

Sermon Reformation 2018

October 28, 2018

John 8:31-36

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson previously read.

We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. As the Pharisees spoke those words, we see just how deluded they were. They were so blind, they didn't even grasp just how blind they were. Offspring of Abraham who had never been enslaved to anyone? What about the enslavement of the Israelites to Pharaoh? What about when these offspring of Abraham were taken captive by Babylon, forced to sing to the Lord in a strange land? What about their time even then, when they did not have real freedom, but the rule under Rome? And that is only to speak of their earthly slavery. Jesus is trying to point out their spiritual condition, slavery under sin.

And we should hear that lesson. After all, in America we pride ourselves on our freedom. Yet what about the fact that not all Americans were always free? And in our day look at where we're going. It's interesting how much history repeats itself. As I was reading for this sermon, one of the resources I use with regularity discussed this word freedom, and it discussed it not only in the context of the Bible, but the ancient world altogether. It made the point that in viewing what freedom is, the ancients saw that when freedom hinged too much on the individual's freedom—or what I think could be termed better license, or licentiousness—this created a problem for law. It said, *“This degenerate freedom is dangerous to the state and therefore to the citizen from another angle, for it can easily revert to tyranny, which means the rule, not of nomos, but of the whim of an individual.”* We can hear how this returns to bondage—which as a note the freedom that should perhaps be ideal is the freedom of the family unit as the building block of society and not the freedom of the individual. In other words, perhaps we can avoid this license by doing all we can to encourage the family in its proper and God-given state. But I digress, because the purpose of this is that we miss the point of what freedom really is. Even were we to emphasize the family properly there's still a huge underlying problem. We are still bound. And Jesus tells us this. He comes as the One who brings freedom, but has to reveal the bondage. And so He does by saying it: **“Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.”** In other words, sin is bondage and we need to be freed.

Of course, what's interesting is that Jesus isn't the only one who has proclaimed this message of bondage. There were others wise enough to recognize it. For example,

the philosopher Plato saw that there was a bondage in this world. He likened that bondage to the bodily passions and even bodily needs. He said that this bondage was akin to being chained to the wall of a cave only capable of seeing the shadows of reality created by light on the wall of the cave. But if we could only crawl out—sure the light would be blinding at first, but then we would see reality for what it is and return to the cave would only magnify the immense darkness in which we had existed.

Or in our own day there was the movie the Matrix. In that the story was that we are all in a computer program which exists hundreds of years in the future but makes us think we are here now. Freedom comes from taking a red pill to get you out. Of course, I don't know that the makers of the movie thought this was really the case, but they got that there's something going on beyond what we see. Even more so, they recognized something—in the story there is a part where a character explains the computer program and says that there had been iterations made of it before the current version and when it was too perfect there was dissatisfaction from the people. What they recognized is the inherent dissatisfaction people have with this life.

In both cases, though, despite the depth of recognition, what they didn't grasp was what the real bondage is: we are in bondage to sin. And that's what Jesus points out. In fact, look at how we should think of this. What do we see that shows us this servitude?

Well three things I thought especially noteworthy were as follows. First we see it in the struggle of our existence, what one of my professors in seminary called the mirror of our existence. As we look at our lives we are bound to experience trials. It is unavoidable that we will get sick. Finally the reality is that we will also die. We are slaves to that. We can't avoid it.

Second we see this in that others harm us. We can be doing all we can to avoid the things of this life which are byproducts of our fallen-ness and what happens? Someone comes along and sins against us. For example, I know I have mentioned the woman at my vicarage congregation who was the victim of sexual abuse by her father. She did nothing to ask for that, and it so horribly harmed her that she has every difficulty living life normally. What a horrible reminder to her that this world is broken and fallen? She was bound in slavery to that.

