

Freedom in Christ

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- [0 : 0 0] Okay, folks, well, let me heartily encourage you to have John chapter 8 open in front of you. And I do feel like a broken record, but I'll own it this morning.
- I say this every week, but genuinely I mean it. This is brilliant. This is brilliant, what we're going to think about today. As you're turning to John chapter 8, here's a question for you.
- Do you want to be free? There is not a more sweeter thought in all the world than that, is there not? To be free.
- I think it's probably the greatest value that our culture loves. To be free, yeah? That is what is on offer today, is freedom.
- Right? Love it in a Scottish accent, yeah? Freedom. Freedom. That is what's on offer here today. The question is, where do you and I find it? Let me tell you about my friend Steph.
- [1 : 0 5] Steph is a fellow dad on the school run, and Steph works for the People's Postcode Lottery in Charlotte Square in the city. And a few weeks ago, Steph's telling me about his job.
- I speak to him often, he's a great guy. And he's telling me about the fact that in the office, you can help yourself to unlimited coffee and snacks. Right? He's Scottish, in case you hadn't guessed. Loves his job for that.
- But then he says this about his job. He says the whole concept of the lottery is really simple. It's to make you think that you'll win, but the whole thing is actually set up to try and ensure that you'll lose.
- And I thought to myself, when it comes to freedom, what a telling description of the problem of the human heart. Okay?
- We live in a world that is selling us tickets to all sorts of things. Saying that ultimately freedom will be found over here. It will be found over there.
- [2 : 0 7] Like sirens calling on the rocks. Come over here and buy what we have to offer. And the problem is that our sinful hearts, we buy them. But what is it that we sooner or later discover?
- We discover that those things will not deliver the freedom that we thought they would give us. Now sticking with the lottery theme just for a minute. Isn't it interesting that so often when winners hit the jackpot, when life for a season quite literally has no bounds, except for the law.
- And to be honest, if you've got enough cash, you can kind of find a way around the law. Okay? What is it as they look back on that lottery win, what is it that they so often say it was?
- That actually it was the worst thing that could have happened to me. Now here's a question for you just to consider, even right up the top. Living in our world today, when we're encouraged to follow our hearts and be true to ourselves, and with those things being almost in our culture today, the litmus test of where true freedom is to be found, have you considered even the mere possibility that for our hearts to truly get what they want might actually be the worst thing that could ever happen to us?

You see, according to the Bible, the human heart is a faulty compass by which to sail by. And the reason is because we don't really understand our hearts, have you come to think about it?

[3 : 40] You know, what was it that Shrek said about ogres? What are they like? They're like onions, right? They're like onions. Profound line in that film.

They're like onions. They've got layers. And I take it that Shrek is saying that they're complicated. There's more to them than meets the eye. There's more going on to the surface than we think there is.

And it's the same is true of the human heart. That there's more going on there than we care to think there is. And so step into our world, Jesus Christ, the one who John has introduced us in his gospel as coming from above, the one who John has already said in his gospel, knows every single human heart.

And he steps into our world. And almost what he does is that he lifts the lid on the human heart. And he says, let me tell you how it is.

So freedom. I mean, who doesn't want to be free? Yeah? Wham, Robbie Williams, Lenny Kravitz, you Google it. They all sang about it.

[4 : 51] Nelson Mandela, George Orwell, they all wrote about it. The thing that separates Jesus from any other person is that only Jesus claims that he can give us it.

And that's why whoever you are here today, whatever you think of the God of the Bible, that is what is on offer to you today. That is why you and I need to listen into what Jesus is saying.

And so by way of just two headings, here's two things for us to think about as we journey through this section. Here's the first one.

It's that everyone's driven by someone. Everyone's driven by someone. That's what Jesus is saying here. Everyone's driven by someone. Now, it was German reformer Martin Luther who said that when it comes to our lives, that we all like to think of ourselves like the captain at the wheel of the ship.

