In Bondage to Freedom

Reformation Sunday T John 8:31-36

(Adapted from W. Weinrich’s Outline in CPR Vol. 16:4 B)

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Today we commemorate and remember the Reformation!

And we give thanks to God for Luther’s clear teaching on the doctrine of righteousness,

In an age where the Roman Church veiled the comfort found in Christ.

Luther restored the pure doctrine of the righteousness of God to the church.

Our epistle reading from Romans 3 clarifies the work of Christ for us:

By His grace, He is our redeemer,

He is our Passover Lamb,

and He is our mercy seat – the sacrifice which pleases God’s wrath on sin.

Luther clarified this Gospel teaching for the Holy Church,

As Christ’s bride had been corrupted and robed of the eternal comfort in His cross.

Toward the beginning of the Reformation,

Luther wrote a Treatise called *On the Freedom of a Christian*.

In this work, Luther expounded the biblical answer on the question:

*What does it mean for man to be free?*

When we hear the word freedom,

we think of something different than how the Bible uses the word freedom.

In our culture, freedom is usually associated with choice.

We’re free to choose to own a gun or not.

We’re free to choose public, private, or homeschool for our children.

We’re free to go to whatever church we prefer.

A person is free who has the right and power to choose as **he** wills.

Therefore, we often hear of the freedom of choice.

Our ideas of freedom arise from the idea of a person being independent and autonomous.

However, the Bible knows no such freedom of man.

Rather, the Bible reveals man as entrapped. Dead in sin. Destined to Die.

Man can only live if he’s freed from *that* slavery and is reborn a new man.

At the beginning of Mel Gibson’s *The Pssion of the Christ,*

Jesus is in the Garden of Eden in deep prayer,

When Satan tempted Jesus to reject the way of the cross that the Father has given him.

He says things to Jesus like “Do you really think that one man can bear the sin of the world?” “Do you really want to DIE for those who don’t love you?”

Jesus struggled to accept the will of His Father, that is, to embrace the cross.

But then the scene climaxes when Jesus sets His heart to accept His Father’s will,

And crushes the head of the serpent underneath His foot.

This scene with Jesus rubs up against our preconceived notions of freedom.

Is Jesus, by submitting to the will of the Father,

Therefore accepting, settling for, resigning himself to slavery to His Father?

Or is Jesus indeed free?

Just who is this man? Is he a slave? Or is He a free man?

I.

Who is this man who willingly goes the way of the cross for the sinner?

Is He a slave?

We must start by saying - Jesus’ death is His purpose.

Jesus came to earth not to preach, do miracles, and gain a following.

He does those things to draw attention to the reason God became flesh.

Jesus stated his purpose in John 12 –

**“Now is my soul troubled. What shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour?**

**But for this purpose, I have come to this hour.”**

Someone had to come to save.

Someone had to die, for we need someone to set us free.

In the Gospel reading, Jesus says – **“If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”**

Jesus’ audience took exception to Jesus’ suggestion that He is the one who gives freedom.

They said – **“We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, ‘You will become free’?”**

Even though the unbelieving Jews didn’t want to admit it,

everyone who sins are slaves of sin.

Sin enslaves us to ourselves – to our lusts, passions, and our foolish choices.

Yet, this is why your Father in heaven has sent His Son Jesus.

He’s sent Him with this purpose in mind –

to glorify the Father’s name in familial obedience,

and through this act, set the captives free.

Jesus does nothing but by the will of His Father.

Just before our assigned text, Jesus said

**“I do nothing of my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me.”**

Jesus never defined Himself autonomously or independently.

He submitted to the will and authority of His Father.

The Father gave Jesus authority to lay down His life or to take it up again.

And so whatever Jesus does is done by the authority of His Father.

Who is this man?

He is the Son of Man sent by His Father to be lifted up on a cross,

And by this lifting up upon His cross,

The whole world will be drawn to Him,

And the whole world will see Him.

Jesus is the light shining in darkness.

He is the city set on a hill for all to see.

