

Written Copy: John 8:31-32 “Your Chains Are Gone”

Reformation Sunday (Celebrated)

Sunday, October 30th, 2022

Text: John 8:31-32

³¹ So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples,
³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Exegetical Statement

Jesus has been testifying to the gathered crowd in the outer courtyard of the temple as to who He and where He has come from, that He has come to be the light of the world, sent by the Father, to proclaim the truth of the Father, all alluding to the fact that He is the promised Messiah. Many, but not all of those gathered believe in Him. Those that believe He knows their faith is shallow, and He seeks to strengthen it before the time of His passion comes when their faith will be sorely tested. He tells them they need to take to heart and remain steadfast in what He is teaching and so draw closer to Him in faith. By this they will know the truth about who they really are as sinners and who He really is as their Savior. And that truth will release them from their bondage to sin and the control of their sinful hearts. But they take offense at the notion that they are enslaved to sin and the sinful nature. They are descendants of Abraham who was the Patriarch of the nation of Israel that was called out of slavery in Egypt to be God's own free people. They are not like the Gentiles who are enslaved to idols. And as far as their subjugation by the Romans, this was all temporary until the Messiah does come and reestablish David's throne in Jerusalem. Jesus responds that anyone who commits sin, no matter how many of what kind of sin, is in fact enslaved by sin and the sinful nature. And in God's house (His reign and rule) the slave of sin has no place. But the Son of God has a permanent place, and He has the power to adopt those into the family from outside, to make them sons like He is. And like Him they will remain in a steadfast relationship with God forever. Therefore if the Son sets you free, you will be most certainly be free to live as child in the family of God, not earning your own freedom, but by being declared free by the work of Christ done for you and given you by faith

Focus Statement:

Jesus came from the Father to reveal to us the truth of who we are in the Law, and then the truth of who He came to be which is the Gospel. He came to save us from our bondage to our sinful nature, and through that sin, death, and the devil by paying the ransom price for all of our sins by giving over His perfect body and blood given into death in our place. By satisfying the demands of the law for our death, and by faith giving to us the credit for His perfect life, we are good enough to be adopted into the household of God through baptism and remain there forever.

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

We don't like to face up to the truth about how deeply sin is ingrained in our life, how we constantly miss the mark of God's perfection no matter how hard we try to obey. We are chained to our sinful nature like an addict and deny things are as bad as they really are. Even our best works are tainted by our sinful nature and count as nothing.

What the hearer should do as a result:

Realize that since we still have that sinful nature in this world, we continue to need to abide with Christ through His Word and Sacrament. The more we realize the depth of our depravity the more we treasure the gifts of salvation He gives to us. We need to maintain that personal relationship with Him through the means of grace to keep us free from becoming enslaved again.

Subject Sentence: Slavery to Sin Broken Only by Christ's Work For You

Introduction: Friend's Son Addicted to Heroin

It's not something you want to imagine ever happening to your kids. I have a friend who had a son that got caught up in drugs. Heroin to be exact. It's not something he ever imagined would happen to his son. He made sure his son went to Sunday School, to Church, Confirmation, attended a Lutheran Grade School and High School. Yet he fell in with the wrong crowd. And once the addiction took hold, he was not the same. His son hid it for a while, but couldn't do so forever. It was a difficult time for my friend and for his whole family. It's not something you want to discuss, even with other Christian friends, so it was a burden my friend shouldered alone. My friend tried to help his addicted son, sending him to rehab several times. But when he got out it didn't take long before he was back on it again. My friend loved his son. But when his son started stealing money and valuables from him and his other children, he was forced to kick his son out of the house. He hoped that this would wake his son up to take seriously the offers of help and rehab my friend was still offering to him. Instead, hard up for money for drugs, he and several others broke into the Church my friend attended and stole several flat screen TV's and other electronics. He left fingerprints. The police caught up with him. And he ended up going to jail.

That's the nature of any addiction, it can wrap itself around you so tightly that you become enslaved to it. Some of you may have had experience with that, perhaps not with hard drugs like heroin, but maybe with alcohol, or cigarettes, or gambling. And if not you, maybe a member of your family. I have that experience in my life. And one of the key problems is the person who is addicted refuses to see there is a problem, and refuses to admit they have any part in it. If there is a problem it's always someone else's fault. They cannot and will not recognize how tightly the addiction has a hold on them, how deeply they are enslaved by it.

