

Characteristics of a Fake Believer John 8:33-59

In our study last week, we took a close look at the conditional, if-then statement Jesus made in [verse 31](#) of John chapter 8: *“If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”* We saw that Jesus was making a distinction between true disciples, and fake disciples, and that in order to be a true disciple and to know the truth, and then to be set free by that truth- in order to have those 3 benefits- we have to continue in His word. Not just continue *reading* His word, the Bible, but to live there- abiding in Jesus’s teaching and presence, letting Him affect every area of our lives.

Now, I don’t know about you, but for me, the concept of fake believers is a little scary. I would feel much more comfortable in the realm of just believers and non-believers, and Jesus indicating that there’s a third group of people who are disciples, but not *true* disciples- is a little unsettling. It would be easy to imagine this scenario as a spy thriller movie, where throughout the movie there’s a battle between the good guys and the bad guys, but towards the end you realize that some of the good guys were just posing as good guys- double agents! Or I’m reminded of some of the movies whose plot is that there’s a large number of people affected by some sort of strange zombie virus, but nobody knows who’s been affected by it until it’s too late. Everyone goes about their day as normal, but always watching their back and suspicious of those around them. Now I don’t believe Jesus’s words here are meant to cause sneaky suspicions to arise within the church, leading us to start doubting anyone’s salvation or commitment to Jesus. I believe the intent of His words is to make us aware that among those who think they are disciples, there are some of them who aren’t truly disciples.

Another place where Jesus teaches this is in [Matthew 7:21-23](#), where He says *“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. 22 Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ 23 And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’* These verses are another warning to us that there are indeed fake believers. These fake believers in this Matthew passage sure did look like true believers when they prophesied in the name of Jesus, cast out demons, and did

miracles. In fact they would look like super believers to us! But Jesus says even these won't enter into the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of his Father will enter. And what is the will of God the Father? Well, maybe we could sum it up as what **John 8:31** says: continue in His word, be true disciples, knowing the truth, and being set free by His truth.

You remember also the parable of the sower, who scattered the seed that represented the "word of the kingdom," the very word that we are to "continue in"- and in that parable is described one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet because they don't have firm roots, when persecution arises, they fall away. And there is seed sown among the thorns who represents the man who receives the word, yet in time the "*worry of the world and deceitfulness of wealth choke out the word.*" ([Matt. 13:18-23](#)) These verses tell us that there are people out there who hear the beautiful message of Jesus and receive it with joy and excitement- and for a time, they live as appearing to be believers. But in time we will see the fake believers separated out from the true believers who continued in His word.

And I believe Jesus's heart in sharing this is not *just* to make us aware of the existence of fake believers, but His teaching is probably more so intended to serve as a personal warning for those of us who consider ourselves to be believers, who consider ourselves as being "Ok" with Jesus. In other words, pure awareness and knowledge isn't the goal, but His words are offered as a "check," a prompt to cause us to do some self-reflection. We are warned of some of the characteristics of fake believers so that we as true believers can be careful not to pick up any fake believer habits. We're not to take His words and start judging and being suspicious of those around us, but rather, we're to look inward and examine our own lives up against the light of Jesus's word.

This morning, as we look at the rest John chapter 8, we are going to explore further the concept of "fake believers" and list out a few characteristics of fake believers that Jesus mentions in this passage. And my hope is not that you start doubting your salvation, no- it's my hope that we each would be renewed and challenged in some way as we each pursue being true disciples of Jesus. If we are aware of the characteristics of fake believers, then we can be alert to any fake believer tendencies that might pop up in our lives from time to time.

