

Real Freedom

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Turning now to the Gospel of John chapter 8 verse 36. The Gospel of John chapter 8 verse 36.

"If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."

It is freedom I'd like us to think about. Real freedom. Free indeed. And just before we proceed with this 36th verse, look back at verse 31, "Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on Him, 'If you continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.'" In verse 32 it's, "The truth shall make you free." In verse 36, "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." Well first of all, yes, it is the truth by which we are made free, and we will be talking about that freedom. God has spoken. God has given His revealed Word. And oh, we are thankful beyond our power to describe that He has done so. What a terrible thing if God had not spoken into our world. What an awful loss if He had not spoken His truth about Himself, about His being, about His attributes, about His plans, and His purposes. What if He'd never told us these things, and we were left to figure them out, and we were left in effect at the mercy of thousands of voices of so much speculation?

People sometimes say, "What is this Bible? What is this Word of God? What a strange thing that you should believe in an inspired book, an inspired revelation." But think of the alternative, if God had not spoken in, what utter confusion! And how, anyway, would we know without His voice, without His Word, about Him? We are mortal beings. We are limited, finite beings. We are enclosed in bodies of flesh. We're captive within time. How could we possibly see, or know, or understand the truth about God the eternal Spirit outside flesh, outside time. We have no ability, no capacity, no power to know the truths about God, unless He reveals Himself. It is the most obvious and to be expected thing, the most rational thing, if you like, that God should speak into our world and tell us of Himself and tell us about ourselves. There are so many different notions concerning human personality, and how we are made and constructed, and how we think, and what's the matter with us, what our weaknesses are and our difficulties, what our aspirations should be. There are so many theories of human personality, God even needs to tell us about ourselves, so that we understand how He has made us, so that we understand about the fall of man into sin and His alienation from God. We're too proud to ever imagine

these things for ourselves, and He must tell us the ugly truth, and then He must tell us His remedy and what He does to pardon and forgive and how He changes us and blesses us.

So, we're thankful for God's Word, for His revelation, and it's full of unexpected things. Perhaps the most unexpected truth in the revelation of God in the Bible is the fact that God saves men and women by grace, by His undeserved mercy, unearned, undeserved mercy and power working in our lives in conversion. That shocks us! That's the last thing we would think of! We think if there is a God that we should surely be capable of earning our passage before Him, and deserving Him, and meriting His goodness. That's what all religions other than the Christian faith, the faith which is based on the revelation of God, that's what they think, that you've got to know the techniques, that you've got to earn your way into the favor and communion with God and the Bible has this magnificent surprise. No, it's by grace and God has come into our world and into human personality and taken our place and suffered and died. The second person of the Godhead has become man and has been sacrificed to pay the price and the punishment on our behalf for our sin. How staggering! How astonishing! All that needs to be revealed. We would never expect it. Never think it.

So, it is the truth that makes us free. It's hearing this message, clear rational message, from God that is directed to our minds, and we can take it in. It is the most profound message in the world, and yet it's the most simple. Who cannot understand Jesus Christ came and died for our sins in our place, and we need Him, to seek and find Him, and to trust in Him, so ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. But more specifically, it is Christ who is, of course, the chief subject of the Word of God, who is spoken of from the beginning, the first pages to the very end of the Word of God. There He is spoken of, and promised, and predicted. His coming is recorded, and what He has done to save us. So, more specifically, verse 36. "If the Son therefore shall make you free, you shall be free indeed."

Now, what did His hearers, Christ's hearers, understand by being free? Well it's evident from verse 33. They answer Him, and they say, "We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man." So they think He is talking about slavery. Actually, they were not right. Historically, they had been slaves. They had known slavery, but, somehow or other, they put that experience to one side, and they proudly say, "We have never been an enslaved people." So, they think this analogy of freedom is referring to slavery, and they're probably right, though equally you can apply it to imprisonment, if you like. We are slaves. We are imprisoned, as God views us. Before we come to Christ, before we're converted to God, we're viewed as people who are in slavery, or people, who are in some respect, imprisoned. We are not free. We're captured. We're imprisoned and held.

Now, if you're a slave, you are a dominated person. If you are a slave, you receive no pay and no reward. You work hard. You work, work, work. You work your fingers to the bone, unrelenting toil. You're a slave. You have no rights. You're very restricted in your life. Your movements are restricted. You can only go out if you have consent, and only on errands or limited journeys. You have no holidays. Your time is not your own. You're a slave, well, on following the pattern of slavery in those days, and in many parts of the

world tragically today, to be a slave. And that's an analogy for life before we're converted, before we know the Lord. We may think we are free, but we are very limited as people and restricted, and we're under orders and I'm going to explain how that is so and that's the analogy of Christ. But if the truth makes you free, and if Christ, the Son of God, makes you free, then you are free indeed. An old-fashioned expression truly free, really free, wholly free, and that only applies to a person who's been converted to Christ.

