

TRUE FREEDOM

JOHN 8:31-40

The star pupil at the University of Oklahoma in the 1960's and 70's was Washoe. She was a chimpanzee who was raised with a human family and who was taught to communicate via a form of sign language. Over the course of four years, she learned to differentiate between 130 different signs. What made her communication remarkable is that she learned to put different sign-words together to communicate new ideas. You have to understand that Washoe was a pampered pet — she enjoyed good food and comfortable living quarters. Yet I am told that her very first sentence was: “Let me out.”

There is something about freedom that appeals to all of us.

Paula and I were in Turkey last month following our time in Moldova. We were talking to our Muslim guide and he was trying to tell us about the political situation in Turkey and he remarked about their freedom of speech. A little while later, he confessed that he had been working on a doctorate but had been forced to abandon his scholarly pursuits because his political ideas were not in exact conformity to those of his country. Apparently, his ideas of freedom of speech were quite different from our own.

We Americans often pride ourselves in living in the land of the free. We can thank the Lord that we have the freedom to meet together and to worship Him. It is appropriate that we enjoy and celebrate that freedom in this season of the year.

At the same time, we should recognize that the Bible teaches us of a freedom that far transcends anything that has been obtained through the signing of a political declaration or from the winning of military victories.

We have a wonderful freedom in Christ. It is a freedom from...

- From the **penalty** of sin.
- From the **pressure** of having to wonder if we have done enough
- From the **pretense** of having to pretend that we are good enough

FREEDOM IS ENJOYED BY THOSE WHO ARE IN CHRIST

31 Jesus therefore was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, “If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; 32 and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (John 8:31-32).

In verse 31 Jesus addresses those Jews who had believed in Him. This entire discourse is addressed to those who had a measure of faith. But it was not a saving faith. It was a faith which was not willing to go further than certain limits. In verse 59, these same Jews who believed in Him will pick up stones to throw at Him and kill Him.

They had a measure of faith, but it was not real. How can you tell the difference? By the ACTIONS that it produces. Here is the principle. If you don't live it, then you probably don't believe it. If you don't walk in the ways of Christ, then you are probably not Christ's disciple. I did not say that if you don't live it PERFECTLY, then you don't believe it. If you are a disciple, then you are in a process of growth. You are becoming more and more like Christ.

I came out of a school of thought that taught it didn't matter if there was growth or not - that some Christians will grow and that others won't and it's okay because they will all end up in the same place in the end. It isn't true. Real belief is that which culminates in action.

If you woke up tomorrow and found out that everything you had believed about Christianity was a hoax and that it really wasn't true at all, how would it change your life? If there would be no change, then it is because you really don't believe it now.

These Jews believed in Him, but it was not a faith that brought freedom. They had a measure of faith. Our passage specifically tells us that they believed in Him. Yet they received none of the benefits of that belief. They believed in the One who came to set men free, but they were not enjoying that benefit.

There are Christians today who have lost all sense of joy in life. If they were honest, they would admit that they were happier when they were pagans. They have made a profession of faith; they have believed in Jesus, but there is no joy because there is no freedom.

Quite some time ago, I was working a double shift at the fire department. That means I was at the fire station for a full 24 hour shift and then when everyone else got off duty and went home, I stayed for a second 24 hour shift, commanding a group of engine companies.

I was walking through the station in the morning while the crews were out washing their fire engines when I noticed one fire fighter sitting and relaxing in the lounge. Using what Paula describes as my commander's voice, I asked him why he wasn't out working with the rest of the crews.

He levitated off the chair on which he had been sitting and started out to go and wash the

truck when I realized with a start that he was one of the oncoming crews, that he had gotten to the station early and that he was not on duty. I didn't have any authority over him. When I realized my mistake, I called him back and we both chuckled over my error.

But imagine if he was not only off duty, but retired completely from the fire service (he actually did retire a few months later). He has turned in his uniform and he has received his severance papers and he is saying goodbye to everyone and I walk in and I order, "Go out and clean that fire truck!"

Can you imagine him going out and picking up the scrub brush and getting to work? What has happened? He is no longer under my authority. I have no legal authority to give him orders. The man is free. But he is not enjoying the freedom that is his.

We are the same way when we do not enjoy the freedom that is ours in Christ.

You may have been told that first you must obey and then out of your obedience you experience freedom; but that isn't so. It is just the opposite. You become free as a gift of grace and out of that freedom you are motivated to obey. If you try to obtain freedom through obeying, then all you will probably find will be the chains of misery.

FREEDOM IS ELUSIVE TO THOSE WHO DON'T KNOW THEY ARE SLAVES

They answered Him, "We are Abraham's offspring, and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, 'You shall become free'?" (John 8:33).

