

The Word Became Flesh | False Freedom

Fairview Missionary Church | Angola, IN

Scripture: John 8:31-59

Speaker: Joel Greenwood

August 27, 2023

So this morning is we jump back into our series called the word became flesh as we've been working through the book, the Gospel of John over the last 6 years on and off, mostly off, but sometimes on. We're going to jump back in and I want to ask the question as we look at the Texas morning. What does it mean to be free? We use this word often in our culture. Definitely in America, we talk about what freedom means. And this question has been answered differently throughout history.

It's certainly has meant to not being a slave to anyone due to war or skin color or debt or anything else. In our context in America, many of us define freedom as the ability to do whatever we want whenever we want. However we want, as long as we aren't violating the rights or freedoms of somebody else. And so living in America, we define freedom as the ability to make our own choices. It certainly can mean a nation that's gaining independence from another nation as we celebrate our freedom.

Freedom by its very definition is the power to act or speak or think as one wants without hindrance or restraints. But I want to ask a deeper question this morning. What does true freedom look like? Is it really just when you get your driver's license and now you can kind of go wherever you want whenever you want without you know your parents having to drive you around? Is it truly just living in America and having constitutional rights?

Is it paying off your mortgage and finally owing nothing to anyone? Maybe it looks like being retired and you no longer have to go to work another day in your life. Is that what true freedom really is? In John chapter 8, today, Jesus is going to share with us what true freedom actually looks like. This is going to be one of my shortest introductions to a message ever because this is already our third week in John chapter 8, and we've only made it to verse 30.

And so if I don't want to keep this message going on a lot further, we're just going to have to go into it, all right? So if you have your bibles, open to John chapter 8 31, John, chapter 8 31, let me pray, and then we will set the scene again and jump back into the story. How many father I pray that you would speak to us that you would draw us close? As you answer the question, what is true freedom? How can we experience it?

What does life look like living in true freedom? As always, I pray that your heart your spirit would speak to our hearts. And that you would receive the praise. We ask this in Jesus name, amen. Okay, so the setting in John chapter 8, since I wasn't here last week, for those that are following along in the message in John chapter 8, we are at the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Now, this is a picture of the model of what Jerusalem would have looked like in the first century AD.

If you ever have the chance to go to Israel, you can kind of see this reconstruction of what the city would have looked like. It's on a small scale, but it gives you an image in your mind. The temple was set apart. It was on the mount there. So it was on the highest point with a huge courtyard where all of these Jews would gather, and there would be celebrations that would take place here. Festivals that would take place, as they would celebrate and remember God's faithfulness to them as a people.

So here we are at the last festival of the Jewish calendar, and it's known as the festival of tabernacles or the festival of booths. And this is when the Israelites would go to the temple, and they would thank God for his

provision. In two ways, one in their history, specifically when God led the Israelites out of Egypt, and they had the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. And God provided for them.

That's why this is called the festival of tabernacles because they all build leafy structures and will live in them, almost like camping, remembering what it was like when they were leaving Egypt and living in the wilderness. The second part of this festival was celebrating God's provision as they would bring in the final harvest of the year. And so they were thanking God for his provision for providing for them. And so here they are at this celebration.

If you were a Jewish person and you had the means possible, you were supposed to go to Jerusalem during this time. So many theologians historians believe there would have been over a million people that would have been there. This year, in John chapter 8, during this festival, things are a little different because there's these rumors that are spreading. There's some turmoil that's taking place about this man named Jesus. This is not his first festival that he's been at.

His ministry has been going on for multiple years now. And so the rumors of who he is, what he's been doing have been kind of working their way through the land, he's been performing miracles, the people are excited about him, but the religious leaders have not endorsed him yet. And so there's a lot of question. What are we supposed to think about this man, Jesus? We've seen the miracles with our own eyes.

We've heard his teaching, but the religious leaders haven't endorsed him because Jesus has been a little rogue. A little cavalier, because he doesn't follow all of the Jewish religious laws that have been established by the Pharisees. Let me just give you one example that he wasn't following the Jewish laws. When Jesus was performing some of these miracles, some of these healings, it was taking place on the Sabbath. And the religious leaders said that healing on the Sabbath is work. How would you like that?

