

Reformation Sunday

October 30, 2016

Prayer of the Day: Gracious Lord, our refuge and strength, pour out your Holy Spirit on your faithful people. Keep them steadfast in your Word, protect and comfort them in all temptations, defend them against all their enemies, and bestow on the Church your saving peace; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Verse of the Day: Alleluia! If you continue in my Word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free. Alleluia! (John 8:31,32)

Sermon Text: John 8:31-36

Did our gospel reading sound a little unbelievable? No, not because it sounds so wonderful. Not because it guarantees you something truly awesome. Rather, if you are *set free*, then it means that you, at one point, are not free. It means someone threatens your freedom.

That's the strange thing. Because if you are like me, you already feel free. You are free to voice your opinion about the government— and not get arrested for it. You are free to choose where to worship, how you worship, and what you hear in worship. You are free to open up a business, free to shop somewhere or not shop anywhere, free to attend certain schools or not attend certain schools, free to get into your car and just drive. I'm pretty sure that at this moment in time you do not feel someone is coming to limit your freedom.

You are free; no one forces you to do something or behave a certain way. So, why would Jesus say: **"If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free?"** Set you "free" from what?

You notice we are not the only ones asking that. A group of Jewish leaders hear those exact same words and they instantly fire back: **"We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?"** You might remember the Jews lived under the iron fist of the foreign Roman Empire. They did not have the freedom to collect taxes for their own interests— such as, to repave their streets or give tax breaks to the poor; their taxes went hundreds of miles away to the faceless government of Rome.

John 8:31-36

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, "I tell you the truth, 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.

You see, the Jews understand Jesus is not talking about national freedom— or the freedom we have as Americans. Jesus is getting at something deeper— and they had a response for it. **“We are Abraham’s descendants,”** they cry.

Understand, the Jews are not just Jews by birth— just like we are born “Americans” and not “Europeans.” These Jews practice Jewish teachings. They are convinced they have a room reserved in heaven because they are **Abraham’s descendants**. After all, Abraham believed in the one true God and the one true God actually spoke to Abraham. The one true God promised Jesus would establish an eternal kingdom and Abraham believed this promise. So, if Abraham is their ancestor and received these promises, then they must inherit the same privileges automatically! Not to mention, the Jews knew God. They have the Old Testament Bible. They worship in a temple the way God wants. They looked forward to the great King God promised. That makes them different from Gentiles (that is, non-Jews). I mean, just look at the Gentiles! These pagans worship the Greek god Zeus. Fortune-tellers are picking over chicken livers. Drunkards guzzle down wine, families fight, friends destroy friendships, and neighbors have orgies! Those non-Jews should head straight for hell for their actions! (so they would say). Yet, if you asked the Jews: “Why should God let you into heaven?” they would point to Abraham and say: “Because we are related to Abraham!”

Yet, Jesus cuts even deeper than heritage. He is not painting future political freedom. He points to a deeper freedom— and the Jews are missing the point. **“I tell you the truth,”** (which, by the way, is Jesus’ way of saying: This is an absolute, unchangeable fact) **everyone who sins is a slave to sin.**” Yes, the Jews did not worship pagan gods, but they still broke the First Commandment by worshipping the man Abraham. Yes, they did not party with liquor and sleep around, but their self-righteous pride drained away the love they were to have for their neighbor ([Leviticus 19:18](#); [Matthew 22:39](#)). The Jews believed they had a free ticket to heaven because of Abraham— and Jesus unleashes a grim truth: *All have sinned and fall short of God’s glory* ([Romans 3:23](#)). Sinful desires, sinful actions wrap its slavish chains around the heart and imprisons everyone to the hell sin deserves!

That means we cannot point to the children’s Christmas services we in or to our stellar Sunday School attendance as reasons God ought to love us. We cannot find forgiveness in the fact we worship more often than just on Christmas and Easter— unlike so many others. We cannot look at God’s Ten Commandments, wipe the hard-worked-sweat from our brow, and say: “Well, I’m trying my best. After all, that’s what God wants.” God’s truth is clear: If you sin just once, you become enslaved to sin. Being a slave to sin means we will not serve God the way he wants us to serve him. Rather, sin dominates us; its desires flow through our thoughts, our wants, our actions. A pride-filled heart will only grow more puffed up. Self-righteous bragging will only become louder. Without a Savior, sin marks us as slaves and **a slave has no permanent place in [God’s] family.**

But! **...but a son belongs to it forever.** If our sinfulness marks us as slaves, then a son must be someone without sin. In Jesus that is exactly what you see— someone whose entire life— his words, actions, and thoughts are pleasing to God!

