

This Sunday's Sermon

I PROMISE...THE TRUTH WILL SET YOU FREE! – JOHN 6:31-36 PASTOR COLIN RIEKE ~ NOVEMBER 3, 2013

To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." 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?" Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.



Dear fellow children of God's promises,

It happened right after Christmas in 1991. Kim, a 36 year old Phoenix bartender, was found dead in the men's restroom. She had been fatally stabbed. The killer had not left much physical evidence. After police swept the scene and interviewed witnesses, they caught a break in the case. One witness had heard the victim say that a regular patron was going to help her close up on the evening of her death. Police approached this patron, a man by the name of Ray Krone. One piece of evidence the police did find were bite marks on the victim. So they asked Ray to bite into a Styrofoam cup to compare bite marks. He was arrested two days later and convicted of murder. A jury sentenced him to death based on the prosecution's expert bite analysis. Krone maintained his innocence.

Ten years went by as Krone tried every last option to exonerate himself. In 2002, DNA testing on blood found on the victim's body conclusively excluded Krone, and instead was found to be a match to another man. On April 8, 2002, Ray Krone walked out of prison a free man. He was the 100th death row inmate to be exonerated of his accused crimes. In the end, the truth won out, the truth set Ray Krone free.

This morning we begin our four week series on some promises from God. These are promises that a gracious, loving God gives to his people to give comfort, to give security, to give assurance. A promise from God can be relied upon, because we know that he will not break his promises to us. Listen to this week's promise from God, "I PROMISE...THE TRUTH WILL SET YOU FREE!"

1. The truth hurts and heals
2. Freedom for good, not for evil

(1)

We hear a story like the one about Ray Krone, and we are all agreed that the truth is a good thing. The truth allowed an innocent man to not be killed for a crime he did not commit. Witnesses on the stand swear, "To tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." But often times it is difficult to find

out the truth about something, about anything. Some of this has to do with a postmodern idea that there is no such thing as absolute truth, only personal truths. Maybe sometimes the reason it is so hard to find the truth is because so often the truth hurts. The truth hurt for the prosecution of Ray Krone to admit they had been wrong, the truth hurt the guilty man who had been hiding for a decade. But the truth hurting is not only a result of our society, but even the society in which Jesus lived.

At the time our sermon account took place, Jesus was teaching people in the temple. Jesus, the very embodiment of truth is teaching people about him. Some of the Jews listening were convinced by Jesus' words, and then Jesus says this, **"If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."** These seem like innocent enough words, we might think how could anyone be offended by them? But the Jews were. They replied, **"We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?"** They took offense at being set free.

Now, part of every Jewish school curriculum would recall the hundreds of years the Jews spent as slaves in Egypt. So it would be foolish for the Jews to deny that they had ever been physical slaves. It was more likely they were denying a slavery away from God. They made the claim to Abraham, their great forefather, they had always been God's chosen people. One of their own Rabbis claimed, "All Israel are children of kings." They relied on this spiritual inheritance. They were never slaves to another god like the pagan nations around them. This is the truth from Jesus they did not want to listen to.

What the Jews thought about God and about their standing with God was not the same as what Jesus was telling them. Jesus told them about the truth that hurts, the truth about sin. **"Everyone who sins is a slave to sin."** This is almost exactly what the apostle Paul wrote in so many of his letters. The Jews took the accusation of sin very seriously, because God had taught them to. So the accusation that they were sinners and slaves to sin, from which they needed to be freed, offended them, because it conflicted with what they thought.

This is how the truth of Jesus' words hurt. The Jews thought because they were God's chosen people they didn't need to worry about anything. There are plenty of things that people think God's Word says today too. Many churches have taken to teaching what they think God's Word says. They think since God's Word says he loves all people – that must mean that he loves all people the way they are and they don't have to change their sinful ways and lifestyles. They think God's Word never talks about money, so when the church talks about it, they must only want more for themselves. They think God's Word can only be interpreted by a select holy few.

