



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

John 8: 31-36

Summer 2022

"Free Indeed"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you, Seth. That was a good introduction to our text, that passage from Luke, because that's what the Lord does in the temple. And in our passage in John 8 He proclaims 'release to the captives'; it's all about "being free."

He is speaking to a crowd, the same crowd that He's been speaking to since chapter 7. And in chapter 8 the 'Great Feast' is over, the Feast of Tabernacles, and He's still there in Jerusalem preaching in the temple, in the Court of the Women. And we're continuing this conversation that He's been having with this group of Jewish men and women.

It's in the Court of the Women and we read an encouraging statement at the beginning, verse 31, "As He spoke these things, many came to believe in Him....". You know, that's how the passage last week ended in verse 30, "As He spoke these things, many came to believe in Him." So now reading the entire passage for today,

³¹So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, *then* you are truly disciples of Mine; ³²and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." ³³They answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, 'You will become free'?"

³⁴ Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. ³⁵ The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever. ³⁶ So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.

John 8: 31-36

May the LORD bless this reading of His Word, and bless our time of study in it together. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

Father, what a great privilege it is to be with Your people, be with the saints on a Sunday morning and do this: read the Scriptures together, spend time studying them together, singing hymns of praise to You, (like that great hymn we sang by Wesley, "O for a thousand tongues to sing, My great Redeemer's praise"). LORD, You have sent the Redeemer to us, the Son who can set us free. And He's done that if we're believers in Him.

And we're believers in Him because He gave us the grace to be believers. We can't boast in our faith. We can boast in nothing and just give You praise for intervening in our lives. Why did You pluck us as brands from the burning? Not one of us can answer that question—other than, 'Your sovereign grace.' Why did You love us? —Because You loved us.

So LORD, may we love You back. And I pray that that will be the result of our time of study this morning, and pray that You would guide us in our passage, and give us the lessons that You would have us to know. Give us clarity on this text and enable us to grow in grace and knowledge.

And so LORD, we thank You for Your Word, Your inerrant Word, and the revelation that it gives us of who You are and who we are; of what we need and what You have given us to meet all of our needs. Help us to rest in that. And what a privilege to do this, to pray, and to pray as a congregation, to come, all of us, together before the throne of grace and seek Your help in time of need.

And there are times of particular need, but every day and every moment for all of us is a time of need. We need Your grace and Your mercy and Your life at every moment. And fortunately, as we'll study later in chapter 10, we are in Your hand, and You'll never let us go, so we live there. We live in Your hand, and the hand of Your Son.

LORD, we are always, always in need of Your constant grace and support; and so we pray You'd give us that. And now, in this hour, give us insight, give us clear, spiritual vision, and build us up in the faith. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

(Message) In Scotland's national epic, *The Bruce*, there is the line, "Freedom is a noble thing." Who would disagree with that? Americans wouldn't, we are a freedom loving people. The first sight that many of those old immigrants got of the New World was the Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor, with its well-known inscription, "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free." But breathe free to do what?

What is freedom? Well, there are different ideas of about that: Freedom is national independence; It's personal autonomy, self-determination; It is freedom of choice, or it's freedom from restraint.

The Lord spoke of freedom and what He spoke about was truly a noble thing. It's not the occasion to do what we want to do but it is the ability to do what we should do. It's the freedom to be what we were made to be. It's something men cannot forge for themselves. It is a gift that only He can give. In John 8 He said, "If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed." (vs36). He alone makes people free—and they are free indeed.

He was speaking to a crowd in the temple and it seemed to be a receptive crowd—at least some were. Verse 30 stated, "that many came to believe in Him." Not all believed or were at all receptive. Many in the crowd were hostile. They were priests and scribes and Pharisees who had been challenging everything that Jesus said. But in spite

of their opposition, many others had chosen to stand with Christ. But how firm was their stand? Had they been brought out of death into life?

