

the gospel of

JOHN

he is the one

JOHN: THE ONE FROM THE FATHER

March 14, 2021

Donald Zimmerman

John 8:36-59

Hi, good morning, Doxa. My name's Natalie and I work as a deacon on staff. We'll be reading God's word together today. So if you have your Bible near you, please grab it. We'll be reading John 8:36-47. Please stand for the reading of God's word.

"So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. I know that you are the offspring of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you. I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father." They answered him, 'Abraham is our father.' Jesus said to them, 'If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing the works Abraham did, but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did.

You are doing the works your father did.' They said to him, 'We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father--even God.' Jesus said to them, 'If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.'"

This is the word of the Lord, you may be seated.

Good morning. Doxa. Thank you for tuning in this morning and being a part of our online liturgy. A month or two after COVID hit, my family and I began the process of working our way through most of the 24 Marvel Universe movies, in proper chronological order, of course. Talk about a genre that has absolutely exploded. Superhero stories and film has had quite a comeback. We can see that all around us. The Marvel Universe has made 22 billion, not million, billion dollars in the box office. Absolutely

unreal. One of the most popular forms of narrative in those Marvel movies is the idea of an origin story, a tale of how it all started. You see, we love learning where greatness comes from. Where Spiderman or Captain America, or Wonder Woman got their skills and their powers and their motivation. Five and a half million people watched *The Last Dance*, a documentary last year on Netflix chronicling, basically, how Michael Jordan became Michael Jordan.

I read a fascinating origin story this last week about Younghoe Koo, he's the top kicker in the NFL. One of only four Korean Americans to ever play in the NFL. He moved from Korea to the States. A friend shot an iPhone video of him doing some tricks kicking a football. And he eventually got signed by the Atlanta Falcons last year. He has led pro kickers in the NFL in field goals made, in total points. His field goal percentage is just under 97%. All from a video recorded on an iPhone. Origin stories move us, captivate us, they intrigue us. And in fact, knowing someone's origin story is a powerful tool in forging relationship, as it often moves us towards compassion and connection with others. It's why when we date someone, we ask a lot of questions about where they're from and what their life has been like leading up to this point.

It's why we've recommended that when new missional communities and DNA groups, two of our primary ministry environments here at Doxa, when they start off, that they start by sharing their story each other. It's why when we do gospel counseling around Doxa that we want to know that person's story, because it's an essential part in helping them move towards healing and wholeness. And Jesus is going to tell the crowds that your origin story, your family, your lineage, your bloodline, that you identify with, that it matters. That the things you believe about your own story matters. In fact, it can be the difference between heaven and hell. Now, you may say that on the West Coast of America in 2021, that things like who your ancestors were, that kind of thing doesn't really matter as much. But here's what I want us to remember: Jesus's message, the Gospel, is both cross and counter cultural. In other words, it applies to every culture, but it also aggravates every culture. The Gospel literally means good news, but for every culture across time and space, when Jesus's message butts up against the sacred and most prized things in that culture, the good news can at times sound like bad news. And this is what I Corinthians 1 means when it says, "For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." The fact is, the prince of peace is pretty combative at times. He's a Jewish man, taking on the Jewish elite head-on, and he'll continue to be misunderstood and controversial and offensive. In fact, part of the work I had to do to prepare this message was to figure out how to even talk about this passage, knowing that there would be kids in the audience. Jesus is not squeamish, and he's not afraid to tackle the darkest parts of our lives.

And he has always, and will always continue to push and poke holes in every culture and every race and every people group forever and ever. Amen. We would have to be just arrogant beyond arrogant to believe that Jesus doesn't desire and won't do that very same work in us in Bellevue, Washington in 2021. Now, because we are all as humans made in the image of God, many cultures have in them, intrinsically, these values and ideals that are actually embodiments of what the Bible teaches us and ways of expressing the way that the kingdom works. That there are causes in the world that those who know nothing about Jesus will actively fight for not knowing that they're actually doing work that Jesus would approve of. Right? And we know this, I mean, aren't there lots of non-Christians doing significant work in shutting down the slave trades and helping the fatherless? Aren't there unbelievers looking for ways to help the poor get out of cycles of poverty?

