

Finding the truth in Jesus

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[0 : 00] Well, every now and again, our family go camping. We enjoy to go camping from time to time. And, you know, just to be outside in nature and in God's beauty.

And one of the things, though, that I really like about camping is that every time I go camping, I realize how many normal, everyday things I take for granted. You know what I'm talking about? Like having water from a tap.

Or having a cold drink. A cold drink on a hot day. You can't keep drinks cold when you're camping unless you've got one of those little battery-powered fridges, which are quite expensive.

Or boiling water. You know what a schlep it is to just boil some water for a cup of tea when you're camping? And if you've been camping, you know exactly what I'm talking about. All these simple things that we take for granted in everyday life are quite an issue when you're camping.

Or take something as simple as having light. You know, after the sun sets, when you're camping, it's quite a battle to make sure there's enough light around to see what you're doing.

[1 : 08] But of course, we never realize that when we're at home. All we've got to do at home is flick a switch. When we go into a room, we do it without thinking, don't we? And we've got light.

Except, of course, when there's load shedding or a power failure or something. But even then, funny thing is, many of us still try to switch on the lights. Even when there's a power failure. Have you done that? Have you done that?

You go into a room and there's a power failure. You know the lights aren't working and yet you still try. Why? Because it's instinctive, isn't it? We take it for granted that we've always got light when we flick on the switch.

And so that's why I find for simple things like that in life, camping is a great way to appreciate those small things that we don't think about in our daily lives.

Well, now, in the time of Jesus, every year the Jews had a big camping trip. I don't know if you know that. It was called the Festival of Tabernacles.

[2 : 03] Literally, it was the Festival of Tents. They had a festival where they all went to Jerusalem and they gathered from around the country and they set up tents in and around the city.

And they lived in those tents for seven days. Now, why would they do that? Well, they did that to remember how their forefathers camped in the desert for those 40 years.

As they were going from slavery in Egypt towards the promised land that God was giving to them. They had to camp out in the desert on the way there.

And the reason that the Jews every year had this big seven-day camp out in Jerusalem was to help them to not take for granted the things that they might normally take for granted.

The reason they were in this country. All the things that God had done for them. They used these festivals to commemorate, to remember, to not take for granted what God had done for them as their forefathers were camping through the wilderness.

[2 : 59] Anyway, the highlight of this festival, the Festival of Tents, was called the Ceremony of Lights. Right at the last and greatest day of this festival, after sunset, they would light up all these lanterns.

And the whole temple courts would be lit up and they would have this big open-air party under the light that these lanterns provided. And the reason they did that was to commemorate not only how God provided for them through the wilderness, but how God guided them through the desert, especially at night, through this big supernatural pillar of fire, which you would have heard about if you read Exodus.

So, God guided them during the day with a pillar of smoke and during the night to guide them through the treacherous lands and the enemy-held territory. He guided them with this amazing pillar

of fire.

Imagine seeing that. Imagine for 40 years getting used to it. I mean, getting used to something that strange and supernatural, this pillar of fire that you would follow. And they needed that because if they walked around in darkness, if they walked around the desert without God's guidance, they wouldn't know where they were going and they'd never find this new life that God had promised them.

And so, that's the background of what's happening in John chapter 8. That's the festival that we read in chapter 7 that Jesus is attending. But now, in John 8, right in the middle of this, well, towards the end of this festival, rather, Jesus says something profound, which we've probably heard before, but now in the context of where he's at, this festival, which, I mean, the early readers of John would have known about this festival.

[4 : 47] It's quite a famous festival. It makes, it has a whole lot more significance. So, let's read that. It's in John chapter 8. He says this, right there in verse 12, is it?

He says, I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. Now, those may be familiar words, right?

If you've been coming to church for any length of time, you've probably heard them before. But they've taken a whole new meaning now, don't they, in the context of this festival of tabernacles and the ceremony of lights.

You see, because Jesus, what he's saying here with these words, he's saying that this supernatural pillar of fire that gave light to the Israelites through the desert, that led them through the darkness to the promised land, that pillar of fire was actually a foreshadow of Jesus himself.

All those years ago, that was a sign that God gave to help us understand what Jesus was going to come and do, not just for the Israelites, but for the whole world.

