

The Cost of Discipleship – Part II
Pastor Ty Blackburn
John 8:31-36
February 10, 2013

...the eighth chapter of John, returning to a passage we started to look at two weeks ago. It was certainly a great blessing to have Bob Summerville and Mary with us last weekend. What a tremendous encouragement they were and the power of God's Word. We come back to this passage, John 8:31-36, which is the text for this morning, and the title I had borrowed from the classic work by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship. I'll remind you that Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a pastor in Germany who when Hitler was on the rise, quickly saw the evils of Nazism. Surprisingly it was rare to see it because Hitler disguised himself really well. Satan, as the Scripture tells us, is good at disguising his own servants as angels of light. Initially, Hitler looked like that in many ways, advocating morality, abstinence from alcohol, the closing down of the brothels, this kind of thing. Hitler was advocating social righteousness. Many of the churches, because they were focused on external things, got on board and rode the wave for a while. Bonhoeffer almost immediately recognized the evils of it because he listened to what he was really saying, and because of that he was imprisoned and died in prison just days before the Nazis were defeated, and before his own prison camp was liberated. He wrote a book called The Cost of Discipleship. We use that title because our passage is dealing with that. The Lord Jesus confronts those who profess faith in Jesus in this passage, those who believe with the cost of what it really means to believe. You'll see this is the pattern that is evident in the ministry of Jesus. Whenever He recognized people who were at the beginning of their faith, He presses hard upon the cost of faith. He says things like, ***"If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.*** (Luke 9:23) Die daily. Remember He said to the man who said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father," and Jesus said, "Let the dead bury their own dead, you follow Me." To the man who said, "Good teacher," expressing some measure of faith, Jesus said, "Why do you call Me good, only God is good," trying to see what the man really believed about Him. The rich, young ruler. "Have you kept the commandments?" He said, "I have." "One more thing you lack," Jesus said, "Go and sell all that you have and then you'll have riches in Heaven. Give it to the poor and then you'll have riches in Heaven." He pressed upon the defining issue in men's hearts. That was His pattern, and that's a very important message, especially for this age because we live in a time of easy believe-ism, where the idea has become commonplace in the church that a profession of faith at any point means that you possess eternal life. Just to profess faith, if you had an experience, if you

meant it at the time, therefore you are saved. That's not the way the New Testament teaches it, that we're saved at an instant in time, yes, and once you're saved you really are always saved. That's clearly the teaching of Jesus as well. No one can snatch you out of His hand, but there is this balancing truth that there is the very real possibility of having shallow faith which is not saving faith. It is something that Jesus is pressing against because He is the Good Shepherd, He lays down His life for the sheep, and He wants to see His sheep come into the fold. So He's never content just to swell the ranks of His followers by taking that initial profession and saying, "Just come on in, guys." He says, "Count the costs."

Bonhoeffer, in his book The Cost of Discipleship emphasizes that and he shows how this idea of easy believe-ism is also, he talks about it in terms of 'cheap grace' and 'costly grace'. The New Testament teaches salvation is by grace alone, that it is the free gift of God, that we do nothing to merit it. It is not by works, it is through faith. It is not by merit, it is by grace. Completely free to us, and yet there is this reality that free salvation costs us everything because we must surrender ourselves to the Savior. We bring nothing. "Nothing in my hand I bring, only to Thy cross I cling." That's why Jesus taught the parables that He did, that to inherit eternal life you had to be like the man who found the pearl of great price and went and sold all that he had that he might buy that pearl. It's an all-encompassing surrender and placing of oneself upon Christ. Well Bonhoeffer talked about 'cheap grace' and 'costly grace'. Listen to this quote from his book The Cost of Discipleship.

Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ living and incarnate.

Costly grace is the Gospel which must be sought again, and again, and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock. Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it costs God the life of His Son. Ye who were bought with a price and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us.

This is the picture and the portrait of what we see in the New Testament in general and in our passage in particular, John 8:31-36. We see Jesus confronting initial

faith, shallow faith, and urging those who had the spark of faith in them to come on. We looked at this last week. We saw that the cost of discipleship, or two weeks ago, is seen in a call to follow Christ. That to be a Christian is not just to have an experience, it's to change the direction of your life. Jesus, what did He say to His disciples? "Come follow Me." To be a disciple is to be a follower. It means that you change the whole direction of your life to follow Jesus. It's not something that you add to your life and keep going the direction that you were going. It means that where Jesus leads, you go. It's also a call to continue in the Word of Christ. That was the second point we saw last time. As we see in the passage, ...***"If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine;*** It's a call to continue in the Word of Christ, and we'll look today at two more aspects of this cost of discipleship which were seen in the nature of the call. Let's read God's Word together. John 8, let's look at Verses 30-36, Verse 30 to set the context.

