

Feb. 22, 2015 – John 8:31-36

I Tell You the Truth...Anyone Who Sins is a Slave of Sin

- *The Truth is we were slaves to sin*
- *The Truth is we were freed from sin*

The first words we ever hear from the devil are: “*You will not surely die.*” (Genesis 3:4). That was a lie. Adam and Eve’s sin brought death upon themselves and brought death and sin into the world and upon us all. And the devil has not changed since he spoke these words over 6000 years ago – he continues to deceive. We hear his lies all around us, telling us that we are in control of our own lives, that what God’s word says no longer applies today, so we can do whatever we want. Or he tries to tell you that what you have done is unforgivable, that no one loves you, and that there is no hope for you.

To counteract these lies we turn to the One who is the Truth (John 14:6) and listen to the Word who is God: Jesus the Christ. During His time on earth, Jesus often prefaced His statements with the words: “most assuredly, I say to you”, or, as the old King James put it “verily, verily, I say unto you”. With these words, Jesus emphasized that what He was about to say was indeed the truth. We may translate this more colloquially as: “I tell you the truth...” And that is what Jesus does: He tells us the truth.

During Lent, as we travel with Jesus to the cross, we will listen to a number of the truths which Jesus spoke. The first one we find in John 8:31-36

As important as the truth is, we don’t always want to hear it. We don’t like it when someone says that we’ve put on weight, or look older, even though these things may very well be true. We don’t want to hear that we have made a mistake at work, or on our taxes. We would rather be told little “white lies” that say that we look fine and are doing well.

One truth that we may not like to hear is the truth that Jesus tells us in our reading. He said: “*Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin*” (v. 34). What is your response to these words? We all admit that we are sinners. Every Sunday we confess our sins. 1 John 1:8 tells that “*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*” So we have all sinned, but are you a slave to sin?

To admit to being a slave is to admit to being helpless and powerless – something most of us don’t want to do. Satan tries to deceive us into thinking that we are in control – that we are like God. “Sure, I sin, but I can stop anytime”. But that is not true. By nature we are slaves of sin and we are powerless to stop sinning.

Frederick Douglas was an black slave. He wrote in his 1845 autobiography, “I didn't know I was a slave until I found out I couldn't do the things I wanted.” That is an apt description of our slavery to sin. As Christians we want to do what is right, to do what pleases God. We do not want to sin. But so often we do what we don’t want to do, and fail to do the things we want to do. We may not realize we are slaves to sin until we try not to sin. This brings to mind what Paul wrote in Romans 7:15-16 “*the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.*” When we try to do good and try not to sin, so often we fail. We see that we are indeed slaves to sin.

How do we deal with this fact? One way is to downplay the seriousness of the problem: “Yes, I sin, but so does everyone else! Everyone else is doing it!” Or “What does it matter what I do as long as I am not hurting anyone else?” Do you recognize these words from the father of lies? It

doesn't matter how many others are doing something wrong; that doesn't make it right. And sin offends God and hurts us even if it doesn't hurt anyone else.

Another way that people try deal with their slavery to sin is with the thought that they can "make up" for their sins with the good that they do. "True, I have sinned, but look at all the good I have done. Surely that counts for something!" They think that if the good they do "outweighs" the bad, that will earn God's approval and blessing. But this too is just another lie of the devil.

Imagine that you are driving through a school zone. You've driven this route many times. Today you're in a hurry, so you are going a bit too fast. You get pulled over and get a ticket. Would you expect the judge to dismiss the ticket because of all the other times you drove by that school without speeding? Of course not! Consider the case of someone who committed murder. Would you expect a judge to release that person because of all the people he hasn't killed and the many the people that he has actually helped during his life? Of course not! If we would not expect an earthly judge to ignore a transgression of the law, why would we expect God to do that?

Our "good works", no matter how great or how many, cannot cover up or make up our sins. They cannot free us from our slavery to sin or save us from the eternal damnation that our sin earns us.

The problem with being a slave to sin isn't the title, but the consequences. Here Jesus tells us the truth: "*a slave does not abide in the house forever.*" Jesus is warning us that a slave to sin has no place reserved for them in heaven. Does that seem harsh? We may readily admit that we have sinned against God and that we are sinners, but do you really think that you deserve hell because of your sin? We like to think that the things that we have done really aren't all that bad. But the truth is: as slaves to sin, we deserve to die. As slaves to sin, we deserve hell. That is a truth that Jesus tells us here.

So how do we escape? How do we escape the chains of sin? It isn't by trying harder, or trying to do better. The bonds that hold us fast are not something that we can break ourselves, no matter how much we try. The key to freedom is knowing the only One who holds the key to release you. Jesus tells you the truth: "*if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed*" (v. 36). There is no other way to freedom from sin and death than through the only Son of God, Jesus Christ.

Jesus here tells you how to come to know Him who can set you free. He says, "*If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free*" (v. 31). Jesus' word is the key that He uses to unlock the shackles of sin. It isn't just any so-called "truth" that will set us free, but only the truth found in God's word – only the truth of Jesus and what He has done.

Jesus did not give a list of dos and don'ts for us to follow so we can try to live a perfect life, but Jesus teaches us that He came to do all the dos and don'ts and to live a perfect life free from sin for us. Jesus did not just feel sorry us when we were helpless and harassed by our enslaving sin, but He stepped in our place and took our beatings and scourging Himself. Jesus was tempted in every way, just as we are, and yet He did not sin (Hebrews 4:15). He died on the cross to pay for your sins and buy your freedom from sin. And Jesus conquered death and rose from the dead. With His resurrection He signed and sealed your emancipation proclamation. It is this word, which tells you the truth of Jesus, that sets you free.

The freedom the Jesus buys you is freedom *from* sin, but not freedom *to* sin. Our sinful nature only wants us to serve ourselves. It craves things like sexual immorality, idolatry, hatred, envy, strife, selfish ambition, and deceit (see Galatians 5:19-21). But Jesus has set us free from all these things. They are no longer our masters. We no longer have to get caught up in them. Galatians 5:1 tells us, "*For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.*" Satan wants us to think that we are still helpless. He wants us to

think that those old chains of sin still tie us down so that we obey our old master. But these are just his lies. Jesus has broken the chains of sin and death.

Jesus has set you free. And when He freed you, He gave you His Spirit. Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom (2 Corinthians 3:17). Instead of the sins that used to enslave you, God gives you the fruit of the Spirit. The Spirit creates in you: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

When Jesus frees us from sin, He frees us to serve God and serve our neighbor in love. Because God has forgiven you, you are free to forgive others. Because Jesus bore your burden – the burden of your sin – you are free to bear burdens of others. Because Jesus spent His life for you, you are free to spend your time for others.

Jesus has set you free, but the truth we learn in Jesus' word does not stop there. It tells us God sent His Son so that you might receive the adoption as sons (Galatians 4:5). This is why Jesus here tells us the truth that while "*the slave does not remain in the house forever; a son abides [in the house] forever*" (v. 35). Through Jesus, God not only frees you from slavery to sin and death, but adopts you as His son so that you have a place in His house forever.

There are some truths that we would rather not hear, like the fact that we were all slaves to sin. But Jesus tells you the truth that He has set you free from sin, and that you are free indeed. Sin no longer has power over you; it is no longer your master. You are free from living for yourself, and you can now live for God and others. And as God's adopted child, you are free to live with Him forever. May you abide and remain in His word, for when Jesus says, "You will not surely die," He tells you the truth.

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