

Freed Slaves

John 8:31-36

Reformation Sunday, October 25, 2015

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

The Bible is God's word. Therefore the Bible tells you the way that things are. The Bible is not merely out to set forth a theological system that we can study. Although it does do that, its goal is to tell us the way that things are. Understand then that the Bible does not tell us things the way that we think that they should be or the way that we wish that they were. The Bible is God's Word. It tells us the way that things are.

When the Bible talks about faith in Jesus Christ, it is talking about life. When it talks about life it talks about life the way that it is. When it talks about life it talks about being born. We did not bring about our own birth. We did not make it happen. When your child defiantly says, "I didn't choose to be born!" he is telling you the truth, although that truth does not exempt him from the responsibility for whatever it is that he got caught doing. We did not choose to be born. We did not choose to be alive. Our parents chose to bring us forth and even they did not have us specifically in mind when they conceived us. Our parents wanted children. They did not want a specific child even though they knew that they would get one. And sometimes even our parents did not choose to have us. There is always the child who was the "surprise."

Family planning implies that we are more in control than we really are. When a couple gets married if they do not have children after a few years people begin to ask them, "Don't you want children?" as if having children is a choice that you can make. My life stands as testimony that children are not a decision that you can make. You are blessed to have them. They are blessed to be born. They are blessed to be alive. They are blessed to exist at all.

This blessing comes to them through no effort of their own. They do not achieve their own birth. It gets done to them. They are floating along in the amniotic fluid and then one day they are pressed out into the world to live in it. They had no say in it. They had no choice in it. They were simply born. God gave them life.

So it is with the new life in Christ. What the Bible is trying to describe to you is new life in Christ. If our lives are new in Christ, then God gave us life in Christ. If this new life in Christ is anything like life in this world, then we have no say in it either. We had no say in whether or not our Lord would come to earth. We had no say in whether or not He would become incarnate. We had no say in the mighty works that He did. We had no say in whether or not He would offer His life for us. We had no say in His crucifixion. We had no say in His resurrection. We had no say in His ascension into heaven. We had no say on whether or not He would sit at the right hand of the Father. And yet He did all of these things and in doing all of these things He gave us life. He saved us from eternal death. By saving us from eternal death and giving us eternal life instead, He has given to us a new life. He did this by His life, death, and resurrection. And for everyone in this room the life, death and resurrection of Jesus were works that He accomplished before we were even born. Our eternal life was waiting for us from before our birth. Jesus Christ had worked this life for us. We had no say in it. We made no effort toward it. We made no decision for Jesus or God that made it possible. He had it all done for us before we were born. He gave us life through no say of our own. We did not ask to be born and neither did we ask to be born again. What is there left to do except to thank and praise Him?

And that is the way that life is. That is what the Bible is telling us. It is telling us that way that things are.

Our sins enslave us.

That is the way that things are. Our sins enslave us. It may not seem like that is the way that things are, but that is the way that things are.

It might seem like some sins enslave us. Sins like drunkenness obviously enslave people. Sins like drug use enslave people. They cannot escape from it through their own efforts. Sins like lust and pornography enslave and shame people. They cannot escape through their own efforts. We can understand why our Lord would say that these sins enslave, but surely not all sins enslave.

It might seem like only scandalous sins enslave. A man who commits adultery may be enslaved to that even though he only did it once. The consequences of that sin follow him. Sins like murder have consequences that follow and haunt a person. It might seem like that sin enslaves.

But human reason insists that surely sins like a little lie or a little gossip do not enslave. Surely a little coveting of my neighbor's things does not enslave. Surely if I substitute an action for a sin, I am doing better than others are. Human reason insists that if I look but do not touch, I am not enslaved. It sure doesn't seem like a little disobedience of the government is all that bad.

And our Lord makes no such distinctions. Anyone who sins is a slave to sin. All of the sins enslave. None of them are better than the others. They all harm. Greed will enslave just as surely as alcohol will. Gossip will enslave just as surely as heroin will. Covetous desires will rob you of a contentment that you cannot get back no matter how hard you try. These sins which we tolerate among ourselves and consider respectable enslave us just as surely as if we had murdered someone. If you disobey your parents it will affect the rest of your life. Some of the largest regrets in my life are the times when I did not listen to my father on earth. He had the authority of God and I did not listen to him. Anger will dominate a person's life until finally you are alone and alienated from those who are closest to you. It all enslaves. Do not be deceived. All sin enslaves. You cannot escape from any of it by your own effort. You cannot escape from sin by the power of your will. If you could escape from sins by the power of your will, then you would be able to up and decide one day not to sin anymore and you would be able to do it. Try it. Try to stop sinning permanently and see if you can do it. Even if you do put away certain external vices, then you will be tempted to take pride in your ability to put away your sins and God will condemn your pride as an offense against him and your pride will enslave you.