John 8:30-36 ~ As He spoke these things, many came to believe in Him. 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." 33 They answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, 'You will become free'?"

34 Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. 35 The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever. 36 So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. 37 I know that you are Abraham's descendants; yet you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you. 38 I speak the things which I have seen with My Father; therefore you also do the things which you heard from your father."

Let's pray together.

Our Father, as we bow in prayer we ask that the entrance of Your Word might give light into our souls, and that in Your light we might see light, that we might be changed into the image of Your Son. We pray this in His Name, amen.

We see in the passage that it's a call to follow Christ, to be a disciple. The issue is whether you're truly disciples or not, whether you're shallow disciples or real disciples, Jesus says. The real disciple is the one who keeps following and keeps continuing in the Word. ***"If you continue in My word,...*** we saw last time that means to remain in the Word. It means in the difference, I read a quote from

Spurgeon which I found so helpful myself that he said that to really be saved means that you don't just continue in the words you agree with that Jesus gives. It's not that you say, "This far I will follow You, but I continue to retain my own right of authority. If I stop agreeing with you, Lord Jesus, I will not follow." There are many people who start out upon the Christian life that way and they fall away because Jesus has a way of saying hard things again, and again, and again, making demands of us that we would never make of ourselves. The true believer, though he may bristle, though he may struggle of course with the things that Jesus does and says in His Word, and He does in our lives, the true believer is marked out by the fact that he perseveres, he does continue, he remains, he doesn't fall away, he stays with the Savior. Spurgeon says it's as if you say to the Lord Jesus Christ, "I believe what You've said thus far and I will keep on believing whatever You say, just because You say it." There's been a fundamental transfer of the ultimate locus of authority in the life of the true believer. "It's no longer me, and as far as I agree with You, Jesus, I will follow You." You see the locus is still with me, but if I say, "No, I give myself to You. It doesn't matter whether I agree with You or not, the only issue is whether You say it or not." That is a watershed, it is a tiny movement and yet that's the difference between eternity in Heaven or hell. Have we surrendered to Him? And continuing in His Word is the evidence of that kind of commitment.

So it's a call to follow Christ. It's also a call to continue in the Word of Christ. There are two more points. Those were the first two we looked at last time. There are two more things we see in the passage that illustrate the cost of discipleship. We see the cost of discipleship in the nature of the call and there are four points, we've covered the first two already.

3) A Call to Grow in the Knowledge of Christ:

The nature of the call is not just a call to follow Christ, it's not just a call to continue in the Word of Christ, but thirdly, the nature of the call of Christ, the call of discipleship is a call to grow in the knowledge of Christ. Verse 32:

John 8:31-32 ~ ...“If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; 32 and you will know the truth,...

It's a call to knowledge, but it's not just a call to a static position, no it's a call to growing knowledge. ***...you will know the truth,...*** In fact, the word translated 'know' in the text, there are a couple of different words that are used often in the New Testament and in John's Gospel as well, that we translate into our English

word 'know'. One of the words means kind of the picture of the fullness of knowledge, that you have grasped the whole picture. That's not the word here. The word here is the word 'ginōskō' which means the idea of this particular word as opposed to the other word is that there is the inception of knowledge, the beginning of knowledge, and the growth in knowledge.

A) Progressive Knowledge:

