

The Truth Will Set You Free

by John Piper

The Gospel of John is under attack for its perceived anti-Semitic language, but Jesus' indictment is not unique to the Jewish people and is a human problem that requires a response of faith and repentance.

Duration: 46:47

Scripture: John 8:31-32, John 8:34, John 8:36, John 8:41, John 8:44, Romans 2:29, Romans 9:6-8, 1 John 3:12

Topics: "Spiritual Freedom", "Sin And Redemption"

Description

This sermon delves into the importance of recognizing our need for Jesus as the ultimate liberator, highlighting how various evasive measures like ethnicity, religion, and moral superiority can hinder us from fully surrendering to Christ. It emphasizes that true freedom comes only through Jesus setting us free from sin, self, and Satan, regardless of our background or status. The message urges listeners to abide in God's word, be transformed by the truth, and embrace the liberating power of Christ.

Transcript

Would you pray with me, please? Lord, who is sufficient for these things, these are weighty, weighty, eternal matters. If the sun shall set you free, and only the sun can set us free, we will be free indeed. I pray that you would protect us from the devil who is going to take a hit here.

I pray that you would open the hearts of Jewish people and Gentiles. I pray that there would be a great liberating effect of your word. You will know the truth, and the truth will make you liberated.

And I pray that I would not be the aroma of death to death, but of life to life. Come Holy Spirit, I pray in Jesus' name, amen. You can live in an evangelical, Bible-believing, Bible-loving world, so secure and bubble-like that you can almost be oblivious of the kinds of radical indictments and criticisms of the Bible that are commonplace in religion departments across the country, in universities, and that are fairly commonplace not far from here, in mainline churches, in classrooms.

I moved outside this world for three years when I lived in Germany. I grew up in the church. I'm part of this.

I love living in this world. It's a great place to live, where we live inside the evangelical Bible, loving, Bible-believing. That's the greatest place in the world to live.

I moved outside of it for three years in Germany. And I remember how pointed, and vivid, and powerful, and even painful one afternoon was when some of this criticism was spoken with such boldness, and

brazenness, and indignation by a scholar. There was a seminar on psalms that I was in, in German.

And we were discussing. People gathered from around Europe to talk about the psalms. And one person began to quote from a psalm, and I don't remember which one it was.

But a scholar across the table became agitated and blurted out. And I remember it in German, because it just went like a sword to me. He said, *das ist doch ein Pharisäer-psalm*.

That's a Pharisee psalm, meaning that psalm teaches the legalism that we run into in the Pharisees. And you can't use that here to argue for anything theologically. And I just, you know, I knew that kind of thing existed in the world.

I just never heard it just face on from a biblical scholar. Seems wise to me, as one of the shepherds who is called to protect the sheep of Bethlehem from those who would do that to the Bible, to pause for half of this message, roughly, and talk about the way this particular text is dealt with. You need to be aware that not only do thousands of biblical scholars around the world think that John, not probably the apostle, they would say, made up dialogues that Jesus never spoke.

But they did it in such a way as to serve their ends and distort Jesus. John 8 is exhibit A in their courtroom to say that's what happened here. The text that was just read to you is, to thousands of scholars, outrageously anti-Semitic and does not belong in any creed and did not come from the mouth of Jesus, who they want to respect.

Of course, there is a lot of hostility between Jews and Christians soon after the New Testament. And they say, the writer of this gospel, much later than Jesus, in that milieu of hostility between Jews and Christians, was putting in the mouth of Jesus these ugly things to say about Jews in order to advance their purposes of getting the upper hand in the conflicts. There's no doubt there was conflict.

Jesus said in Mark 13:9, they will deliver you over to councils and you will be beaten in synagogues. Saul, otherwise known as Paul, was a Pharisee, a Jewish Pharisee. Before his conversion, in Acts 9, says he was breathing out threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord so that if he found any belonging to the way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

There's no doubt that there was conflict after Jesus was off the scene. Vicious and bitter conflict between the church and the Jewish community. It was very strained.

