

God's Word Sets us Free

John 8:31-36

Walpole had lived in his loft for six months and by now, it was filled with the paintings he had created. He worked day and night, stopping only occasionally for something to eat. He thought little about food and less about sleep. But what he thought about least of all was his rent. As a result, his landlord now stood before him, demanding the three months rent Walpole owed on the loft. *“Give me a couple of weeks,”* Walpole pleaded. *“I know I’m on the verge of making some sales.”* *“Absolutely not,”* the landlord said. *“You gave me that story last month. You won’t get another day’s credit from me.”* *“Look,”* Walpole said, *“think of it as an investment. Someday this loft will be famous and you’ll be able to charge a fortune for it. In a few years, people will come into this disgusting loft and whisper, ‘Wow! Walpole used to live here.’”* To which the landlord replied: *“Pay your rent now, or they’ll be able to say it tomorrow morning!”*

Obviously, Walpole’s pride got the best of him. He thought his superior artistry and ability would get him out of his predicament. But in the end, there was no way he save himself or pay off his debt. Such is the wayward nature of our human flesh, especially when it comes to spiritual matters. In our sinful pride, we too, often mistakenly think that we deserve God’s

approval, or that we can somehow save ourselves from our sinful predicament, failing to realize that there is no way we can pay the price for our sins. Fortunately for us, unlike the landlord, God's credit never runs out. He offers us, not only His approval and acceptance, but His forgiveness and salvation free of charge. But all too often, instead of taking refuge in the freedom and forgiveness that God's Word provides, we foolishly try to take refuge in our own works and abilities.

Such was the case with the Jews in our Gospel Lesson for this morning. St. John describes them as those "*who had believed in Jesus.*" But the Greek construction he used there seems to indicate that although they may have made an outward confession of faith there was no inner conviction. In other words, they believed some of the things Jesus said. They agreed with some of His teachings, but they didn't put their full confidence and trust in Him as Savior. And the reason they didn't is because they weren't sure they needed the refuge and freedom that His Word could give them.

That's why Jesus said to them: "IF YOU ABIDE IN MY WORD, YOU ARE TRULY MY DISCIPLES, AND YOU WILL KNOW THE TRUTH, AND THE TRUTH WILL SET YOU FREE!" The only way to be set free from the sins and fears and accusations that assail us, is to immerse ourselves in the Scriptures. In short, we need to seek refuge in the castle of God's Word,

where we can be protected from the assaults of Satan. For that's the only way to know the truth that will set us free.

In a way, it's little bit like young Tommy, who was playing in the garden. When his mother came out to get him, she saw that he was slowly eating a worm. She turned pale. *"No, Tommy! Stop! That's horrible! You can't eat worms!"* Trying to convince him further she noted, *"Now the mother worm is looking all over for her nice baby worm."* *"No, she isn't,"* said Timmy. *"How do you know she's not?"* asked his mother. To which Tommy replied: *"Because I ate her first!"*

In a funny way, that story reminds us that you have to be careful what you eat. And that's particularly true, when it comes to our heart and soul. If we fill our minds up with the nasty things of this life, the worms of earthly passion will make us sick. That's why we need to nourish ourselves with the truth. And the only place we can find that is in the Holy Scriptures. For In His Word God provides us with a rich banquet feast for our soul.

But unfortunately, too often we forget to eat the right thing. Our diet gets out of whack, because we get so caught up in the cares and activities of life, that we fail to feast on the truth of God's Word. Rather than abiding in Scripture, we look at briefly, once in awhile. It's like the old saying, *"It's a nice place to visit, but I wouldn't want to live there."* Well, in our text Jesus does urge us to live there. We should actually dwell and abide in God's Word.

For when we don't, that's when we lose our freedom and become enslaved to sin.

That's was the situation with the Jews in our text. When Jesus told them, that if they would abide in His Word, the truth would set them free, they replied: "WE ARE OFFSPRING OF ABRAHAM AND HAVE NEVER BEEN ENSLAVED TO ANYONE. HOW IS IT THAT YOU SAY, 'YOU WILL BECOME FREE?'" You know, every time I read that verse I laugh and say to myself: "*What are you talking about. Let's see, you were slaves to the Egyptians; you were slaves in Babylon. At the time this text was written, you were slaves to Rome. But other than that, you've never been slaves to anyone.*" Such is the nature of sin – it so blinds our eyes that we cannot see our slavery. We cannot see the shackles of guilt and shame the bind us. That's why Jesus said: "TRULY, TRULY I SAY TO YOU, EVERYONE WHO COMMITS SIN IS A SLAVE TO SIN."

