



Text: John 8:31-38<sup>1</sup>

Series: *Life in His Name* – The Message of John’s Gospel

Title: Part 20 – Set Free!

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**“So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” John 8:31-32**

What does it mean to say, “I am a disciple of Jesus Christ.” The word “disciple” essentially means “a learner” and being a “learner” of Jesus Christ is a life-long learning journey. Last week we reflected together on Jesus’ declaration...

**“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” John 8:12**

I suggested to you that the background for that statement was the wilderness experience of the Israelite people as they followed God through the desert for forty years from Egypt to the land of Palestine. God led them by day with a pillar of cloud and by night with a pillar of fire. Jesus said to people of his day, “Follow me, the light of the world, just as your ancestors followed God by the light of the pillar of fire.” Being a disciple of Jesus is a process of following and learning from Jesus as he leads us through life and brings us home to his Father’s house.

There are **four essential marks or facets of the discipleship journey** that Jesus addresses in his exchange with these people in the temple in Jerusalem. I want us to think about the journey of discipleship this morning. What I’m describing are not “four stages” that follow necessarily one after another. In fact, most of them occur together in varying degrees. That’s why I’m calling them “marks” or “facets” rather than “stages” in our journey.

The **first mark of the discipleship journey** is that of...

### **Believing in Jesus**

The people to whom Jesus is speaking about true discipleship are the same people to whom he said “I am the light of the world.” Everything from the beginning of chapter seven to the end of chapter eight happens in the temple during the Feast of Tabernacles. These people are the same crowd who heard his invitation...

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission, All rights reserved.



**“If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’ ” John 7:37-38**

It’s the same milling multitude that stood and heard Jesus warn those who hated him and sought to take his life...

**“unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins.” John 8:24**

And this is the crowd of whom John said at the end of that exchange...

**“As he was saying these things, many believed in him.” John 8:30**

Then Jesus turned to these people, turning away from his determined opponents, and addressing these new believers directly. John tells us...

**“So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him....” John 8:31**

Several times in John’s Gospel we’ve encountered what one Bible scholar (D.A. Carson) calls “fickle faith.” In the second chapter of his Gospel, John tells us that during Jesus’ ministry in the temple during Passover, many people were deeply impressed by his teaching and by his miraculous signs and John tells us...

**“Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.” John 2:23-25**

Jesus could read their hearts. He could do that because he is Jesus, the Son of God. You and I can’t do that but Jesus can. And Jesus knew that the belief these people held in him was not going to last and so he didn’t “entrust himself to them.”

And then later in chapter six, John tells us that after Jesus’ miracle of the feeding of 5000 people Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life.” (John 6:35) And he told the crowd that the bread he was giving for the life of the world was “his flesh.” He was telling them that he was going to give his life for them. Jesus was speaking about his cross and when he called on them to believe in him in the light of the cross he described it as “eating his flesh and drinking his blood.” He said to the crowd...

**“Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day ... Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.” John 6:54, 56**



But many could accept the idea of a dying Messiah and John tells us...

**“After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.” John 6:66**

That’s why Jesus turned to address these new disciples. There is a kind of believing in Jesus that goes nowhere and accomplishes nothing of any eternal value. There’s a kind of believing that is not “true discipleship” and that is what Jesus is addressing with these people. True discipleship begins with belief in Jesus but it moves on from simple belief into something deeper and stronger. True belief has root and depth.

Jesus can see the difference in the hearts of people; we can’t see it with the precision and clarity that he can but because he warns us about we know it exists among us. Over the years I’ve known people who believed in the Gospel message about Jesus Christ but who today no longer walk with Jesus. The Bible does not empower me to judge them but it does equip me to warn us all: watch your heart for shallow belief! God’s Word challenges us all to ask ourselves: ***am I a true disciple of Jesus Christ?***

The **second mark of true discipleship** is that of...

### **Abiding in Jesus**

**“So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples...” John 8:31**

The word “abide” essentially means to “remain.” What Jesus is calling for here is consistency of commitment and orientation. This is how one Bible scholar explains the meaning of the word, “abide.” It “signifies **a settled determination to live in the word of Christ and by it, [that involves] a perpetual listening to it, reflection on it, holding fast to it, carrying out its bidding.**”<sup>2</sup>

In John chapter fifteen Jesus uses the word “abide” over ten times. He uses the picture of a vine to describe what “abiding” in him means. He tells us...

**“I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.” John 15:5**

And again he connects abiding in him with our intake of his word.

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<sup>2</sup> Beasley-Murray, G. R. (2002). Vol. 36: Word Biblical Commentary : John. Word Biblical Commentary (133). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.



