

## John 8:31-36

Reformation 2019; November 3 & 4, 2019

We have all heard it, and most of us have prayed. *"God if you do this for me, I promise that I will do this for you."* When we find ourselves in a position that we don't like, we will try to strike a bargain with God. When we feel that we are incapable of achieving our desires by ourselves, we turn to the one who we believe is capable of attaining our desire. However, there is one problem in trying to strike a bargain with God. When we bargain with someone, it makes the assumption that one or the other person has something that the other one wants. God doesn't lack or need anything. The truth is that God doesn't need anything from us. He is not dependent on anything that we could even do. He does not need our terms of the bargain. In fact, his "bargains" with us are all one sided. He created the relationship that we have with him. He blesses that relationship. He promises to give us eternal life. There is nothing that we can do. God does it all.

Yet, we think that we need to do something to get freedom. We desire freedom. That's really what the festival of Reformation is all about. Freedom. It's not about political freedom. It's not about the freedom that we want to do things our way. It's a freedom that is much more basic and deeper than the freedoms that we often find ourselves talking about. We want freedom from the fear of condemnation and punishment. We want the freedom to live a better, more grace-filled life. We want to live as God's children. We want to love and bear with one another—our brothers and sisters—just as our Father loves and bears with us. Yet, we also know that we can't have it because of sin. We try to do it by ourselves, and we so often find ourselves failing. With Christ, we are free. So, today, let us celebrate the freedom Christ has given to us.

Where do we learn about true freedom? We find it in the pages of the Bible. Yet, for some the Bible is just another holy book. Others see it as a book of rules. People may look at the Bible and try to follow it because it paints a picture what a good life might look like. The Bible is much more than any of those things. The Bible is a book that is totally about freedom. Jesus says it so clearly in our text: **"Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."** If you want a verse that sums up the Bible, it's that verse. Freedom is not connected to anything that we do. It is not connected to our heritage or family. It's about Jesus' truth. It's about the truth setting us free. We want freedom!

Radio commentator Paul Harvey tells of an experiment involving a chimpanzee that scientists were determined to teach written communication. For 14 years scientists worked with this chimpanzee, providing symbols in its cage to enable him to form syllables. Finally, the day arrived when it seemed the chimpanzee was actually going to make a sentence. Word went out. People crowded into the room. They watched as the chimpanzee turned symbols into words and words into a sentence. What did he say? *"Let me out."* Isn't that the cry of humans, of us? We look into our hearts and lives, and we say: *"Let me out."* No matter how hard we try, we are still prisoners of sins. We just can't seem to get good enough to satisfy the justice of God.

What do we do? Some, they give up. We are told that we are free to do what makes us happy. In other words, you are free to do whatever you want. What happens? Oh, it might make us happy for a moment. But it doesn't take long and our conscience once again drags and pulls us down into guilt. No matter how hard we try, we find ourselves dragged down deeper. Make no mistake. The devil wants to lock you up and throw away the key. If it is the truth that liberates and frees, then it is the liar who captures and kills. In the same chapter as our text Jesus describes this liar: **"He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies."**

Day after day we scream hopelessly, *"Let me out."* Yet the liar keeps whispering, *"There's no way out. Do something drastic. Cut and run. Throw in the towel. Give in, give out and give up."* A man named Martin Luther knew how that felt. Martin Luther knew this voice as well. He writes in his great Reformation hymn: *"The old evil foe now means deadly woe. Deep guile and great might are his dread arms in fight; on earth is not his equal."* When we believe Satan's lies we find ourselves going deeper and farther and longer, until we are bound and tied up. Jesus said it clearly: **"Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin."**

That's us. Trapped in sin -- locked in habits we cannot beat and bound in a bondage we cannot break. Worse yet, just like the Jews of our Lord's day, you and I often live in denial, echoing the words, we **"have never been slaves of anyone."** They were not free. We are not free. Sin makes everyone prisoners; everyone is powerless to break free. Yet Jesus says: But Jesus has heard our cry; *"Let me out."* He responds with this promise: **"... the truth will set you free."** Our striving and planning doesn't achieve freedom. Our best efforts and ingenuity are no help. No. It is the truth that sets us free.

Jesus is the truth that sets us free. To Nicodemus, caged in the hopeless laws Judaism, He said, **"For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him."** To the woman at Jacob's well, bound to one broken relationship after another, He said, **"The water I give will become a spring of water welling up to eternal life."** To the man born in the prison of blindness He said, **"Go, wash in the Pool of Siloam."** To Mary and Martha, locked in grief over the death of their brother Lazarus, He said, "I am the Resurrection and the Life." To Peter, who had publicly, openly and willingly denied Him three times He said, **"Take care of My sheep."**

Freedom is often viewed as the ability to do whatever you want. But a scriptural understanding of freedom grasps that we are only free when we live according to our creator's intention. Picture this as an illustration of freedom. When you take a fish and throw it out of the pond and thrown on the bank, it has been set free from the water. The fish has not been set free to live in a bigger world than the pond. Yet, the fish has been destroyed because it now lives contrary to its design. God designed the fish to live in water.

God has not designed us to live as sinners, but to live in him. This is the honest-to-goodness truth. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ means you are liberated from the liar and your prison doors are wide open. Luther experienced this truth and wrote: *"When I understood it, and the light of the Gospel came into my soul, the gates of paradise opened, and I walked through."* This same liberating power sets us free from the condemnation of our sin, from the pain of our past, from worry about our future. No one can take this freedom from us; no law can stop it, and no power on earth or hell can destroy it. That's what the Reformation is all about. That's what God wants you to be: free. In Christ we can say: *We are free to be ourselves, forgiven children of God. Amen.*