So, after Jesus stated the requirement of continuing in His word in order to be a true believer, in verse 33 it says... ([John 8:33-36](#)) Here Jesus points out our first characteristic of a fake believer- they are a slave to sin. The Greek word for “commits” in this verse is a present participle, in other words it is like our words that end in “-ing,” and the idea is that a slave of sin is committing sin in a perpetual, continual way. No human on this earth is completely free from committing *individual* sins. No matter how hard we try, there is a sin nature programmed into our DNA that we won’t be completely free of until we are residing in God’s Kingdom. But there is a difference between sinning out of a state of imperfection, and sinning out of the state of being a slave to sin. Peter says in [2 Peter 2:19b](#) “...for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved.” Peter is saying that we become a slave to the sin that defeats us. And Paul says that being a slave to sin results in death, so instead we should become slaves to obedience that results in righteousness. He says in [Romans 6:16](#), *Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?*

Are there any perpetual sins in your life that are overcoming you? Jesus wants to give you freedom, for you to share in His Sonship, and remain in His house forever. You don’t want to remain a slave to sin. What does Jesus say happens to the slave? [verse 35](#)... Again, remember Jesus is talking to fake believers, who He is likening to slaves of sin. And here in verse 35 He says that even slaves, (the fake believers), even they- remain in the house *for a time*. They might work alongside, and gather together with the rest of God’s family, for a time, but in the end, they will be removed out from amongst the true believers. [Verse 37](#)...

Here’s our 2nd characteristic of fake believers, Jesus’s word “has no place” in them. Often we make room for everything else in our lives, but it’s very easy to get filled up and not have any “room” (time, desire, focused attention) for Jesus’s word. Don’t let His word get rooted out by all the other distractions of life. Fight to ensure there is always a place in you for Jesus’s word. [Verse 38](#)...

This verse gives us our 3rd characteristic, fake believers do the things they hear from their father, and if you want to know who that father is, go ahead and scan your eyes down to [verse 44](#)- there Jesus tells them that the “father” He is referring to is *the devil*. We as believers need to make sure we are imitating God

our Father, and not imitating the fallen broken world- as it imitates its father, the devil. [Verse 39-47...](#)

Here in verses 43 and 47 we see a 4th characteristic of fake believers, and it is that they do not hear God, nor Jesus's word. As verse 43 states, the fake believers don't understand what Jesus is saying, because they cannot hear! And verse 47 explains why they cannot hear- it is because they are not of God- they're not following Him and surrendered to Him.

Every now and then, I get the opportunity to play music out at the Flat Rock Playhouse. And the shows they do there are top notch, elaborate scenery, lights, costumes, singers and dancers... and the musicians get thrown on stage and attempt to play really difficult music, at the exact same time as those lights, singers, dancers, stage hands, scenery changes, etc are all going crazy. As a musician, I feel like I'm playing one of those Simon Says electronic lights games- you know the game where the buttons light up in a certain order, and you have to copy what it does, pressing the buttons in that same order, and each time it adds an extra lighted button to the sequence. That game takes a lot of concentration, so in reading the music I feel like I'm focused, attempting to get through the Simon Says sequence, but all the while people in crazy costumes and bright lights are dancing, singing and waving around in my face. There's abrupt tempo changes, key changes, slow downs, cut offs, instrument changes, start and stops based on the action on stage- it's complete mayhem. So how does the band keep it all together, start and stop together, and focus to play beautiful music in the midst of such wild circumstances? Let me tell you the trick: all the musicians have ear pieces in which they can hear the voice of one person, the musical director. In the midst of all the chaos, there's a voice that the band is listening to that's saying to start or stop, cueing all the tempos, giving all the direction and keeping the band together. He knows the show, and is able to communicate with the Show Director above him who is choreographing and calling the shots for the whole show. There's been times where, unknown to me, the volume was turned down in my headphones and all of a sudden I found myself lost on the page of music, not syncing with the band, not understanding what was going on. I got lost and didn't understand because of one reason; I couldn't hear the words of the musical director.

Life is often crazy and chaotic, with endless distractions, all kinds of things blinking and flashing, dancing around you, and all of us go through transitions- life's tempo changes- and the best way to keep it all together and make beautiful music in life is to hear and listen to our musical director- Jesus. He knows life's show and is in continual communication with the Show Director- God the Father. Make sure you are tuned in and listening to His word, spending time in prayer with Him, and spending time reading His truth from the Bible.

