

John 8:31-36

³¹So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you remain in my word, you are really my disciples. ³²You will also know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

³³“We are Abraham’s descendants,” they answered, “and we have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say, ‘You will be set free?’”

³⁴Jesus answered, “Amen, Amen, I tell you: Everyone who keeps committing sin is a slave to sin. ³⁵But a slave does not remain in the family forever. A son does remain forever. ³⁶So if the Son sets you free, you really will be free.”

Really Free

I.

It was a Friday. It was not quite a month since the original document had been signed. Now the delegates met to sign a special, embossed copy. The first delegate to sign wrote his name in large, flowing script. His name has become synonymous with signing. He wrote boldly, he said, because he wanted those opposing to have no need to get out their reading glasses to see his name.

His name: John Hancock. The document: the Declaration of Independence. The first had been signed July 4, but this embossed copy was signed August 2, 1776. Hancock said: “We must be unanimous.” Benjamin Franklin replied: “Yes, we must indeed all hang together, or most assuredly we shall all hang separately.”

Freedom. So important did the colonists consider freedom from a far-off monarchy who governed them without representation that they pledged their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor to fight the most powerful force of their time to achieve it. So important was it that they agreed to disagree on some fundamental principles—slavery was left in place in many of the colonies.

And so...another war would have to be fought many years later. The Civil War had the same goal as the Revolutionary War—freedom. Freedom for those who had been held in slavery. Many more decades later the Civil Rights Movement happened to actually facilitate the freedom that had been promised after the Civil War.

Freedom. It has been said that the deepest craving of the human spirit is to be free.

Just before the verses that serve as the Gospel for today, we are told: “As he was saying these things, many believed in him” (John 8:30, EHV). That’s good. Many people were hearing Jesus, and what he was saying made sense to them.

But then...“So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, ‘If you remain in my word, you are really my disciples. ³²You will also know the truth, and the truth will set you free’” (John 8:31-32, EHV). “Set you free.” Those are tough words. By those words, Jesus deliberately implied that these Jewish people were slaves.

The deepest craving of the human spirit is to be free. “‘We are Abraham’s descendants,’ they answered, ‘and we have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say, “You will be set free?”’” (John 8:33, EHV). Huh? A huge chunk of the history of the People of Israel was the fact that Moses led them out of *slavery* in Egypt. Once they were living in the Promised Land of Canaan, several times the nation was taken into captivity—into slavery—for a time. Even at the moment in history Jesus spoke to them, the Jewish people were completely

under the thumb of the Roman Empire. They were, indeed, slaves in nearly every sense of the word. But they didn't want to admit they were slaves. They didn't want to see themselves as slaves. They didn't want anyone *else* to see them as slaves or think of them as slaves.

II.

“Jesus answered, ‘Amen, Amen, I tell you: Everyone who keeps committing sin is a slave to sin’” (John 8:34, EHV).

Being held under the thumb of a far-off power with no representation in the government that controls everything in your country is distinctly unpleasant and uncomfortable. Having your freedom of movement taken from you and your labor essentially stolen by someone who claims to “own” you is not only demoralizing, but repulsive. But slavery to sin is worse. Slavery to sin is a slavery that masquerades as freedom, but is not.

Like the Jews who believed in Jesus, we are content to listen to him when he says things we like to hear. We like to hear about eternal life. It's great to hear about God dealing with the wicked at Judgment Day. It's wonderful to be reminded week after week that Jesus has promised to be with us always—to the end of our lives, and even to the very end of the world.

But then Jesus pushes into some sensitive areas in our lives—areas that we don't want to hear about or admit to—areas that identify us as slaves to sin.

The Apostle Paul tells us: “Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message comes through the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17, EHV). Faith is worked in the heart by the Holy Spirit and you become a believer. That surely begins the journey.

But do you remember what Jesus said at the beginning of this lesson? “If you remain in my word, you are really my disciples. ³²You will also know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31-32, EHV). *Remain* in his Word. The Word of God is also what keeps faith alive. The longer a person who has been brought to faith in Jesus stays away from the Word, the weaker faith becomes.

If faith is not nourished by the Word of God, eventually it will die. People who do not see their ongoing need for the Word of God are slaves to sin. Is it enough to come to worship only on rare occasion to hear the Word of God rather than coming regularly? Is it unimportant to pick up a Bible during the week and read and study the Word? Does it seem reasonable to insist that you learned all you needed to know about God and your salvation in Confirmation Classes years ago?

When we think there is no more need to study God's Word, as if God has nothing more to teach us, we are despising the Word of God. When we hear a preacher and simply judge the sermon on how entertaining it is instead of having a hunger and thirst for a deeper understanding of the Word of God, we are despising the Word of God.

“Jesus answered, ‘Amen, Amen, I tell you: Everyone who keeps committing sin is a slave to sin. ³⁵But a slave does not remain in the family forever’” (John 8:34, EHV). No one but Jesus, himself, is left out of the category of slave to sin by Jesus' definition. *Everyone* keeps on sinning. *Everyone* is a slave to sin. You are a slave. Sin is your master.

Have you ever known anyone who stopped sinning? I've known people who insisted they had not committed a sin in years. Anyone who makes that claim is already full of the sin of pride and self-worship. Ironically, that makes him still a slave to sin.

III.

“But a slave does not remain in the family forever. A son does remain forever. ³⁶So if the

Son sets you free, you really will be free” (John 8:35-36, EHV).

Jesus was a *not* slave to sin, excluded from God’s family. Jesus was, and is, the Son—the very Son of God and the heir of everything God has. Jesus was the only One who was *truly* free. But he allowed himself to become a prisoner of sin. Your sin and mine hung with him on the cross. He was not enslaved; he could have chosen to walk away from that cross at any time and left us in the sin that enslaved us. But he didn’t. He paid with his own lifeblood as the sacrifice necessary to release us from the bonds of slavery. He paid for every sin—even the most private sins we are reluctant to confess.

That all-important message is what you hear in the Word of God. The Bible is not a book that gives a list of dos and don’ts. The Bible unfolds the precious gift of God for us. It tells His-Story. The story of God coming in human flesh for us; being crucified on a cross for us; rising from the grave to show us that the sacrifice for our sins was complete; ascending into heaven, promising to prepare a place for us so that we can go with him to that place when he returns for us.

IV.

“If you remain in my word, you are really my disciples. ³²You will also know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31-32, EHV).

Your chapter remains unfinished. You have been set free from slavery to sin by Jesus. To know Jesus’ truth is to be set free from slavery. You are free. But you will *remain* free only as you remain in Jesus’ Word.

Satan has not forgotten about you; he is still active. Daily he tempts you. Daily he speaks the lie that the concept of freedom means you being your own master, not you being the servant of Jesus. Daily he works to bolster your own foolish pride, so that it becomes harder to confess your sins to God. Daily he wants to shackle you to the sins Jesus has already paid for. “This world’s prince may still scowl fierce as he will, He can harm us none. He’s judged, the deed is done! One little word can fell him” (CW 201 v. 3).

Keep using God’s Word to fell your old, evil foe. Jesus has won the victory. You are free. *Really* free. Amen.