True Discipleship!
John 8:28-33

We looked last time we were together at the three questions that were asked of Jesus, and the last question was basically a challenge to his authority _ "Who are you?" In other words, this was not a question where they were trying to find out information about Jesus, but saying, "Who do you think you are to lecture us on eternal life, don't you recognize who we are?" And Jesus responds by saying that he is the one who is sent by the Father. In other words, he is the Messiah. And then we read the response in verse 27 where we ended last day, "**They did not understand that he had been speaking to them about the Father.**" They had no clue that he was about His Father's business because they really did not want to know. Now, look at verse 28 because it is very significant verse, "**So Jesus said to them, 'When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me.**" Notice who is doing the lifting up the Son here is the religious leaders. They are the ones that will hand him over to Pilate to be crucified. He will be lifted up.

But the point here is that it will become apparent who Jesus is. "**Then you will know that I am he.**" It will become crystal clear through his substitutionary death and resurrection his personhood. Peter preaching on the day of Pentecost makes this very point, Acts 2:22-24, "**Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.**" It was evident that he was God's man because God raised him up - an undeniable fact. Then he concludes the sermon in verse 36, "**Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.**" The crucifixion shows the personhood and purpose of Jesus more than anything. If we want Jesus to be known the cross is always at the centre.

Jesus goes on in verse 29, "**And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him.**" God the Father is with him. That means he is not with them in their unbelief, and if they stand against him they are standing against the one who has come to do the will of the Father. That is clear in the text. Jesus always pleases the Father, an amazing statement that puts him in a category all on his own. And look at the response, "**As he was saying these things, many believed in him.**" We realize that many will reject the message of the gospel, but so often we forget that as we faithfully proclaim Christ over the course of life, that many will truth in him. God will give the increase. And this is exactly what we see in this passage of Scripture. We praise God for his goodness.

Now look at the very next verse because there is something important to see here, "**So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, 'If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples.**" There are two things here. One is that the individuals that

believed in verse 30 believe in him, and the ones that Jesus addresses right here believed him. And there is a world of difference in believing in him and believing about him. One is saving faith and the other is just believing certain facts about Jesus but really not trusting in Jesus as our Saviour and Lord. Also, notice there are two terms: the "many," and the "Jews" that are distinguished in this verse. The Jews who believed about him is a term that John used to describe the religious leaders and not the general populace of Israel. So what Jesus does is turn to these individuals who have a deficient faith, and indicate what true faith looks like. And what we have is three marks of true discipleship. And these are so important because we know that even though individuals might claimed to be followers of Christ, many are not. We are told to make sure of our calling and election in Christ.

So the question to ask ourselves is do we have these marks? Well what are the marks of those who true believers in Christ?

1. The first mark is abiding in Jesus Christ. V. 31.

Now again, how do we know that we are truly a disciple of Jesus Christ? And the answer is we endure in the faith of Jesus Christ - if we keep and do not stop trusting in him. It does not mean that there will not be challenges along the way, and that there will not be ups and downs. Not every day with Jesus is sweeter than the day before. We realize that there are real and heavy struggles, but in the end through all those hills and valleys is a faith that endures, a faith in Christ that abides in him and lasts.

So look at verse 31 again, "**So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples.**" Now notice the structure of this verse because he is teaching how you can know whether you are truly a disciple or follower of Jesus Christ. Remember that is what a disciple did and does is follow their master and teacher, and his teaching. How do I know that I am a true disciple, the real thing? Jesus gives the condition that proves the reality, "**If you abide in my word.**" Now the word abide means to remain or continue or to dwell. We remain in his word, with his truth and we keep trusting in him. He will really bring out this truth in chapter 15 with the vine and the branches. Jesus begins and says, "**I am the true vine.**" But listen to what he says in John 15:4, "**Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.**" Jesus' concern is not that we should just call ourselves Christians but that we should abide in the words of Christ, trusting and relying and living in light of that, the same way that a branch abides in a vine. The branch receives life from the vine but also bears fruit because it is connect to the vine. There is a changed life for those who are believers as they continue to live for Christ. There is a constancy in abiding in him.