You can't heal on the Sabbath. And so Jesus was actually healing people on the Sabbath. And so these religious leaders said, how can he be the messiah? The one that we've been waiting for, if he doesn't even follow these rules that we have set up, that we have tried to establish. And so they say he can't be the messiah, but all of the people want him to be the messiah. They want him to be the Christ, the one that they have been waiting for because they're all sick of living in Roman bondage.

They are enslaved by the Romans at this time living in their own land feeling like slaves. But he's not doing what everybody wants the messiah to do, or at least what they thought the messiah should do, which was be a military leader and conquer Rome and free Israel and be the next king of Israel. Jesus has just finished a conversation in John chapter 8 with the Pharisees and the religious leaders, and he's kind of called them out on what they are believing, and he has made the personal claim that Jesus says, I am the great I am.

He has now made the public claim that he is God. Of course, the Pharisees didn't take this well, but according to John, as we finished, John chapter 8 in verse 30, even as he spoke, John says, many put their faith in him. So many people believed that he was the great I am, and this is now who Jesus is going to talk to as we begin in verse 31. He is speaking to those who have put their faith in him.

Ready? John 8 31. To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, if you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Now, it is important for us because there's going to be times as we continue this morning that you're going to go, was Jesus really talking to those who believed him? And the answer is yes. We have it here. So for this whole next section, Jesus is speaking to the Jews who believed in him, because you're going to want to do what I did, you're going to want to go back because it's going to seem like he's not talking to people that believe in him.

It's going to seem like he's trying to defend himself or he's speaking to people that don't believe. So this leads to my first principle that I will continue to unpack for the rest of this morning and that principle is this. It is possible to believe in Jesus, but not be his disciple. It is possible to believe in Jesus, but not be his disciple.

Now, for some of you, hopefully that made a red flag go off in your mind and say, well, wait a second, pastor. What are you talking about?

In John, chapter three 16, we know this first for God so loved the world that he gave us one and only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life. But what does that word believe mean? If you believe in him, it is possible to believe in Jesus, but not be his disciple. Let me unpack this. One of the most difficult questions that I am asked in my position as a pastor is when somebody contacts me, a family member, the funeral home contacts me and says, hey, they're someone has passed away.

It's a family member of somebody in your congregation, and they want you to do the funeral. And so I meet with the family, and we begin to discuss what the service is going to look like. And in the midst of those conversations, often, somebody from the family will say pastor, I have a question for you. My mother, my father, my brother, you know, whoever it is, they believed in Jesus. They were a good person. They weren't perfect, but they were a good person, and they believed in Jesus. Are they in heaven? You want to talk about a difficult question to answer in the moment, right?

I mean, who wants to tell somebody that just lost a loved one? No, I don't think your family member is in heaven, right? How many times do you think I've done that? Zero. It's not the time nor the place to say that. But when I was first a pastor, I felt obligated to answer that question. I wanted to be able to give them some assurance that yes, their family member is in heaven. So I felt like I had to be a detective. And so I would start asking a bunch of questions. Like, well, do they go to church? They read their Bible.

Did they seem like they followed Jesus? Did they not follow Jesus? I would do all of this to try to answer their question. So that I could give them assurance, yes, your family member is in heaven. It took me a while in my ministry career to realize I don't have to answer that question because I'm not God. I don't have to answer that question. It is God who sees the heart. It is God who is the one who is going to judge. And I can't make that assessment from a human standpoint.

But it is very clear that there is a difference between believing in Jesus and holding to his teachings. He said, if you hold to my teachings, you are my disciple. If you hold to my teachings, that's more than just believing in him. I think that Jesus meant more here than just the red letters in your Bible, right? The words of Jesus. I think he meant the entirety of scripture.

Now, even as we talk about this, being obedient to those teachings, holding to his teachings, I don't want you to see this as a work reward relationship. I don't want you to see this as a, oh, well, I have to do this and I have to read my Bible and I have to pray and I have to give and I have to do all of these things. And then I will be saved. It's not a work reward relationship. Instead, I want you to see it as a cause and effect relationship.

In other words, what Jesus is saying here is if you believe in me, if you truly have proclaimed me as your lord and savior, if you are my disciple, then you naturally are going to obey my teachings. Because we read in our scripture reading this morning that you are saved by grace through faith, not by works so that no one can boast. This is not a works based gospel that we have to do all of these things.

