

John 8:31-36

**Theme:** Freed Indeed

Since two things can be true at the same time, it's more than reasonable to say that each of us is a walking conundrum, a contradiction, a consciousness that contains multitudes. Walt Whitman once wrote, "Do I contradict myself? Very well, then, I contradict myself; I am large – I contain multitudes." We want one thing one moment and the opposite the next. I can be energized by people and love being around them and a few minutes later desire to be around no one. I can feel lonely and revel in solitude. You can be both excited and intimidated. We all live with things that seem opposed but are just two things being true at the same time.

For every believer, two very different things are true at once. You are a saint. You are a sinner. You are both all the time. Jesus says a truth thing, "*If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.*"<sup>32</sup> *Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.*" (**John 8:31-32**) Earlier, he said, "*You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me,*"<sup>40</sup> *yet you refuse to come to me to have life.*" (**John 5:39**) Ever seeing but never perceiving, ever hearing but never understanding. Owning a Bible doesn't make you holy. Believing in Jesus, the center and fulfillment of the Bible's promises does.

In **John 8**, Jesus speaks to those who believed and instructs to them to keep holding onto his words, to remain in them as his disciples. Does this mean memorizing verses without understanding them? Nope. God's holy child seeks insight and prays for understanding. Does it mean keeping the Word in your head, locked in there, without letting it shape your life? Nope. God's holy child has just got to live out the Word that fills the heart. Holding onto Jesus' words means reading, meditating, and finding satisfaction in them, like a thirsty deer lapping up water. It means learning, not just hearing Jesus' words, and then bringing those words with you when you're away from page, pew, or podcast. Those who know Jesus' words and remain in them know and remain in God's saving love. They're filled by that love and want to live it out. No easy feat because remaining in Jesus' words also means wrestling with them when they're hard to understand or hard to hear. Keep returning to the Word again and again, because in it you hear the truth again and again.

The truth is that God sent his Son, Jesus, into the world, not to condemn the world, but to save it through him. Jesus is the savior from sin. This truth sets free. Whoever believes that Jesus is the one chosen by God to save sinners is already a free person right now. There's no condemnation for such a person, no judgment, no crippling fear of God. Believing the truth, Jesus' words, make people righteous. **Genesis 15:6**, "*Abram believed the LORD, and he credited to him as righteousness.*" Abram was made holy by faith because faith in God's promises is credited as righteousness. Jesus prayed for God to always do this, "*Sanctify them by the truth, your word is truth.*" (**John 17:17**) The words of Jesus make us holy because they explain what he did! His perfect life, his cross, his resurrection. This message of freedom, the truth of the gospel of Christ is something everyone needs to hear, especially those who don't think they do!

When told of the universal need for freedom, some in the crowd responded defensively, "*We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?*" (**John 8:33**) They hadn't forgotten Egypt or the nations who oppressed them during Judges, or captivity in Babylon. They were aware of Rome's control. They also knew Jesus was speaking in spiritual terms and responded spiritually but still missed his point. They were children of Abraham, children of the line of kings, heirs of the world, the mighty one would come from Father Abraham, just like they did, and so because of that, they thought they were right with God, spiritually free. If you think you're right with God through anything other than Jesus, you're mistaken.

To show them how wrong and how captive they truly were, Jesus said another true thing, *“Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.”* (**John 8:34**) Could Jesus be any clearer? Everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Everyone. You sin? Ok, you’re slave to it. No one’s immune to this reality but thinking so is what the enemy wants you to think! Convince yourself you’re free from sin, and you’ll find you have no need for Jesus. Such thinking plays into the deceiver’s plans. But God, who loves you, wants you to know both your sinfulness and your helplessness against it so that you might know and cling to the Savior who has already conquered it for you, his Son, Jesus, whom you desperately need.

You can’t free yourself. No one can. An enslaved person can’t simply decide to quit and walk away without severe punishment. Imagine the power it would take to stand up and walk out unshaken by pain, undeterred by the anger of others, snapping chains like tissue paper, and just go. No human can do that. Only the Son of God can and he did! He used his power to liberate us because we could never do it ourselves. The slave to sin has no power, no ability to say “no” to sin, but the Son, who belongs in and rules God’s house forever, does and he gives his power to us. Ironically, the very Son so many rejected is the one who remains forever because he is the champion of life who poured out his life to death making intercession for us sinners.

Jesus rules over God’s house in mercy and love. With this in mind, he assures us, *“So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”* (**John 8:36**) Because all authority in heaven and earth has been given to him, when Jesus declares something, that’s how it is. The Son says that all who believe in him are free, so that’s how it is. You have been freed indeed. Even in moments of doubt, uncertainty, or worry that you aren’t, you still are because Jesus has set you free. Free from what? Sin, death, the dread of crippling eternal existential uncertainty. Free for what? Life on God’s joy-filled and blessed terms knowing God’s with you wherever you go, empowering your life of freedom. **II Corinthians 3:17**, *“Now the Lord is Spirit and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.”* That’s true for you all the time, too. You can say with the psalmist, *“I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free.”* (**Psalms 119:32**) Being free is the very reason Christ set you free, *“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm and do not yourselves be burdened again by a yolk of slavery.”* (**Galatians 5:1**) Christ the savior has bought you with his life and brought you into his kingdom. You get to do his will. You are a servant of his righteousness. He’s your Lord and Master, and there’s no one better – he’s the King of grace!

All of this is true for you all at the same time, conundrum and contradiction free. You are a sinner, but you’re a forgiven sinner. You are one who, by grace, holds to Jesus’ words. You’re his disciple. You know the truth of Christ. You are free. You, who want nothing more than to remain in Jesus, will be free forever. Stand always on that truth. Amen.