

John 8:31-36
Reformation Day (Observed)
October 26, 2025

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

Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. 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."

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Current events (especially international events) of the past year or so have raised the societal discussion of the relationship between Christians and Jews and whether they have some common bond in their Scriptural history; and those discussions have often shown how religious views influence political views (and visa versa). It's pretty stunning to see how the audience in our text this morning (of 2000 years ago!) equally had trouble with that concept of religious views being mingled with political views.

Jesus begins our text with the well-known exhortation: "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." And, immediately, the Jews jump on this idea of being set free... and they view it through the lens of politics: "We have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, 'You will become free'?"

Now, we could spend a lot of time on their revisionist history... their fathers had been slaves in Egypt, in bondage in Babylon, the current generation was under the rule of Caesar. How did they honestly believe they had not been enslaved to anybody? But, that's not really the point... it's simply a good illustration of their stubborn tunnel vision and tone-deafness to their need – not only the plight of their political situation, but of their greater need for salvation from sin. And that's a tone-deafness, well-illustrated in our text, that was not unique to the Jews of Jesus' day; Christians struggle with it – you and I struggle with it, too. We so often are tone-deaf to our greatest need because we have tunnel vision on what we feel are more pressing temporal matters.

We so often judge God's blessing upon us by how well we see ourselves doing temporally. We consider our true needs to be those things that temporal affairs (aka, generically, 'politics') can solve; and, when politics (and other temporal matters that affect home life and personal well-being) seem to be going in a direction we favor (I'm successful, I'm wealthy, my reputation is intact, I'm healthy), we become complacent, indifferent, even stubborn toward the Word of the Lord... and the great need that Word of the Lord proclaims, the need for salvation from sin.

And, consider the weight of that Word, the authority of the Word, which Jesus speaks next to those who believe their current situation to be pretty comfortable. He says: "Truly, truly, I say to

you”... you know *that* refrain; perk up your ears! Something of divine weight, of divine clarity regarding our reality, is coming... “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin.”

If you want to see some commonality, some relationship, that binds together Jews and Christians, here it is. And not just Jews and Christians, but all people of every tribe, nation, and language. “Everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin,” Jesus says. By His own Word, anyone who sins (even once!) is enslaved to it... just ask Adam and Eve.

So, how are you going to politically or temporally talk yourself free of that one?... especially when your spouse, your children, your parents, your siblings, your neighbor, everyone around you can point out the obvious – you are a sinner. A *slave* to sin means you’re *identified* by your sin – you’re a sinner. No two ways about it, no matter how often the religions try to come up with an excuse: “Well, they’re too young to know any better – age of innocence. Well, you can work your way out of it.” No, a slave to sin means you’re identified by your sin. We don’t need some ‘gotcha’ moment on the news or some undercover reporting to prove that one. If you’re honest with yourself, you’re a sinner. To try to speak better of yourself and your good intentions is prideful foolishness. And to speak of the universality of that as an excuse as to why your sin doesn’t really matter is equally foolish. Imagine one slave saying to the next slave: “Well, everyone’s a slave. I can’t help that about

myself. You can't help that of yourself. So, really, since it's true of everyone, it's true of no one. We're all free!" What absurdity those slaves would live in! And yet, that's how we attempt to *rationalize* the bondage of our sin. But, "*slave[s]* to sin."

Interestingly, the Word of Jesus that truly sets you free *includes* this first Word... this first Word that speaks plainly about everyone's bondage to sin. Those of us studying Galatians: did we not just study last week that the Scripture **imprisoned** all, held everyone **captive**, **enslaved** everyone precisely by pointing out the truth of our sinfulness! As we heard in our epistle reading to the Romans, "Through the Law comes the *knowledge of sin*." That's the work of the Law! Isn't that the same Word Jesus now speaks? "Everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin." Or, as St Paul says it in our Epistle Reading to the Romans, "For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

That doesn't sound very freeing! Yet, meditating upon and understanding the depth and magnitude and weight of every sinner's captivity is an essential part of the freeing truth, because such devastating news prevents me from thinking I can free myself, save my reputation, or contribute my own effort toward attaining freedom. Such devastating news leaves me (the sinner) resigned to the great "Truly, truly, I say to you" reality: I can do nothing to free myself; I deserve to be in bondage forever; I can only beg in repentance... and can only hope that the holy God is also a merciful

God. If the holy God is not also merciful, I am condemned to hell forever. That's just the plain truth. And He's completely just and righteous to do that. But, if the holy God is also merciful, then I have not only hope, but confidence and joy.

And, having meditated upon that great truth, which has been since Adam enslaved all mankind in the Fall, then how breathtaking is the truth that the Lord's first Word in response to that Fall was *Gospel*... not punishment, not Law, not instruction and exhortation, but *Gospel*... the Gospel truth of the Messiah to come, to win the victory through suffering, and to defeat sin, death, and the power of the devil forever.

