

ABIDING IN THE WORD IS FREEDOM

John 8:31-44 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

Freedom in reality is a heart matter. When Sir Raleigh was awaiting execution after being falsely accused of treason, he was lying with his head upon the execution chopping block. After laying his head down on the block, the executioner asked Sir Walter Raleigh if his head was placed right and comfortable. Sir Walter Raleigh's last words were, "It matters little, my friend, how the head lies, but how the heart lies. My God shall raise me up, I trust." Then, on October 29, 1618, the axe fell. Even the freedom to die in peace when convicted in a sham trial is a matter of the heart. God's Word teaches the truth over and over about how vital the heart is to all the other facets of our lives. Proverbs 4:23 states, "Keep your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life or the issues of life." Proverbs 23:7 adds, "As a man thinks in his heart, so is he." Freedom is a heart matter.

Last Sunday, we read in John 8:30, "As Jesus was saying these things, (saying, "I am the Light of the world; whoever follows Me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life) many believed in Him. Now in John 8:31-32, we continue the message, and we are told that these many who believed were the people Jesus continued to speak to. We read, "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." Jesus never mentioned the word heart, but He was saying to all those who believed that giving Him mental assent would not spiritually set them free; Jesus was rather speaking of the necessity for them to have a change in their hearts toward Him. Giving Jesus our mental assent and our okay will never save a soul or ever bring us spiritual freedom. Jesus' words are clearly words telling us that the path to true spiritual freedom is a heart matter.

As we continue studying this mighty message of Jesus spoken in the temple treasury, He was explaining to these many who believed in Him that spiritual freedom is a heart matter. What then is this four-fold path to freedom?

FREEDOM BEGINS WITH A CHANGE OF HEART AS WE ABIDE BY FAITH IN THE WORD. (I.)

Listen to verse 31. "So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in Him, "If you abide in My Word, you are truly My disciples." To be one of many who believe or who claim to have faith in Jesus isn't enough faith to save us unless we abide in God's Word. True faith or being born again begins with an awakened heart, a seeker's heart, a convicted heart, which at the moment of conversion, becomes a converted heart. At the moment we believe and receive Jesus, He enters into our hearts by faith. There must be, as in being born physically, so spiritually, a time or a moment when we are spiritually saved, spiritually born again. That's the beginning of truly becoming one of Jesus' disciples. But as being born physically doesn't make us mature or fully grown, so being born again spiritually is not the end of becoming one of Jesus' disciples, but only the beginning. Jesus says we must abide in Him. The Greek word for abide here is **meno**, which is used 120 times in the New Testament. **Meno** means to stay,

stay put, to continue in a given place, to tarry, to abide, to remain, to dwell, or to endure in Christ, in love with Him, and in communion with Jesus. This continuing, this remaining and abiding in Jesus speaks of **(1) continually listening to the Word of Jesus, the Word of God**, and to listen to the voice of God's Spirit. A true disciple of Jesus is always open and listening to the voice of the Lord. A Christian disciple is a believer who first listens to what Jesus has to say before making decisions. An abiding disciple also means **(2) continually learning more and more about Jesus**. The Greek word for disciple, **mathetes** means one who keeps learning what kind of living Jesus desires in us. An abiding disciple also means **(3) continually studying the Word to understand it better**. Abiding also means **(4) continually applying God's Word to our lives in a life of obedience to Christ**.

Abiding in Christ doesn't mean we never sin—sinless perfection. All of us come short of the glory of God. But abiding in Christ means that we have in us, by God's indwelling Holy Spirit, the freedom not to sin. Andrew Murray in his book, "Abide In Christ," wrote of this abiding as reminding him of a unapproachable lion unless his keeper is present. If the keeper is present, anyone can rest their neck on the lion's neck. Yet to approach that same lion without the keeper there would mean instant death. The picture is that each believer, though still capable of sinning and who still sins at times, has within him or her the Keeper who constantly provides freedom not to sin. If we are truly abiding in Jesus, we are so in love with Jesus, that we want Jesus beside us constantly. Sometimes, however, we ignore the presence of our inner Keeper. When we do, we have a forgiving Keeper. An unbeliever may know Jesus died for him and that God provides salvation and an inner Keeper to help us not to sin, but if that unbeliever refuses to let the Keeper enter into his cage of sin, there is no protection for him from the wages and ravages of sin. Are you by faith abiding in the Word? Then you have an abiding change of heart that comes by listening, learning, studying, and applying God's Word to your life. This first step in Jesus' path to freedom is this glorious provision. Secondly,

