

John 8.31-59 Sermon / COB / 08.10.14

Introduction

† **[Slide 1: Title]** How many of you saw the movie, *The Matrix*? Just like in *The Matrix*, we all are born into deception. We are born in slavery to sin, but we think we are free. We are born walking in spiritual darkness, but we think we are in the light and can see clearly.

- Jesus asks us to trust him. But he tells us things we struggle to understand: that we are deceived about everything and need his word. He tells us things we struggle to accept: that the way to light and freedom is to give up our free will, to commit to following him no matter what.
- He might ask you to take the narrow path, like this tunnel: dark, half filled with water much of the time, no end in sight, sometimes so tight you have to turn sideways, sometimes so low you have to crouch over in the water. Would you believe this is the path to freedom and light? Are you willing to follow Jesus even when it makes no sense to you where he is leading?
- Turn in your Bible to John 8.31, and we will see what Jesus has to say about this.

[Slide 2: 8.31-32] John 8.31-32 NET: Then Jesus said to those Judeans who had believed him, “If you continue to follow my teaching, you are really my disciples and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

† We left off last week with Jesus teaching in the Temple, hinting at his own divinity and declaring that he was the light of the world, so those who followed him would have the light of true spiritual life instead of dwelling in spiritual darkness.

- In v.30, the author John said that people started to believe in Jesus when he said these things. But Jesus knows what is in their hearts, so he gives them a test of faith. He says if they would literally “remain in his word” then that would prove they truly were his disciples. As we discussed last week, true faith leads to truly following Jesus.

† **[Slide 3: freedom]** Those who are true disciples of Christ will know the truth from God which Jesus teaches and the truth will set them free!

- We have talked about how the truth can set us free in our sermons about sanctification or spiritual growth. This begins with the gospel truth, for when we accept the gospel promise in faith, we are born again spiritually, redeemed from the power of sin, empowered to resist temptation, forgiven and restored in right relationship with God.
- God’s truth extends to the rest of scripture, which counters the deceptions we face. Sometimes we have wrong thoughts because of our fallen flesh; sometimes we learn deceptive ideas from our fallen culture; and sometimes we are attacked with negative thoughts by demons, but the truth of God can counter all of these deceptions, and set us free from their dangerous effects.
- But the truth will set you free if and only if you become a true disciple of Christ, who remains in his Word.

[Slide 4: 8.33-34] John 8.33-34: “We are descendants of Abraham,” they replied, “and have never been anyone’s slaves! How can you say, ‘You will become free?’” Jesus answered them, “I tell you the solemn truth [this is ἀμὴν ἀμὴν, truly truly, the way Jesus begins very profound statements], **everyone who practices sin is a slave of sin.**”

† The Jews had been exiled and lost their freedom to Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and now Rome. They now enjoyed some religious and political freedoms under Rome, but still were oppressed by a foreign power. So when they insisted they never had been slaves, they were being rather technical.

† **[Slide 5: slavery]** We all are born into slavery to sin. The verb translated as “the one who practices” is a present participle, perhaps suggesting people remain slaves to sin if they are characterized by repeated or continuous sin.

- But as scholar D. A. Carson notes, the act of any sin proves our slavery to sin; it has to, right? we could be walking in light and life with God but we choose the darkness and sin, it has to be because of our slavery to sin, and this choice works to enslave us further. So we all are in need of a savior, of a liberator, to redeem us [free us] from this slavery and to bring us forgiveness for our rebellion.

† The prophets did say that the Messiah would one day will deliver Israel from political oppression. But on his first visit, Christ was not concerned about oppression by Caesar, rather he was concerned about oppression by sin, about our own shameful self-centeredness and fallenness.

- It is not that Jesus is uninterested in social justice, but that he knows the pursuit of social justice would be futile without providing the remedy for sin. As we work to cure the ills of our society – as we fight for equal rights or mitigation of poverty – we need to keep this in mind, that the thing people and society need most is the freedom that comes only through the gospel of Christ.

