

Continuing in Jesus' Word

Disciples of Jesus

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Bible Text: John 8:31-32
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John chapter 8 is where we find the scripture reading this evening. John chapter 8, we begin reading at verse 20, and we'll read through verse 51. The text is verses 31 and 32. This is Jesus interacting with the Jews and with the leaders of the Jews the day after the feast of tabernacles in Jerusalem. We read in verse 20, and we'll pick it up at verse 20.

20 These words spake Jesus in the treasury, as he taught in the temple: and no man laid hands on him; for his hour was not yet come. 21 Then said Jesus again unto them, I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins: whither I go, ye cannot come. 22 Then said the Jews, Will he kill himself? because he saith, Whither I go, ye cannot come. 23 And he said unto them, Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world. 24 I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins. 25 Then said they unto him, Who art thou? And Jesus saith unto them, Even the same that I said unto you from the beginning. 26 I have many things to say and to judge of you: but he that sent me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I have heard of him. 27 They understood not that he spake to them of the Father. 28 Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things. 29 And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him. 30 As he spake these words, many believed on him. 31 Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; 32 And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. 33 They answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free? 34 Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. 35 And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever. 36 If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed. 37 I know that ye are Abraham's seed; but ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you. 38 I speak that which I have seen with my Father: and ye do that which ye have seen with your

father. 39 They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham. 40 But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham. 41 Ye do the deeds of your father. Then said they to him, We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God. 42 Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me. 43 Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word. 44 Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. 45 And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not. 46 Which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me? 47 He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God. 48 Then answered the Jews, and said unto him, Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil? 49 Jesus answered, I have not a devil; but I honour my Father, and ye do dishonour me. 50 And I seek not mine own glory: there is one that seeketh and judgeth. 51 Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death.

And we'll stop with the scripture reading so far. May God bless this scripture reading to our hearts and write its eternal truths upon our hearts.

The text this evening is verses 31 and 32, and we'll be looking at verse 30 as well.

31 Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; 32 And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, a confession of faith is always a special occasion. To hear, in this case, a young man stand up in front of church and confess his trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, and confess his love for the Lord Jesus, and to hear him make a commitment with vows to live for Jesus, and serve Jesus, and honor Jesus, that's a special occasion. It's a big occasion, too. When you think about it, this is one of the most monumental events in a Christian's life. It really is the beginning of the rest of your life, Riley. It dictates tonight, and the vows you make dictates how you're going to live the rest of your life. And yet, at the same time, as special as the occasion is, as monumental as the occasion is, the reality is also this, what we've witnessed tonight is only a beginning. It's a good beginning, it's a proper beginning, but it's only a beginning, and just as with pretty much everything in life, it's the follow through that matters, isn't it? It's the continuing in that confession of faith. It's continuing in the vows that you've made that matters. And the message here for Riley and the message for all of us tonight is this, Jesus is not satisfied with mere beginnings. That's the main message of the text. Jesus is not satisfied with mere words and mere talk. Jesus is calling here for faithfulness. He is

calling here for perseverance, for diligence, and for follow through. That's the character of true discipleship. That's why this is very fitting for our series on discipleship. This is the character of discipleship. Follow through. That's what we're going to look at in the preaching tonight. We take as our theme "Continuing in Jesus' Word" and we'll look at that theme under three points: first we look at the meaning, second the self-examination, and then third the blessings.

Before we look at the words of the text itself, let's first take in the context and this whole passage that we read this evening. There's a lot going on here and sometimes these words of Jesus can be challenging for us to understand so let's make sure we understand what Jesus' focus is here in the passage we read tonight and, first, let's look at the verses leading up to the text. In the verses that lead up to the text, we learn what's going on. Jesus has just finished celebrating the feast of tabernacles. It's the day after he is in the temple, he's in the treasury, he's in like the court of the women, right where they would be passing by to make their sacrifices, and he is teaching the people. He's still, therefore, in the city of Jerusalem. Time-wise, because it's the feast of tabernacles, it's about six months before his crucifixion. The leaders of the Jews hate Jesus. They especially hate his popularity. They are wanting to kill him, as he mentions multiple times in the passage we read, and they are openly challenging his teaching but Jesus goes on teaching the people nevertheless. In verse 24, Jesus is emphasizing the need to believe on him. In verse 24, he says, "If you do not believe that I am the Christ, the Son of God, you will die in your sins." And now down in verse 30, we read, "As he spoke these words, many believed on him."