And no one should seriously deny that the history of the church is indicted because of horrible centuries of Christian hostilities against Jewish people. When I was preparing my message on Robert Murray McShane for the pastor's conference, I read his journal of his 1839 trip to Israel, an eight-month trip to Israel in which he wanted to get the lay of the land, do evangelism, find out how best to serve the Jewish people in Palestine. And he groaned, he wrote several times, he groaned at how hard it was to do evangelism because the legacy of hostilities in the 19th century already, already.

He wrote, the Jews mistrusted the Christians, especially the Roman Catholics, because of the indignity and persecution they had suffered at their hands for centuries. And we Christians should be ashamed of this history. Wherever hostilities toward Jewish people happened at the hands of professing Christians, we should say to Jewish people, we are so sorry that happened.

However, unlike so many critical scholars, we should not lay the blame for that at the feet of the Gospel of John, as they do. I mention this now in the series on John because chapter 8, that we're in the middle of now, is the most offensive chapter in the minds of these people. I'm going to read you now from Richard Hayes, professor of New Testament at Duke Divinity School, the kinds of things that he and hundreds and hundreds of other critical scholars say about this chapter in particular.

Quote, nowhere in John's gospel does the superheated animosity toward the Jews come to more vigorous expression than in chapter 8. The dialogue of John 8, 39 to 47 is the most deeply disturbing outburst of anti-Jewish sentiment in the New Testament. John makes a fateful theological step from the empirical fact of unbelief of the Jews. The Jews who do not believe must be the children of the devil.

The conclusion of verse 47 articulates the chilling logic of this position. The reason they do not hear the word of God is that they are not from God. One shudders to contemplate the ethical outworking of such a theological perspective on the Jews.

The gospel of John really does adopt a stance toward Judaism that can only engender polemics and hostility. Close quote. And I am jealous that that slander against the Bible not hold sway in your hearts.

I am jealous for you and for the word of God. I abominate words like that. And I hope you do.

Let me mention four problems with that kind of talk about this passage in particular and John in general. These are hard words that Jesus uses towards those that he's talking to, very hard words, especially to offensive, especially offensive, to modern, soft, pluralistic ears. So here they are, four responses, the fourth one launching us into the text.

And we'll be on this text several weeks. The grandeur of what's here cannot be exhausted in one message. If we try, response number one, if we try to eliminate from the gospels language that is intensely indicting of some Jewish people, all the apostles were Jews, Jesus was a Jew.

If we try to eliminate offensive, indicting language of some Jewish people in Jesus' life, we will have to eliminate way more than John. Jesus' language towards the Pharisees is almost uniformly negative in all four gospels, and intensely so. He called them brood of vipers in Matthew and Luke.

He called them hypocrites in all four gospels. He called them blind men and whitewashed tombs and children of hell. This intense indictment of Jesus, of most of the Jewish leadership of his day, is pervasive in the gospels, not a quirk of the gospel of John.

Therefore, know how radical this criticism is. What we lose here is the Bible. If Jesus in the gospel of John has to go, so do the other gospels.

That's response number one. Number two, Jesus spoke of all unbelievers this way, not just Jews. Sons of the devil were we.

Remember the parable of the weeds. Jesus says, the field is the world. The good seed is the sons of the kingdom.

The weeds are sons of the evil one. The harvest is the clothes of the age. Those weeds are all unbelievers in the church of all time.

Jewish people are not unique in their unbelief and their vulnerability to the blind and distorting work of Satan. We all are. The indictments of John 8 are not meant by Jesus to separate the Jews into a special category of sinner.

We are all indicted in this chapter, and I hope you feel that before we're done. That's response number two. Response number three, Paul, not just John in the gospels, teaches plainly that all unbelievers are under the sway of the devil and blinded by him.

Second Corinthians 4, for the God of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers. And he says of all of us, before we had sovereign grace, conquer our wicked, unbelieving, rebellious hearts, all of us who were unbelieving were, he says, children of wrath. That's way worse than children of the devil and dead in our trespasses and sins.

The New Testament as a whole, not just John's gospel, sees in ongoing resistance to Jesus, whether Jew or Gentile, sees in that ongoing resistance, deadness, blindness, sin, and the accompanying work of Satan. All people, if they resist God's grace, are children of Satan. We need to see this criticism in John's gospel far more radical than some give the impression that it has.

