

**John 8:31-36 “I Tell You the Truth: Anyone Who Sins Is a Slave to Sin” Ash Wed. 02-18- 15**

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Grace and peace from God our Father and from our suffering Lord and Savior, who sets us free! Amen.

We hear the saving truth from Jesus in John 8:31-36

These are Your Words heavenly Father to turn us away from sin’s control to true freedom in Christ. Amen.

Dear former Slaves set free!

For many people, Lent is about giving up something. It is a time when people think of making sacrifices or not enjoying things in life as they usually do. Whether we give up a food or give up doing some favorite thing or not, we know that that is not the main purpose of Lent. We’re here to remember what Christ gave up for Lent. He gave up His dignity, His safety, and sacrificed His life. Lent should have a deeper effect on us than just giving up sweets. God calls us to true repentance of our sins. He warns us in His Word about the power of sinful desires and works and how they can so easily enslave us.

The devil is constantly trying to deceive us. Sometimes he shouts it. Sometimes he whispers it. He tempts us saying: “You are your own boss and It’s all about you” or he’ll say, “You’re worthless. No one loves you. There is no hope for you.” He wants us to give up on God and walk in our own ways. That is why it’s so important for us to listen to the voice of the One who is the Truth. Over the next six weeks, we’ll see how much our Savior gave up for us with his suffering and death. But we’ll also hear him speak the truth that saves us. Today’s (tonight’s) theme is:

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

**First, the truth is, sin still affects us.** By nature, we don’t want to hear this truth. We don’t want to feel confined in our relationships or in our daily activities due to fear of sinning. We don’t want to hear that too often our words and actions at school or home are sins against God. We want our own form of “truth” that lets us do whatever we want. Maybe that explains we don’t like hearing Jesus say, *“I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.”* (v.35) Some of the Jews objected that they weren’t slaves to anyone. They were being deceived by the devil and didn’t want to admit it. Saying that we’re a slave to sin makes us feel helpless. It makes us feel like we’re not in control. But it’s the truth! Frederick Douglass, a freed slave who turned abolitionist wrote, “I didn’t know I was a slave until I tried to do the things I wanted.” As Christians, we want to serve God with all our hearts and lives. We don’t want to sin. But, in what day haven’t we sinned? We in America live in the land of the free, but by nature we are slaves to sin.

What do we do about our sin? We could downplay the gravity and say “It doesn’t matter to God. We know who Jesus is and what He did. So what if we’re slaves to sin?” Do you recognize who is putting those thoughts in your mind? They come from the Father of lies not from God’s truth.

Even when we as Christians admit that sin is a big deal and it bothers us to sin; we’re tempted to think like the Jews of Jesus’ time. They thought they did enough good things so God would overlook their sins. “How can we be that bad when we are ‘good children’ of Abraham? (v.33) The devil tempts us: “Let’s focus on the good things in life instead of harping on the bad!” Do we recognize his voice? The devil is trying to get us to magnify our own deeds to downplay our sins, so that Christ has little value for us. But, our good deeds cannot cut through the chains of sin that bind our wrists. The label that Jesus used *“a slave to sin”* (v.34) truly shows where we stand with God on our own. Jesus said, *“A slave has no permanent place in the family.”* (v. 35) What is His point? He is warning that a slave to sin has no room reserved in heaven, because a slave to sin has no true saving faith. With that news in mind, sin is a big deal.

As Christians, how would you respond to this question, “How many of you sin?” All of us would say, “We’re sinners!” But then if I ask, “How many of you sin to the level that you deserve to be in hell?” We don’t want to admit that! We can’t deny the truth that we’re sinners. Through personal experience we’ve all seen sin’s power affect our lives and others. But to be told that we deserve hell, that’s harder to swallow. But that’s the truth. That’s why we’re here on Ash Wednesday. Too often we’ve heard the devil’s lies: “You will not die. You won’t be judged.” But, God told Adam after sin, “*Dust you are and to dust you will return.*” (Genesis 3:19) As slaves to sin, we deserve to die. We deserve hell.

**Second, the truth is: Jesus has freed us!** On our own, we can’t be a spiritual Houdini to escape the chains of sin. We get freedom not by what we know, but by whom you know.” The key to freedom is to know the One who holds the key to release us. That one is Jesus. As the Savior, he established an eternal freedom for us in heaven. He holds in His hands the key to eternal life. “*If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.*” (v. 36) So the question now becomes, how do we get the key? Jesus says, “*If you hold to [literally, if you remain in] my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.*” (v.31-32) This truth of Jesus is the key He used to unlock the shackles of sin. This teaching shows a Jesus who didn’t hand us a checklist of do’s and don’ts so that we could live perfectly to free ourselves from sin. Jesus did all the do’s and don’ts for us. This truth shows us a Jesus who didn’t just feel sorry for us when we were under a heavy load and getting beaten by our slavemaster, sin. Jesus stepped in and took the load and the punishment for us. The truth is: Jesus paid the wages for sin by His own death. But, the innocent Savior was not banished to hell after death. He rose from the grave, thus signing and sealing our emancipation to be in heaven. This is Jesus’ truth which sets us free!

There’s even greater blessing than just having eternal life as a gift from Christ. Not only are we set free from the chains of sin and of the law’s curses and eternal condemnations, we are now free to serve God and to serve one another in love. By nature, that is something we could not do. Our sinful desire is to serve only ourselves. Our sinful nature craves immorality, hatred, envy, drunkenness, and the like. But since Christ set us free, those things aren’t our masters anymore. Rather, our new self, our freed self, is equipped by the Gospel and motivated in love 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 for us. We are free to live in the truth of the Gospel.

A few decades after Jesus spoke with the Jews about freedom, the Holy Spirit inspired the apostle Paul to write on the same topic. “*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) And a little later he went on to demonstrate how that shows itself. Instead of *immorality, hatred, discord, envy, drunkenness, and the like*, living in freedom includes “*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law.*” (Galatians 5:22, 23)

It’s true that by nature we are prone to sin. The power of sin is the law that condemns us. But now the Holy Spirit has given us faith in Christ to set us free. If we want to give up something for Lent, let it be that we no longer let sin control us. It has no more power over us, despite the devil’s lies. Christ has set us free from the power of sin and hell. They are no longer our master. We are set free to live for Christ today. We are set free to live with Christ forever! When Jesus says that we are no longer slaves to sin, but are sons and daughters with a permanent place in the family, He speaks the truth! Amen