[5 : 55] So Jesus is claiming that he has come to earth to lead human beings in general out of darkness into a new place, a new life that God is preparing for us in eternity.

A place that without his light, we wouldn't be able to find. So you see, Jesus is fulfilling the true meaning of that pillar of fire in the Old Testament.

It's amazing, isn't it, when you start to see how all of these weird and wonderful things that happen in the Old Testament all point us to Jesus in some way. And here we see Jesus is showing us all of these years after the Exodus what that pillar of fire really points to.

It points to him. It points to what he was going to do for human beings. But of course, if that's the case, it comes with an implication for us, doesn't it?

Because what did the Israelites have to do? If they wanted to arrive in their promised land, what did they have to do? Well, if we want to arrive in the new eternal life Jesus is talking about and has been talking about so far in John, we must do what the Israelites did, which is to follow the light.

[7 : 08] It's quite simple, isn't it? You can't just believe in it. You've got to follow it wherever it takes us, just like the Israelites did. And so what does that really look like?

We've often heard of this phrase, following Jesus. But how do we follow Jesus today? Seeing he isn't here physically, we can't follow him like his early disciples did, where they literally, you know, he got up and walked somewhere.

They walked after him, they followed him. But how do we do that? Have you ever wondered? How do we actually follow Jesus today? Well, he goes on to tell us in this passage later on in verse 31 and 32.

And I want you to look at those verses, and I want to actually spend the rest of our time this morning just looking at those verses, because it's in this thing that Jesus says in verse 31 and 32 that we learn what it really means to follow him.

And not only what it means to follow him, but what will happen in your life and mine if we are following Jesus. And so let's have a look at it. Let's have a look at what he says, verse 31 to 32.

[8 : 17] To the Jews who had believed in him, Jesus said, If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

Okay, so first of all, notice here. Jesus is talking to the Jews that had believed in him. To those who had already come to believe in his, at least partly, in his identity, who he was and who he's been claiming to be.

But look what he says to them. Basically, he's saying to them, Just because you believe in me doesn't mean you are really my disciples. It's quite a thing, isn't it? He's saying just because you

believe doesn't mean you're following.

Because true belief is seen in following the light, not just believing in it. Just like those Israelites in the desert weren't going to go anywhere just by believing in the pillar of fire. They had to follow it. And if they didn't, it would leave them in darkness. If they didn't get up and follow the light. And that's what Jesus is saying to the Jews of his day.

[9 : 26] He's saying when he leaves them, which he was going to do not long after that. After his death and resurrection. And ascension into heaven. When he leaves, those who merely just believed in his identity.

Watched him from a distance but didn't follow him. They will be left in darkness, he says. And then he goes on to tell us just what following him entails. So he tells us why we need to follow him. As to not be left in darkness. And then he says what following him means. He says if you hold to my teaching. If you hold to my teaching.

Not just hear my teaching. Not just understand or learn or even agree with my teaching. But hold to my teaching.

The people who do that. Those are who Jesus calls his true disciples. And it's when you do that.

[10 : 28] Jesus says that two very important things will happen in your life. What are they? Firstly, you will know the truth. Now, when Jesus said this to the Jews then.

When he said, if you hold to my teaching, then you will know the truth. Most likely he meant, listen. You don't exactly know what's going on right now. I get that. But trust me. If you hold on.

If you stick with me. You'll see. And you'll eventually know what's going on. You'll know the truth. See, that's what it meant to the original hearers.

He's referring, of course, to what's going to happen. Only six months later from when he said this. The time when he is what he called lifted up. When he's crucified.

He'd already spoken about that in John so far. He's been anticipating this moment. He's been heading towards this moment. His death on the cross. And he says to these people. That's when they'll see the truth about him.

[11 : 31] And about what he's doing. If they stick with him. If they carry on holding to his teaching and follow him. Even to the cross. Then they will see the truth. About who he really is.

Because you see that. When he died on the cross. His atonement for the sins of the whole world. That happened there on the cross. The reason he came to earth.

That is the ultimate truth. That the whole Bible is about. That is the ultimate truth. That all of those prophets spoke about. It's the point of the whole Old Testament.