Aren't there many that don't identify with Christ at all, giving away their time and their resources generously to those in need? And all of this without a relationship with Jesus. You see, it's in our imago Dei, which simply means being made in the image of God, that there are ways that we reflect God's design without even trying, because it's inside us. It's the very blueprint that we were built from. And at the same time, we can see clearly that every single culture falls short in living out the full glory of heaven

and Jesus's way of life. That Asian culture has elements that look like the kingdom and has elements that do not. That Indian culture has elements that look like the kingdom and elements that do not. That Slavic culture has elements that look like the kingdom and elements that do not. That American culture, God help us, has elements that look like the kingdom and elements that do not. And so the gospel of Jesus, his message and his person, will continue to push and poke and singe the parts of our worldview and lifestyle that run off the map and leave a biblical way of life behind. And Jesus has been doing this in a Jewish context all through the book of John. We've seen him jab at the Jews and shake them up over the last seven chapters. He's jabbed at their self-righteousness. He's jabbed at their rules and regulations. He's jabbed at their accomplishments and their reasoning. And today he throws his biggest punch yet. He's about to throw an absolute haymaker to those who stand against everything he is teaching. Not because he's trying to harm them, but to clarify for them how far off they really are.

One last thought before we dive into the text. There are scholars over time in history who have tried to build a case that John was particularly anti-Jew or antisemitic and that that colored his writings accordingly. And in that group, this particular passage that we're going to look at today is the very tip of the spear and at the top of their argument. And I want to share with you the main reason why I fundamentally disagree along with the vast majority of Christian scholarship, that John was not actually anti-Jew. Jesus speaks across all four gospels that sin is a human problem, not a Jewish problem. Jesus's language towards the Pharisees is almost exclusively negative in all four gospels and often intensely so. I mean, he called them a brood of vipers in Matthew and Luke, hypocrites in all of the gospels, blind men, whitewashed tombs, and children of hell in Matthew 23. We see plainly that Jesus is perfectly content in all of the gospels to contend with the Jews over their sin problem. John Piper helpfully in his comments on this passage says that "Jewish people are not unique in their unbelief and their vulnerability to the blinding and distorting effects of the devil." So let's remember that origin stories matter. Let's remember that the gospel is cross and counter cultural. And remember that Jesus sees sin as a human problem, not a Jewish one. With that, let's dive into the text, starting in verse 36. It says,

"So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." We're continuing here in chapter eight, we're picking up where pastor Jeff left us off last week. And as he walked through those passages previously, he unpacked how most of us wouldn't consider ourselves slaves to sin. But if we continue in those sins, Jesus says that our sin is our master and that we have no power to help ourselves. But if we invite him into our struggles and tap into the power that the Holy Spirit offers us, that we actually have the ability to put sin to death. God does not end temptation for us. He does not end our struggles. But he does end the overpowering and overwhelming and crushing force that sin has over our lives. And that power that Jesus offers is true freedom. Now there's a lot of ways that we reach for freedom. In a year as hard as the last one, I have to believe many of us have reached for things that maybe w're supposed to offer us freedom, ways to numb the pain, ways to allow us some escape from just all of the chaos and madness of this last year.

But I'm also confident that some of those things we have reached for have probably also not given us freedom, but actually built prisons in which we live now, because this is how satan wars against us. He offers us options to us that seem like freedom, but we find ourselves actually more locked up after trying those things out. Jesus is better. Jesus is different. He offers himself fully, freely, and forever. He is the only true liberator. And let me be clear. If you reject the liberator, you will not have true freedom. There is no lasting freedom to be found outside of him. The passage continues in verse 37. It says, "'I know that you are offspring of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you. I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father.' They answered him, 'Abraham is our father.' Jesus said to them, 'If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing the works Abraham did, but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. You are doing the works your father did.'"