This is so different than some just intellectual assent to truth although that is necessary. People might know the truth about Christ but really not know him, or some sort of emotional response that is fleeting. The person here remains, abides in the truths of Christ and the gospel, and because of that they cannot help but bear fruit. True faith keeps going. The vast majority of these people who believed something about him are not true believers, and certainly not the religious leaders even though some were beginning to be persuaded. How do we know? Because they didn't remain.

The did not abide. At the end of the chapter they will pick up stones to kill him. That is not abiding.

So let me ask the question: are you abiding in Christ? Is your faith real and authentic and not just name only? Do you find even through it has been difficulty at times that you have remained with him? You are still identifying with God's people, still seeking to know his word, still being faith to Bible study, and still seeing the fruit of the new life come from your life?

Jesus gave the parable of the four soils in Matthew 13, and we realize four soils or four responses to the message and three were insufficient and faulty. The soil that was the hardened path the seed was eaten immediately and did not take root. The soil that was shallow and had rocks underneath, looked promising as he came up really fast but died and wilted because of trials and persecution, and the seed among the thorns existed for a while but because of the cares of the world was strangled out. Neither abided or endured. But what was different among the good soil? How was it different? Listen to Matt 13: 23, "**As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.**"Here is the proof of the true disciple of Christ is not only does it not die but that it remains, but it is productive and fruitful. God causes that fruit the same as a branch on the vine. Again, I have reiterate this: none of this means life is going to be one steady incline to Christ-likeness. We will have ups and downs. We will falter at times, but what it does mean is that we will get up, dust ourselves off and continue to follow Jesus Christ. We will return to Christ, for forgiveness, renewal and strength to be different in our lives. We will remain and abide with him.

Let me ask you: do you see any evidence of the true disciple in your life? Do you see yourself not just being Christian by name but truly abiding in him? There is a living relationship with the vine that causes a different fruit from the world? Jesus says that a true mark of discipleship is abiding in him, and you see the truth of that you can know that you are his disciple.

2. We know that we are truly his by experiencing Christ. V. 32.

Now let me say that how we experience Christ is through his word, and knowing his word. There is a new knowledge that thrills our souls, and allows us to see who God is, who we are, and allows us to interpret our world around us. And it is not just at the beginning of our salvation that we see and learn who God is, but all the way through our Christian lives that we discover more and more of who he is, and it thrills our hearts to see him, and realize the glory of his works and plan and promises.

So look at what he says here in verse 32, "**and you will know the truth.**" If you are truly a disciple and truly abiding in Christ then you will know the truth about who Jesus is and what he came to do. We will no longer be living in darkness. Look back at verse 12, "**Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.**" And haven't we experienced this? We have lived in darkness and when we were living in darkness we did not even know it, but we came to Christ and it is as if a light bulb went on. All of life is viewed differently. We see our sin so much more clearly, but we see the

truths of Christ - who he is and what he came to do - to give his life as a ransom for me. The dark lie that we have lived in has been exposed by the light. And it is not that we just might know the truth or think it is the truth, but those who are believers have a conviction that what Jesus has done is enough for a sinner like me. And let me say it again, there is a thrill in knowing these truths.

And the thrill of knowing these truths is that it causes a hunger to want more of that light or more of that knowledge of God and Christ through his word. It is as Psalm 34:8 says, "**Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!**" We have tasted and seen, and that creates an appetite for so much more. One who abides in Christ is not a know it all, but he is one who comes and sees more and more life through the Scriptures. He realizes that this world is fallen and sinful. The believer is not shock by trials and troubles because God has told us to expect them. He or she has a growing peace even in the midst of those trials and they learn the glorious truths and promises of his presence and sovereignty. And we increasingly look for his coming.