You are saved by faith, but the natural outcome of being a disciple or follower of Jesus is that you are going to obey his commands and want to obey his commands. So what are these teachings that Jesus is talking about? Now, there's a lot of them, but let's just look at one of these that would be an example. The idea of scripture reading, reading scripture. If you are a disciple of Jesus, you are going to read his word. You're going to read the Bible. You just will.

I'm not telling you how much you have to read it, how long you have to read it, or where the line is between your disciple or your not a disciple. But if you are a disciple of Jesus, you naturally are going to want to read his word. You're going to want to understand it. You're going to want to study it. You're going to want to know more because a disciple of Jesus is going to want to spend time with him and follow him. Think about a

disciple during the New Testament times when there was a priest that you wanted to follow and they had disciples that would go under them.

They would give up everything in order to follow him. They would sacrifice everything so that they could walk with him and live with him and spend time with him. This is what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. You just naturally are going to want to build your relationship with him. And so I ask you the question, are you a disciple of Jesus, or do you just believe he exists? Because there's a huge difference. Are you a disciple or do you believe he just exists?

Let's go on to verse 32. Jesus said, if you obey my teachings, you are my disciple. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free. This is an interesting statement in our world today, especially in my generation and probably the generations after me a little bit, because many people in my generation don't believe in what we call absolute truth. That there is something that is true no matter when or where or how it's just true all the time, and it's always been true.

Here, Jesus is saying, if you know the truth, the truth will set you free. John is making the claim Jesus is making this claim that there is absolute truth. And there is a way to know truth that is true no matter what anyone else says or believes, it is just true because it's true. And that truth is that Jesus is God and he has conquered sin and death. Jesus in the Gospel of John will say, I am the way the truth.

And the life. And you will know the truth and the truth will set you free. You see, this freedom that comes only through Jesus Christ is far greater than any freedom this world has to offer. This truth that Jesus is talking about himself is the truth that will truly set you free so that you no longer will be a slave to sin.

Jesus is going to go on in this conversation to bring that out a little more that we all are slaves to sin and the only way that we can conquer that is through Jesus Christ. You see, there are so many people in our world today who think they are free, but daily they're living in bondage. They live in a free country with endless possibilities for a better life, but yet they are controlled by sin.

And these individuals that I talk with that I meet with, they can not break free, no matter how hard they try. Because they're unwilling to submit to Jesus. This slavery takes on many forms. We all have our own vices or things that we struggle with or are the ways that the enemy tries to attack us, things that can enslave us to sin, things like alcohol addiction, sexual addiction, monetary addiction, the desire to accumulate more and more, the desire for fame and popularity to be known in this world.

Food addiction even religious addiction, I have encountered people who are not a disciple of Jesus that are addicted to religion. And what that can do for them, drug addiction, again, you name it, we all have our vices, but these individuals can go years, decades even, believing they are free when in reality, they are constantly living in chains.

Jesus said, if you hold to my teachings, you will know the truth. And the truth will set you free. And I told you we had to finish John chapter 8, and I've only done two verses so far. So we're going to go through the rest fairly quickly here, all right? Verse 33. They answered him. Jesus, we are Abraham's descendants. And we have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?

I stop here just quickly to mention a few things. Isn't it true? That we are often blind to the slavery we are in. I mean, how is it even possible for these Israelites to stand before Jesus and say, we've never been a slave to anyone? Do they not know their own history? They've been a slave to everyone. I mean, even just worldly speaking, and at the time they make this statement, they're enslaved to the Romans.

They're in bondage to the Romans. How can they make the statement? No, we're not slaves. What are you talking about? Don't we do the same things? Again, if you've ever been to an AA meeting or an NA meeting,

the very first step to getting help is admitting you have a problem. That's the first step of our Salvation as well. Admit your need for a savior, I have a problem. I am a sinner. I am enslaved to sin. I can't stop.

And yet, they will look at Jesus and say, we're not slaves. So he goes on to make it a little more clear. Jesus replied in verse 34. Very truly, I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now, a slave Jesus said, had no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to the family forever. So if the son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

For I know that you are Abraham's descendants, yet you are looking for a way to kill me because you have no room for my word. I am telling you, Jesus says, what I have seen in the father's presence and you are doing what you have heard from your father. Jesus just makes the statement. The true statement, you're a slave to sin. I'm not talking about other human beings or nations. I'm talking about you are enslaved to sin, but the son can set you free.

