

# "Set Free"

## John 8:31-36

October 26, 2014

Reformation Day

Slavery is never a good thing, but always a very horrible thing, especially for the slaves. We not only read of the terrible mistreatment of slaves during Civil War times, but see the same thing happening today. A quick Google search reveals that there are 21 – 30 billion people trapped in slavery around the world even though it is not legal anywhere in the world. Of these slaves, 78% are in labor slavery and 22% are in sex slavery, earning 150 billion dollars for the traffickers every year.

But do you know what is worse than being a slave? It is not even knowing you *are* a slave. How is that possible? Most people today think they are as free as a bird to do as they please without suffering any consequences when, in fact, they are slaves. That's what Jesus says in our Gospel reading today.

When Jesus talks about being set free, the Jews who believed in Him were a bit perturbed. They said, "We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, 'You will become free'?" Had they forgotten the 400 years their people had been slaves in Egypt? Had they forgotten that they were presently a conquered nation living under the rule of Rome? No. They weren't talking about political slavery. They were appealing to their status as descendants of Abraham. They were the chosen people of God and recipients of all of God's promises and blessings. They had never been spiritually enslaved to anyone and would be saved because of that.

We might make the same claims even better today. Unlike the Jews, we have never been ruled over or enslaved by a foreign power. Concerning spiritual slavery, on this Reformation Day, we might appeal to our status as spiritual descendants of Martin Luther. We might use this day to be very proud of being Lutherans – followers of Luther – whether we are life-long Lutherans or Lutherans of lesser time. I believe there are many people who feel they will be saved because they are

Lutheran – either by heritage (“my parents were Lutheran”), by tradition (“we used to attend a Lutheran church once in awhile”), or by official decree (“I was confirmed and am still on the membership role of a Lutheran congregation”). Like the Jews in our text, we might say, “We are descendants of Luther and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, ‘You will become free’?”

Jesus goes on to define slavery. With emphasis, He says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin.” If that is the definition of slavery, that means you are slave. I am a slave. All are slaves for the Word of God says, “There is no difference between Jew and Gentile for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” (Rom. 3:22-23) Our master is not Egypt, Rome, or any modern day terrorist group or foreign power. Our master is sin.

How is sin our master? How are we slaves? First of all, sin is our master whether we know or admit it. Although Luther knew and felt sin as his master quite intensely (In fact, it was his motivation for beginning the Reformation), we often don’t “feel” our sin today. Having been brainwashed by the present day culture, we may be ignorant of what sin is. We may have bought into the redefinition of sin and the guilt-free lifestyle which our world proclaims. Yet, just because we don’t feel it, it doesn’t mean it’s not there and not controlling us. It’s like cancer. Just because you can’t feel it, doesn’t mean cancer isn’t there and killing you. Ignorance is not bliss with sin or cancer.

Secondly sin controls you and me. It reminds me of a line by a comedian who was talking about quitting smoking. He said, “Quitting smoking is a very easy thing. I’ve done it a million times.” How often have you tried to quit sinning? A million times? The truth of the matter is that you can’t quit sinning. Neither can I. You do something wrong which the Ten Commandments forbids and swear you will never do it again, but you do. You fail to obey what God commands in the Ten Commandments and swear you will do better the next time, but you don’t. Sin controls you. Sin controls me. We are slaves to it.

Third, sin is your master because you cannot escape its effects. Jesus says, “The slave does not remain in the house forever.” In ancient times, a slave’s time in the master’s house was temporary. The slave could, at any time, be transferred, sold, or killed.” In the same way, as slaves of sin, our time here is only temporary. The Word of God promises, “The wages of sin is death.” (Rom. 6:23). We will all die because of sin’s complete mastery over us. It is our wage as slaves. You don’t have to go to the Word of God to see that we are slaves to sin. Go to a mortuary or a funeral. See the dead body. There is the proof.

How do we become free of sin? It is not by our own works or efforts. That was the way of thinking during the time of the Reformation. People believed that trusting in God AND doing good works was the way to be free. They believed that doing their religious duties would free them – pilgrimages, indulgences, and traditions – if done sufficiently and correctly.

But that is not Jesus’ way to be set free. Even if it was possible to be set free by doing good things, how would you ever know if you had done enough good things? You wouldn’t and you would remain enslaved. The Word of God says, “Be holy as I, the Lord your God, am holy,” and that seals the deal. Any notion of freeing yourself is impossible.