Now, a key part of understanding the text before us this evening is to understand what verse 30 actually means when it says that many believed on him. What does that mean? Well, contrary to how we might first understand it, it doesn't actually mean that many believed on Jesus with a true and living faith. That's not what it means. Rather, it means that many were believing on Jesus with an outward confession and probably in this specific instance, what the people were believing is that Jesus has the potential indeed for being their Messiah, their earthly Savior who could really save them from their enemies and their Roman overlords. Yes, we may certainly say that there were some in this interaction that were coming to a true and saving knowledge of Jesus as Lord and Savior, but the idea is many were starting to look at Jesus as having a real potential for being their earthly Messiah, their earthly Savior from the Romans. That this is the meaning of verse 30 is clear from a few things. First, as we know, this is how it was throughout Jesus' earthly ministry. In fact, when you look at the gospel account of John itself, you come to see that this is a theme running through the book of John. John emphasizes the contrast between believing, true faith, and a false faith, not believing.

We could give a few passages, but just for two, look at John chapter 2, verse 23. You can even turn there if you'd like. John 2, verse 23. "Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did. But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man." And the point in those verses is this, Jesus knew that although many were believing in him, the majority

of them were not true disciples because Jesus understood that they were just looking at him as a miracle worker, as one who could be an earthly king. and help them establish an earthly kingdom. And so we read, verse 24, Jesus does not commit himself unto them. Literally, you could translate that this way, Jesus did not believe in them. They believed in Jesus, but Jesus did not believe in them. They committed themselves to him, they were looking to him, but Jesus was not committing himself. He was not believing in them, or the nice words that they might have been saying about him.

So you have that language that the people believed on Jesus, but Jesus knew it wasn't a true believing. John chapter 6 verse 66, you read there too, "From that time," John 6 verse 66, "From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him." And there it's the same thing, these same kind of people who said that they were Jesus' disciples, they said they wanted to learn from him, they wanted to follow him and love him and serve him. They said they were his disciples and then they gave it up and they stopped believing on Jesus. Why? Well, in this case, because his teachings were too hard for them to stomach. They didn't like his teaching. It just wasn't lining up with their hopes of an earthly kingdom, earthly power, and earthly honor.

Another passage you could look at is John 12 verses 42 and 43, where you read in John 12 verses 42 and 43 that there were many leaders who were believing on Jesus but they were not confessing Jesus openly for fear of the Pharisees, because they loved the praises of men more than the praises of God. So they believed on Jesus, but it was that kind of earthly belief that he could really be a good Savior from the Romans.

And so my point is, here in John chapter 8, Jesus is again interacting with these same kind of people. Perhaps they see in Jesus the potential for being a powerful leader, maybe they see the power of his speech, right? No man ever spake like this man. They know his ability to perform miracles and now either openly or amongst themselves, they are saying, "We believe in Jesus." So that's how we need to understand verse 30. It's not a true faith, it's predominantly a false faith. And if you look at verse 33, you even see there just how quickly the attitude of the people changes. Verse 30, they say that they are believing on Jesus. Jesus then makes a comment of how the truth will set them free. And then immediately in verse 33, the people start questioning Jesus and it's almost confusing when you first read it. Evidently, these people are suddenly taking offense at Jesus' implication that they are not free men, but that they are slaves, and that tells you something about these people as well. These people are not spiritually minded.

So that's how we need to understand verse 30. It's not a true faith predominantly, but it's predominantly a false faith. Another reason this is how we need to understand verse 30 is this, notice the words of verse 31, that's the text. Verse 31, "Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed." And that word "indeed" means "truly." Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If you continue in my word, then you truly are my disciples. So even in verse 31, Jesus is making a contrast here between those who say they are disciples, they're making an outward confession, and those who are truly disciples and Jesus says, "If you continue in my word, then you are truly my disciples."

