ask him why he left us." Earl sighed and thought, Now I will find out the truth!

How often do you go out of your way to seek the truth?

Keep In Mind

"If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." (John 8:36, KJV)

Words You Should Know

A. Continue (John 8:31) meno (Gk.) — To abide or remain

B. Indeed (v. 32) alethos (Gk.) — Truly, in truth

Say It Correctly

Torah. TORE-ah

KJV

John 8:31 Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed;
32 And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.
33 They answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?
34 Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.
35 And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever.
36 If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.
37 I know that ye are Abraham's seed; but ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you.
38 I speak that which I have seen with my Father: and ye do that which ye have seen with your father.

NLT

John 8:31 Jesus said to the people who believed in him, "You are truly my disciples if you remain faithful to my teachings.
32 And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."
33 "But we are descendants of Abraham," they said. "We have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean, 'You will be set free'?"
34 Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave of sin.
35 A slave is not a permanent member of the family, but a son is part of the family forever.
36 So if the Son sets you free, you are truly free.
37 Yes, I realize that you are descendants of Abraham. And yet some of you are trying to kill me because there's no room in your hearts for my message.
38 I am telling you what I saw when I was with my Father. But you are following the advice of your father."

The People, Places, and Times

The Feast of Tabernacles. The dialogue in John 7 and 8 (excluding 7:53–8:11) occurs in the Jerusalem Temple during the Feast of Tabernacles (7:2, 37; 8:12). Often referred to simply as "the feast," the Feast of Tabernacles was a seven-day observance that included celebrating the Lord's protection and providence (Leviticus 23:41; Deuteronomy 16:14). This festival was celebrated at the time of the barley harvest. Many fruits are also ripening when this autumnal memorial occurs, and feasting is a major part of how it is observed. The booths, or "tabernacles," the feast is named for refer to the tents the Jews construct to live in for the weeklong festival. These tents remind them of their time wandering in the wilderness before coming to the Promised Land. Both the tents and the harvest fruits remind God's people of how He provided for them in the past and continues to provide for them now.

Background

The tone of the discussion in John 7-8 is somewhat argumentative. Jesus preaches in the Temple area, telling His listeners many abstract theological concepts about Himself and His relation to the Father. The crowd always questions Him, answering Him with confusion or with contradiction. John makes a point of gathering these theological discussions, as Christ explains many concepts to His followers: the glory of God, following Sabbath laws, knowledge of God, the living water of the Spirit, His coming death, true light for the world, standards for judgment, and truth.

In the Bible, the essence of truth is not adherence to an external set of rules, laws, and regulations. Truth is more than accuracy. Central to the biblical concept of truth is faithfulness or reliability. God is the standard for truth. God's truth is that by which all other truth is measured. God's truth can be measured according to His unbroken promises and covenants and His unfaltering love for His people. God's truth is not just reflected in His commandments. God's truth is to be reflected in the way we as human beings live our lives.

At-A-Glance

1. Set Free (John 8:31–32)
2. Truly Free (vv. 33–36)
3. Free to Follow (vv. 37–38)

In Depth

1 Set Free (John 8:31–32)

Those who believe in Christ, who have faith in Him, follow a certain condition. Believers would “indeed be” His disciples only if they “continue in [His] word.” Jesus obviously saw the possibility of disciples being only partially committed in their faith. He was clear that partial faith is insufficient. A disciple who is not totally committed cannot be relied upon to follow and obey His commands. Weak, uncommitted faith keeps us in bondage to sin. Jesus offered His disciples absolute freedom from the bondage of sin. Those who “abideth” in the teachings of Jesus would know God's truth. In Christ Jesus lies the power to set people free. His words, “the truth shall make you free” (v. 32), are not a reference to an academically learned truth. It is not education or knowledge that frees us from spiritual bondage. Rather, we are freed by our spirit awakening through the power of Christ.

What has the power of Jesus' truth freed you from?

