

## **John 8: 32 The truth will set you free**

It's sometimes funny where the Lord gives you inspiration for sermons. You don't have to be kneeling by your bed in prayer, or with your head stuck in a massive theological commentary.

I was lying in the dentist's chair a couple of months ago having some specialist treatment done on my teeth. Every now and again I'd hear the dentist (tut) or (hmmm). I couldn't see the expression on his face because I had my eyes shut, but I knew it wasn't going well. As I lay there listening to Mozart playing in the background, time went on. Swallowing was becoming a worry – having your mouth open makes it difficult to swallow effectively, doesn't it.

Anyway it seemed like it was taking a long time – I went in in broad daylight, it was now getting dark. I only realised afterwards how long I was lying there – having your mouth open for over an hour is quite difficult for me. I realise some people have **no** problem opening their mouth for an hour or more – mentioning no names! I just wanted it to end, I wanted to be out of there. The chorus of a song by the band 'Queen' kept coming into my head as I lay there "I want to break free, I want to break free!" ( I hear ..... does a wonderful Freddie Mercury impersonation – see him afterwards!) "I want to break free!"

In fact, if you look at Freddie Mercury's songs there are quite a few references to a desire to be free, to be rescued, to be saved, to be let go, as in his most famous song 'Bohemian Rhapsody' – remember the choral bit in the middle – 'will you let me go', I'm sure you've heard it. The search for freedom. Freddie didn't manage to find the freedom he was looking for - he died as a result of pneumonia brought on by HIV Aids when in his 40s.

Forty-five years ago Dr. Martin Luther King stood and gave a famous speech – "*I have a dream*", he said, and he echoed the thoughts and feelings of all coloured, minority and disadvantaged peoples down through the centuries. He and many others were calling for equality, justice and freedom – this was his dream: he quoted the patriotic song of America "*My country, 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing. Land where my fathers died, land of the pilgrim's pride, from every mountainside, let freedom ring.*"

He called the people to "let freedom ring" – this was his dream. He was expressing the desires of his people to be free.

*“From every mountainside, let freedom ring,” he said. “When we let freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, “Free at last! free at last! thank God Almighty, we are free at last!”*

Five years later, on the 3rd April 1968 he gave a speech to be known as his ‘mountaintop speech’, which he ended *“And He [God] has allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you... I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. My eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord!”*

He found **his** personal freedom. The next day he was assassinated.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> April this year, Izzy Mutanhaurwa posted a message on the Internet: *“The people of Zimbabwe, exercised their democratic right to vote for change, change that they can trust, to vote for life, food, education, jobs, dignity and democracy. The Zimbabwean people are now free at last. It's hard to believe Mugabe is gone. Thank you to the people of Zimbabwe that voted for genuine Change. Goodbye Bob and Welcome New Zimbabwe. **Free At Last!**”*

We now know that these feelings were very premature, considering all that has happened in the last 2 weeks. But the strong desire for freedom is still there.

April 6<sup>th</sup> - the Olympic Torch was carried across London, its progress halted by protesters crying ‘Free Tibet’.

Isn't this a feeling we **all** have? We may not be suppressed or oppressed in this country as in other countries, but don't we all want to be free? Free at last? Don't we all have things in our lives which stop us from being free? I'm sure we do. And I'm sure that we spend a lot of time and energy trying to be free of things which we feel **stop** us being free.

We don't have to be physically in prison, to feel imprisoned. We can feel imprisoned in our home – the mortgage to pay for, there's always something that needs doing round the house. Maintenance, washing up, cleaning, tidying, cooking – and that's just the men! – “I want to be free of this.”

You may feel restricted by work – same routine every day, get up, go to work, do your best to please, come home, telly, bed. And it goes on day after day. Trapped in your daily routine – “When's my next holiday?”

At the gates of some Nazi concentration camps were the words “Arbeit macht frei” – “Work sets you free.” It certainly didn’t set the Jewish inmates free, work is not a liberating experience nowadays.

Perhaps you feel trapped by physical infirmity – we’re all caught in the downward spiral of declining health. Somebody said “From the moment we’re born, we’re dying.” A bit pessimistic! But some of us aren’t as young as we used to be. Gone are **my** marathon-running days. Perhaps we’re feeling the infirmity that comes with increasing age. Perhaps we can’t get out as we’d like to. We’re not free to do what we want to do, when we want to do it. And we’re not that good at it now anyway! We’re not free. We long to be free from the things that restrict us.

