

## THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

### 26. Genuine Faith — Genuine Freedom

John 8:31-36

In **John 8** we have a divinely curated selection of some of the profound and powerful actions and words of Jesus while He was in Jerusalem for the feast of Tabernacles — actions and words that revealed his identity and His mission.

Over the past three Sundays we've been looking at the amazing, radical declaration that Jesus made concerning Himself.

**John 8:12 (ESV) ...“I am the light of the world.**

Everyone listening to Jesus was familiar with the many ways that the Old Testament used the word *light* in connection with God, His life-giving presence, His saving work, His Word, His Wisdom.

And with that short declaration He revealed HIMSELF as the LIGHT of the presence of God, the LIGHT of salvation, the LIGHT of life, the LIGHT that shows us how and where to walk, the LIGHT that exposes our darkness and our sin, the LIGHT that shows us God, the LIGHT that gives us God's wisdom, the LIGHT that shows us God's justice.

With that radical self-disclosure we see the movement of the Gospel: The Gospel begins with God, who is light (1 John 1:5), moving towards fallen man who is in darkness and is darkness. The ultimate movement was God becoming man in the person of Jesus.

*John 1:1;14:18 (NIV) <sup>1</sup>In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.... <sup>14</sup>The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.... <sup>18</sup>No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.*

But that infinitely gracious movement by God invites demands a response from man!

That's why Jesus deliberately didn't stop at declaring who He is. He moved from *revelation to response* — from *revelation to relationship*.

**John 8:12 (ESV) <sup>12</sup>.... “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”**

FIRST — Who He is demands a response! You simply cannot do NOTHING about the One who says that HE HIMSELF is the LIGHT of the presence of God, the LIGHT of salvation, the LIGHT of life.

SECOND — Jesus describes the only way a man or woman can experience and *have the light of life*.

*Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”*

**Andreas Köstenberger** — *For John, “believing” and “following” are virtual synonyms<sup>1</sup>*

THIRD — The action of following implies that *believing* that Jesus is the light of the world is something far deeper, far more costly than cognitive agreement.

**J.I. Packer** — *When I say “I believe in God,” I am professing my conviction that God has invited me to this commitment, and declaring that I have accepted his invitation <sup>2</sup>*

The Pharisees — one of the most powerful and influential sects within Judaism — responded!

**John 8:13 (ESV) <sup>13</sup>So the Pharisees said to him, “You are bearing witness about yourself; your testimony is not true.”**

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<sup>1</sup> Köstenberger, A. J. (2004). John (pp. 253–254). Baker Academic. .

<sup>2</sup> Packer, J. I. (1994). Growing in Christ (p. 19). Crossway Books.

“We don’t believe you! We won’t follow you because you’re a liar”

We spent the big chunk of last week walking through the way Jesus responded to them.

We closed with what John saw happening as Jesus responded to the Pharisees.

**John 8:30 (ESV)** <sup>30</sup>As he was saying these things, many believed in him.

**Verse 31** is the response of Jesus to those who said “I believe / I will follow.”

**John 8:31 (ESV)** <sup>31</sup>So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples,

Just as Jesus defined the need to respond to His claim to be the light of the world — He made sure to define what it means to believe / to follow Him.

**REMEMBER** — John composed this curated collection of events, works and words of Jesus so that those reading them would *believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing (they) may have life in his name (John 20:31-32).*

Within each of those moments/conversations/miracles we’re getting an amazing look at God Incarnate on Mission. As those sent by Jesus on mission we take our cues from Him.

D.A. Carson makes this observation about what we’re going to look at this morning:

*Jesus is standing true to a pattern we find elsewhere: he is never interested in multiplying numbers of converts if they are not genuine believers, and therefore he insists on forcing would-be disciples to count the cost.* <sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Carson, D. A. (1991). The Gospel according to John (p. 348). Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans.

Let me put it another way: Jesus was not — and still is not — looking for votes. He's not campaigning to be elected as Messiah and Son of God. He's not trying to get a bump in the polls.

Jesus was not — and still is not — content to see someone raise their hand or come forward at an altar call.

Jesus would not leave a man or woman content with a form of faith that wasn't GENUINE — that would not connect them to Him in a saving / life giving way.

**John 8:31 (ESV)** <sup>31</sup>So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples

In 21<sup>st</sup> century American Christianity the word *discipleship* is usually associated with those who want to go deeper into the things of the Christian life; the word *disciple* is usually associated with a person who is really serious about their faith.