So that's the preceding text. Then let's also look at the verses that follow and if you look closely at the verses that follow the text, what you see is Jesus putting a heavy emphasis on people's actions. He's emphasizing that a person is known by his deeds, you will know a person by what he does. Notice verse 34. "Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin." Jesus is basically saying, "If you walk in sin, that's showing where your true commitments are. Your commitment is to sin. If you walk in sin, then you're not my disciple. You are the disciple of sin." Verse 38, "I speak that which I have seen with my Father: and ye do that which ye have seen with your father." Again, Jesus is emphasizing what people are doing. Are you committing sin? Are you doing what you have seen with your Father? What are you doing? Verse 41, "Ye do the deeds of your father." Verse 42, "Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me." Another deed, this is what you would do. And verse 44, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lust of your father ye will do." And if we jump to verse 51, Jesus says, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, if a man keep my saying, he shall never see death."

And so the point is, Jesus is putting an emphasis here on what a person does. It's not so much what a person says. A person can really say all they want. It's what a person does. A person who has God as his Father behaves a certain way. And a person who has Satan as his father will behave a certain way also. A true disciple of Jesus is known by his deeds and so you go back to the text, verse 31 especially, it should be clear what Jesus is saying, "If you continue in my word, then you are my disciples indeed." And really this goes back to what a disciple is. Remember in this series, what is a disciple? A disciple is a student of Jesus, who sits at the feet of Jesus, who learns from Jesus, and then a disciple is one who takes that instruction and who does it, who follows Jesus, who walks after Jesus, and who imitates Jesus. "If you continue in my word, then are you truly my disciples."

Well, that's the context. Now, let's look at the specific words of the text, especially verse 31. That's the concentration, that's what we concentrate on this evening. "If ye continue in my word." When we look at that language, there's really three things we need to answer, three questions to look at. First, what is this word? If you continue in my word, what is this word Jesus is talking about? Well, we could also understand it this way, continue in my teachings. If you continue in my teaching. And now if we would just limit ourselves to John chapter 8, what Jesus is talking about is his teaching concerning who he is as the Christ. You go to the beginning of the chapter, we didn't read it, verse 12, "Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world." I am. I am that I am. I am Jehovah. Verse 24, "I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am." This is who I am. I am. You go to the very end of the chapter, we didn't read that either. Verse 58, "Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am." I am not of this world. I am from above. Jesus is teaching that he is the Christ. That gets at the heart of it. He's the God of our salvation, the promised Messiah. He will soon be lifted up on the cross for the salvation of his people, and that's the teaching we need to continue in.

Do you embrace that teaching of Jesus, that he indeed, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Mary, is the Christ, the Son of God? Then you are his disciple. But of course we can go further. It's not just his teaching in John chapter 8. It's his teaching throughout his whole earthly ministry. It's his teaching concerning salvation in him alone. It's his teaching concerning a holy life, concerning the kingdom of heaven, concerning heaven and hell. And we can go broader than just his earthly teaching, if Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, well then, if he is the "I Am that I Am," then the whole Bible is the word of Jesus. The whole Bible is what Jesus is teaching us. So that's the word too, continue in my word, continue in the scriptures.

Then second, the question is, what does the word "in" mean? Continue in my word. What does it mean to be in the word? Well, to be in the word of Jesus means to be in the teaching of Jesus and the way that I think about it is, think of a big bubble, a big sphere. You're continuing in the sphere of Jesus' word. So you have this sphere around you, and it's Jesus' word and that's the sphere, that's the bubble that you walk in as you go through life so that as you breathe in, you're breathing in what's in the bubble. You're breathing in Jesus' word. As you breathe out, you're breathing out his word. You're surrounded by his word. When you walk, it's the word that's guiding you where you walk. To be in the word of Jesus really means to have Jesus' word in you. If someone is in the word, just like if you're into sports or if you're into hobbies, that means that you have a deep interest in it. You spend your time in it. You invest energy in it. And that's what it means if you're into Jesus, if you're in his word. You have a deep interest in what Jesus actually says. You invest your time into what he teaches and you find your pleasure and your enjoyment in what he teaches. That's what it means to be in Jesus' word. You're into the Bible. And it means that you spend your time in the Bible. You follow the instruction of the Bible. You want to know more of the scriptures. It determines how you think. It determines how you walk and you want more of it. That's what it means to be in the word.