But don’t lose hope as Luther did in his early years in the monastery. There is hope. There is a way out. There is freedom. And it is to be found in the Word of God. Jesus says, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth.” This is a very radical statement. Jesus promises us something that our culture says does not exist: the truth. This is not just any old truth. This is not philosophical, scientific, or man-made religious truth. This is not Lutheran truth or even Missouri Synod truth. This is God’s unchanging truth.

What truth will you know by abiding in Jesus’ Word? First, you will know the truth of God’s Law. As you might have learned in catechism class, the Law is an “SOS” (Shows Our Sin). This is not a very cheery truth, but it is a very necessary truth to know. Knowing that we have sin and its consequences is like knowing you have cancer and its consequences. Hearing the diagnosis of

cancer from your doctor's mouth is not pleasant. It is horrible and frightening. Yet not to know you have cancer when you do will only result in your death. Knowing that you have cancer allows you to seek treatment and be cured.

It is the same with sin. Preachers who refuse to preach God's Law and sin are doing their listeners no favors. The Word of God declares that all who sin will die and all who die in sin will be condemned to an eternity in hell. Not knowing that you have that sinful condition when you do will only result in your eternal death. Knowing what sin is and that you have it allows you to seek treatment and be saved.

This leads to the second great truth which the Word of God reveals: the Gospel. This was the great act of reformation which God used Luther to accomplish: the rediscovery of the pure Gospel. Like the Law, the Gospel is an "SOS", but of a different kind. The Gospel Shows Our Salvation and Savior. It reveals the cure for sin, death, and hell which we could never find or achieve on our own. Regarding the perfect requirements of God's Law, the Word of God reveals that Jesus has already fulfilled all of those requirements on our behalf and for our benefit. Jesus perfectly did all that God requires of you. Jesus perfectly avoided all that God forbids of you. And you receive the credit for Jesus' perfect obedience when you are baptized into Christ.

Jesus also bore all the sin, guilt and punishment which you and I have deserved when He went to the cross and died. Not only do you have Jesus' holiness by which you can stand before God on the Last Day, but all of your past – all of the sin which you have done, all the good which you have left undone, every sinful thought, every sinful word, and every sinful deed – has been fully and completely forgiven through the shed blood of Jesus when He died.

Jesus also conquered that which is due us because of our sin, namely, death. By rising victoriously from the dead on Easter, Jesus has opened the way for you to pass through death and the grave to life and paradise as God had always intended it to be. Eternal life without the curse of sin, the presence of evil, or the threat of death is ours by Jesus resurrection.

Knowing this truth, Jesus says, will set you free. You are free in the best possible sense. You are free from the guilt of past sins. They have been totally forgiven. You are free from worry over the present situation. You have a kind and loving Heavenly Father who cares about you and will care for you in the best of times and, especially during the worst of times. You are free from fear about the future. At this very moment, Jesus is preparing a place for you in your Heavenly Father's house and He will return to take you to it.

So, live as free people, not as slaves. Don't give up your freedom to return to slavery. While God has given you freedom through His Word, there is one way you can give that freedom away: by abandoning the source of that freedom. Jesus says you will be free because you know the truth. You will know the truth because you are His disciples. You are His disciples because you abide or remain in His Word. If you fall away from that Word, Jesus implies, you are no longer His disciples. You will no longer know the truth. And you will no longer be free. It's like trying to lose weight or get into shape. The best diet will not help you lose weight if you follow it only occasionally. The finest exercise program will not help you get into shape if you do it only once in awhile. But regularly eating the food prescribed by your diet will bring about weight loss. Faithfully following an exercise program will get you in shape.

So abide in our Lord's Word. Be in the Lord's house regularly to hear His Word of Law and Gospel. Be in the Word of God in your homes every day as you read His Word, privately and together as a family. These admonitions are not given to restrict your freedom (as they are so often taken) but so that you might be truly free people.

If you didn't know it before you came to church, you know now that, apart from Christ, you and I are all slaves of sin, our own sinful natures, and the devil himself. As much as we like to think we are free, we are not. Yet, in Christ, that has all changed. On this Reformation Day, we do not praise Martin Luther, but we praise God and thank Him for using Luther to rediscover the authority of the Word of God and the freeing power of the Gospel. All the benefits which Christ won for us by His

obedient life, sacrificial death, and powerful resurrection which are given to us by His Word have freed us from guilt, worry, and fear. As truly free people we live confidently and joyfully as we live now. We are filled with hope and anticipation as we eagerly wait the life which is to come. God will not take back His promises and nothing can ever enslave us again. For, as our Lord said, "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." Amen.