

## **Identifying Impostors**

(John 8:31-36)

(preached 12/2/18; Pine Grove BC Sun AM)

### **Introduction**

Ferninand Demara was born in the state of Massachusetts in 1921.

He ran away from home at the age of 16 and eventually joined the army.

After a year in the army, Demara went AWOL, and in order to avoid capture, he told everyone his name was Anthony Ignolia, which was the name of a friend he made while serving..

This fake identity served him well for a while.

He even joined the Navy for a while under this false name..

However, his time in the navy was not fulfilling either so he faked his own death, took the name of Robert Linton French and faked being a professor of psychology at Gannon University in Erie Pennsylvania..

The FBI eventually tracked Demara down and he spent 18 months in military prison for desertion.

However, once he got out, Demara was up to his same tricks..

Over the next 30 years of his life, he impersonated a civil engineer, a sheriff's deputy, an assistant prison warden, a psychologist, a hospital intern, a lawyer, a child care expert, a teacher, a cancer researcher, a newspaper editor, and yes a preacher..

And he faked all of those professions under different names at different times.

His story was even made into a movie in 1961 called "The Great Impostor."

The most incredible tale of his posing as other people is the time he was abroad the Cayuga in the early 1950s.

The Cayuga was Canadian military destroyer assisting the US in the Korean War.

Well, the Cayuga came under fire and 16 men were wounded, some with life threatening injuries.

Demara was on board under the fake name of Joseph Cyr, who was a Canadian surgeon.

Unfortunately for Demara, he was the only doctor on the boat and everyone brought these injured solders to him.

Now mind you, he had never been to medical school.

He was not a licensed doctor, much less a surgeon.

Yet, Demara possessed an extraordinary IQ and photographic memory.

So while the injured soldiers were being brought to his small operating room, Demara grabbed a medical book off a shelf and prepared to help them..

In fact, one of the men had a bullet lodged beside his heart, and Demara actually operated on him, removed the bullet and sewed him back up to a full recovery.

The incredible story made the Canadian papers and the real Joseph Cyr came forward.

Demara was dismissed but never charged for his crime..

When asked about his life of deception, Demara said that he did it only because he could.

“Any organization has room for more people to come into it, but the first rule is that you don’t barge it. You create your own space and you simply live in that world without crowding out the spaces of others.”

For Demara, being an impostor was simply too easy..

In the life of the church, there have always been impostors posing as true believers..

Judas Iscariot is the ultimate impostor, posing 3 and 1/2 years as a true disciple and follower of Christ..

Yet, many have come after him in years since his deception..

Listen to how Jesus describes impostors in Matthew 7:21.

***21 “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 [n]miracles?’ 23 And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’***

That is a chilling passage.

Those are not verses to hang on your fridge or frame and throw up in the living room..

No one makes a Christian T-shirt with that verse on it because it wouldn't sell, yet those words of Jesus are just as true as other others he uttered.

But this is the only place that Jesus talks about impostors..

He tells a parable in Matthew 13 about someone sowing seeds..

***3 And He spoke many things to them in parables, saying, "Behold, the sower went out to sow; 4 and as he sowed, some seeds fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up. 5 Others fell on the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil. 6 But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. 7 Others fell [b]among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out. 8 And others fell on the good soil and \*yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty. 9 He who has ears, [c]let him hear."***

What we need to take note of here is this..

3 of the 4 seeds that are sown sprout up..

Yet only 1 of the 3 seeds represent true belief..

The other 2 seeds are impostors..

The come up.

They look like true growth yet the lack of soil kills one, and thorns choke out the other..

And the reality is that not every seed that springs up represents a plant that will make it..

The same is true in the church.

Not everyone that shows up and looks like a Christian is a Christian.

There are impostors that play the part of the true believer but they will not make it.

Later on in that same chapter, Jesus says this in verse 47..

***47 “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet cast into the sea, and gathering fish of every kind; 48 and when it was filled, they drew it up on the beach; and they sat down and gathered the good fish into containers, but the bad they threw away. 49 So it will be at the [y]end of the age; the angels will come forth and [z]take out the wicked from among the righteous, 50 and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.***

Look, the church is a dragnet.

It collects all sorts of people in it.

