



The Statue of Liberty is one of the most powerful icons in the world. I remember the first and last time I saw it and just being blown away by its beauty. The statue is full of powerful symbols that communicate something of what our nation stands for. She wears a crown with seven spikes, representing the seven seas and seven continents of the world; liberty is a universal value. She holds a tablet in her left hand. It's a book of law based on the founding principles of this nation. There are 13 layers of granite that comprise the body of the pedestal representing the 13 colonies that formed America in 1776.

The two most powerful symbols in my mind are at the highest and lowest points on the statue. At the highest point, she holds a torch. This symbol of light was meant to show that liberty would enlighten the whole world. At the lowest point, we see another symbol. She wears sandals, suggesting her stature as a free person. And she's not standing still; she's walking forward. At her feet are broken chains, demonstrating that she's free from slavery and bondage.

Today we come to a passage of Scripture in which Jesus depicts himself much like Bartholdi depicted the Statue of Liberty. Turn to John 8. We'll be starting in verse 12 and looking at the entire remainder of the chapter. It's a lot of text so we won't be able to read all of it, and we'll skip around a bit, but you'll get the gist.

Jesus Offers Light to Those in Darkness

In these verses Jesus uses two powerful images to communicate something of what he has to offer. First, in v. 12 it's like he holds up a torch and says, ***"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."*** It's likely that Jesus said this on the last day of the Feast of the Tabernacles, which we looked at two weeks ago in chapter 7. Jesus was standing in what was called the Court of the Women. There would have been four large stands, each with four golden bowls. As part of a sacred ceremony, someone would climb a ladder and fill them with oil. Then they'd be lit, using the worn undergarments of priests as wicks. They'd happened at night so all Jerusalem would be illumined. In a world that didn't have public lighting after dusk, it was a spectacular thing to see this light shining from Jerusalem's yellow limestone walls while choirs of Levites sang and people danced in the streets. Imagine Jesus, in the very court where this ceremony took place, standing beneath the 16 lit bowls of oil, announcing that he's the true light of the world!

The symbol of light is used in many cultures and many religions to symbolize a number of things, but what would Jesus have meant and how would his Jewish audience have understood him? No doubt they would have thought of the light of the glory of God, which they called the Shekinah glory. There was a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night that protected and led the Israelites through the wilderness. These were the people who were taught to sing, ***"The Lord is my light and my salvation -- whom shall I fear?"*** (Ps. 27:1). God had also given his people his word (law) and so they could say, ***"Your word is lamp to my feet and a light for my path"*** (Ps. 119:105). God said through the prophet Isaiah that the coming Messiah would be ***"a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth"*** (Is. 49:6). Jesus is saying, "That's me. I am that light. I am **the** light. I am the glorious light that led you through the wilderness. I am the One who saves you and guides you, and not just you but the whole world."

Of course, the assumption behind this image is, apart from Christ, we're all in darkness. That's not a very nice thing to say. I was looking at some old photos of our family and I came across one that showed one of my daughters at her birthday party trying to whack a piñata with a baseball bat. You know what I'm talking about. You take a rope and hang this paper maché figure stuffed with candy onto a tree. Then you blindfold a kid, give her a bat, twirl her around until she's dizzy, and set her loose to try to knock open the piñata so the candy falls out. Usually you have some deranged adult at the other end of the rope controlling the location of the piñata so the kids can't destroy it too early in the game. It's all quite funny unless you're the kid who is blindfolded! In a way, that's how we all are. Apart from Christ, we're spiritually blindfolded, dizzy, expending all our effort trying to get some of the goodies out of this life, but with no idea where we're really going.

Jesus Offers Freedom to Those in Bondage

The second image that Jesus uses comes in verses 31–32. He says, ***"If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."*** So Jesus offers light to those in darkness and freedom for those in bondage. Like Lady Liberty striding forward with broken chains at her feet, Jesus promises to break the chains that bind us.

