

The I AM Who Will Make You Free – *John 8:30-59*

Introduction – What does it mean to be free? Part of that answer depends on what you are being freed from, or what you are kept from being enslaved to. Jesus is the greatest liberator in the world, but the world did not want to be free from what Jesus set out to free the world from. He came to free captive humanity from its bondage to sin, misery, and death. But sin's bondage is a bondage that permeates the heart, the will, and the affections, and therefore no one wants God's freedom. Someone from outside (or above) that enslaved human nature would have to come to deliver us from ourselves, our father, and our affections towards darkness. *"If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed."*

Overview of the Text - Following Jesus' discourse on the world above and the world beneath, and the warning that they must believe that He is I AM (vv21-29), John tells us that many *"believed in Him"* (v30). Remember, that verb can also be translated, *"committed to"* (2:23-24), and Jesus goes on to challenge that commitment (vv31ff). He continues to sift the wheat from true chaff, the true faith from the fickle faith. Their faith is fickle because they believe in their own righteousness first even as they say they will commit themselves to Jesus. Jesus tests them with the truth that those who abide in His Word will be made free which implies they are slaves and this offends the new band of believers (vv31-36). Jesus acknowledges that they are Abraham's descendants on the one hand (v37) and yet they are acting like their real father (v37ff). They don't believe Jesus' words and they do not do His works; they are not at all like Abraham (vv38-41). Questioning Jesus' lineage, they claim their Father is in fact God (v41b). Jesus says this is impossible for if God was their Father, they would love Him for He is from God the Father (v42). He says they do not understand because they cannot bear His Word (v43). And then we hear of the nature and desires of their father who is the devil (v44). He was a murderer and a liar from the beginning (vv44-45). Because Jesus speaks the truth, they cannot and will not listen, for they are not from God (vv46-47).

They again attack Jesus' argument with an *ad hominem* (v48), but Jesus will not take the bait. He seeks His Father's honor and glory and so does not care that they seek to dishonor Him (vv49-50). Again, His point and offer: *"if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death"* (v51). And refusing to seek to understand, they again attack His argument: How can you be greater than Father Abraham who is dead, along with all the prophets (v53). Who does Jesus think He is anyway (v53 – and you can clearly see what they do not believe)? Jesus answers that He will not seek His own honor, but He will speak the truth even if about Himself. He knows God and He knew Abraham who rejoiced to see Christ's day, saw it with faith and was glad (vv54-57). Jesus then plainly states that before Abraham even was, He was and is the self-existing "I AM," the transcendent Creator God (v58). These *"believers"* then picked up stones to throw at Him; Jesus hid Himself and left the temple (vv59).

Abiding Faith – The truth that shall make you free is the truth of persevering, abiding faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God (v31, 51). *"Our Lord here describes one of the marks of a genuine disciple of His. Continuance in His word is not a condition of discipleship, rather it is the manifestation of it"* – Pink. A tree is known by its fruit, it does not become that kind of tree by making fruit. And the blessed man is like a tree planted by the rivers of water, bringing forth fruit in its season (over time) and whose life is prosperous with that ongoing fruit (Psalm 1:3). He is a vine, well pruned, to produce more fruit (John 15:2). He grows up into maturity like a newborn learns to walk even though he is already a biped. He has plenty of questions, but he is no caviller, always disputing and quibbling, raising petty, annoying objections (1 Tim 6:3-5). Jesus is the great I AM; He is "God from God, Light from light, Very God from very God," and at His name every knee shall bow. This is where abiding faith rests.

Slaves of Sin – The truth that shall make you free is the truth that releases you from the bondage of sin and the total depravity of Adam's sinful race (v34). The man of the world does not imagine that he is in bondage to sin. How could he be? He is freely choosing his liberty from the law. What God calls sin, sinful man calls an expression of freedom. But why does man like His sin? Why does he love the darkness? The answer is that he is a sinner by nature; it is his natural course. *"The condition of the natural man is far, far worse than he imagines, and far worse than the average preacher...supposes"* (Pink). For instance, consider what the sexual revolution of the 60s has brought to our nation and culture? This so-called freedom has left us with higher rates of addiction, suicide, depression, broken families, incarcerations, murdered babies, confused and lost souls. Jesus has come to make us free, not only from our sin, from the power and guilt of sin, but from our love of sin.

Slaves, not Sons – The truth that shall make you free is the truth that places you in a new family (v35). There is another aspect of this idea of being a slave and that is how it contrasts with being a son, and this is why the conversation turns to "who is your father" (vv37-41). These Jews are descendants of Abraham in one sense, abiding in the house of God. But the fact that

they are seeking to rid themselves of Jesus proves they are not sons in the house, they are slaves. Their place in this house is only temporary. Only sons will abide in this house forever (v35) and there are some in this house who will soon be cast out. Who are the true sons of Abraham? Those with the faith of Abraham (Gal 3:26-29). Abraham was promised many descendants and blessings (Gen 22:17-18), and those promises came through the righteousness of faith (Rom 4:13). John the Baptist had already warned the Pharisees and Sadducees much earlier that being genetic descendants of Abraham would not save them (Matt 3:7-9). These Jews thought they lived in the Father's house as freemen with a right to the father's inheritance while they were in fact slaves doomed to being cast out like Ishmael, son of the bondwoman (Gal 4:30). Only through faith in Jesus Christ, the seed of Abraham, and our elder brother, are we brought into a new family and made coheirs with Christ.

Satan the Murderer – The truth that shall make you free is the truth that kills the murderous envying of the devil and your heart (v43-45). One of the lies that keeps us from freedom in Christ is the devil's twisting of God's good words and promises, "Has God indeed said..." (Gen 3:1). The devil is a murderer, and the first recorded murder is that of Abel by his brother, Cain (Gen 4). It is interesting to note the parallel of that story with what is going on with Jesus and the Jews. Cain cannot endure his sacrifice not being accepted while Abel's is accepted (Gen 4:3-7). God gives Cain a clear path to blessing, but Cain only can envy the favor the Lord has placed on Abel. That envy leads to hatred and hatred to murder. Likewise, the Jews will envy the Lord Jesus (Gen 27:18), handing Him over to be crucified. They hate the free grace and forgiveness Jesus is offering the prodigal son for they are that son's bitter brother. They hate the favor of the Lord over Jesus, and that hatred turns to murder. This is what envy does (James 3:14-16).

Consider the catechism of *cancel culture* today. What are we taught to hate more than anything else? Privilege. We are to hate the privilege others have – things that they have been given but have not earned. They get it because they are sons, and we aren't so we don't get it also. And that is not fair. Our land is cultivating a murderous hatred of privilege. They are stoking the flames of envy.

But Jesus came to kill your envy and to cause you to delight in Him and in His Father's delight over you. He has come to set you free. You are in fact privileged in Jesus Christ. You are of God because you hear God's words – and they do not (v47).

Humility that Will Not Lie – The truth that shall make you free is the truth that grants you the ability to have humble confidence in the truth (v32, 49-51, 54-59). Jesus is not trying to honor Himself (v54) but He will receive all honor from God, for He is I AM. Jesus will not lie about this (vv55-56, 58), and we must not either (Acts 4:12). It is not arrogant to speak the truth; it is humble confidence in the truth that sets free the hearts of fallen man.

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