So when we think about this call to grow in the knowledge of Christ, I want us to think of three sub-points under this third point in the broad outline of the last two messages. The kind of knowledge that we're called to in Jesus is first of all, progressive, a progressive knowledge. The word here means '*to come to know, to know by experience, and to know with certainty because one has come to know personally*'. So the idea though is of growing in knowledge. The Christian is one who doesn't just come to know some truth and then stops. A true Christian doesn't say, "How little can I know and still get to Heaven?" That's not the way that the born again believer by nature is going to think. Now sometimes we forget. We're sheep. We forget how important it is to keep knowing, don't we. I'm so grateful the Lord gives that image of sheep. When you first heard about **...all we, like sheep have gone astray...** or **...the Lord is my Shepherd...** It's so comforting. You know sheep are so cute and cuddly. If you've never been around sheep they seem cute and cuddly, don't they? From a distance? If you get close to them they're kind of dirty and nasty. But the reason the Lord shows sheep, and I don't think it was an afterthought, I think the Lord created sheep to show us what we're like. It's because sheep are stupid. They're uniquely stupid. Of all the herd animals, they're the dumbest. They forget. I was reading a couple of years back, I was doing a sermon series on Eldering, and talking about shepherding and how we have to shepherd one another. As Elders we have to also be shepherded by the other Elders because we all are sheep ourselves. So we need to be under authority because we're all dumb like sheep. I was reading some stuff online, some different research. I found some stuff from the University of Tennessee. It was not Christian at all, it was talking about tending sheep. They were saying that when you have a flock of sheep, you have to be sure to go in on a regular basis at least weekly and feel of the sheep. You know they've got that hair, right? What they're talking about is you've got to feel and see because a sheep can get really skinny. You don't know it because it's got all the wool coming out, right? So feel of the sheep regularly. Why? Because sheep forget to eat. I don't ever forget to eat. It may have happened a time or two, but spiritually I forget to eat. What really matters, I forget to eat because I'm a dumb sheep. Sheep will get into poisonous things. One sheep will eat something that's poison and fall down dead, and other sheep will think,

“That still looks good to me,” and they’ll eat, and they’ll die, and fall down dead, and it’ll keep on happening. That’s why they have to be tended. Then cows kind of wise up. Cows don’t look that smart, but they’re a whole lot smarter than the sheep.

He tells us we’re sheep. The comfort of that is that the Lord knows our frame, and so even though we’re supposed to be growing in knowledge, it’s possible to forget that. But the true sheep that know His voice when they’re reminded of it, will follow the Shepherd. We find ourselves wandering off, just like the hymn “Prone to wander, Lord I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love.” But the heart of the true believer says, “Lord, take my heart. Take and seal it. I don’t want to keep wandering.”

So the call to Christ, the call to true discipleship, the call of the true Christian is a call to grow in the knowledge of Christ, a knowledge that is progressive. We see it in the word *‘know’* and we also see it in the word *‘disciple’*. This can go back to that for a moment, the word *‘disciple’*, the verb means *‘to learn’*. So the noun *‘disciple’* is *‘a learner’*, *‘a lifelong learner’*. Someone whose primary focus is to learn and practice the truth of what he learns. It means *‘to attach oneself to a teacher, to bind oneself to a teacher’*. So we’re called as Christians, if you’ve made a profession of faith and you want to follow Christ, you’re called to attach yourself to Jesus to keep learning from Him. To place yourself under His Word again, and again, and again. Personal Bible study, personal Scripture memory, personal meditation, meeting with the Body of Christ, letting other brothers and sisters speak God’s Word into your life. We desperately need that and that’s what we’re called to do. That is the base of what it means to be a Christian. We’re called to grow in the knowledge of Christ. That’s a knowledge that’s progressive.

B) Practical Knowledge:

Secondly, the second sub-point under this point is it’s not just progressive knowledge, it’s practical knowledge. It’s not theoretical knowledge. There is an element of theory about it of course, but it doesn’t stop there. It is theoretical only in the sense that it’s going to be applied in practice. It’s to understand it so that you can eventually do it. The question is how we apply and practice what we learn. The idea of the disciple is someone much like an apprentice in a profession, someone who attaches themselves to a master craftsman so that he can learn from the master and do what the master does. The call to Jesus Christ is to know Him and to be like Him. The one who says he knows Him, John writes in 1 John, must walk as Jesus walked. Not just talk as He talked, but walk as He walked. The knowledge is to be

practical. There is always the danger of just learning in our heads and not in our lives, but the true believer is the one who presses on when he's reminded, as sheep need to be reminded, he wants to walk as Jesus walked. Not to be like those who Paul speaks of in 2 Timothy 3:7, who are always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth. To come to a knowledge of the truth biblically is to do it. Not just to understand it, but to do it.

C) Personal Knowledge:

So it's a call to grow in the knowledge of Christ in which our knowledge is progressive, it's practical, and thirdly it's personal. **...you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.**" On our side it's personal knowledge, but it's also more than just on our side personally. You have to personally come to know the truth more, and more, and more progressively and practically in your life if you're a follower of Christ. But there is another personal element and that is that truth itself is a person. In John's Gospel that is clearly an emphasis of the apostle. Truth is a person. Think about how he introduced to us Jesus Christ in his prologue. He speaks of the light shining in the darkness, **...was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man.** (John 1:9) John the Baptist was not the light, he came to bear witness to the light, the true light. Light is an image of truth itself.

