

JESUS SETS MEN FREE

John 8:31-59

Key Verse: 8:31,32

"To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, 'If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.'"

In the previous passage Jesus saved a woman caught in adultery. In this event we learned that there is now no condemnation for those who are in [Christ Jesus](#). We also learned that when we don't live a life of mission, we fall into a life of sin. May God uphold us as men of holy mission. In this passage Jesus teaches us that there are two kinds of children of God; one is the false children of God, and the other is the true children of God. We learn how we can be set free from the bondage of sin, and that we can be free indeed.

I. The way to become the true children of God (31-41)

First, hold to Jesus' teaching (31-32). Look at verses 31 and 32. "To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, 'If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.'" In these verses Jesus taught the people how we can be free indeed. We wish human life were always happy. But in most cases, human life is hard and sorrowful. One writer compared human life to boxers in the ring. In a boxing match there is always a victor and a loser. The victor is happy. But the loser is very sorry when he sees his bloody nose. When we engage in humanity studies, especially those about ordinary people, we find that most people in history have been bound by sorrow and empty pride.

How can we be free from our sorrow and empty pride? Verses 31b and 32 say, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." When we want to enjoy true freedom in the Son, we must [meet one](#) condition. What is it? We must hold Jesus' teaching in our hearts. It is true. For example, in the past many people memorized Confucius' teachings, which were the moral rules to govern the five human relations. When they memorized Confucius' teachings, consisting of 500,000 words, they became his disciples. His teachings contributed to unifying the vast nation of China. On the other hand, his teachings caused Chinese kings to see their people as slaves, and Chinese men to see their women as slaves. Jesus' people must hold to Jesus' teachings. When we hold to Jesus' teaching, we can really be his disciples. A "disciple" is a learner. A disciple of Jesus is a learner of Jesus. Unless we learn, we can be disciples of no one. One who does not learn remains childish even when he becomes 73 years old. When we hold to Jesus' teaching, we are really Jesus' disciples. We may not be able to memorize [all Jesus'](#) teachings, but we must have at least one word of his teaching in our hearts. Then we can be his disciples.

Second, we come to know the truth (32). Verse 32 says, "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." Wow! We can know the truth, when many great and thoughtful men have searched for the truth and died not knowing it. Yes, when we hold to Jesus' teaching, we come

to know the truth. There have been many great teachers who taught many good principles of human life. But their teachings were all human ideas, assumptions and hypotheses from their heads--not from God.

What then is the truth? The truth is the most invaluable thing in the world. Where is such a thing on earth? The truth is something that never changes--forever. Where is such a thing on earth? The truth must have universality in it. Where is such a thing which applies to all men down through the generations? There is no universality in the time and space of the world. But Jesus' teaching applies to all men of all ages. At present, the word of Jesus applies to the people of the USA, the people of Russia and the people of African countries. Jesus' teaching is invaluable, for it gives eternal life and the hope of the kingdom of God to those who believe in him.

There have been many great men in human history who made heart-moving speeches. For example, Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, "Of the people, by the people, for the people," remains the best speech in American history. His speech contributed much to American democracy. On the other hand, it became the seed-bed of secular humanism, and people have been degraded by secular humanism to the level of amorality.

If we hold to Jesus' teaching, we come to know the truth. History proves this true. Our American forefathers held to Jesus' teaching in Matthew 6:33, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." When they held to his teaching, at the beginning, some lost a little; some, too much. But in the long run, they learned that his teaching is the truth: When they held to his teaching, they were richly blessed.

Third, the truth sets us free (32). Look at verse 32. "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." Many ordinary people think they are free if they can live according to their sinful nature. One young man is blindly rebellious, thinking that his rebellious mind is the expression of his unlimited human freedom. He is a slave to his rebellious mind. Many have died from anxiety attacks or heart attacks due to their excessive worries about money. One woman works double-time to make a little more money. She has made money. But she is always miserable for more money. She is a slave to her greed. One young man is taking more than seven years to complete a four-year undergraduate degree because he has wasted his study time in carnal desires. He is always sorrowful and proud. He is a slave of his flesh desire.

One woman's first daughter died when she was too young. Then the woman was consumed by her sorrow, and she also died soon. She was a slave of her sorrow. One comedian was very popular. But he was too self-conscious. He made others laugh, but he cried every night, for he was endlessly sorrowful. He was a slave of public opinion. One girl was so clever that she thought she could enjoy many "Romeos" and still make a great success. But it did not work that way. She became a virtual prostitute. She is a slave to demon-possession, for "demon" has the meaning, "a clever person." Man without morality is no longer man.

Sorrow and empty pride seem to be the most aggravating elements in human life. But when we have Jesus' teaching, we come to know the

truth, and the truth sets us free. For Jesus' teaching is the very word of God. Jesus' teaching is the word of the holy God, which remains forever (1 Pe 1:24,25). What's more, Jesus' teaching is the life-giving word of God to all men. Without Jesus' teaching, nobody knows the truth. Without knowing the truth, nobody is free.

Jesus knew his disciples' political ambition. So Jesus taught them time and again the meaning of his death and resurrection (Mk 8:31,32). Jesus also taught them spiritual greatness, not political greatness (Mk 10:42-45). Finally his disciples understood his teachings, especially about the meaning of his death and resurrection. Peter said in 1 Peter 2:24, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed." Peter grew up to be the most prominent spiritual leader of all ages because he accepted Jesus' teaching. Even Bartholomew, whose presence or absence made no difference, is on the list of the apostolic band because he also accepted Jesus' teaching.