That simply was not the case in the Gospels, the book of Acts and the New Testament Letters. Did you know that the followers of Jesus Christ are called “Christians” only three times in the New Testament (Acts 11:26; Acts 26:28 and 1 Peter 4:16)? The most significant is Acts 11:26 where Luke tells us that it was in Antioch that followers of Jesus were first called “Christians”.

The Twelve were disciples before they were apostles. In Acts 1 (shortly after Jesus returned to heaven) we're told that Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples. In Acts 6:1 we're told that “the disciples” were increasing In Acts 9 were told that Saul of Tarsus was breathing out threats against “the disciples.” In Acts 14, Paul went to Derbe and preached the Gospel and “made many disciples.”

HERE'S THE DEAL — Jesus was then — and Jesus Still is calling men and women to a **genuine faith** — a faith that FOLLOWS Him.

No small side note: He's commissioned the church to BE disciples and to MAKE disciples!

**J.I. Packer** put it like this: “Belief” is often confused with “opinion”. But faith is a matter of treating a person or thing as trustworthy and committing yourself accordingly. <sup>4</sup>

**So here, Jesus** immediately spoke to those who claimed to “believe” in Him. He wants them to know what ***genuine faith in Him*** looks like.

## I. JESUS SAYS THAT GENUINE FAITH PERSEVERES

**John 8:31 (ESV)** <sup>31</sup>So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples

**QUOTE: A.T. Robertson** — *Your future loyalty to my teaching will prove the reality of your present profession. Continuance in the word (teaching) proves the sincerity or insincerity of the profession. It is the acid test of life.*<sup>5</sup>

He makes it clear that ***genuine faith in Him will persevere*** — ***hold tight to His teaching***. He makes it clear that ***genuine faith in Him costs nothing less than everything***.<sup>6</sup>

**HUGE QUESTION:** What does it mean to ABIDE in the Words of Jesus? The Greek word here is ***μένω meno***. Here is what the Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (also referred to as BDAG) — has to say about this Greek word, ***meno***

= ***Remain, Stay, Luke 19:5*** *And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.”*

= ***Dwell*** — In ***John 1:38*** we are told that John and Andrew asked Jesus “*where are you staying — (meno) — abiding or living?*”

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<sup>4</sup> Packer, J. I. (1994). *Growing in Christ* (pp. 19–20). Crossway Books.

<sup>5</sup> Robertson, A. (1997). *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Jn 8:31). Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

GENUINE FAITH produces a follower of Jesus who remains in the place of **listening** to the words of Jesus — **living** in the words of Jesus as if His Word was their home!

GENUINE FAITH involves a continuing — on-going relationship with Jesus — in which the believer comes **under** his instruction — **sits** in it and is **steeped** in it!

**Such an approach to living is inextricably bound up in the term DISCIPLE.**

The Greek word for disciple is μαθητής **mathētēs** (mah-thae-tase)

**DISCIPLE** (*mathētēs*) is literally — **the learner**. A disciple of Jesus does not merely believe — a disciple is someone who is constantly learning from Jesus.

*John 13:13–14 (ESV)* <sup>13</sup>You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. <sup>14</sup>If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.

*John 15:12 (ESV)* <sup>12</sup>"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

As we read the New Testament we find that a disciple was more than a mere pupil or learner. A disciple was an **adherent** who accepts the instruction given to him and makes it his rule of conduct.

**EXAMPLE** — there were the disciples of John (Matt. 11:2; Mark 2:18; Luke 5:33; 7:18; John 3:25)

**EXAMPLE** — there were the disciples of the Pharisees (Mark 2:18).

**EXAMPLE** — In John 9:28, the Pharisees told the healed blind man, "Thou art his disciple; but we are Moses' disciples."

Jesus says that the **true disciple** did not merely believe in the sense of "I agree with Jesus" or "I like Jesus." GENUINE FAITH results in someone making the

teaching of Jesus the basis for what they believe, how they process life and how they conduct their lives.

**William Barclay** — *The disciple is the learner who learns in order to do. The truth which Jesus brought is designed for action.*

## CONNECT THIS WITH PHILIPPIANS 2

*Philippians 2:4–8 (CSB)* <sup>4</sup>Everyone should look not to his own interests, but rather to the interests of others. <sup>5</sup>Adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup>who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be exploited. <sup>7</sup>Instead he emptied himself by assuming the form of a servant, taking on the likeness of humanity. And when he had come as a man, <sup>8</sup>he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death— even to death on a cross.