As he continues on in the prologue, he says in the decisive moment where he explains the word which had formed all of creation. The Word which was God. The Word which was with God. In John 1:14 he says:

John 1:14 ~ And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

The unique glory of this One that had become flesh. To see Jesus Christ is to see grace. To see Jesus Christ is to see truth. He is, as we saw in this passage, John 8:12, Jesus said, ***"I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life."*** But think of John 14:6:

John 14:6 ~ Jesus *said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.

He is the truth. He Himself is truth itself. What does that mean? What is truth? The ultimate truth that the world needs is what God is like. Who is God? And Jesus Himself, everything about Him is truth. To see Him is to see God. He says this in

His Gospel, “Have I been so long with you and you don’t know, Philip, that he who has seen me has seen the Father. I am the truth. I am the way to the Father. I am the truth. I am the life of the Father.”

So when we talk about knowing truth, we’re not talking about facts and this is so important for us in western civilization, those of us who were not raised in the East. I mean, we all have our pitfalls, different cultures, and in the West we focus too much on theoretical knowledge detached from practice. Individual, personal experience. The East focuses on group thought and stuff like that. Each one has its weakness. In Christ you find the balance, but we have this tendency to think of truth as facts that you learn and you take a test. “I’ve got those facts now in my brain.” To know truth in the Bible is not like that. To know truth in the Bible is to start with facts about God, but facts about God must become personal knowledge of God. The difference is, and I love what J.I. Packer says in his book Knowing God, that there’s a difference between knowing about God and knowing God. They both start with learning about God, but the difference between knowing God and knowing about God is when you learn something about God, if you take that directly to Him personally in worship then you come to know Him. You see that?

So what we’re seeing is, as we learn truths about Jesus, it is so essential that we regularly, daily, hour-by-hour as we reflect on who He is, we don’t think about Him in the third person, “I love this about Jesus.” No, we say, “I love this about You, Lord Jesus.” That’s what we’re called to, a lifelong, progressive, practical, and personal knowledge. Growing in knowledge that is always personal at its essence. That knowing truth is a personal and relational experience. We have to discipline ourselves to kind of put that mental reminder when we read our Bibles to talk to God over the Scriptures. “Lord, I don’t understand this. I don’t understand why You did this.” Second person, you see? Not, “I don’t understand why He did this,” but, “I don’t understand why You did this. Why do You say this? Why were you so hard here? It appears to me that You’re hard here. I know that You’re right. I know that You’re good. I trust You, but I’m wrestling with You.” Like Habakkuk we talked about, he wrestled with God. He was honest with his questions about God. He went to God with his questions and God revealed His glory to him. But it’s personal knowledge.

So the call of the true Christian is a call not just to follow Christ, not just to continue in the Word of Christ, it’s a call to grow in the knowledge of Christ. Growing knowledge of Christ.

4) A Call to Walk in the Freedom of Christ:

And fourthly, it's a call to walk in the freedom of Christ. This is the last major point in about which the next several verses focus. ... ***and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.***" There it is in a nutshell right there, that knowing the truth in a progressive, practical, and personal way isn't just theoretical. You see? It makes a difference. It's practical. You can't know the truth and not be free, Jesus says. If you know the truth you will be free. The truth will make you free. It will set you free. It will break the chains. So a call to walk in the freedom of Christ. Following Christ then, continue in the Word of Christ, progressing in the knowledge of the truth of Christ will have a certain and inevitable consequence—you will grow in the freedom that is in Christ. You will be free. That is the call of the Gospel, and this is one of the things that we have to learn, that in sharing and witnessing one of the challenges, and this is where we forget to. I know I do.

I was reading something so helpful just the other day about sharing the Gospel with unbelievers. The guy was talking about that really the essence is not learning technique, or not learning strategies, it's really just being so enthused about who Jesus Christ is that that is the real heartbeat of real evangelism because then you're just telling this person about the thing they need more than anything else, and that is to know how wonderful Jesus Christ is. When something is precious to us we can't help but talk about it. That's true about the things that we like in this world, isn't it? The things that you really enjoy doing, it's hard not to talk about. Somebody else says they love doing it, and you're like, "Hey, yeah, I love that too." It could be fishing, or hunting, or whatever.

How much more that should be true of us when we're talking about Jesus Christ, and when we think about the fact that it is Jesus who sets us free. Anybody we're talking about that does not know Christ, we know this about them, that they are in bondage, and what they need more than anything else is to be set free. We have met the Person they need to meet that can liberate them. Following Christ will have the inevitable consequence of greater freedom in Christ.