He goes on in versus 39 through 41. They answered him. But Abraham is our father. If you were Abraham's children, said Jesus, then you would do what Abraham did. But as it is, you are looking for a way to kill me. A man who has told you the truth that I heard from God, Abraham, who you claim is your father, did not do such things. You are doing the works of your own father, we are not illegitimate children.

They protested. The only father we have is God himself. Jesus is letting these Jewish people, these Israelite people know, listen, there is a difference between your family through blood and your family through faith. You keep talking about your family through blood. I understand that Abraham is your earthly father. He's, you know, you all came from Abraham. He's kind of the father of your entire nation and generation and faith and everything else. I get all of that.

But I'm not talking about Abraham as your earthly father. I'm talking about spiritual things. Spiritual matters. You may be family by blood, but you are still enslaved because of sin. You need to overcome your sin. They claim the only father we have is God himself. Jesus says they're doing the work of their father. So who is he referring to? He's going to make it clear. Jesus said to them, if God were actually your father, you would love me for I have come here from God.

I have not come on my own, God sent me. Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. Can you hear the frustration, the pain? As Jesus is trying to have a conversation with these people who believed him. And yet now they're arguing with him, why is it not clear to you? It's because you're unable to hear what I say. For you belong to your father, the devil. Everybody wants to hear that, right? You can imagine that didn't go over very well.

These are the people that said they believed him. And he's saying, no, your father, the devil, you simply want to carry out your father's desires for he was a murderer from the beginning. Not holding to the truth. For there is no truth in him for when he lies, he speaks his native language for he is a liar and the father of lies. Now, this verse in and of itself could be a whole message. About the enemy of our soul. His native language is lying.

He can not speak the truth. So if you and I are able to interpret, when we hear the voice of God versus the voice of the enemy, we always can know what truth is. Because if it's the voice of God, he speaks only in truth, he is unable to lie. And if we know that it's the voice of the enemy, he only can lie, so the opposite of what he says is truth. Jesus said, I am the way the truth and the life.

The enemy only speaks lies. Yet because I tell the truth, Jesus said to them, you do not believe me. Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you just simply believe me? For whoever belongs to God, here's what God says. But the reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God.

It is possible to believe Jesus existed, but not be. A disciple. They are going to go on here. And try to hurt him even more. Because now he has made the claim to them your father is the devil. They don't take well to that. So they respond and verse 48. The Jews answered him.

Aren't we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon possessed? Aren't we good at this as human beings? When somebody points out a fault in our own life, what do we do? Well, what about you? What about you? You're not perfect either. You have mistakes too. And so Jesus points out, you know what? Your father really is Satan. You're believing what he says. You're following his commands and their first response is, yeah, well, you're a Samaritan in your demon possessed. What does it mean when they're calling him a Samaritan? He's having this conversation about who his father is, and they're thinking, your father, we know who your mom is.

She's married. And we've heard the rumors and the stories of this virgin birth, but we don't buy the virgin birth. We think that Mary just went off and, you know, cheated on Joseph and so you were this illegitimate child. You're a Samaritan because Mary was Jewish, but whoever your real father is, he's not, which makes you a half breed. Jesus is pointing out truth to them. And instead of receiving that, they're just throwing barbs back. And we do the same thing.

We are so easily offended. When somebody we love brings something to our attention, it says, you know what? Maybe we need to work on this a little bit. We say, I don't have a problem. You have a problem. We're just following in the footsteps of others. We go on in verse 49. I am not possessed by a demon, said Jesus. But I honor my father and you dishonor me.

I am not seeking glory for myself, but there is one who seeks it and he is the judge. Very truly I tell you whoever obeys my word will never see death. At this, they exclaimed, now we know that you are demon possessed. For even Abraham, the father of our faith died, and so did all of the prophets, yet you have the gumption to say that whoever obeys your word will never taste death, are you greater than our father, Abraham?