Finally, there is our own sin. And this is the worst part. Look at what we do and say. Look at our attitudes. I mentioned that about the Matrix, and how we are discontent in this life. Not only that, but look at some of the other things. For example, I was listening to an audiobook called Irresistible about video game and screen

addictions. It talked about behavioral addiction altogether and described how we as people become addicts to things like social media because we focus so much more on the bad than the good and strive to have the affirmation of the like for our picture, or the sharing of the article we share. But one negative comment crushes us. Or it also talked about how we become addicts to things like gambling because we are so motivated not to lose money. In fact far more motivated by that than by winning it.

And that's just in our attitudes in clinging to satisfaction of things other than our God. Then there is how we sin against or neighbors. Think about how we don't love as we'd like to be loved. We bite in our criticisms but shrink back in offense when criticized. We seek easy and immediate forgiveness when we offend our neighbor, but cling to their wrongs against us. Or think about how quick we are to harm when someone harms us. Let alone our rebellious attitudes and lustful hearts. We can't avoid these things. For some it's one thing and for others it's another. But we've all got it.

Since the lottery has been in the news a bit lately there was a story about a lottery winner whose life took a real turn that reflected our sinfulness that I read this week. This man had won something like 300 Million Dollars, which after tax ended up being around 150 million or so. When he won he promised to use the money for good, to tithe it, to be generous with it. And he was doing that, but then it got to his head. He got in trouble for drinking too much at strip clubs. He gave all kinds of money to his teenage granddaughter who ended up falling into a life of drugs and died very young. He and his wife fought and finally divorced. And in the midst of all of it, he never blamed himself for any of it. It was everyone else's fault, even though he would go around bragging that he had more money than God.

But that's what we do in our sin. Every one of us could swear we wouldn't be like that, and by God's grace maybe we wouldn't. But there's a good chance we would because what that money would do would be to make us think we are not dependent upon another One greater than us.

And worst of all think about how the Law of God fits into this. Look at what Paul says in the Epistle Lesson. **By works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.** Here God gave this Law which is holy and good. Gave it that we would be called by it to love, even demanding that we would love our neighbor as ourselves. And yet what does it do now? Gives us knowledge of our sin. It doesn't work that good work in us. We are so broken, so blind to our blindness that it has to come and reveal to us that this is the case. It has to point

out that our existence as sinners in this sin-fallen world forces us to consider ourselves before anything else over and against what God wants for us.

Do we see what a bondage this is? Do we see what a cloud over this life death really is, the fleeting nature of this life and how we can't escape? In the midst of such vanity. Vanity of our toiling only to die, vanity of trying to do good and bad happening to us. Vanity of our own sinfulness. What bondage! What slaves we are!

But in the midst of this slavery, the Son comes and has good news for you. **If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.** There is a way out of all of this slavery: the Son who freely chose to enter into this broken world and lead His people out of it. Jesus came and took the yoke of sin off of us and put it onto His own shoulders on the cross. And in His resurrection the gate is opened to our freedom.

And look at the joy of what He has done. Our sin He has borne and won forgiveness for it. We didn't deserve it, but as Paul said, it's given to us freely as a gift. A gift. We didn't earn it. We couldn't earn it. We were bound in chains in service to the enemy. But He bought our forgiveness and freedom. Even from birth we didn't deserve it. We had Easton here this morning, and confessed that this was his state until that blessed gift which he was given, that gift that His sins have all now been buried in the tomb of Jesus, and that his life, just as your life as baptized children is in that resurrection from the dead.

And in that resurrection we see the freedom we have over death. That it no longer holds us in chains, but those chains have been broken. And in the cross and resurrection we have the blessed comfort that even those sins against us have found justice, found payment. Yes we are tainted by them, but even they are paid for in Jesus blood that we would be cleansed as we partake of that very body and blood in his holy meal.

And in Jesus, then Christians, is our hope. The promise of our freedom obtained by grace through faith. We need not delude ourselves like the Pharisees and think that we have never been bound. We have been and brutally so, even by our own choice. But Christ has freed us from all of that by His great love. Again, freely as a gift, by His grace. In that grace may He keep us from a return to that bondage until we live in the light and eternal freedom of His Kingdom. Amen.