

“Jesus Makes Us Free”

(John 8: 31 - 36)

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Text: John 8: 31 - 36

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, "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."

Dear friends in Christ,

Do we have slavery in Australia? Yes, all kinds of slavery. Let's point out some of our slavery. Many are slaves to wealth and affluence; slaves to selfishness; slaves to earthly possessions; slaves to gambling; slaves to sport; slaves to good times and parties; slaves to mobile phones, computers IT, and TVs; slaves to excessive drugs and alcohol; slaves to non-stop activities with little time for real family and home life.

But slavery to sin, which really summarises the above, is the greatest kind of slavery. Jesus said, **'Everyone who commits a sin is a slave to sin.'** Slavery has been with us for centuries. What can be more frightening than to become a slave to one's selfish ambitions and desires. You see it in politics, in business, in workplaces and schools, and in families, everywhere.

Reformation Sunday should have a rich meaning for Christians. The message of the Reformation goes resounding down through the centuries, ever since its inception on 31 October 1517. On that day came the release from slavery to human made traditions and abuses of the Gospel. The minds of people were to be exposed to the good news of Jesus Christ after centuries of religious slavery. People on the street were at long last going to have the opportunity to read God's precious Word in their own language. They were at long last going to be able to own a Bible, and read it in the language of their own country. What joy this became for people in those days right up to the times we live in.

The soul-searching and seeking after God was experienced in many ways by Luther, and now that release had come, he was able to share it with others through the printed Word and preaching. To Luther God gave wisdom, learning, and grace to unveil, for all to hear and see, God's life-giving Word to a sinful, dying world.

What more arresting verses can be found in the Bible than those in which we hear Jesus say, *'Truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin So, if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed?'* In the one verse we have the diagnosis of the seriousness of the human situation, and in the other the confidence of Jesus that he can meet, cure and satisfy that problem.

Who is there in our world who does not want to be **free**? All people want to be **free**. If one is weighed down with a huge debt, one wants to be **free** of that debt. The desire to be **free** gives the New Testament of the Bible its essence and atmosphere. When a nation is oppressed by another nation, there is no peace until freedom has been obtained. In Jesus there is a freedom that only he can give **freedom** from slavery to sin and selfishness and **freedom** to serve him and others in love.

Free! Free! Free! That is the core and spirit of the New Testament. The apostle Paul wrote to the churches in Corinth and Galatia, "Where the spirit of Jesus is, there is **freedom**," and "For **freedom** Jesus has set us **free**; stand strong therefore, and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery."

It is now 500 years since the days of the Reformation. But we still want to thank God for the people of the Reformation. There were people like John Wycliffe (1324-1384) who before the Reformation, actually translated the Bible into the English language. There was John Huss (1373-1415) from Prague, whose preaching was based on Wycliffe's biblical teachings; he was charged with heresy, arrested as a heretic, and burned to death. These men helped to awaken the minds and thoughts of many people, pointing them to the **freedom** they could have in Jesus. Things were happening in the Church that tended to prepare the way for the Reformation.

With the Reformation came the **freedom** and peace of the heart, mind and soul for people, through Jesus. In teaching his students the New Testament Scriptures at Wittenberg Luther came to realise more and more how far the Church had strayed from Biblical teaching. He became incensed with John Tetzel's selling of indulgences not only for the living but also for the dead. For Luther this was a perversion of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. On the Word of God, the Bible, he firmly stood. The Church in its practices and teachings had to conform to the Bible or he would have no part of them. His famous quotation still rings in the Church today, "Here I stand, I can do no other; God help me!" The Church is indebted to this soldier of the cross of Jesus. This is the heritage and **freedom** given to us through the Reformation.

What about us Christians today? Are we living in the **freedom** of the Gospel, and joyfully passing it on to our children and grandchildren, so that we and they can see the remarkable **freedom** and forgiveness we have in Jesus, our Lord and Saviour and Friend? With the way society is crumbling today do we need a new Reformation?

God grant that the day may never come again when the Gospel is buried beneath the layers of so called human wisdom, and Jesus is found to be knocking in vain at the door of peoples' hearts to speak to their eternal souls! Jesus won our complete freedom from sin and death by that huge price he paid on Calvary's cross, and with the Reformation came the restoration of that truth for the salvation of precious people. May we live in Jesus' remarkable gift of freedom responsively and responsibly as we serve him and our fellow human beings. **Amen.**

The peace and love of God which passes all human understanding, keep our heart and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Sermon by Pastor Graham Zweck 25 October 2020