He died and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are? Does anybody ever use that phrase? Come on, be honest in your life. When somebody tells something to you and you just say, who do you think you are trying to tell me that? Jesus, of course, here was referring to the second death, which is much worse than the first death. He's not talking about physical death. He's talking about spiritual death. And the second death, your spiritual death is much worse than your first death, and they completely missed it.

He wasn't talking about physical. He was more concerned about spiritual. He goes on in versus 54 through 59. Let's wrap up chapter 8. Jesus replied. If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My father, whom you claim is your God, is the one who glorifies me. Though you do not know him, I know him. For if I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him, and I obey his word.

Your father, Abraham, rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day. He saw it and he was glad. You are not yet 50 years old, they said, to him, and you have seen Abraham. See, they still don't get it. They still don't get what he is talking about. Very truly, I tell you, Jesus answered before Abraham was born, I am. There it is again. Can that really be missed before Abraham was born? I am.

Jesus is making a bold claim. So bold that at this point, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds. And I just got to tell you, multiple times in the gospels, we read about Jesus slipping away or he hid himself from them. Do you ever wonder how that happened? Is he just really good at hiding? I mean, does he go invisible? I don't have any idea. But Jesus hid himself because it wasn't time for that to take place.

But these people who believed him, now we're ready to stone him. True freedom is found only in Christ Jesus. It is only through Jesus that we can be set free from sin. There are many people in our world today who

believe they are free. But they are enslaved. Sin controls them. They're powerless against it. Their sin is actually ruining their lives, and we can see it from the outside.

It causes divorces and broken friendships, bankruptcy, health struggles, and these aren't even the worst of being enslaved to sin, their sin is leading toward death. Spiritual death. All while believing they are free. Maybe you are here today or listening today. And if you were honest, you are enslaved by your sin. You've tried to make better decisions.

You've tried to have the effort or the power to overcome this by your own doing, but it just doesn't work. You would even come here. You're here in church on a Sunday morning. Maybe you're watching online or listening on the radio. You say, I believe in Jesus. I believe he existed, but it still feels like something is missing. Like I'm not seeing things the way that everybody else does. Remember the words that Jesus said? If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.

So we have to ask a question, a difficult question. Is it possible that your feeling of disconnect is because there are still areas of your life that you're not submitting to Jesus? This is not a fun question to ask. It's difficult. But to be his disciple requires repentance. It requires a turning around from our life that we are walking away from him and turning towards him and not just walking towards him but running towards him.

My biggest concern is that as the church, we will become like the Pharisees and like these individuals who believe in Jesus. But don't become his disciples or followers. Some of you may say, what's the distinction there? I like to point people to James chapter two verse 19. James says that even the demons believe in God and shudder. The demons believe God exists. They know God exists.

But it's like a mental understanding, the belief that John talks about in John chapter three verse 16 is this idea of being a follower submitting everything to him saying, you are my lord. I need you. I admit I have a problem. I need you to save me.

My prayer is that we would hold to his teachings and the truth through trials and tribulations, and that as you are here today, you would ask yourself the question, have I really submitted to Jesus? Or do I just believe in the concept of Jesus? We're going to close by singing the song he is more than able.

And I believe as a man of faith that God is more than able to save anyone and everyone. Who will submit to him? We'll have people up front if you want prayer, it can be about this topic. It can be about anything. And if you just want someone to pray with, that's what we're here for. And so as the song is playing, we'll be up there. We'll pray with you. If it's just uncomfortable for you to come during the closing song because you don't want people to see you, we'll stay up for 5 or ten minutes after the song's done. So you can come up any time.

And we'd love to pray with you. Maybe you just want to do your business with God because you're embarrassed, ashamed, or you just are kind of an introverted person, and you just want to do it yourself. That's fine. The authors are open. If you come to the altars, you can do your business with God, and I promise that we will not bother you, but I can't make the promise that a family member or a friend isn't going to come up and pray with you, all right? I can't promise that. But if you want to come, just feel free to come. Let me close in prayer.

Heavenly Father, I pray that your spirit would be working amongst us right now. That regardless of where we are at in our walk with you, whether we are disciples or not disciples, that we would take that next step towards you. And for those that are here in our following you, this is just another time to celebrate and to offer hearts of gratitude and thankfulness.

That you are more than able to save us. Continue to do the work that only you can do. We ask this in Jesus name. Amen.