It is, the text I just read from Richard Hayes, is a deep opposition, not to one imbalanced New Testament writer, but to the pervasive diagnosis of the human problem in the New Testament. Namely, deadness, blindness, and victimized and controlled by the God of this world. This is not a Jewish problem.

This is a human problem. And so the indictment of it is so profound, it fills me with jealousy that you don't even come close to believing it. Last response, launching us now into the text.

The same author who wrote the gospel, John, wrote the first epistle. Most people see that. Language is the same.

Terminology is the same. Structural ideas are the same. And in that letter, the author makes crystal clear.

You don't need Paul to tell him. You don't need Matthew to tell him. He makes crystal clear himself that it isn't Jews who are the children of the devil.

It's unbelievers who are the children of the devil. Listen to 1 John 3, verse 8. Whoever, very important word. Are we with him? Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil.

Jew or Gentile. For the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil in Jew and Gentile.

That's good news. So yes, Jewish leaders in John 8 are called sons of the devil. But woe to us Gentiles if we read this and do not see it as a tragedy of unbelief but rather see it as the bitterness of anti-Semitism.

Woe to us. Woe to us. If we put that on God's holy word.

Jesus is not addressing a Jewish problem but a human problem. Woe to us if we don't see the Son of God here laboring as a doctor, a physician who is coming into the world to diagnose and name with painful names cancer is not a pretty word name with horrible names the disease for which He alone is the liberator. Woe to us if we don't see Him loving us here loving Pharisees here naming their disease here and saying over and over I'm water, whoever comes whoever comes will drink and everlasting rivers will flow out of your heart.

He said that to Pharisees and you if my word just finds a place in you and you stay in it you could be my disciple and you'll know the truth and the truth will set you free from blindness and self and Satan and you'll be a child in the house not a slave in the quarters.

That's the word to Pharisees tonight and then okay, verse 30 that's where we ended last time and it said many believed in Him I am the light of the world, he had said in verse 12 I am the light of the world whoever, whoever follows me will not walk in darkness that's what Satan wants you to do and succeeds wherever there's no faith my followers will not walk in darkness of the devil anymore but will have the light of life the sun will set them free that's what he said in chapter 8 verse 12 and now the question is when it says in verse 30 many believed was it real? because we've seen in this gospel there's fake faith, right? we've seen it in chapter 2 we've seen it in chapter 7 there's faith that's not faith there's a kind of faith that's just fascinated with his miracles because they want

bread remember you want your stomachs full that's why you're following me oh, oh, you're a miracle worker we believe in you there's fake faith in this gospel and is this it? that's and Jesus leaves the question open but He gives us a test to know if we're real verse 31 and following so let's read it so Jesus said to the Jews after He had said many believed He said to the Jews who had believed in Him is that real? if you abide in My word you are truly My disciples and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free now those two verses must have a sermon and tonight's sermon is not it okay? so we're coming back because every word I mean I made a list of things I wanted to talk about in that verse fill the page so we're coming back to the majesty of almost every word in that verse

but I I told Noel the other night how frustrating it is to preach on this gospel because when you start getting verses like this you've got to slow down and if I slow down I never finish so we try to slow down a little and then like this, you know so I'm doing one of those tonight I want to see what happens to the group that says no to this because that's what we have here in verses 36 down to 47 they say no, we're not going to do that so something happens between verse 31 and 45 because look what he says in verse 45 but because I tell the truth you do not believe well that's clear lots of people believed in verse 30 and he said if you hang in there with my word you'll be real and he gets to verse 45 and says you're not real so there's a group at least a group I don't know how many who

heard those words and something happened between 31 and 45 that they're gone and that's what we're dealing with here I want to know what happened what are they doing how are they responding am I like that how could I not be like that I don't want to hear this from Jesus so I think what we have here is a warning in these verses 33 down to 47 a warning of how human beings you notice I'm not saying Jews they happen to be Jews a warning that human beings take ethnicity they take religion they even take God and they take moral superiority and they use them to justify themselves and evade the Jesus who says I can set you free if you'll have me and they don't want him and they don't want him for those reasons that's what I'm seeing here that's kind of a summary of the ways human beings resist

