

John 8:28-36, 42-59

Introduction

This section of John 8 follows what seems a wearisome argument between Jesus and His enemies. They were accusing Him of lying, and they said that God was not His Father in a special sense. Jesus' reply was that they were of this world, and He was from heaven. They would die in their sins if they did not believe in Him. All He taught was from God, and they would love Him if they knew God. Their real father was the Devil, and they were behaving like him. He was a murderer and liar.

Jesus challenges His enemies to find one thing wrong in His life. When Jesus claimed to be God, the Jews were so exasperated that they took up stones to throw at Him. In the midst of this scene of argument, dispute and bitterness, are found three perfect gems of truth, which are to be our subject. These three great truths about Christ (i) His person is to be worshipped; (ii) His power is to be experienced, (iii) His pattern is to be followed.

Christ's person is to be worshipped

Right at the end of the chapter comes this amazing statement, **Before Abraham was born, I am!** (John 8:58). Jesus, who had only been on earth 30 years, claimed that He was alive before Abraham (who died 2000 years before) existed!

Jesus uses one of God's titles, "I am". **I am that I am** (Exodus 3:14). God told Moses to tell the Israelites that "I am" sent him. He is eternally existing, one that is always "I am". Here is a further reminder of who Christ is. John is never done reminding us of the wonder of the person of Christ, how He was truly man – who felt weary and thirsty, had human emotions like grief, and who suffered physical death – and also truly God, the Eternal Son, ever-existing with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (John 1:1). **Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father** (John 14:9). **You loved me before the creation of the world** (John 17:24). **Thomas said to Him, 'My Lord and my God'** (John 20:28). Perfect man and perfect God. How important this was in order for Him to be Saviour. Man had sinned, so a man had to suffer. But the Saviour had to be God – to redeem vast multitude. We must hold tenaciously to this truth, in the face of cults and denials.

This must lead us to adore and worship. This truth gives us the assurance that our prayers are heard. If He were only a man, how can we pray to Him, and how can He hear and respond? This truth allows us to rest our souls upon Him in perfect security. He is a divine Saviour, so we have perfect safety and security. He is a strong foundation for our faith and reliance. Therefore we can be sure that He is able to save to the uttermost.

The theme of many of our hymns is just this.

*“I dare not trust the sweetest frame
But wholly lean on Jesus’ name.
On Christ the solid rock I stand.
All other ground is sinking sand.”*

This wonderful, mysterious and glorious truth that the Lord Jesus is perfect man and perfect God, who existed before Abraham, should lead us to adoration, worship, honour and confidence.

Christ’s power is to be experienced

If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed (John 8:36). Thus speaks the liberator and deliverer. The enemies of Jesus were boasting that they were free, but Jesus tells them that they are not free because they are slaves to sin. People who habitually and continuously practice sin, show that they are slave to sin. The sinner who thinks he can do whatever he likes is a slave. He may boast that he can handle it; he is not mastered by it for he can stop it when he likes, in experience cannot.

Slavery through sin takes many forms. Guilt, habit, Devil, world, fear of other’s opinions, fear of the future. All mankind are slave to one thing or another. Jesus’ bold claim that he can make a man truly free is a true and genuine offer, and the freedom He gives is not spurious. Through Christ we can have a life of fellowship with God, a life of liberty and freedom. If we are bound by sin, we cannot fulfil God’s purpose. To have freedom over sin is to enjoy His protection, be useful in His service, sure we are in His will, and to be on warm loving terms with the heavenly Father. Standing in the Synagogue in Nazareth, Jesus had quoted Isaiah 61:1 when he said, **The Spirit of the Lord is on me... He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners.... To release the oppressed...** (Luke 4:18).