Now, there are three points I want us to look at under this heading as well, three sub-points about this freedom.

A) Freedom in Christ is at First Offensive:

In fact, it's quite offensive, because the first thing the Jews do is this is where they stumble. Remember they had an initial faith where He's talking to those who came to believe in Him. Look what it says in Verse 31:

John 8:31 ~ 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.” 33 They answered Him, “We are Abraham’s descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, ‘You will become free?’”

“Wait a minute. You’ve gone too far,” they say. “We don’t need to be free. We might need a Savior, and we might need a Messiah, but we don’t need to be free like You’re talking about.” That was just too offensive. It’s too much. It’s interesting. Before really studying this passage, I had always kind of thought that they were just being incredibly dense when they said, “We’ve never yet been enslaved to anyone,” and that they were talking about political freedom. “We’ve never yet been enslaved to anyone, because we’ve always been our own nation.” It’s like they forgot about the fact that they were subjugated so often in their history, and there were times before even the kingdom that they were subjugated by the Philistines or the Aramians, the Midianites coming in. In Judges, you look at all the bondage that they’re bringing to them, but then later they become a kingdom under Saul, David, and Solomon, and then the divided kingdom, remember?

Then the Assyrians come in and subjugate the Northern Kingdom. Then the Babylonians come in and subjugate the Southern Kingdom and cart them off like slaves a thousand miles from their home. Then they’re delivered from the Babylonians because the Persians subjugate them, and they’re delivered from the Persians because the Greeks subjugate them. Then they have a brief moment, a respite of about a hundred years when they throw off the Greek yoke under the Maccabean revolt. They have a hundred years of freedom and then the Romans come in and subjugate them.

I’m thinking here they’re talking about the fact that somehow they’ve forgotten that history. I really don’t think that’s what’s going on, though. I don’t think they’re denying all of that time of subjugation. I think what they’re doing is they’re really actually closer to the truth than we might have been first tempted to think. They’re speaking of Spiritual freedom. Not exactly, and they’re not precisely where they need to be, but they’re closer. When they say they’re Abraham’s descendants, what they mean is, “We are the seed of Abraham, and therefore we have the calling of Abraham. Abraham is a friend of God. Abraham is uniquely blessed of God. Through Abraham, all the families of the earth are going to be blessed. We are his seed, and therefore we are those who reign. Even when we’ve been carted off in slavery, we weren’t slaves, not in our hearts.”

There's some wisdom in that. No matter what man does to us, if we're free in Christ, we can't be enslaved. They're saying something like that. The problem is they think they're already free Spiritually. They don't realize that what Jesus is talking about is that though they're literally Abraham's descendents physically, and though the promises that were given to Abraham are there in front of them, they are personally slaves until they give themselves to the Messiah. This is what they didn't realize, and it was offensive to them that Jesus was telling them that they were slaves Spiritually. That's why they just immediately answer back: ***"We are Abraham's descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, 'You will become free'?"*** And Jesus explains what freedom He's talking about.

John 8:34 ~ Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin."

What He's telling them is, "You are not as righteous as you think you are. The fact that you possess the Law, the fact that you possess the temple and the covenants, you have to have been made righteous in your heart. You have to have been set free in your soul, and you have not been. He's telling the Jews. This is why John the Baptist came baptizing. In fact, if they'd been paying attention and thinking this through, and some of the faithful were, it was really quite astounding that John the Baptist when he came and ministered, it wasn't astounding that he said, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand," but the people understood that there were times of departure from the Lord and that they needed to come back, and the prophets would come and call them back. But when John the Baptist called them back, he said, "You need to be baptized." That was astounding because the only people who were ever baptized in the Old Testament were ungodly Gentiles who came to be converts to Judaism, Proselytes. There was the Proselyte baptism. When a filthy, uncircumcised Philistine wanted to unite with Israel, he could come, be circumcised, and also be baptized and become a follower of Yahweh, be admitted into the synagogue to hear the Law and to hope in Christ, the Messiah to come.