Consider that. Jesus is the Son of God— the Words he speaks literally come from God’s mouth. Instead of using this God-status to lord it over you, he shares Words of

eternal life with you. The Almighty King of the universe leaves his throne in heaven! He reaches down to help people whose own choices wrecked their life! Jesus is equal to God, and yet he willingly lays aside the glory he possesses as God so that he can suffer the consequences we deserve!

Jesus becomes human like one of us— a human who faces temptations, but never becomes a slave to sin. He remains the Son with whom God is pleased. Since he is a Son who holds eternal life, he can reach down, grab your ankle— and with key of forgiveness in hand— unlock the shackles of sin. **YOU ARE FREE INDEED!** *Hear the truth— and live the freedom.*

Look again at verse 35— and see how you fit in. Jesus sets up a contrast: **“The slave does not remain in the house forever...”** You know this. A slave must obey his master. The slave does not have authority over the head of the house. He is not an heir to his master’s riches. He does not live in the house, but rather in the slave’s quarters. He can be sold whenever the master wishes. He has no freedom.

“But, the son does remain forever...” The son is not forced to obey a master— just like how you live at home. You are free to enter any room in your house; you do not need permission. You are free to reach for food; free to use televisions. Your parents keep you; you are an heir to their estate. You reap the benefits that come with being a “son” or “daughter.”

So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. If Jesus paid off your sins by his death on the cross, then what are you? A slave? Someone working to earn God’s love and favor? Someone who believes the nicer you are to God the nicer he will be to you? No! You are not a slave to God! You are a son, a daughter of God! **YOU ARE FREE INDEED!**

We are talking about being a child to the Almighty. This is the One who holds back roaring seas and rushing winds. He chains Satan into the very depths of hell. He laughs at world leaders who boast in their power. And then he turns to you, with compassion pouring from his smile, and cherishes you! Growing up, did you feel confidence because your father (or mother) was leader of a group? People respected him. He commanded his employees to work— and they worked. Even though he held this power, you, his child, could freely run up to him and ask him anything! A smile lit up on your father’s face and he wanted to listen to you. Your father didn’t make you wait your turn; he didn’t ask you to “talk business only.” He listens to you! This is your relationship with God— a child loved by him!

You are Free Indeed! You get to *live the freedom!* So, since you are free to live for God, it means that you are not slavishly commanded to obey his commandments. Since you are free to live for God, it does not mean you are free to ignore your Father’s commandments. So, what does this freedom mean as a Christian? It means that our attitude towards the Word has changed.

Many in the world see God’s commands as rules meant to make your life boring and to starve you of satisfaction. Maybe you feel like you can abuse your body and indulge in excess because God doesn’t care. Yet, Jesus does not forgive sins so that you can sin some more. You obey your heavenly Father because you want to. His commandments (or as

Jesus says in verse 31, his **teachings**) are his. Because they come from the mouth of your Father, you gladly do what pleases him.

So, you are free to love God with a pure heart— and you do. You live comforted—not because you feel guilty when you are scared. You live comforted because your sins are forgiven! On your deathbed God's Word makes you certain that you are going to heaven. His Word brings peace and hope. God does not afflict you with troubles because he is angry with you. Jesus has made you a son, a daughter—a child loved by God.

YOU ARE FREE INDEED! Maybe that does sound a little unbelievable. Because you may already feel free. You are a free American to freely live certain ways in your freedom. Yet, the freedom Jesus speaks of deals with more than just your national freedom.

The freedom Jesus gives you is longer lasting than political freedom. It reaches deeper than your individual freedoms. Your Savior has freed you from sin's slavery. His innocent life unlocked the chains to sin's bondage. He has risen to declare you set free for life now!

That is the true freedom Jesus speaks of in verses 31 and 32. Your freedom is found in your relation to God. You are not out to win God's favor. You are not trying to convince yourself that you have contributed to eternal life. You do not mope around when your friends laugh at your life shaped by the Word. You find freedom in knowing Jesus has already made you an heir of heaven. You are free to serve God with an upright heart! *Hear the truth! Live your freedom* to serve God with thanks! **YOU ARE FREE—FREE INDEED!**