[Slide 6: 8.35-36] John 8.35-36: [Jesus talking] “The slave does not remain in the family forever, but the son remains forever. So if the son sets you free, you will be really free.”

† Jesus offers to set us free. How can we believe that? Jesus says a slave has no permanent place in a family or household, but a son, as a descendant or blood relative, will always be guaranteed a place.

- Now remember who Jesus is. The Son of God is the one with an eternal familial relationship with God the Father. Jesus enjoys permanent rights as the unique Son of God, and exercises full authority vested in him by the God Father [3.35] to free slaves, to give true spiritual life [1.4; 8.12], to empower us to have freedom from the power of sin [1 Peter 2.24]. So if the Son sets you free then you will be free indeed!

† **[Slide 7: free]** This is not freedom to sin – we already are doing that! – it is freedom to be able to choose righteousness instead of sin, to choose to follow Jesus by remaining in his teachings instead of giving in to the flesh, to choose to walk in the light in victory with God instead of being mired in the darkness of our sins.

- It will be freedom because it will please us to make this choice. How well does that describe you? Are you exercising this freedom to choose to walk in the light instead of the darkness? are you eager to make that choice each day? Have you committed to submit to Christ in every way?

[Slide 8: 8.37-40] John 8.37-40: [Jesus talking] “I know that you are Abraham's descendants. But you want to kill me, because my teaching makes no progress among you. I am telling you the things I have seen while with the Father; as for you, practice the things you have heard from the Father!” They answered him, “Abraham is our father!” Jesus replied, “If you are Abraham's children, you would be

doing the deeds of Abraham. But now you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth I heard from God. Abraham did not do this!"

- † **[Slide 9: 8.37]** In v.37, your translation might say Jesus' word "has no place" in them. That is a good translation of the negation of the Greek verb *χωρέω*. But this also can mean there is no progress, like the NET says. They hear Jesus' teaching and even respond favorably at first, but it has no impact on who they are or how they live. Thus they remain sinful and begin to resent the teaching, even to the point of wanting to kill the prophet who brings the convicting message.
- † **[Slide 10: 8.38]** There is a scholarly debate on how to translate the second half of v.38. The majority of Greek manuscripts have a possessive pronoun, meaning "your father," and so most translations say "you are doing what you have heard from your father," as in the NIV.
 - But some of the earliest and best manuscripts don't have that pronoun, so they read "the Father," as in God the Father. And since the verb could be descriptive of their behavior or a command from Jesus, some translations, like the NET, say "as for you, practice the things you have heard from [God] the Father!"
 - Which view is correct is not terribly important. We know Jesus would want them to be obedient to what God has revealed as his will, particularly through the teachings of Jesus himself; and Jesus momentarily will start talking about these people having and obeying a rather unattractive father, other than God the Father.
- † **[Slide 11: 8.39-40]** In any case, the people want to assert that they are descendants of Abraham, perhaps to assert they do live out the spiritual/moral obligations of being Abraham's heirs.
 - Certainly, they were proud of being descendants of Abraham, and believed this placed them in the covenant with God and thus made them righteous. They based their hope on being the physical seed of Abraham, but even in the Hebrew scriptures [our Old Testament], physical descent was insufficient to determine if you were really an heir of Abraham in God's kingdom.
 - Jesus retorts that if they are the seed of Abraham, then they should do the deeds of Abraham: they should put their faith in God's promise of deliverance through the Messiah, instead of trying to kill the Messiah, about which Jesus emphatically says, "This Abraham did not do!"

[Slide 12: 8.41-43] John 8.41-43: [Jesus speaking] "You people are doing the deeds of your father." Then they said to Jesus, "We were not born as a result of immorality! We have only one Father, God himself." Jesus replied, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I have come from God and am now here. I have not come on my own initiative, but he sent me. Why don't you understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot accept my teaching."