Yet what happens with John is he comes along, saying, "All of you Israelites who were by birth children of Abraham, every one of you needs to go through Gentile Proselyte baptism." In other words, "Every one of you are filthy, uncircumcised Philistines. Every one of you in the sight of God is just as ungodly as the most ungodly. There is no difference." That was offensive. That's what Jesus is saying here. When He says, "You need to be free," He's pressing on the same nerve. It's not about external relationship. It's not about outward association. It's about

inward transformation. To be saved, you must be set free at the very depth of your soul. That's what He's saying here, and that was incredibly offensive. This is something that I think speaks perhaps more powerfully and clearly to those of us who have been raised in Christian homes, to those of us who have grown up in America, a "Christian" nation, to those of us who have been raised in church or raised in the Bible Belt, the South. We tend to think that because we've made an affiliation with the church, and we've had an experience, that therefore we're already clean, and the root problem is we never really saw ourselves as that dirty in the first place. That's the rub. Jesus is saying that to be saved, you have to first of all see how lost you are. You have to come to see what you are in the sight of God, not as you look around you at men. A lot of times I think we're tempted to think, "Yeah, I need to be saved. I've sinned. Sure I've sinned. I've done things that displeased God and I need a Savior," but we don't really understand what that means.

I was talking to a friend of mine recently, a gentleman who had professed to be a believer for about 30 years. He came to my office not too long ago. He doesn't go to this church. This is a friend, and he wanted to tell me what happened to him. He told me a story. He had taught Sunday School for 25 years, maybe, taught Bible studies, and it was a guy who was Reformed in his theology, solid theology. He said, "I'll tell you what happened to me." It had been 6 or 7 years since we saw each other, and he told me what had happened, and he said, "Ty, I think the thing that I didn't realize was that I grew up in a Christian family, my parents were Godly, they loved the Lord, they taught me the Word, but somehow I had kind of the mindset that I'm just an Opie Taylor kind of guy. Yeah, I need God, but I never saw how filthy I was apart from Christ, and therefore I never really clung to Christ, and God had to take me through some things to show me the depth of my own depravity. I think I was saved about a year ago. God wakened me up from that lethargy and kind of shallow commitment."

This was a guy that was regularly in church, regularly teaching the Bible, all those things, but he said, "I wasn't really clinging to Jesus. He wasn't everything to me. He wasn't the focus and heart of my life until now." That is something that we all need to be aware of and especially be ready to receive the offense of the cross. That's what Paul's talking about is the offense of the cross, to personalize it, that if I was the only person that had sinned, or if you were the only person that had sinned – and you know, we have respectable sins, don't we? We think, "Well, I struggle with anger. I struggle with worry and that's better." "I may struggle with lust, but I've never acted on it. I don't look at pornography. I don't do this. I don't do that, and so therefore I'm fighting against it, but it's not that big a deal, and I

never really saw it as ugly as it really is.” Jesus said to look at a woman lustfully is to commit adultery in your heart. To desire what other people have, to be a coveter, is wicked ungodliness. To be a worrier is to blaspheme the Name of a sovereign God, and if only your besetting sin was all that Jesus died for, it would have required just as much agony at Calvary. You and I, our sin, would have required just as much agony as the Nazi war criminal, because our sin is that horribly offensive to a Holy God. For us not to love Him with all of our hearts every moment is an offense to His holiness. For us to worry, for us to slander, for us to be lustful or greedy, for us to be angry or fearful, these are wicked usurpations of His rightful place, and deserve an eternity in hell.

We have to ask God, “Lord, show me. Show me. Search me. Know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts. Show me the wickedness that comes out.” I think this is one of the problems that I’ve seen in my own life. It’s just a part of sanctification I struggle with. I tend to find it very easy to blame my sin on other people. Do you have that same problem? I mean, I don’t mean to do it. I’m not thinking consciously that I am doing it, but I just do it naturally. *I’m sorry I got angry, but you shouldn’t have said what you said. I wouldn’t have done that if only you had done this.*

In Mark 7, Jesus talks about how it’s not what goes into the mouth of the man that defiles a man, but what comes out of the mouth of the man. Remember that? He says, “It’s not what goes into the mouth of the man but what goes out of the mouth, because that’s what comes out of the heart,” and He says, “What comes out of the heart,” and then He has this long list: Murder, adultery, and all these wicked things come out of the heart. So what it means is that whatever comes out of your life, whatever comes out of your heart, is not the responsibility of anyone else. It is a reflection of what was inside. It is the revelation of what was already there.

It’s like if I put a tube of toothpaste on this pulpit, and I say, “I’m going to squeeze it now.” Here’s some Crest toothpaste and I’m going to squeeze it. Let’s take a moment. Who wants to vote that it’s going to be toothpaste that comes out? We would all expect toothpaste to come out. Why? Because toothpaste is in there. When the toothpaste comes out, the toothpaste tube shouldn’t say, “I am so upset that you made me like that.” I just revealed that you were like that. I just revealed what was already in you. So we should be appalled at our wickedness, and when the Lord lets people be around us that are sources of opportunity to expose what’s in there, we ought to be appalled not at the squeeze, but at the contents of the tube of toothpaste.

