

John 8:31-32

The Truth Will Set You Free

July 21, 2024

Main Point: In this passage, Jesus challenges “those who had believed in Him” to go all in, to surrender to His claim to be Truth. Jesus claims that Truth will set us free as we abide in Him. In a world full of lies, this is a precious gift. But like any precious gift, it is costly. It will cost you everything. And it will set you free.

SI: two verses, but give context by reading 8:12-47.

8:12 context – at the Feast of Booths or Feast of Tabernacles – a national end of year harvest celebration held in Jerusalem.

The Jews are eager to celebrate and maintain their received tradition. The status quo, especially their power, must be preserved. But Jesus makes these stupendous claims.

Intro:

Focus on vss. 31-32. “Jesus said to the Jews who believed in Him...”

Jesus says this to those ‘who had believed Him.’

Close to Him.

Seen Him.

Experienced Him.

Knew the Scriptures.

What does He want them, and us, to know? That the truth will set you free.

1 The Truth

The BeReal social media app

Came out in 2019, quickly became popular

You get a notification on your phone at a random time each day, and you take a photo of whatever is in front of you and whatever is behind you and you post it.

Supposed to be a way to escape the artificiality of a curated life on other social media platforms.

Social media without the social posturing.

Jonas Du tells the story of what happened on his college campus, and why the app is losing users and how many other social media apps with a similar desire to foster authenticity have failed.

His conclusion – nobody wants to be real.

Instead of posting the mundane pic of studying in the library or waiting in line at the grocery store, people started waiting until they were doing something they thought others would think is cool.

Be Real became Be Fake.

Because of our human condition to be prone to be better, prettier, or stronger than we actually are, we are susceptible to lies.

<https://www.thefp.com/p/nobody-wants-to-be-real>

And Jesus still says, the truth will set you free.

What truth?

Everyone makes truth claims, and every religion, every system of belief. Every human has a deep desire and even need to be right, to live with yourself.

This is why so often we hear someone say ‘my truth.’ It’s shorthand for ‘I feel secure in my belief.’ Doubling down on being right in one’s own eyes.

What if your truth, your narrative, your construct, is actually a lie? This is Jesus’ point in this whole dialogue.

So, Jesus makes these stupendous claims! He claims to be Truth, the Truth. And what this means is that everything else is counterfeit. Everything that goes against the Bible is counterfeit b/c Jesus has proven so through His Perfect Life, Atoning Death, Victorious Resurrection and Ascension.

Christians aren’t prideful about this, braggadocious about it, but gentle and kind b/c we know it’s not our job to convince people of the Truth.

But persuading is different than convincing. (which is one of the purposes of preaching) There are answers to all the attacks, as Jesus shows us here.

The Jewish leaders are incredulous – we have never been enslaved to anyone! So Jesus intensifies His claims with a truth that only He possesses. A freedom that only He can give.

“If you abide in My Word...”

Then

“you are truly My disciples.”

The Truth... will...

2Will – Promise & Challenge – here it is challenge –

The theme of Jesus’ preaching is to reach people with the message of redemption – freedom from the bondage of sin – and He consistently does this either through challenging people to accept their need to change, or by embracing people in their vulnerability such as when He says “come to Me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28)

Here, Jesus is full on challenging the spiritual authorities in Israel to see who He is and submit and surrender to Jesus' authority. His claim – He is Truth & His Truth WILL:

This promise requires belief, receiving, and action

You can only receive what you are open to receiving. If you are hardened in your own opinion, and especially if you are sure and certain of your own rightness, then you are not open to receiving. We need to hear and remember the many stories of genuine conversion only after significant brokenness, failure, and self-reformation efforts that have gone bad –

Two stories of the promise here fulfilled

John Newton - ... “how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me...”

Long and wonderful and terrible story of John Newton's conversion

He resolved over and over again to do better. He would go through intense suffering or a near-death experience as a sailor and solemnly vow to get religion and clean up his life. But it never stuck. He took on the appearance of a zealous Christian, but it wasn't heart change, root change, true conversion, until it was.

“At length the Lord, whose mercies are infinite...interposed to save me. He visited me with a violent fever, which broke the fatal chain, and once more brought me to myself. But, oh, what a prospect! I thought myself now summoned away. My past dangers and deliverances, my earnest prayers in the time of trouble, my solemn vows before the Lord at His table, and my ungrateful returns for all His goodness were all present to my mind at once. ...For a little while, I concluded the door of hope to be quite shut; but this continued not long. ...I dared make no more resolves, but cast myself before the Lord, to do with me as he should please. ... I was enabled to hope and believe in a crucified Savior.” (from *Beyond Amazing Grace*, J.Todd Murray, pp. 30-37)

Then closer to us, story of Alice Lewallen:

Long time Christian

Grew up in the church

Attended a well-known Christian college

In her mid-30s 'tired of trying to be good'

In a Bible study with several patient Christians

Went to talk with a pastor of a friend...