All those sacrifices. What they were pointing towards. It's the ultimate revelation of God's plans for this world on the cross. It's on the cross that we see how God has fixed the problems of this world. The greatest problem of this world. It's on the cross that we learn what the greatest problem of this world is. You see. What happened on the cross. When we understand it.

[12 : 29] Answers all of the questions we have. About life. And death. And eternity. Questions that we would otherwise be in darkness about.

Despite all the knowledge of this world. The world prides itself. Doesn't it? In its knowledge. The science. The technology. The smartphones. Despite all of that. You know. We're not really that smart.

Are we? Because not even the mighty Google. Can tell us what happens after we die. Have you Googled that? Who knows? Not even Google can tell us the meaning of life.

And how we can be right with God. The most important questions. The real important questions. Of our lives. The world. And all its knowledge.

Has nothing to say about. The world is still in darkness. About the most important questions. Of your life and mine. But it's the cross.

[13 : 25] That gives us those answers. That we are all looking for. Deep down inside. It's the cross. That makes sense. Of a life. That nothing else makes sense of.

The cross explains our suffering. When we look at the suffering of Christ. That he willingly went through. Because he knew. What was necessary. To overcome our sins.

And that suffering. Is a result of our sins. The cross shows us. How. Only through death. Can there be real new life. And the cross tells us.

What's to come. Because Jesus. Didn't stay there. On the cross. He rose. To new life. Never to die again. And so you see. It's at the cross. That we get.

All of the answers. That this world can't give us. And it's only on the cross. Not in any other religion. Or in any other faith system. Or in any other belief system.

[14:23] Only at the cross. Will you find the answers for life. But notice. It's only those who continue to follow Jesus. To the cross. Who get to know that truth.

Who get to really know. Those answers. Those who would stick with him. Long enough. And come to realize. What happened on the cross. What it meant. And be changed by it.

Those who didn't. You know. Do that. Those who didn't follow him there. They didn't get it. To them. Who heard about it. This guy died on the cross.

He was just another. Convict. Dying. A Roman execution. To them. They didn't get it. Because they didn't follow him there. They didn't realize. They didn't. Grasp.

What the cross meant. But it's the same for us. Looking back. So they were looking. At this point. When Jesus taught them. They were looking forward. Jesus was looking forward.

[15:20] To the cross. We of course. 2000 years later. Are looking. Back at the cross. But it's exactly the same. We are. To hold. To Jesus. Jesus. Jesus.

Teaching. As well. Disciples. Today. Are those. Who don't merely believe in Jesus. Or know the facts. About his life. But. Disciples.

Are those. Who follow him. To the cross. And who are changed. By what happened there. Who take that. On board.

In our own lives. And it changes us. Deep down inside. Those. Are the ones. Who are holding to his teaching. The ones who. Discipline our lives.

Around the truth. Of the cross. Disciples. After all. That's what the word. Disciple. Means. Doesn't it? I've said this before. But the. The English word. Disciple.

[16:12] It's a good word. It's a good translation. Because it comes. From the word. Discipline. It's the. It's the same root. And so. Disciple.

Is not just. Someone who believes. Something. But someone who disciplines. Their life around it. That's the difference. And. And that of course. Is what the rest of the New Testament.

Teaches us. To do. You know. The gospels. Didn't. Weren't the end of the Bible. The gospels are the center. Of the Bible. That's what all the Old Testament. Points towards.

That's what all the New Testament. Looks back on. But. All of those letters. In the New Testament. That were written by Paul. And others. They are teaching us. How. To live cross.

Shaped lives. How to. Discipline our lives. Around the truths. Of the cross. How to die. To our old self. And start to live. The new lives. That Jesus.

[17:07] Has earned for us. And so. If you're not reading those. If you're not reading. The letters. In the New Testament. Well then you're not really. Following Jesus.

Are you? You're not really. A disciple. Holding to his teaching. If you're not. Even bothered. To read it. But it's those who do.

It's those who. Who do. Holds to that teaching. And. And meditate on it. And grapple with it. The teaching which Jesus continued. Through the apostles. Those who strive.

To live in accordance. With the truth. Of the cross. And meditate on God's inspired word. When it teaches us. How to do that. In our daily lives. It's those. People.