Our Slavery to Sin

Now for those who have never had to experience this, thanks be to God. Yet there is an enslaving power that affects all mankind, even you, even me. And that is the subject of what Jesus has to say to us in our Gospel Lesson today. He is talking about the enslaving power of sin, and how it chains us and enslaves us into pleasing the sinful nature that is inside each and every one of us. Now this is not something that we normally like to dwell on in our lives. We might admit that yes, we have a few hang-ups, after all, who doesn't. But it certainly doesn't reach the level of enslavement, does it? Jesus in our Gospel Lesson would disagree with that.

John 8:31-32 ³¹ So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

As our Gospel Lesson opens Jesus has been teaching in the outer courts of the temple in Jerusalem. He is there in Jerusalem in keeping with the laws of Moses celebrating The Feast of Booths. He has been teaching the crowd that has gathered around Him that He has been sent by the Father to be the light of the knowledge of the Lord shining out into the darkness of the sinful world, and that those who listen and follow what He teaches will live in a manner that is pleasing to God. But what He teaches stands in opposition to the religious leaders of the day. So, they ask Him who He thinks He is, who He is claiming to be. He answers that He is exactly the One from God that His authoritative teaching and miraculous signs show Him to be. And what this testimony should be telling them is He is the long awaited Messiah. But the crowd is divided on whether or not He really could be. The Scribes, the Pharisees, and the chief priests refuse to believe that He is and are actively plotting to get rid of Him. Yet the crowd notices that even though the religious leaders don't believe they are not stopping Him from teaching openly in the temple.

And there are some in that crowd who believe Him to be the Messiah. It is to these believers that He addresses the opening verses of our reading. They have faith, but that faith has shallow roots in rocky soil. Jesus knows that faith will be severely tested in the time to come, especially when He is arrested, tried, and crucified. So, He advises them not just to hear His words, but to dwell on them, take them to heart, make them abide there, because in doing so they will know the truth, and that truth will set them free.

John 8:33-34 ³³ They answered him, "We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, 'You will become free'?" ³⁴ Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin."

At this point the crowd takes offense. But who exactly is it that is answering Jesus? The unbelieving scoffers, the Pharisees and the Scribes? Or is it those who had believed in Him? Perhaps all of the above. Whoever it is they certainly didn't like Jesus implying that they needed to be set free. Needing to be set free means that you are enslaved to something. And that didn't fly with these proud Jews. And it does give witness to why the people by and large refused to believe in Him, and in the end, would all reject Him. They had proud hearts that refused to admit they were slaves in any sense of the word, and in doing so denied the obvious. First of all, they obviously were not free in a political sense. They were under the control of Rome, as subjugated people. And before Rome it had been the Greeks, and before that the Persians and the Babylonians. Perhaps they could see themselves as free believing this situation was only temporary, that God was sending His promised Messiah who would overthrow these Roman occupiers and would reestablish the Kingdom of David in Jerusalem.

But at the same time, they saw themselves free in a spiritual sense too. Abraham was their father, the Patriarch of the nation of Israel. He was declared free from sinful condemnation and to be in right standing with God. They believed that because they were blood descendants of him that his right standing was also given to them. And didn't they earn God's pleasure by the way they kept the laws and made all the right sacrifices at the temple? The Pharisees even kept additional manmade laws and regulations to ensure they faithfully kept God's commands. Certainly, they did enough to earn right standing before the Lord. Who did Jesus think He is implying that spiritually they were enslaved to anything or anyone!

We know that no one is perfect. Yet God demands perfection from each one of us. It's a nice notion to think that God gives us a break on our imperfection because at least we are trying. Kind of like in grade school sports where everyone gets a trophy whether they win or not. But when we think God is like that, we are not believing in the One true God, but a god of our own imagination. The One True God is Himself holiness and perfection. And those He calls to be His children must also be as He is. We must hit the mark of perfection each and every time. The arrow of our thoughts, words, and deeds must hit the bullseye right in the center, and we constantly miss the mark. And that is what sin is, missing the mark of God's perfection.

Jesus says that whoever sins is a slave to sin. That is because when we sin, when we disobey His commands, we choose not to follow His will for our lives but instead satisfy the ideas, desires, and pleasures of our own sinful hearts. We were born with an innate desire to please ourselves. We were born enslaved to sin. We can try to fight it. Luther certainly did. He thought that by joining a monastery and living the life of a monk he could be good enough to please what he saw as "the angry God" who was angry with him over his sins. He worked hard, constantly reading the Bible, praying continuously, and demonstrating his sorrow over his sinful thoughts, words, and actions by tirelessly confessing them. He went so far as to throw himself against the wall and to the ground, to demonstrate how upset he was over his continued sinning in an effort to earn the favor of the One whom he saw as the angry God. But no matter how much he did it was never enough.