- † Now Jesus starts hinting at their dishonorable parentage. They respond by denying anything inappropriate, they are not born as a result of immorality, they are legitimate children of God.
 - But again Jesus has a retort. If they truly were spiritual heirs to Abraham, they would do the deeds of Abraham. If they truly were children of God, they would love the Messiah-savior whom God the Father has sent to them.
- † Jesus then asks a rhetorical question and answers it himself. Why don't they understand his teachings? Because they literally are "unable to hear his word."

- The notes in the NET Bible point out that this is not a reference to deafness; it is about hearing in the sense of really listening and responding to something. They cannot accept his teaching, they refuse to grasp it, to honor and obey it. Their values, prejudices, and flawed concept of morality preclude them from accepting and remaining in Jesus' teaching. They are proving both their slavery to sin and their lack of faith.

[Slide 13: 8.44] John 8.44: [Jesus speaking] "You people are from your father the devil, and you want to do what your father desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not uphold the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, because he is a liar and the father of lies."

† Oh, ho! Not only are they not children of Abraham, not children of God, Jesus says they are children of the devil, because they do what he desires!

- Your translation might read a little differently at the start of this verse, but the thrust of the Greek preposition ἐκ is the source or origin of these people. Jesus said his opponents were the devil's very offspring, a statement which certainly infuriated them.
- The Greek also says something like, "you carry out the lusts of your father." By not responding to the gospel message, they continue walking in sin and darkness, following the example of Satan and doing what he desires of them.

† **[Slide 14: Satan]** In tempting Adam and Eve, Satan introduced sin and death into the world; thus he is a murderer from the beginning. We also know from scripture that Satan has directly caused the death of some people.

- Satan does not uphold the truth, he literally does not "stand" in the truth, in that he does not accept the validity of truth nor does he act truthfully. He lied to Adam and Eve in the first temptation, and thus is the father of all lies.
- If Satan is pure evil, with no integrity and a murderous heart, what of his spiritual children who follow in his footsteps, walking in spiritual darkness? Jesus is fiercely insulting these people who had been responding positively to his message just a little while earlier.
- This is one reason we do not rely on emotional manipulation to get people to say they accept Christ in faith. These people thought they believed, but it was just their emotional response in the moment, it was a "false positive" and we don't want that for people. We want people to hear the truth about Jesus and then with God's help respond in faith to that truth.
- We all once were in the darkness, doing the devil's work, though we were deceived and didn't know it. Now that we are enlightened, we know that the only path from the darkness to the light, from slavery to freedom, from death to life, is faith in Christ.

[Slide 15: 8.45-47] John 8.45-47: [Jesus still speaking] "But because I am telling you the truth, you do not believe me. Who among you can prove me guilty of any sin? If I am telling you the truth, why don't you believe me? The one who belongs to God listens and responds to God's words. You don't listen and respond, because you don't belong to God."

† While the children of God will so love the truth that they will believe in Jesus, the children of the devil will be so deceived that they will not be able to accept the truth or Jesus. We have seen in this

gospel that for such people to come to faith, God the Father must draw them [6.44], give them to Christ [6.37], and enlighten them to see the truth [6.45].

- † Nobody can prove Jesus guilty of any sin. Because he was divine as well as human, he could live a perfectly pure human life in the will of God the Father. This is why he was a worthy sacrifice for us.
 - Since they cannot prove Jesus guilty of any sin, why do they not believe him or in him? Because they are not God's people, though they think they are. They are totally depraved, as we are all born to be, and as yet they are unenlightened by God.
 - They are deceived, but note that they are in the covenant community; the equivalent today would be people in the church. This begs the terrifying question, do we all really belong to Jesus? or are we deceived? We will have to use that test of faith he just gave us.