Well, John doesn't tell us that, he doesn't say. But Jesus talked to them about that next in verse 31 and gave them important instruction on faith, saving faith. He had seen large crowds in Galilee melt away when they didn't like His teaching. So here He explained to these new believers the characteristics that separate the true from the false, the true from shallow faith, genuine disciples from fickle disciples.

And in this instruction, we have more than a hint of what the freedom is that He would speak of in the next verse. He said, "If you continue in My word, *then* you are truly disciples of Mine." (vs31b). The genuine believer remains in Jesus' teaching, obeys it, doesn't doubt it, seeks to understand it better, and is guided by it—even when everything else opposes it. That's what the fickle disciples in Galilee did not do in John 6. They said, "This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?", (vs60), and left Him.

A true disciple will not understand everything in the Bible, not initially, but will know that it is true: That the problem is with him or her, not with the Scriptures, and will seek to know them better and study them to understand them.

The characteristic of genuine faith is perseverance. The believer perseveres. Jesus said, "continue in My Word." (vs31), 'persevere in My Word.' The only way we will understand God's Word is if we first believe it—believe it to be true. And then we increase in our understanding of it.

And if we believe, we will obey. That may result in some hardships for us: It may result in some loss; loss of friends or loss of ease and comfort. But what we gain is better friends; and wisdom; and both temporal and eternal blessings.

And in verse 32, Jesus spoke of those blessings. Persevering faith not only establishes the genuineness of one's faith, it also has power; "And you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."

John 8 has two of the most quoted verses in the Bible. Verse 7, often simplified as, "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone." And this, "The truth will make you

free." It's not unusual to find John 8:32 engraved over the entrances to libraries and buildings on college campuses, or have it as the school motto.

"The truth will make you free", in Latin, is the motto of an important local university down in University Park. It's also on the main building at a large school in Austin, (hint, hint). And truth does give freedom. Knowledge is power.

But the Lord was not speaking of truth in its broadest sense. He was speaking of the Gospel of Salvation. He was speaking of Himself. He is the Truth, and the Highest Truth. The One of whom John said, back in chapter 1, verse 14, "is full of grace and truth." "I am the way and the truth and the life," He will say, "...no one comes to the Father but through Me." (Jn 14:6). And here the truth 'that makes free' is the truth about Him. —It is the Gospel. It is the Good News that Christ releases people from their sins; that He gives, as Isaiah said, "...liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners", (Isa 61:1), to all who believe in Him.

Now, the Lord's audience must have been surprised by that. 'If you are My disciples, if you truly believe in Me you will be set free.' Surprised, because the rabbis taught that the Law set people free in their writings, in the Mishnah. They said, "The yoke of the Law will remove mundane care" —remove the troubles and the anxieties of life. It will make you free. That's where their hope was; it was in the Law of Moses.

But throughout John's Gospel we read that the Law pointed to Christ. Back in chapter 5, Jesus said, "If you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me." (vs46). He's all through the Word of God. He's all through the Old Testament. He's all through the Law of Moses. He is the one who sets people free: Set Israel from slavery in Egypt; sets people free today. And He was offering freedom to those who were there in the temple on that day.

But the offer of freedom assumed that there was a condition of slavery. And by making the offer, He indicated that the Jews didn't have freedom—which got a reaction from His critics in the crowd. "They answered Him, 'We are Abraham's descendants, and

have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say,
'You will become free'? " (vs33).

Now there's some irony in that because just as they were making their claim, "We have never been enslaved to anyone", Roman soldiers were guarding the temple court of the Gentiles. In fact, Israel's history has been one of constant enslavement: They served the Egyptians; they served the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Greeks, and Syrians. —Rome was just the latest conqueror.

And, of course, they knew that. So it's more likely that they meant, 'They had never been enslaved spiritually' —and didn't need His freedom. "We are Abraham's descendants..." they said. Which was a great claim; they were Abraham's descendants—and there were no more privileged people on the face of the earth than the Jewish people. It was to Abraham that God gave the promise, "...In you all the families of the earth will be blessed." (Gen 12:3). That revealed and prophesied blessing for his descendants; and freedom is at the heart of blessing. So his descendants, they reasoned, as these Jews were, were not a race of slaves. 'We're Abraham's descendants. We're free people.'