Right? True. We all like to think of ourselves as the captain at the wheel of the ship. But he said, in actual fact, flip the illustration around. And in actual fact, each of us is a horse with a rider on our backs.

[6 : 03] Right? Keep that image in your head. We're actually like a horse with a rider on our backs. Now, where has he got that from? He's got it from Jesus. You see, here is Jesus in discussion with the Pharisees.

Now, clock with me, if you haven't already, into this passage, verse 31. The Pharisees are the religious leaders of the day. And the Pharisees think they're, verse 31, because they are Abraham's physical offspring.

They are from his physical line. That they assume that they are gods. And they assume because they are gods that they are free.

And of course, here is a people who historically know all about what it is to be slaves. I mean, if you're initially like, this is part of your DNA.

This is part of your people's story. It's part of your story.

[7 : 10] It's part of your story. You understand what it is to be a slave. And you understand what it is to be free. And you'll hear echoes of that story and where it finds its ultimate fulfillment all over this chapter, if you look hard enough.

Because Jesus says, just like it was physically then for you in slavery and God rescued you. So it is spiritually.

You are in slavery. It's a really hard thing to hear. Why is Jesus saying that? Well, who is the rider on the horse of their lives?

Evident in the fact that his word, verse 37, finds no place in their hearts. And by extension, the same is true for all those who will not accept Jesus' words.

Who's the rider on the back? Verse 44. It is the devil, this created fallen angel, who Jesus describes here as a murderer from the beginning, who is the father of lies.

[8 : 14] Now, we've got to do a little bit of work here. When Jesus says, in the beginning, that should, in our minds, take us back to the opening play of the Bible story.

Right? Genesis 1 and 2. God speaks. Creation does his bidding. He creates the heavens and the earth. And this God, he speaks, this beautiful God, creation happens and he creates mankind.

He creates human beings. And this is who you are here today. Whatever you think of the God of the Bible, you are wonderfully made and dignified because you are made in his image.

All mankind, all life made in his image. And so there in the Bible story, Genesis 1 and 2, it culminates with Adam and Eve living in the Garden of Eden under God's good rule, enjoying his presence, enjoying what it is to be in relationship with him.

And then you hit Genesis 3. And another voice appears on the scene. And this voice simply says, and remember this for where it ends.

[9 : 25] Did God really say? Did God really say? Did God really say? Is he not out to ruin your fun?

Can you really trust that he knows best? Can you really know that he's got your best interests at heart? If I were you, I think you'd be better off going it alone.

I'll show you where true freedom is to be found. And in Genesis 3, this is what happens. That Adam and Eve, they take it. And what happens after that point?

What do Adam and Eve do in the story? What's the verb? What are they doing? They're hiding from God. Not because they found freedom.

Not because they don't want God to take what they have. That they found it. No, they hide because they're ashamed. The father of lies sells us.

[10 : 27] And here's clock it back into the open illustration. Sells us the dream of the win. The freedom is to be found over here. But in the end, and our sinful hearts want it.

In the end, it's all set up so that we'll lose. And here's the thing to see.

That lies and darkness will never deliver on their promise of freedom. They deliver not life and freedom.

They deliver death and God's judgment. And so Jesus is saying that sitting behind every anti-God stance in the human heart.

Every lie about his character. Every falsity about who he is. Stands the father of lies. I don't know if you knew this, but in 2016, the Oxford Dictionary word of the year was the word post-truth.

[11 : 35] Which is technically two words, but let's not split hairs here, okay? It's a word, and there's the definition that means that now emotional and personal beliefs are more influential in terms of how people live their lives and choose the things that they do over objective truth.

And so that's how truth is viewed in our world today. You hear phrases all the time, like, that is your truth. That is my truth. It's all relevant. It's all relative, rather.

Now listen, as Christians, we believe in truth, not just as a concept that God created the world with beauty and order to it.

We believe in truth as a person. Jesus said he is the light of the world. That was last week. And now he says here today that his word is truth.