How could the Lord speak *Gospel* so quickly on the heels of the Fall? We have our answer in our first reading, when John says, "Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an *eternal* gospel to proclaim." An *eternal* gospel means *more* than "it had this starting point in the garden and now lasts forever." It means God didn't make it up in haphazard *reaction* to the Fall; the Gospel was known to God since before the beginning. And that is so because the Gospel *is* the person of the Christ, the second Person of the Trinity – "the Lamb slain", planned by God since before the foundation of the world. The second Person of the Holy Trinity *is* the Gospel. Always has been; His mission wasn't an eventual addendum to his resumé. He *is* the Gospel. Notice how many Christian denominations confuse that and say, "He teaches us the Gospel, He instructs us with the

Gospel, He gives us the Gospel (to use rightly to save ourselves). No, He *is* the Gospel. He is the promise, He who would become the Seed – the one Seed and offspring of Abraham through whom all the promise would come, the one Seed of the virgin through whom all salvation would come. And, if He – from before the foundation of the world – prepared to become flesh... and if the Word which is spoken and written and proclaimed is always regarding *Him*... then that proclaimed Word is forever, for *He* is forever. That written Word is forever, for *He* is forever. And if *He* is forever, the promise is forever. And if the *promise* is forever, then your hope in that promise is certain because the object of your Faith is forever.

Indeed, to us is given an *eternal gospel*, for Christ – He who by the power of His sacrificial death has defeated death – He remains forever. So, Peter says, “the Word of the Lord endures forever.” And, therefore the promise of our own resurrection can never fade, nor be forgotten, nor end up forsaken... because it is intimately tied to the resurrected Christ and His very flesh-and-blood body forever.

Now, that *also* means: just because it’s an *eternal gospel* we confess, does *not* mean it is a gospel only *about eternity*. (How often do people make that mistake: “Yes, I know Jesus died for my sins, cares about eternity; but the temporal stuff – that’s what I’ve got to deal with.”) Is the God-man Jesus Christ only concerned about eternity? No. He commands you to pray and never lose heart (didn’t

we hear that just last week?), He teaches you to pray and gave you the prayer to pray – even for daily bread and for his will to be done on earth precisely because He – as the Noble and faithful Shepherd incarnate – cares for his dear sheep *for today*... not only caring about getting them to the goal of those verdant green pastures on the horizon, but cares for them during the sojourn and knows how the ‘today’ of the sojourn impacts His sheep’s faithfulness to keep eyes on the horizon... so that, as they traverse the valley of the shadow of death, they may fear no evil, for their Good Shepherd is with them. His rod and staff comforts them. He’s by their side upon the plain with His good gifts and Spirit.

So trust in *Him*. For *He* is your gospel. *He* is the promise... and the promise fulfilled in history, and thus the promise certain to come again in glory. And, therefore, he is the Faith, the Faith for you to cling to in faith. Isn’t that how our Epistle Reading says it? –

“All ... are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is *in Christ Jesus, whom* God put forward as a propitiation by his blood (there’s *the* Gospel, the promise fulfilled, the Faith)... and how does Paul conclude? – “to be received by faith.” Your faith clings to the Faith, clings to Christ our righteousness, for when *He* was revealed, “the coming faith was revealed,” Paul says, so that God may prove Himself (as our epistle reading says) “the justifier of the one who has faith *in Jesus*.”

So, hope in *Him* – the one Seed of the promise, that St Paul may tell you as he told the Galatians that those who have been baptismally clothed in the faith of Jesus are all seeds of promise.

In fact, it would have been great if our lectionary's Gospel Reading included just one more verse, for – in verse 37 – Jesus says to the Jews, “I know that you are the offspring (seed / σπέρμα) of Abraham; but you seek to kill me because *My Word* does not receive a place in your heart.”

Isn't this exactly what we've been studying in Galatians? – the *supposed* offspring of Abraham versus the *true* offspring of Abraham. The *supposed* offspring of Abraham wanted to kill the Christ because *true* status as the seed of Abraham is only for those who rejoiced in Abraham's Christ... the same Christ promised from Eden, the same Christ whose sacrificial death on the cross fully paid your ransom (need not be added to by your efforts), the same Christ who is still the Word enfleshed for you today.

Abraham lived by faith in that Word of promise, manifest in the God-Man: “Remain in My Word”... that Word that endures forever because it is the promise of that eternal gospel, the Lamb who now *stands* though He had once been slain, the Messiah who came in blessing, who today comes veiled in His gifts, who will one day come again in unveiled glory.

That is a very *freeing* comfort... not just that we will *one* day know eternity, but that we may live *each and every* day with the

clear conscience before God, before one another, that we are heirs of eternity.

Do you live each day as if imprisoned and held captive? Then you are enslaved to the world, or perhaps you believe yourself indebted to a punishing God waiting to be appeased. No, the Baptismal life is one of freedom – not freedom from Christ, but freedom *in* Christ...freedom from being cursed by the Law because of your sin, freedom from death and the devil, freedom to be the children of God and to love His whole teaching and Word and truth, which is to say, freedom to have a clear conscience before God and defiant against the world, and to love God's holy will for this creation and for the new creation to come... all because: *certain in Christ* is your inheritance of the eternal Gospel. The eternal Gospel to be proclaimed *forever*; it will never fade, change, or be forgotten in the courtroom of God Most High... for the Gospel is Christ, who is the same yesterday, today, and forever. So, if Christ sets you free, then you are free indeed.

In the Name of the Father
And of the Son
And of the Holy Spirit.
+ AMEN +

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