

John 8 v31-58 Exodus 3:13-15

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[0 : 0 0] Good evening. It's nice to be here. If you would open your Bibles with me to the passage Mike read for us from John chapter 8, John 8, 31 to 59, and you will find that on page 1074 of the church Bibles. God's providence is a wonderful thing, and through no deliberate intention of my own, or of Jason's, I don't think, this evening we'll follow on very closely from what we heard this morning. Because here again in John 8, the whole point is are you listening?

Or more closely, how are you listening? Are you abiding in God's word? What we saw the necessity of listening this morning, and this evening I want us to focus on more closely on how we are to come and to listen. I think it's common knowledge that we are affected by who we listen to, or what we listen to, and it's true of all of us that we make choices about who those people are. Some people we hang on every word, others we just don't pay quite as much attention.

We all choose to listen to different things, whether it's colleagues at work, maybe it's certain friends who you pay more attention to, maybe there's certain politicians who you'll hear more readily than others. Maybe there's teachers at school, or lecturers at university, who just speak much more sense than the rest of them. Wherever life takes you, there will always be people who you listen to, and some people who you don't. I wonder who those people you listen to are in your life.

There's a number of different factors that affect who we choose to listen to. For one thing, I think people in positions of authority we listen to more readily. If a teacher, a toddler came along and told me to wash the dishes or something, there's a good chance I wouldn't do it. If my parents told me to wash the dishes, there's a slightly bigger chance I would do it. If the queen knocked on the door and told me to get my rubber gloves on, I probably would. If Ian told me to come wash the dishes, I can guarantee you they would never get done. There's lots of different factors, though. It's not just authority.

It can depend on how well you know the person. If someone you've never met before comes along and starts telling you how to live your life, you're probably not going to have much time for them. Maybe it depends on how much you care about the person.

[3 : 0 4] If you've never, sorry, if you're married, and you have a husband or a wife, and they start talking, even if it's nonsense, you're probably going to listen to them.

You should listen to them. Who is it that you listen to? Whose words do you treasure above everyone else's? And that is the question we face in John chapter 8. That's the question the crowd had to face as well.

And the sad reality of the situation, as we will see, is that they start off listening to the right person, but their attitude leads them astray.

We're going to split this evening's passage up into three sections. We're going to look first at the audience. We're then going to look at the argument put forward, and then finally the accusations.

So let's first look at the audience in verses 31 to 34. And we start in verse 31 with Jesus addressing a group of people, those who had believed in him.

[4 : 11] I mean, basically what we would call Christians. They are professing believers, people who have watched and listened to Jesus. And on the face of it, it's a very promising start.

Just a bit of background on John's Gospel so far. Up to this point in John's Gospel, there have been a number of what appear to be almost false starts. Since Jesus started his ministry, groups of believers have popped up here and there, but they've quickly fallen away.

And Jesus is left time and again with just a faithful few. And there seems to have been a recurring problem. Because the new followers so far have only been interested in what Jesus is doing.

They like the miracles, but when Jesus starts talking, they start leaving. They don't like what he says. He says back in chapter 4, with apparent exasperation, unless you people see signs and wonders, you will never believe.

Then we see in John chapter 6, that after the feeding of the 5,000 and Jesus walking on water, he has this massive crowd falling. But then Jesus starts teaching.

[5 : 25] And by the end of the chapter, this massive crowd are muttering to each other, this is a hard teaching. Who can possibly accept it? And then just a few verses later, we read, from this time on, many of Jesus' disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

Why? Because they liked what he was doing, but they didn't like what he was saying. We want to see some disciples who come and follow Jesus who aren't there just for the miracles.

And that's exactly what we get in our passage today. At the start of chapter 7, at the start of this section of John's Gospel, Jesus leaves Galilee, and he comes to Judea, and he has only done one thing since arriving.

He has only been teaching. No miracles, no feeding the masses, no telling people about everything they ever done. Jesus has simply been teaching these people the truth.

And then in chapter 8, verse 30, just before our passage today, we read, even as he spoke, many put their faith in him. And as we read it, we think, finally, finally we've got what we're looking for.

[6 : 40] So when we come to look at the audience, Jesus is addressing, in verse 31, it looks like a very good start. A group of people who have put their faith in Jesus, not just because of what he can do, but because of what he's been saying.

The audience Jesus is addressing is a group of believers. A group of people who we today would call Christians. They profess their faith in Jesus.

