

JESUS SETS MEN FREE
(Key Verse Message)

John 8:31-32; (31-59)

"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 the previous passage Jesus saved a woman caught in the act of adultery. Because of her adultery, she was a condemned woman. She was supposed to be stoned to death. But Jesus saved her from her condemnation and said, "Go now and leave your life of sin." We learned that the life of sin is a condemned life. We also learned that Jesus sets us free from our condemnation. Romans 8:1 says, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus...." Today we want to think about how Jesus sets men free.

First, hold to Jesus' teaching (31). 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.'" In these two verses Jesus teaches us how we can be free indeed. Verse 31 says, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples." This short sentence tells us the first step to become truly free men in God. First and last of all, we must listen to Jesus' teaching and hold on to his word as a matter of first importance. The word of God is truth. As we know well, 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 (1Pe 1:24,25). Therefore, we must have the word of eternal life in our hearts.

Once Jesus fed 5,000 people to their fill. Then they followed Jesus to the retreat place. So Jesus' retreat was frustrated. Jesus really wanted to give them the spiritual bread. Then they began to run away 20 by 20, ten by ten, five by five, one by one, two by two, until only the disciples of Jesus were left. They too were shaky under the circumstances. Jesus asked Peter, "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (6:67-68). Peter did not run away because he had the word of eternal life.

Just hearing the word of God is not holding to the word of God. We must plant within us the word of God we received so that it may take root in our hearts. Then we can be Jesus' disciples. Colossians 3:16 says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God." Again, Colossians 2:6-7 says, "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness." Therefore, to hold to Jesus' teaching is to take root in the word of God. Psalm 1:2,3 explains how to hold to the word of God. It says, "But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers." Those who hold to the word of God are like a tree

planted by streams of water, which. is always fruitful and prosperous.

The best example of one who held on to God's word is Abraham. When he was 75 years old and his wife was barren, God gave him his word of promise. Genesis 12:2 says, "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great and you will be a blessing." The absurdity is indeed great that God would give Abraham children like a nation and make him a blessing. But Abraham held on to the word of promise. Hebrews 11:9 says, "By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise." John, the author of this gospel, said in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." Once Jesus told Peter, "But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee" (Mk 14:28). Jesus and his disciples had to experience Jesus' crucifixion. But Peter believed that after crucifixion Jesus would rise again, because Jesus said so. In this way, the disciples of Jesus became his disciples by holding to his words.

Jesus said that those who hold to his word will become his disciples; then they will know the truth, and the truth will set them free. What was the Pharisees' reaction? They were very angry. They said, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?" (33) They reacted in this way because they had no word of God in their hearts. They reacted like this because they were hypocrites. In reality, they had been slaves of the Egyptian Empire, of the Babylonian Empire, of Alexander the Great and the Greek Empire, and finally, of the Roman Empire. What was worse, they were slaves to their own sins. But they said, "We are Abraham's descendants, so we cannot admit being slaves to anybody." They also said that they were free from the bondage of sin because they were descendants of Abraham.

Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin" (34). Jesus meant that even though they were Abraham's descendants, they were not free from the power of sin. They were under the power of sin. Jesus said in verse 35, "Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever." Jesus told them that those who have no word of promise in their hearts have no permanent place in God's family; they cannot obtain eternal life and the kingdom of God as their inheritance. So Jesus urged them, "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (36). Jesus earnestly taught them how to become the children of God. Jesus indirectly rebuked them that they did not hold on to the word of God. Jesus introduced himself as the one who gives them true freedom. But they had no word of God, so they wanted to kill Jesus. Verse 37 says, "I know you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are ready to kill me, because you have no room for my word." Jesus also rebuked them for their lack of faith. If they had had the word of God in their hearts, they would not have tried to kill Jesus. But they tried to kill Jesus because they had no word of God in their hearts (40-41).

We contrasted those who are holding to the word of God and those who are not holding to the word of God. Those who are holding to the word of God are children of God. But those who do not hold to the word of

God are like murderers. May God help us to hold on to one word of God and take root in it, and grow as a big tree which bears much fruit. If we do not hold to the word of God, we are not disciples of Jesus. Therefore we must hold to the word of God, even one word of God in our hearts, so that we may be his disciples. Verse 31 says, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples."