What wonderful terms are used in describing the Christian faith – “Freedom”, “saved”, “delivered”, “redeemed”. **The glorious freedom of the children of God** (Romans 8:21). **Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom** (2 Corinthians 3:17). **It is for freedom that Christ has set us free** (Galatians 5:1). Also found in many great hymns:

*“He breaks the power of cancelled sin,
He sets the prisoner free.
His blood can make the foulest clean,
His blood availed for me.”*

This freedom is not ours by extra effort of our will. It is the Son who makes us free. Because He is eternal and divine, He has authority and power to do so. Just as when Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation to set free the Negro slaves, he was able to do so because of the authority invested in him as the President of the USA.

Why do people not realize they are in slavery? They are living in the shallows of life, occupied by their duties and enjoyments. They do not realize the inwardness of sin and the extent of God’s claims on their lives. But once they realize, the Gospel of Christ’s redeeming death and the infilling power of the Holy Spirit makes sense.

When they come under the authority and lordship of Christ, and press on further and deeper in that relationship, the freedom becomes more real. There is a huge difference between the superficial easy-going profession of Christianity which is so popular among some Christians today, and the life-and-death clutching, clinging to Him which comes when there is an awareness of the tyranny and bondage of life. The only chance of freedom is in cleaving to Christ.

Christ's pattern is to be followed

Finally a look at the motive which dominated and controlled his life. **I always do what pleases Him** (John 8:29). **My food is to do the will of Him who sent me** (John 4:34). **I have finished the work which you gave me to do** (John 17:4). **My Father... not as I will, but as you will** (Matthew 26:39). Complete harmony between Father and Son. The Son came on earth, lived, taught, spoke, suffered and died – with one aim and motive – to do God's will. His only concern was to please His Father. No wonder the Father said, **This is my Son, whom I love; in whom I am well pleased** (Matthew 3:17).

In this regard, the Lord is our pattern. Of course, He is much more than that, for He is our Saviour and liberator, but then we come under His Lordship, and He always does what pleases God. Becoming a Christian means passing out of a life of independence of God and pleasing self, and passing our life over into His hands. Our "old man", dominated by self-pleasing, is ended on the Cross, where he is crucified. This crucifixion is signified by baptism.

Sadly many Christians fail to realize this. They only come to Christ when really big decisions have to be made, or when life is in a crisis. But in the normal run of life, Christ does not get a look in. Being alive to God means belonging wholly to Him, personal commitment to the Lord and His will. Living to be and to do as He pleases. Not His servant, but His slave. Everything centred on the Lord. Wanting nothing apart from Him.

This is not for super-Christians. No, this is what the normal Christian's life should be, by New Testament standards. The Christian's life has passed into the possession of another. He has finished with his life of independence. God has made us, redeemed us, and at last we are accountable to Him – not to the church, or to other Christians, or to family.

When we realize all this, the Christian life ceases to be a burden and becomes a joy. When He has all of us, we have all of Him. That is not harsh tyranny; it is rest for the soul and the joy of the Lord. **His yoke is easy and his burden is light** (Matthew 11:30). **His commandments are not burdensome** (1 John 5:3).

How seriously do we take this pattern set by the Lord? He is not asking that we never fail Him or never make any mistakes. But He is asking that we be concerned to always do the things which please Him. Do you ever think about it? Purpose it? Plan for it? Are you prepared to get out of life's entanglements and influences that prevent this? Are you prepared to end the controversies the Lord may have with you? Whatever clogs our steps and hinders us from running along God's road, we must be willing to let that go.

*“And so, beside me on the way,
The unseen Christ doth move.
And I can lean each hour upon His arm
And say, ‘Dear Lord, Do you approve?’”*

Here is the answer to peace, contentment and satisfaction. We find self-fulfilment through self-surrender; self-discovery through self-denial. There is no misery like being out of God’s will, and no joy like being in it. An eagle in a cage is a pitiful sight, it is meant to soar. The Christian running his own life is out of element. He was created to please God and to live in His power. That is his destiny.

Conclusion

We must worship the person of Christ, and experience His power. His pattern is to be followed. **Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go** (Matthew 8:19).