

**October 27, 2013  
Reformation Sunday**

*“Jesus Speaks the Truth that Sets Us Free”*

**JOHN 8:31-36**

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**T***o the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. <sup>32</sup> Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” <sup>33</sup> 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?” <sup>34</sup> Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. <sup>35</sup> Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. <sup>36</sup> So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.*

Dawn was breaking as Jesus made his way down the Mount of Olives, across the Kidron Valley, into the city of Jerusalem and to the temple courts. Crowds of people gathered around him and he began to teach. The religious leaders came dragging a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. They wanted Jesus to tell them whether she should be stoned to death according to the laws of Moses. Jesus bent down and started writing with his finger in the dirt. When they kept on questioning him, he stood up and said, “If anyone of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.” Then he bent down again and started writing in the dirt again. One by one the accusers slinked away knowing in their hearts they were just as guilty of sin as she was. Then Jesus said, “Has no one condemned you?” When she said, “No,” then he said, “Then neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin.” These words gave her the freedom of forgiveness and the freedom to live a whole new life.

Only the words of Jesus can set us free from sin. From the time that we were born we have been enslaved to this problem of sin that condemns us before God and drags us down to eternal death and punishment. Only Jesus can set us free from the strength of sin and the power of the law.

**Jesus tells the truth about being enslaved in sin**

The religious leaders who came to Jesus could see an adulterous woman enslaved by sin but they could not see how they were also enslaved by sin. This was true also of the large crowd of people who gathered around Jesus to hear him speak in the temple. Like many people today, they just didn’t realize how desperate their situation was without Jesus.

“To the Jews who believed on him, Jesus said, ‘If you hold to my teachings, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’” Jesus is speaking to people who want to follow him on their own terms. They want to believe on him as their King who will take care of their daily problems in life and usher in a kingdom of glory for the nation of Israel. They want to believe on him as a great prophet and teacher. They want Jesus to help them sharpen their skills so they can live a better life the way you might sharpen an expensive chef knife in your kitchen. In this very same conversation Jesus told them about coming from the heavenly Father to rescue them from their sin. He told them about being lifted up on the cross. They filtered out the words

Jesus spoke to them about being their Savior. They wanted him on their terms just as many people do today.

You can see how strong these filters are in the way they resent the words of Jesus that spoke about being free. "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?" People who have strong filters are not able to see the obvious. The Jewish people had been slaves in Egypt for over 400 years and slaves in Babylon for over 70 years. What about the forefathers who were so enslaved to idol worship that they sacrificed their own children to heathen gods with names like Baal and Chemosh and Molech? They could see the sin in a woman who was caught in adultery but they could not see the sin that was so prevalent in their own lives. They could not see their need for Jesus to rescue them.

Jesus tells us the truth about sin. He says, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin." There are big sins and there are little sins. Jesus said in Matthew 15, "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander." Just this past week our court system in Santa Barbara County sentenced a man who had cheated an elderly lady out of millions of dollars from her trust fund. What did not make the news is the girl in high school who cheated on a test by getting answers from her friend when the teacher was not looking. If you had any unkind thoughts this past week toward anyone, that also falls into the category of sin. Sin enslaves us because it puts us under the condemnation of the law as we are told in Romans 6, "the wages of sin is death."

Jesus uses the strong word "slave" to describe what sin can do to us. At the time of Jesus it was estimated that one third of the Roman Empire was made up of slaves. We think of how the people from Africa were captured, put on to slave ships, sold in the market, and often mistreated. Occasionally slaves were fortunate to have masters who cared for them and treated them with respect and even helped them earn their freedom. Sin is a cruel task master. It delights in taking you out into the shed and whipping you until you almost die from the beating. Sin is a master that verbally abuses you and tells you how worthless you are and how there is no hope for you. Sin is a master that wants to tie you to a ball and chain and cast you into a lake, not a lake filled with water, but a lake filled with fire. Sin likes to control your sinful nature to convince you that you can save yourself and you don't need Jesus.

On this Reformation Sunday, we think of how Martin Luther entered into a monastery with the hope that he could free himself from the chains of sin by his own good deeds. I am holding in my hand something called a hack saw. If I were in a dark dungeon and chained to a wall, with such a hack saw as this I might be able to free myself from the chains and cut through the bars and get free. My best efforts at trying to free myself from sin won't even put a scratch in the chains that pull me down. In a great sermon on John 1:29 about the Lamb of God Luther said, "The Law shows me what I am. It reveals sin and burdens me with it.... Then I become frightened and would like to get rid of it." He goes on to say, "Indeed, each of us beholds his sins and promises to mend his sinful from day to day saying: "O Christ grant me a respite and stay the time of my death and I shall become pious and atone for my sin!.... As soon as reason sees that it has sinned, it declares, "I will reform and become pious." Martin Luther looked for his reformation in what he could do to free himself from the ball and chain of sin. Every human being on the face of this

earth is born programmed by the fall into sin to free himself from the ball and chain of sin. That's what Jesus means when he speaks about being a slave to sin.

Listen again to the words of Martin Luther from the hymn "Dear Christians One and All Rejoice." "Fast bound in Satan's chains I lay; Death brooded darkly o'er me. Sin was my torment night and day; In sin my mother bore me. Yet deep and deeper still I fell; Life had become a living hell, So firmly sin possessed me." But then Luther goes on to describe his hope in Christ that set him free. "But God beheld my wretched state Before the world's foundation, And mindful of his mercies great, He planned my soul's salvation. A Father's heart he turned to me, Sought my redemption fervently; He gave his dearest treasure."

### **Jesus tells the truth about being free through him**

How different it is from being a slave to being a son. "Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." It was God's plan from all eternity to send his Son to free you from sin, so instead of being a slave you can enjoy the position of being a dear child of your Heavenly Father. In the story Jesus told about the lost son, the lost son came to his senses after enslaving his life to sin. He comes up with a plan to go home and volunteer to become his father's servant. Instead of receiving his son as a slave and letting him try to work his way back into the family, the loving father hugs the son and calls for the servants to bring the ring and put it on his finger, and sandals for his feet, and a robe and a feast of all feast. Joyfully he proclaims, "For this son of mine was dead and is alive again, he was lost and is found."

The words of Jesus bring us such comfort and peace this morning. "So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." Listen to how Martin Luther described this amazing freedom in a sermon preached on these words. "This is what liberates me from sin-not I myself, fasting, the life of a monk or nun, the Mass, pilgrimage, or the intercession of Mary and other saints; but it is solely Christ's redemptive work. For no one else was born of Mary, died, was buried, rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven than this one Man, Christ. Outside of him there is no one in heaven or on earth, not even an angel, who could help us."

These words really comforted me this past week. "For no one else was born of Mary, died, was buried, rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven." Every single religion in the world without exception speaks about freedom that you find by following the rules and regulations of that religion. The Muslim religion teaches that you can be free from this world and enjoy Paradise if you honor Allah and follow the rules and regulations of his prophet Mohammed. It offers you the nebulous hope that if you do your best maybe, just maybe Allah will be merciful and gracious in the final judgment. Only in these words of truth that Jesus offers us do we have the hope that the Son does everything necessary to free us from slavery of sin.

"So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed!"

Martin Luther captured the essence of his freedom we have in Christ with these words that never cease to bring a smile on our face, a spring in our step and a song in our heart. "Christ has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all

sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver but with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death. All this he did that I should be his own, and live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as he has risen from death and lives and rules eternally. This is most certainly true."

I am going to repeat these words of Jesus and after I repeat them again I ask the congregation to end this sermon for me with a rousing "Amen." "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed!" Amen.