

**THE GOSPEL OF BELIEF - Studies in John's Gospel - Part thirty-seven**

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**BELIEVERS IN JESUS' PERSON BUT REJECTERS OF HIS WORD?**

**John 8:30-47** - "As he was saying these things, many believed in him. [31] So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, [32] and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." [33] 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?'" [34] Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. [35] The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. [36] So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. [37] I know that you are offspring of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you. [38] I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father." [39] 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,** [40] 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. [41] 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." [42] 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. [43] Why do you not understand what I say? It is because **you cannot bear to hear my word.** [44] 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. [45] But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. [46] Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? [47] Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God."

This is one of the most difficult passages in John's gospel. It contains some of the harshest words from Jesus, and that alone makes it a tough study for a comfortable Canadian Sunday morning church service. But even that isn't what makes this passage so challenging.

The real sticker is the way the passage *opens* seems so different in tone from the way it *ends*. Look at the description of the "believers" in the first two verses - **John 8:30-31** - "As he was saying these things, **many believed in him.** [31] So Jesus said to the Jews **who had believed him,** "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples...."

Now look at the *last* four verses of our text - **John 8:44-47** - "**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. [45] But **because I tell the truth, you do not believe me.** [46] Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, **why do you not believe me?** [47] Whoever is of God hears the words of God. **The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.**"

Remember, the *audience* hasn't changed between the opening of our text and its finish. Jesus is speaking to the ***very same people!*** So we naturally have some work to do if we're to make sense of this. There is obviously a different kind of *belief* being discussed as Jesus addressed these professing *believers* of whom He will soon say they are the ***offspring of Satan***. All of this to say the title of this whole series - "***The Gospel of Belief***" - was never more apt than in the theology of today's text. We had better make certain we are using the term, "***believing in Jesus***" the same way *Jesus* understood it.

1) **WE ARE SAVED BY BELIEVING IN JESUS PLUS NOTHING - AS LONG AS "BELIEVING IN JESUS" IS DEFINED AS "ABIDING IN HIS WORD"**

**John 8:30-32** - "As he was saying these things, **many believed in him.** [31] So Jesus said to the Jews **who had believed him,** "If you **abide in my word,** you are **truly** my disciples, [32] and **you will know the truth,** and **the truth will set you free.**"

Jesus' words are frequently misread in these verses. These are not *works* verses. They're *belief* verses. Jesus is ***defining*** belief. He is not ***adding another condition to initial saving belief***. He's not encouraging an ***additional, higher level*** of discipleship. "***Abiding is believing.***" Believing ***is*** abiding. In other words, this is still a salvation by faith alone text. It's a Reformation text.

I think the context ***demand***s this interpretation because Jesus clearly ***does not*** equate their belief with spiritual life. There is no place in the Scriptures where Jesus identifies ***true*** believers as being ***followers of Satan*** (44). If that weren't clear enough, or if someone thinks it clever to point out the obvious occasion where Jesus spoke to Peter and said, "***Get behind***

*me Satan!*”; it should also be pointed out that Jesus bluntly tells these who profess belief in Jesus that they do **not believe Him** - **John 8:45** - “But because I tell the truth, **you do not believe me.**” So **believing in Jesus** means **believing Jesus**, and **behaving like what He says is vitally true**. This is not **earning His life by works**. It is simply **trusting His Person and words as true**.

Jesus **defines** such trust in very simple and inviting terms - **John 8:31-32** - “So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, ‘If you **abide in my word**, you are truly my disciples, [32] and **you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.**”

That simple word **“abide”** is rich with meaning. The Greek word **“meno”** is often translated **“dwell.”** Here’s the full definition: **“a primary verb; to stay (in a given place, state, relation or expectancy), abide, continue, dwell, be present, remain, stand, tarry”**

We all need to linger here. **Believing** in Jesus means, so says Jesus, **abiding** in His Word. It means **giving time** to listening to His Word. Believing in Jesus means **knowing the content** of His Word. It means **having His Word constantly present** under your feet. Abiding in Jesus’ Word means **persisting in faithfulness to it** when everyone else is moving in the opposite direction. Abiding in Jesus’ Word means **dwelling in it - moving into it permanently with all your stuff just like you would move into a house**. You take everything **with** you because you’re not going to **dwell** anyplace else. Believing in Jesus means **His Word is your new home**. It is the place from which you **begin everything else about your routine**. His Word is now your **new dwelling**, not something you pull out for **church** or for **devotions**.

## 2) **THE TWO-FOLD PROMISE OF TRUTH AND FREEDOM IN JESUS CHRIST**

**John 8:30-36** - “As he was saying these things, many believed in him. [31] So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, [32] and **you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.**” [33] 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?’” [34] Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. [35] The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. [36] So **if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.**”

What could be more inviting and empowering than the two-fold promise in Jesus’ words. Who doesn’t want to **know the truth for sure (32)** and who doesn’t want to **find freedom in all of life (32)**? These are the cravings of our hearts, are they not? We fill schools and universities and spend small fortunes in our quest for truth. We protest and march and clamor for our rights and our freedoms. These are the deep quests of humanity. Or at least they **appear** to be.

The **truth** in the context of John’s gospel is the **truth about who Jesus is and why He came**. The whole concept of **believing** in Jesus is predicated on **believing** who He is and **believing** in what He came into this world to do. For all eternity nothing matters more than **knowing this truth**. To be in error here is to make all other knowledge useless.