And that truth is the thing that will set us free. And so there are two big equal signs that are flying right over this text. Okay? Here's the first one. It's that truth equals freedom.

[12 : 44] Right? Truth equals freedom. Jesus says, verse 35, and love this, If the Son sets you free, you are free indeed.

Right? A slave who's working in a house has got no right to set anyone free. No authority. No jurisdiction.

But it's different with a son. He has his father's authority. He holds the jurisdiction. And when he declares somebody free, when he says you are good to go, then that's a totally different story.

And so that is what Jesus is saying today. I guess this is like Aladdin. Aladdin, no fellow genie could free Aladdin. Right? No fellow genie could free the genie in Aladdin.

No, only the one, only the master, only the one in charge could. And Jesus is saying, my word is where freedom is found.

[13 : 52] Now let's just pause for a moment there and say, wow. Let me urge you to see what this is telling us. And I love this this week. It's telling us that if you are a follower of Jesus here today, then you are free.

You're not just free to have a relationship with Jesus, although that is absolutely true. No, your status, our status is now that we are united to Jesus.

He's made us his because we have had our eyes opened by his grace and are now adopted children of the Father.

And that's who you are here today if you trust us in Christ. That is who you are. And how has Jesus done that? He has done it through his death on the cross.

As he became sin for us. As he took the penalty that we deserved. As he made us his.

[14 : 57] As he shares his life with us. As our lives are caught up in him. And what has happened there, as a result, what has happened is that he has broken the chains.

He has broken the dominating chokehold that the father of lies and our sin has over us. Right? He has broken it. You see, friends, serving and worshipping God, we've got to understand this, was not on any of our radars before he got involved in our lives.

It just was not there. We just weren't interested. But now, because he got involved, that desire that we have inside of us to do his will, that shows us that we are his.

That is a sign of the Spirit's work and presence in us. The Spirit who helps us cry, Abba, Father.

And I don't think anyone gets this better than hymn writer Augustus Toplady, which you just have to say is the coolest name ever.

[16 : 11] And we sang this just a few moments ago. And he puts it like this in his hymn, Rock of Ages. And you probably skipped over this, didn't even think about it. I remember this line in the song, Hit Me With Fresh Power, a couple of years ago.

When I understood more clearly what Jesus has done. He says this, Let the water and the blood from thy wounded side which flowed be of sin.

And then see what he says, the double cure. Save me from its guilt and its power. I am free from the penalty of sin because what have Jesus done for me?

And I am now free to choose his will in a life of worship and obedience to him. He's broken the guilt and he's broken the power of sin in our lives.

It's the double cure. And I wonder whether some of us need to wonderfully recapture the sweet smelling aroma of that double cure. Because perhaps you're here today.

[17 : 15] Because perhaps you're here today and honestly your life, it feels really unspectacular. It feels really mundane. It feels really ordinary as you follow Jesus.

You think, no big deal here. And this passage would tell you the opposite is true. Particularly, I think, living in our world where many friends and family, peers and neighbours think that in all honesty.

That if you're a Christian, you're the one who's the slave. Right? With your limiting stance on sexuality and gender. With your dated views of when life begins and ends.

With your restricting belief that there's only one way to God. Constraints that you're putting on your life because you're looking at rules that are contained in this really ancient dated book.

And so if anyone's the slave, it's you. I mean, is that connecting with folks? In our world over the last couple of weeks where we've seen the protests for some of you guys, your students, protests at Edinburgh Uni.

[18 : 21] Where we saw stuff that's going on at the Stand Comedy Club this past week. Is this connecting? You need to hear, if that is you, Jesus say, my word is truth.

And if you are following it and if you are abiding in it, then that word has set you free. Friends, everyone's driven by someone.

And because that is true, everyone's living out something. And Jesus speaks, verse 31, to those who have believed him. Do you see that? Come with me to the text, verse 31.

He's speaking to those who had believed him. Isn't that interesting? That Jesus knows that their following of him is only surface level. That they claim his name and yet they bolt at the idea that he wants the total allegiance of our hearts.