It may not be physical, it may be mental – something that goes on in your mind that denies you freedom. You feel forced to do something just because it’s what everybody does. You don’t really want to do it, but you feel you have to. Perhaps this is **more** worrying than physical restriction. In your mind you’re a prisoner to all kinds of thoughts, feelings. You just want to get rid.

So what do you do? You try and get out of it – you get out of the house, you have a holiday, you go to new places, maybe make new friends. But sometimes **these** can lead to new restrictions.

For example, many use sport as a means of escape. I went to watch Brighton “play football” (very loose description!) a couple of weeks back. I found it quite comical but also very sad (and that was just the football!) No, listening to what was going on around me. This was obviously the highlight of these people’s week – they’ve worked hard all week, and their time of freedom is watching a football match. But they’re still not free.

One stands, they all stand. One moans, they all moan. One shouts at the ref, they all shout at the ref. One sings, they all sing. They have a language of their own – Brian will translate “Albion!” “Seagulls!” They’re trapped in this one-ness. The sad thing is, it doesn’t matter how old you are, or which sex you are – there was a 10 year-old girl behind us singing along and slating the ref, just like the rest.

We long to be as free as a bird, floating above the earth, without a care. .... tried it once. Said it was great. Wants to do it again. But I can guarantee, every time, he’ll still come back down to earth – faster than he’d like perhaps.

We're trapped. We're imprisoned! We want to get out of here! We want to escape! Is there a way out? Can we ever be free? Is this what life is all about? Is this you? Be honest. Come on – we all feel like this sometimes, don't we? I know I do.

There's a wonderful verse in John's gospel chapter 8, verse 32 where Jesus says, **“Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”** (repeat)

This verse is clearly telling us that there **is** a way for us to be set free. Isn't that what we want? Freedom – to be set free. Isn't that one of the reasons why people go out partying, dabble with drugs, or alcohol, go shopping even, or emigrate to Australia – people just want to be free.

This verse is telling us that the way to be set free is to know the truth.

That's great, but like with most of the Bible – to read something makes you think further, makes you ask another question. (After you become a Christian, you then have to **grow** as a Christian, there is always more for you to know. We will never know all there is to know about God – God wouldn't be God if he could be confined to our human brain.)

So when you read this verse, you then have to ask, **“Can** we know ultimate truth?” So many people say there are many strands of truth, each of us can know our little bit, they say each religion has a strand of truth – we can't know ultimate truth. This verse says, **“You will** know the truth, and you will be set free.” It clearly says that we **can** know the truth.

So what is **the truth** that will set you free?

Jesus said, **“I am the way and the truth and the life – I am the way, the truth and the life, no-one comes to the Father, except through me.”** (John 14:6)  
Jesus says that **He** is the truth. So to know Jesus' truth – to know **Him** will set you free.

We read in Luke's gospel, chapter 4, verse 14 onwards of an occasion when Jesus was in Nazareth and he went into the synagogue where Jews were worshipping; he stood and read a quote from the book of Isaiah in the Old Testament; verses 18 and 19 say, *“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.”*

*He then rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them ‘Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.’*

Jesus – what are you saying here? Jesus is clearly saying that **he** is the one who was prophesied to come as king of his people. The Jews thought when the promised king came, he would be a warrior king, who would come and set his people free from all oppression, that he would release them from occupation. Jesus is saying that kind of king is not the true king of the Jews. He is the truth. Jesus has come to fulfil the prophecy of the Old Testament, but not in the way they were expecting.

Jesus came to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim freedom for prisoners, to make the blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk, to release the oppressed. He came to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour, to say that there **is** a way of salvation – and **now** is the time for you to be saved. **This** is the year of God’s favour. Jesus says “I have come so that you can know the truth about God, you can know the Way to God – it’s in me, Jesus. You can know release from whatever’s enslaving you, whatever’s imprisoning you, whatever’s trapping you, by knowing the Truth – believe in me,” Jesus says, “know **me**, my truth will set you free.”

Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life.”

I saw this advert in a local magazine recently. It says “Live life to the full ...” It goes on to list all the things you could possibly need in life – 250 acres of beautiful grounds, café, bar and restaurant, library, bowling green, swimming pool, tennis court, fishing lake, gym, car club and 24 hour emergency support. Prices starting at only £335,000 if you want to put your name down. “Live life to the full.” To the full? Is that it? Will that satisfy **you**? What about a McDonalds? Live life to the full?