Well, they were God's people. They saw themselves as 'sons of the kingdom.' In fact, they're referred to that in Matthew, chapter 8, (vs12), "sons of the kingdom." Not slaves; and certainly they don't need to be set free. The very suggestion that they were slaves was a great affront to them.

This is one of the obstacles to evangelism: Telling people who think that they're okay, that they're really not okay. That's what Jesus was doing with these Jewish people who were so full of the confidence in their relationship with the LORD that when they heard this from Jesus, it was, as I said, a great affront. And that happens, I think, routinely when the Gospel is given to people today, and informing them that 'They're not okay; they're guilty; they're sinful and they're helpless—and they need God's mercy and grace.' No one wants to hear that. People object to that.

The Greeks did. When Paul was on Mars' Hill and told the philosophers of Athens that 'Judgment day was coming, and they needed to repent!', they laughed at him. That was Gentile arrogance.

This was Jewish pride. 'They were Abraham's descendants', which was true, and which is a great privilege. They could not imagine, though, of 'being in need.' 'The Greeks were—not them!'

But there's more to being a descendant of Abraham and having a claim on physical parentage. John the Baptist reminded them of that in Matthew chapter 3, verses 8 and 9. He told them, 'God could raise up children to Abraham from these stones.' And if you've been to Israel you know it's a very rocky country, particularly up around Jerusalem with lots of limestone.

And it was a vivid reminder of their need for grace, 'God can raise up new people like you out of stones. There's nothing special about you; it's all of God's grace.' 'They couldn't rely on their ancestry', is what John was saying—as esteemed as that was. They needed to repent and do works of repentance.

Abraham understood that; he understood his condition very well—certainly better than his descendants did. At one point in Genesis 18, he told the LORD that he was "but dust and ashes." (vs27). Nothing to brag about there.

But these people didn't have that attitude. Just the opposite. Their connection to Abraham made them *special* in their minds—and without need of mercy. They were not slaves.

So the Lord had to explain to them what He meant by freedom and slavery. And to emphasize His meaning He began with a strong assertion. Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin." (vs34). 'Sin is slavery.' That's the slavery He was speaking about. And nothing has changed in 2000 years. It's just as true today as it was then. This is as much a message for us today as it was to those ancient Jews.

Freedom means different thing to different people: For some it's personal autonomy, it's a self-directed life. It's life without restraints. It's the right to do and be whatever one wants to be or do—or what one thinks that he or she is; (the talk today about his or her truth).

The message of John 8, verse 34 is, 'Sin is not liberty, it's license. It's not freedom, it is slavery to personal passions that are dark and deadly. Sin may be pleasurable—but it is lethal.' So there's a warning in all of this, a warning to all of us.

But again, it's not new; it's as old as the Old Testament. Solomon wrote in Proverbs 23, verse 27, "A harlot is a deep pit And adulterous woman a narrow well." We heard a very good lesson on that two weeks ago; 'It may be enticing, but once a person falls into that moral hole, it's hard to get out.'

You can visit ancient Egyptian copper mines that are down in the Arabah, the desert in Israel, south of the Dead Sea, and get a glimpse of the kind of slavery Solomon spoke of. The mines are deep holes in the ground and they were worked by slaves. The Egyptians lowered them straight down into these narrow pits where they worked all day in these claustrophobic conditions and sweltering heat. There was no escape. —They worked until they died. Sin, sin of all kinds, is a deep pit. Those that avoid the kind of pit Solomon spoke of, of moral failure, can fall into a different kind of pit, that of self-righteousness.

That's what characterized the Lord's critics here in the temple. They were convinced that they were moral and they were not slaves. But self-righteousness is the worst pit to be in because the person who is affected by that, who is self-righteous, can't see himself as self-righteous—and can't see his condition and need.