To get the full impact of this passage, you have to see where they were standing. Verse 20 of this same chapter tells us that Jesus was in the treasury. That was located in the Court of the Women just outside the Temple. This was a great structure, but there was another great structure just to the northwest. It was the Fortress Antonia. It was the fortress that housed the Roman garrison.

- The statement of the Jews was not true. As they spoke these words, they were in bondage to Rome. They were speaking in the shadow of the Antonia Fortress which loomed over the Temple.
- Not only were they in bondage to Rome, they were also in bondage to their traditions. They had added all sorts of traditions to the word of God, seeking to build a hedge around that law and they bound heavy burdens to people who sought to follow and keep all of those traditions.

- Furthermore, they were bound to sin. They harbored all sorts of secret sins in their hearts and they pretended it wasn't there and they blinded themselves to their lost condition.

Religion can do that. When we come to church and we sing the songs and we pray the prayers and we put some money into the offering plate, we can forget the truth of the matter that we are people who need a Savior.

I served as a fire fighter for 29 years. I've done the job as what we used to call a "tailboard fire fighter," as a Lieutenant, as a Captain, and finally as a Battalion Chief. I lost track a long time ago of how many people we had rescued and how many lives we had saved. The hardest person to help is the one who doesn't realize he needs help. The person who is in denial. The person whose very life is in danger but who doesn't see it.

It can be hard to save the life of someone who doesn't realize he needs saving. Such a one resists the efforts of the savior. That is one of the reasons God gave us the Law -- it shows us our need for a savior.

- The Law says, "The one who sins is deserving of the punishment of death."
- And then it very thoroughly tells us what sin is.
- It acts like a mirror, showing us our condition of how we really are.

You look into the mirror of the Law and what do you see? Jesus tells you what you see in verses 34.

³⁴ Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. (John 8:34).

When you look into the mirror of the Law, what do you see? Remember that the law speaks not only to outward actions, but to inward attitudes. It doesn't only say, "Thou shall not steal, thou shall not commit adultery, thou shall not murder," it also say, "You shall not covet -- you shall not desire your neighbor's possessions, you shall not lust after his wife, you shall not hold grudges and bear malice toward him."

Is there anyone here who struggles against that sort of slavery? Remember that there is no cure without a diagnosis. There is no salvation apart from a realization of your lostness and your need for a savior. There is no freedom apart from a realization of your slavery. The good news of the gospel is that Jesus came to free you from that very slavery. That brings us to our next point.

FREEDOM IS FOUND BY THOSE WHO KNOW THE SON

And the slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever. ³⁶ If therefore the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed.” (John 8:35-36).

There is a difference between one who is a slave in a household versus one who is a son in that same household. A slave can be tossed out at any time. That fact that he is currently in the house does not guarantee a relationship with the owner of that house.

Paula and I had some renovations done to our house last year. We had workers that were in our house every day. But they are not there any longer. Why not? Because they were not there as family. They were there only to serve for a time.

Here is the principle:

- Sons stay.
- Servants don't.

Jesus is speaking specifically to those who had grown up in the land of Israel. They had been in the house of the Lord since their birth. They were members of the chosen people, the seed of Abraham, the people of the covenant. They had the word of God and the promises of God. But the truth of the matter was that their relationship was only that of a slave. They were in the house, but they were not a permanent resident of the house. Unless something happened, there would come a day when they would be cast out. They needed to stop being slaves and become sons.

You have the same need. The fact that you are in church today or even a member of a church is no guarantee of your relationship with the Lord. Being a church member does not save you any more than being in a cookie jar makes you a cookie. You need to know the Son. You need to know Jesus because knowing Him means being free.

What does it mean to be truly free? Freedom is not doing what you really want to do. Freedom is doing that for which you were made. For example, I love to eat chocolate. But eating chocolate would not lead to freedom; it would lead to slavery. By my very nature, I have desires that go against my body. Experiencing true freedom sometimes means not giving into those desires.

A drug addict may crave the drug to which he is addicted, but freedom is not attained by giving into that craving. Real freedom is in doing that for which you were made.

FREEDOM IS THREATENING TO THOSE WHO DON'T

KNOW HIM

“I know that you are Abraham's offspring; yet you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you.” (John 8:37).

There were some present who were hearing the words of Jesus who were anything but free.

- They did not know the Son.
- They did not know they were slaves.
- They were not free and they didn't want anyone else to be free either.

Have you ever known anyone like that? There is an old saying that misery loves company. What is true of misery is also true of slavery. Slavery loves company and freedom is threatening to those who are not free. That was seen on one occasion where the disciples saw a man who was casting out demons in the name of Jesus.