**GENUINE FAITH** means *hearing, noting, and doing what (Jesus) says, bowing to his claim to rule and manage us.*<sup>7</sup>

**BIG IDEA HERE** — A disciple of Jesus shows ***genuine faith*** in Jesus by **persevering** in, **remaining** in, **staying** in and **dwelling** in the Word of Jesus — not simply for academic satisfaction or for intellectual appreciation, but in order to find out what Our Savior and King wishes us to do — and then **doing it!**

THIS has always been the trademark of genuine faith. The New Testament (Rom. 4:11) describes Abraham as the “father of all those who believe.” Here’s what God said about Abraham.

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<sup>7</sup> Packer, J. I. (1994). *Growing in Christ* (p. 20). Crossway Books.

*Genesis 18:19 (ESV) <sup>19</sup>For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice....*

GENUINE FAITH / TRUE DISCIPLESHIP is not a matter of what I feel about God.

GENUINE FAITH / TRUE DISCIPLESHIP is not a matter of how I feel about something His word says about me.

GENUINE FAITH / TRUE DISCIPLESHIP is not about how I feel about my circumstances, myself or my neighbors.

GENUINE FAITH / TRUE **DISCIPLESHIP** is **to continue**. When Jesus teaches you something — when His word convicts you remain in it, live in it.

Jesus closed the Sermon on the Mount — the manifesto of His Kingdom — by saying

*Matthew 7:24; 26–27 (ESV) <sup>24</sup>“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and **does them** will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.... <sup>26</sup>And everyone who hears these words of mine and **does not do them** will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.*

**Eugene Peterson** — “Discipleship is a long obedience in the same direction”

**John 8:31-32 (ESV) ...“If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, <sup>32</sup>and you will know the truth,**

Here’s why GENUINE FAITH leading to TRUE DISCIPLESHIP results in **knowing the truth**

**1.** Jesus is not speaking about knowing truth in the sense of knowing and agreeing with some philosophical proposition. It is trust *in Jesus Himself* who said — *“I am the way, the **truth**, and the life.”*



2. The Word of God does not claim to *just contain* truth, but **is truth**; It is not simply **true**, but **is truth itself!** The bible itself is the **final standard** of truth. In **John 17:17** Jesus doesn't say — *Your word is true*. He says — *Your word is truth*.

It is only in the truth of Jesus that we see God for who He truly is. It is only in the truth of Jesus we that see this world for what it really is. It is only in the truth of Jesus that we see ourselves for who we really are. It is only in the truth of Jesus that we see what things are of real value, eternal value. It is only in the truth of Jesus that we see what is right and what is wrong; what is truly good or truly bad. It is only in the truth of Jesus that we see what things are really important and what things are not.

## II. GENUINE FAITH LEADS TO TRUE FREEDOM

**John 8:31-32 (ESV) ...“If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples,<sup>32</sup> and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”**

Jesus says that

GENUINE FAITH perseveres in / lives in His Word —

THAT is the mark of a TRUE DISCIPLE of Jesus.

That GENUINE FAITH leads to a personal relationship with the One who IS truth.

And as a result of knowing the truth / knowing Jesus who IS truth — you experience **TRUE FREEDOM**.

The amazing thing is that the world has NO IDEA what freedom really is. Apart from the truth of Scripture we have no concept of what freedom is. Many frame freedom as “I'm free to be me.” Others frame freedom as being free from rules or standards that prevent them from doing whatever feels good.

Jesus — the Truth-Teller in a world of lies — is going to tell us that TRUE FREEDOM begins with knowing we are slaves that need to be freed!

This moment will show the **professed** faith of some of the “many” in **Verse 30** for what it really was.

They have made a profession of faith in Jesus — and at least intellectually — believed that He is indeed *the Light of the World* and that if they *followed Him they would not walk in darkness but have the light of life*.

They might have been tracking with Him as He spoke about the way genuine faith perseveres — leads to following Him and abiding in His words. But these guys did not feel good **at all** about His words when He said that that GENUINE FREEDOM comes from abiding in His Word and knowing Him.

**John 8:33 (ESV)** <sup>33</sup>They answered him, “We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, ‘You will become free’?”

*Wait a minute — we’re descendents of Abraham, we’re Jews. We don’t need any deliverance. When were we ever slaves? We were never in bondage to any man — unless you count that 400 years in Egypt — or Assyria, or Babylon, or Persia! Other than that we’ve never been in bondage to any man. By the way — don’t mind those Roman soldiers you see everywhere.*

At that very moment they were in bondage to Rome — but could not bring themselves to admit it.