FREEDOM CONTINUES IN A CHANGE OF HEART LEADING US TO KNOW THE TRUTH AS DISCIPLES. (II.) We read Jesus' words in John 8:32, "And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." What a hope this held out to these many believing Jews—liberty. Those who believed Jesus' words were truly free and they must have known it inside them. But the vocal responders to Jesus' words certainly were not converted—they were opposed to Jesus. Liberty is what many fight for. Philosophers dream of liberty intellectually. But Jesus was offering freedom on a higher plane, freedom in our hearts, souls, and spirits—spiritual liberty. How would you have responded to such a gracious promise? Look at the vocal Pharisees reacting to Jesus' words in verse 33. "They answered Him, "We are the offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that You say, "You will become free?" The law laid it down in Leviticus 25:39-46 that no Jew was to become a slave or to make another fellow Jew his slave. Now with a bold-faced lie, these Pharisees and other Jews told Jesus, "We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone." Was that true? No, it was untrue. The Jews were often enslaved and in bondage even prior to the

Exodus. They were in bondage to the neighboring nations such as the Philistines during the time of the Judges. They were in bondage to Egypt for 400 years. For 70 years, they were enslaved in Babylon. At this very moment, they were Roman subjects praying for Messiah to come and deliver them from their bondage as slaves of Rome. There was scarcely a major power whom the Jews had not been enslaved to—Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Greece, Syria, and Rome. They longed for freedom, but they were not free, but before Jesus, they were too proud to admit they were in bondage, and that they needed to be set free. In pride they convinced themselves that they were whole and needed no physician, convinced they were free, and in need of no liberation. The speaking portion of these many who believed in Jesus were demonstrating their unwillingness to hold to Jesus' teaching. Because their pride was so strong, they could not and would not acknowledge their own need or recognize Messiah, the divine Word incarnate standing before them.

A few years back, in an evangelistic service in church, a young sixth grade girl came to her pastor and told him, "I'm not a Christian, but I want to be. Will you pray that I will be saved tonight? He responded, "Yes I will pray now!" Then as she left him, she added, "Pastor, just don't mention my name." At the end of the service, the Pastor asked everyone to bow their heads and he prayed, "Dear Lord there is someone here tonight who wants You to save them and has come up to ask for prayer. Father, I pray this person will be saved right now, if You know which person it is who wants Your salvation." He got no farther in the prayer because this young lady stood up and said, "It's me, Jesus, it's me," as she broke into her pastor's prayer. Pride kept her from wanting her name mentioned, but the problem was solved when she wanted Jesus to make sure He knew it was her. When we are too proud to admit we are enslaved sinners, there's no salvation for us, until we admit it is us in need of salvation and deliverance. Then we are free to grow in the Word as His disciple. There is a third step to saving freedom.

FREEDOM RESULTS IN A CHANGE OF HEART AS WE NO LONGER ARE SLAVES OF SIN. (III.) Notice John 8:34-36. "Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone (this is not only a promise to Jews) 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." Did Jesus mean that whoever ever sins after salvation is no longer free? No, This is a difficult phrase to understand. It helps to observe that the Greek word Jesus used is present continuative meaning He was saying everyone who practices sin, or continually is sinning is a slave to sin. Jesus wasn't talking about isolated sinful acts such as Peter denying Him or one of us speaking rudely to our child, our spouse, or our friend. Jesus here is speaking about our pattern of life. If we are constantly sinning, we then are slaves of sin and we need to be set free. John makes this clearer for us in his epistle in I John 3:7-10, saying, "Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as He is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for

God's Word abides in Him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil; whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother." Three tips about growing in the truth are: (1) There is one way to be freed from the pattern of sinning in our lives. We must become slaves of righteousness. Romans 6:16-18. "Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness. But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness."