And that they might need to change. No, they're like the proverbial cat that's playing with a ball of string and saying, I'm not going anywhere. I'm quite happy. And so verse 34, Jesus says, listen, everyone who practices sin.

[19 : 29] And I take it there. He just means everyone who lives in sin. Okay. This is just what you do. This is your life. You see nothing wrong with how your heart is before a holy God.

He says everyone who does that is a slave to sin. And the thing about that language is it's conveying to us the truth that we cannot free ourselves from it.

That is the natural direction of all of our hearts out with the grace of God. That our inclination is to run after our own glory. That will see us on that final day answerable to this holy God.

It's what we all do by very nature. We follow the pattern of our own hearts. We desire our own glory. But for the Christian, and this is where the Exodus imagery here is so powerful.

You have been freed. I mean, I'm reading that Exodus story in my own time in the evenings. And you get that impression in the early chapters that they've got no interest in freedom. They are grumbling. Oh, yeah, they're crying out to God.

[20 : 35] But I think they're quite happy where they are. But they have been freed. You have been freed. God has saved you. He has overcome your biggest enemy.

He has freed you. Not so, and this is true in the story of Israel, not so that you can wander aimlessly around in the desert. No, God said that I have saved you.

I have made you mine. I have saved you to live for me. I have saved you out of the self-obsessed wall of mirrors that your heart had built around itself.

I have saved you out of that. And I have saved you to a life of enjoying and knowing and seeking my glory. And our response in joy is to faithfully obey his words.

So that's what God had done to Israel. That is the pattern of the Christian life. You see, the nations of the world were meant to look in at Israel and say, What other nation has a God as good as that?

[21 : 37] What other nation has a God with laws as wonderful as that is to see Israel doing their God glorifying thing? And so we've got to see the same pattern then in what Jesus says.

To see it is the mark of the true disciple. The mark of the true disciple. And that's what we're all about here as a church. Disciple making disciples of Jesus Christ.

That word disciple there, think about it like this. Someone who is a lifelong learner of Jesus Christ. What is the mark, says Jesus?

The mark is that we abide in his word. And here's the second equal sign that's blazed all over this passage. The first one, do you remember?

Truth equals freedom. The second one for us is to see that disciples equals abiding. Some of us will remember that old English word.

[22 : 37] It's kind of a little bit out of fashion just now. That word abode. Do you remember it? It's how they speak in Downton Abbey, isn't it? Old Carson. Where somebody abodes. So when somebody says, where do you abode?

What are they asking? They're asking, where do you live? And Jesus is saying that the true disciple, the world will know that they are mine because they are living in.

They're living in my word. That's how you'll know. That's what you'll see. In the words of Mark Dever in his wonderful little book, Discipling, at the heart of Christianity is God's desire for a people to display his character.

And so the question for us corporately, the question for us individually as we respond to this is, are we abiding in his words?

Are we spending time in his word? Is he shaping the course and direction and thoughts and intentions of our hearts here?

[23 : 46] Are we making time in the busyness of life? And it was so wonderful to hear about the women's brunch a few weeks ago when you guys were thinking about that.

How can we carve out time in the busyness of life to seek the face of the Lord? Guys, are we making time for his word in our lives?

To hear his truth, the truth that will set us free. Now, two questions as we begin to wind this up this morning for us to think about. Some of us will be here today and we need to feel the challenge of this.

Some of us, we are hiding in the darkness and believing the lie. The devil whispering in your ear, did God really see?

Do you know what is safer in the darkness where nobody knows? Do you think, honestly, there's going to be life and light out with the darkness? We need to be a community where falsity and cover-ups and blind eyes are just not a thing.

[24 : 56] We need to be a community that doesn't let the darkness and the father of lies get a foothold in our relationships together. We need to be a community who puts up our hands and owns our mistakes.