And then third, the question is, what does it mean to continue, to continue in that word? Well, it means to endure. It means to persevere. It means to stay. You're in the word, now stay in the word. Abide in the word. Remain faithful to it. As I have already alluded to, there were many in Jesus' day who had a beginning of being his disciples. They were following him. They were making their time to sit at Jesus' feet. Jesus fed the 5,000, then he preached the Sermon on the Mount, there were many people listening but they didn't persevere in it. They didn't continue in it. It's like Jesus' parable of the four soils. Some seed sprouts up, and some seem to be excited about Jesus but then you read soon, the cares of the world or the deceitfulness of riches choke out the word. They had a beginning, but they didn't continue. Or persecutions come and trials come and it's hard to continue according to Jesus' word and a person suddenly becomes offended with Jesus. It's not worth it to them and so they walk away. And Jesus says, "If you continue in my word, if you hold fast to it, if you stay in it and submit yourself to it and confess it and embrace it, remain faithful to it, then you are my disciples truly."

Now we must not misunderstand the language here. Jesus is not speaking some kind of conditional language as if continuing in Jesus' word is a sort of condition to being his disciple, as if you somehow earn this status of being a disciple if you continue in Jesus'

word. Neither is Jesus saying that it's possible for someone to be a true believer for a time and then after a while, a true believer falls away from salvation and perishes. That's not what Jesus is teaching. Jesus is simply expressing a statement of fact, right? "If you continue in my word, then you are my disciple. This is what a disciple is. This is the proof and the evidence of what a disciple is, you're continuing in my word." This is how true faith behaves itself, it's a faith that follows Jesus and that continues in his word. Jesus doesn't say, "If you continue in my word, then you shall be my disciple." No. "If you continue my word, then you are my disciple." That's the meaning of the text.

Well, that's the meaning. With all that being said, what I want to do now is spend an entire point just looking at ourselves and applying these things to ourselves in self-examination because I think that's really the point of the passage. I think it's also very fitting on the occasion of confession of faith to do this. Jesus here is giving all these listeners a warning and he's giving them an exhortation, "Continue in my word." And the fact that many of these listeners in his audience push back against Jesus and they do seem to be characterized by a false faith rather than a true faith, perhaps gives us pause to consider that maybe there's even more reason to make sure we are applying this passage to ourselves because the danger is real, isn't it? So the question is are we continuing in the word? Are we abiding in the teachings of Jesus? Instead of just assuming that we are, are we? Is my faith a true faith or is it a false faith?

Well, we can apply this to a few different things in life. We can apply this, first, to what we believe, what we confess regarding the teachings of scripture. What do I believe concerning Jesus of Nazareth? It's like what we heard this morning, the virgin birth. Do I believe what his word says about this mystery of the virgin birth? Do I submit myself to this? The world mocks this truth. Am I submitting to it and continuing in it? Even though, you know, the science behind it, it's a work of God. It's a miracle. But the world would demand of you an explanation of the science. It's impossible. Regardless of what the world says, am I continuing in what scripture says? I know that with God, all things are possible, as the angel Gabriel says to Mary. Do I confess that this Jesus, born of Mary, is the eternal and natural Son of God, God himself, who was there in the beginning, the Maker of the heavens and the earth, who has come down and taken upon himself our flesh? Do I believe he suffered the full punishment due unto me for my sins and who on the basis of his atoning death frees me from bondage to sin? That's what Jesus is teaching in John chapter 8. Are we continuing in this word? Jesus is the "I Am that I Am." Before Abraham was, Jesus is. Of course, there's other teachings that Jesus gave us that we must continue in. Maybe it's Jesus' teaching concerning the Bible. Jesus says two chapters later, John chapter 10, that the scripture cannot be broken. The scriptures are the infallible, authoritative, holy word of God. Am I continuing in that teaching? How about when it comes to the biblical account of creation? Or when it comes to the definition of marriage and how God made them in the beginning male and female? Do I submit myself to the scriptures as the infallible word of God?