2 Truly Free (vv. 33–36)

Even the Jews who believed in Him did not understand the kind of bondage Jesus was referring to. Any talk of bondage made them recall the experience of their enslaved ancestors. When Jesus spoke of them being in bondage, they hotly informed Him that, as descendants of Abraham, they had never been a slave to anyone. The only form of slavery they understood, however, was physical bondage. They were blind to the fact that sin kept them in spiritual bondage.

Many preachers have been heard to say from the pulpit, “Sin costs more than you want to pay and keeps you longer than you want to stay.” The power in sin lies in its ability to deceive. A person trapped in the bondage of sin probably never envisioned that he or she could be so enslaved.

Apart from Christ, no man or woman can boast of being free. According to the Master, anyone who has committed sin is a slave to sin (v. 34). But the power that lies within Him sets us free. Jesus' mission was to give eternal truth to all people. If we love truth, we love Jesus, the Son of the living God. If we love the Son, we love His Father's truth. When we accept Him, truth finds a dwelling place in our hearts.

How does the permanence of Christ's freedom show itself in your life?

3 Free to Follow (vv. 37–38)

The freedom Christ offers releases us from sin's hold over our actions, but this does not mean we are completely free from all control. We are freed to serve God instead. When we are free from sin and hold God's message in our hearts, we are compelled to speak of it. If we are still slaves to sin, we are still compelled to speak. But then we speak from the poor understanding offered by the world and the Enemy.

Jesus already held God's truth in His heart. Because He knew the truth He was free, certainly free from sin but also free to speak boldly in the face of fierce and mounting opposition. Contemporary Christians should decide how they will follow in His steps.

Are we willing to speak His truth, even when it is opposed by others? Are we willing to embrace the freedom He has provided for us?

Search the Scriptures

1. Why did the Jews take offense to Jesus' assertion that they were in bondage (v. 33)?
2. Who is a servant of sin (v. 34)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. Explain how a person becomes enslaved by sin. Discuss the bondage of sin as it manifests itself in substance abuse, promiscuity and marital infidelity, dishonesty, hatred, racism, sexism, classism, and false piety. Why do people often remain in bondage when Christ has offered to set us free?
2. Spend some time talking about how often the sins that hold us in bondage seem so pleasurable and relatively harmless in the beginning. By the time we see the ugliness of our condition, we are already in bondage.

Liberating Lesson

Coming from a history of enslavement, both legal and socioeconomic freedom are especially important concepts to African Americans. Sadly, many of our people are still enslaved to a life of incarceration, addiction, violence, self hatred, and poverty. Jesus said that those whom the Son sets free are truly free. In what ways can the freedom that comes through Christ manifest itself and break loose the chains that hold so many African Americans in spiritual bondage? How might the church actually perpetuate that bondage by causing people to feel they cannot enter God's house because of their present circumstances? What are you and your church doing to help others know the truth so they might be set free?

Application for Activation

Examine your own life for ways in which you are still in bondage to sin. List at least one condition from which you wish to be set free. Pray sincerely for God to give you the desire to be led out of bondage from that issue. As you grapple with your own issues of bondage, you will be molded into a grateful, compassionate, and understanding witness for Christ.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Matthew 21:1–11

The Triumphal Entry is told in each of the Gospel accounts (Mark 11:1–10; Luke 19:29–38; John 12:12–19), but each includes different details and emphases. The Gospel of Matthew is plentifully endowed with the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. More prophets are quoted in Matthew than in Mark, Luke, and John combined. Matthew's writing style is also marked by his emphasis on the teaching ministry of Jesus.

To understand this text, consider the context. Immediately before entering Jerusalem, Jesus informs His disciples that He would be going to Jerusalem where the chief priest and scribes would mock, whip, and ultimately sentence Him to death. Jesus assures His disciples, however, that God would raise Him to life on the third day (Matthew 20:18-19). While Jesus is sharing this grave news, Salome, the wife of Zebedee and mother of two of the disciples, James and John, is so preoccupied with her sons' successes that she misses, or ignores, the gravity of the inhumane intent of Jesus' enemies. Though there is evidence (Matthew 20:17) that Jesus and company were in motion, talking and walking away from Judea and going to Jerusalem, Jesus hears, questions, and answers Salome. He settles the indignation of the 10 other disciples, a common reaction among the disciples toward women (Matthew 26:8) and children (Matthew 19:14). He also opened the eyes of two blind men sitting by the Jericho roadside.