Who are the only people on earth. Who will really know the truth. The only people on earth. Who will know. What this is all really about. Are those who hold to the teaching of Jesus.

[18:03] Because you will never. Know any real answers. Until you come to the cross. And until you put your faith. In what Jesus did there for you. Until you do that.

Life will continue to be. A mystery. Maybe you've come to church. Or you're listening to this recording. Because you've got questions.

About life. And maybe. Church is one of the places. You hope to find answers. Well I want to tell you. At the cross. That's where all your answers are.

Look to the cross. Seek to understand. What happened at the cross. If a Christian brought you to church. Ask them. What happened at the cross.

Ask them to explain it to you. And what it means for them. And respond to that. In repentance and faith. Because if you do that.

[18:59] If you come. To the cross. And you understand what happened there. And you respond to that. Not only will you know the truth. All the truth you need to know about life. But.

Secondly. The truth will set you free. Now the Jews. He was talking to. When he said this. Jesus. Of course. They took offense.

At what he was saying. Because. To the Jews. Their whole national identity. Was based on the fact. That they had escaped slavery. In Egypt. Right? That they had found freedom. In Israel.

But then Jesus comes along. And tells them. That their supposed freedom. Is just a farce. And they're not nearly. As free. As they think they are. They don't want to hear that. They think they're free. They're not slaves.

To anyone they say. But Jesus says. No. No. No. You are. Why? Because. Look at verse 34. Jesus replied. Very truly. I tell you. Everyone who sins.

[19 : 56] Is a slave. To sin. And so. No matter how free. They thought they were. The truth is. Their sin. Showed them up. To be slaves.

Still. They can't help sinning. They can't stop. Sinning. Which means. They're still under slavery. As much as they were in Egypt. Except it's not slavery.

To someone out there. Some foreign power. It's slavery. To something. In here. That's what Jesus. Wanted them to see. They're still slaves. To something. Inside them.

But it's not just them. Is it? Look again. What Jesus says. He says. Everyone. Who sins. Is a slave. To sin. Show of hands.

Who here hasn't sinned? No one. Ah. Thought so. If you're sinless. Then there's really no point. Coming to church. Is there? But you're not.

[20 : 55] I'm not. No one is. Because. We are all. By nature. Slaves. We can't help it. Can we? By default. Unless. We are given freedom. Somehow.

From the slavery. By default. We have to serve our sin. We have to. We have no choice. That's what Jesus is saying here. You know. The western world.

Prides itself. In its. Freedom. The. The US president. Is called. The leader. Of the free world. Have you heard that phrase before? But there's no such thing. As a free world.

According to the bible. Political freedom. Isn't freedom. Because we are all still. Slaves to sin. Sin. This whole idea of. Free will.

That people talk about. Is really just. An illusion. There's no such thing. As free will. We are slaves. To sin. Yes. We make choices. In life. But those choices.

[21 : 48] Are all affected. By whatever our hearts. Are slaves to. So we're not really. Free. In the true sense. Of the word. At all. Except for those.

Who hold to the cross. Who hold to the teaching. Of Jesus. Those who really. Follow Jesus. You know what he promises? He promises. You will know the truth. And the truth. Will set you.

Free. So how does the truth. Of Jesus. Do that? How does the truth. Of the cross. Set you. Free. Well. Jesus explains. By saying something. Even more offensive.

To these Jews. He doesn't mind. Offending these people. Later in verse 44. He doesn't hold back. He says. Their father. Is not God. But the devil. That's. This is quite a.

Controversial thing. To say to a bunch. Of religious Jews. The most. Upstanding. Religious people. In all the world. He says. Your father is the devil. That's what he tells them. Straight to their face.

[22 : 45] He's saying. That's who they're really serving. And Jesus. Just spent. The last few chapters. Of John. Proving. That. That they're really. Serving the devil. That they're not seeking.

God's will at all. Despite all their. Religious pretenses. In fact. Because of their sin. They are separated. From God. He's not their father. They're separated.

From him. And so they have no choice. But to serve the devil. Because they don't have God. In relationship. To serve. Willingly.

And joyfully. They're separate. Their sin has. Has pushed them away. From a holy God. And they have no choice. But to serve the devil. Because. Truth is. Everybody's got to serve.