**That was their problem.**

They were descendants of Abraham. They had been hand selected by the One, True and Living God to be His chosen people. The One, True and Living God had entrusted THEM with His Law and His Word in the Old Testament Scriptures.

**With that pedigree how could Jesus be talking to THEM about freedom?**

<sup>34</sup>Jesus answered them,

So here comes His Word — Here comes the Light of His Word to expose them as something they could not imagine themselves to be — SLAVES!

**John 8:34 (ESV) <sup>34</sup>Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin.**

In Southern California — on the 91 Freeway going towards Riverside there was a dam on the opposite side of the freeway with a big Liberty Bell painted on it along with the words — 1776-1976 200 years of freedom.

But here’s the problem — We live in “the land of the free” — but people are slaves to passions, possessions, and position.

True Freedom is not a matter of political and social liberty (which we should never take for granted). True freedom is not a matter of religious heritage.

You can live in the “land of the free and the home of the brave” — you can be a descendant of Abraham, or a descendant of Baptists or Methodists or Presbyterians, or Evangelicals, you could have even gone to Calvary Chapel way back when it was “in the tent” — but NONE of that makes you **Truly Free!**

GENUINE FREEDOM is the product GENUINE FAITH in Jesus — a faith that perseveres in following Jesus and obeying Jesus.

**John 8:34 (ESV) <sup>34</sup>Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.**

He has said that GENUINE FAITH is a faith that perseveres in His word — which is the mark of being **true disciples** — and **they would know the truth** — and **the truth would make them free!** Here’s His words

**Everyone who practices sins is a slave δουλος to sin.**

**A.T. Robertson** points out that the grammar does not refer to a single act of sin — but rather a continuous habit or practice.<sup>8</sup>

*“Whosoever keeps on practicing sin [literal translation] is the servant δουλος of sin.”*

To be a **slave to sin** means that sin owns you — it governs you — it seeks nothing but to abuse you.

**Here is the interesting thing** — When we talk about sin we tend to talk in terms of specific sins — murder, drunkenness, anger, stealing, sexual sin.

Those are sins — but those are a by-product of something much deeper. Jesus is addressing the heart of the issue here — He is addressing the condition of sin.

Sin is a condition. It is a state of being. It is a state of being in rebellion against God. It is a state of being obstinate towards God. It is a state of being hard of heart towards God. It’s a state of rejecting God’s truth. It is the state of being in which we live as if we were God. As D.A Carson puts it —

*“the root problem is our rebellion against God..... our grotesque de-godding of God.”<sup>9</sup>*

**It is out of that state of being that sinful activities, specific sins flow.**

**As descendants of Adam** we are born into that state of being! We sin **by nature** and **by choice**. That’s why Paul could write in Romans

***Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,***

Jesus said that we are all slaves to sin — slaves to its presence and its power.

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<sup>8</sup> Robertson, A. (1997). *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Jn 8:34). Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems.

<sup>9</sup> Excerpt From Scandalous. D. A. Carson

Those listening to Jesus protested. You may protest. We all protest. We tend to see ourselves as basically good people who occasionally do bad things.

We have this estimation of ourselves because we compare ourselves to others. Before I became a Christian I would run into Christians who would ask me if I was saved. My knee jerk reaction was to think: *Why do I need to be saved? I'm a pretty good person. I'm not perfect but I'm not a serial killer either. I'm somewhere between Mother Teresa and Adolf Hitler.*

Jesus says — *No, you're bad people who once in a while do something nice.* And when we do happen to do something good we tell ourselves how good we are and we ruin it with our pride — basically turning that good moment into sin! So we're back to the reality that we are **slaves to sin**.

Again — We are so much like those listening to Jesus! We are great at minimizing our enslavement. “It’s not so bad. I just have to make a few adjustments.” In fact, in our culture “sin” is virtually banned from our vocabulary.

Tragically — in contemporary church culture there is a frighteningly low view of sin. Modern church culture has ignored or redefined the depths of the hold of sin upon us. In 21<sup>st</sup> century American Christianity, the great point of faith in Jesus is not **True Freedom** — it’s not to be liberated from the presence and power of sin — it is to the end of personal happiness. Hence the conflation of Gospel with partisan politics.

**John 8:35 (ESV)** <sup>35</sup>**The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever.**

His audience has referenced their relationship to Abraham. Perhaps Jesus talks about the difference between a slave and a son knowing that they would think of Isaac (Abraham’s son) and Ishmael (the son of Abraham’s slave.) Paul spoke of Isaac and Ishmael in **Galatians 4**.

