

## INTRODUCTION:

Before we take a look at a passage of scripture in **John 8**, I'd like to share with you a story about a landscaper who was hired to landscape a yard by a wealthy land owner.

- The landscaper was given complete written instructions well in advance of the day that he was to do the work, along with the street address and a good description of the home.
- The man carelessly read the land owner's written instructions, but he was sincere with his work and possessed great zeal.
- He arrived at the job, quickly removed his tools and equipment, and started work.
- The landscaper worked all throughout the day, giving all that he could give.
- At the end of the day the landscaper surveyed his work and he was well pleased... **"Certainly the owner will pay me well for a job well done!"** he exclaimed to himself with smug satisfaction.

At dusk, the landscaper's cell phone rang – it was the land owner who asked where the man had been all day... **"I've been working at your home, of course; I've completed the job, and I know you'll be pleased with my work"**, said the landscaper.

- After a short pause, the land owner said, **"I've been at my home the entire day, and you never showed up, so I got someone else to do the job."**
- In shock, the dismayed landscaper ran back to his truck, grabbed the written instructions, carefully checked the address, and read through the description... at that moment, the tired man comprehended his careless mistake...he had spent the entire day in the wrong yard!

When we consider this story, we recognize that it is possible for a person to misread or disregard a perfect set of instructions.

- And because of this, they may invest all of their time pursuing misguided goals as they have been trying to accomplish something that is seemingly of value.
- But really, they have simply been wasting a lot of their time.
- In the end, they have not only missed an opportunity for something good, but they will not receive a reward because of their mistake.

This morning, as we take a look at **John 8** and a conversation that Jesus had with the Jews, we find that there were some that received His instructions with a proper understanding, and there were others that refused to follow His instructions.

- Beginning in **John 8:12**, we find that Jesus said to them, ***"I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life."***
- Jesus let them know the value of following His instructions and yet many of them did not believe in Him.
- Over the next several verses, He very specifically told them that He had been sent with a message by God the Father.
- For example, in **verse 28**, Jesus said, ***"...you will know that I am He, and I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me."***
- And according to **verse 30**, ***"As He spoke these things, many came to believe in Him."***

So, although some were disbelieving, there were many who had come to believe in Him as having been sent by the Father as the Messiah.

- I'd like us to focus our study this morning on what Jesus said to those who believed.

- In **John 8:31-32**, He gave the believing Jews a piece of advice (or really a condition) that if they did as He instructed, they would receive three benefits.
- Let's read these two verses and see what happened in response to their belief...

**31 So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine;**

**32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."**

**I. Let's first consider what Jesus wanted them to do... the only thing that He really asked of them is that they CONTINUE IN HIS WORD.**

Some translations say, "***If you abide in My word...***"

- The Barnes commentary, which I keep behind the desk in my office, says that this phrase means "**to obey my commandments and to receive my doctrines.**"
- Just like the landscaper who had received a very clear set of instructions, Jesus also has a set of commandments and doctrines that must be heeded.
- Basically Jesus is saying, if you follow my instructions, you won't be pursuing misguided goals, you won't be wasting your time and your energy on something that provides no reward or compensation.
- These Jews had just come to a point that they believed in Jesus and He was trying to tell them that now they just needed to prove their faith in Him—they would do so by continuing in His word and following His instructions.
- Keep in mind, He had just told them that He speaks the things that the Father taught Him and He was sent by God with that message!
- This was a condition! IF you continue in my word, THEN you can anticipate these results.

When I was in high school, I took a computer programming class and I remember there were several types of commands that you can give a computer.

- Back in the late 80s computers were a lot more simple than they are today, however I specifically remember that one type of commands that you could give the computer was an If/Then command.
- For example, if you created a multiple choice computer test, you could tell the computer what response to give the test taker.
- IF the answer is "a", THEN the computer will respond by displaying "**Correct.**"
- But, IF the answer is "b, c, or d", THEN the computer will respond by displaying "**Incorrect.**"

In **verses 31**, Jesus gave an If / Then statement!

- "***If you continue in My word, then...***" you will receive these three benefits...
- Receiving the three benefits was conditional upon whether or not they continued in Jesus' word.

**II. Let's take a look at the three benefits that come from meeting this condition... Jesus said that you ARE TRULY DISCIPLES OF MINE.**

This idea of not being a true disciple is kind of a scary one.

- I cannot help but to think of how many people in this world feel as though they ARE truly disciples of Jesus, but are not really continuing in His word—they are not obeying His commandments or receiving His doctrines.

