

## I TELL YOU THE TRUTH . . . ANYONE WHO SINS IS A SLAVE TO SIN

Dear Friends in Christ,

"I tell you the truth . . ." This little phrase was spoken by Jesus over and over in the Gospels, 79 times to be exact. "I tell you the truth . . ." Jesus used these words to introduce important facts, important statements, important spiritual truths to his disciples. In his word Jesus still uses these words to introduce important facts, important statements, important spiritual truths to you and me. Our Midweek Lenten sermon series this year is based on six of the spiritual truths which Jesus introduced with the words, "I tell you the truth . . ."

We use as our text, the words of Jesus recorded in John 8:31-36

*<sup>31</sup> To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. <sup>32</sup> Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." <sup>33</sup> 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?"*

*<sup>34</sup> Jesus replied, "**I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.**" <sup>35</sup> Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. <sup>36</sup> So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.*

Throughout Scripture, the truth of God is countered by, opposed by the lies of the devil. It's been that way since the time of Adam and Eve. "You will not surely die." Thousands of years ago, the devil spoke those words in the Garden of Eden. And ever since, Lucifer's language has remained the same: lie, after lie, after lie. Sometimes he shouts his lie. Sometimes he whispers it. Sometimes he speaks with such a natural, casual voice that you don't even suspect anything shady. But he still continues to speak to you.

He says. "You are your own boss, you don't have to be restricted by religion . . . all religions are really the same, you can find a different one, one that's not repressive, one that lets you really have fun, one that lets you be a part of things . . . you can have it all, you may have to lie and cheat and stab a few people in the back on the way up, but you deserve fortune and fame and power . . . it's your body, you can do with it what you want, satisfy and gratify your body, you're gonna love it, don't worry about the consequences, there are none." Sometimes Satan's lies lead in another direction ". . . you're worthless . . . no one loves you . . . that terrible thing you did twenty years ago, it's unforgivable."

We live in a world where the devil's dialect is spoken all around us. That is why it's so important for us to listen to the voice of the One who is the Truth. God-willing, over the next six weeks, we'll walk with our Savior in his Word. As we do, we'll see him suffer. We'll see him die. We'll see him rise again. But we'll also hear him speak. As you listen, you will hear him repeatedly assure you, "I tell you the truth."

## **I Tell You the Truth . . . Anyone Who Sins Is a Slave to Sin**

**I. Truth is . . . we were slaves to sin.**

**II. Truth is . . . we were freed from sin.**

### **I. Truth is . . . we were slaves to sin.**

If you're like me, the truth is not always what we want to hear. We don't want to hear the doctor say, "You really need to lose weight." We don't want to hear that the girl or guy we're dating isn't the best influence on us. We don't want to hear that our mistake at work set the project back a month. Too often, "truth" is more about how we want something to be rather than what it really is. Maybe that explains our defenses going up today when Jesus says, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin." I understand that I sin. I admit that I sin. But as soon as Jesus says that I'm a slave to sin, that makes me feel helpless. That makes me feel like I'm not in control of my life. By definition, a slave is unable to do the things he wants to do. He has to do what his master tells him to do. As Christians, what do we want to do? We certainly don't want to sin. But is there anyone who has the ability to keep from sinning? No. By nature we're slaves. We may live in the land of the free, but by nature we are slaves to sin.

"Ok, ok. I'm a slave. So now what?" I suppose we could downplay the seriousness of that truth: "Who cares if I sin? Everybody sins. I still know who Jesus is and what he did for me. So what's the big deal if I'm a slave to sin?" Do you recognize that voice? Those are words dripping off the tongue of the father of lies. "Ok, ok. Sin is a big deal. I get it. In fact, it bothers me when I sin. But don't you see me doing a lot of good stuff too? How can I be a slave to sin when I do all these commendable acts of kindness and service? Why don't you comment on the good things I do instead of always harping on the bad?" Valid point, but do you recognize the voice? Again, it's the devil talking, trying to get us to look at our own deeds as a counterbalance to our sin. Our deeds, no matter how "good" they are according to the world's measurement, cannot cut through the chains of sin.

