

Jesus said to the Jews who had believed Him, “If you continue in My word, you really are My disciples. <sup>32</sup> You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

<sup>33</sup> “We are descendants of Abraham,” they answered Him, “and we have never been enslaved to anyone. How can You say, ‘You will become free?’”

<sup>34</sup> Jesus responded, “I assure you: Everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin.

<sup>35</sup> A slave does not remain in the household forever, but a son does remain forever.

<sup>36</sup> Therefore, if the Son sets you free, you really will be free. (John 8:31-36)

### Remain in the Word

“But I’m a Christian...I’m a member of that church...I’m a Lutheran...I was baptized there and confirmed...” “But I already know all that stuff; we’ve already heard all this before...” “I just don’t get a whole lot out of the service and have a hard time paying attention...don’t worry, I know where I’m going when I die.”

I wonder if Jesus would have heard responses like this today when he says in John 8: **“If you continue in My word, you really are my disciples. You will know the truth and the truth will set you free”** (v.31,32). In John, Jesus is speaking to a group of Jews who believed him. At the same time, they seem to be missing an important detail about what it means to be a follower of Jesus. A follower of Jesus lives and abides in his word and that word lives in her which sets her free!

But that is the sticking point for the Jews. How can this Jesus guy be saying, “You will become free?” **“We are descendants of Abraham and we have never been enslaved to anyone.”** If you know the history of the Old Testament you might be scratching your head and wondering how they could say something like this. The Jews were literal slaves in Egypt for over 400 years! One of their most significant holidays, Passover, celebrates their freedom from that slavery! You read the Old Testament and they seem to be more often under the rule and oppression of other kingdoms than their own. They were ripped from their homes and forced to live in captivity whether that was by the Assyrians or Babylonians. Even when they were speaking with Jesus they were under Roman rule.

Were they suffering from historical amnesia or conveniently ignoring their past? Neither. But because they were from the line of Abraham, even when underneath the rule of others, they saw themselves as free. Physical kingdoms could oppress them and overtake them, but they were God’s chosen people. They were Israel. They had God’s promise that all nations would be blessed through them! Therefore, they were free. They had God’s good favor and a place reserved in eternity. They were the Jews, Abraham’s descendants who would be enslaved by no one! Their freedom rests on that connection to Abraham. So, because they did not see themselves as slaves of anyone, they hardly saw any reason to need to

remain in Jesus' word to know the truth. For them, the truth was they were already free.

Maybe that sounds strange. But what we hear today really isn't that different. We don't point to our relationship to Abraham but we like to think we know a thing or two about freedom and, therefore, what we need to make ourselves free. We point to our relationships to certain groups, communities, or even the family name. We see our freedom in our connections to the right political parties who put the laws we agree with in place. We find our freedom in the fact that we aren't enslaved to the same sin as he is. You aren't enslaved by the addictions that she has. We should be free because you live up to these expectations you have of yourself or from other people. You might see yourself as free because you know your faults and recognize your sins; unlike others who can't seem to recognize their own. At the very least we see ourselves as being free because we live in the land of the free and you are free!

Jesus responds, **"I assure you: Everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin"** (v.34). Belonging to a certain group, part of a so-called Christian community, your name on the membership list, baptized souls, or family connections to a church community does not make you free. Being a good person, doing the right things, doing whatever you want does not make you free. How could it? We readily admit no one is perfect. You know your own life and struggle with sin. Even when you've been able to move past that sin of yesterday there's another one you fall into today. But it's not just the bad things we do. What makes it even more sickening is how you know as well as I do that you shouldn't want to do it, in fact you know you don't want to do it, but you find yourself in that sin, again. Then there are the other days when we hardly put up any fight at all telling ourselves we are free to stay in that sin and abuse God's forgiveness. If that wasn't bad enough, even the good things we do are stained with self-serving motives. I do it because I have to or should...it makes me feel good...I'll impress him...I'll get something later from her.