Now this immediately raises the question, "What kind of bondage are we talking about?" The Jews who were listening to

him completely missed the point. That's why they say, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?" In other words, "What are you talking about? We're not in bondage to anyone." It's interesting they say that. They know quite well they're under the control of the Roman Empire. In the past they'd known slavery in Egypt, Assyria and in Babylon. But somehow they tied their freedom to the fact that they were physical descendants of Abraham. Abraham was the father of the Jewish nation. God had made a covenant with him, promising to make him a great nation. So their sense of freedom was tied not so much to politics but to their genetics, being able to trace their paternity to Abraham.

But Jesus was talking about a different kind of slavery. Look what he says next, *"Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed"* (verses 34–36). Jesus is talking about spiritual slavery. For Jesus, the ultimate bondage isn't enslavement to a political or economic system, but a vicious slavery to moral failure, to rebellion against the God who made us. The cruel master isn't Caesar, but shameful self-centeredness, evil, and an enslaving devotion to created things in place of the Creator. This is why Jesus would never allow himself to be reduced to mere political Messiah; to free people politically but not spiritually would be like a sloppy paint job over a house infested with termites.

It's tragic how we all try to deny this slavery. At some level, all of us have been like the alcoholic in denial. Everyone sees the problem but us. Think about the person who is unable to forgive. Perhaps they've been hurt or betrayed by someone they trusted, and now they can't let it go; they won't let it go. They cling to their right to hold this thing over that person's head. It happens in families all the time. It might be a husband towards his wife or a son towards his mother. You think you're free, but you're enslaved. You can't let it go and it not only poisons the person you won't forgive but it poisons you. Everyone sees how it's destroying you, but you won't let it go. That's slavery.

Jesus says, "I've come to set you free from that." Notice he even explains how this freedom is won and what it looks like. He talks about the difference between a slave and a son. The son is in a house and he has access to everything. He can go wherever he wants to go; he can jump on the bed; he can open the refrigerator and grab what he wants. But the slave has no rights. If you're a slave to sin, that's you. The fact is, that's all of us. But Jesus says if the Son sets you free, you'll be free indeed. Who is the Son? That's Jesus! He sets us free from the power of sin. So lives that were curved in on themselves, lives that were living in the dark little dungeon of their own ego, are set free. The one enslaved by bitterness and an unwillingness to forgive comes to

an understanding of how Christ died on the cross for him. As he experiences his own forgiveness, he's set free to forgive his wife.

He can Offer this Because of His Unique Relationship with the Father

So let's recap. Jesus claimed he's the light for those in darkness and the source of freedom for those in bondage. You can imagine that some of the people Jesus was talking with in Jerusalem had a hard time hearing this, particularly the Jewish leaders. For that reason, much of this chapter focuses on the authority of Jesus to make such claims. This comes out in the back and forth between Jesus and these leaders. What Jesus keeps coming back to is that his claims are true because of his relationship with his Father. So now Jesus is talking about paternity. At least 10 times in this passage, Jesus points to the fact that he's from the Father, and speaks on the authority of the Father, is going to the Father, and pleases the Father. He claims, in other words, that his authority isn't owing to human origin. It's owing to his relationship with God the Father.

Let me give you just a taste of this. When the Pharisees question the authority of his testimony, Jesus responds in verses 16–18, *"But if I do judge, my decisions are true, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me. In your own Law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is true. I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent me."*

Then they ask him in v. 19, *"Where is your father?"* Most likely they had the rumors about Jesus's birth. "Yeah, Jesus, who was your father?" Jesus says, *"You do not know me or my Father... If you knew me, you would know my Father also."* Wow! To know him is to know the Father!

Later, when they question who he is and where he's from he says, *"I have much to say in judgment of you. But he who sent me is trustworthy, and what I have heard from him I tell the world"* (v. 26). John adds, *"They did not understand that he was telling them about his Father"* (v. 27). Later, Jesus says, *"...I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him"* (verses 28–29).