Now, I want to remind us that for these people and in this period of time, lineage really, really, really mattered. Okay? You don't hear a lot about that in our world, in our culture, except for maybe the occasional kid threatening another kid with my dad could beat up your dad, but for the Jews and ancient middle East, their lineage mattered a lot. And so when they answer him that Abraham is our father. And Jesus says, no, no, he's not. This is because Jesus is saying the true Jewishness is not simply a physical bloodline, it's a faith and obedience line. And this explains what Paul is getting at in Romans 9:6-8, when he says, "not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring... it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring."

Now I know it's hard to believe this, but I promise you that that human heart really only has three primary responses to God's truth. And I'm going to warn you it'll sound oversimplified, but I'm telling you that in these three options on the table, you are probably going to hear some of yourself. And I want you to pay attention to which one of these things feels the loudest in your walk right now. Most of us probably touch all three of these bases in a 24 hour period. But I want you to just to listen and again, just figure out which one is the most prominent. Okay? So number one, some of us receive the truth of God. We have learned to trust his word, trust his spirit, and trust the ways in which God speaks through the community around us. And I'll talk about that more in a minute.

Some of us wrestle with the truth of God. And this is an important distinction because there's room for doubters and skeptics in Jesus's ministry. And that means that there's room for those people at Doxa, too. There's questions you have unanswered, there's hangups and hesitations. And yet there's part of you that wants to dive in, too. And I want to add that this is most of us, most days, I don't want us to confuse, however, the second bucket with the third. And that is that some of us reject the truth of God. We hide behind our own plans, our own preferences, our personality type, our way of doing things, our race or culture or political party or sexual identity, our comforts, sometimes in a strategy that we see Satan employ, we actually hide behind the scriptures, to give us a pass, to not actually obey what God is calling us to, to experience life and flourishing.

We reject God's word. And when we reject God's word, we will do anything we can to suppress or turn down the volume on anything that sounds like him in our lives, because we know there's a gap, and we have no intention of closing it. And this is what Christ means when he says, "My words find no place in you." Listen, if you've got people in your life who have an angle on what's going on and they don't think you should step into a situation or take an opportunity that's presented itself, maybe they're saying, "Hey, I really don't think you should date that girl, man. I don't think this is a good idea." "I don't think that job sounds like a healthy fit for you." "I think you should maybe take a break from social media or drinking or spending time with this particular group of toxic people."

The Bible tells us that we're to listen to the community around us, to at least consider those things. And that listening to those things is actually wisdom. So slow down and receive that. Part of being in gospel community is listening to the ways that God speaks, not only his word and his Spirit, but through his people. Christianity is not a cult. We're not here to try and control each other. But if you reject what he's saying through others, others that love you and him. If you suppress that, what he's trying to say to you, that's a real dangerous place to be. God is throwing you a life raft in dangerous waters. And when you disregard that voice in your community, you're swimming away from the raft. And some of us are rejecting the truth of God in our life, right now.

I know some of us are probably thinking right now in this moment, how do I know if I'm wrestling or rejecting? And I'll tell you, really only Christ can answer that for you. Are you moving toward him? Are you moving toward his people? Can anyone in your life that really knows you say, "You look more like Jesus than you did a year ago or two years ago." Are the fruit of the spirit more present in your life

today? These are just questions to reflect on. It doesn't answer everything for you. But I know that it'll take some courage to face these questions. And I also know that talking to Jesus about this stuff could very well save your life. Continue in verse 41.

"'You are doing the works your father did.' They said to him, 'We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one father--even God.'"

I told you, this is one of the most intense passages in the entire New Testament. And this chapter is not for the faint of heart or the prude. And their attack here is on the perceived impurity of Jesus's mom. Basically saying your mom has been with so many guys you don't even know who your dad is. Can you imagine? The mercy in our savior to not simply snap his fingers and liquefy every organ in the man's body that says this to his face. Absolutely unbelievable. Can you imagine the leaders in a church talking to Jesus during a church service and saying that his mom was a horrible person? This reminds me of the passage in Romans 2, it says,

"Do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed."