**“If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.” John 15:7**

Notice how Jesus speaks on John 15:7 of abiding in him. Our intake of God’s word is not just about reading the Bible. It’s reading the Bible to hear Jesus. Jesus criticized the religious leaders of his day for reading the Bible but not listening to him. He said...

**“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.” John 5:39-40**

We can stumble into the same kind of religious reading of God’s Word without seeking to listen to Jesus’ voice.

Sadly, these people to whom Jesus was speaking about true discipleship gave evidence on this very point that they were not true disciples. “Abiding” in Jesus’ word involves an allegiance to Jesus’ word and an obedience to it that these people simply didn’t evidence. He said to them...

**“If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” They answered him, “We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, ‘You will become free’?” John 8:31-33**

“How is it that you say...” the tone of their words is aggressive. They are calling into question Jesus’ declaration that they need to be freed. “We’ve never been enslaved. What are you talking about?” Their backs are up. They’re in fight mode. They’re insulted by Jesus’ statement that they are enslaved in some way or other. In short, they are not abiding in Jesus’ word.

And it gets worse. Jesus explains what he means. He tells them...

**“Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” John 8:34-36**

Jesus identified their basic spiritual problem. They were sinners who needed a Saviour and Redeemer. As sinners they stood under God’s judgment. These people had a false confidence that they were right with God because they were physical descendants of Abraham. They had the right religious pedigree. But, Jesus told them, “You’re not right with God. You’re not members of God’s household because you’re enslaved to sin.”



I'm struck by how modern the attitude of these people was. Often we have to work to find our way into the world of the Bible but these words of the Bible jump right into our world. People say exactly the same thing today to Jesus. "What do you mean by calling me a slave to sin? I'm not a slave to sin. I'm no "Mother Teresa" but I'm not a bad a person, either. I'm a good person, more or less. If you're looking for slaves to sin go talk to the drug dealers and mass murderers but don't talk to me about being a slave to sin!"

But what is "sin"? John Stott is one of the great Bible teachers of the last century. When he was a university student he heard another great Bible teacher, William Temple, define the essence of sin as "self-centeredness." Temple described sin as a man who says...

*"I am the center of the world I see.' And where the horizon is depends on where I stand. Education may make my self-centeredness less disastrous by broadening my horizon of vision. It's like a man climbing a tower who sees further in terms of physical vision while remaining himself the center and the standard of reference. I am the center of the world I see."*

Stott went on...

*"That's what the Bible means by sin... [It's] the dark little dungeon of my own ego. That is sin, a twist of self-centeredness that has us imprisoned. But God's order is that we love him with all our being, and then that we love our neighbor and put ourselves last. Sin is the reversal of the order."<sup>3</sup>*

Jesus defined the essence of God's order with two commandments...

**"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Matthew 22:37-**

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None of them could meet this standard and neither can any of us. By Jesus' measure, we are all sinners enslaved to self-centeredness and rebels against the supremacy of God in all things and the priority of our neighbors' needs above our own. We are enslaved to sin!

These people questioned Jesus authority to define their world but true disciples of Jesus come to his word and allow it to define their world for them. And so I'm going to ask you another discipleship question: **Do you allow Jesus and His word to define your world? Do you abide by His Word and in His Word?**

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<sup>3</sup> John Stott, "Freedom," Preaching Today, Tape No. 102. I posted 12/01/1997 © 2011 PreachingToday.com



Jesus tells us that if we believe in him and abide in his word, then **thirdly, our journey of discipleship will be marked by ...**

### **Knowing Jesus**

Jesus said...

**“If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth...” John 8:31-32**

This verse is often quoted by academic institutions as a kind of endorsement of the pursuit of truth. The words are often carved in stone over the doors of educational institutions...

“You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free.”

Jesus isn't opposed to the pursuit of learning but that isn't what he's saying will free us.

Sometimes this truth is quoted as a maxim in counseling or justice situations as a way of encouraging people to admit the truth and find relief in their confession...

“The truth shall set you free”

Jesus expects honesty in every aspect of our lives, but that isn't “the truth” he has in mind here.

Jesus spoke of knowing “the truth” but I've chosen to speak of “knowing Jesus,” why? Notice something in the text with me. Jesus said...

“you will know the truth, **and the truth will set you free.**” John 8:32

And then in verse 36 he said...

**“So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” John 8:36**

So, who or what sets us free? Is it “the truth” or is it “the Son”? Or is it both, because “the Son” is “the truth”? Jesus said of himself...

**“I am the way, and the truth, and the life.” John 14:6**

John, speaking of Jesus in the introduction to this Gospel, declared...

**“the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” John 1:14**



What Jesus is saying is that our journey of discipleship will lead us to a deeper and richer relationship with Him. As we believe in him and abide in his word we will come to an ever-increasing experience of Jesus. This is so much more than knowing correct doctrine about Jesus ... this is knowing Jesus himself!