“God, help me. I’m the one. It’s me. It’s me. It’s me, oh Lord, standing in the need of prayer. I am the sinner. Have mercy on me, the sinner. God, thank You for revealing the wickedness, but God, help me.” Jesus said it’s not those who are well that need a physician. It’s those who are sick, and if you don’t see that you’re sick, you can’t come to the great physician. And that’s what He’s saying here. He is beckoning them to see their sickness. This is the loving Savior saying to them, “You have a shallow faith.” And I love this. The fact is in Jesus’ kindness, He is loving to the shallow faith. He invites it. If you have a measure of faith and you’re worried that your faith is not genuine, the good news is that real faith starts where you are, and Jesus does not bruise the broken reed or extinguish the smoking flax. He is a gentle Savior that will keep beckoning you to Him, so continue in His word. Continue under His word. Continue to grow in the knowledge of who He is and keep looking to Him, and He will transform you in His time.

So this freedom is first of all offensive, but there are two other points about it that I want to mention as well. It’s also instantaneous and thirdly ongoing. I’m going to talk about that. It’s instantaneous and ongoing at the same time.

B) Freedom in Christ is Instantaneous

C) Freedom in Christ is Ongoing

He says the truth will make you free.

John 8:36 ~ So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.

The idea there in Verse 36 is that if you come to know the Son, you are free at the moment you come to know the Son, and yet there’s this future idea in Verse 32 that you will grow in the knowledge of the truth, and the truth will keep making you free. So it’s instantaneous and ongoing. Do you see that? And you see this in the Scripture. I mean, we’re set free from slavery at the moment we trust Christ. Colossians 1:13 tells us that He has delivered us from the domain of darkness. It happens at the moment that we’re born again and express faith in Christ. We’re delivered. We’re set free, and yet freedom is something we have to keep walking in. That’s what Romans 6 is all about, that we are to keep acting as if we’re free.

Romans 6:13 ~ and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. 14 For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

You are no longer a slave of the Law or sin, but you're a slave of grace. So it's instantaneous and it's ongoing. The Christian is someone who should be continually, if we are walking in the truth, walking in progressive freedom, ongoing freedom. Again, I mentioned that we can get distracted. If we stop feeding on the truth, what happens? We stop growing in freedom. It's very simple. If we don't eat, we begin to shrivel up. If we don't drink, we're parched. So we need to eat and drink the word of Christ, and as we do, we will be transformed. That's what Paul tells us. The progressive nature, the ongoing nature of this freedom, is seen in Romans 12:2.

Romans 12:2 ~ And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind,...

Be continually transformed by the renewing of your mind. The question we need to ask ourselves when we look at these two points is Lord, as I look at the profession that I've made, I'm identifying with Your people. I'm seeking to continue in Your word. Am I coming to know You more? Do I really know You Jesus Christ? And if I know You, am I walking in progressive freedom? Over time, am I putting off sin? The war with sin continues until the day we die. Sin is a lying task master. I love the image that Martin Lloyd-Jones gives in his commentary on Romans 6. He says we're so tempted to act as though we haven't been transferred from the domain of darkness to the domain of God's Son, because of our frailty and weakness. We feel like we're still slaves, because we have an old nature clinging to us.

It's like we came out of the tomb of Lazarus, born again, and yet we can't get the grave clothes off and we don't get the grave clothes off til Jesus calls us home. We have to keep fighting against that, but the power is in the freedom that is in Christ. It is knowing Him personally, for Him to be our life, to be looking to Jesus. If we struggle in an area, if we struggle with fear, Jesus is the One we are to look to. He does not fear. He has perfect love. Look at Jesus. Look at His love. He will help you to love. Know His love. Experience His love. Bask in His love, and you will stop fearing. He's everything that we need in whatever area it is. But Lloyd-Jones mentions it's like this. He said it's like a slave in America. Martin Lloyd Jones is a great British preacher who died in the 80's, a wonderful man of God who preached at Westminster Chapel in London for a number of years.

He says it's like a man who was delivered from slavery after the great American Civil War, and a man who had grown up as a slave and lived as a slave, year after year after year. He's now set free. He now is a free man, but imagine that same

man is standing in the town where he had grown up and had been a slave. He's a free man, and imagine he's standing there talking to a friend and he hears the voice of his former slave owner, his former master. He hears the voice. What would that do? He'd feel the muscles tense, a wave of fear come over him, anxiety, perspiration. He feels at that moment like a slave, but if the Son has set you free, you shall be free indeed. You have to remember, "No, there's been a change of status. I'm no longer a slave. The Son has set me free. I am free indeed," and you have to walk as a free man.