Our problem often is that we fail to recognize how enslaved we really are and, therefore fail to see how much we need the freedom Jesus offers. Instead, we want him to fix our marriages, our finances, our politics, fix our relationships and work, thinking that will bring us freedom. We want him to change our position in life—give me the job I want, the relationships I crave, the place I want to live, a more comfortable life able to enjoy the things I want—then I will be free. But the freedom Jesus offers, why should I need that?

And when we fail to recognize how enslaved we are, we fail to see our deep need to be in the word. Then the devil has you right where he wants you. He doesn't want you in the word. He wants you to think you are too busy. He wants you to not listen to it and step away from the word that makes you feel uncomfortable and wrong with what you are doing in your life. He wants you to believe that there's no point to pay attention because you've heard this all before. He wants you to believe that you don't know enough or it's too hard to understand to keep you from studying it more deeply and growing with the word. He doesn't want you to try and listen and so he points out how you are just going to fall asleep or be distracted anyway. He wants you to leave the word to when you have the time because he knows how to fill up your schedule and tire you out so that time rarely shows up. He wants you to think this word isn't enough and doesn't take care of the "real" issues in life. He doesn't want you in the word because he knows that this word is powerful and effective and the one thing that will free you from him and from sin. He works to keep you from the Lord's Supper because he knows how powerful that physical Word is. He wants to keep you a slave because a slave has no place in God's household forever but will be condemned right along with him. He knows hell was prepared for him and he wants you in chains at his side.

Jesus knows this. That's why he came. Jesus doesn't sugar coat anything but instead shows you the truth. He speaks his Word into your ear so you see the thing that is keeping you from being free is not broken relationships, money issues, whoever is in office, your position or place in life. It's sin.

And from that sin, the Son sets you free. He knows how greatly tempting those sins are. He's felt temptation's pull just like you do. But he defeated it all. He's heard the empty promises from the devil's lips and half-truths he loves to speak and Jesus knows how enticing they can be. But Jesus defeated those too with the same tool he gives to you: the word that endures forever. Sin and the devil had no desire to let you go but held you close and fast. But you've been bought at price. It was Jesus' precious blood poured out on the cross and given for you. Your debt of sin is paid. You are forgiven. You've been set free. Jesus shares your flesh and blood so that with his sinless life and innocent death in your place he's crushed Satan's head and destroyed his work. Satan does not control you. You are free! Even brooding death hanging over you has lost its power and sting. Jesus has been raised to life for your justification so that we know without a doubt that at the cross you already are declared not guilty. You are free! We will not die but live because Jesus lives. You are no longer a slave controlled by sin. The Son has set you free you are free indeed.

And he gives you the word to make you free. It's through the word that Jesus works so that his work for you becomes your own. It's through the Word that Jesus frees you from self-delusions, the world's false truths, and Satan's temptations. It's through the water and the Word that Jesus makes you a follower of his, brings you into the God's household, and declares you an heir of eternal life. He invites us to remain in the word with him as we gather at His table and we physically touch and taste his body and blood given and poured for the forgiveness of sins. We remain in the word as we gather together, confess our sins and He forgives you through his called servant. We pray that he work in us to not despise his word but work the desire to be in it as it is read and proclaimed in the service and sermon. We remain in the word in our conversations with each other and our daily remembrance of our baptismal grace. Being a follower of Jesus, a Christian, isn't just the abstract idea or membership card to be forgotten in your desk, purse, or wallet. It's abiding, living, staying in the Word as we come to God's house with God's people to receive it as it is spoken to us and we receive it in the Lord's Supper, Holy Baptism, and absolution—your sins are forgiven. And as we gather in God's house here be assured that you will dwell in the house of the Lord forever because the Son who is the truth has set you free so you are free indeed.

So, remain in the Word that removes the shackles of sin and frees you for living as God's child. He sets you free from the have-to's and should's. He sets you free from the Law that convicts and damns. He sets you free from trying to impress him and works to appease him. You are set free from sin for service to your neighbor so that you might share this word with them and set them free. So, they too might come to know and believe they like you are set free by love that you do not deserve but he freely gives—grace alone. You are free by that faith alone that he creates in your heart that receives this gift. You are free through this word alone that shows you these truths and makes you God's child of his household. Remain in his Word. Amen.