Listen to the passion in Paul's desire to know Jesus. He wrote...

**“I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.” Philippians 3:8-11**

Paul's passion was “that I may know him....” Paul knew Jesus better than any other human being every has ... but he still wanted more! And his prayer for the believers in the churches was that they might know him more (Eph. 4:13; Php. 1:9-11; Col 1:9)

So let me ask another discipleship question: **How hungry are you for more of Jesus?**

Finally, **the fourth facet that marks our journey of discipleship** is that we are...

### **Set Free by Jesus**

**“...and the truth will set you free.” John 8:32**

Jesus, the Son, will set us free from sin. What kind of freedom does he have in mind? First of all, he means...

### **Freedom from God's judgment against our sin**

Jesus said...

**“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.” John 5:24**

All the punishment that our sin rightly deserved was poured out on Jesus, the Son, on the cross. We have been liberated from the fear of punishment.



Secondly, he means...

**Freedom from the curse of death upon our sin**

Jesus said...

**“Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.” John 8:51**

For believers, resurrection and eternal life is our destination, not death and darkness. We have been liberated from the crushing fear of death.

Thirdly, he means...

**Freedom from alienation from God because of our sin**

Jesus said...

**“Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” John 8:34-36**

Through faith in Jesus we become members of God’s household. The Son makes us “children of God” (John 1:12) and in exchange for our slavery he gives us sonship. Paul grasped the wonder of this gift from the hand of Jesus when he wrote to the Romans...

**“For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’” Romans 8:15**

And fourthly, he means...

**Freedom from the oppressive power of sin over our lives**

Paul also grasped the wonder of this gift of freedom. He wrote...

**“For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.” Galatians 5:1**

Pauls speaks of our liberation as a “done deal”: Jesus “has set us free.” And Jesus speaks of our increasing experience of liberation: he declares that because he “has set us free” we “will be free” in increasing degrees.

Jesus defeated sin, death and the devil in his death and resurrection. **His victory over sin is immediately ours by faith in him and progressively ours**



**by experience as we “abide” in him.** As we believe in him, abide in his word and grow in our experience and knowledge of him, Jesus works in us to break the power of sin in our lives. Our journey of discipleship involves an ongoing liberation of our lives from the indwelling presence of sin.

*In his book *Ghost Soldiers*, Hampton Sides tells the story of a dramatic mission during World War II. On January 28th, 1945, 121 hand-selected Army Rangers slipped behind enemy lines in the Philippines in an attempt to rescue 513 American and British POW's who had spent three years in a hellish prison camp near the city of Cabanatuan.*

*Sides describes the first effects of liberation as chaos and fear. The prisoners were too mentally brittle to understand what was taking place. Some even scurried away from their liberators.*

*One particular prisoner, Bert Bank, refused to budge, even when a Ranger walked right up to him and tugged his arm.*

*"C'mon, we're here to save you," he said. "Run for the gate."*

*Bank still would not move. The Ranger looked into his eyes and saw they were vacant, registering nothing.*

*"What's wrong with you?" he asked. "Don't you want to be free?"*

*A smile formed on Bank's lips as the meaning of the words became clear, and he reached up to the outstretched hand of the Ranger.*

*The Rangers searched all the barracks for additional prisoners, then shouted, "The Americans are leaving. Is there anybody here?" Hearing no answer, they left.*

*But there was one more POW Edwin Rose. Edwin had been on latrine duty and somehow missed all the shooting and explosions. When he wandered back to his barracks, he failed to notice the room was empty and lay down on his straw mat and fell asleep. Edwin had missed the liberation. But there was a reason why. Edwin was deaf.*

*Four Americans died in the rescue; two Rangers in the firefight and two prisoners who perished for reasons of poor health. The freed prisoners marched 25 miles and boarded their ship home. **With each step, their stunned disbelief gave way to soaring optimism. Even Edwin Rose made it. He finally woke up and realized liberation had come.**<sup>4</sup>*

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<sup>4</sup> Van Morris, Mt. Washington, Kentucky, source: Hampton Sides, *Ghost Soldiers* (Doubleday, 2001) | posted 7/05/2004 © 2011 PreachingToday.com



The Son of God looks us in the eyes and asks, “**Don’t you want to be free?**” And as we take his hand and walk with him, as we believe in him, abide in him and grow to know him, his life and power breaks the stranglehold of sin in our lives and we gain an increasing joy as we realize ... liberation has come!

**My chains are gone, I’ve been set free,  
My God, my Savior has ransomed me.  
And like a flood His mercy reigns,  
Unending love, amazing Grace.**

- **Invitation to Prayer Ministry**
- **Final Song:** Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone)
- **Benediction**