and evade Jesus I want to unpack that and I want you to pray as I'm unpacking it that you will spot that in yourself if it's there and you'll kill by faith in Jesus that's where we're heading the real reason why Jewishness is important here is because it represents the kind of religious, ethnic, moral self-justification that all religions have and that all humans have apart from sovereign grace overcoming our rebellion and our blindness but verse 36 if the Son sets you free you will be free indeed and the freedom he's talking about is what? freedom...what? verse 34 Jesus answered them truly, truly I say to you everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin that's why Chuck Hedis read Romans 6 said the same thing notice the word

everyone not you everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin he's

not into Jewish uniqueness here he's into human uniqueness not monkeys humans who sin are slaves of sin you're either a slave of righteousness or you're a slave of sin Paul said it Jesus is implying it this isn't Jewish this is human we all sin we're all slaves of sin there's only one way to escape and that's the liberator if the Son sets you free you'll be free if you won't have the Son you stay a slave forever Jewishness is not the issue here Jesus was Jewish all the apostles were Jewish suppose do a little mental imagination experiment here suppose Jesus were presented in a Muslim atmosphere here like this this is Jewish Muslim or Buddhist or Hindu or animist or secular Western materialist choose any of those religions and he said only the Son me Jesus Christ crucified and risen can

liberate you from your bondage to Satan self and sin what would the response be? it would be exactly like this everywhere unless God does for them what he did for some many opened their eyes convicted them of sin took away the irrational blindness drew them to himself you must believe the Son you must abide in his word then you'll truly be his disciples you'll know the truth the truth will set you free only through Jesus Christ that's what you say in that milieu and the religious response to that I've seen it many times is who in the world do you think you are? we have a religion and a morality that's why Jewishness matters here it's simply the present illustration of the way all of us are the way we evade Jesus evade Jesus and his words of indictment we don't like to be indicted I don't

need to be Jewish not to like to be indicted tell me I'm a slave I'm going to get mad at you right? there's nothing uniquely Jewish about not liking to be called a slave now here's what we need to do in the time we have left we need to analyze the escape routes that they took or the evasive measures that they used and the self-justifications that they kept raising against this claim you must let me liberate you or you're not going to be liberated how did they move against that? and there are at least three and I've named them several times ethnicity, religion, and moral superiority so let's look at them verse 33 they answer him we're offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone how can you say you'll become free?

Jesus at this point remarkably agrees with them that they are the offspring of Abraham look at verse 37 I know that you're the offspring of Abraham so he agrees you are yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you so my question is do they have a good defense? against judgment? like remember when John the Baptist came preaching judgment? he said we have Abraham as our father and John said if God needs children he can raise them up from stones that was John the Baptist's answer are they legitimate in saying we're not in danger of your indictment of God's judgment here or of our slavery because we're the offspring of Abraham you said so yourself you agreed with us we're the offspring of Abraham and everybody knows in the Jewish sphere that if you're the genuine offspring of

Abraham you're not going to come into judgment and you're certainly not a slave we are the freest people on the world on the planet because we have the law and God's word the holy oracles of the divine so they defend themselves with in this case specifically an ethnic argument offspring of Abraham that's a line that's a bloodline from Abraham it's religiously laden and we'll get to the religious response in a minute but at this point they're picking out Abraham and saying that's our line that's our line we're safe because we're in that line that argument could be used in other religions and other ethnicities as well now it gets messier verse 39 they answered him Abraham is our father but this time Jesus says he is not Jesus said to them if you were Abraham's children you would be doing

the works of Abraham the works Abraham did but you now seek to kill me a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God this is not what Abraham did that's amazing you're not Jews don't care what you say don't care what your bloodline is you're not Jews you say he's your father he's not your father true Jewishness is not a bloodline it's a faith line have you ever wondered I mean if you ever wonder where Paul got his theology in Romans 9 wonder no more let me read it to you it's amazing this is Romans 9 verses 6 to 8 not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God but the children of promise are counted as offspring where did he get that so we're