There's another characteristic of fake believers in this passage, we see it in verse 39 and verse 41. Fake believers feel right with God for the wrong reasons, and thus prove themselves not to be really right with God. In [verse 39](#) the people felt right with God because of their ancestry- they were related to Abraham! They were claiming that their race, their ethnicity, was what made them right with God. Being born into a certain race will not make you right with God. Being born into a Christian family will not save you from eternal separation from God in Hell. A right relationship with Jesus is the only hope mankind has in this life, and in the life to come- He is the only One who can set us free. In [verse 41](#) they say "*We were not born of fornication.*" Now why would they say that? Perhaps they were bringing back up the rumors that had circled around Mary and Joseph, as Mary had become pregnant with Jesus out of wedlock. Perhaps they were insinuating, "Jesus, our parents were moral people, but it's questionable concerning your parents." Since most, if not all of us here this morning are non-Jews, then there's probably none of us who would place the race card before God. But perhaps we sometimes justify ourselves before Him like these in verse 41, by our morality, or our parent's morality, our upbringing, the good things we do and have done... or by how long and frequently we have attended church. Morality in itself will not set you free, it will not give you a right relationship with God. Only Jesus can set us free from the bondage sin has on us. And that freedom comes from knowing His truth, being true disciples of Him, continuing in His word.

The debate between Jesus and the fake believers continues through the end of John chapter 8. Jesus continues making a big deal out of His word; we see in [verse 51](#) He says "*Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he will never see death.*" This whole conversation grew out of Jesus saying "If you continue in my word... the truth will make you free" ([John 8:31-32](#)) And He wants these He is talking to, to be free. He wants us who are reading His word this morning, to be free! Throughout the whole rest of the conversation He's emphasizing that which

will set you free... His word! To continue in His word, do the deeds of His word, hear His word, understand His word, keep His word- and why is His word so important, how is it that His word can set us free? Because His word is the very word of God- God who created us and who holds life and death in His hands. And Jesus attempted to communicate this to the fake believers that day. In verse 56 He told them more about this Abraham guy whom they were claiming as their Father, He says... ([verses 56-59](#))

Jesus knew something about Abraham that the people did not know. And when He told them, they scoffed- basically saying "how do you know what Abraham rejoiced about? Abraham lived over 1700 years ago, and you're but a young man." And Jesus, in non-direct fashion, told them who He really was. *"Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am."* ([verse 58](#)) "I Am" is the name God described Himself as to Moses. ([Exodus 3:14](#)) Not only was Jesus calling Himself a name ascribed only to God, but the way He said it was stating that He existed before Abraham. I guess Jesus could have insinuated that by saying he was the "I Was," who existed a long time ago, but Jesus- being God, is more than the "I Was." He is the Alpha and the Omega- the first and the last, the beginning and the end, the One who was, the One who is, and the One who is to come- ([Rev 1:8, 22:13](#)) He is the Great I Am! He exists freely outside the bondage of time, the bondage of sin, the bondage of death- He is the only one who is equipped to give us counsel concerning the pathway to freedom. He is the only one who has experienced true freedom. When seeking life's answers, when seeking freedom in life, seek the counsel of the one who speaks from experience, one who has already accomplished the goal that you seek- and that one is Jesus.

May we each be completely freed by Jesus. May we not let any of these fake believer characteristics arise in our lives. Don't be a slave to sin- be freed! Make room in your life for Jesus's word. Don't imitate the world, doing the things that Satan wants you to do- rather continue in Jesus's word so that you can conform yourself to your Father in Heaven and do His deeds. Don't be one that doesn't hear- submit yourself fully to God, and spend time listening to His voice presented in His word. And lastly, don't hold onto anything other than the word of Jesus as to what makes you right before God. His word proclaims that we have nothing to offer to God- not race, morality, church membership- we have nothing to offer other than repentance before Him, and acceptance of His forgiveness.