They believe in him. That's what we want, isn't it? For people to put their faith in Jesus. And that's what makes this chapter of John so shocking, almost frightening.

Because this very same group of people, who start out showing all the right signs, at the end of the chapter, they are standing there with stones in their hands, ready to put Jesus to death.

They could call themselves Christians, in verse 31, and by verse 39, they want to kill him. And the question we've got to ask is, how has this happened?

[7 : 45] What has gone so wrong? What has led to such a drastic change? And we can see hints of the problem, right from the start of the conversation.

Look at verse 31 with me. 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. See what he's saying? It's very simple. Just hold to my teaching. If you abide in my word, then you will be set free.

And the immediate response, they don't hold to his teaching. They start arguing against it. Verse 33, we are Abraham's descendants, and have never been slaves of anyone.

How can you say that we shall be set free? Two things come to mind here. First, as we've already noted, right off the bat, they aren't holding to his word.

[8 : 49] They've got their own agenda. They've got their own system. And if Jesus isn't going to fit into their system, then he's the one who's going to have to change. And that's immediate warning signs.

The other thing you think, reading verse 33, is what on earth are they talking about? Abraham's descendants have never been slaves to anyone.

You don't need a PhD in Old Testament history to know something's not quite right there. And it seems like an utterly ridiculous thing to say. And the answer seems so obvious. And I think John teases us into the judge's seat.

We know the answer, don't we? I mean, the Egyptians, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Romans, take your pick of any Middle Eastern power. The Jews have probably been slaves to them.

We're ready to put them down, put them in their place. But then comes verse 34. And all of a sudden, we're put back in our place. Because Jesus' answer puts anyone who thinks they are free in any sense right over there with the Jews who were looking so stupid just a moment ago.

[10 : 02] We, who probably think we are free in so many ways, we pride ourselves on our liberties, we think we are free to make our own decisions, choose our own careers, free to live life as we please.

Well, we are just as needy as the Jews who seem to have no idea about their own history. Because everyone, verse 34, everyone who commits a sin is a slave to sin.

And so, although the discourse continues to be centered around the Jews, we cannot sit in the jury's box and judge the antagonists of John's gospel from a distance. Nor can we sit here and think about how much better the people around us could be.

Jesus has a very powerful message for every sinner. And that includes you and that includes me. We all need to be set free.

This is very much a message for everyone. It can be so easy, can't it, to listen to a sermon or read a passage at home and think how good this would be for someone else.

[11 : 17] Think how much your friend or your colleague or your neighbor or the person sitting next to you, how much they need to hear this. How appropriate a message this is for them.

But when we come to God's word, when we listen to Jesus, when we hear his teaching, we need to realize that this is a message for every sinner. And that means that it's a message for you.

Everyone who has ever done anything wrong needs to come and sit under and listen to God's word. When you're doing your daily Bible reading, when you listen to David preach here week in and week out, we have to come and think first and foremost, what does God's word mean for me?

How does this affect me? Yes, pass it on, share it with others by all means, but Jesus didn't come with teaching just to challenge your friends. He came with teaching that challenges you.

We need to be wary of sitting above those around us, of thinking somehow it's just the Jews who've got their history in a muddle. We all need to be set free from the shackles of sin.

[12 : 29] We need to make sure that when we listen to Jesus, when we hold on to his teaching, when we abide in his word, we are doing so with humble and contrite hearts, hearing what God's word has to say to us.

So the audience in John 8 is all of us. Jesus is conversing with these professing Jews, but in doing so, he is addressing everyone.

Because everyone who sins is a slave to sin. So the audience is all of us. And now we look at the argument which takes place between verses 35 and 37.

And the argument here is all about one of paternity. The crowd is insisting that they are Abraham's descendants. And Jesus acknowledges that in verse 37.

But their claims to be Abraham's children in verse 39 are refuted by Jesus. And this is one of those moments where you have slight sympathy towards a probably confused crowd.

[13 : 37] It's not the simplest of things to get your head around. Jesus tells them, you are descendants, but you're not sons. And Jesus' point seems to be this. If you went on to Ancestry.com or whatever and went back far enough, yes, you would find Abraham.

But a son, a son is someone who takes after their father. A son is someone who imitates their father's actions. Someone who bears a family resemblance.

And you, Jesus says to those gathered before him, you do not take after your father. You are not sons of Abraham because you don't do the things Abraham did.

And then comes what would have certainly been the most shocking of Jesus' points in verse 44. It says, Abraham did the works of God, so Abraham is a son of God.