Sin is real slavery. This is not an imagined slavery or a pretend one. Our congregation is not a club of people who participate in a common fantasy. Since sin is slavery, we cannot escape from it. Someone must rescue us.

The mark of our slavery is our mortality. It is the brand that cannot be removed. It is the mark that is on all of humanity. Death makes sure that we all know that whether we are rich or poor, blessed or impoverished we are all enslaved. Death makes sure that we all know that whether or not a person was a good person in the eyes of his neighbors or someone that they could not stand and are glad that he is gone, they were both slaves to sin. They could not escape. Death over took them.

You cannot choose to escape death. You cannot will yourself not to die. You can brag and boast about the freedom of your will, but you cannot beat death. It will take you no matter how much will you have. Members of our own congregation have set their fight against death. They struggled valiantly against it and we prayed that they might live and death overtook them anyway. There is no freedom of the will. If there were, you could choose not to die. Since you cannot choose not to die, there is no real freedom of the will. The freedom of your will is over paltry things like which shirt in your closet are you going to put on today. You are enslaved. Death is the mark of your slavery.

All of this makes it unusual that even the Jews who believed in Jesus said that they had never been enslaved. I suppose that if Jews who believe in Jesus did not see their slavery, I should not be too surprised when you Gentiles do not see it either. And the Jews tell our Lord this during the Festival of Tabernacles. One of the things that God was trying to accomplish with Israel when He instituted the Festival of Tabernacles was to demonstrate to all of the generations of Israel how He made the Israelites live in the wilderness when He brought them out of Egypt. The Festival of Tabernacles commemorated their redemption out of slavery in Egypt. How they could be so blind as to forget that and insist that they had never been slaves to anyone points to the blindness that our sins bring upon us. We do not think that we have been enslaved by anyone either. We even make up theological systems that insist that we are free, but do not take into account the reality that the Word of God is revealing to us.

The Israelites in Egypt could not choose to free themselves. If they could have, they would have long before their slavery ended. They came up out of Egypt and lived in freedom, when God sent Moses to them and God performed His mighty wonders against Pharaoh and against Egypt and against Egypt's gods. Then they were free.

You were not free from Your sins until the Son of God showed up and performed His mighty acts in His life, death, and resurrection. Then you were freed from Your sins.

Jesus is the Son God. Jesus has a permanent place with His Father. His Father is God. Jesus has a permanent place with God. As a result Jesus lives a life consistent with His permanent place with God the Father. In other words He lives His life comprehensively in accord with God's will. He is a permanent part of the Father's family. He is the Son of God.

The Sonship of Jesus is an eternal Sonship. He has always been the Son of God. He always will be the Son of God. He has always lived in conformity with His Father's will. He always will live in conformity to His Father's will. He is the beloved Son who always does the will of His Father. Whether He does the will because He is the Son or He is the Son because He does the will of the Father does not matter. The place of Jesus in the household of God is permanent.

Because Jesus is the Son of God, He is God's heir. He inherits all that the Father has. That is why He sits at the Father's right hand. He is administering all that the Father has. All that the Father has is His.

Therefore Jesus also has authority with the Father. When He sits at the right hand of the Father it is more than simply administering the Father's authority on the Father's behalf. It is also beseeching the Father on behalf of others. Our Lord sits at the Father's right hand. He may therefore intercede on behalf of anyone for whom He wishes to intercede. Since the Father loves the Son because He is the Son or because the Son does God's will, either way, the Father listens to the Son and out of love for the Son grants what the Son requests.

In this way the Son of God has authority in the household of God. He has an eternal say in the affairs of God's household. Therefore if the Son releases the slaves of the household, they are free period.

Because of the place of Jesus in the household of God, the only decision that matters is His. You can pray to Him all that you want it does not matter. You are a slave. You have sinned. You have no permanent place in the family. A master is not obligated to give a slave anything that the slave requests. Therefore the master is free in regard to His slaves. They are His after all.

Jesus is not enslaved. He is the eternal Son of the Father. His will is truly free. He may free us because He is the Son and has the authority to do so or He may allow us to continue in the slavery into which we have sold ourselves.

The Son has chosen to liberate you. His life, death, and resurrection were His choice to redeem You. It was His choice to save you. It was His choice to forgive you. It was His choice to release you. You are free. You are free because He made you free. You are free from all constraints whatsoever. You are not bound by the Law of God in any part. You are free to keep it or not keep it. You are no longer enslaved to your sins. You are no longer enslaved to death.

The resurrection of Jesus demonstrates that death no longer has mastery over Him or you. The mark of sin that was upon us is removed. Resurrection from the dead awaits us. You are free.

You know the truth. You know this truth. You know this truth because you have continued in the words of Jesus. You know the Word of God. You know the truth and it has made you free.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.