From this context, today's text emerges. Jesus has expressed the purpose of their departure from Judea (Matthew 19:1). Their destination is Jerusalem and a place frequented by Jesus, the Mount of Olives (Matthew 21:1).

1 And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples,

The Mount of Olives is the place where Jesus agonizes and is betrayed, the place where He ascended into heaven, and also the supposed place of His second advent (Acts 1:9–12). The Mount of Olives is mentioned often in each Gospel (Matthew 24:3; Mark 11:1; Luke 19:37; John 8:1), as Jesus and His disciples frequently passed by it. Heading east out from Jerusalem, one goes down into a valley, and up on the next hill over is called the Mount of Olives. An olive grove stands there to this day, with

some of its trees being old enough to have been seen on that very day of the Triumphal Entry long ago.

Notice a common pattern in the number of disciples Jesus sent. In the Bible the number two is often given in an “either/or” way: two gates, two great lights, two eternal places, two masters, two debtors, two sons, etc. In these incidences, the Bible is teaching how to make choices by comparison. The number two is also given in a “both/and” way: Jesus sends two of His disciples to visit John the Baptist while he is imprisoned (Matthew 11:2); Jesus sends forth the disciples by two’s and gives them power over unclean spirits (Mark 6:7); Jesus sends the 70 by twos into every city and place where Jesus would come (Luke 10:1) and Jesus walks with two on the Emmaus Road (Luke 24:13). In these references, as well as in the current text, Jesus alludes to camaraderie.

2 Saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me.

3 And if any man say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them.

The village “over against” refers to a place on the opposite side of a valley from you. Since Jesus and the disciples are on the Mount of Olives, the city of Jerusalem and its suburbs are all “over against” them. They are told they will find these animals “straightway,” just as soon as they reach the city.

If the two disciples are questioned about fulfilling His command, Jesus instructs the disciples to use words of urgency. Jesus takes no chances of offending the owner of the animals as He prepares for His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Jesus is confident the owner will respond positively to His need.

The disciples are instructed to say, “The Lord has need of them.” How much do we, as believers, trust God to supply our every need? Hopefully, we can answer confidently by quoting Philippians 4:19, “But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”

The grammar of Matthew’s Gospel is not clear whether Jesus is assuring the disciples that “straightway” the owner of the animals will send them with the disciples, or if “straightway” Jesus will send the animals back to their owner. The Greek word *eutheos* (ew-THEH-ocē) means at once. If it is the quick action of the owner, culturally speaking, in the words of Dr. Jeremiah A. Wright Jr., Jesus expects the owner to send the animals “rat now.” If it is that the owner will get the animals back right away, it is another example of how God takes care of future consideration even before we can worry about it.

4 All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying,

5 Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.

This is a frequent refrain throughout Matthew’s Gospel. More than any other Gospel writer, Matthew is concerned with explaining how Jesus fulfilled all the messianic prophecies the Jews were expecting. Because of this, many scholars assume Matthew expects that his primary audience will be Jewish.

Behold (Gk. *idou*, ee-DOO) is a kind of interjection in Greek and draws attention to the subject “King” and the beginning of the long awaited day of liberation for God’s people. The context of this prophecy originally spoken by Zechariah is that God is coming into Jerusalem to proclaim peace over the

Israelites' perpetual enemies of the Philistines and Phoenicians (Zechariah 9:9). He further promises battle and victory against the Greeks. God as the returning King promises to break the bow and remove the chariot, because His people will need them no more. Prisoners will be freed from their dark dungeons. God's dominion will stretch from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates and down to the Red Sea, and to the ends of the world.