(2) There is more help Jesus gives as He changed the figure a bit in verses 35-36. Jesus here says, "The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever." Slaves only have temporary privileges in the master's house. Sons have freedom always and forever. Thus, Jesus was telling these Pharisees and Jews if they would only let the Son of God set them free from the practice of sinning, they would be free indeed. The picture is that they no longer would need to be worried about being sold or dismissed. Jesus is pointing out that the only true freedom of the soul from sin is to be able with God's indwelling Holy Spirit to "say no to sin."

Socrates once said rightly, "How can you call a man free when his pleasures rule over him?" The picture Jesus gives of everyone of us who practices being a slave to sin is of a slave chained in a dungeon, who can't break free of his chains. Every time we go back to our practice of sin, the chain becomes tighter until our slavery to sin begins to crush us. Jesus said the slave's limitation in his master's house is that he has no security or assurance of enjoying his limited freedom permanently.

(3) There is a most important tip here, and that is that when we receive Christ, we don't give up our freedom. Rather, we give up our slavery under sin, and become free to do what we please because we now please to serve Jesus, our master and do His will. Today, some of us may deny our slavery like the Pharisees did, but the reason we deny it may well be that we've never tried to get free. We are in bondage without knowing it. When we try to stop our sinful habits without Jesus, we can't. I am reminded of our dog we had when we lived for 14 years at 523 D Street, from 1976 to 1990. Our dog, Princess, appeared to be free until the meter reader came. Since we knew about her dislike for intruders in our back yard, we kept her on a chain. She looked free until he opened the gate, and Princess could only go so far, until she started choking herself barking at the intruder of our property. She looked free until she wanted to run. I ask each of us today, "Are we slaves of sin, or a cherished sin, or are we bond-slaves of Jesus? Many say, "I can quit this habit whenever I want." We can't ever quit without being freed from sin by Jesus. 4thly,

FREEDOM ALWAYS IS ACCOMPANIED BY A CHANGE OF HEART AS OUR ATTITUDES AND ACTIONS PATTERN THOSE OF ABRAHAM. (IV.)

Vs. 37-44. "Jesus said, "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.” 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.**”

When we are slaves of sin, it is a tough blow to be denied what we have always believed to be true. Jesus denied that Abraham was their father. Jesus knew what he spoke by observing the attitudes and actions of their hearts. These Pharisees and Jews sought to kill Him. That wasn't what Abraham did. Abraham couldn't show enough kindness to God on the plains of Mamre where Abraham received Him, bowed before Him, and showed Him reverence and hospitality. Listen to the story in Genesis 18:1-8. We read, “And the LORD appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth and said, “O Lord, if I have found favor in Your sight, do not pass by your servant. Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree, while I bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since You have come to your servant.” So, they said, “Do as you have said.” And Abraham went quickly into the tent to Sarah and said, “Quick! Three seahs of fine flour! Knead it, and make cakes.” And Abraham ran to the herd and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to a young man, who prepared it quickly. Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared and set it before them. And he stood by them under the tree while they ate.”

Every Pharisee and Jew prided themselves on how Abraham treated the Lord. Jesus told them their heart attitudes and actions were missing. Their native tongue and actions were not those of Abraham, but blow of all blows, their speech betrayed them as having the devil as their father, the father of all lies, including their lies. Jesus was saying, “By listening to the devil's lies, you have hardened your hearts not to receive Me. Where are we, each of us with Jesus? Are we flirting with the slavery of sin? Are we playing with fire? In 1838, on July 31, the slaves in Jamaica were freed. They made a mahogany coffin, dug a grave, and threw their master's whips, the torture irons, the branding irons, fragments from the treadmill, handcuffs, and so much more. At the stroke of midnight, the coffin was lowered into the grave and those thousands of former slaves sang the Doxology. They knew it was God Himself who led the British to set them free. What should we be singing? Freedom is a heart matter. Do you have a new heart? Does it show? Amen