*38 John said to Him, “Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we tried to hinder him because he was not following us.”
39 But Jesus said, “Do not hinder him, for there is no one who shall perform a miracle in My name, and be able soon afterward to speak evil of Me. 40 For he who is not against us is for us.” (Mark 9:38-40).*

Here was a man who was exhibiting a certain amount of freedom. He wasn't one of the Twelve. He wasn't attending the right seminary or in the right denomination. He may not have even been reformed. But he was casting out demons in the name of Jesus.

The disciples couldn't take that. They tried to stop him. He didn't fit into their paradigm of what people of God ought to do.

There is a lesson here. It is that we can become enslaved even to good things. We can come a slave to things that in themselves are good and right and miss the fact that God is doing something even better.

Are you threatened by freedom? Are you threatened when...

- You hear Christian music that goes against your preferences?
- When someone raises their hands in worship?
- When someone doesn't raise their hands in worship?

Freedom is threatening to those who don't know Christ and if you are threatened by freedom, then perhaps it is time to go back to the cross and to remember the One who died to set you free.

FREEDOM IS RECOGNIZED BY THOSE WHO ARE FREE

38 “I speak the things which I have seen with My Father; therefore you also do the things which you heard from your father.” 39 They answered and said to Him, “Abraham is our father.” Jesus said to them, “If you are Abraham's children, do the deeds of Abraham. 40 But as it is, you are seeking to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God; this Abraham did not do. (John 8:38-40).

Jesus was speaking to those who took great pride in their past heritage. They were children of Abraham. The problem was that their actions did not match the actions of Abraham and their faith did not match the faith of Abraham.

Jesus says to them, “It is well and good that you claim Abraham as your father, but if you really want to claim Abraham as your father, then you need to do what Abraham did and believe what Abraham believed.”

What did Abraham do and what did Abraham believe? Abraham submitted himself to the will of God and he believed the promises of God.

Every once in a while, I ask someone about their spiritual life and they tell me about their godly parents or they tell me about the church to which they belong or they tell me about how they were baptized as a baby. Perhaps they even think that they are on the right track because they were born in a “Christian nation.” Now it is wonderful to have godly parents and to belong to a Bible-believing church or to have been baptized; it is wonderful to enjoy the national freedoms we enjoy, but these things do not guarantee your relationship with God.

- Being in a godly home will not save you.
- Being baptized will not save you.
- Being a Presbyterian will not save you.
- Being an American will not save you.
- Being a Republican or a Democrat will not save you.
- Doing good works; even doing the very best you can, will not save you.

You need to come to Christ in faith, realizing your need for a Savior and trusting in Him as that Savior and submitting yourself to Him as your Lord.

FREEDOM IS NOT FREE

We've been talking about the freedom that we have in Christ. It is a freedom that...

- Is enjoyed by those who are in Christ.
- Is elusive to those who don't know they are slaves.
- Is found by those who know the Son.
- Is threatening to those who don't know Him.
- Is recognized by those who are free.

We are forced back to one last basic truth about freedom. It is that **freedom isn't free**. Those who signed the Declaration of Independence learned that lesson. The freedoms that we enjoy in this country today were earned by the struggles and the lives and the blood of those who fought to obtain it.

In a much greater way, your freedom in Christ is not free. It was purchased on your behalf by the greatest sacrifice in all of history -- the sacrifice of God's own Son. Today we come to His table to remember that supreme sacrifice that He made on our behalf.

Jesus came to destroy that which destroys life. He came to release us from that which enslaved us. It was not an easy fix. He had to die in order to fix it. Sin was no easy obstacle.

The death of Christ was no accident. As a kernel of grain must be crushed to produce bread and as a grape must be crushed to produce wine, so also He had to be crushed to save men.

Yet even when the kernel of grain is crushed to make bread and even when the grape is crushed to produce wine, they must then be eaten and they must be drunk in order to be beneficial. So it is with Jesus. You appropriate Him through faith. Only then does He nourish your spiritual life.

It is also no accident that the Last Supper was held at the time of a great holiday celebration. It was held at the Passover. It was held at the feast that commemorated the independence day of Israel. It was held on the day that served as a reminder to the people that they had once been slaves in a foreign land and that God had done a mighty work to set them free.

One important thing to remember about the Passover is that all of Egypt was under the penalty of death. It did not matter whether you were Israelite or Egyptian, man or animal, every firstborn of Egypt was to be put to death. The only way of escape was by the

application of blood to the doorposts of the house.

You are set free in the same way. It takes the application of the blood of Christ, not to the doorposts to a house, but by a faith application of the doorposts to your heart. You can trust in Him today and He will give you real freedom.