You see, when we continue in sin – whether it's gossip or lust, foul language or a mean temper, a bad habit or a bad attitude – when we continue to live in sin without repenting and forsaking it, we are enslaved by it. We are in bondage to it. And like a slave, we cannot break free of the bonds in our own strength. St. Augustine once said: "*At times a man's slave, worn out by the commands of an unfeeling master, finds rest in flight. But where can*

the slave of sin flee. An evil conscience cannot flee from itself; it has no place to go.” There is no way we can set ourselves free from our sin and guilt.

Rev. Chuck Blanco describes it this way: *“We are like the inept prisoners who think they can tunnel their way to freedom. Smuggling a shovel to their cell, they dig and dig and dig; but bereft of plan or compass, their tunnel comes up in the cell next door. On their second attempt, they tunnel into the guard’s room. On their third attempt, they tunnel into the warden’s office. No matter how hard they try, no matter how many tunnels they dig, they haven’t the means to be successful; they always come up still in prison. So it is with our attempts to conquer sin ourselves; we haven’t the means to set ourselves free. The result is always an unsavory slavery. As the commentator William Barclay has put it, ‘The point is that the man who sins does not do what he likes; he does what sin likes.’”*

Dear friends, that’s why it’s so comforting to know that someone on the outside came to engineer our prison-break. Like the popular TV show where the man comes inside the prison to set his brother free, so Jesus Christ our Elder brother came to take our place in the prison cell of death and hell, so that you and I might be released from our bondage to guilt and shame. That’s what Jesus was talking about in our text, when He said: **“THE SLAVE DOES NOT REMAIN IN THE HOUSE FOREVER; THE SON REMAINS FOREVER. SO, IF THE SON SETS YOU FREE, YOU WILL BE**

FREE INDEED!” How true that is. A slave in Jesus’ day always lived in constant fear – fear that if he did one little thing wrong, he would be kicked out of the household, traded to an even worse master, or put to death. He had no permanent place in the family, like a son did.

And that’s exactly what our situation was like, before Jesus Christ, THE Son, came along. We were bound up tight in the cords of our own iniquity, fearful that any little sin would bring us crushing punishment, knowing full well that we couldn’t help but sin. But then along came Jesus Christ, the Son, and He set us free. By His death on the cross He broke the cords of sin and iniquity that held us fast and snapped them in two forever. And by His resurrection from the grave He adopted us into His heavenly family. He gave us a permanent place in His eternal household. Which means that, when we sin and wander away, the Father takes us back in again. He doesn’t want us to become slaves anymore. Instead, He accepts us as His dear precious children, granting us the inheritance of everlasting life. And that, my friends, is the only truth that can set us free.

Interestingly enough, in Greek the word *truth* literally means: ‘that which is not forgotten.’ In other words, truth is unforgettable. And who is more unforgettable than Jesus Christ? The most unforgettable thing about Him is that although He was perfect and holy, He became guilty for us, by taking our sin upon Himself, so that in exchange He might give us His

righteousness to make us pure and innocent before God. That is the unforgettable truth of His Word – that Jesus Christ, the unforgettable One, died and rose again to save us, so that now we are unforgettable to God. He will remember our sins no more, but He will remember you and me forever, because our names are written in His Book of Life.

My friends, that is the heart and soul of the Reformation – that we are saved by God’s grace alone, through faith in Jesus Christ alone, as found in God’s Word alone. That’s why it’s so important that we daily spend time in God’s Word, the only truth that can set us free. As Martin Luther once put it: *“You must boldly take your stand upon God’s Word, which no devil, hell or death can suppress. Therefore, no matter what happens, you should say, ‘This is God’s Word. It is my rock and anchor. On it I rely and it remains. And where it remains, I too remain.’”* That should be our motto – to remain and abide in God’s abiding Word, the truth that sets us free!

Kay Meyer writes about a young mother, who was in a car accident. Her children were trapped in the car, while she was thrown clear from the accident. As adrenaline surged through her veins, she ran back to the mangled auto and, with superhuman strength, pried open the door and rescued her two young children.

In an even greater way, Jesus Christ rescued us from the worst wreck of all – the fatality of our sins. In our time of emergency, He set us free by the

truth of His forgiveness and salvation, the truth of His Word. And that's why, like that young mother, we need to be concerned about rescuing others. For as we daily immerse ourselves in God's Word, and partake regularly of His Sacraments, the adrenaline of the Holy Spirit will fill our lives, so that we are empowered to share that freeing, saving truth with others, as the Reformers did. May God empower us to do that, for Jesus' sake. Amen.