I think something that is very much on all of our minds is what's going on in my life, what does God want me to do in my everyday life? We say God wants us to be happy, so do whatever makes you happy. We wonder what job we are to take so we pray about it and think God will tell us. Perhaps the most damning thought of all is thinking our sins are just little mistakes that really aren't a big deal, or that Jesus is only part of the solution (because we need to play our part too). But in all of this we cannot be content just to think that's what God's Word says, we need to be in it constantly ourselves.

Because when we are in it constantly, we find the truth. And this truth can in some cases be quite different than what we thought truth was. Today we remember the Reformation, a day when Martin Luther asked 95 questions to bring the Christian Church back to the Word of God, back to the truth. Because the Christian Church, much like the Jewish people before them, had begun to rely on what they thought God's Word said, instead of what it actually said. The summary of the truth in God's Word is that no one is righteous, no one is good enough to get to heaven. Our sins condemn us to hell. And no amount of begging or trying hard or money was going to change that.

The truth of getting to heaven is not found in what we think it's found in, it's found in Jesus, Jesus, only Jesus. This is God's promise of THE TRUTH THAT WILL SET YOU FREE. And this promise is only found in God's Word – the Bible. And it wasn't until the quiet collision between my sinful heart and the Word of God, that I knew the truth, and THE TRUTH THAT SET ME FREE.

(2)

There's one very critical difference between THE TRUTH THAT SETS ME FREE, and the truth that set a man like Ray Krone free. In the case of Ray Krone, he had not committed the crime he was accused of committing. It was the right thing to do to set him free (and get some compensation for his decade of time served). The truth about our situation however is far different. If we stand on our own merits, then we are rightly convicted. It is only standing on the merits of Christ that we are freed. It was as our lesson from Romans stated, **"But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe."**

THIS TRUTH HAS SET ME FREE. What a difference that makes. And the less you know about this truth beforehand, the greater of an impact it will likely have on your life. Take again the example of Martin Luther. He had heard all of his life the resounding gong of God's Law, "You're not good enough." When he finally saw this section of Romans, the Holy Spirit opened his eyes and he was blown away – a righteousness that is completely separate from you, for you. He clung to this truth so tight and would not let go. He wouldn't let go when confronted by the Church to take back what he had said. For four years he held out hope that God's gospel proclamation would fall on listening ears. But when asked a final time to take back what he said, he uttered arguably his most famous words, "Unless I am convinced by Scripture or clear reason, I cannot and will not recant anything." He took a stand that put his life in danger, and yet he was willing to do so because of the truth he found in Holy Scripture.

Now I doubt any of us will ever gain the fame and notoriety that Martin Luther did, and perhaps we will never have to put our life on the line to defend this truth. So maybe your life won't completely turn upside down with news of this truth. But I wonder, how does this truth affect you? Ask yourself this question: What if I really believed that what I believe is really real? I'll repeat that again: What if I really believed that what I believe is really real? Think about it, who you are now – you a child of God, washed in the blood of Jesus Christ. You know where you're going – heaven, that is your eternal destiny. Think about how this promise affects or could affect your life?

I will tell you one way that it won't affect your life. It won't encourage you to live however you please so long as it makes you happy. Living for yourself means that you are not living for Jesus, it means you are not following his teaching. Jesus said, **"If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and THE TRUTH WILL SET YOU FREE."** Truth, absolute truth, is not found in whatever we think truth is, it is found only in the Bible. So a natural way that this promise of God will affect your life is to know more about this truth.

We want to know more about this truth not just to counter those who don't believe, but because in this truth we are free. I think all of us here, myself included, know that there is so much more we can learn about this truth. We can never know enough about God's Word. Maybe that means coming to church a little more to hear about this truth. Maybe that means we take advantage of one of the different Bible Studies going on during the week. Maybe that means finally starting, or restarting that family devotion. These are all ways that get us into the truth. These are all ways we can get spiritually fed and know this promise of God much better.

Just like it would be foolish for a prosecutor of a criminal case to say, "I think this man committed murder." It is foolish for us to say "I think God's word says this." It is much better to know this promise of God backwards and forward, not only for others, but also for ourselves. Because God has promised, **"THE TRUTH WILL SET YOU FREE."** Jesus is the truth, Jesus has set us free! Amen.