not surprised when we read at the end of John 8 41 look at the last clause of verse 41 we have one father even God remember Paul had said it's not the children of the flesh who are the children of God I hear they're saying we are we have one father even God Jesus said to them if God were your father you would love me for I came from God and I'm here first there's the ethnic connection we have Abraham as our father and now we have the religious connection God is our father the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is our God and Jesus says he is not this is unbelievably offensive you just can't say anything to Pharisees more offensive than Abraham's God is not your God if he were you'd love his son this is huge for our day folks oh please get this this is huge until the sun sets you free you are

not a child in the house you're a slave in the quarters verse 34 verse 34 truly truly I say to you everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin the slave does not remain in the house forever so pause there yes they are children of Abraham in the flesh sense they're in the house but they're not going to stay in the house forever there's only one way to stay forever become a son be born again into the family of Abraham let me finish it the slave does not remain in the house forever the son, little s I think is right here on son the son remains forever and then the big S in the next phrase if the son shall set you free if you want to be a son of Abraham you have to be born again that's what he said to Nicodemus that's what Paul said in Galatians 4 we become sons by the Spirit we become true

Jews true Jews you know this text Romans 2 29 a true Jew is one inwardly circumcision is a matter of the heart by the Spirit not by the letter and certainly not by bloodline children this is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God the fact that you want to kill me and won't receive the truth shows who your father is it gets maximally offensive the devil he says was a murderer from the beginning and you're acting like him when you want to kill me therefore you're in that line that's your bloodline you do his will you do his will now here's a little interesting connection with 1st John chapter 3 verse 12 I'll read it Cain, brother of Abel Cain who was of the devil of the evil one same kind of language Cain who was of the evil one and murdered his brother because his own

deeds were evil and his brothers were righteous Cain was not a Jew this is not about Jewishness this is about me and my resistance to the one being in the world who if I let him have total control of my life will give me liberty from the devil and liberty from myself and liberty from my sin and I like my sin and I like my self-freedom and my autonomy I don't have to be Jewish to be human it's just one variety and we all live in different varieties of rebellion against Christ's amazing offer come to me if the son sets you free you'll be free it's the only way I'm almost done one last application some of you might be sitting there saying I just don't do that I don't even know what my ethnicity is and frankly I'm not religious so I'm obviously not lifting up my religion to evade Jesus I

think the whole thing is a crock I'm just an average Joe keeping my nose clean probably as good as the next guy one closing word to you from this text because that's the morality issue like I said there were

three three escape hatches here ethnicity, religion we have God as our father and now where am I getting this I'm as good as the next guy I'm just an average Joe and I'm not any big sinner this doesn't have anything to do with me look at verse 41 about the middle of the verse they said to Jesus Jesus we were not born of sexual immorality where in the world did that come from he didn't say they were and they probably weren't so they're right so what's the point well you know what the point is you were your mother got pregnant before you before she was married if there's anybody around

here that's enslaved you're enslaved to a sordid past what use is that to them in this text one use we're superior that's your moral superiority it's already coming out we know your background we don't have a background like that so we'll use that here that'll be our last use we got Abraham we got God and we got married mothers not you this is vicious so my closing summary and appeal to us all can we just crawl inside the human condition here stop pointing fingers at anybody and own this all of us are prone to say I don't need you Jesus I have my ethnicity or I don't need you Jesus I have my religion I got my God or I don't need you Jesus I've got my moral superiority I'm just an average joe keep my nose clean surely not like some of these rascals you know, sleeping around none of those

work one thing works if the son will set you free you will be free indeed that's it that's the message of the text there are all kinds of escapes there are all kinds of evasions there's only one liberator and he's here in this room in fact he's wherever you are moving toward you saying whoever comes to me I will not cast him out whoever comes and drinks I'll satisfy him and in him I will become rivers of living water you stay in my word live in my word, trust my word enjoy my word, be satisfied with my word eat my word, drink my word you'll be real you will be free you will be my disciple you'll know truth ever increasingly and you'll be freer and freer until one day no more sin that's what you could have tonight let's pray so father in heaven I plead with you that Jewish friends watching

this or in this room or in the south campus or the north campus would feel themselves not fingered not isolated not peculiarly sinful they are just human and need Jesus like me and I pray for morally superior people and religiously confident people and ethnically proud people that Jesus would get victory and break in and make us children instead of slaves I pray this in his great and holy name Amen

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