[Slide 16: 8.48-51] John 8.48-51: The Judeans replied, "Aren't we correct in saying that you are a Samaritan and are possessed by a demon?" Jesus answered, "I am not possessed by a demon, but I honor my Father— and yet you dishonor me. I am not trying to get praise for myself. There is one who demands it, and he also judges. I tell you the solemn truth [ἀμὴν ἀμὴν, truly truly], if anyone obeys my teaching, he will never see death."

- † The Jews who had returned from exile in Babylon viewed themselves as a pure race, the true descendants of Abraham. The Samaritans were a mixed breed of Jews who had remained in the land and other ethnic groups who had been exiled into the land, and over time they had developed their own religion, which was based on Judaism, but not entirely consistent with it.
 - So the Jews looked down on the Samaritans, and thus calling Jesus a Samaritan definitely was meant as an insult, but what it is supposed to mean is unclear. Perhaps that he is a heretic, perhaps that his heredity is more questionable than theirs.
- † During the Festival of Tabernacles, when Jesus publically accused the religious leaders of wanting to kill him, some in the crowd who were unaware of the plot thought he was acting crazy and suggested he was possessed by a demon. Some of these same people are present now, and the way they angrily dismiss Jesus' words is to say again that he is possessed, that he is talking nonsense.
 - Sometimes Jesus said things that were difficult to understand or difficult to accept. But this was not the result of arrogance, dementia, Samaritanism, or the occult, just his obedience to say what God the Father had for him to say. We should keep that in mind today, when we find his teachings hard to understand or accept.
- † **[Slide 17: no death]** Jesus finishes with, "ἀμὴν ἀμὴν I say to you, if someone should keep my word, he certainly would never see death into the eternity."
 - This raises two questions. The first is what does Jesus mean by never seeing death? Obviously we all still physically die as a result of sin. But the one who puts his/her faith in Jesus is given new spiritual life that begins now, and physical death cannot extinguish it.
 - We have already heard Jesus say in John 6.40 NET, "For this is the will of my Father— for everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him to have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."
 - A friend of mine died two weeks ago. Because she had put her faith in Jesus, she now is in Heaven with him, she still is spiritually alive. When Jesus returns to resurrect the dead for

judgment, she will receive her new, flawless body, and she will remain spiritually alive on the new earth. The moment she put her faith in who Jesus is and what he had done for her, she became reborn in spirit, with eternal life.

- † **[Slide 18: how no death]** The second question is what Jesus means in the first half of the sentence. The NET reads, “if anyone obeys my teaching.” Literally in Greek, it says, “if anyone should keep my word.” The verb τηρέω means to keep or guard, but it often was used as we see here: to keep a promise is to fulfill a promise; to keep to a teaching is to live it out, to believe it and obey it. In a moment we will see Jesus declare that he keeps God the Father’s word [8.55].
- So what is his word that we must keep? Jesus might be referring to the gospel alone, for we already know that if we believe in the gospel of Jesus, then we have eternal life.
 - But earlier, Jesus said true disciples would remain in his word, which suggests more than just the gospel. What is in view here is not obedience leading to salvation. Rather, Jesus’ whole message was about salvation, about recognizing Jesus for who he is, identifying ourselves with him by faith, and believing in his promise of deliverance.
 - In v.31, it is not that remaining in Jesus’ word makes you a true disciple, it is that it proves you are a true disciple. So it is here: it is not that we obey to earn salvation, but that true saving faith will lead us to obey, and obedience will prove we have eternal life in us.

[Slide 19: 8.52-56] John 8.52-56: Then the Judeans responded, “Now we know you’re possessed by a demon! Both Abraham and the prophets died, and yet you say, ‘If anyone obeys my teaching, he will never experience death.’ You aren’t greater than our father Abraham who died, are you? And the prophets died too! Who do you claim to be?” Jesus replied, “If I glorify myself, my glory is worthless. The one who glorifies me is my Father, about whom you people say, ‘He is our God.’ Yet you do not know him, but 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 obey his teaching. Your father Abraham was overjoyed to see my day, and he saw it and was glad.”

