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SERMON TITLE: "Oh, the Freedom of Following Jesus!"

SCRIPTURE: John 8:31-51

DATE: May 27, 2018

Check out the service at www.fpcd.org.

READ John 8:31-51 Happy Memorial Day weekend!

Do you love good news? Here's some good news:

Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil. . . . He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. . . . But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!) For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:1-2, 4-6).

That's good news! We will be eligible for a wonderful world to come because of God's mercy.

Do we think, "I'm so glad I've got my religion together and I am going to heaven where I will live in freedom in God's Kingdom?" Are we simply to wait until we die and enter God's heavenly kingdom? Or, is the kingdom for here and now?

People in the military who make the commitment to defend our nation and our freedom understand the value of eternal life—and also the value of being free here and now. They fight so that you can continue to be free. Freedom is so important that they put their very lives on the line, which is immensely honorable.

Jesus talks about freedom in the here and now. Many Christians do not necessarily feel free. So how do we get it? Jesus says *put your whole life on the line to gain this wonderful freedom*. When he talked about it, though, it created an argument. Let's take a closer look.

Jesus speaks to the people (Jews) who believed in him:

"You are truly my disciples if you remain faithful to my teachings. You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8:31-32)

Sounds good but they didn't get it.

Jews: "We are not slaves. What do you mean, 'You will be set free'?"

Jesus: "Here's how you are slaves: Everyone who sins is a slave of sin. The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place forever. So if the Son sets you free, you are truly free. But, there is no room in your hearts for my message."

Their minds were closed to Jesus. He can see into hearts so he was aware that though they *said* they believed in God, they actually disbelieved. Lack of belief in John's gospel is synonymous with aligning with the devil.

Jews: "Our father is Abraham!"

Jesus: "Then follow Abraham's example!"

- ~ Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith. (Romans 4:3)
- ~ Abraham received God's messengers who said, 'Your wife Sarah will have a son this time next year.' (Genesis 18:10)

But they struggled to accept that Jesus is God's messenger.

Jews: "God himself is our true Father."

At this point Jesus got really frustrated and said . . . No, not really! Jesus is extraordinarily patient.

Jesus: "If God were your Father, you would love me, because he sent me. Your father is the devil. Anyone who belongs to God listens gladly to the words of God."

Jews: "You are a devil!"

(Have you ever had an argument like that? Obviously, this was a rough day for Jesus.)

For Jesus, you have two choices: Follow him or follow the prince of this world; the devil.

The reality is that without Jesus there is no change of heart. But with Jesus a whole world of hope opens up. What he is saying is such incredibly good news, so love-filled that

he was willing to die for it. That's why Jesus goes to great lengths to explain it.

To understand it, let's return to this statement: "You are truly my disciples if you remain faithful to my teachings." (NLT) Another version says "if you hold to my teaching;" (NIV). Another one says "if you continue in my word." (NRS)

TRUE DISCIPLES abide in Jesus' word. There must be a connection with God. Even though we struggle with sin, particularly unbelief, when you connect with Jesus he can open the reality of God's kingdom so that you stand in it.

Even when the teachings of Jesus seem confusing or life gets tough or you feel that he is so distant you can't even hear him, stick with him, resource him, be confident he is near, ask for his power in your life. He is the truth. He gives you freedom.

Remember, Jesus said you are not just to identify with him, you need to act like him. The Jews identified with Abraham but they were not acting like Abraham.

Once as a teen I got in trouble with my father. He gave me the straight talk. He said, "I cannot believe you did that. A Vollrath does not act like that."

My father wanted a good reflection on his name just like Jesus wants you to reflect him.

My father's correction gave me a gauge for better behavior. Later, when I went to college, I remembered that it is how I act that makes the difference. I needed to live by my upbringing, including holding to Jesus' teachings.

The primary duty of believers is this, "Be a learner in the presence of Jesus." If you do this, you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.

These Jewish believers to whom Jesus was speaking had stalled out. They really did not know what it meant to follow God's teaching—or follow Jesus. It was all a shell. They did not know God, even though they said they did.

Following Jesus daily is what frees us. It's a process. This Memorial Day weekend reminds us how valuable freedom is; and real freedom is freedom from sin.

Remember the good news?

Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. . . . But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead.

You are saved by grace. But does that mean you never strive to change? No, we do not stay as we are. We do not continue to be controlled by anger, unfaithfulness, bitterness, or guilt. We become a new creation—it takes time, but we can be transformed.

Alcoholics Anonymous helps people be transformed from alcoholism. Let's think of become disciples by using their process, which is actually God-inspired. I'm adjusting it accordingly. What if we approached living by faith like this:

1. I am powerless to live a Christian life myself.
2. Jesus is Someone Greater who sends me the Holy Spirit to help me know the truth.
3. I am turning my will and my life over to the care of Jesus Christ.
4. I am taking a searching and fearless moral inventory of myself.
5. I admit to God, myself, and another person my wrongs.
6. I will humbly invite the Holy Spirit to remove all these defects of character.
7. I will make amends whenever possible.
8. I will create a habit of taking personal inventory, and when wrong, promptly admit it.
9. I will pray and meditate on God's word to improve my contact with Jesus Christ, praying for knowledge of His will and the power to carry that out.
10. Through this greater spiritual awakening, I commit to not just identify with Jesus, but to follow Jesus.

Do you want to act like Jesus? That path will set you free. You must open the door to prayer, honesty, a moral inventory, confession, forgiveness, new habits, and restored relationships. Partnership with Jesus brings amazing freedom.

If we take Jesus' words seriously, we will find that not just once when we were saved, but every day he gives you grace upon grace to continue seeking his truth, and find his freedom.

Does your faith need bolstering this morning? Oh, the **freedom** of following Jesus.

AMEN