Though the King is arriving, He comes meekly. Historically, a king arrives with a legion of bodyguards, officers, property, housing, pomp, and circumstance. Instead of arriving on a beast of burden, kings approach their subjects in chariots carried by the palace entourage. Jesus, however, comes without a horde of attendants surrounding Him; He comes meekly and sitting on an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass, or beast of burden.

Matthew mentions both a donkey and her colt, even though the other Gospel writers only mention the donkey. Other Gospel writers simply record this particular happening. Matthew offers no explanation of why Jesus needed both animals, or of how He used both. Perhaps He only rode the donkey and the colt simply followed behind its mother. Perhaps He rode one for a section of the road, then switched to the other. Matthew mentions this detail likely to make sure his audience fully appreciates the fulfillment of Zechariah. The exact use of the colt, then, is not important. What is important is that Jesus is the fulfillment of prophecy.

6 And the disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them,

7 And brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set him thereon.

It is not specified which two disciples went for the animals. Whoever the two disciples were, they acted to do as the Lord commanded. Obedience is an important characteristic in the life of God's children. Hopefully, God can count on us to follow His instructions just as directly as these disciples did, even when we don't understand why such a task is needed.

Matthew describes the coming of the Christ in all meekness and mercy to effect salvation, not in His might and majesty. It was the opposite of envy, enterprise, and arrogance; Zion's King enters Jerusalem outwardly impoverished, representing the life of Zion's humble citizens. Indeed, Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem can be compared with His birth. His nursery was borrowed, humble, and meager. Likewise, His triumphant entrance was on a borrowed means of transportation, humble and meager.

Reading about the disciples putting their clothes on the animals is reminiscent of Jesus' earlier instruction to the disciples about sharing even the clothes off their backs (Matthew 5:40; Luke 6:29). There Jesus emphasized the importance of freely giving up your cloak should anyone sue you for your coat. Jesus downplays worrying about clothing, among other things (Matthew 6:28). Apparently the disciples have learned and accepted this lesson because they spread their clothes on the animals and set Jesus on it. The Greek word here (himation, hee- MAH-tee-on) refers to the words cloak, garment, clothes, raiment, robe, apparel, vesture, and coats interchangeably. Therefore, it is possible the disciples spread an array of clothing.

8 And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way.

This was the week of Passover. Jerusalem and surrounding regions were crowded with travelers from the diaspora. The law required this migration on a number of occasions. Again, note the connection with Christ's birth. Joseph and Mary were traveling to Bethlehem to register for the

census. Bethlehem was so crowded that all of the lodging places were filled. “No room in the inn” was common during the festivals, also called feasts (particularly during the Feast of Passover, Pentecost, and the Day of Atonement). During the Feast of Passover then, a “very great multitude” was available to spread their clothes and to cut down branches from the trees. The branches allowed a softer and gentler ride against the uneven, stony, dirt roadway for the King of the Jews. Mark does give us a hint to these leafy branches, which John specifically identifies as palm trees (John 12:13). The disciples and people of Jerusalem do not have an expensive red carpet to roll out for Jesus, but they provide the honor they can with their clothes and palms making a humble parade for a humble King.

9 And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.

For centuries, God’s people awaited the fulfillment of the Old Testament promise of the perfect King who would reign over His people. He was coming to establish a kingdom with laws written on the heart, a kingdom of love, joy, and peace. Psalms 45 and 110 give the promise of a Messiah yet to come. Daniel verbalizes his vision of one who is given dominion, glory, and a kingdom in which all would serve (7:13– 14). Matthew and Luke magnify the King in His earthly ministry. Remembering these prophecies, the crowd proclaims Jesus as King during His triumphal entry during the feast of Passover, later to be called Palm Sunday.