- † When the people quote Jesus, they change what he said from “never see death” to “never experience death.” Your translation might say “never taste death.” “Taste” is a good translation of the Greek verb γεύομαι, but this verb did not mean “sample a little” like we might associate with tasting something, rather it meant to partake of something, to experience something.
- † The people are still thinking in terms of physical death, and are angry that Jesus has implied his word is more powerful than that of Abraham or the prophets. There is a cute little thing in the Greek here that doesn’t come across in the English. It is a little bit of sassiness, like they said, “Do you think you are greater than our father Abraham, who – as you know – died?” And then they finish with, “Who do you make yourself out to be?”
- † The most profound statement here is Jesus saying, “Your father Abraham was overjoyed in that he might see my day, and he did see and he rejoiced.” What does this mean?
- God’s revelation of deliverance for his people began before Abraham was born, then continued with God’s promises to Abraham. Abraham might not have known any details about the Messiah-savior, but he knew God had promised the Messiah would come. He looked forward to what later became known as the Day of the Lord. Jesus declares the Day of the Lord is his day, because he is the Messiah-savior.

- What does it mean that Abraham saw this day and was glad? Nobody knows for sure, but here is what I think after checking with scholarly teachings. Through the Abrahamic Covenant, Abraham understood that it would be one of his descendants who would die to deliver the world from sin and evil. God also had told Abraham that he should send away his son Ishmael because it was through his son Isaac that the promises would come true. When God told Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, he no doubt thought that Isaac must be the Messiah. The book of Hebrews reveals that Abraham believed God would resurrect Isaac after his sacrifice. Then at the last minute, God provided an alternative sacrifice for Isaac, and said Abraham's faith was making it possible for God's promises to come true through him and Isaac.
- I think this scene in Genesis 22 shows that Abraham was looking forward to the Messianic Age, which began with the birth of Jesus, and that God gave Abraham a symbolic glimpse of what was to come, which caused Abraham to rejoice.

[Slide 20: 8.57-59] John 8.57-59: Then the Judeans replied, "You are not yet fifty years old! Have you seen Abraham?" Jesus said to them, "I tell you the solemn truth [ἀμὴν ἀμὴν, truly truly], before Abraham came into existence, I am!" Then they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out from the temple area.

- † Four quick things to note here. First, Abraham had been dead for over 2000 years at this point, so the people were mocking Jesus' claim to have known Abraham.
- † Second, the people who in v.30 were said to begin to believe in Jesus, now want to stone him to death. Obviously, their faith was not real, but rather just an emotional response to Jesus.
- † Third, note that Jesus is declaring himself to be God here. ἀμὴν ἀμὴν [truly truly] I say to you, before Abraham came to be, I AM!" As we discussed last week, Jesus says ἐγώ εἰμι in Greek, I AM! thereby associating himself with Yahweh the God of the Jews, for this is how God referred to himself through various prophets in the Old Testament.
- † Fourth, note that the people clearly understand this is what Jesus was saying, that's why they picked up stones to kill him, for they thought he was being blasphemous. They liked his teaching before, but now they could not accept his message that he is divine, that he is Yahweh.

Conclusion

- † **[Slide 21: summary]** There is a lot to think about in this passage, but here is one key concept I would like us to take for reflection. If you really believe in Jesus as your savior, then you will remain in his word – that is you will seek to obey and follow him – and if you really seek to obey and follow Jesus, then you will learn and absorb the truth that will set you free from slavery to sin and evil.
 - This is what characterizes a person who will never taste death. In fact, you will be walking in the light of life with Jesus, instead of in spiritual darkness with sin, and thus you will truly taste spiritual life even now, before you go to Heaven. We have discussed these facts in our sanctification sermons, but now you see that Jesus spoke these truths himself. Let's pray...