

How to Be Free
John 8:21-36
February 15th, 2026

1. _____ in Christ (8:21-30)

2. _____ in His Word (8:31-32)

3. _____ Your Slavery (8:33-36)

Questions for Discussion/Reflection on John 8:21-36

1. Can you think of other examples in which someone might people use the quote from John 8:32 that doesn't really fit the context of John 8?
2. What does Jesus mean when He repeatedly tells people that where He is going, they cannot come? (8:21; 7:33-36) What does He repeat and what does He say that is different for His disciples? (13:31-14:6)
3. In 8:30 many are said to "believe" in Jesus. What evidence do you see in the verses that follow that calls into question the sincerity of the faith of at least some of those who "believe"? See 8:31, 34, 37, 44, 55, and 59
4. What are some reasons why someone might identify as a Christian but fail to continue in His word over time? (8:31; Mt. 13:3-9, 18-23) Why is continuing essential for a disciple?
5. In its proper context, what does Jesus mean by the famous quote in 8:32?
 - a. What is necessary for us to know the truth?
 - b. How does that set us free?
 - c. From what does it set us free?
6. Why do you think the Jews denied ever being enslaved in v. 33? Do you think they were unaware of their history, defined slavery differently, or something else?
7. Compare John 8:34 and Romans 6 (or selected verses out of Romans 6 – verses 5-7, 12-14, 16-18). What does it mean to be a slave of sin? How do people practically experience that slavery without even realizing it?

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Big idea: The truth about Jesus brings true freedom from sin.

Intro:

One of the most famous quotes from Jesus comes from this section: “You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” It is inscribed in granite above the entrances to libraries and government buildings.

Miami University in Ohio above the arch in Upham hall (pic)

At the University of Freiburg in Germany (pic)

In the Central Intelligence Agency Original Headquarters building (pic)

People resonate with this truism that we don’t need to fear truth but truth is good and truth makes us free.

Free from ignorance, free from tyranny, free from deception

But what did Jesus actually mean when He said this? Was He thinking of college libraries and government spy agencies? Was He thinking of the value of higher education on developing human capital? Education is a rich blessing and Christians have been at the forefront of education historically, but is that what He meant? Or is there a different kind of freedom in mind?

What we learn is that there are people in slavery who don’t realize they are in slavery. And Jesus offers real freedom. How can we be free?

1. **Believe** in Christ (8:21-30)

- a. Debates about the identity of Jesus are still in the background
 - i. He gives living water to those who believe in Him (7:37)
 - ii. He is the light of the world (8:12)
 - iii. As I summarized a couple weeks ago
 1. He is fully God, fully man, fully good, fully sufficient to save
- b. He will go away (v. 21)
 - i. Death on the cross, the means by which He goes to the Father after His resurrection
 - ii. They will seek him – meaning, they will continue to look for their messiah but they will not find Him because they have rejected the Messiah.
 - iii. When they lift him up (v. 28) on the cross, they will know that He is – it will be the clearest and fullest revelation of the Messiah.
 1. That is what is meant by the predictive words of Isaiah 53
 2. **Isaiah 53:4** Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted.
 - iv. Many would of course still reject Him even then but His glory will be revealed as the suffering servant of Isaiah.
 - v. They will die in their sin
 1. Notice it is singular in v. 21 – sin not sins
 2. – singular – the particular sin of unbelief