Something. Everybody. Martin Luther. Seeing it's. It's the 500th. Anniversary. Of the Reformation. This year. I thought I would. Mention him.

[23 : 38] Because. He wrote a book. Called. The Bondage of the Will. Where he really. Meditated. On what it was. To be human. And he reveals. In that book. How all human beings.

Are made. To serve. Something. Or someone. And he uses. The illustration. Of a horse. Whose. His choices. A horse's choices. Are limited.

To what its rider. Decides. Right. And where its rider. Decides to go. The horse can't go. Somewhere else. But where its rider. Tells it to. And so. Luther says. Is the human.

Will. Under control. Of its rider. And if it's not. God. Who's directing us. It will be the devil. And the sins. That he leads us to. Because we are all.

Servants. Of something. One commentator. On this. Talking about this. Whole idea. Of human freedom. He states. This free person. Is a myth.

[24 : 34] Who never existed. And who never will. We are radically. Incurably. And eternally dependent. Beings. Who were made. To serve. And so.

If. We are not. Brought near to God. And enabled. To serve him. We will serve the devil. We have no choice. And we will have no choice.

But to sin. We will not be able. To stop it. But you see. That's why coming to the cross. Sets us free. Because when.

Our sins are atoned for. When that barrier. Between us. And a holy God. Is removed. And we are brought near to God. In a real relationship. Not only.

Do we. Do we come to God. And we are unable. To serve him. But. We want to. Out of gratitude. For all he has done for us. And he gives us.

[25 : 31] New desires. To serve him. And we are given help. To do that. All through. The cross. And putting our faith. In the cross. And coming. To Jesus. And having our sins.

Atoned for. We are set free. From the bondage. To sin. You see. The cross. Breaks the devil's power. Over us. And enables us.

To become. Servants of God. It enables us. To serve God. Which is. Ironically. A service. That sets us. Free. Because as someone else.

Has put it. A quote. True freedom. Is not the liberty. To do anything. We please. But the liberty. To do what we ought. And it is genuine liberty.

Because doing what we ought. Now. Pleases us. True freedom. Is the liberty. To do. What we ought. To do. What God made us.

[26 : 25] To do. And we can only do that. Through the path. Of the cross. And so that's what I want. To leave you with. This morning. As I finish. It's through submitting.

To Jesus. Every day. Our lives. To him. To Jesus. And his teaching. Submitting our lives. To his. Teaching. Which means. Shaping. Our lives.

Around the cross. And. And. Diving. Into scripture. And all those. New testament. Letters. That teach us. How to shape our lives.

Around the cross. It's through doing that. Being true disciples. Giving up. Our way. And following Jesus. That's how we find. True freedom.

In our lives. And until you do that. You will never be free. And so. Will you commit yourself. This week. And. Beyond. To hold. To the teaching of Jesus.

[27 : 20] Is not just to believe in it. Not just to understand it. Not just to read it. But to hold. To it. To be changed.

By what he did on the cross. And live in light of that. Each and every day. Will you commit to reading the letters. Of the new testament. Which teach you how to live. A cross shaped life. We're coming up to holidays.

Christmas. Most people are taking leave. Why don't you make it a project. To read through. Some of those. Great letters. In the new testament. That. Teach us.

How to hold to the teaching of Jesus. In our daily lives. Very practically. And will you pray. For Jesus. To set you free. From the constant pull of sin.

That you know is there. Will you follow the light. Out of darkness. Out of the wilderness. And into. The new life. That God is calling you to live.

[28 : 14] Will you do that. Let's pray for God's help. Yes Lord Jesus. We thank you. That you rose from the dead. And that through following you.

And holding to your teaching. We. Can have light. Out of the darkness. And that you set us free. Lord. From our sin. Thank you for the Holy Spirit.

Who you give to those. Who come. To put their faith. In the cross. The Holy Spirit. That changes our desires. The Holy Spirit. Who directs our thoughts.

Who brings us back to the Bible. Who helps us to understand. Your word. Thank you for all of these graces. That you've given us. Help us Lord. To use them. Help us not to be lazy.

Help us not to be distracted. But help us to hold to your teaching. And shape our lives every day. Around the cross. We pray this. In Jesus name. Amen.