

Teaching Points

We're going to pick up where we left off in this conversation between Christ and some Jews. Throughout this discourse Jesus has already made some powerful claims regarding His heavenly origin, His relationship with the Father, and His knowledge of the peoples' sin. Verse 30 states that many who heard Jesus speak "believed in Him."

As we move on to verse 31, we see Jesus address "**...those Jews who believed Him...**" It's not entirely clear if this was the same audience as the one just mentioned in verse 30. Perhaps Jesus went on to address those who believed in His previous words - or perhaps He turned His attention to another group of Jews who professed belief in His claims.

There's an interesting development that takes place in these verses. From John 8:31-8:59 we see these Jews sort of push back on Christ's claims. There is a kind of escalation that occurs. They question Jesus, then they try to refute Him, then they sarcastically mock Him, and by the end of the chapter they have stones in their hands ready to kill Him. It's surprising to read all this resistance to Christ from a group of people who are said to have "believed Him".

Discussion Question: How are we supposed to understand this? How can John say these Jews believed Christ and then tell us how they openly resisted Him?

Thoughts: *It seems that their "belief" was something short of saving faith. In other words, these particular Jews had some sort of mental agreement with part of Christ's message - but it's clear they had not committed their hearts to Him as Lord and Savior. We might call this a "spurious" faith. (Spurious means not authentic, genuine, or true.) It's possible to experience a kind of outward positive response to part of Christ's message while remaining inwardly un-renewed.*

Think of someone who hears that Jesus is loving and forgiving. A man may respond positively to this part of Christ's person and work. And yet, upon hearing about the holiness, justice, and righteousness of Christ the same man may be turned off. He wants to follow a loving, accepting, tolerant Christ - but not a judgmental or holy Christ.

The parable of the soils (Matthew 13:3-9;18-23) illustrates how men's hearts can react to God's word in ways that look like real faith - only to fall short and die in the end. This doesn't mean that a person can possess true saving faith and then lose it. It simply means that hypocrites can resemble true saints in many ways!

Look at the disagreement that occurs between Christ and these Jews. It manifests in several clashes. For tonight, we'll only have time to consider part of the back-and-forth.

Jesus tells them about knowledge, truth, and freedom - but they deny their need to be made free. (vs. 31-36)

Right away in verse 31 Jesus makes it clear that true faith is not a momentary agreement with certain claims. Instead, true saving faith ABIDES in the word of God. We could say it this way, true believers are those who remain in Christ's words. They put down roots and bear fruit throughout the course of their lives.

On the other hand, many people profess faith in Christ but lack this enduring fruitfulness. They don't abide in His word and sooner or later they show their true colors.

Jesus makes an incredible statement that these Jews immediately try to shoot down. He says, ***"If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."*** (vs. 31-32)

Think about the amazing benefits of abiding in Christ's word! We're ignorant but in Christ we receive knowledge. We're mistaken in our thinking and living but in Christ we receive truth. We're slaves but in Christ we're set free. This is a wonderful summary of union with Christ. Only those who are united to Him by faith enjoy these blessings.

Discussion Question: Jesus uses the concepts of slavery and freedom to make His point here. What kind of slavery did He have in mind? How do we describe the kind of freedom He's talking about?

Thoughts: *Jesus is clearly referring to spiritual realities here. He's talking about man's slavery to sin (see vs. 34-36). Scripture teaches that we're "dead in trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1,5). That means we are hopelessly trapped in the dominion of darkness with no hope of escape. BUT...God is able to change that. In Christ there is freedom from this slavery. "...if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed."* (vs. 36)

It's hard not to cringe when you we read the Jews' response in verse 33. ***"We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can You say, 'You will be made free'?"***

Seriously?! How foolish was this statement! The history of the Old Testament records the Jews' slavery in Egypt, their oppression by foreign nations during the days of the Judges, their deportation into Assyria, and their 70 exile in Babylon - not to mention the fact that while they spoke these words they were under Roman occupation!

Jesus calmly corrects their errors. First of all, He's talking about slavery to sin. Anyone who lives in sin IS NOT ENJOYING FREEDOM. Sin is a slave driver. Sin separates us from God and drives us into destruction and despair. This is precisely why we need

Christ to set us free. We cannot get ourselves out of this slavery - but Christ is able to break every chain.

Prayer Focus

Praise God for knowledge, truth, and freedom in Christ! Let's worship Him as our chain breaker. Let's be thankful for how He's made us "free indeed"!