That recognizes that reconciliation, that being one with one another, is such a wonderful and beautiful thing worth, really worth spiritually fighting for. There's a friend of mine that said to me recently, if you're only 10% responsible for the 100% of a fallout, or something that's not quite right with the individual, you are still 100% responsible for that 10%.

You've got to own it. You've got to go towards it. That life really is found in the light. We're willing to bear the pain and the consequences of going towards opening the can of worms because we fully believe in the power of Jesus' light and truth to bring transformation in a way that only the gospel can.

Light and truth. Do you know what we found the other day in our girls' outside playhouse? We found a wasp's nest. And I spotted it in the corner.

It was the thing just the size of a golf ball. And so I go in and I see it and I come back into the house and I say to Alex, there's a wasp's nest there. We really should do something about it.

[26 : 21] And in my mind, that would just go to Google and find out somebody who could come and take it away, okay? But what would have happened? They wouldn't have come out immediately. They would have come out in, what, a week's time or something like that and sorted it.

What would have happened to that wasp's nest the whole time? Would have grown? Yeah? Much bigger problem on our hands. Alex hears it.

She takes a different approach. She takes a pair of oven gloves or maybe they were gardening gloves. I can't remember. Out she goes, takes it, down it comes, stamps on it, dead. Right?

And I do know, I realize I come off the worse in that illustration. But do you see the point? When it comes to the light shining in the darkness, the truth having its effect over the lies.

Friends, what do we need to kill today? What do you need to kill? The father of lies, and this is so often what he does, he rings in our ears wedding bells, when the whole time it's alarm bells.

[27 : 22] What do we need to kill this morning? Where does the light need to penetrate? Feel the challenge of this passage, is what Jesus is saying here. And feel the comfort as well. You know, what's really helped me this week is to take a sticky note and put it on the front of my Bible, and all it says is the word freedom.

I find it so helpful this week, just coming to God's word every morning and reminding myself what it is that we're doing, reminding myself who I am, and reminding myself why his words, sticking here, abiding here, is the best thing that I can do with my day.

Everyone's driven by someone, and everyone's living out something. And so let me just close with this thought. It's this.

I remember Chloe, our first, our oldest girl, when she was really young, she had this wound, wind-up mouse train. Okay? And the two of us would just spend ages building this track and getting this thing going.

What would happen is I'd go out the room, and what she thought was hilarious, in a toddler's world of slapstick comedy, is to take that mouse off of the track and just let it run.

[28 : 44] Right? And so I'd come back into the living room, and I'd go hunting under the sofa for this thing, trying to find it and put it back. Now, you could argue that that mouse was free. That train was doing its thing.

In the words of Elsa, it's time to see what I can do to test the limits and break through. No right, no wrong, no rules. Or in the case of this, no tracks for me. I'm free. But where is that mouse going to flourish?

Where is that train going to do its thing? By being in the place that it was designed to be. And Jesus has saved us out of a life where we were dominated by our sin.

And where we lived our lives pursuing dead idols. And he saved us out of it and said, I've saved you for more than that. And he saved us to serve and love the living and true God.

And so as we put this into application this week, as we abide in his words, what we've got to understand as we lean and embrace the promise that Jesus makes to us today, is that that is life back on the tracks.

[29 : 53] So do you want to be free? Do you want to be free? Jesus said, if you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.

Then you will know the truth. And the truth will set you free. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray.

And so our loving Heavenly Father, Lord, I'm so conscious I never know where this lands. I never know what you are doing in people's lives.

But Father, thank you that your spirit is the one who searches and knows every single heart and mind. And so I just pray, I plead that he would be doing his work of shining the spotlight on Jesus, of convicting us and challenging us, also comforting us, and helping us celebrate the gospel.

Father, I pray that he would be at work right now. And I just thank you, Lord, in our world where we so often feel trapped, that there is a wonderful promise from the King of Kings that he makes to us that in his word is true freedom.

[31 : 24] So, Father, be with us as we finish our time together. And as we move now into a time of communion, Father, massage these truths home to our hearts, we pray.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.