

What Are You, Slave? Or Free?
John 8:31-36

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Slavery is an ugly thing. It is a part of the history of the United States. Brother fought brother over the issue, and more sons of the United States dying in that bloody conflict than in any other war in our nation's history. Today, we think that slavery is a thing of the past, an ugly blemish on our history, yet slavery still exists. In some places in the world people are still sold to others and enslaved.

But I want to address the slavery mentioned by Christ, and defined by Him in our text. This slavery is a condition of submission to, or domination by, some influence, habit, or behavior. What is most scary about this form of slavery is that people are willful enslaved in this way. Even more scary, is that all people today are in some form of this slavery.

Some are alcoholics, in slavery to drink. Others are in slavery to different drugs, lacking the willpower to abstain. Others are in slavery to pornography. Some are slaves to their belly, satisfying their cravings with food. Others are in slavery just to do whatever makes the happy, no matter what it might be.

To what are you enslaved? Before you answer that question, I want you to remember our text from John's Gospel. Remember what a slave is, according to Jesus, *"I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin."*

So, now considering the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, how many of you are slaves? I am sure that your gut response is that you are not a slave, just like the Jews in our text responded to Jesus. And, of course not! None of you are! You can all stop sinning, whenever you desire. Right? Then do so!

How do you know about sin? Because the Law speaks of it. So, is the law good or bad? Of course, the Law is good! It is God's holy law, it has to be good! Is it negative? Absolutely not! The law was given to guide us all in holy living. If we do as it suggests, if we love God and our neighbor, all would be wonderful. God's law is given to declare to us the loving manner in which we are to deal with one another. If we were all to do so, there would be no issues in our world.

The problem is that we do not.

I was talking with someone at a nursing home who had become despondent. They were afraid that they were never going to be allowed into heaven. Why? Because as much as they tried to stop their sinful behavior, they fell into the same sin again, and again, and again. "Pastor, I confess my sin and ask God for forgiveness. I know God gives it, but then I do it all over again the next day. Since I cannot stop sinning, then I must not be going to heaven. I cannot help it! It is like I am in slavery to this behavior."

What was the grievous sin this individual thought was dooming them? What terrible iniquity

vexed their conscience? Was it adultery? Struggling with misuse of alcohol or drugs? Hatred? An unwillingness to forgive someone? Misuse of God's name? Were they a gossip, ruining the reputation of others?

These are the sins that pop into our minds to which we believe it is easy for people to be enslaved.

This individual was enslaved to a sin, most of us would think of as rather silly. And yet, this individual was absolutely correct in their understanding of this as a grievous sin, it was a sin as great as murder or adultery. Confined to a nursing home, unable to do all that they had done, this individual seemed to find almost everything as something to complain about. Meals were never right... the veggies were too cold, the meat overcooked, the coffee was too strong, the toast needed more butter, the eggs were too runny, and the milk glass was always too small. They came to the room too early with their meds. They came to the room too late with their meds. All these things this individual took out with rudeness upon the staff.

Rightly so, this individual saw all the complaining as a sin against the goodness of God to supply everything needed. It was also a complaint against those God had provided to care for them. By the way, they believed they did an excellent job – admittedly by the resident, oftentimes above and beyond the call of duty – especially considering how many times they heard complaints. It boiled down to a simple issue – this person was frustrated with the inability to do what they had been able to do only a short time ago. That frustration was taken out on anybody and everything else, dissatisfaction even with God.

Are you willing to admit your slavery to sin? I do not know what particular sin vexes you, but you are enslaved to it, even as I am enslaved to mine. Has your sin become a habit so you are you enslaved to it? What is the pet sin to which you are enslaved, you do it without thinking about it? Or maybe your sin is the same one everybody else around you does, so you think your slavery to this sin, is not truly sin? How do you excuse your sin? You are enslaved to sin, yet you are just like the Jews in the text, you believe that you have never been a slave to anyone.

Luther was just like my dear friend at the nursing home. He acknowledged his slavery to sin. He conceded whole-heartedly his woeful existence. He knew he could not break free of sin. But, he thought that he must. As a good Papist, a follower of the teachings of the church at Rome, he felt responsible for breaking free from his bondage to sin. And if he could not break free, hell's eternal torment awaited him. Luther used to beat himself into unconsciousness trying to punish himself for his sins so that he would avoid eternal punishment by God.

Jesus spoke to Luther, to my dear friend, to the Jews, to me, and to you. He speaks to us all in our slavery, *“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” “I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”*

Dear friends, as we celebrate the Reformation, we remember that it is still all about Jesus. It was about Jesus in the Garden of Eden, a promise made to Adam, Eve, and Satan. It was about Jesus when Abraham took Isaac up that mountain. It was about Jesus when the firstborn died in Egypt because they did not have the blood of the Lamb on the doorposts and lintels of their homes. It was about Jesus when the angels appeared to the shepherds on the Judean hillside. It was about Jesus when Peter preached his first sermon. It was about Jesus when Paul was killed in Rome. It was about Jesus at the Council of Nicea in 325. It was about Jesus when Luther nailed the 95 Theses on the Wittenberg church door in 1517. In the true church, it has always been – and always will be in The Church – all about Jesus.

True freedom from slavery comes from outside. A slave cannot free himself or herself. Oh, they might try and run away, but that does not change their condition. Freedom needs to be granted.

Which of us has not tried to break the bondage of our slavery to sin? Some have denied it, as did the Jews in our text, but that was just a lie. Some have tried to do better, like my dear friend at the nursing home. Some tried to beat their sins out of themselves, like Luther did. Nothing changed in any of those attempts, slavery to sin continued.

Christ, the very Son of God came to set men free from sin. He was never enslaved to sin. He overcame every temptation that the devil, the world, and even His friends set before Him. He broke all the chains of bondage and sets the captives free with the shedding of His own precious blood. The ransom price demanded of sin He paid in full. The blood of the Lamb of God, shed upon the cross, takes away the sins of the world.

This very Son of God was never enslaved. Sin held no dominion over Him. It is the very Son of God who has all the rights and privileges of inheritance, the beloved Son of the Father. It is this Son who gives to you His rights and privileges. Christ calls you by name and gives you His name, He frees you from your slavery and makes you a member of His family. He writes your emancipation proclamation in His own precious blood, declaring you freed from bondage to sin.

It is Christ who freed my dear friend at the nursing home. Addressing their sin, Christ's words in our text spoke volumes. The Son sets you free, and you are free indeed. He has purchased your forgiveness and proclaims it to you, in that Word, giving to you.

Dear friends in Christ, when you view your slavery rightly, you realize that there is nothing you can do. However, even as there is nothing you can do, it is still about Jesus – the Son has set you free. And, as the Son has set you free, you are indeed free. Hear the words of freedom He speaks to you, proclaiming your emancipation from slavery – your sins are forgiven. The chains of your sinful bondage have been shattered.

Your freedom gets you invited to sit at the Master's table. Sit at the Master's feast, here is the place of honor – the head table. The Son Himself serves you a meal that sets you free, His own body and blood.

As you hear these truths about you, and partake of the only food that strengthens faith, proclaim with me that truth that is ours, the truth about our bondage to sin. Free at last, free at last. Thank

God almighty I'm free at last! Exactly correct! You are free from your slavery to live as God's children, now and forevermore. Amen.