

So today we have the title - Anchored in the word, or put another way, "The word of God is our anchor in the storm"

Last week we learnt how our obedience to God gives us a life that is blessed. It's true that God loves you and He has an amazing plan for your life. He wants you to be happy and He wants to bless you, but there's more to His plans and purposes than that. Today we are thinking about how the word of God is our anchor in the storm, referring to John chapter 8 verse 32

A few weeks ago Andrew spoke to us about Jesus calming the storm and the disciples witnessing the power of God and in turn learning to trust Him. We learnt that in the same way we trust God in life's storms. But for Jesus, and His word to be our anchor in the storm we need to be in his boat! Andrew shared that Whilst those around felt the effects of Jesus calming the storm it was only the disciples who were actually with him who truly appreciated the calmness and reassurance because Jesus was with them, close to them, in their boat. So if Jesus is to be our anchor we need to be in his boat. We need to decide if we are his disciples. God wants a personal relationship with each of us. And He wants us to partner with Him in sharing His love and the Gospel of Jesus Christ with those who don't know Him.

So today we are linking this idea of safety and security with the truth. That is God's truth, the Bible, the word of God. If we are his disciples and we have made that decision to be in his boat we need to get serious about studying the Bible and we need to think carefully when we refer to God's word as the truth. We are going to put today's scripture John 8 verse 32 in context. We're going to look at what has just happened before Jesus spoke these words. I have chosen the Message version today:

8¹⁻² Jesus went across to Mount Olives, but he was soon back in the Temple again. Swarms of people came to him. He sat down and taught them.

3-6 The religion scholars and Pharisees led in a woman who had been caught in an act of adultery. They stood her in plain sight of everyone and said, "Teacher, this woman was caught red-handed in the act of adultery. Moses, in the Law, gives orders to stone such persons. What do you say?" They were trying to trap him into saying something incriminating so they could bring charges against him.

6-8 Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger in the dirt. They kept at him, badgering him. He straightened up and said, "The sinless one among you, go first: Throw the stone." Bending down again, he wrote some more in the dirt.

9-10 Hearing that, they walked away, one after another, beginning with the oldest. The woman was left alone. Jesus stood up and spoke to her. "Woman, where are they? Does no one condemn you?"

11 "No one, Master."

"Neither do I," said Jesus. "Go on your way. From now on, don't sin."

12 Jesus once again addressed them: "I am the world's Light. No one who follows me stumbles around in the darkness. I provide plenty of light to live in."

13 The Pharisees objected, "All we have is your word on this. We need more than this to go on."

14-18 Jesus replied, "You're right that you only have my word. But you can depend on it being true. I know where I've come from and where I go next. You don't know where I'm from or where I'm headed. You decide according to what you can see and touch. I don't make judgments like that. But even if I did, my

judgment would be true because I wouldn't make it out of the narrowness of my experience but in the largeness of the One who sent me, the Father. That fulfils the conditions set down in God's Law: that you can count on the testimony of two witnesses. And that is what you have: You have my word and you have the word of the Father who sent me."

¹⁹ They said, "Where is this so-called Father of yours?"

Jesus said, "You're looking right at me and you don't see me. How do you expect to see the Father? If you knew me, you would at the same time know the Father."

²⁰ He gave this speech in the Treasury while teaching in the Temple. No one arrested him because his time wasn't yet up.

²¹ Then he went over the same ground again. "I'm leaving and you are going to look for me, but you're missing God in this and are headed for a dead end. There is no way you can come with me."

²² The Jews said, "So, is he going to kill himself? Is that what he means by 'You can't come with me'?"

²³⁻²⁴ Jesus said, "You're tied down to the mundane; I'm in touch with what is beyond your horizons. You live in terms of what you see and touch. I'm living on other terms. I told you that you were missing God in all this. You're at a dead end. If you won't believe I am who I say I am, you're at the dead end of sins. You're missing God in your lives."

²⁵⁻²⁶ They said to him, "Just who are you anyway?"

Jesus said, "What I've said from the start. I have so many things to say that concern you, judgments to make that affect you, but if you don't accept the trustworthiness of the One who commanded my words and acts, none of it matters. That is who you are questioning—not me but the One who sent me."

²⁷⁻²⁹ They still didn't get it, didn't realize that he was referring to the Father. So Jesus tried again. "When you raise up the Son of Man, then you will know who I am—that I'm not making this up, but speaking only what the Father taught me. The One who sent me stays with me. He doesn't abandon me. He sees how much joy I take in pleasing him."

³⁰ When he put it in these terms, many people decided to believe.

³¹⁻³² Then Jesus turned to the Jews who had claimed to believe in him. "If you stick with this, living out what I tell you, you are my disciples for sure. Then you will experience for yourselves the truth, and the truth will free you."

As I read this I felt some of the frustrations Jesus must have felt when he was trying to make the crowds understand who he really was and how, if they believed Him, they could have a different life. Some listened and did believe, as it says in verse 29 and 30. He said,

"The One who sent me stays with me. He doesn't abandon me. He sees how much joy I take in pleasing him." ³⁰When he put it in these terms, many people decided to believe.