This is what a disciple of Jesus does. He continues. He blocks out what the world may say. He continues in Jesus' teaching. Right? This makes sense. How can a person say he is a disciple, it's very basic, how can a person say he's a disciple of Jesus, and yet openly

deny and contradict his word? And yet, it happens, doesn't it? It happens out there. It happens at Christian universities and colleges. But it also happens closer to home, doesn't it? Maybe in our own conversations with others. We're hanging out with people on Friday night, and someone makes a comment that is just clearly out of harmony with Jesus' teachings. Maybe it's a comment about how premarital sex is okay, or getting drunk is okay, or resisting authority is okay, or dishonoring my parents. And maybe they say, "This is normal. After all, lots of people are doing it." And maybe they even mock you and say, "What? Aren't you attracted to people of the opposite sex?" And then maybe you have to pause a moment and just say, "Whoa, let's stop here on this Friday night. Let's talk about this. Aren't we disciples of Jesus Christ? We can talk about this certainly, but isn't the word of God going to be what determines how we think and how we talk and how we act on these things?" Otherwise, we're just not Christians. Otherwise, I'm deceiving myself. Are we continuing in Christ's word?

One other example I think of that's relevant is the topic of divorce and remarriage. Just this past week, I heard from someone else how they interacted with someone and that someone said they just don't understand our position on divorce and remarriage, as if our position is so extreme, so opposed to the Spirit of Christ and the love of Christ. And it's certainly very foreign to how many think today. And to people's senses, to people's feelings, it sounds unreasonable. And yet, beloved, I submit to you, I think we've all experienced it, that when you actually open the scriptures again, and you see what Jesus' word actually is on the topic of divorce and remarriage, it's really black and white. If someone marries someone who is divorced, they are committing adultery. That's the teaching of the word. There's just no way around it. And this is discipleship, that I continue in it, I abide in it. Right? In every single thing, when it comes to our thinking, the question is this, am I a student of Jesus? Is it his word determining how I think, or is something else determining how I'm thinking right now? My point is, for someone to say, "I know that this is what Jesus teaches, but I just don't want it anymore," that's not discipleship.

Well, that's just doctrine. We can also apply this question to how we actually live, our lifestyle. Am I continuing in Jesus' doctrine when it comes to my life? Maybe in doctrine, I am very jealous over the truth, but how is it in the way that I'm actually living? For example, what does Jesus teach me about getting drunk? "Oh, my doctrine is good. I know getting drunk is wrong. But in my actual living, I'm not abiding by it because after all, I get drunk when I feel like it. I make provision for the flesh. I make sure that I don't have to drive anywhere when I'm drunk and then I get drunk." How about the use of pornography? "I know it's sinful but I'm still going to do it anyway."

Beloved, if we see that kind of attitude in us, that should make us weep, shouldn't it? This is not discipleship. I said it when I first came to Grace, and I'll say it again, because you can really say it anywhere, the question is not if there are people in church struggling with pornography, the question is how many? How many young adults are struggling with pornography? How many parents are struggling with pornography? And how many are just not struggling with it at all? That's the issue, especially, isn't it? That's not the mark of discipleship, beloved. That's the mark of a false faith when I'm not even

struggling with it. That's slavery to sin and a person who stays that way is going to die in his sins. That's exactly what Satan is trying to do with these things. Don't I believe Jesus is the Christ? In Jesus Christ, I am not only set free from the guilt of my sins, but I'm set free from the bondage to sin. Knowing Jesus changes everything about my life, including my use of pornography. Listen here, you don't have to be a slave to the phone. You don't have to be a slave to the unclean images that ruin your soul. No, continue in Jesus' word. Abide in his truth, submit to his commandments. There has to be a struggle there at least, doesn't there? In whatever area of life, there at least has to be the struggle there, doesn't it? So that I hate my old man of sin. I hate these deeds of the flesh. I know they are offensive to God and at the same time I fly to that very same God I've sinned against and I'm seeking his forgiveness in the blood of his son Jesus Christ and I'm seeking for the grace to continue in Jesus' word because I want to be a disciple of Jesus indeed. And we can make it even stronger, because I am a disciple of Jesus indeed.