Being a slave to sin, whatever it maybe, immorality, empty piety, or religiosity is a hard life because sin is a hard master. 'Always' Isaiah said, "There is no peace for the wicked." (Isa 48:22),—no peace. And there's no peace for the moralist who stands on his own merit.

You see that in the rich young ruler, who came to Jesus in Matthew Chapter 19, verse 16. And there he asks the Lord, "Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may

obtain eternal life?" He was an admirable character, an admirable young man; a clean, good, religious Law keeper—but unsettled and troubled in his soul. And with good reason, because if eternal life is dependent upon us; what we do, what we keep on doing; there is no assurance. We're all prone to wander and we all constantly fail.

But again, evangelism is hard preaching because many people, most people maybe, cannot see how desperate their condition is—and don't respond. They're spiritually blind and spiritual slaves. People have achieved political freedom; modern inventions have given us freedom from time, hard labor, and sickness.

This modern age has been richly blessed materially—blessed by God's goodness to us. Man by his natural powers, has, by the grace of God, freed himself from many things; from the want and worries of earthly existence. And that's certainly true of our age and our place here.

But he's never been able to free himself from the darkness that covers his soul; to free himself from his ignorance of the true God; or deliver himself from a heart bent to selfishness and sin.

That's the greatest slavery. And often a person must be brought to the point of despair of his or her attempts to be righteous and gain spiritual and moral freedom in order to be brought to the truth, brought to the end of himself or herself—to be brought to the Lord. And maybe some of those that Jesus spoke to here, who it's said, 'Came to believe in Him', had come to that point and truly had believed.

But most in that crowd had not come to that knowledge of reality; had not come to that wisdom. Jesus was mainly talking to people who were convinced they were 'Right with God', that they were 'Abraham's descendants', that they were 'Okay'. But the only way to pierce this darkness in their hearts is with Light. Jesus is "the Light of the world"; and so He continued to give them Light. He continued to teach them truth to help them to despair of themselves.

So in verse 35 He stayed on this subject of slavery by describing the status of a slave; and that it is *insecure*. A slave has no permanent standing; the slave does not

remain in the house forever. The son does remain in the house forever. But a slave is not the son of the master. He may work in the house. He may even enjoy some of the amenities of the home, but as a slave he has no rights. He's property and he can be sold away.

The Lord was illustrating the nature of slavery in order to apply it to the Jews. Their security was based on being Abraham's sons. Jesus challenged their assurance by indicating that they were really slaves. They had privileges as Jews, Jesus didn't deny that, but apart from faith in Him and salvation, their privileges were only temporal and would not last forever; in fact, wouldn't last for long.

A slave's only hope is for a liberator—one like the son of the master who has the authority to free the slave. And that's Christ. He's the great liberator. He's the Son of God. And as God's Son, He has full authority to free the slave. He states that in verse 36. "So if the Son makes you free," He said, "you will be free indeed." But how would He do that?

The only way He could do that, since our enslavement is due to our own sin and guilt, is that He had to pay the penalty for our sins by His death in our place as our substitute. God is holy. He cannot wink at sin or simply dismiss it as we might do with an offender. His justice must be satisfied so that, on that basis, (the basis of righteousness, the basis of justice satisfied), our guilt could be removed by Christ paying our debt.

And we receive the benefit of that payment through faith. It becomes ours by simply trusting in Him as Abraham did, (the one they boasted in). That's exactly what he did: They boasted of being Abraham's sons, his children, and yet they didn't do what Abraham did. What Abraham did is seen very clearly in Genesis chapter 15, in verse 6. "Then he," (Abraham), "believed in the LORD; and He," (the LORD), "reckoned it to him as righteousness." Abraham "believed in the LORD", was forgiven and considered righteous—set free through faith alone. Not in anything of himself, but in everything in the LORD.