But then he specifically spoke to the Jews, who *had claimed* to believe in Him, the amplified version of verse 31 and 32 is “If you abide in My word [continually obeying My teachings and living in accordance with them, then] you are truly My disciples. ³² And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

Abide in my word – abide, to keep to, to hold on to, to act in accordance with, to obey, to acknowledge and to respect, is this how we see the word of God.

Jesus taught that if you Abide in His word, the Bible has the truth about salvation and how to live, which sets us free.

Well that all sounds good.

I abide in the word, read my bible, I acknowledge it as the truth, I hold on to what it says and act accordingly, then I will know the truth and the truth will set me free, set me free from sin and the penalty of sin which is death. Sorted. Is that it then? Is that enough? Is it that simple?

Well in one way yes, but if we are completely honest, are we really there? Are we truly his disciples? Do we absolutely believe the bible’s truths over everything else, over the experts, the intellectuals of our modern age, over whatever the latest theory is on this and that?

Am I able to honestly say “I am truly His disciple, I know the truth, the truth that sets me free, the truth that is my anchor in the storm,

To decide, I think we need to look at who we really are.

Are there parts of our lives that need a reality check? We need to ask God to reveal to us what we are really like. Not who we think we are, or try to be, but the real us. We live in a world which on one hand seems transparent, there is cctv everywhere, watching and recording our movements, our lives are displayed on social media, with us uploading and sharing photos of where we are spending our days and who we are sharing them with, and even what food is on our plate. It seems we share so much about ourselves with others.

But is this the truth about who we are? We also live in a world where we show a false image of ourselves with airbrushing in magazines being the norm and more and more of us feeling pressured to look a certain way. The statistics for mental anxiety these days is shocking, and I wonder if the pressures to have a certain way of life is contributing to this. We too often compare ourselves with others. We need to have the latest technology and as the phrase goes, keep up with the Joneses. An article in the guardian last year said that by the end of 2016, the average uk household would owe close to £10,000 in debt with loans, credit cards and overdrafts, and that’s without any mortgage debt. Many families are increasingly depending on credit to be able to afford essential items. When debt seems to be the norm with those around us, how easily do we see this as acceptable. Does this contribute to how we see ourselves? We think we are coping ok but really we can't afford to buy what we need. Is the public face we show, and the way we live our lives, who we really are?

And what are we really like to live with? Is the behaviour we show to each other in church the same behaviour we show at home? Is the way we are behaving in line with what God wants for us? Are we behaving like Disciples who know the truth, who know what the Bible says about who we are, how we should spend our time and money and how we should treat each other?

If the truth sets us free from sin, what can we do to make sure we know what the truth is? If someone came up to you today having heard this scripture, and asked you what the truth is, what would you say? Which truths can we find in His word that convinces us that His ways are best? Which truths can we find that will convince us that it's not about what we have or how we look that matters. Over the years it is the teaching of 'Who I am in Christ' that has had the biggest impact on my life. I need to see myself as God sees me. Believe me, if I didn't I certainly would not be standing here now. God sees our potential, he sees our weaknesses and flaws but still says, You can do things because I am your strength, , You are a new creation, you are a child of God, you are holy and blameless in my sight. The result of discovering who we really are brings freedom. The result of accepting that God wants us to let go of accumulating stuff is freedom. The result of letting go, of competing for position, of striving for perfection, is freedom. Freedom comes by taking the word, finding truths and not just knowing them but accepting them and applying them.

When in life do we experience freedom? For me it is when I live life simply, maybe on holiday when all I have for possessions is a suitcase of clothes. When I have less stuff around me I feel free. I think there is nothing better than having a good clear out! Spiritually, when we have no baggage, we are free. God doesn't want us to be walking around with baggage, with stuff that we're holding on to, with stuff that drags us down, He wants us to be free.

So for me, truth 1 – hand over the baggage – you can say the verse with me I'm sure, "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you." This word is your anchor, God wants to take your worries from you. He knows that unless you hand them over to Him you can't receive His freedom and live in His peace.

What are you holding to? Can you acknowledge it and hand it over to him?

Truth 2

I, we, need God's love everyday. Getting topped up with God's love and His truths once a week when we are here isn't enough. We need to turn to Him every day. Lamentations chapter 3, verses 22 - 23 says.

"Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."

The Bible wouldn't say His compassions are there every day if God wasn't expecting us to need Him every day. There are days when I feel so consumed by stuff, pressures of home life, work, friends in need and sometimes just my high expectations on myself to have everything just so that I forget to come to Him and get my daily dose of His love. Those days are always a struggle and I am learning to make sure it doesn't happen! And let's not come to Him apologetically saying oh here I am again God. I need some compassion and love today. The truth is God is there, ready and waiting. He is waiting to pour His love into us.

