

Finding Freedom: Voices

1. Overview of our new series “Finding Freedom”

- 1.1. This morning we are beginning a new series titled “Finding Freedom.”
- 1.2. Many of us are living with burdens or hindrances that we have become so accustomed to operating with that we no longer recognize how they are affecting us.
 - 1.2.1. The anxiety feels normal.
 - 1.2.2. Burying our emotions feels normal.
 - 1.2.3. Distancing ourselves from other people feels normal.
 - 1.2.4. Fear feels normal.
 - 1.2.5. Feeling inferior seems normal.
 - 1.2.6. Outbursts of anger feel normal.
 - 1.2.7. Needing to be in control feels normal.
 - 1.2.8. Never being satisfied feels normal.
- 1.3. Many of us may deny that we even need to find freedom from anything. John describes an interesting interaction that Jesus had with a group of Jewish believers.

31 To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. 32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

33 They answered him, “We are Abraham’s descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?”

34 Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. 35 Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. 36 So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. 37 I know that you are Abraham’s descendants. Yet you are looking for a way to kill me, because you have no room for my word. 38 I

am telling you what I have seen in the Father's presence, and you are doing what you have heard from your father."

John 8:31-38

1.4. Now note a few things here.

1.4.1. The individuals to whom Jesus is speaking are described as "Jews who had believed him." In other words, they had some kind of positive response to Jesus, but they didn't understand what was really going on in their own hearts. They thought they were free.

1.4.2. But Jesus goes on to describe a few of the ways in which they are bound.

1.4.2.1. They're bound in sin.

1.4.2.2. There is murder in their hearts.

1.4.2.3. And they're being manipulated by dark forces.

1.5. These were "good" people. These were spiritual people. These were people who had taken some kind of positive step toward Jesus. But they certainly weren't free.

1.6. Is it possible that we may be similarly bound up in our hearts?

1.7. Our theme passage for this series is a passage that in many ways defined the agenda of Jesus' mission. Let's read in Luke 4.

16 [Jesus] went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, 17 and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

*18 "The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me*

*to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

*20 Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat
down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. 21
He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your
hearing."*

Luke 4:16-21

1.8. Jesus' desire for us is that we would live in freedom. Let's pray.

2. This morning I want to address the voices that imprison us.

2.1. All of us have had our lives impacted by the voices of those around us, often to an extent that we don't fully realize. And these voices can be like invisible chains that keep us from living how God intends for us to live.

2.2. My parents both love to sing. They sang in the church choir all throughout my childhood and they often sang around the house. They sang so frequently that I started to sing some of the songs I heard them sing even though I had personally never heard the original. Years later when I heard the original recordings of some of these songs I felt like I was listening to remakes.

2.3. When I was a teenager, someone heard me singing something and remarked, "Wow, you really can't sing." I don't remember the exact circumstances, and, who knows, maybe I was in the middle of puberty and my voice was changing. Maybe I was feeling particularly insecure that day, as many teenagers often do. But I remember the comment. And I remember the effect it had on me.

2.4. For years after I heard that comment I didn't open up my mouth to sing. I was embarrassed. This perhaps offhand remark made its

way into my soul. It impacted the way I lived.

- 2.5. Now, as my wife will tell you, I sing all the time now. I don't so much embarrass myself when I sing as I do my family members. But it took a number of years for me to move beyond that one comment.
- 2.6. Years later when I was beginning to work as a campus minister, a more seasoned minister was trying to speak into my life and he said to me, "You're under-confident." He may have been trying to build me up and encourage me, but the effect in that moment was actually to make me feel less confident.
- 2.7. For years when I would engage in moments of ministering to other people a voice lingered in the back of my mind: "You're under-confident."
- 2.8. What voices are impacting your life? What messages have you internalized? How are these voices and messages shaping your life in the present?
- 2.9. **When we read through the gospels we discover that Jesus had to manage an incredible number of potentially crippling voices in his life.** He heard the same voices that so often impact us. But He lived in freedom. What voices did Jesus have to manage in His life?

3. Firstly, Jesus heard the voice of misguided expectation.

- 3.1. Throughout your life, people will put misguided expectations on you. Jesus was no exception.
- 3.2. In Mark 1 we read:

35 Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. 36 Simon and his companions went to look for him, 37 and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!"