If you have trusted in Christ, if you will trust in Him, you can be assured that He was punished in your place and suffered all of God's wrath for you; the penalty of sin is paid for, it is removed, and you're free.

And the liberty is instantaneous. We don't go through a process to merit deliverance. We don't have to achieve a higher level of acceptability with the Lord in order to finally be saved. Christ didn't die for the righteous or the worthy, but for the ungodly. He saves the sinner just as they are. He saves us in our sin—where we are, at the moment of faith.

But He not only saves us in our sin, He also saves us from our sin. That's very important to understand that. He saves us in our sin, but He saves us also at the same time *from* our sin, out *of* our sin. We're not only delivered from the guilt of sin and the penalty of sin, but from the power of sin. He makes us free indeed!

That doesn't mean that we're completely free of indwelling sin, or that sin never gains the upper hand in our lives; we know that's not the case. It does, of course. We battle with that. When the Israelites entered Canaan, it was their land. It was their inheritance. They were no longer slaves in Egypt but free men in their own country.

But there were still Canaanites in the land who didn't want to cede any of that land to them. So Israel had to fight for every inch of real estate that was already theirs. As long as they fought with faith in the LORD, they were victorious. And as we live by faith, we overcome the power of sin in our lives, because we have within us the life of Christ. I say it often, but perhaps it needs to be said often, (we need to be reminded), we live a supernatural life—a different life; the life of Christ is within us through the Holy Spirit. Paul said, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me." Galatians 2:20. Christ is in us. His life is in us.

But, we're also in Him. In 2 Corinthians 5, verse 17, Paul wrote, "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come." We are new creatures. We're not the people we used to be—(you know this passage and we'll study this more later), we're like a branch in a vine or a tree; and

just as a branch receives life-giving sap from the tree to produce leaves and fruit, so too we receive spiritual life, spiritual energy from the Lord—His life is in us.

We're free from the old life—that life is over. The person is dead that we used to be—and we are new persons, we're new individuals. The believer in Christ is a new creature. That's what Paul said and knowing that affects our behavior as we act on it.

St. Augustin did. He lived a notoriously immoral life as a young man. He wrote about that in his *Confessions*, where he recalled a prayer of his youth, (I've quoted him before), "Give me chastity, but not yet." He was converted out of that, and he became a new creation with new life in Christ.

And then one day his past caught up with him on a street in Milan when a former mistress saw him. She called out to him. But when he saw her, he quickly turned and he ran the other way. And surprised by his response, she ran after him calling out, "Augustin, it is I." Augustin kept running the other way and he answered, "Yes, but it is not I."

That was true. The old Augustin was dead. —He was a new creation. Some have dismissed that story as apocryphal. There's no evidence of that at all; and it's completely true to life. It illustrates accurately, 2 Corinthians 5, verse 17, how a new creature lives in response to temptation. It shows us how Romans chapter 6, verse 11 is lived out—there Paul wrote, "Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God and Christ Jesus."

Consider this to be true: 'You're dead to sin. You're alive to God and Christ Jesus.' Why? Because that is what you are if you're a believer in Christ. You are in Him, and He is in you.

We're dead to the old life, therefore, reckon that to be true. Consider it to be true daily and know that you can't go back to that old life. Reckon yourself to be a new person with new ability and act upon that. That's the life of faith; living out your life according to what the Scriptures tell us we are—because it is true. We are each a new creature. That's real freedom—the power to run from temptation. Freedom is not the

liberty to do whatever we *want* but the liberty to do whatever we *ought*. And not only that, but to do it because we *want* to do it.

What we ought to do and want to do, or, 'ought to want to do' and will, if we are Christians, is what Jesus told a scribe when He summarized the Law of God and the will of God in two commandments. The first and foremost is to 'love the LORD our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.' The second is to 'love our neighbor as ourself.' It's all positive—it's what we can and we should do.

That's freedom: Freedom from error, from ignorance, and self-delusion. We know God Almighty. Think of that. We personally know God Almighty. We really know Him! The darkness is gone. And knowing Him, we are free; free to do what is right.

