

Series: Receiving life by believing in God's Son (a Gospel of John study)

Sermon Text: John 8:27-44

Kids Phrase: Free

(Only John tells us this part of Jesus' story)

John said he wrote this letter to help us find “*fullness of life through believing Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.*” We're working through **1:19-11:57** where he tells real-life stories of how it looked when people met Jesus.

- During last week's lesson, I suggested persecution is inevitable for those who follow Jesus. He was constantly on trial for His love of the truth, not just from “*worldly*” folks; but at the Feast of Tabernacles, He drew a lot of fire from “*religious*” people. You wouldn't expect that, would you? Sadly, those who think they have God all figured out, rarely prefer biblical correction. As with Jesus, our toughest audience is always going to be religious people. We should be neither surprised nor detoured by this because spiritual warfare is about the liberation of image bearers bound by sin! Satan frequently convinces people that bondage is freedom. In his commentary on John, Pastor Bruce Milne reminds us, “*Our freedom is not the freedom to do as we want, but the freedom from being controlled by our fallen hearts to do as God wants ... true freedom is not the liberty to do anything we please, but ... to do what we ought; and it is genuine liberty because doing what we ought, now (also) pleases us.*” Church folks can suffer from something akin to “*Stockholm syndrome*” where the bond we formed with sin during our captivity inhibits how we receive the freedom Jesus offers. Like those in our text, we can struggle to believe this astonishing and unimaginable...

BIG IDEA: If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

Today's passage challenges us to consider **3 qualities of true believers**...

Quality #1: **True believers endure.** (8:27-31; cf. 2:23ff, 6:60ff).

- **Verses 27-30** tell us **They did not understand that he had been speaking to them about the Father. So, Jesus said to them, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me. He who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him."** Jesus made a gruesome prediction here... His claims of being one with **the Father** would be verified the day they would **lift him up** (i.e., crucify Him). Matthew 27 describes how God used powerful signs to affirm Jesus during the crucifixion (e.g., sudden mid-day darkness, the tearing the temple veil from top to bottom, an earthquake, dead saints

being raised, and tombs bursting open). On that day, the invisible God gave visible evidence for thousands of people to witness. The most antagonistic of unbelievers were forced *to know* God was with Jesus (cf. Matthew 27:54). One must ignore all that occurred the day of Christ's crucifixion to claim there's no tangible evidence for the existence of God.

- **Verses 30-31** tell us *as he was saying these things, many believed in him. So, Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples."* Can you believe He said that? You'd think Jesus would've been thrilled for any favorable response back then, but instead He basically said, "*Time will tell whether you truly believe in me.*" He was less impressed by "*professions of faith*" than we are. I mean, if Jesus were Baptist, He'd have scribbled their names on a convert list and taken them to the river, so he could brag about his "*success*" at the next denominational meeting. Instead, Jesus had a "*wait and see*" mindset towards aspiring *believers* with untested faith. "*The Parable of the Sower*" offers insight into how He viewed conversion. In Matthew 13, Jesus said God's Word is like seed being spread over 4 types of soils: Hard, Rocky, Thorny, and Good. He explained, "*As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is one who hears the word, immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.*" Defining "*success*" differently than Jesus breeds fake *disciples*. He sought faithful endurance, not "*flimsy professions*" and "*big numbers.*" While I hope all our members are *true disciples*, the reality is, we can't *know* your faith is legit until it is tested (like friendship/marriage). I mean, you may call yourself a banana, but we can't be sure until your peeled and a few bites are taken out of you! 1 Peter 1:6 (NLT) says, "*...trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold--though your faith is far more precious than mere gold.*" All this implies genuine faith is something proven over time, so we can't give up on people too quickly. Also, when our faith is challenged, and it must be, *true believers endure* by *abiding* (finding rest) *in God's Word*. That's quality #1.

