

“THE TRUTH WILL SET YOU FREE”

John 8:1-12, 31-36

Key Verse: 8:31,32

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.”

In this passage, Jesus saves a woman from the hands of religious leaders and gives her a new life direction. Today’s passage also teaches us that Jesus can set us free. We live in a society where freedom is cherished more than anything else. People in our society are willing to endure very offensive things, such as disgusting arts and the KKK marching for the sake of preserving the freedom of expression. Yet many people are not really free. They are slaves to their own sinful desires. They are enslaved by the fear of death and condemnation. The Constitution cannot set us free from this kind of bondage. But Jesus can set us free from the bondage of sin and death. May God teach us how to be really free!

I. “NEITHER DO I CONDEMN YOU” (8:1-11)

Look at verse 1. “But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.” Jesus had spent a busy day preaching the word of God on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles. When the night fell, Jesus went to the Mount of Olives, and there he knelt down and prayed, as it was his custom. Jesus prayed there all night, not for himself but for the salvation of the world. The busier his life was and the more popular he became, the more Jesus prayed. He needed time to listen to God and find a clear direction in his mission. How much we want to pray like Jesus! Look at verse 2. “At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people sat gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them.” From the early morning Jesus taught them the word of truth. He taught them the word of God whenever he had an opportunity. The word of God and prayer were the two basic ingredients in Jesus’ daily life. Let’s learn from the Lord what must be the priorities in our lives.

Suddenly a group of people stormed into the temple courts, interrupting Jesus’ Bible class. They were the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees. They were not alone. They dragged in a woman caught in the act of adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” As usual, they didn’t ask Jesus this question to learn from him. Verse 6 says that they used this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing Jesus. In fact, they thought this was a perfect question to entrap Jesus. If he answered “yes” he would get in trouble with the Roman authorities as the Jews did not have the right to carry out a death sentence (Jn 18:31). He would also contradict his own teaching of forgiveness and mercy. On the other hand, if he said “no” he would oppose the Law of Moses which was a serious transgression to the Jews. No wonder they marched into the temple shouting

in their minds, “We’ve got you this time, Jesus.”

What kind of men would use a woman in this way? The teachers of the Law and the Pharisees were supposed to be the shepherds for God’s flock. This woman was their sheep! But instead of taking care of her, they used her to satisfy their own desires. They did not see the woman as an individual who needed God’s mercy. Rather, they used her as a bait to capture Jesus. They must have put a considerable effort to catch the woman in the act of adultery. Perhaps they placed an all night surveillance on her. Perhaps they had a hidden camera in her room, monitoring her activities. While Jesus labored in the Mount of Olives praying to God, these wolves dressed in shepherd clothes were busy snooping around this woman’s room.

What was Jesus’ answer to their question? He did not answer them right away. Look at verse 6b. “But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground.” We don’t know what Jesus wrote on the ground. Most likely he wanted to give them a few moments to reflect on what they were doing and come back to their senses. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.” The religious leaders were self-righteous and dragged the woman around with their hands. But Jesus challenged their consciences and their consciences were pierced. They could not deny their sinfulness before the holy God. What did they do? Look at verse 9. “At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there.” They tried to condemn Jesus as well as the woman. Instead, they were condemned by their own evilness. We see that the world is filled with condemnations. All day long people condemn one another. And at night they condemn themselves in the cold sweat. Who can rescue us from this condemnation?

Look at verses 10,11. “Jesus straightened up and asked her, ‘Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?’ ‘No one, sir,’ she said. ‘Then neither do I condemn you,’ Jesus declared. ‘Go now and leave your life of sin.’” In this verses we learn two things about Jesus.

First, Jesus did not condemn, but saved her. We don’t know why this woman came to live this kind of sinful life. Maybe she had been neglected by her parents. Maybe she was abandoned by her husband. One thing is for sure. She followed her sinful desires instead of the word of God. She walked in the darkness of sin. Everyone, including herself, condemned her. No one could save her from this condemnation. But Jesus saved her from condemnation.

No one has the right to condemn another person because each one is a sinner before God. Only Jesus has the right because he had no sin in himself and because God gave him the authority to judge men. (5:22) But Jesus did not condemn her. It’s because he did not come to this world to condemn us, but to save us from condemnation.

How does Jesus save condemned people? In order to save condemned people like us, he became a condemned person. He was condemned and crucified on the cross. Galatians 3:13 says, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: `Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.'" Because he was condemned on our behalf, there is no condemnation for us. In Romans 8:1 Paul declares, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus..." The woman had to be condemned because of her sin. But Jesus saved her from condemnation by being condemned in her place. How great is the love of God through his Son Jesus! No one wants to see his child suffer from anything. But God, in his great mercy, put his one and only Son to condemnation so that we might be saved from eternal condemnation. This beautiful gospel has been given to us; but still there are many, especially young people, who live in sin and darkness. Let's pray that, through our witnessing, many young students may come to Jesus and hear the good news.

Second, Jesus gave her a new life direction. Jesus also said to the woman, "Go now and leave your life of sin." Jesus not only saved her from condemnation; he also commanded her to start a new life -- life based on God's word, not on her sinful desires. Jesus wanted to restore the image of God in her as well as her beauty as a woman. Jesus wanted her to live as a useful person. He wanted her to live in the light.