38 Jesus replied, “Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.”

Mark 1:35-38

- 3.3. The people of Capernaum had expectations for Jesus, and notice that the disciples were prone to do everything in their power to try to meet those expectations. “Everyone is looking for you!” they exclaimed to Jesus.
- 3.4. Most of us don’t want to disappoint other people, and we tend to feel guilty or ashamed when we don’t live up to their expectations.
- 3.5. On one occasion John the Baptist sent a few people to Jesus with the question:

“Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?”

Luke 7:19

- 3.6. John the Baptist was the one who prepared the way for Jesus. So what’s up with a question like that? John is effectively saying, “You’re not living up to what I thought you were going to be. So I’m reconsidering my commitment to you.”
- 3.7. Now Jesus knew human nature, and knew that even with all of the amazing things He was going to do there was no way He was going to avoid disappointing people. In fact, he preemptively told the people of his own hometown:

“Surely you will quote this proverb to me: ‘Physician, heal yourself!’ And you will tell me, ‘Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.’”

Luke 4:23

- 3.8. What expectations are you trying to live up to?
- 3.9. You know sometimes we have high expectations of ourselves and we don't even know how they got there. We can no longer separate our own internal voice from the external voices that shaped it.
- 3.10. Many of us are struggling with anxiety stemming from our inability to live up to all of the expectations that we have embraced.
 - 3.10.1. We have to be smart and attractive and clever and fit and knowledgable.
 - 3.10.2. Our kids need to overachieve.
 - 3.10.3. We need to be well-traveled and cultured.
 - 3.10.4. We need to wear the right things and eat the right things and decorate our homes the right way and support the right causes.
 - 3.10.5. We need to have it all together but not be too into ourselves.
 - 3.10.6. We need to be focused and driven, but also cool, calm and collected.
- 3.11. Some of us have family members or bosses or co-workers or friends that we live in fear of disappointing.
- 3.12. Jeremy's story
- 3.13. Some of us are making decisions not based on what we should do, but defensively, trying to make everyone happy.
- 3.14. Whose expectations are you living under?

4. Secondly, Jesus heard the voice of criticism and accusation.

4.1. Jesus was bombarded with criticism and accusation throughout His public ministry.

4.2. In fact, Luke writes:

6 On another Sabbath [Jesus] went into the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was shriveled. 7 The Pharisees and the teachers of the law were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely...

Luke 6:6-7

4.3. Wow. These religious leaders were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus. They were looking for something to criticize.

4.4. And, not surprisingly, these religious leaders found plenty.

“John’s disciples often fast and pray, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours go on eating and drinking.”

Luke 5:33

“If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner.”

Luke 7:39

“Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don’t wash their hands before they eat!”

Matthew 15:2

“Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy?”

Luke 5:21

4.5. All of us have to deal with voices of criticism.

- 4.6. Story of the podcast review of our church service. “The sermon was hard to follow.”
- 4.7. **Our world is full of criticism. In fact, we’re often the critics. Why? Why do we criticize?**
 - 4.7.1. **Some criticism is just an immature response to our own disappointment or frustration or pain.** We’re trying to shame the other person to get the behavior we want. Or we’re trying to get control. Or we’re trying to cause pain to another person as an act of retaliation. “What’s wrong with you? That was an idiotic decision.”
 - 4.7.2. Sometimes we criticize out of an attempt to justify ourselves. We want to be right in our own eyes or the eyes of others, so we criticize those who differ with us.
 - 4.7.3. Sometimes we feel threatened by another person, and so we criticize as a defense mechanism.
- 4.8. Most of us are very familiar with giving and receiving unhelpful criticism.
- 4.9. When the voice of criticism takes root in our own souls, we respond with either fight or flight.
- 4.10. We may, as we described above, start dishing out criticism. We feel wounded and we respond by wounding others.
- 4.11. Or we may just shut down.
 - 4.11.1. Someone tells me I’m an idiot, and I believe it, and give up developing my intellect.
 - 4.11.2. Someone tells me I’m awkward and so I start avoiding social situations.

4.11.3. Someone tells me I underperform, and so I just stop trying to advance.

4.12. Or maybe my whole life becomes centered around overcoming someone else's criticism. "I'll prove I am worth something, that I can achieve, that I am smart." Instead of being able to listen to the voice of God and His direction, all I can hear is the critical voice and that voice shapes the whole direction of my life.

5. Thirdly, Jesus heard the voice of rejection.

5.1. We have a deep need to be accepted, and so most of us are careful not to do anything that will lead to the scorn and rejection of others.

