

John 8:31-36

Lent 1; February 22, 2015

**"I Tell You the Truth...Anyone who sins is a slave to sin"**

<sup>31</sup> To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. <sup>32</sup> Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." <sup>33</sup> They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?" <sup>34</sup> Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. <sup>35</sup> Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. <sup>36</sup> So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

What is Truth? Pilate once asked that question of Jesus. 2000 years later, this world is still wrestling with that question. If you want to see that, just look at the news headlines in the last couple of weeks.

*"NBC Nightly News" anchor Brian Williams has been suspended for six months without pay following his false claims about an experience he had during the Iraq War, NBC News President Deborah Turness announced Tuesday night.*

*Bill O'Reilly's 1982 Falklands War stories called into question. A report, published late Thursday, alleges that Fox News' Bill O'Reilly repeatedly misled viewers by claiming to have been in a war zone during the conflict between England and Argentina in 1982. In his book, in public appearances and on his television program, O'Reilly has claimed to have been "in an active war zone" in the Falklands, despite the fact that no American correspondents are believed to have reached the combat zones on the islands. In the interview, O'Reilly said that he never claimed to have been on the Falkland Islands.*

We value *Truth*. We want people to be truthful with us. We try to be truthful with others. Yet, the truth is not what we always want to hear. We like to hear: *"Did you lose some weight."* We don't like to hear: *"Did you put on a few extra pounds while you were gone?"* Then there is the question that there is no good answer to it: *"Do you think this dress makes me look fat?"* We don't want to hear that the girl or guy we're dating isn't the best influence on us. We don't really want to know how much it is going to cost to fix our car. Truth – what is truth?

Throughout Jesus' ministry on earth, he made many different statements that begin with the words: **"I tell you the truth..."** Over the next five weeks, we are going to look at some of the **"I tell you the truth"** statements of Jesus. Unlike the *"truth"* of this world, we can trust these words of Jesus as being absolute truth.

Jesus says to you and me: **"I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin."** Did you know that you are a sinner? We would answer that question by saying that; of course, I know that I am a sinner. There is not a single one of us here that would say that we are not sinners. Do you think of yourself as being **"a SLAVE to sin?"**

Jesus is saying that by our sinful natures, we are bound so tight to sin that we can't get away. The picture that I have in mind is that of a prisoner who is walking into a court room. His feet are chained together. His hands are chained together. His hands and feet are chained together in such a way that he cannot escape. Even if he thinks he could get away, he has the sheriff deputies hanging on to him as well.

Sin is a BIG deal. Satan wants to downplay that truth statement of Jesus in our lives. *"Who cares if I sin? Everybody sins. I still know who Jesus is and what he did for me. So what's the big deal if I'm a slave to sin?"* We can try all kinds of different ways to try to escape from this truth. *"Why don't you look at all the good things that I do instead of always harping on the bad?"* Yet, there is not anything that we can do that can escape those chains of sin.

This statement of Jesus describes the status that we have with God. Jesus says, **"A slave has no permanent place in the family."** It almost sounds like Jesus is a mobster, *"You're not part of this family."* But what's his point? In very clear terms, Jesus is warning that a slave to sin has no room reserved in heaven. Now sin's a big deal. How many of you sin? How many of you sin to the level that you deserve hell? In our minds, there is a distinction between those two questions. Yet, the answer to both of those questions is the same, isn't it? As **"slaves to sin,"** we deserve hell. There is no wiggle room in that statement. There is no grey area. You sin. You are a slave. You will die.

What's the escape plan? How do we pull a Harry Houdini and escape these chains? How do we get freedom? You've heard the old saying, *"It's not so much what you know, but whom you know."* My fellow slaves, the key to freedom is knowing the One who holds the key to release your chains. That one person, that key person, is Jesus. As the Son of God, he has established eternal residency in heaven. He holds in his hands the keys to eternal life. **"If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."**

So the question now becomes, how do we get to know this key person? Jesus says, **"If you hold to [or literally, if you remain in] my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."** What is this **"TEACHING"** of Jesus that sets us free? This teaching of Jesus is not a checklist of do's or don'ts. This teaching of Jesus is about a Jesus who steps in front of us and takes the beating from the slave-master for us. This teaching shows us a Jesus who didn't get permanently knocked out on a cross. This teaching shows us a Jesus who stormed back from the grave, thus signing and sealing our freedom papers. This teaching, which tells us the truth of Jesus, sets us free.

Some of you may have seen the note in the bulletin about giving up something for Lent. As you may have noticed already, and are going to notice even more over the next six weeks or so, my hair on my head and face are going to get a bit longer, as I don't shave or cut my hair. It isn't just the point of giving something up. It also reminds us of how we look to God as a slave to sin. We look rough. We look like slaves to sin. But then the cross and Easter changes all of that doesn't it. The truth of Jesus sets us free!

Here's the icing on the cake. Not only are we set free from the shackles of sin, we are now also free to serve God and one another in love. We are free to carry other people's burdens as Jesus carried ours. Free to forgive others as Jesus has forgiven us. Free to spend our time for others as Jesus spent his for us. We are free to live in the truth of Jesus' Word.

What is truth? The world will always keep looking for truth. They will never find it. Truth is found only in Jesus. As we look at these upcoming statements of truth, may we be comforted by a Jesus who truly loves each of us. Amen.