Quality #2: *True believers are not slaves to sin.* (8:32-37; Romans 6:17, 7:18-25, 8:2; 1 John 3:4-9)

- Jewish people proudly trace their lineage back to Abraham, who Romans 4 calls, “*The Father of Faith.*” God made big promises as He declared this Chaldean man to be the first ever Jewish person (cf. Genesis 12:1-3). Many descendants viewed Abraham’s “*blessing*” as a birthright, not realizing God also requires trust and obedience. Their ancestry made them feel superior in all ways (e.g., morally, racially, culturally), which accounts for their poor response in *verses 32-37* as Jesus said, *you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.* *They answered, "We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone.* (By the way, this was wildly untrue because they were Roman subjects and their ancestors had been enslaved in Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Macedonia, and Syria!). They asked, *how is it that you say, 'You will become free'?"* *Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices 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. I know you are offspring of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you.* Jesus challenged their claim to *believe* in *His Father* for 2 important reasons: 1) Their hateful, murderous desires proved they were still *enslaved to sin*; 2) There was *no room in their hearts for his message*. 1 Corinthians 12 declares “*Not all things are helpful*” and believers must never be “*dominated by anything.*” No *believer* will be perfect, but if you think God is okay with sin, affirm lifestyles that violate His design, and are uninterested in His Word, then why would you claim to be a Christian? We must never be like this Jewish crowd who viewed *belief* as a “*birthright*” or a “*goal*” at which they had already arrived. Back in John 3:1-8, Jesus described faith as the “*start*” of a journey, like being born again. We don’t look at newborns and say, “*My work here is done*”, so why would we ever do that with faith? In his commentary on John, Pastor Chuck Swindoll urges us to view faith as a journey where *freedom* is found by “*coming to terms with the truth of our cravings...the origins and influences of our cravings, and...our personal responsibilities.*” As God slowly unveils our hearts, humble repentance and faith prove we are *true believers* who *endure* and *are not enslaved to sin*. This leads to one more quality we should consider...

Quality #3: *True believers desire what our Father desires.* (8:38-44)

- In *verses 38-44* Jesus said, *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 (implying He was!). 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. See why we can't accept the claims of other religions? If you don't love Jesus, then you don't love God. If we don't love what Jesus said, then we don't love God. Jesus was the embodiment of *the Father*, but these folks *refused to hear His words*. Jesus did what *He saw His Father doing*, but these folks, who claimed faithful *Abraham was their father, desired the will* of a different *father--the devil!* They had not yet experienced true *freedom*, which is always first about what we *desire*. You aren't set *free* by being born into a religious family or attending religious events like these Jews. Jesus said, **if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.** So, true *freedom* is a supernatural gift by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. How do we know we have it? When, by the Spirit's help, we *endure by abiding in God's Word*, become less *enslaved to sin*, and start *desiring what our Father desires*.*

Let's pray: Father, may our professions not be flimsy like this Jewish crowd. Illuminate our minds to see the contradictions between our claim and our lifestyle. Your Word says in James 2:14-17 NLT, "What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don't show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone? Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, and you say, 'Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well'--but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do? So, you see, faith by itself isn't enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless." Like it or not, who we are is evident in our desires and actions. As we abide in Your Word, may Your Spirit set us free from enslavement to sin and make us a like You--children who see Your Dad as someone to be more like. Amen.

Let's sing: Please stand and join us in singing about how Jesus is the "Light of the World."

So, what's your NEXT STEP?

- Remember, our next step always begins with faith in Christ. Either placing faith in Him for the first time or exercising faith to repent, change, and grow. Either way, His Spirit will help you.

Quotes/Additional thoughts:

- **Book Context:** The Gospel of the Apostle John, the son of Zebedee, provides a clearly stated purpose. *John 20:30-31* says, "**Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples,**

which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” Some people demand to have all their questions satisfied before bowing to Jesus, yet John claimed his limited account was enough to bring anyone to faith. As we read it, our Savior and friend emerges from the pages as a real person in the real world. Jesus shows us what we could become, if we too would rely on His infinite Father who will gladly supply whatever we need.