And so I do continue in Jesus' word. I continue in Jesus' word in the midst of trials. Right? Satan tempts me to despair, to go off, because it's just hard. And I continue in Jesus' word in the midst of persecution. Maybe waiting to marry and an opportunity to marry someone who isn't a disciple of Jesus arises. What am I going to do? I want this. This is a good desire to be married but I'm called, according to Jesus' own instruction, to marry in the Lord, to date in the Lord, because dating is with a view to marriage. Am I continuing in his word?

Well, besides doctrine, besides lifestyle, when you really look at what Jesus' teaching is about, what stands out in all our interactions with each other is also this, love. Love. We read it every Sunday, every Sunday morning. "What is the greatest commandment? Love God. What's the commandment that is like unto it? Love your neighbor." That's Jesus' word. There's this verse that maybe parents use oftentimes with their children, "Therefore, all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." And then you've got to apply that to yourself, "For this is the law and the prophets." This is scripture. Love, am I loving? Is that my chief concern? That maybe sounds so watered down, but it's actually the exact opposite. This is the hardest thing in the world to do, to love, to love with the pure holy love of God. Am I loving? Or perhaps, am I more concerned about my image and reputation?

I was struggling with whether to say this or not, but I'm going to say this. I think it will be profitable. If I may speak somewhat freely on this, I would say this. I think this is an area of discouragement among the young people and young adults in many churches today. I think one of the challenges that we are facing is this, that maybe this is timeless and maybe this is obvious, but the youth don't care so much about appearances and outward looks. Maybe when it comes to themselves, they struggle with being self-conscious but when it comes to the church, that's where the youth want to find authenticity. It makes sense to them. That's where they should find authenticity. That's where the youth want to find maturity and a realness, a genuineness, living in the truth. And I think the challenge is, as strange as it might sound, that's even how the culture around us is enticing and manipulating young people because the wicked culture around us is acting as if it's all about being genuine, right? "Be true to yourself. Be real. Be your true self. No one's

going to judge you. You can be your authentic self. We're not going to judge you." And people are so confused, they have no direction that they latch on to anything, trying to act as if they are being genuine. And at the same time, I think the pressure is there to try to be genuine as the world determines what genuineness is and then they just end up living genuinely sinful lifestyles. And we must not fall into that to be sure but I think what young Christians are craving in the church is this, to respond to that in the world around us with our own emphasis on being genuine, being real. Not with the idea that now we can be more free and loose with our sins but so that we are living as honest, genuine, authentic, born-again Christians with the life of the Spirit in me, battling sin, recognizing the reality of that each one of us has that old man of sin and then we also get to rejoice in these small victories that God gives us each day as we battle against sin.

I think sometimes there's often the struggle to see it for the youth, so what they sometimes see is this, as long as other people aren't seeing me with this sin, or others aren't on me for this sin, and I keep it under wraps, then I'm okay. And I think if adults and parents aren't talking openly to their children about their faith, about the real battle that the Christian life is, and then we put on this facade of being perfect, I mean that's discouraging to anyone who knows their own sins, and then it's easy for young people and young adults to interpret their parents' actions as if they are just concerned about outward appearances. And so then we have this environment where people can get so fired up about controversy, doctrinal integrity, or they get fired up about putting other people down, and yet the question I think that needs to arise is, are these people ever getting fired up about the misery of their own sin, or fired up about Bible study, or they never get fired up in a good way about the preaching, and about the gospel itself, or about that little victory over sin that the Lord gave us in our lives.