The same is true for you and for me. The chains that bind us to pleasing our sinful heart are strong, too strong for us to ever break them on our own. We need someone else to come along, someone stronger than us to break those chains and set us free. And that someone is Jesus.

Set Free From Sin By Our Savior Jesus

Romans 3:23-25a ²³ **for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,** ²⁴ **and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,** ²⁵ **whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.**

Paul in our Epistle Lesson teaches us exactly how it is that Jesus sets us free. Every single one of us has sinned, fallen short of the perfection God demands. Yet we are declared to be justified, declared innocent of the charges of sin with no sinful thoughts, words, or actions accusing us in God's presence. Not because we didn't commit them; we did. But because our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ paid the price to remove them from our record forever. He did this by becoming the propitiation: the atoning sacrifice, His body beaten and crucified and His blood shed being the punishment you and I owed for our sins. And that work of Christ has been credited to your account through the faith you have been given in Baptism, and by the Gospel. The Holy Spirit in granting you faith has created a new heart within you, one that desires to obey the Lord your God out of love for Him, the same love that moved Jesus to be your atoning sacrifice. It's that gracious gift, and that work of faith, that breaks our enslavement to our sinful nature. It declares us to be in right standing with God, not because of anything you have done, because you could never do enough. But because of everything Jesus has done for you.

John 8:35-36 ³⁵ **The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever.** ³⁶ **So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.**

One who remains a slave to sin cannot and does not have a place in the Father's eternal household. But the Son, who is Jesus Christ, was sent to be the sacrifice that sets you and I free from our slavery to sin. And His resurrection promises us that eternal home with Him forever.

Abiding in His Word

Now even though each one of us has been given this new heart as Jesus' free gift of grace, we still have our sinful nature that is alive and well within us. And it is always ready to encourage us, especially at the prodding and whispering of the world and the devil, to indulge in the things that it desires, which are always opposed to what God calls on us to do. As Luther pointed out we all are saints and sinners at the same time. And as we face the trials and difficulties of life in this world it can be hard for us to deny the call of that sinful heart. And so, we indulge, we fall off the wagon, and allow those chains of sin to wrap themselves around us again.

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This is why we need these words from Jesus just as bad as those listening to Him in the temple. We need to stay connected to His words, to abide in them, to meditate on them and pattern our lives after them. In doing so we abide by faith in the One who said them. They teach us the truth about who we really are, moving us to acknowledge as we did at the beginning of the service "*our unworthiness and confess before God and one another that we have sinned in thought, word, and deed, and that we cannot free ourselves from our sinful condition.*" But His words of truth do more. They move us to say "*Together as His people let us take refuge in the infinite mercy of God, our heavenly Father, seeking His grace for the sake of Christ, and saying: God, be merciful to me, a sinner.*" When we abide in His word, we not only see more clearly just how much of a sinner we are, just how strong those chains are that bind us to serve our sinful nature, but even more so just how strong is the forgiveness and salvation we have in Jesus Christ. We begin to understand that just as quickly we try to wrap those chains of sin around us, He comes and sets us free again, showing us in His word just how much He loves us, and how His work of salvation defeats our sin every time.

Conclusion

My friend's son did some time in prison. And that time was very hard on both he and his son. But it was not without fruit. The Lord came to that young man through the faithful visitation of his father, and through prison ministry. He began to attend Bible Study and worship services in jail. He and his father exchanged letters about how important Jesus was to both of them during this time. When he got out, there was of course the worry that he would fall back into his old ways. But he didn't. Then came the day when he didn't show up for work, or answer his phone. His father went to his apartment and found the door locked. He got the manager to open up the door, and he found his son lying dead in the living room. As he looked around the apartment, he was very afraid at what he might find: evidence of drugs. But he never found any: no drugs, and no drug paraphernalia. What he did find was an open Bible and a note pad filled with writings and meditative thoughts on the Scripture he was reading. It was filled with wonder and praise at the love and grace that had been poured out upon him, even though he was undeserving from the one who had broken his chains.

For that young man the chains were gone, he'd been set free. His God His Savior had ransomed him. The same is true in your life. No matter what you've done, no matter how tightly the chains of guilt and sin have been wrapped around you, through faith in Christ you have the same confession as that young man. Together let's repeat the chorus of our sermon hymn: "*My chains are gone, I've been set free. My God, my Savior has ransomed me. And like a flood, His mercy reigns. Unending love. Amazing grace.*" Your Savior has set you free to abide with Him now in this life, and is at work to keep you in steadfast faith, to take you home to His father's house on the Last Day. Amen.