And free from fear. Think of those three Hebrews who wouldn't worship the king of Babylon's golden image in Daniel 3. They were threatened with the fiery furnace. They didn't flinch, "Our God is able to deliver us," they said. 'But even if He doesn't, we're not going to worship the gold image.' (vs17). He did deliver them. In fact, Christ was with them in the flames. Many saints have not been delivered from the furnace and died fiery deaths. But they had the courage to face death for Christ and to accept His will for them—and to accept that with a life that ended glorifying Him. Now that's freedom from fear, the kind of freedom that Christ gives to His people. It's the new life, and again, it's supernatural.

We are able to serve others, to love our neighbor. That's freedom from selfishness, from ego—free to put others first much as Christ sacrificed Himself for us at Calvary. That's Philippians chapter 2, verse 5. He is the great example to the Philippians that Paul cites in order to teach them to not think of themselves as more important than others, to put others ahead of themselves. And we have the ability, the power, to do that—the freedom to do that.

But again, having said all of that, this is not a promise of a sin free life, of sinless perfection. That's nowhere promised in the Word of God. From the day we are born-again, to the day we die, life is a struggle. In Ephesians 6, Paul describes it as a struggle against "spiritual forces...in heavenly places" (vs12). He narrows the battle, the spiritual struggle there, to that spiritual realm that is exterior to us, that affects us from the outside. It includes not only the demonic, the satanic, it also includes the world and 'the spirit of the age' that puts pressure on us to conform to it—which is also outside of us and impressing itself upon us.

But then there is also the interior, the struggle within. And that's what Paul speaks of in Romans chapter 7 and in Galatians chapter 5, where he describes it as a 'battle with the flesh', and 'the sin that is in us.' And it is constant, it is continual. You're fighting it right now. We're always dealing with that. Temptation doesn't stop.

Failure still happens. We don't always, "reckon ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." (Rom 6:11). We don't do that as we ought. Paul wrote at the end of Romans 7, in which, (as you know), he speaks of his frustration in this spiritual struggle; and how he doesn't match up to things himself. He's doing what 'he doesn't want to do', and 'doesn't do what he knows he should and wants to do.'

But He says at the end of it, though, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our LORD!" (Rom 7:25). In other words, he will be freed completely in the future, in the resurrection, to be glorified and perfect. And that's the hope that we have—that's the hope every believer in Jesus Christ has. We are presently free from the power of sin but we still deal with that sin and struggle with it. But the day is coming when we will not only be free from the power of sin, we'll be free from the very presence of sin. And all of this that we go through now, will be a thing of the past and forgotten.

And that's the promise that the Lord offered His audience that day in the temple: To be free to live obediently, believing in Him, and abiding in His Word. Some may have been enslaved to the sin of immorality there in the temple that day—or the sin of

religious pride which is, 'grinding away at the mill of merit', toiling and sweating to produce and earn God's favor.

That's slavery. That's what John and Charles Wesley did and their friend, George Whitefield, who engaged in all kinds of religious activity, wearing themselves out in a futile attempt to be saved by their works. But God shined His grace into their hearts. Charles wrote of it in one of his great hymns, *And Can It Be*,

...

I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee."

Do you want to be rid of the chains—want that freedom? —Then come to Christ. Believe in Him as your God and Savior. He receives all who do. And then, by His grace, follow Him.

Father, there's nothing more amazing than the great truth that the Son of God died for His people, for a multitude of them—for everyone who's put his faith or her faith in Him. So we thank You that now there is no longer any condemnation for us who are in Christ Jesus. We thank You for that.

LORD, give us joy as we contemplate that and give us resolve to live a life that's honoring to You, that brings glory to You. May we live a triumphant life of serving You. We can do that only by Your grace; and so we pray for that. Bless us to that end.

Now the LORD bless you and keep you. The LORD make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. The LORD lift up His countenance on you and give you peace. In Christ's name. Amen.

(End of Audio)