Jesus said, “*I have come that they may have life,*” but he says more than that, **“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”** (John 10:10) As attractive as this place in the advert sounds, you know and I know, there is so much more to life, there has to be. Jesus offers life to the full. We all want to be free to enjoy that life to the full.

I’m sure you know of the story of Jesus feeding the 5,000 with 5 loaves and 2 fish. Jesus provided physical food in a miracle.

But Jesus then went on to say that what people really need is **spiritual** food: he said, “*For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. ... I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.*” (John 6:33-35)

Jesus gives life to the world. But not just temporary life, he doesn't just feed you for a little while, the food he comes to give to those that believe in him, is eternal – it lasts for ever. What wonderful news! “*He who comes to me will **never** go hungry.*” Jesus says ‘if you come to me, I am the Way of salvation, I will bring you freedom, but not just temporarily, but for ever.’ Life to the full.

Jesus came from heaven and lived for 30-odd years on our planet, and while he was here, he physically set people free from their illnesses, from their sicknesses, from being possessed by demons. He made the blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk. You hear nowadays of people being healed miraculously; at other times God works through the wonderful gifts he has given to surgeons and doctors to bring healing. That's the here and now.

But Jesus is concerned with eternity. Life here now is a preparation for eternity. He came to give life to the full, not just here and now, but into eternity. There are times when as Christians we still feel trapped, we still long for freedom from pressures and situations that restrain us in some way. But God is with his people. Pray to him, focus on him, lift your eyes from the problem down here up to the solution up there. Jesus will set you free. He is concerned for your eternity.

Jesus' work is a work for eternity. He opens blind eyes to see the truth; he unstops deaf ears to hear the truth; he enables the lame to walk in the ways of the truth; he sets the stubborn, self-sufficient, proud heart free to recognise and accept the truth.

But there is something we need to do. We have to believe, and we have to obey.

Let's go back to where we started this evening, with that verse in John's gospel, chapter 8, but read from verse 31, “*To the Jews who had believed 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.*” (John 8:31-32)

There is something for us to do. Being set free by the truth comes only when we believe in the truth, when we believe that Jesus is the Son of God, that he came to bring salvation. How did he do that?

He did that by dying on the Cross. He had to do that because we have all sinned, that is neglected God in our lives – we haven't acknowledged God for who he is, we went our own way. The Bible calls that sin, and when he died on the Cross, Jesus – in a sacrificial way paid for our sins. Because he took upon himself the punishment for our sins, we can be **free** to enjoy the relationship with God that he always wanted us to have. When Jesus rose from the dead on that first Easter day, he showed that he had the victory over sin and death. He was freed from death, so now we too can know that same freedom.

We have to **believe** that these things are true. That Jesus died for us, for you, for me – “*No-one comes to [God the] Father except through me,*” he said. Salvation and freedom from our sins is found in no other, only Jesus. Believing these things, we need to ask God's forgiveness for the wrong things we've done, and tell him, we want to go **his** way, the **true** way.

Once we do this, God saves us. But the Bible tells us we need to work out our salvation. We are Christians, but our lives as Christians need to show that we are saved – we need to **go on** believing. It's not a one off thing. We need to nurture our belief, we need to grow. We can't stand still – we need to get to know the truth more, we need to get to know Jesus better.

As we do that, we will encourage our belief, get rid of our unbelief – because while we are in this life there will still be times of unbelief, there will still be times of doubt. As I said earlier, we can never know everything there is to know about God, never experience everything there is to experience of God while we are in this life. We have been set free from the guilt of our sins although we may be tempted by those sins continuously. Cling to God – he can set you free.

“Do you want to be free? Jesus says ‘Lift your chains – I hold the key; all power in heaven and on earth is given to me – only I can set you free.’” (Casting Crowns – ‘Set me free’)

Let's be determined to get to know more of the truth day by day, because Jesus promises, “*You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.*”  
Let's pray.

I quoted from the American song “My country, ‘tis of thee”, earlier. The 4<sup>th</sup> verse, I’m sure Matthew knows, goes like this:

“Our fathers’ God to Thee, Author of liberty,  
To Thee we sing.  
Long may our land be bright, With freedom's holy light,  
Protect us by Thy might, Great God our King.”

God is the author of liberty. Let’s sing and praise God, for the freedom only he can bring.