There are good fish and bad fish in it..

There are real believers in it and there are impostors in it.

This is simply a truth of the church age.

No one is at the door of the church offering a test of your salvation...

No the church doors are flung wide open and all sorts of people are collected into it..

Some leave immediately.

Some stay forever.

Some simply fake it.

The same was true in the ministry of Jesus.

Jesus came into the world, took the Scriptures and told people that he was the Messiah..

He then did some incredible miracles.

He raised people from the dead.

He healed the lame.

He gave sight to the blind.

He created a meal for 20,000 people out of thin air..

And look, his ministry was dragnet.

It collected all sorts of folks who followed him and appeared to love him and support him..

Jesus was the show in Israel and thousands upon thousands came out to see him...

Yet, when it was all said and done, and he went back to heaven, only 120 or so continued to follow his teachings and obey his word..

The dragnet of his ministry that once that 1000s of people in it emptied to the point of just a handful of people..

The magnet of his ministry that was once so powerful lost its grip once he left this earth..

And how do we explain that?

John puts it this way in one of his letters to the church describing people who leave the fellowship of believers..

***19 They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that [d]it would be shown that they all are not of us.***

Now the question that constantly comes to us is this..

How do we deal with impostors?

Where do we file this in our brain?

How does this fit with what we know about God?

Well, the first way to deal with impostors is to identify them..

In other words, how do we identify true believers?

What defines true Christians?

How do we know? How can we tell?

If someone says that they believe in Jesus, is that enough?

If someone comes to church, is that enough?

If someone has been baptized, is that enough?

Well, 6 little verses tucked in the middle of John chapter 8 are going to give us big answers to these questions..

In fact John 6:31 may be the single most important verse in answering the question of what makes a true believer in the entire Bible..

So let's take a look at this important passage.

And my prayer is that you would use this passage to first examine your own heart today..

Are you a true believer in Christ?

Do you pass the test of salvation?

But I also hope that you would take these verses to your family and friends...

The main reason I came back to the south to preach is the issue of false conversion...

There are so many people in our region of the world who are impostors..

So many people who claim to know and love Christ yet their lives do not display any evidence of their claim..

Look, I am not mad at these people.

Many were led astray by poor preaching and teaching in pulpits and Sunday school classes..

So I didn't come back to breathe fire on these impostors, I came back to rescue them from the fire..

And you should have the same heart..

You know people who fake their Christianity.

Now is not the time to ridicule them, now is the time to rescue them..

So first of all evaluate yourself this morning, but also arm yourself with some Scripture to go and rescue impostors that live among us..

Let me read these verses to us..

John 8:31-36..

***31 So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, “If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” 33 They answered Him, “We are Abraham’s descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, ‘You will become free’?”***

***34 Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. 35 The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever. 36 So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.***

We are going to note 2 truths in this important passage this morning..

The first truth we will call..

I. The Evidence of True Belief (31-32)

The second truth we will call...

II. The Exoneration of True Belief (33-36)

Let’s begin in verse 31..

## **I. The Evidence of True Belief (31)**

***31 So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him..***

Let's stop right there and remind ourselves where we are in John's gospel..

Remember, John 8 is set in the fall before Jesus goes to cross in the spring at Passover..

The location of John 8 is Jerusalem at the feast of tabernacles..

This was one of 3 Jewish festivals that Jesus was required to attend as part of keeping every part of God's law..

We have been at this festival since John 7..

Jesus has taught to the massive crowds here, showing them that he is the living water and the light of the world.

His ministry is drawing to a close, and this is his last chance with the largest number of Jews who have flooded into Jerusalem for this fall festival..

And the reason that this is Jesus' last chance is that the Jewish religious leaders are fed up with him.

He is not supporting their false religious system, so they set their heart to kill him and they will accomplish that at the next festival in the spring called Passover..

However, on the other hand, the crowds love Jesus..

They love that he feeds them and heals them and puts on a show of supernatural miracles every once in while..

And some come to him saying that they are believing in Him...

But don't look at verse 31 as a statement of true belief..

Many have already come to Jesus posing as true believers only to leave when he doesn't meet their demands of more free food and free healthcare...