You are not sons of Abraham, neither are you sons of God because you don't do the works of God and if you're not doing the works of God, Jesus says to them in verse 44, then that means you're doing the works of the devil.

[14 : 49] If you don't belong to God, you belong to the devil. If you're not doing the will of God, then you're doing the will of the devil. It's shocking and it's no surprise it doesn't go down that well.

But most frightening of all, that it's true. If we are not doing the will of God, then we are doing the will of the devil. And there is one clear problem that Jesus highlights, one main reason why they are not the sons of God, but slaves to the devil.

He says it again and again. Verse 37, he says, I know you are Abraham's descendants, yet you are ready to kill me because my word finds no place in you.

Again in verse 43, why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. Verse 47, again, he who belongs to God hears what God says.

The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God. Look back at Jesus' opening words in verse 31. He says, if you hold to my teaching, then you are really my disciples.

[16 : 15] The important thing here is not where you came from or who your parents are. It's not where you work or the size of your salary or the charities you donate to. It's not even what you say you believe.

What really matters, the measure of a true disciple, are you listening to Jesus? Are you abiding in his word?

Are you holding to his teaching? Do the words of Jesus find a place in you? And tragically, for the crowd Jesus was addressing, the answer is an emphatic no.

They did not listen to Jesus. They did not hold to his teaching. They did not abide in his word, all because they could not. It's there in verses 43 to 45.

They are utterly blinded by their lives of sin and deceit. They have lived under the dominion of Satan and so have become totally and utterly blind to the truth.

[17 : 20] They cannot see the truth because they have been brought up in a world of lies. It's like having a very dodgy but very rich geography teacher.

A bit weird. Imagine you're back in school. You've got this, what seems to be really good geography teacher. He loves teaching, he makes the classes exciting, he's really energetic, seems like a good guy and you've got no reason to doubt him.

And this geography teacher, he tells you that New Zealand is a country between Poland and Russia. But he's your geography teacher, so you go along with it.

This isn't just any geography teacher though, he's pretty well off, he's got a lot of power. So he's got his own textbooks published that tell you all about New Zealand and Poland's tumultuous past.

He's got his own world maps printed where everything east of Australia is just ocean. He's even on the exam board, so you're always getting A's. Everything in your life tells you that New Zealand is this country between Poland and Russia.

[18 : 27] You spend six years learning all about New Zealand, you pretty much know everything there is to know about it. Then you go to university and you meet someone from New Zealand.

And he starts talking about how much he loves sailing. And you think that's a bit odd coming from a landlocked country. So you ask him, how does someone like you get into sailing being so far from the sea?

And all of a sudden, this idiot starts telling you that New Zealand is in the Pacific Ocean. You have on very good authority that it is in fact nowhere near the Pacific Ocean.

And what reason would you have to believe him? And as if you needed any more convincing that this guy was off his rocker, he then starts telling you that a kiwi is a bird.

word. Now, I know it's a stupid analogy, but if you spent your whole life believing and being taught one thing, and then one guy appears and tells you that the complete opposite is true, tells you that everything you ever knew was a lie, well, why would you listen to him?

[19 : 36] Why would you trust him over your lifelong teacher? And this is the situation that the Jews find themselves in. It's bad that they don't understand Jesus.

What's worse is that they are so far buried in a world of lies that they couldn't even if they wanted to. So far gone that they are incapable of helping themselves.

And they're not alone. Because as we noticed earlier, Jesus isn't just speaking, to the crowd gathered before him that day in Judea. He is speaking to all sinners everywhere.

And that means we are all as helpless as they were. We are all in the same situation. But what counts is how we react to the difficult and uncomfortable diagnosis of our condition.

When we listen to Jesus, when we hear him tell us that we spend most of our time doing the will of the devil, how do we react? Are we so insulted by the outrageous proposition that we refuse to hear any more of it?

[20 : 48] Or are we willing to accept that we are so utterly evil and deceived and in desperate need of help? When we listen to God's word, we must come to it in all humility.

humility. We must sit under God's word, not over it. Humility is absolutely essential to the Christian life. I can quite confidently say that every person in this room thinks far more of themselves than they would ever admit to anyone else.

But if we come and sit at the feet of Jesus, if we hear what he has to say, we will very quickly realize that on our own, we are worse than worthless.

Without Jesus, we are subject to the will of the devil and all his malice. But we've got to hold on to Jesus teaching and that means holding on to our own depravity, recognizing our need for a savior.