So not only does he come from the Father and speak for the Father but he always does what the Father wants. He doesn't even seek his own glory. Skip down to verses 54–55, *"If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and obey his word."*

Then comes something amazing. It begins with Jesus saying in v. 56, *"Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad."* Obviously, he's talking about his pre-existence, but they don't get that, and so they say, *"You are not yet fifty years old...and you have seen Abraham!"* (v. 57)

They must be thinking, "We got him now. This guy really is nuts. He's hanging himself right here in front of everyone!" Then Jesus makes the most audacious claim of all. He says, "*Very truly I tell you...before Abraham was born, I am!*" (v. 58)

Now they're mad. You see, Jesus used the divine name. Remember, Moses had asked God, "*What's your name?*" God said, "*I AM*" That's his name. That's where we get the name Yahweh in the Old Testament. This is a claim not to be the Father, but to be One with the Father and to be equal with the Father. No wonder John says, "*At this, they picked up stones to stone him...*" (v. 59). That's blasphemy and that deserves stoning.

Now all this information about his relationship with the Father is important because it backs up his claim to be the light of the world and the One who brings true freedom. Why can he make those claims? Because he's from the Father and speaks on the authority of the Father, is going to the Father, and pleases the Father in all he does. But it also brings up another question in this chapter, and that's who is **your** father?

Our Paternity Depends on Our Relationship to the Son

We live in the day and age of paternity testing. Have you ever thought of how they did that before the advent of DNA analysis? The first form of any kind of paternity testing was by matching blood types between the child and alleged father, which became available in the 1920s. Even that really only said that a particular man **could** be the father, not that he **was** the father. Before that, all you really did was compare physical characteristics.

The Jewish people in this chapter want Jesus to know about their own paternity. They say, "*Abraham is our Father*" (v. 39). Paternity test or no paternity test, we come from him. But Jesus said in response, "*If you were Abraham's children...then you would do what Abraham did. As it is, you are looking for a way to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things*" (verses 39–40).

They didn't get it, so they say, "*We are not illegitimate children... The only Father we have is God himself*" (v. 41). But Jesus wasn't buying it. They're still thinking biology, but Jesus is thinking spiritually. What Jesus says in this chapter is your spiritual paternity turns on your relationship to the Son. We already saw in v. 19 how he said, "*If you knew me, you would know my Father also.*" Well, here in v. 42 he adds, "*If God were your Father, you would love me...*" So to know him is to know the Father, and to love him is to love the Father; you can't separate the two. Who is your father? It all depends on your relationship to the Son.

In this chapter it's not just about believing in the Son, but it's following him and obeying him. Jesus said, "*whoever follows me will not walk in darkness.*" Remember what happened right before he said this? Jesus said to the woman caught in adultery, "*Neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more.*" Then, as if in

the next breath, he says, "*I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but have the light of life.*" If you really follow him, you can't continue to walk in sin and darkness. You'll walk in the light as he's in the light.

This comes out powerfully right in the middle of this chapter. After Jesus was done saying some hard things to them, John says in v. 30, "*Even as he spoke, many believed in him.*" I read that and think, "Praise God! Jesus just got a bunch of folks in that crowd to pray the prayer and raise their hand. Awesome! The angels in heaven are rejoicing! Let's get them baptized and signed up for the new believers class."

But that's not what Jesus does. Look again at v. 31, "*To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, 'If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.'*" Wow! Instead of giving them the assurance of salvation, Jesus rocks their boat and says, "Listen, I'm delighted you believe but you need to hold to my teaching." That means not only that you believe his teaching but you obey his teaching. If you really belong to him you'll continue on in your believing and loving and obeying. When you do that you'll come to know the truth and that truth will set you free. Free from what? From sin. Not just from the penalty of sin but from the power of sin, from being a slave to sin.

My wife and I visited Boston several years ago and we followed the historical walk called the Freedom Trail. It's a great walk where you see many of the old sights that were part of our nation's independence. And to see all of these great sights along the freedom trail you only have to do one thing—follow the red line on the sidewalk. In essence, that's what Jesus calls us to do here. Hold to my teaching. Hold to my truth. Follow the red line and you'll enjoy true freedom. Of course, we can't do that apart from his help. That's why he's given us his Spirit; to keep us on that red line of freedom, and when we stray from it, he lets us know.

