

True Freedom
John 8:31-36
October 25, 2015

So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." They answered him, "We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, 'You will become free'?" 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.

Today's Gospel reading is all about freedom. It's odd that in America, the land of freedom, millions of people have no idea what freedom is all about. Millions of people think they are free, and they couldn't be more wrong. These misguided souls have been tricked into thinking that freedom is something granted by the government. They have no idea that true freedom exists only within the confines of God's Word – and the Word of God is Jesus Christ.

The first mention of freedom in the Bible comes right after God created Adam: *The Lord God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die"* (Ge 2:16-17 ESV).

God intended for Adam to experience complete freedom. However, freedom does not mean the absence of restraints. Freedom is not being able to do whatever you please. If everyone were free to do anything and everything that pleased them, we would be constantly stepping all over everyone else's freedom. Freedom for everyone to do as he or she pleases isn't freedom, it's anarchy.

True freedom is the privilege and the power to become all that God wants you to be. True freedom is the opportunity to function at your full potential to the glory of God. Every human being is born with potential. God doesn't make junk. If you have been baptized into Christ Jesus, if you have been made a member of God's family, then the Holy Spirit has added spiritual gifts to your natural talents.

The United States Army used to invite people to "be all that you can be." God invites us to be all he wants us to be. Our freedom begins when in the salvation that comes by grace through faith in the atoning suffering and death of Jesus. After salvation is ours, we have the potential for total freedom.

We have the freedom of knowing that, while we will always be sinners here on earth, we don't have to earn our own forgiveness. We are free from the punishment of the Law that condemns.

We have freedom from sin. We no longer have to live in the bondage of addictions and perversions. We can tap the power of the Holy Spirit so we can tell Satan to leave us

alone.

We have freedom from other people. As people of God, we don't have to be concerned with what other people think of us. The only one, whose opinion matters, is God.

We have freedom from the past. We can be assured that whatever we have done, or whatever has been done to us, is washed away by the blood of Christ. We can put the past to rest and live for today, tomorrow, and forever.

We have freedom from things. Materialism is one of the strongest temptations we face. The world bombards us with the lie that "The one who dies with the most toys wins." However, we know that the one who dies in Christ is the only one who wins.

In a nutshell, that is what true freedom looks like.

If there is true freedom, is there such a thing as false freedom? Yes. There is a false freedom and it is extremely dangerous. It's dangerous for two reasons.

First, it's dangerous because of where it comes from. St Peter explains it this way: *There were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them – bringing swift destruction on themselves. Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping* (2 Pe 2:1-3 NIV).

False freedom often begins inside the church. That's what Peter is warning us about. There will always be false teachers in the church, who claim to believe God's Word. Yet they will twist Scripture in such a way that they use the Word of God to lead people into a religious bondage. They preach the rules of men, not faith in Christ.

In addition to that, Peter warns: *In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up* (2 Pe 2:3 NIV). Many of these teachers of false freedom are more concerned with the condition of your wallet than the condition of your soul. These false teachers use our vocabulary, but not our dictionary. When they speak about salvation, freedom, and sin, they mean something totally different than what the Bible teaches.

Second, false freedom is dangerous because of what it offers. False freedom would have you believe that you can have freedom without responsibility. That's a lie. The prodigal son wanted freedom without responsibility. He soon ended up with nothing and living with the pigs. You can't have freedom without responsibility. People who don't take responsibility for their freedom will lose their freedom.

Freedom without responsibility is a dangerous and destructive thing. That was Satan's lie to Eve in the Garden of Eden. "Go ahead, do what you want. Why should you have

to listen to God? Exercise your freedom. After all, it is your right.” Satan was the first one to abuse the term “equal rights.”

False freedom would have you believe that you can have freedom without accountability. That’s a lie. There are churches that teach there will be no final judgment. They say, “How could God condemn someone to hell for all eternity and still be a loving God?” They preach that, since we are living in a state of grace and we are always forgiven, we can live any way we please. After all, our sins are forgiven, right?

Listen to Paul: *What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?* (Ro 6:1-2 ESV). Paul says “by no means” can we go on sinning.

False freedom would have you believe that you can live as you please without consequence. That’s a lie. That is not in line with God’s Word. Romans 6:23 tells us in no uncertain terms that: *the wages of sin is death*. Numbers 32:23 says: *your sin will find you out*. And Proverbs 28:13 warns: *he who conceals his sins does not prosper*. Whether they are good acts or bad acts, all actions have consequences.

That’s all false freedom. It is based on lies, but God’s freedom is based in truth. The power of God works through the truth. Satan works through lies. Jesus even called Satan the father of lies (John 8:44).

The lies of Satan lead to the bondage of lust, greed, hatred, and perversions of all kinds. The necessary result of following the false freedom of the devil is the eternal torment of hell.

God uses truth to set us free and to lead us to true fulfilment in him. The truth that God uses has been given to us through his holy Word and through our Savior, Jesus Christ. Listen as Scripture speaks about God’s truth.

John calls Jesus: *the true light that gives light to every man* (Jn 1:9 NIV).

Jesus told Thomas: *I am the way and the truth and the life* (Jn 14:6 NIV).

Jesus prayed to his heavenly Father: *Sanctify them by the truth; your Word is truth* (Jn 17:17 NIV).

And in his first letter, John writes: *It is the [Holy] Spirit who testifies, because the [Holy] Spirit is the truth* (1 Jn 5:6 NIV).

God’s purpose for his people is freedom. God’s method is truth, and that truth is manifested in Jesus. Still, for us to experience the true freedom God wants for us, there are three responsibilities we must take upon ourselves.

It is our responsibility to grow in the knowledge of God. The better we know the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the more true freedom we will enjoy. The way to know God

better is to faithfully and regularly study his Word. By studying Scripture, we will gain more than just an intellectual knowledge, we will develop a personal relationship with God.

It is our responsibility to love and trust God. Jesus said: *If you love me, you will obey what I command* (Jn 14:15 NIV). What did Jesus command us to do? *Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. Love your neighbor as yourself* (Mt 22:37 & 39 NIV).

We trust God by putting our lives in his hands. We will find true freedom when we learn to turn to God in all circumstances. The book of Proverbs encourages us to: *Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding* (Pr 3:5 NIV).

It is also our responsibility to obey God. It sounds like a contradiction in terms, but true freedom can only be found in true obedience to God. When you obey God with all your heart, ethical dilemmas and issues of right and wrong, which cause other people tremendous distress, become a no-brainer for you. You find great freedom in simply following God's commands.

James writes: *The man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it – he will be blessed in what he does* (Jas 1:25 NIV).

Today, our Gospel reading invites you to experience the true freedom that is found only in full obedience to our Savior. We have Jesus' own promise that: *If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed* (Jn 8:36 ESV).