Without Jesus, all men are under the condemnation of sin. All men walk in the darkness of sin. They are all like this woman who was condemned by her sin. They have no strength to get out of their condemnation. But when we come to Jesus, he gives us strength to get out of condemnation. John Newton was a slave dealer. He knew it was wrong to be a slave dealer, but he had no strength to get out of his situation. But when he accepted Jesus, Jesus gave him the strength to stop the life of sin. Jesus also helped him to live in the light. So he sang, *"Amazing grace, how sweet the sound / That saved a wretch like me! / I once was lost but now am found / Was blind but now I see."*

II. "IF YOU HOLD TO MY TEACHING" (31-36)

Jesus knew that the Jews were also slaves to their own sinful desires, even though they looked religious outwardly. As he was preaching the word of God, many of them opened their hearts and believed (30). So he taught them a secret of how to be really free.

First, "Hold to my teaching". Look at verses 31,32. "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.'" He told them to hold to his teaching. As we learned in John 6, many Jews had come to Jesus and amazed at his word of life and miraculous healing of the sick and the possessed. But they did not hold to his teaching. They left Jesus when they did not get immediate benefits from him. They did not commit their lives to the Lord. Instead, they were only interested in something that would satisfy their physical needs.

We know that a runner cannot be declared a winner if he stops in the middle of the race course. Likewise, Christian faith is a continuing process. To be born again one day is not the end. In fact, it is just a beginning. Just as a new-born baby needs to drink milk and grow, a Christian must drink the spiritual milk and grow in faith. It is a life-time process. Jesus teaches us to hold to his teaching. We must hold to his teaching in our hearts and put them into practice in our daily lives. When we hold to his teaching, we can really be his disciples. This is the reason why we must study, meditate and obey God's word on a daily basis.

As we know, the word "disciple" means the learner. A disciple of Jesus is the one who learns from Jesus and follows him in his footsteps. Without learning we cannot be disciples of anyone. One who does not learn remains childish even when he becomes old. When we hold to his teaching, we are really Jesus' disciples. We may not remember all the teachings of Jesus, but we must have one word of his teaching in our hearts. Then we can be his disciples.

Second, "Then you will know the truth." Look at verse 32 again. "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." Yes, when we hold to Jesus' teaching, we come to know the truth. What then is the truth? Truth is what is true. There are several characteristics of truth. Truth is something that never changes, even when circumstances change. Truth must be universal, applying to everyone in the world. Where is such a thing in this world that stays constant forever and applies to everyone? Everything in this world is temporary. Nothing in this world stays constant forever. Nothing in this world can be everything to everyone. Therefore the truth cannot come from this world. The truth must come from God who is eternal. Indeed, the Apostle Peter said in 1 Peter 1:24,25. "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever." Nothing in this world is worthy of holding. They will all pass. Only God's word, which is eternal, gives us eternal life. Matthew 5:18 says, "I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished." The word of Jesus is the truth. Jesus' teaching is worthy of holding. It gives us eternal life and the hope of the kingdom of God to those who believe in him.

If we hold to Jesus' teaching, we come to know the truth. For example, the Pilgrim Fathers held to his teaching in Matthew 6:33, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." When they arrived in the new land, they had to confront many difficulties as pioneers. But they built their church before their own dwelling places. It didn't make much sense to human eyes that they put God first when they had to worry about their own survival. But they found out that his teaching is the truth: When they held to his teaching and sought his kingdom first, they were richly blessed by God, more than what they had expected.

Third, "and the truth will set you free." Look at verse 32 again. "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." Many people think they are free if they

live according to their sinful nature. To them freedom means doing whatever they feel like doing, whether right or wrong. The main principle by which today's young people live seems to be 'when it feels good, do it.' However, they find out that unlimited physical freedom does not give them real freedom. They become slaves to their own flesh desires. They may enjoy sinful pleasures for a while, but they suffer much from their guilty feelings and eventually from the condemnation. Man cannot be truly free until he is free from sin and death. Who can free us from sin and death?

Jesus says, "... the truth will set you free." When we have Jesus' teaching, we come to know the truth and the truth sets us free. The gospel of Jesus sets us free from our sin and death. Jesus died on the cross and was raised on the third day to set us free from sin and death. Only Jesus' teaching is the life-giving word of God. Without knowing the truth no one is really free.

St. Augustine was a slave to his own sinful desires despite his superior intellect. He was a wanderer at a time when the Roman Empire was about to collapse. No one could help him out of his hedonistic life. He could not help himself. But the truth rescued him. His soul was awakened by the word of God spoken through St. Ambrose. Then he read Romans 13:13,14: "Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature." He held to this scripture in his heart. Then he was changed from a corrupt man to an influential servant of God. He was set free from his bondage. When we come to know the truth, there is a tremendous result in our lives.

How did the Jews respond to Jesus? They said, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?" The Jews had pride in being Abraham's descendants. They had pride as the chosen people of God. This pride helped them overcome many sufferings in their history. But their racial pride blinded them toward the word of God. At that time they were under the bondage of the Roman Empire. They also had been under the rule of Egypt and Babylon. But they even denied the historical facts. The Jews were slaves to their racial pride. More importantly they were slaves to their sinful nature. But when they did not admit that they were enslaved, they could not be freed.

Despite their proud minds, Jesus wanted to help them. Look at verses 34-36. "Jesus replied, 'I tell you the truth, 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.'" They were slaves of their sin of pride. It was tragic that they had no place in the glorious house of God (35). Jesus wanted them to empty their pride so they might have room for his word. Jesus really wanted them to have places in the glorious house of God.

In this passage, Jesus says the condemned woman, "Then neither do I condemn

you. Go now and leave your life of sin.” These words of Jesus set the woman free. Likewise, the word of Jesus is the truth that sets us free from sin and condemnation. May we come to Jesus and accept the truth, and receive the real freedom and eternal life!