

Spiritual Freedom

John 8:31-36

Our Scripture needs to be read carefully. At almost every point there is the possibility that a wrong turn could be taken which would cause the reader to miss what Jesus is saying. You might ask, "Why should this be so complicated? Isn't the gospel meant to be simple enough for everyone?" And the answer is yes, and that is in fact the problem, we tend to make what Jesus has said very simply and make it very complicated. Jesus uses the three simple concepts here of belief, truth, and freedom. These are loaded words are they not? They tend to have all kinds of things attached to them. But they are only loaded words because of what we do with them. To hear what Jesus is saying we need to let go of our preconceived notions that we associate with these words and hear them simply, as Jesus spoke them.

For example, Jesus spoke to those who had "believed" in Him. Interpreters immediately want to discuss whether these who believed in Him were truly saved. In the next sentence Jesus invited them to "make their homes in His word" and that those who did so would truly be His real disciples. So, they believed but were not yet real disciples... and what does that mean? This becomes an occasion for the Calvinist to say that the truly saved will certainly endure to the end and so these had clearly not yet come to genuine faith. The Armenian would say, see they have believed and yet, they have to keep believing in order to make it. The problem with these points of interpretation is that they begin with the listener rather than with the teacher. Jesus wasn't speaking to our theological controversies but to men and women who had responded to Him in a positive way.

Those who had believed in Jesus in the context of the controversies that filled the air during the Feast of Tabernacles were those who took Jesus' side in the argument. The Religious leaders wanted to convince the people that Jesus was a fraud and that He intended to deceive the people and make trouble for Israel.

Jesus clearly claimed that He had been sent by God to do all that He did and taught and that the people needed to hear Him as they would hear God. Those who believed sided with Jesus but, what was next? It was not just an academic discussion. If Jesus was from God, if He was the Messiah, then what was the practical implication of these conclusions. If Jesus was calling the people to follow Him then what did He want them to do? The answer to this question was to make themselves at home in His Word. To do so would be to truly become His disciples.

What does it mean to make yourself at home in His Word? The expression answers itself, does it not? Think of moving into a home where there is a place for everything and everything is in its place. Suppose that you are not used to living like that. You might prefer to put your feet up on the furniture and to where your shoes around the house. Can you make yourself at home in a place that is different than what you are used to? Answer: you can if you want to, if you need to, if you know that to do so is the best choice that you can make.

To make your home in God's word is to fill your life and heart with His Word. It is to treasure it and to be nourished by it so that it protects you from sin and directs your way and leads you into a relationship with God that can be characterized as fellowship, friendship, and sonship. A relationship that is expressed through serving the Lord, walking with God, and being seated with Him in heavenly places.

We notice that some who are in the church love to be in the Word. Some love church but seem to avoid the Word when possible. Often, those who avoid the Word have unsundered issues in their lives. Belief and unbelief are often bedmates. Some of the greatest of men and women have allowed deep inconsistencies to take root in their lives but these things never turn out well. We did an entire series of message that we called the suspension of faith where we identified specific examples from the lives our Biblical heroes and heroines where belief was suspended so that personal agendas could be pursued. Abraham suspended his faith when he went to Egypt and lied by calling Sarah his sister. He suspended his faith when he took Hagar as a concubine in order to have a son that God had already promised. Rebekkah suspended her faith when she

manipulated to get the blessing from Isaac for Jacob rather than Esau. In every case where faith is suspended, negative consequences follow. You don't have to make yourself at home in the Word. You don't have to be guided and directed by the Word. You don't have to experience God's best. You can self-destruct if you want to. Living according to God's Word may at first be uncomfortable. You may feel as if you are giving up the things you love. What you will find is that God has a plan to make your life satisfying and fulfilling like nothing you have ever imagined. You have made choices toward the fulfillment of your felt needs. But, you are deceived by your own desire for immediate gratification. When you compromise your integrity in order to get what you want you will not end up with what you really want. You cannot discover the blessings that God has planned for you unless you walk in the path of obedience to His Word and to His will as He has revealed it to you.

Take the young man whose parents have taught him that homework comes first. He thinks to himself that he will just play his video games for 30 minutes and then do his homework. But he gets so wrapped up in the game that he looks up and it's dinner time and he still hasn't started on his homework. He eats and then thinks that he can do his homework in about 45 minutes and so he hits the games for a while longer. At midnight, he decides that he can do the homework before school and so he keeps playing. At 2 AM he goes to bed and then sleeps in and barely makes it to school the next day. This pattern persists and soon he is flunking 3 of his classes. Eventually his future prospects will be limited to just a very few unexciting options because he lived as he pleased rather than making himself at home in the Word.

You believe in God. You believe that He loves you. He has demonstrated just how much He loves you on the cross. He knows you better than you know yourself. After all He is your creator. He wants the best for you. Are you willing to trust His judgment over your own? Belief in Jesus does that. When you choose your judgment over His, that is unbelief.

The people took His side. Then they had to decide. Would they make themselves at home in His Word and become real disciples?