- c. They cannot come where he is going
 - i. Once again they misunderstand Him
 - 1. 7:33ff He said the same thing and they wondered if He was going to the Greeks
 - 2. 8:22 they wonder if He is talking about suicide.
 - ii. He is going to the Father – but they are rejecting Him and therefore rejecting the Father – He is the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father except through Him – so they cannot come if they persist in unbelief.
 - iii. Contrast with His disciples in ch 13 and 14
 - iv. **John 13:33** "Little children, I am with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, now I also say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.'
 - v. **John 13:36** Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, where are You going?" Jesus answered, "Where I go, you cannot follow Me now; **but you will follow later.**"
 - vi. **John 14:1-3** "Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. ² "In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. ³ "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, *there* you may be also.
- d. Contrast between Him and His opponents
 - i. Jesus is from above, they are from below (v. 23)
 - ii. They are from this world, he is not from this world (v. 23)
 - iii. Where he goes, they cannot come (v. 21)
 - iv. God is his father, the devil is theirs (vv. 26-27, 41-44, 54-55)
 - v. Not a contrast between spiritual and material but between Himself and His rebellious creation.
 - vi. Therefore they will die in their sins unless they believe "that I am He."
 - 1. We'll come back to this next week because He continues to use this language about Himself.
 - 2. In this verse it could just be that they need to believe that He is who He has been telling them that He is. But as it continues to be used it seems to at least hint and echo the language of God in Exodus 3 who names Himself "I am who I am."
- e. The correct response is to believe, and many do believe in v. 30
 - i. Freedom starts with seeing reality as it is, which means seeing our problem of sins (plural) but especially sin (singular) of unbelief in our Creator God and the One He sent to rescue us.

2. **Continue** in His Word (8:31-32)

- a. Jesus says to those who believed – if you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of mine.
 - i. The target audience of this section are those who say they believe.
 - ii. We have learned in John already that there is a difference between spurious, fleeting, superficial belief and true, deep, saving belief.
 - 1. 2:23ff – many believed but Jesus was not entrusting (same word) himself to them because He knew what was in man.

2. Ch 6 – many who “believed” walked away because of hard teaching

b. If it isn't just saying they believe that shows them to be His disciples, what is it?

i. Continuing in His word

1. *Meno* Abide, remain, hold on to, it can literally mean to live in or dwell in; to keep on; to last, to endure
2. His Word fills us up, we let it confront us. When we are confronted, we don't change the word or the meaning or ignore it, we seek to conform our lives and our thinking to the Word. (adapted from Carter)
3. It's not the momentary excitement of a 100 meter sprint but the steady plodding of a marathon runner.
4. It's following Christ through the joy of newfound faith, and the pain of disappointment and heartache. Through singleness and marriage, and the ups and downs that come with each. Through infertility and new parent and toddler/baby and teens and empty nest. Through the loss of a spouse and deterioration of our own bodies.
5. A disciple – a learner – of Jesus *continues* in His word.
6. **Hebrews 3:14** For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end,
7. As saw in John 6:39 "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing,
 - a. From God's perspective, this looks like Him holding us, keeping us, losing none of us who have trusted in Christ because we have been given from the Father to the Son.
 - b. From our perspective, this looks like continuing, remaining, abiding and therefore demonstrating ourselves to truly be His disciples.

ii. *Then* you will know the truth

1. Carson – we come to know the truth, not simply by intellectual assessment, but by moral commitment.
2. Endurance, continuing, abiding, remaining in His word over time brings the knowledge of the truth.
3. Moody: It is clear from Jesus' statement that truth is not merely intellectual. To know the truth requires a commitment to the Person of truth: to Jesus himself.
4. If we want to know truth, we find it through continuing in His word over time.
5. We can and we should read broadly and learn in all sorts of disciplines and from all sorts of people. We're image bearers of God and developing our minds is a stewardship. However, as disciples of Christ we keep comparing what we learn to the Word. We visit other books but we live in the Bible.

iii. And the truth will make you free

1. It's not the truth about physics or calculus – although it's a common grace blessing to know more about how God's world works.

2. It's not the truth about corruption in the government – although we want to live in a transparent and honest society.
3. It's truth about Jesus, truth from His word, truth embraced and truth held on to.
- iv. But what does it actually make us free from?
 1. To be free we need to understand what we are enslaved to and made free *from*.