5.2. But Jesus regularly experienced rejection. In fact, He experienced rejection from basically every conceivable direction.

5.3. The people of His hometown, Nazareth, literally tried to throw Jesus off a cliff.

5.4. The religious leaders, who held the power in Jesus' day, plotted to kill Jesus.

5.5. When Jesus got so busy that He didn't even have time to eat, His own family thought He was actually going insane.

5.6. After one of Jesus' lessons, many of His disciples said:

"This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?"

John 6:60

5.7. And then they left. They turned back and stopped following Him.

5.8. When the authorities came to arrest Jesus, His closest disciples, the twelve apostles, bailed.

- 5.9. Peter, the head of the group, denied even knowing Jesus.
- 5.10. Rejection from the people around us is one of the most difficult things we will ever experience.
- 5.11. Voices of rejection cut us deeply.
 - 5.11.1. My parents don't want me. Steve Jobs denied that he was the father of his first daughter during the beginning of her life and she wrestled with resentment and rejection for decades.
 - 5.11.2. My spouse doesn't accept me.
 - 5.11.3. Nobody will befriend me.
- 5.12. Being fired from a job, or cut from a team, or excluded from a group can leave us with deep pain and resentment.
 - 5.12.1. Maybe we won't open up to anyone any more.
 - 5.12.2. Or we're cynical toward relationships.
 - 5.12.3. Or we reject whole classes of people; we hate men or women, or some ethnicity, or athletes, or some in-crowd.
 - 5.12.4. Or we're so desperate for acceptance that we seek it out even in bad relationships.
- 5.13. Are voices of rejection affecting who you are today?
- 5.14. There are countless voices that have shaped our lives and are very much affecting our present. How do we deal with them?

6. We have to lock-in on the voice of God.

- 6.1. Before Jesus heard all of the expectations of the crowds, the criticism of the Pharisees, and the rejection from nearly everyone

around Him, Jesus heard:

“You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”

Mark 1:11

6.2. This was not the only time Jesus heard the voice of the Father.
Luke writes:

...Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

Luke 5:16

6.3. In fact, when Jesus was being pressed by the voice of Satan himself, He responded:

“It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

Matthew 4:4

6.4. The voice of God is your life! And Jesus indicates here that one of the primary places to find the voice of God is in the Scriptures.

6.5. You need to address every destructive voice that you are hearing with the power of God’s words.

6.6. Maybe you feel like you’re completely alone in life; that nobody will stand with you or fight for you. Remember God’s word:

The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.

Deuteronomy 31:8

6.7. Maybe you’re living with the sting of rejection by your own family.
God’s word says:

*Though my father and mother forsake me,
the Lord will receive me.*

Psalm 27:10

- 6.8. Maybe you feel overwhelmed by all of the expectations that people have placed on you or that you have placed on yourself. Maybe it's crushing you. Remember Jesus' words:

28 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Matthew 11:28-30

- 6.9. Maybe you feel like you never win and that you will never win. God's word says:

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

Romans 8:37

Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 15:57

- 6.10. Lock-in on God's word. Choose to give it a greater place in your life than any other voice.

- 6.11. Spend time with people who will reinforce God's word in your life. You need people who can help you recognize when you're listening to the wrong voice, and can speak the word of God into your life.

7. Secondly, recognize that Jesus received the voice of condemnation for us.

- 7.1. So many times the voices of criticism and accusation cut us so deeply because there is an element of truth in what we're hearing.
- 7.2. There is something wrong inside of us. Our motives are mixed. We are selfish or lazy or fearful or manipulative or critical.
- 7.3. But Jesus absorbed the voices of insult and mockery and rejection and condemnation on our behalf. And it wasn't just the voices of humans He absorbed. He experienced the rejection of God the Father on our behalf. He cried out on the cross:

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Matthew 27:46

- 7.4. God extends complete forgiveness to us through His Son Jesus Christ. When we turn our hearts back to God and receive His forgiveness, our hearts can open up to hear every other word of life and hope and blessing that God has for us.
- 7.5. If you're having trouble receiving what God is saying to you, perhaps you need to freshly receive His forgiveness.
- 7.6. This morning we're going to go to the place of forgiveness — the cross — by celebrating together the Lord's supper. Matthew writes:

26 While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body."

27 Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. 28 This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."

Matthew 26:26-28

- 7.7. By going to the cross, Jesus was saying, “I forgive you, I forgive you, I forgive you.” Will you receive His forgiveness this morning?