“Hosanna” is the greeting used by the gathered community of faith on the occasion of Jesus’ triumphal entrance into Jerusalem. From Psalm 118:25–26, the Hebrew word for this greeting is most closely translated as the following prayer: “Save now,” or “Save, we beseech Thee.” It should be noted at this point that the annual festival, called Passover, commemorated the final plague on Egypt when the firstborn of the Egyptians died, and the Israelites were spared because of the token of blood on the lintel and the two side posts at the door of the Israelites (Exodus 12:22). The thought of divine salvation is in the background of everyone’s minds.

The crowd exclaims, “Hosanna to the Son of David” and “Hosanna in the highest.” You cannot get any higher than highest. The highest is where God, angels, and the great cloud of witnesses dwell, and where heaven is. The phrase “Son of David,” is presented several times throughout Scripture, referring to God’s promise to David that there would always be a ruler in Israel of his bloodline. Because of the sin of David’s biological children, God could not reward the Israelites with continued earthly reign from that line. What God provided instead was so much more: His own Son, also descended from the line of David through his adopted father, who would be King forever in heaven.

The word “Blessed” (Gk. eulogeo, ew-low- GEH-oh) means to speak well of. The Hebrew equivalent barak is used when the patriarchs were performing an act of adoration and a pronouncement of family prophecy and inheritance. Later in Matthew, Jesus blessed the gathered community with the Beatitudes during the Sermon on the Mount. In the context of the Beatitudes, makarios (maw-KAW-ree- oce) is the Greek word translated “blessed” and means fortunate and happy. The multitudes who witnessed Jesus’ Triumphal Entry went before and behind Jesus speaking well of “he that cometh in the name of the Lord” (Matthew 21:9).

10 And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this?

Jesus’ spiritual power stirs up the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and every fiber of their hearts is moved. The Greek here for “moved” (Gk. seio, SAY-oh) means to agitate or cause to tremble. Again we see parallels between Jesus’ entrance into Jerusalem and His entrance into the world. Matthew’s account of Jesus’ birth also mentions the Magi’s news that there was a new King of the Jews caused Herod to

be “troubled, and all Jerusalem with him” (Matthew 2:3). In verse 10, the inquiring minds are among a group of trouble-making opponents with ill-intent toward Jesus. Some of them who are saying, “Hosanna” now would later say, “Crucify Him.” Others would sing, “Pass me not, O gentle Savior.”

11 And the multitude said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.

Matthew presents Jerusalem in a very negative light. At the beginning of the Gospel, Jerusalem is where King Herod reigns and calls for Jesus and all the young boys of Bethlehem to be murdered. Later, Joseph moves his family from Bethlehem (near Jerusalem) to Nazareth because Herod’s son Archelaus is king in Jerusalem (2:22). Early in Jesus’ ministry, when Jerusalem politics land John the Baptist in jail, Jesus moves His ministry north to Galilee (4:12). Matthew does not record Jesus returning anywhere near Jerusalem until this point. This is perhaps why the people of Jerusalem do not know who Jesus is.

In answer to their question, Jesus’ followers call Him a prophet. For the most part, the title “prophet” referred to an Old Testament character, and John the Baptist was a prophet quoting prophets and used prophetic words, “Prepare ye the way of the Lord.” The New Testament is a book fulfilling the words spoken by prophets. Though Jesus is called Rabbi eight times throughout the Gospels, He is called prophet about a dozen times. Of course, Jesus also quoted Old Testament prophets. A prophet’s role was to speak truth to power, and deliver God’s word to the people. They might work miracles or warn of coming troubles. All of these Jesus does, so “prophet” is not an incorrect title for Him. It merely stops short of acknowledging His full title: Messiah.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Remember You Once Were Slaves
(Deuteronomy 15:12–15)

TUESDAY

Children of the Free Woman
(Galatians 4:21–31)

WEDNESDAY

Anointed to Proclaim Liberty
(Isaiah 61:1–3)

THURSDAY

The Light of the World
(John 8:12–20)

FRIDAY

Jesus Is from Above
(John 8:21–30)

SATURDAY

I Shall Walk at Liberty
(Psalm 119:41–56)

SUNDAY

Jesus Brings True Freedom
(John 8:31–38)