And I think all of these comments are fitting into the point with the sermon this evening because this is exactly what the Pharisees are doing in John chapter 8. What are these Pharisees and these leaders concerned with? They're just concerned with their outward image. They're concerned with their reputation. Jesus tells them in verse 32, "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free," and how do they respond? They're not caring about what Jesus actually says in a good way but they're simply offended at Jesus' insinuation that they could somehow be in bondage to someone and they take offense to that. That's what they're concerned about, "We never were in bondage to any man." Really? Are you lacking in even the little bit of self-awareness that you should have? Don't you realize that even as you speak, you are in bondage to the Roman Empire? But you're so enamored with your own self-conceit that you don't even recognize that Jesus is on another level and he's talking about spiritual bondage and not something earthly. I think the heart of the issue is this, are we actually listening to what Jesus is saying? Do I actually care about his word? Right? If I'm a disciple, then I should take the word and receive it instead of push back right away and say, "We never were in bondage." Do I want to understand his word? Am I continuing in his word?

Well, beloved, I know that the Christian life is one that ebbs and flows. We have our ups and downs. And I don't mean to encourage anyone here tonight who finds themselves in a place where they are struggling in their walk with Jesus. Not at all. The point here is this,

if I am a disciple of Jesus, then this is where my heart needs to be. At least my heart. I am jealous about continuing in this word. I know I have only a small beginning. I know my resolve isn't what it should be. But even then, when I'm struggling, I'm praying for help and by God's grace, as he hears my cry for help, we sang it this morning, or this evening, I take up the resolve once again to make progress in my Christian walk. And as I do that, then I also take up the resolve, also scooping up these words in verse 32 and embracing the blessings that Jesus promises to his disciples. Verse 32 says, "and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free." You will know the truth. Continuing in his word, you will know the truth. You will know Jesus, who is the truth. You will know who he is as the blessed Savior that he is. You will grow in your knowledge of the truth of the good news. You will grow in your understanding of the meaning and purpose of life itself, of where you should find your identity, what your purpose in life is.

This is what you can expect, Riley. As you now go forward the rest of your life, continuing in his word, you will know the truth and the truth will set you free. Personally. Because the truth is, believer, Jesus is your Savior. Believer, Jesus has borne the full punishment for all your sins. Believer, your life's purpose is to glorify God and enjoy him forever, and you will experience that, knowing the truth, having that truth set you free, set free from the power of sin. Jesus is your Lord, sin isn't your Lord anymore, and Jesus is a glorious, merciful, powerful Lord indeed. You are set free from the condemning word of your own guilty conscience because even as your own conscience accuses you of the sins you've committed, you fly to the cross, you say, "Jesus is mine. What he did is for me." And coming to the Lord's Supper, it will be more fully declared and revealed unto you that Jesus is yours. You're kept free, we might say. As you know the truth and the truth sets you free, you're also kept free from falling into those devastating traps and painful snares of the devil. Set free from living a lie. Set free from the bondage of living for myself. And then at the end of life, it all gets burned up as hay and wood and stubble. You're set free from the oppressive, impossible rules of the Pharisees. You're set free to live according to the perfect law of liberty. You are set free to love because as hard as love is, it's the greatest thing. It's the most liberating thing. God is love and to love is to know God at work in me.

You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free. That's a certainty. Isn't that the experience of the child of God? For us who've made confession of our faith and we are continuing in Jesus' word, isn't that your experience day by day? Jesus' word is always right. His word is always good. I know it myself. I've walked in sin and it's bondage, it's misery, it's suffocating, it's self-destructive, but the law of the Lord is good. The law that the Lord has ordained is perfect, the soul to restore. His truth makes the simple most wise. The truth that is sure evermore. His precepts are righteous and just, rejoicing the heart and the mind, and all his commandments are pure and lightening the eyes of the blind. Riley, that will be your experience too. Indeed, it already has been your experience. You have a good beginning, Riley. The command that comes to you, the command that comes to all of us is this, continue in it. Continue in Jesus' word. "If you continue in my word," Jesus says, "then ye are my disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free." Amen.

Let us pray.

Our Father, we thank thee for thy word. Give us to heed it, give us thy Spirit, and use this preaching to shape us by it, that we might indeed continue in thy word, and we might know the truth and know the freedom of walking in the truth. All praise and glory be unto thee for so great a salvation. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.