So what you see in verse 31 are people like the seeds of the sower that are springing up around Jesus, yet they are not the lasting kind..

Now look, Jesus knows this because he can peer inside the human heart...

So he warns these impostors in the second half of verse 31..

***“If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine;...”***

There you go.

There’s the definitive statement on what true salvation looks like..

True believers are those who continue in the words of Christ.

In other words, they live a life that obeys the commands of Christ..

Impostors don’t continue..

They don’t obey.

Sure, they may jump out of the starting gate but they fall by the wayside..

Now, listen to me carefully so that you don’t confuse this or others.

This is not teaching that salvation is **kept** by continuing in the word of God..

The Bible never teaches salvation by obedience.

Jesus never teaches that.

Not one time ever.

Jesus is not saying that salvation is **kept** by continuing in the word.

Jesus is saying that salvation is **demonstrated** by continuing in the word.

Salvation is not **attained** by continuing in the word, salvation is **proved** by continuing in the word..

Here is the issue.

Anyone can claim to believe in Christ, but the truthfulness of that claim will only be seen in the days, weeks, months, and years that follow..

These Jews were running to Jesus and saying....

We believe in you...we believe in you...we believe in you..

And Jesus is simply saying..

True belief will be seen by how you do after your claim of belief..

I worked in family restaurant for 5 years.

The food was excellent and people would come from all over to eat their hash and chicken stew..

You would first time visitors all the time, and they would often leave by saying something about how good it was..

The owner was always pleasant with them, but he always said this...

If they really meant that it was good, they will return..

If not, they didn't mean a word of it..

And he was right..

Look, Jesus had people hanging all over him posing as true believers...

And his response was always the same..

Those who truly believe in me will stay with me..

You see, in a fallen world...

Anybody can say anything..

And nowhere is that more true than in the church..

I have heard people make all sorts of commitments to the Lord in the church..

I have heard people make all sorts of promises and vows to God...

They have the freedom to do that..

But guess what?

The proof of their vows will be seen in the pudding of their lives...

This is the defining mark of what it means to be truly saved..

Now, let me also add this..

Jesus is not describing perfection after a person's claim of belief, but he is describing a general direction of people's lives after a claim of faith...

People who are truly saved will still sin, but they will grow to hate sin..

They will despise times that they give into temptation..

And they will progressively move away from sin..

True believers aren't sinless, but they are making progress away from sin everyday..

And the reason is that true believers stay in the word of Christ and his words convict our hearts and move us more and more to obedience..

This is the evidence of true saving faith..

Saving faith continues in the word of Christ..

Saving faith endures..

It perseveres..

It presses on despite persecution, despite trouble, despite failures..

I was talking Wednesday night but the best test of salvation is a trial..

Because people who stay with Christ during the darkest of days prove their faith because they continue despite the difficulties...

Growing old is not good, but as you age and your love of Christ grows, you prove the truthfulness of your faith..

So that is the evidence of true belief, but Jesus isn't done..

Let's look to verses 32 to 36 to see..

## **II. The Exoneration of True Belief (32-36)**

Jesus continue to talk to these people .....

***32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”***

Everyone loves the word free..

Free country..

Free food.

Free continental breakfast.

But Jesus’ use of the word free far exceeds any of those ideas of freedom..

The greatest freedom anyone can feel is the freedom from sin..

Look, I appreciate the freedom of this country.

I am grateful to the Lord that I can preach the gospel in church this morning..

I am grateful for folks who provide that freedom by serving in the military and being apart from their families so I can be with mine..

I am grateful for folks who have given their life to provide a blanket of freedom for me..

However, the freedom that Christ provides is far greater..

Because the freedom he provides in his death isn't a national freedom, it is a spiritual freedom that frees me from the bondage of sin..

Now, phrases like "freedom from sin" and "bondage to sin" aren't understood by everyone.

In fact, there are people around Jesus right her in John 8 who don't understand.

Look again at verse 33..

***33 They answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, 'You will become free'?"***

You see, they fall into the trap that many people fall into as well..

Their minds hear the word 'free' and immediately think of national freedom..

Their claim is that Israel had never been enslaved to anyone..

Now that is actually funny because Israel had been enslaved numerous times..

The Egyptians enslaved them in the days of Moses..