Truth number 3 He never leaves us. Let's consider life's storms, to many it could be loneliness, rejection, humiliation, illness, to some the storm may be an addiction which has come about from trying to escape from the pressures of everyday life. Which words, which truths can we speak when we pray for those we know who are struggling. If we are truly disciples we should know the scriptures that speak into these situations. You can probably think of some right now. I think of Hebrews 13 verse 5. Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

And this truth from Isaiah

When you pass through the waters, I *will be* with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, Nor shall the flame scorch you. For I *am* the LORD your God,

Sometimes we can get used to the words we read and it is good to look at a different version, especially when we are challenging ourselves and considering do I really believe this. Is the word my anchor? DO I trust it when everything is going wrong around me? Those words from Isaiah in the message version go like this:

“Don’t be afraid, I’ve redeemed you.
I’ve called your name. You’re mine.
When you’re in over your head, I’ll be there with you.
When you’re in rough waters, you will not go down.
When you’re between a rock and a hard place,
it won’t be a dead end—
Because I am GOD, your personal God, The Holy of Israel, your Saviour.

It was Mark Clay last week who challenged us to consider if we really do trust God with all our heart. Today we need to consider who we really are. There is a famous phrase, it is in the hard times that we grow the most. I believe that it’s in the hard times that you find out who you really are. As Christians, it’s in the hard times that we find out if we are truly disciples. We find out if we really know the truths. In those moments of pain, loss, confusion, stress, can we recall scripture that can be our anchor. It really is too late to look for those scriptures when you are in a storm, you need to have them in store, ready.

Proverbs 4 verse 21 and 22 says “My son, pay attention to my words *and* be willing to learn; Open your ears to my sayings. Do not let them escape from your sight; Keep them in the centre of your heart”

Are we willing to learn, willing to spend time finding the truths that we can learn by heart, ready to quote when we need to. There’s a little book that I sometimes turn to when I need a scripture and it is organised into sections with headings like, Disappointment, Grief, Healing,

It’s a great tool, but it would be even better if I didn’t need it, if I had those scriptures in my head ready to use! Until then I do use it because I know that “the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword.” When we see the Bible in this way there is a shift. It is true that when the word is our anchor, it holds us firm and keeps us safe in the storm. But when it is compared to a two-edged sword it becomes something we can hold, it is our tool in the battle. It isn’t that long since we studied the armour of God, looking at Ephesians 6 verse 17. Take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. There’s the instruction, take the sword, use it. There really is power when we not only know the truths, but we speak them aloud. God created everything with His words. Proverbs 18 verse 21 says “Death and life *are* in the power of the tongue”

So if we are truly disciples, we acknowledge that the word of God is our anchor in the storm, we believe that the promises of love, protection and guidance are there for us, we also accept the responsibility of learning what the Bible says, learning scripture to say aloud when we are in life’s storms. Having said that, I also accept this isn’t easy. God knew this and that is why we have the Holy Spirit with us.

If we let the Holy Spirit into our life He can work with issues we have, hurts, pride, anger, forgiveness, all those things that separate us from God and can prevent us from accepting the truths and promises in the

Bible. When we let the Holy Spirit work in us, we are ready to accept the truths that set us free. I am a strong supporter of the freedom in Christ course. With each week, truths are explored and with the support of the course leaders, people are able to acknowledge if there are any issues that hold them back from accepting these truths. Unless these issues are dealt with, people can't move on and their freedom is limited.

I don't think you can be a bit free. Looking at the image on the screen, if these chains were around you, you would definitely know about it. You are either free or you aren't. We might hide things in our heart, hurts from the past, anxieties about the future, but when we hide them we are fooling ourselves. God wants us to be free so we can enjoy all he has for us. How can we enjoy life if we are burdened with worry, fear and bitterness?

Verse 31 starts If you are truly My disciples... So the question is who are you? Who is the real you? Forget the public face you show to the world... Acknowledge who you really are. Ask God to reveal to you the parts of you that you hold back from him. Acknowledge the hurts that are stopping you from receiving his peace. Give your baggage to him. Spend time in the word, search yourself and acknowledge who you really are and how this lines up with who God says you are and who you can be. When you trust God, you can allow His love and his truth to change you into being more like Him.

I don't want anyone to settle for a life that is less than what God has for them. As parents we have dreams of what we want for our children, we want peace, we want joy, we want fulfilment,

Our Heavenly Father is the same. For me to believe that I am Anchored in The word I need to look at myself and ask, do I really believe the truths and promises that tell me that I can cast my care on Him, that God's love is new every day, and that He will never leave me. Can I trust that anchor to keep me safe? Is my understanding of the word something I treasure in my heart? Something more than head knowledge, something I know well enough to quote when I need to, fully believing the power behind the words in am saying? Do these truths translate into action? can share the same truths with those I meet who need to know them?

I want to encourage you not to settle for anything less than the best life Christ has for you. If you're ready to do that, then pray this with me:

"Lord, in Jesus' name, I pray that You would challenge me to acknowledge who I really am. I am committed to learning who I am in you, finding and learning the scriptures that tell me how you see me, rather than how I see myself. I will spend time in the word, learning the truths that will be my anchor in life's storms. I am no longer worried about my future but excited about all that You have planned for me. Thank you Lord that your love is new every day. Thank you that you never leave me, and Thank you that your word is the truth and it does set me free."

Amen