I just, I can't even wrap my mind around what it would be like to be in that moment, in that space, in that room. He continues in verse 42. "Jesus said to them, 'If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word.'"

So we don't fully know what happened here, but something happened significant between verse 30, where we were last week, and verse 43 here, because we started with a description of a believing and supportive and very interested crowd. And then something shifted, something turned, and Jesus said something and they turned against him. Now Jesus has always had more fans than disciples. I want to say that again. Jesus has always had more fans than disciples.

There have always been more people wanting to watch him from a distance than those that actually want to walk with him. And I wonder if sometimes the greedy desperation commonly found in the disciples in the New Testament, feels a little over the top or even repulsive to an affluent and very well-educated and generally well provided for room, like Doxa church. Jesus has always had more fans than disciples. And you might ask, "Well, how do you know the difference? How do you tell the difference between a fan and a disciple?" Look I'm not attempting to create duress or concern or fear in you. If you've received Christ as your Savior and you're walking as his disciple, but the stakes are high and in a church our size, I promise you that both fans and disciples are sitting in Doxa church right now.

And with that in mind, I want to talk just for a moment about some of the differences that I see between fans and disciples. Fans focus on the gifts. Disciples focus on the giver. Fans focus on giving up as little as possible. Disciples focus on getting as much of Christ as possible. One last comment to this talk of fans and disciples, which is that many of us in this room, myself included, started as fans and then one day, by God's sovereign, grace had our eyes opened to the truth that this world would never come close to satisfying my longings and the things happening in my heart. As long as you have breath, you have a standing invitation into friendship with Christ and he desires to save you today. You may walk in today and find yourself listening to this sermon as a fan of Christ, but you might leave here because of the work of the Holy Spirit and become a true disciple, willing to lay down anything, give up anything, follow Christ into any place or circumstance that he should call you to knowing that he is always for you, and that he offers himself fully to you.

We're going to move quickly through verses 44 through 59. And so just allow me to summarize for us. They continue as they have all throughout John, to confuse the physical and the spiritual. They still are

not seeing Christ as God. And so when he makes some claims about being outside of time and knowing their ancestors personally, the pre-incarnate Christ not being limited by time or space, they accuse Jesus of having a demon because people who say these kinds of things must be crazy. They must be possessed. And Jesus calls them a bunch of liars. That they're all a little toddlers and Lucifer's nursery and that their great, great, great grandfather that they believe to be one of their biggest bragging rights, is in fact in agreement that they are enlisted in Satan's army and accomplishing his works of evil and destruction. Your dad is the devil and like father like son.

And just in case that you think that it couldn't have been that bad or that I'm exaggerating Jesus' position. They end the passage with everyone bending down to pick up rocks because Jesus has in their eyes committed crimes punishable by death. And so with no trial or judge, they intend to just smash Jesus's head in with blunt objects until he bleeds to death in the middle of a church service for everyone to see. When we reject the truth of God, we will do anything to suppress it. Anything to avoid it. And anything to silence it because we are not made to be satisfied by anything else. It's why it takes so much energy to run from God. Have you ever noticed that? Have you ever noticed that in seasons when you're running from God, you just feel tired? Some of you are exhausted this morning from that race. Hear me say this. Jesus is ready for you to come home. No stipulations, no contracts, no lengthy apologies. Just mercy.

Here's how I want to wrap up our time together. If you boil down this whole heated exchange between Jesus and the Jews, you get a picture of two kingdoms, two systems, two ways of thinking, and the headline for this whole passage reads: You think you're sons, but you're slaves. And Jesus makes it really obvious that the Jews are on the wrong side of the ledger. That they thought they knew how to get to heaven. They were confident that they had the keys to the gates of heaven, but not only do they have the wrong key, the key has been snapped off inside of the key hole. And now they have a locked gate and a jammed key hole. They're not getting in. Their race is not going to save them. Their religious habits are not going to save them. The religious habits of their parents or their parents' parents or ancestors are not going to save them.