Bible examples of people in this category would include even religious people that God rejects in **Matthew 7:22-23.**

- Notice that they had even prophesied and had received the ability to do amazing things and yet they still didn't really continue in His word.
- Jesus said, "*Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'*"
- It seems to me that their motives were all wrong, they didn't have their heart focused on the right things and they really didn't take the time to understand what God wanted from them—even to the point that He would say, "*I never knew you.*"

Another excellent example is Cornelius the centurion who we read about in **Acts 10**.

- In **Acts 10:2**, he is described as "*a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, and gave many alms to the Jewish people and prayed to God continually.*"
- You may have read my "Sermonette" in the Salem Times-Commoner on Friday—Cornelius was the focus of that article.
- **Verse 4** says God heard his prayers—in response, He sent Peter to share with him the commandments and doctrines of Christ.
- I'm certain that Cornelius thought that he was truly one of God's disciples and yet God would not have sent Peter to him if he was already in a saved condition.

One more example is Saul in **Acts 9**—Saul zealously tried protecting the Jewish traditions thinking that he was doing the right thing as a true disciple of God.

- **Acts 9:1-2** say, "*Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.*"
- Christians (known as "*the Way*" back then) were being threatened and murdered by Saul because they opposed what Saul thought was God's will.
- And He refused to heed the words of faithful Christians, like Stephen, that were trying to teach him the gospel of Christ—Keep in mind, Saul heard the entirety of Stephen's sermon in **Acts 7**.
- In **Acts 7:37**, Stephen had told Saul and the Jewish Council that Moses had foretold about the Christ to come.

Saul thought he was doing the right thing. He thought he was doing the will of God.

- However, he had specifically been denying that Jesus was the Christ and refused to follow His teachings or his commandments.
- He was not a true disciple because he refused to abide by the word of Jesus.
- So when Jesus approached Saul on the road to Damascus, He told Saul that he would be a chosen instrument and a witness before the Jews and Gentiles—He would bring them the commandments of Christ so that they might "*receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance*" having been "*sanctified by faith*" in Jesus. (**Acts 26:18**)
- Note that with Cornelius and with Saul this sanctification began with being taught the word of Christ followed by baptism.
- At this point in life, Saul became known as Paul and He faithfully continued in the word of Christ and was thus truly a disciple of Christ.

**III.** Let's go back to **John 8** and think about the next benefit that Jesus said comes from continuing in His word... He said "*If you continue in My Word...*" you shall KNOW THE TRUTH.

Saul had been living his life on the premise that these people known as “*the Way*” were deceiving God’s people and thus they had to be silenced and this group of people needed to be stopped.

- He thought he had the truth, but he was wrong!

Even the Pharisees in **Matthew 22:16**, seemingly admitted that Jesus was the source of truth... They said to him, “*Teacher, we know that You are truthful and teach the way of God in truth, and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any.*”

- When Luke began his gospel account of Jesus, he expressed that he had “*investigated everything carefully*” so that the reader “*may know the exact truth*” about the things that they had been taught. (**Luke 1:3-4**)
- There are a lot of false doctrines out there and yet only the doctrines of Jesus Christ are the truth.

We can know therefore, that the truth is very valuable.

- A wise man in **Proverbs 4:13** wrote about the value of wisdom saying, “*Take hold of instruction; do not let go. Guard her, for she is your life.*”
- In **Proverbs 23:23-24**, it also says, “*Buy truth, and do not sell it, Get wisdom and instruction and understanding. The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice, and he who sires a wise son will be glad in him.*”
- The truth is something that can not be bought or sold and yet it is something of indescribable value.

I was reading a bulletin article the other day that exemplifies the value of truth... I’d like to read the article in its entirety because it drives home the point I’m trying to make:

**“If you are my friend, if you are concerned about my soul, give me the truth. Do not flatter me. Do not praise my virtues while remaining silent about my vices. Do not fear the truth will offend me. Do not treasure our friendship, our friendly relations, above my salvation.**

**Do not think by ignoring my sins you can help me. Do not think that being blind to my sins will prove you charitable. However I may react to it, whatever may be my attitude toward you after you have done it, GIVE ME THE TRUTH. For the truth, and only the truth, can make me free from the shackles of sin, strengthen me in the pathway of righteousness, and lead me to heaven’s joy.**

**If I am wavering, weak, lukewarm, indifferent, neglectful; if I have been overtaken in a trespass; if I have been drawn into the pleasure of the world; if I have left my first love’ if I have been lead astray by error; or if I have done none of these, but simply need to grow in knowledge and be edified, GIVE ME THE TRUTH!”**

We’ve all heard the common phrase... “**The truth hurts.**”

- And although I agree that the truth can hurt for a short time, it is my opinion that it is also true that the lack of truth hurts even worse!
- The apostle Paul had become so convicted in sharing the truth that he once wrote in a letter to the church in Corinth saying, “*For we can do nothing against the truth, but only for the truth.*” (**2 Corinthians 13:8**)
- It is worthy of note that in this very same letter Paul also wrote more than once about the sorrow he had caused them by the rebuke he had given in his previous letter, but he recognized that their sorrow had been turned to joy because it produced repentance.