But we grow in these truths. That is what a disciple is. He is a learner. The greatest treasure that God gives his people who are indwelled by his Spirit is his word. People may complain that all Christians want to do is talk about the word, but the reason is that we have come to know the truth, and that truth of Christ and him crucified with all the doctrines around it that are taught in the Scripture have come to occupy our hearts. Do you know the truth? Are you increasing in your delight of the truth? True followers of Jesus base the foundation of their lives on the truth taught in the Scriptures. Listen to Psalmist in Psalm 19:10 and how he describes the Word of God, "**More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.**" It is better and more delightful that the greatest sweets and more valuable the greatest treasures in this world. Christians, true Christians have always been known by this characteristic- they are people of the book!

3. The last mark of truth discipleship is liberty. V.32.

So we see the marks of being a true disciple of Jesus Christ is abiding in Christ, constant following and growing in him, also knowing the truth and the desire to grow in that knowledge. The light has come on. And the third is liberty. And as we will see in this text that liberty in Christ is so different than what many times we think. Liberty is not that I can do whatever my foolish heart wants to, but God has thrown off the chains, so that now I can serve him, follow him and know him. Before the chains of sin and my own wicked and depraved heart kept me from following Christ. There is the slavery and the ravages of sin. And many look at Christianity as being too restrictive, but it is just the opposite. I get to freely and volitionally follow and make much of Jesus and enjoy Jesus Christ like I never have been before. I am no longer controlled by my sinful heart or the fear of this world but I am controlled by the One true King and Saviour Jesus Christ. So let me ask this question: are you experiencing this liberty to follow Jesus Christ? It is not that I have to, although sometimes it is difficult but I truly want to? Not even life and death control me but Christ does.

So look at what Jesus says here in verse 32, "**and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.**" This is one of the glorious and great truths of our salvation. There is freedom. Again, this is in relation to our salvation in Christ. it is liberation because of the gospel of Good News. So how does the gospel give us liberty? Well, let me name just two ways but there really are so many other ways. One is that we are no longer under the condemnation and penalty of sin. We are naturally and in our selves under that punishment of sin. But God has released us from the penalty. We are no longer under that condemnation. And now we can live in light of the glorious truth that God is for us and not against us. And think how that affects our lives. We no longer live in fear of God but now we can approach God. We can bring our burdens and fears to him, because we know that he is no longer against us but in Christ Jesus he is for us. And there is a liberty because we no longer have to prove ourselves worthy because that would be an impossibility. But now we can respond in joy in following him in response to what he has done. It is such a different but liberating response to the gospel of Christ.

But the other truth is that we are being progressively liberated from sin practically. We are positionally absolutely righteous, and now we are becoming what we already are. And there is a freedom in that life. We have become slaves of God and slaves of Christ but there is such a freedom in that. Listen to Romans 6:17-18, "**But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.**" We have been set free from sin! I no longer have to listen to its false message that this is where life and peace and security is found, because I have found true life and peace and security in Christ. True Christians live in light of their new freedom in Christ. This is the most liberating life that you could ever live. This is so different the way people portray Christianity as a miserable life. But it is the most liberating and satisfying life, not because of our circumstances or the lack of trials in our lives, but because of our new life before Christ. Aren't you glad you are a believer? Aren't you glad that the things that used to control your life no longer do? Oh, there is such freedom in Christ.

So here are the three marks in this passage. One is abiding in Christ. There is life that keeps abiding and trusting in him. There is secondly, a knowledge of the truth, even a thrill to know these truths of Jesus Christ, so much so that we want to grow in these truths. And the final mark is that these truths really have sets us free to serve God and enjoy him forever! So let me end with a couple challenges. One is: does this describe your life? Certainly there are challenges and we can see these three marks sometimes more clearly than others. But do we see them? Remember, he is challenging those with a superficial belief in him that was not saving. Make sure of you calling and election in Christ. And if this does not describe you: why wouldn't you want this life? Why wouldn't you want to see the light of Christ, to know that God is for you, and no longer be controlled by your passions but really enjoy God? It is now time to see your need and trust in the one true way of salvation through Christ alone.