- **Life in his name:** Life is the Greek word, “zōē”, which means “Life, Living, Lifetime, Life-Giving” and is where we get the word, “zoology” in English. Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words says it's “used in the NT of life as a principle, life in the absolute sense, life as God has it, that which the Father has in Himself, and which He gave to the Incarnate Son to have in Himself, Jhn 5:26, and which the Son manifested in the world, 1Jo 1:2. From this life man has become alienated in consequence of the Fall, Eph 4:18, and of this life men become partakers through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, Jhn 3:15, who becomes its Author to all such as trust in Him, Act 3:15, and who is therefore said to be 'the life' of the believer, Col 3:4, for the life that He gives He maintains, Jhn 6:35, 63. Eternal life is the present actual possession of the believer because of his relationship with Christ, Jhn 5:24; 1Jo 3:14, and that it will one day extend its domain to the sphere of the body is assured by the Resurrection of Christ, 2Cr 5:4; 2Ti 1:10. This life is not merely a principle of power and mobility, however, for it has moral associations which are inseparable from it, as of holiness and righteousness. Death and sin, life and holiness, are frequently contrasted in the Scriptures.”
- **The Feast of Tabernacles:** “Many Jewish communities around the world keep the festival of Tabernacles, or ‘Booths’, to this day. The ‘tabernacles’ in question are usually makeshift shelters, made out of whatever comes to hand, set up in the open air in a back yard or porch. They may be used for meals, or even for sleeping. Their purpose, like so many Jewish traditions, is to remind the people of the time when their ancestors wandered in the wilderness, living in tents, that is, ‘tabernacles’ or ‘booths’...It was also an agricultural festival, coming at the climax of the harvest season, celebrating the harvest of grapes and olives in particular...In the time of Jesus it was one of the three great annual pilgrimage feasts (the others being Passover and Pentecost), when tens of thousands of Jewish people would converge on Jerusalem...The celebrations went on for a full eight days, starting and ending with a special sabbath...John is the only gospel that mentions a celebration of this festival, and the chapter begins here with all kinds of teasing hints of what is to come. Will Jesus go up to Jerusalem for the festival, or won't he? What does he mean by talking of his ‘time’, which isn't here yet? What are his brothers trying to get him to do?” Professor NT Wright
- **The lifting up of Jesus:** “The supreme moment of revelation is when Jesus is ‘lifted up’ (8:28), which is not merely the cross, but the series of events that led to his glorification: betrayal, trial, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. Through these events, the world will see not that Jesus is simply telling the truth (NIV), but that he is the bearer of God's divine name (‘I am’). ‘When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am.’” Professor Gary Burge
- **Connections in this text:** “The ‘lifting up’ is of course a reference to His crucifixion, a prediction He had made to Nicodemus perhaps as much as two years earlier (3:14-15). He then repeated His teaching from His encounter with the Pharisees after healing the invalid (5:19-47).” Pastor Chuck Swindoll