The Assyrians enslaved them in 722 BC.

The Babylonians enslaved them in 586 BC.

And even as they spoke to Jesus on this day, they were enslaved to the Romans...

But the humor of the comment is not the point.

The point is that most people don't think of spiritual things when they hear the word 'free.'

Most think of national and physical freedom.

And the reason for that is that no one sees himself as a person in bondage..

There are billions of people in the world today, and the vast majority have no idea that they are in bondage..

In fact, if you ask them if they are enslaved, they will laugh and stare at you like you are crazy..

This is the response of these people around Jesus on this day..

“Truth will set us free?”

“I didn’t know we were tied up..”

Yet, the reality is that sin had them bound..

Verse 34...

***34 Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. 35 The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever. 36 So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.***

For 23 years, I lived under the bondage of sin.

Now, I had no clue of sin’s power over me.

In my mind, I just lived my life based upon what I wanted to do..

Yet, the reality is that what I wanted to do was all guided by my sinful desires..

This is the power of sin, and no one can understand it until God opens their eyes to see it..

These Jews around Jesus were caught in the power of sin.

Not only were they controlled by their own sinful desires, their false religion was led by men in the same bondage...

Jesus called the Jewish leaders ***“blind guides of the blind that were both headed straight for a pit.”***

If it is possible to be in double bondage to sin, this was true of the Jews around Jesus..

It is also true of folks in false religious systems today...

They are not only blind to their bondage to sin, they are led by others who are blind as well...

And the reality is that both of them think they are free..

That was certainly the attitude seen in the Jew here..

Yet, they were bound by sin, and those chains would lead them away from the God that they claimed to love..

So what was the solution to their bondage?

Verse 36..

***36 So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.***

The only one with the key to the chains of sin is Christ..

He is the only way to freedom in this world.

Sadly, many of these people claimed to believe in Him but he never freed them from their bondage because he knew their claim was empty..

Have you been made free by the Son?

What an incredible benefit of saving faith...

It exonerates you..

It lets you leave the prison of sin.

It frees you from the bondage of temptation and giving it to sin over and over..

It declares innocent of all sin..

It allows you to walk up to Christ in that day without any fear of being told to depart from Him forever..

This is the freedom that Christ offers this morning.

It is not a freedom of the press...

It is not the freedom to assemble..

It is not the freedom of speech..

It is the unmistakable freedom from the sin that controls every aspect of your life without you even knowing it..

But that freedom that comes with a price..

You must give up trusting in yourself and you must put all your trust in Christ..

And you must repent of the sin in your life.

You must regret it.

You must mourn over it.

And you must not return to it...

Freedom is found in Christ when we repent and trust fully in Him alone.

## **Conclusion**

Where does this hit you this morning?

Are you an impostor in here this morning?

Did you make an empty declaration that you believed in Christ only to see that you have not continued with Christ?

If so, repent and believe in Christ as Lord and Savior.

Don't worry about what people will say.

Worry about what Jesus will say when you try to enter heaven and find no way in..

Are you someone who simply realizes the bondage that you are in to sin?

If so, repent and believe in Christ as Lord and Savior..

Are you someone who knows others that are faking their way through Christianity?

If so, take this passage and lovingly call them to repent and trust in Christ.

I can't think of another passage in the Bible that applies to folks in our part of the world than this passage.

So many people are posing as believers in the south, yet all of them are still in bondage to sin, though they haven't the slightest clue.

Find freedom today.

Give up the charade and truly come to Christ this morning..

Ferninand Demara had a sad ending to his life of posing as other people..

At the end of the day, he was broke and homeless in Southern California..

The man who had written a book about his life actually took him into his home for a while until he began impersonating him..

The final few months of his life were spent in deep depression until he died from a heart attack at the age of 60..

The doctor that cared for him in the final few months of his life was quoted in the NY Times as saying this..

"Over the past few weeks, all Mr Demara said was he wished he could die and go to heaven."

I have no idea of the spiritual condition of the man who faked his way through life, but I don't know this..

He didn't fake his way into heaven.

If he got there, it's based solely on his belief in Christ..

And the same is true of all of us.

There will be no impostors in heaven, so make sure your faith is genuine today.

Let us pray.