Second, you will know the truth (32). Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, asked, "What is truth?" (18:38) There are many people who pretend to know the truth. There are also many people who ignore the truth completely, because the truth does not give them even one dollar bill. But to know the truth is indeed important, because the truth is the truth. As it's essential qualities, the truth must have invaluable. The truth must be the most precious thing. The truth must not change forever. If truth changes, then it cannot be truth.

Confucius was born when China had wartime every spring and autumn. At that time, Great China was divided into a thousand pieces. They fought wars with one another during the springtime and autumn time. So we call it the wartime of spring and autumn. Confucius wrote two books--one about the three moral principles and another about the five human relations. In his book about human relations, he taught that subjects must absolutely obey the king, that children must absolutely obey their parents, and that wives must absolutely obey their husbands. His books about three moral principles and five human relations brought about the unification of Great China. His teaching amounted to 500,000 words. The Chinese people all memorized them. Those who memorized well could be government officials. Those who did not were relegated to the slave class. They began to memorize early in the morning at 6:00 a.m., and continued until 10:00 p.m., kneeling down on the floor. Confucianism became strong because people memorized and took root in Confucianism. But Confucius' teaching resulted in a master and slave nation, because he emphasized blind obedience only.

When we review Christian history, we find that the most outstanding people have been those who dug out the word of God. They were those who lived up to his teaching. They were also those who taught the word of God. The truth is not second-dimensional; the truth is third-dimensional. We have thought about the truth, that it should be invaluable, unchanging, and universal. But where is a universal truth in this world? For example, Shakespeare was a national treasure of England. But now, even English people do not understand what he was talking about. Dante's "Divine Comedy" was so popular among Catholic people. But now it has become a secular comedy.

What is truth? In the past, so many men of thought had tried to discover what was the truth. But they all died with bitter smiles. Some Chinese philosopher said, "If I know the truth in the morning, I am happy to die in the evening." It is because without knowing the truth, we cannot see the world as a whole, and we cannot see the absolute meaning of life. But Jesus said in John 14:6, "I am the way and the truth and the life." Why is Jesus the truth? Because he taught us where he came from and where he was going back to. The most repeated sentence in John's gospel is: "I came from God and I am going back to God." Once Jesus' disciples sensed that Jesus was going to run away, leaving them behind. Then Jesus said in John 14:1,2, "Do not let your

hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you." These days many people wonder why they have to do their homework every day and take a test every week for 15 weeks. Most people who have made a large amount of money wonder, "What do I do with this big money? Why have I crushed my bones to make all this money, which my cousin is going to get?" Most of all, they think a funeral home is the end of human life. But Jesus' teaching that "I came from God and I go back to God" solves all these problems. We did not come from the loins of our fathers just to go to the graveyard. We came from God, and after our pilgrimage is over, we go back to God and enjoy his eternal life and the glorious kingdom of God as our inheritance.

There are so many people who want to spare their lives, even ten minutes longer. But Matthew 6:27 says, "Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?" Therefore, the things of the world cannot be the truth. Only Jesus is the truth, because he teaches us the meaning of life, where we came from, and where we are going back to. It is amazing for us that we can come to know the truth if we hold to the word of God and become Jesus' disciples.

Third, the truth sets us free (32). Look at verse 32. "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." These days there are so many people who do not know the true concept of freedom; they misuse it, and then perish. But when we study the Bible, we learn that freedom is the best gift to mankind. God made the world and everything in it and gave it to the first man, Adam. He said, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden, but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die" (Ge 2:16,17). Our God is like a father. Our God is like a mother. He doesn't want to rule and overrule us; he gave us the freedom of choice. He also gave us abundant provisions and never-ending fish in the ocean. Nothing was lacking. But in order to make spiritual order, God commanded the first man not to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, or he would surely die. Here we learn that for human beings God gave paradise and abundant provisions and unlimited resources. And there was no shame in paradise, even though they went around naked. In brief, freedom is a very precious thing God gave us to use well. With this freedom, we could freely serve God and rule the world and be happy.