- **Superficial belief:** “The discussion now moves on to address those ‘who had believed’ (8:31). Yet as the story unfolds, it is evident that despite their interest in Jesus, they are unwilling to accept the deeper truths about him. In fact, this audience becomes the very audience that launches the most severe criticisms of Jesus in the entire Gospel. In the end they argue that Jesus is demon-possessed. And Jesus even says that rather than acting like children of Abraham, they are behaving like children of the devil.” Professor Gary Burge
- **Truth and freedom:** “The way to freedom is through the truth, and what matters therefore is to know the truth. Tyranny and slavery of every sort thrive on lies, half-truths, evasions and cover-ups. Freedom and truth go hand in hand... When people rebel against God in whatever way, new fields of force are called into being, a cumulative effect builds up, and individuals and societies alike become enslaved just as surely as if every single one of them wore chains and was hounded to work every day by a strong man with a whip.” Professor NT Wright
- **How truth sets us free:** “The Greek term is suggestive of release from indentured servanthood. Any drug addict who has been ‘clean and sober’ for a number of years will say the same: As they came to terms with the truth of their cravings, the truth about the origins and influences of their cravings, and the truth of their personal responsibilities, they found freedom. In fact, any repentant sinner will affirm the power of truth to liberate... Jesus clarified the purpose of His statement. The master is sin. Jesus’ statement that a ‘slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever,’ is meant to highlight the inferior status of a slave. Old Master Sin uses people for its own evil purposes, and when the body of the slave is wasted from use, the slave is cast out. The Son has come to liberate sin-slaves from their old master, allowing them to become children of God.” Pastor Chuck Swindoll
- **Israel’s shallow view of freedom:** “Jesus is offering—we might have thought—what everybody in Israel was longing for! Freedom at last! And at an even deeper level than they had imagined. Surely this will catch people’s attention, especially with those who, as John says, have now come to believe that he really is the Messiah (verse 30)? They hear straight away that he is offering a freedom which goes far beyond the national hope of freedom from Rome, and they react against the idea. ‘How can you say such a thing? We are Abraham’s children, and we’ve always been free!’ Jesus doesn’t point out, as he might have done, that the foundation of their national life and faith was not just Abraham, but the Exodus which had taken place after their slavery in Egypt. He goes straight to the heart of what he means. There is a worse slavery than that which they had suffered in Egypt, or the semi-slavery they were suffering under the rule of Rome. It is the slavery that grips not only individuals but also groups, nations and families of nations. It is the slavery we know as ‘sin’.” Professor NT Wright
- **The difference between sons and slaves:** “Slaves can be sold and traded. Slaves have no security. Thus, because they are slaves, their residence in God’s family can be in jeopardy. Hence, sinners who claim to be sons of Abraham may discover that they have lost that which they prize. The “son” who is secure and permanent is likely Jesus himself. If the son in such a large household sets a slave free, he will be free indeed (8:36). Imagine, then, if the Son of God sets a slave free. The freedom enjoyed will be indescribable. Paul does not miss this parallel to make the same point (Gal. 4:21–31). True Jewishness is inward, not physical and outward (Rom. 2:28–29).” Professor Gary Burge

Articles/Songs/Videos:

Helpful thoughts for discussion leaders:

1. Go for a single, not a home run...don't drag the night out; realize more people = less deep sharing.
2. Keep discussion around 30mins. Once you hit the "sweet spot", spend your time there.

Challenge Questions

Review the BIG IDEA: If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

-Simple questions...What is God teaching you? What are you going to do about it? How will it help you love & serve others?

Preparation questions for John 8:27-44.

- What did Jesus say would finally make His claims indisputable? (8:27-29)
- Why did Jesus seem to push back on those who were finally starting to believe? (8:30-34)
- What were the Jews holding on to that was blocking true belief? (8:35-40)
- Who did Jesus accuse them of continuing to follow? (8:41-44)

Application questions from John 8:27-44.

- Has your faith been tested yet? Please share one of your stories to help us grasp the connection between abiding in Jesus and enduring earthly trials.
- If someone took the sum of all you think, say, and do, would it add up to a life that is mastered by sin or mastered by Jesus? What evidence is there that the truth has set you free? In what areas are you struggling to live in freedom and who has God put in your life to help?
- How can things like religious affiliations and enslavement to sin keep us from knowing God, hearing prophetic truth, and benefitting from the gospel? Where has this been a problem for you?
- What's the difference between "salvation by works" and "faith that produces works"? In what ways are faith and works compatible and necessary to salvation? (cf. James 2:14-17)

Here are some great resources for digging deeper into community group life...

How life together looks <http://austinstone.org/stories/film/item/140-missional-community-lukes-story>

Rethinking what we do https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kvWnXYSELF4&feature=player_embedded

Numerous articles to provoke thought <http://toddengstrom.com/archives/>

What groups of 2-3 might look like <http://toddengstrom.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/LTG-Overview.pdf>