Holding on to teaching of Jesus means holding on to some pretty uncomfortable truths. But that is what we must do. Sadly, again, that is not what the crowds did.

[22 : 06] The argument was too damaging to their pride and so they rejected the message and they rejected the messenger. And so they abruptly abandoned the argument and just start hurling accusations at Jesus in verses 48 to 59.

They're fed up with the truth. They don't want to hear it anymore. And the conversation just descends into playground insults. You're a Samaritan. You've got a demon. We don't like you anymore.

Go away. Leave us alone. But Jesus doesn't give up on them. His intention isn't to pummel them into the ground and leave them battered and bruised, stranded and abandoned.

He wants them to know the truth. He wants them to understand. Verse 51, one. He wants them to realize the situation they are in so that they can be set free.

Jesus isn't the one doing the rejecting here. And although his message might have seemed a bit blunt, the kindest thing you can do for a false believer is expose it.

[23 : 13] Because believing you believe and actually believing aren't always the same thing. It is far better to find your faith is phony today and have a chance to repent than go on believing you believe until Jesus says on the last day, I never knew you.

It's not popular. It might not be nice. It is, however, the kindest and most loving thing Jesus could do for these people. But again, the crowds don't like what Jesus says.

And again, it is because what Jesus is saying doesn't fit with what they think they know to be true. Jesus says that anyone who keeps his word will never see death.

But they know that Abraham died and they know that the prophets died. And so is he saying that he's greater than Abraham? And here we find the crux of the matter.

The real issue at heart here. The problem is that the crowd in John chapter 8, they don't recognize who Jesus is. To start off with, they clearly thought he was a pretty impressive guy.

[24 : 28] They obviously thought he was a good teacher. They liked what he said. They might even have thought he was a prophet. But they certainly didn't think he was greater than Abraham. Look down at verse 56 with me.

Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day. He saw it and was glad. You're not yet 50 years old, the Jews said to him, and you've seen Abraham.

I tell you the truth, Jesus answered, before Abraham was, I am. At this they picked up stones to stone him. But Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.

They didn't think Jesus was worth listening to. They didn't think he could say what he was saying because the Jesus they knew was not the same Jesus that they needed to know.

We read earlier on the passage in Exodus where God gives his name to Moses. I am who I am. Tell them that I am has sent you.

[25 : 32] And these Jews would have known straight away exactly what Jesus was implying when he says, before Abraham was, I am. They knew what he meant and they didn't like it one bit because Jesus was equating himself with God.

But they didn't see him for what he claimed to be and ultimately they never saw him for who he really was. Because if they did, if they understood who Jesus was, they would have known that he was absolutely worth listening to.

The crowd accused Jesus of being many things. But when Jesus finally makes it clear exactly who he is, then they accuse him of blasphemy and they pick up their stones.

John puts forward a very clear purpose to his gospel. He says that all these things are written, that this book is written, so that you might believe.

But not just believe in any old Jesus. These things are written so that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ and that he is the son of God. And by believing in him you may have life in his name.

[26 : 50] If the Jesus you believe in isn't the son of God, then you might as well be standing with a stone in your hand. God. If he is the son of God, if he is the word of God, then you can be sure that he is well worth listening to and his teaching is well worth holding on to.

And if you're unsure whether that's you or not, then Jesus gives us a very clear test in these verses. If you hold to my teaching, then you are my disciples.

Is your Jesus the creator and sustainer of the whole universe or is he just a pretty good guy? Do you live by his words or do you live by someone else's?

The call is to believe in Jesus, the son of God, because those who keep his word, they will never taste death. There's only one way to life and that is through the words of Jesus.

We listen to people with authority, we submit to people we respect, we honor those we esteem. We must hold on to Jesus' teaching for ourselves, we must sit under God's word in all humility, and we must recognize the authority that God has in his incarnate person.

[28 : 09] The question is, are you listening to Jesus, or are you doing the will of the devil? Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for your word, and we pray that by the power of your spirit, Lord, you would enable us to listen to it, to hold on to its teaching, to abide in it.

And Lord, we pray that you would keep us from sitting over it, from trying to perform it to our own world, but rather we would humbly and graciously receive the truth, that we would be shaped and molded by your word.

And Father, we thank you so much for your son. We thank you for all that he has done for us and accomplished for us through his life and death, and we pray that we would glorify him in all that we do.

Amen.