One young man accepted Jesus' world mission command and went to Moscow as a student missionary. He faithfully served Russian students for four years. At the same time, he finished his Ph.D. at Moscow State University. Then he was invited to become a professor at his alma mater in Korea. But he could not leave Russian students like sheep without a shepherd. He knew he would suffer in Russia without a professor's position. He knew he would suffer in Russia with leg rheumatism during the cold winters. But he decided to remain as a shepherd for Russian students. He is free indeed. St. Augustine was a corrupt man in spite of his superior intellect. He was a wanderer on the earth at a time when the Roman Empire was about to collapse. No one could help him out of his hedonistic intellectualism. He also could not help himself. Once, he read Romans 13:13,14: "Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature." He held to this short teaching of Jesus. Then he was changed from a corrupt man to a saint of his times. He was set free from his bondage. When we come to know the truth, there is a tremendous result in our lives.

Fourth, the racial bondage (33-41). How did the Jews respond to Jesus? The Jews were slaves to their racial pride. Look at verse 33. "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?" They had pride in being Abraham's descendants. They had pride as chosen people. Of course this pride helped them overcome unbearable sufferings and survive. But their pride as Abraham's descendants made them slaves to racial pride. They have been despised for this. In Jesus' time they were under the bondage of the Roman Empire. They also had been under the rule of Egypt and Babylon. In spite of the historical facts, they never admitted they had been under the rule of anyone. Their racial pride also blinded them to the Son of God.

Even though they were so proud and blind, Jesus wanted to help them. Read verses 34-36. "Jesus replied, 'I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free,

you will be free indeed.'" They were slaves of their sin of pride. It was tragic that they had no place in the glorious house of God (35). Jesus wanted them to empty their pride so they might have room for his word. Jesus really wanted them to have a place in the glorious house of God. Of course, Jesus recognized that they were Abraham's descendants. But what they did was not like Abraham. Instead of being a blessing like Abraham, they were ready to kill Jesus (37,40).

What was their response? They protested, "Abraham is our father" (39). "We are not illegitimate children" (41b). It meant, "Only we are the rightful children of God, and God is the Father to us only." They did not curb their pride.

II. The children of the devil (42-47)

Look at verse 42. "Jesus said to them, 'If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me.'" These Jews were not the children of God, but the children of the devil. First, they were not children of God because they did not love the Son of God, even though the Son had revealed God's redemptive love and purpose through his earthly messianic ministry. Everybody, even a blind beggar, recognized Jesus as the Son of David (Mk 10:48). But the Jews despised and rejected him. Second, they were the children of the devil because they did not accept the Son's word. When they heard the Son's word, they knew that Jesus was the Son of God, but their pride made them deaf and dumb. Third, they were the children of the devil because they had the devil's desire. They wanted to kill Jesus (44). They were murderers. They were also the children of the devil because they were liars. They said what was expedient according to the situation. We learn here that those who do not speak on the basis of God's word are liars and devils. The devil is the one who does not hold to the truth (44). They did not believe even when they heard the truth (45). They did not believe in the Son because they did not belong to God (46,47).

III. Jesus' claims about himself (48-59)

They should have accepted the Son's word. But they did not. They said to him, "You are a Samaritan and demon-possessed." They gave vent to their indignation by insulting him with profane words. But Jesus was very patient with them and said, "I tell you the truth, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death" (51). Jesus really wanted them to have eternal life by accepting his word. Jesus is a good shepherd for proud people.

What was their response? The Jews exclaimed, "Now we know that you are demon-possessed! Abraham died and so did the prophets, yet you say that if anyone keeps your word, he will never taste death. Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?" (52,53) Their racial pride blinded their spiritual eyes not to see the Son.

The Jews did not know God's plan of world salvation through Abraham. So Jesus explained how Abraham held on to God's promise to him concerning the coming Messiah. Look at verse 56. "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad."

Abraham believed God's promise when God said to him in Genesis 22:18, "...and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me." Based on this promise, Abraham waited for the coming of the Messiah and rejoiced. After his death, Abraham rejoiced in the kingdom of God to see the promised Messiah coming into the world to save men from their sins. Jesus wanted the Jews to know that all Abraham's hope and joy were deposited in the Son. Jesus wanted them to repent of their false pride in being Abraham's physical descendants, and have the hope and joy that Abraham had had.

What was their response? Look at verse 57. "'You are not yet fifty years old,' the Jews said to him, 'and you have seen Abraham!'" They had no spiritual understanding. Look at verse 58. "'I tell you the truth,' Jesus answered, 'before Abraham was born, I am!'" Jesus plainly told them that he is God. The Jews were those who had been waiting for the Messiah. But when he came, they rejected him. It was a tragedy. Jesus still wanted them to open their spiritual eyes to see him as the eternal God. He said, "I tell you the truth, before Abraham was born, I am!" At this, they picked up stones to stone him.

In this passage we learn that we must hold to one word of Jesus' teaching, so that we may be the disciples of Jesus. May God bless us to know the truth, so that we can be free indeed.