The **freedom** described and offered here is the **freedom from the bondage of sin and the judgment it will ultimately bring**. We know this from Jesus’ words in **verses 34-36** - “Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone **who practices sin is a slave to sin.** [35] The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. [36] So **if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.**”

So it is the **Son** who brings this freedom. We can’t achieve it on our own. And it is this very **truth** about the Son and His gift of freedom that we need to know. Jesus, in His wonderful revelation, brings the divine promise of **both** the **truth** and the **freedom** we can’t obtain anywhere else.

## 3) **THE SURPRISING RESPONSE TO JESUS’ WONDERFUL PROMISE AND WHAT IT REVEALS ABOUT THE HUMAN HEART**

**John 8:33-37** - “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?’” [34] Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. [35] The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. [36] So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. [37] I know that you are offspring of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you.”

Don’t hear this text casually. You have just read something unbelievable. We have moved from **belief** in Jesus (30-31) to wanting to **kill** Jesus in **seven verses (37)**! What could possibly turn hearts so quickly? What kind of **inner spiritual virus** can

rob the soul of a **warm response to God the Son and His promise of truth and freedom?**

There are some clues. Jesus is offering them **freedom from the bondage of inner sin**. He's telling these religious people that **"everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin" (35)**. And He's telling them **He** can bring them **freedom from this horrible slavery (36)**.

And the first objection pouring from their lips is **"That's all well and good Jesus. But you've got the wrong crowd!"** That's exactly what they're saying in **verse 33** - **"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'?"**

Get the big picture unfolding here. Jesus stands with pardoning **truth** and **freedom**. There are no hurdles to climb - no legalistic hoops to jump through. It's all **good** news. But these religious people **can't afford to respond** precisely because they're **religious** people. They aren't supposed to **have** this depth of sin problem. And they can't **admit it**. They can't bend that low.

Now, **why** does John feel it's crucial to include this account in his gospel? We **know** he selected it from a mountain of other material. He **tells** us so in **John 21:25** - **"Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written."**

So why this particular account? John **wanted** this account for a specific reason. No doubt about it. And the reason this account matters to you and to me is John is reminding us all that the real **tough** conversion isn't the **conversion from sin**. The real tough conversion is the one that we professing believers face every day. The real tough conversion is the **conversion from righteousness**. It's the ongoing repentance and conversion of pretty good, religious people. This is **how** we **abide** in His Word. We move ahead spiritually only to the degree that our **past growth** never gets in the way of **present responsiveness in repentance**.

Do you see the way these religious people are **defending themselves**? That is the **natural instinct** of pretty decent people. The woman caught in adultery didn't have that luxury. Her **self-image** was already shattered. She had no more pride to defend. But these pretty decent people did. And that instinct lies in the heart of all of us. That is what makes Jesus say, **"...my word finds no place in you" (37)**. I can't **make room for Jesus' word** and **protect my own pride** at the same time.

This is the meaning of Jesus' words in **Matthew 9:12-13** - **"But when he heard it, he said, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. [13] Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.'"**

We know there **are** no righteous people for Jesus to call. That's not what He means. He means there are people who **know their unrighteousness** at a profound level. And there are other people who don't **face their neediness of grace that often**. Those are the two crowds Jesus pictures. And He can only help the former, never the latter. People who **protect themselves** can't make room for the honest revealing word of Jesus. And they'll never find the promised truth and freedom.

#### 4) **WE ALL LIKE TO THINK WE ARE SEEKERS OF TRUTH - JESUS SAYS THIS IS NOT SO**

**John 8:38-47** - **"I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father." [39] 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, [40] 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. [41] 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." [42] 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. [43] Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. [44] 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. [45] But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. [46] Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? [47] Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God."**

There are ten sermons in this passage alone. I only want to pull out two ideas. Jesus tells these pretty nice people they are **truth haters** (45), and then He tells them **why** they are truth haters (44, 47).

We all like to think we are seekers of truth. While the trend is starting to fizzle out, we used to pride ourselves on having **"seeker sensitive"** churches. The idea being everyone out there is a **seeker** of truth if only it is presented in a palatable

manner.

But Jesus says these people who wanted to kill Him wanted to kill Him for only one reason. He ***told them the truth***. The words of **verse 45** are actually chilling - ***“But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me.”*** ***“Because”*** is the important word. The ***reason*** they don't believe Jesus is ***because*** He is telling them the truth.

They have no ***other*** reason for not believing Jesus. That's what Jesus points out with His question, ***“Which one of you convicts me of sin?”*** (46). Their rejection of Jesus isn't due to some flaw in His character. No. It is solely on the basis of the ***content of His word*** that they reject Him. What they hate about Jesus is His ***truthfulness***. Period.

Now, the ***reason*** they hate the truth - **John 8:44, 47** - ***“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....[47]....Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.”***

Jesus is describing ***spiritual genetics***. People who reject Jesus' word would prefer to blame their rejection on more intellectual reasons - lack of evidence - hypocrites in the church - complicated theology - too many rules - whatever. But Jesus denies all of this.

Jesus sees the same darkness in these hearts that Paul described in **Romans 1:18** - ***“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.”***

O how we need to hear Jesus describe the nature of spiritual bondage and darkness! There is a kind of ***slavery*** in any denial of Christ as Savior and Lord. Jesus said so. Sin is a genetic slavery (34). That means no one is being ***original*** in rejecting the truth of Jesus Christ. They all partake of the same inner condition.

We can't get ourselves out of this. The Devil - and the world that dwells under his sway - hates the truth about inward sin and actual, grace-driven redemption in Jesus Christ alone. When the Holy Spirit draws your heart, yield. Life is too short to dabble with Christ. Come into the light of the truth and find freedom in Christ Jesus, God the Son.