But my point is, sometimes the truth hurts!

- Sometimes people will even go to extreme lengths just to avoid the truth.
- There is a story told of a wealthy businessman some time ago who was fascinated by the microscope.
- Looking through its lens to study crystals and the petals of flowers, he was so amazed at the beauty and detail.
- He decided one day to examine some food he was planning to eat for dinner.
- Much to his dismay, he discovered that tiny living creatures were crawling in it!
- Since he was especially fond of this particular food, he wondered what to do.
- Finally he concluded that there was only one logical way out of this dilemma—he would destroy the instrument that caused him to discover the distasteful fact... so he smashed the microscope to pieces.
- In other words, rather than facing the truth that he was eating micro organisms, he would rather deny the truth and continue to do what he enjoyed despite the truth.

Isn't that precisely what a lot of people do today as it pertains to the truth contained in the Bible?

- They have bought into the lies of Satan and believe they are true disciples of Christ despite their lack of obedience to Him.

The only questions we need to all be asking now are...

- Are we continuing in Jesus' word? And do we really know the truth?
- It is my opinion that THE MOST IMPORTANT THING that a Christian can do is to get in the habit of reading the teachings of Christ in the New Testament.
- And if you really think about this statement, I'm sure that you'll agree with me.
- When we continually read His word, we will be motivated to follow His word and everything else will naturally fall into place—The evangelism, the prayer life, the spiritual growth... they'll all come naturally as a result of reading the Bible every day.

One thing that I love about this verse of the Bible is that by abiding in the teachings of Christ, we CAN KNOW the truth.

- There is a lot of religious confusion out there that can all be sorted out if we would just abide in the teaching of Christ.
- Jesus told us that we can know the truth.

#### IV. **Moving forward, let's look at one final benefit... THE TRUTH CAN MAKE US FREE.**

Have you ever had a hidden sin in your life that you desperately wanted to keep secret.

- It was one of those things that if people knew you were involved in it that their opinion of you would change.
- And perhaps you struggled with the particular weakness for some time and may be even had to use deception or lies to keep it a secret.
- Do you ever think about what a burden it is to keep carrying around that secret?

In **Roman 6**, the apostle Paul wrote extensively about being a slave to sin.

- Where did Paul get this idea of being a slave to sin?
- The answer is, from this very passage in **John 8** that we have been studying all morning.
- When Jesus explained that the truth would make them free, some unbelieving Jews inquired about this and Jesus explained further in **verse 34** that "*everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin.*"
- Carrying around our secret sins can be a great burden!

- Have you considered how liberating it would be just to get it all in the open so you don't have to run around hiding in your guilt any more?

This, I believe, is the value of confession that we read about so much in the New Testament.

- The truth can make you free.
- As you know, the Apostle John wrote the gospel account that we have been studying this morning.
- In **1 John 1:9-10**, he also wrote, *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.”*
- James also wrote, *“...confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed.” (James 5:16)*

When we learn the truth about Jesus and we are obedient to His commands, we can be set free from this burden of sin.

- In **Romans 6:3**, Paul wrote, *“Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?”*
- A couple of verses later he continued... *“knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin.”*
- This all makes sense when we connect it to what Jesus said.

Jesus said that we could be free from the slavery of sin by abiding in or continuing in His word.

- We would know the truth; and that truth would set us free.

### **SUMMARY:**

Have you thought about the connection between this passage and **John 14:6** where Jesus said *“I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.”*

- Jesus gave three benefits to abiding in His word... being a true disciple—true disciples were known as *“the Way.”*
- The second benefit is knowing the truth—Jesus is the truth.
- The third benefit is being set free—Jesus is the life.
- When we abide in the teachings of Christ, we are set free from slavery to sin and given life eternal.

### **CONCLUSION & INVITATION:**

If there is anyone here this morning who has ignored the instructions of Jesus and you feel that you may be spending all of your time in the wrong yard, I would like to encourage you to read and be sure that you understand the word of Christ.

- You can be a true disciple. You can know the truth. And you can be set free from your slavery to sin.
- If you have not been baptized into His death and raised up to walk in newness of life, freed from sin, I would like to encourage you to come forward as we stand and as we sing.