Turn around and walk with your head held up high as a free man, because of Jesus. It's not because of who we are. We look at our Savior, our great High Priest who has passed through the heavens and has fulfilled the Law completely, and is perfect righteousness and is our righteousness, and we don't yield ourselves to sin like a slave would. Imagine that guy comes up and says, "Hey Ty, come here. I need you to do something, boy." He calls me that and I feel like I need to go. "Wait a minute. I'm free. The Law says I am free. You have no authority over me anymore because of what Jesus Christ has done," and so you don't yield your members. If I was to go, I'd be yielding my members to sin as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin.

Well, what do I do? In that moment, I don't just say, "I'm not going to go. I'm not going to go." What I do is I turn around and I yield myself (Romans 6:13) to God and my members as instruments of righteousness unto God. I love that. He doesn't just say, "Don't yield your members." Think about the parallelism of this. Don't yield your members to sin as instruments of unrighteousness. You would think he'd say, "But yield your members as instruments of righteousness." He does, but there's something else he adds in the middle. He says, "Don't yield your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin, but yield yourselves to God and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God." What he's saying is there's that personal element. It's not me saying, "I'm not going give my body to that." No, I give myself to God. He is my righteousness. He is my hope. You are my life, and I look to You as a little child looks to his mother and his father for nourishment. "I can't do it, but I look to You, and You are my salvation," and He reaches down His strong arms, the Savior reaches down His strong arms, lifts us up to His breast, and says, "Walk with Me. I am your righteousness. I am your light. I am your victory," and we walk as free men when our eyes are on Christ. That is the calling of the true believer. We may forget these things. We find ourselves continually forgetting these things, because we're sheep, but don't walk in the dirt anymore. Stop today.

At the time when you fall this week, get up and remember, “Wait, I’ve been called to freedom.” It is for freedom that Christ has set you free. Do not be subject again to the yoke of slavery. God has given us a glorious salvation, and we need to ask ourselves, “Lord, search me. Show me. Am I Yours? And if I am, Lord, I’m going to keep looking at Christ more and more, and if I feel like I might not be Yours, I’m going to keep looking at Christ, keep casting myself upon Christ, keep trusting in Christ until I know in my experience that I’m saved,” because the evidence of salvation comes out in our life. Jesus said, “You will know them by their fruit.” Over time the believer bears fruit as he’s abiding in Christ. You have to keep abiding in Christ, though, and he bears fruit. May God help us to be people who bear that glorious fruit unto the praise of our Savior.

Let’s go to Him in prayer...

Our Father, we rejoice in the fact that our Savior is everything that we need. There is no deficiency in the work, in the Person, in the victory of Jesus Christ. He has done all things well according to Your plan of perfection, according to our need, absolute sufficiency. We’re thankful that He has paid the sin debt for every single sin – past, present, and future – every sin of commission, every sin of omission. He bore Your wrath on the cross for everyone who would ever believe, and He paid that debt in full. There remains no more payment for sin, no more wrath for the believer. And not only that, Lord. He didn’t just take our sins away, but He gives us His righteousness, and there’s nothing deficient about His righteousness. He lived a life of 30+ years of perfect righteousness. He lived as one whose meat and whose drink was to do the will of God, always thrilling Your heart.

Every time You looked at Jesus in His earthly life, Your heart leaped with joy because He was exactly what You intended man to be, exactly what You created us to be, and You were thrilled in Your Son. And Father, to know that those who believe in this room today, when we attach ourselves to Jesus Christ, You look at us even after we’ve stumbled and fallen, You look at us as we look to You and You see the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ, and Your heart thrills to see Your child look to You, clothed in perfect garment. God, give us greater faith. Give us greater clarity of what really is true. Make us people who cling to You, who follow You closely, who are constantly seeking to feed on the truth of Your word, whose eyes are always on the Shepherd, and whose ears are always attended to His voice so that we might stay close to Him until He comes. We pray these things for Your glory and in Your Name, Amen.

This audio presentation, description, and transcription by Providence Church in Duluth, Georgia, USA, is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 License.

 Except where otherwise noted, this work is licensed under <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>

Attribution:

Based on work at Providence Church, Duluth, GA, USA and found online at <http://www.providenceduluth.org>. Permission for use beyond the scope of this license may be requested by contacting Providence Church, Duluth, GA through their website.