Slavery was a present reality in the world of **John 8**. Those listening to these words understood this language. They knew that a slave was not a part of the family. They knew that a slave didn’t get the family name — couldn’t touch the

family inheritance. They knew that at any point in time a slave could be cast out and mistreated. But a **son** was completely different. A son was loved. A son was given the family name. A son was beloved by the father. The son is in the house and has access to everything. He can go wherever he wants to go. He can stay as long as he wants to stay. But the slave has no rights.

**HERE'S THE POINT** — If you are a slave to sin, the son's freedoms are not yours.

Jesus is saying — you want the place of the son! You want a relationship with God whereby He is **your** Father — and He adopts you into his family.

Jesus is essentially telling them that the reason they are slaves is because they are not **sons** of God. He essentially says — Since you are a slave to sin, you are not a child of God.

Sin exists. People are slaves to sin — and as a result they do bad things. You and I are PEOPLE! What in the world do we do with that problem?

**HERE'S THE ANSWER** — The conversation shifts from **sin** to **Him**

**<sup>36</sup>So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.**

**QUOTE: J.C. Ryle** — *Liberty, most Englishmen know, is rightly esteemed one of the highest temporal blessings. Freedom from foreign dominion, a free constitution, free trade, a free press, civil and religious liberty--what a world of meaning lies beneath these phrases! How many would sacrifice life and fortune to maintain the things which they represent! Yet, after all our boasting, there are many so-called freemen who are nothing better than slaves. There are many who are totally ignorant of the highest, purest form of liberty. The noblest liberty is that which is the property of the true Christian. Those only are perfectly free people whom the Son of God "makes free." All else will sooner or later be found slaves.*<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> J.C. Ryle — Expository Thoughts on the Gospels, vol.8

**ONLY JESUS CAN GIVE TRUE FREEDOM.** That freedom is a freedom FROM one thing and a freedom TO another.

Jesus frees us **from** the *power of sin* and the *penalty of sin*.

*Romans 8:2 "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus frees from the law of sin and death"*

Jesus frees us **to** a life of serving God.

*Romans 6:17-22 (ESV) <sup>17</sup>But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves δουλος of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, <sup>18</sup>and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. <sup>19</sup>I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves δουλος to righteousness leading to sanctification. <sup>20</sup>When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. <sup>21</sup>But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? The end of those things is death. <sup>22</sup>But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves δουλος of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.*

The Greek thought was that a man found his true worth only in being conscious of himself and in the free development of his potential. Thus he placed great value on the right to be **independent of others** and **to live just as he pleased**.

The Greek felt only revulsion and contempt for the position of a slave — the *doulos* — because the slave was **subordinate** and **dependent**. His position was looked upon with contempt because the *doulos* didn't belong to himself — he or she belonged to someone else. To the Greek that was awful.

But the early Christians understood that they had BEEN SLAVES of SIN. But Jesus had set them FREE! They saw themselves not as set free to live for themselves. They saw themselves set free to SERVE their Savior.

When you discover that Jesus, the true and forever King, shed His blood to purchase you out from under the power and bondage of idols and sin — rescue you from the penalty of sin — you don't want Jesus to be your 9-5 boss — you **want** Him to be your master! You want HIS will to become your will. You want HIS passions to become your passions. You want HIS kingdom to come instead of yours.

In that light the concept of Doulos became something wonderful

The apostles — Paul; Peter; James; Jude — all used the word in reference to themselves. They called themselves the doulos — the **bondslaves of Christ!**

They saw it as an honored and privileged position. They saw themselves as belonging lock, stock and barrel to the Lord.

**QUOTE: J.C. Ryle** — *Liberty, like this, is the portion of all true Christians in the day that they flee to Christ by faith, and commit their souls to Him. That day they become free men. Liberty, like this, is their portion forevermore. Death cannot stop it. The grave cannot even hold their bodies for more than a little season. Those whom Christ makes free are free to all eternity.*<sup>11</sup>

## **DO YOU HAVE FAITH THAT PERSEVERES?**

**REMEMBER** A.T. Robertson — *Your future loyalty to my teaching will prove the reality of your present profession.*

Are you abiding in the Word, living in it — living from it — living to do it?

Are you obeying the Word? Have you been freed from sin but you're living for self?

**ARE YOU TRULY FREE?** Only Jesus can set you free!

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<sup>11</sup> J.C. Ryle — Expository Thoughts on the Gospels, vol.8