He says – **“I have come into the world as light,**

**So that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.”**

Jesus reveals Himself to the darkness of sinful man.

And in bringing light to the dark world,

By revealing Himself to those who believe in Him,

Who hold and grasp onto in faith,

Jesus reveals the loving Father in heaven to them.

For Jesus said **“Whoever sees me sees him who sent me”**

In another scene from the movie *The Passion of the Christ*,

Jesus was flogged by the Roman soldiers.

In that scene, Jesus was chained down to the pole while He took his flogging.

Then, fast forward towards the end of the movie,

The soldiers nailed Jesus hands and feet to a cross.

These two scenes – the flogging and crucifixion – show Jesus being tied down.

Yet this symbolic fact teaches that Jesus is bound to His Father’s will.

Does being in cuffs and nailed to wood sound like a free man?

(PAUSE)

Does this mean that Jesus is a slave?

Of course not!

To die the death of the cross reveals the freedom of the Son –

That He is free to do the will of His Father.

II.

Who is this man who gives over His life?

He’s absolutely free.

He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

He is the Son of God who freely does and reveals the Father’s will.

He is the Word of God made flesh –

That is, He is the image of the invisible God,

And through Him, God speaks to His creation.

For He is one with His Father,

Who sent His only Son as a gift to the world,

Who freely submits to His Father’s will and gives over His life for the life of the world.

III.

Who is this man whose life is given so that others might live?

Is He a slave? Or is He free?

Our text tells us – **“The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever.”**

Jesus is not a slave, but the Son – and He remains in the house of God forever.

Therefore, He is the Son who makes ***us*** free when you were baptized into Him,

For **“if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”**

In baptism, you received His Spirit,

For you must be born again of Spirit and water,

if you are to be recipients with Jesus of His kingdom.

And as the resurrected Christ breathed on his disciples and said –

**“Receive the Holy Spirit”,**

so now does the Spirit you received at baptism

give you assurance that you abide in the Son, Jesus.

For in Jesus, we’re created anew to be as He is.

But as Paul says in Romans 6,

The baptismal life gives life to the new man.

And this new man that we are by our baptisms, is free in Christ, yet also a slave.

Paul writes, **“Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey,**

**Either of sin, which leads to death, or obedience which leads to righteousness?**

**But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.”**

Since we’re baptized into God, made a new man, and received the Holy Spirit,

we’re free from sin, but slaves of righteousness.

We are made as Christ is - bound to the will of the Father.

Specifically, we’re bound to the commandment of love,

given to Jesus by His Father.

IV.

Who, then, is this man whose life is willingly given over for others?

Is He a slave ***and*** free?

This man makes Himself to be in you and I,

and shares Himself with us.

He is the baptized one, who freely invites us, the baptized,

to pray to our Father.

He is the baptized, who freely invites us, the baptized,

to gladly live as slaves to the life of Christ.

He is the baptized, who freely invites us, the baptized,

To be bound to the law of love.

He is the baptized, who freely invites us, the baptized,

To live in the perfect freedom which can only be found in God’s love.

In one of the final scenes of the movie, *The Passion of the Christ*,

The Roman Soldier stabs Jesus’ side with a spear to confirm His death.

Out from Jesus’ side comes water and blood.

As soon as Jesus’ water and blood from His side hits the soldiers face,

He kneels and looks up to Jesus with awe and wonder,

as if He had just been baptized and washed clean in the blood of the Lamb,

as if He had become a new man through Christ.

The Reformation preached the freedom we have in this crucified Christ.

The Father gave up His only Son out of the freedom of His love for the world – which is the Reformation teaching ‘grace alone.’

It is impossible to receive that which is freely given except through the freedom of a thankful reception of that gift – which is the Reformation teaching ‘faith alone.’

This is the freedom from sin we have in the Gospel that is proclaimed through the Scriptures – which is the Reformation teaching ‘Scripture alone.’

Through this man, we are made new – free from sin, and a slave to love.

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