But let's face it. It's not really the label "slave to sin" that you and I have a problem with. It's the status that title puts us in before God. Jesus says, "*A slave has no permanent place in the family.*" It's disheartening to hear, "You're not part of this family." But what's his point? In very clear terms, Jesus is warning that a slave to sin has no room reserved in heaven. Now sin's a big deal. Sin can separate us from God. Sin can keep us out of heaven.

If I were to ask, "How many of you sin?" I'm sure one hundred percent of your hands would go up. But if I then asked, "How many of you sin to the level that you deserve hell?" Undoubtedly, at least one person's hand would go down, maybe more. You see, we can handle facing the truth that we're sinners. Through personal experience, we've become accustomed to that accusation because we've seen it so blatantly in our lives. But to be told we deserve hell, that's tougher to swallow. But that's the truth. And quite frankly, that's what Ash Wednesday is all about: to lead us to come to grips with the truth of what God told Adam way back when, "*Dust you are and to dust you will return.*" (Genesis 3:19 NIV). As slaves to sin, we deserve to die. As slaves to sin, we deserve hell.

## II. Truth is . . . we were freed from sin.

What's the escape plan? How do we pull a Harry Houdini and escape the chains of sin? How do we get freedom? You've heard the old saying, "It's not so much what you know, but who you know." Fellow slaves, the key to freedom is knowing the One who holds the key to release your chains. That one person, that key person, is Jesus. As the Son of God, he holds in his hands the keys to eternal life. *"If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."*

So the question now becomes, how do we get to know this key person? Verse 31, Jesus says, *"If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."* This teaching—not any teaching, but *this* teaching, Jesus' teaching—is the key that Jesus uses to unlock the shackles of sin. This teaching shows us a Jesus who didn't hand us a checklist of do's and don'ts so that we could live a perfect life free from sin, but a Jesus who did all the do's and refrained from doing all the don'ts and ended up living a perfect life for us. This teaching shows us a Jesus who didn't just feel sorry for us when he saw us getting beaten and whipped by our slavemaster, sin, but a Jesus who stepped in and took the beating for us. This teaching shows us a Jesus who didn't get knocked out by sin when he stepped into our place, but a Jesus who stormed back from the grave, thus signing and sealing our emancipation proclamation. This teaching, which tells us the truth about Jesus, sets us free.

Here's the icing on the cake. Not only are we set free from the shackles of sin and the curse of the law which says "If you sin, you will die," we are now also free to serve God and serve one another in love. By nature, that is not something we could do. Our sinful nature never wants to do God's will. Our sinful nature only wants to serve ourselves. Our sinful nature craves things like pride, jealousy, self-centeredness, sexual immorality, hatred, greed, and the like. But since Christ set us free, we don't have to get caught up in those things anymore. They aren't our masters anymore. Rather, our new self, our freed self, is equipped and motivated to live for God. We are free to carry other people's burdens as Jesus carried ours. Free to forgive others as Jesus has forgiven us. Free to spend our time for others as Jesus spent his time for us. We are free to live in the truth of Jesus' Word.

A few years after Jesus taught this lesson on freedom to the group of Jews referred to in our lesson, the Holy Spirit inspired the apostle Paul to write on the same topic to a group of Christians like us. He wrote, *"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."* (Galatians 5:1 NIV). Then the Apostle Paul demonstrated what that freedom would look like. Instead of pride, jealousy, immorality, hatred, greed and the like, living in freedom includes "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." And then here's my favorite line, *"Against such things there is no law"* (Galatians 5:22-23 NIV).

Oh, it's true, we once were slaves to sin. And the power of sin is the law. But now the Holy Spirit has worked faith in our hearts and we are doing things against which there is no law. What is that evidence of? Sin has no power over you anymore. Sin is no longer your master. The Son has set you free. You are free to live for him today. You are free to live with him forever. Unlike the devil, when Jesus says to believers, *"You will not die,"* he tells you the truth. Amen.