By the way, that's not the message the world is giving us. Friday night I went to the Giants game and they showed a video honoring the work of a very well known church and its pastor in San Francisco. The motto of that church is "Embrace and live your own truth." That sounds nice, doesn't it? The idea is that truth is whatever you want to make it. There's no objective standard of truth; truth is whatever works for you. The idea is that this is true freedom; the freedom to live according to your own truth and no one else's. That sounds good but that's completely the opposite of what Jesus says here. Jesus says, "Embrace my truth. Hold to my teaching. Then and only then will you be free from the power of sin." True freedom is the exact opposite to what most people think it is. Most think freedom is freedom from any restrictions so that I can live for myself and be free. That isn't freedom. That's bondage to my own self-centeredness. True freedom is to be set free from my silly little self so I can give myself in love to God and to others.

In Jesus' day, the only way to test paternity was that you looked like your father. "Oh, I see that you have your father's dark hair and blue eyes." We do the same thing today. Whenever we watch my son play football we can always find him on the field because he stands and put his hands on his hips just like me. Well, it's the same way in spiritual things. If God is your Father, you'll reflect the characteristics of your Father and the One he sent. It's interesting these people were looking to kill Jesus and he says to them in v. 44, ***"You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies."***

When it comes to spiritual paternity, there are only two options; two fathers. Either you follow the Son and hold to his teaching and get his Father as your Father, or you reject the Son and reveal you have a different father—Jesus calls him the devil. When it comes to spiritual paternity, it's one or the other; there are no gray areas for Jesus.

It seems to me this passage is all about change. "Follow me and you will no longer walk in darkness. Hold to my teaching and you'll no longer live in bondage to sin but the truth will set you free. You will be free to become more and more what God created you to be; more and more a reflection of him.

I know many of you have been praying for Steve Aurell. Steve has been a pastor on our staff for the past 17 years overseeing our Recovery Ministries. For the past year Steve has been fighting pancreatic cancer and it breaks my heart to tell you the doctors have only given Steve a week or so to live. We ask that you pray for Steve and his wife Laura and his daughter Jessica. But I want you to know that Steve is the greatest example I know of a life that's been transformed by Christ. Steve has written his story and let me just read how it begins and you'll see what I mean.

"Although this story is autobiographical in content, it's really not about me. That statement, in and of itself, makes me chuckle inside. Like many of us, I grew up thinking that everything revolved

around 'me' and my entitlements without much thought as to how that may be affecting others. As one old southern blues legend sang, 'with hands full of gimme, and a mouth full of much obliged.' That's how self-centered I once was, and still am on occasion. That doesn't mean I'm not a player in the script. After all, this is a story about my life. My focus, however, is on what God has done, rather than what I have done. As sovereign He's the One who has moved the pieces. And my hope is that the reader will also agree that there can be no other explanation for the radical shift that occurred in my life over 20 years ago. In many ways, it's still a mystery to me....

"One thing is certain however—as the Bible contains both an Old and a New Testament so does my life. The old was totally corrupt, in the process of decay, on its way to ruin and destruction; the new is freshly created in the likeness of God. The old was dominated by powerful lusts and uncontrolled passions; the new is created in integrity and purity. The lusts of the old were deceitful; the righteousness of the new is true.... What changed? What made the difference? How does one go from being a taker to a giver, from a renegade to a respected member of society? How does an old heroin addict with 25 years of addiction history maintain 20-plus years of consistent sobriety? How does one spend the majority of his life in prison, only to wind up working in a church as a pastor for 17 years and counting? There can only be one reason. ...God became my reason for living. ...He rewrote the script, not on tablets of stone but within my own heart. It's how He set me on a new path; rewired my desires. And restored a wounded family and broken marriage through His grace. So you see, it really is not about me. It's about His redemptive purposes. He's the only One who has the power to create something new out of the old and transform the stench of death into a breath of life."

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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