3. **Recognize** Your Slavery (8:33-36)

- a. They object, citing their ancestry and history.
 - i. It could be that they are woefully uninformed about their own history.
 - ii. There was scarcely a major power whom the Jews had not served: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Greece, Syria, and Rome. (Carson)
 - iii. But more likely they were thinking of spiritual freedom and privilege – we've always been free by our knowledge of the true and living God as revealed to the Jewish people in the law.
- b. Everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin.
 - i. Everyone – broad, universal
 - ii. Commits sin – all have sinned (Rom. 3:23), there is no man who does not sin (1 Kings 8:46)
 - iii. Is the slave of sin – slavery not to a person or to a political system but to sin itself.
 - iv. It's easy to see this with a sin that we put in the category of addiction – alcohol abuse, marijuana, pornography use.
 1. Sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay.
 - v. But this is a much broader statement – anyone who commits sin is a slave of sin.
 1. They have a master – and that master is sin – that master is their own sinful desires.
- c. I think people may respond to that the same way Jesus' Jewish opponents responded, "What? I've never been a slave, let alone a slave to sin."
 - i. "I do what I want!"
 1. First, what do you want? Is it sin? Is it ultimately self-focused? If so, are you free?
 2. Second, are you sure you do what you want? How often do you want to control your speech, but don't; do you want to close the computer or put away your phone, but you don't; do you want to stop drinking, but you don't?
- d. The experience of a slave and a son are radically different – the son is permanent, secure, stable.
 - i. They knew slavery in the Roman world – in the best scenario it was temporary, more like indentured servitude – in the worst scenarios it was marked by mistreatment and injustice. It was not like being a son.
 - ii. But THE Son (Jesus) can set the slave free.
 - iii. This is another famous and beloved quote of Jesus, "If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed."
 1. Free from what – sin!
 2. He takes away the penalty of sin but He also breaks the enslaving power of sin.

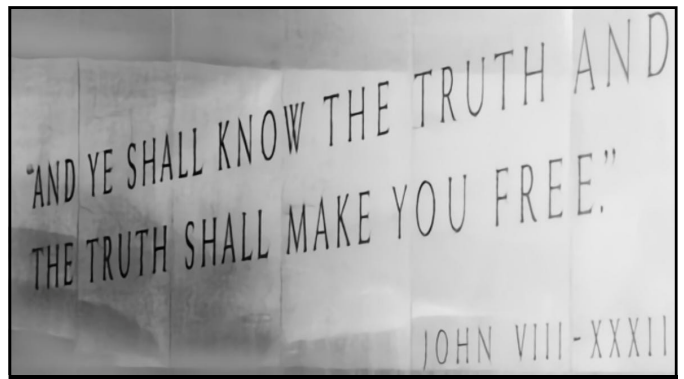
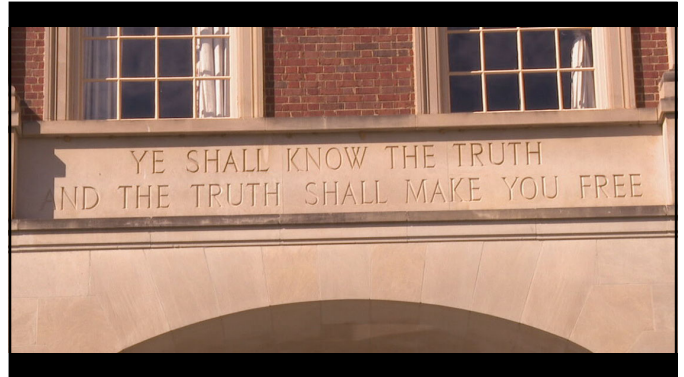
- e. DA Carson: True freedom is not the liberty to do anything we please, but the liberty to do what we ought; and it is genuine liberty because doing what we ought now pleases us.
- f. Romans 6 warns us that even though we have been set free from sin, we can return to it and place ourselves under its slavery again.
 - i. **Romans 6:12** Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts,
 - ii. **Romans 6:14-15** For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace. ¹⁵ What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be!

4. Conclusion

- a. The application is right there in the outline, but I'll reverse it for logical order:
 - i. Recognize that apart from the work of Jesus, you're a slave to sin.
 - ii. Believe in Christ.
 - iii. Continue in His word as a disciple.

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John 13:36 Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, where are You going?" Jesus answered, "Where I go, you cannot follow Me now; but you will follow later."

John 14:1-3 "Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. ² "In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. ³ "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, *there* you may be also.

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