But this freedom was taken away from the man when Satan came to the first man's wife in silky clothes and said, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" She answered, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die'" (Ge 3:1-3). Here we see a tragedy in the woman. She did not hold on to the word of God concerning true freedom in God. When she talked with the devil, she naturally became a liar, for she omitted one word, "surely." God said, "...for when you eat of it, you will surely die." But she omitted one word, "surely." Therefore, lying is omitting one word from the truth. Because of the woman's misuse of God's word by omitting one word, "you will surely die," her husband and she herself were cursed. Even heaven and nature were cursed. They lost their love relationship with God. They lost the

truth. They became liars, and they became a man and woman of hard labor. Without working hard, sweating on his brow, Adam could not support his family. The blessedness of woman, child-bearing, became unbearable labor pain.

Where there is no truth, men become reckless. Cain was Adam's son. God accepted his younger brother Abel's sacrifice and did not accept Cain's sacrifice. So Cain destroyed his beloved younger brother out of his anger. Even though God tried to counsel him, he could not take it. He thought he was doomed to be a wanderer, living with a sense of guilt and punishment, and with fear that somebody would kill him at any moment. Therefore it is necessary for us to know the true concept of human freedom in God. Cain's choice to be a wanderer with a guilty conscience and sense of punishment, and with the fear of death, is not true freedom. But most modern people are following in Cain's footsteps.

Those who know the truth love God, knowing that Jesus came from God. But those who do not have the truth are the devils who want to carry out their father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. Those who do not hold to the truth are devils. When they lie, they speak like the devil (42-45). They are liars because they do not belong to God (47).

On the other hand, those who know the truth can be free indeed. Dr. Augustine Song had rheumatism in his left leg. So as soon as he finished his Ph.D. in chemical engineering at Moscow State University he wanted to go back to Korea to cure his leg. But in the course of living in Moscow, God gave him a great shepherd heart toward Russian students who are so nice and honest but are like sheep without a shepherd. After studying Russian history, he was even more convinced that Russia had many good sheep, but has scarcely had good shepherds. As soon as he finished his Ph.D. at MSU, he was invited by Korea University to accept a professor's position. But he refused the offer and remained in Moscow. Ever since he took over the directorship of Moscow UBF, Moscow students have been growing as shepherds of their nation. Dr. Samuel Yoo is a medical doctor who went to Uganda as a medical missionary. Recently his daughter had brain damage and was hovering near death, and his own left leg was suddenly swollen and bleeding. But he did not give up and go back to Michigan where his father was. He is free to remain in Uganda. In a recent letter, he only mentioned that Ugandan students are like sheep without a shepherd; he mentioned very little of his and his daughter's illnesses.

Dr. Albert Schweitzer made a decision of faith to study philosophy, theology and music, and then go to Africa as a missionary. But he found that with his philosophy, theology and music he could not be a help to African people in Lambarⁿ[^] Congo. So he began to study medicine. It took six years. He barely finished medical school. He did all his best to become a medical missionary to Lambarⁿ[^] Congo. In his last days he exclaimed, "My body is confined in this land. But I am indeed free to think of Jesus, to think of God's flock of sheep, and to play the pipe organ on a paper keyboard." In short, he expressed that he is indeed free in Jesus Christ. Without Jesus we are under the bondage of the power of sin. Without Jesus we are slaves of all kinds. I don't have to talk about all the different kinds of slaves of sin, because you know

better than I. At this time, let's hold on to the word of God, become Jesus' disciples, come to know the truth, and in the truth of Jesus, enjoy true freedom.

Fourth, they should have accepted the Son's word, but they did not. They said to him, "You are a Samaritan and demon-possessed" (48). They vented their indignation by insulting him with profane words. In spite of their insults, Jesus exemplified Abraham's faith. Look at verse 56. "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad." When Abraham held on to the word of God's promise, he could see the kingdom of God, and he longed to see the Messiah. Jesus really hoped that these descendants of Abraham would truly be like Abraham, who had God's word of promise in his heart.

What was their response? "You are not yet fifty years old," the Jews said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!" (57) They had no spiritual understanding. Look at verse 58. "'I tell you the truth,' Jesus answered, before Abraham was born, I am!'" Here Jesus proclaimed that he is the Son of God.

What do you have in your hearts? Let's empty our hearts and accept one word of God, hold on to it, and let it take root in our hearts, so that we may be the children of God, and so that we may be free indeed.