Their discipline, their religious activities are not going to save them. And some of us have never experienced, notice I didn't say know because I'm not interested in what you think about God today, I want to know what you have felt inside of you and experienced. Some of us have never experienced what it is to be God's kids. God, as a loving and gracious father. As the one who's thrilled to dote on his kids. As one who knows our weaknesses and actually moves towards us when we blow it. We've read the rule book. We know he's keeping score. We know that we're accountable for the things he's given us. Can't bury those talents in the ground, right? Listen, God doesn't have employees. God doesn't hire you. He makes you a home. Think about the difference between sons and slaves. Jesus uses this language a ton, of sons and slaves.

And before you get hung up on the, you know, the male connotation of son let's remember that Jesus uses this term through the scriptures to subversively refute the cultural misogyny and the patriarchy that's happening in that culture, right? Women couldn't testify. They couldn't own property. They couldn't vote or receive inheritance. And Jesus is just going to add fuel to the fire in saying that his female disciples are entitled to all of the same inheritance in heaven. This was the church and Christ treating women better than the culture did. So in this culture, being a son meant legal representation. It meant having an inheritance. It meant you could handle family affairs. That's what sons could do. Slaves don't get any of that. Now, Satan has no true sons. Only slaves. God only has sons. Where do slaves live? You know, most often on the edge of the property, in some kind of shack, right?

Not great living quarters. Where do sons live? My son is 11. He sleeps across the hall from me where I sleep. Not one time has he walked in the door and paid me rent. Not one time has he come home and

thrown a wad of cash on the counter and said, "Here you go, dad. Pay the power bill with this." And yet he lives under my roof with all of his needs met. Why? Because he belongs to me. Because he is mine. Because he was formed in part from me. He is my child. Because I would do anything for him. I would walk through any fire to pull him out. I would walk away from all of this and all of you for his sake. It's not even a question. Slaves sleep outside, but where do sons live? I want you to just listen to me as I read these verses, I'm going to jump around a bit, but I think some of these verses will help frame this. These come from the Psalms. Psalm 23:6 says,

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

"O Lord, I love the habitation of your house and the place where your glory dwells." Psalm 26.

"In my Father's house there are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and I will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also." John 14. There's a lot more. I can keep going, but I think you get it. Does this sound like God is looking for slaves or for sons?

What do I care about most as Oliver and Harper's father? Their heart, their well-being, our connection together. What does a slave owner care most about? Performance? Output? What kind of numbers are you putting up? What have you done? Let's count your failures. Listen church, the voices of Satan and his team and the voice of the Holy Spirit sound very different. I can't count how many times in counseling appointments that I have to, or ask of the person across from me to consider the fact that the voice of the enemy does not sound like the voice of the Father. When people say there's something inside of me that just says I'm super broken and I messed up again and it's gonna go bad. These kinds of things are not the voice of the father. His voice is kind, his voice is truthful. His voice is compassionate.

Does it cut us down to the bone? Yes, but it's not because he's mean. It's because he sees past all of the fluff and the distractions that grab our attention so easily. It cuts because he's a surgeon saving your life, if you've trusted him. If you've decided that being a fan is not enough. That you want him, not just the stuff that he gives you. That you don't want to just let go of as little as possible, but get as much of him as you possibly can. Christian, you are not an employee in God's company. You are not a slave in his field. You are his sons and daughters and he offers you everything. Let's pray.

Jesus, thank you for this church. Thank you for the work that you are doing. I pray for those that have walked in pride, of feeling like they have contributed and been a part of what you are up to and found that to be their source of identity. That we would come back, repent of that and come back to recognizing that our identity is being your sons and daughters, first and foremost, that any work that we do comes from that. And for those, God, that have felt guilt or shame for being on the sidelines and not participating in the ways that they maybe feel they ought to, that they too would feel your voice calling them back in mercy and in grace. They would hear an invitation to come back to the table and to participate in your rescue plan for the world. Thank you for your love of Doxa. Thank you that you love the Eastside and that you do desire to work through your sons and daughters as an outpouring of what you're doing inside of us. Use us for this. Use us for your glory. We pray these things for that reason. Amen.