Told pastor, “I don't want to be seen a fool” – heard herself say this... her reputation and her history of religious activity had to die. She had to do what Jesus is pointing to here for the Jewish leaders to do – give up, surrender, abandon completely their own religious self-reformation efforts and historical pedigree and be set free.

Caused some consternation among the leadership of her church
She held her ground – she had been religious and dutiful, but not a Christian.

Many in our southern church-ianity culture have had a religious experience but have they been saved? Are they truly abiding with, walking with the Lord or are they faking themselves out?

Trans to 3: This promise is like no other. One Man is claiming to deliver on His own ‘if, then’ statement. This promise that if we hold to Jesus’ words, if we abide in, remain in, persevere in, seek to understand more and more, find His Word more and more precious to us and controlling of us, then we will be set free.

3 Set You Free

song by Gable Price and Jon Foreman, “How it Sets You Free” as inspiration for this sermon – cheery, pop-rock song, and then it says this:

“They say the truth will set you free. Maybe, possibly. But not before it rips your chest out, and not before it puts your back against the wall. The truth might set you free, but first its gonna set fire to your house, it takes what you’ve been trusting, breaks it down to nothing at all...”

Free From bondage – free from our bondage to our resistance to grace.

This is how the Truth of Jesus works – once you are freed from resistance to grace as evidenced by our self-reformation, self-help efforts, then and only then are we free to abide in Jesus and His Word.

Jesus is pointing to the necessity of surrender.

And as many of you know, this is ongoing surrender, not a one-time surrender. Because the substitutes for truth are innumerable. The counterfeits keep coming. Those of you children and youth who participated in **WACK** this summer – our hearts are factories that produce idols – things we rely on other than God to numb the pain or give us a temporary high.

No hiding here the fact that it is painful. It’s heart replacement surgery. And then the ongoing Christian life is both mortification and vivification – putting to death and bringing to life. I wish we talked about this more so that when the deaths come they aren’t so unexpected, so deeply painful. But this is the way it has to be bc of our human stubbornness and pride that has to be rooted out in order to set us free. And true Christians are those who welcome the pain b/c of the promise – it will set us free.

Rosaria Butterfield wrote a powerful memoir about coming out of a lesbian background and becoming a Christian. At the beginning of the book she writes, “In the pages that follow, I share what happened in my private world through what Christians politely call conversion. This word—conversion—is simply too tame and too refined to capture the train wreck that I experienced in coming face-to-face with the living God.” (*The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert.*)

ILLUS of when I was confronted about something that was pretty small, but I bowed up, I didn't like it bc I knew correction was coming, reformation, disruption to the status quo of the way I had been acting. And this person was right, but I didn't want to hear it or receive it. I was proud, defensive, and in the process of hardening my heart. Do you see how important a soft heart is? A heart willing to hear. Why? B/c Jesus is your friend, and pride comes before a fall. And He took the fall for you, if you can take it in. And nothing else can atone for your sin, especially not your own efforts.

Now we are getting to the core of this whole phrase - “the truth will set you free” set us free from our resistance to grace. Our flesh is so strong that we bow up, we rebel, we resist being needy b/c it is so vulnerable. We want to pay for some part, at least. God, isn't there something I can give you for this gift? Isn't there something I can take credit for? Nope. Nothing in my hands I bring. As soon as you try to bring something, you forfeit the grace that is yours by gift alone.

How do you know if you are free?

What happens when you get challenged? After the initial bowing up and defensiveness, do you come to your senses or do you stay entrenched?

How open are you to receiving correction?

What are your trophies of grace stories? Your stones of remembrance? Your boasting in your weaknesses so that God's grace is magnified?

How much talking do you do versus how much listening?

What do you talk about God freeing you from? Do those closest to you know? Do they know that you were a dead man walking b/c of your bondage to a sin or a pattern of behavior that was harmful and you saw it, you finally saw it and you now are walking in ongoing repentance and faith?

Does your heart leap at this line of questioning, or does it get angry? Let the truth set you free, even as it rips your chest out and puts your back against the wall. Jesus means for you to be free, and if Christ sets you free, you are free indeed.

Conc:

What do you need reminding of again and again? That we must surrender any and all and every attempt at self-reformation. That grace alone is what will lead us home. That anything good in us is gift from God who loves us and gives us eyes to see our need for Him and hearts to depend upon Him more than we ever thought we could or needed to. That without abiding in Jesus we are nothing. That abiding in Jesus and His Word is the hardest and most wonderful thing we will ever do.

That Jesus is Truth and His Truth protects, sets free, and keeps us free. Free from what? Free from resisting grace. Free from evil, deceit, lies, untruth, spin and man-centered insatiable greed for power. Free to trust His power. Ah, doesn't this sound wonderful, like you long for this to be true? It is.

Bene: Now to Him Who is Able...