So we're limited. I'll tell you how we're limited: I'm a slave if I'm not converted. I'm a slave. Yes, you're a slave to sin. You can't ultimately control yourself. Of course you can to some degree, and you're responsible to do this. You can stop doing certain wrong things. You can choke back certain wrong words when you try. You can regulate your life to some degree, but broadly speaking, you cannot. Broadly speaking, lifelong, you're going to be under the power of corruption, inner corruption which is within you. You won't be able to control or curb your pride, so that you're a humble person. You won't be able to control fully your temper maybe, whatever your particular weakness is, or maybe for some people, your greed, or your covetousness. These are horrible things, and some people their selfishness. We're in the grip, all of us, of sin, and it rules us, and it governs our lives. We're restricted by it. Of course, without conversion to God we have no communion with Him. God is off-limits. We cannot really pray. We cannot say we know Him. We do not have His help. We don't have joy of knowing Him and walking with Him. And without conversion, we have no spiritual light. We don't understand the plans of God, and the purposes of God. We see everything from this world's point of view. We think like worldlings. Our outlook is the outlook of a worldling. It's all for this present life. We don't really have lights into eternal things and understanding. We're very limited and very restricted.

Let me talk about this, these are disagreeable things, just for a moment: ways in which we are not free. You have a false view of the world and life and what it's all about before conversion. The world puts its point of view across to us, and we accept it. We believe it. We're entirely rationalistic. Isn't it interesting, just now, there's the Rosetta mission, I don't know whether you've been following it, and a suitable comet is the focus of interest, and it's been hoped and thought by many scientists that this would prove that water...the mystery of water is immense in the world. Where did it come from? Why have we got more water than any other planet in the solar system? Where did it come from? And so, oh well, it must have come from somewhere. Some of it may have come about here on our planet, but the mystery of the enormous quantities of water on the earth is a very considerable one. And if you don't believe in God, and you don't believe in creation, then you've got to explain, where did all this come from? And one of these, you will know better than I do, probably, one of the common explanations nowadays, it was delivered here, somehow or other, from a comet, or comets. And so, the Rosetta mission was hoping to find water on this particular comet to prove the feasibility of this. An awful lot is pinned on this. Oh, you spend these vast sums of money, because you're going to find out and prove that, after all, there is no God, and we can explain in entirely rational terms how water got here, how life came about, what the history of human origins is, and so on. Well, unfortunately, as you will have followed, it's the wrong sort of water. It isn't our water which has been found on the comet in mind at all, but what interests me is this: that

though this is an enormous setback to the idea that water was delivered by the comets, what interests me is the reaction of some of the leading scientists. And they're not saying, "We're very disappointed. This is crushing. This is a tremendous setback for us." They're saying, "This is wonderful. This is just the beginning of a new era of discovery." What? It's all gone wrong? It isn't the right kind of water? It's heavy water? "Yes, but that's only the beginning now of an entirely new field of discovery which is on the horizon." Well, alright. All credit to them for being great optimists and so on, but I would say, wouldn't you, that they are thinking with, dare I say it, religious zeal. This isn't so much science, this is religion. Of course they are brilliant scientists. The fact they could ever mount such a mission, that they could ever carry this out, shows unimaginable brilliance and scientific prowess, but the thinking behind it is that we have to prove that there is a rational explanation for everything. We've got to get rid of God. And they are convinced "Oh, this is no setback. It's just the beginning of a new chapter. We'll get there. We are sure to." This is religious faith that there is no God. This is religious zeal and taxpayers' money driving it all forwards to prove, hopefully, that there is no God.

I shouldn't waste time with this, but you know, we are enslaved to a false view of the world and the great campaign to put God on one side and prove that He isn't there. We are enslaved by the idea there is no meaning to life, there is no purpose to life. There is no God, and there's no need for God. We're enslaved by our sin. We're enslaved by these false views of the world and of man. We are enslaved from time to time also, by the fear of death. Every time we have a curious illness, a suspicious pain, there is anxiety. In people who are not converted, this is heightened. "What's the matter with me? Am I going to live? Am I going to die?" We're enslaved and at the mercy of chance, and disappointment, and grief which plagues us all through life's journeys. But worst of all, we're enslaved to condemnation, because we're under the condemnation of Almighty God. And one day we have to give an account to Him and if we've ignored Him and slighted Him, then we're lost and condemned sinners.

People sometimes say, "I want to escape from God and from any notion of God. I'll be a rebel. I'm free to sin." But you're never free. I knew a man once, some years ago, and he had escaped from jail. Well, actually, he was sentenced to a term in an open prison so it wasn't terribly difficult for him to walk out, and he did walk out, and he decided he was free. When he spoke to me he'd been on the run for six months, and he said it was the most terrible period ever in his life. He was unable to go home. Of course he couldn't go home. If he went home, he'd be picked up and arrested. He couldn't work legally. He just had to do jobbing, and so on, and scrape a living where he could for time and move on. He was confined to cheap hostels and charity hostels. He couldn't make a home. He was terrified of re-arrest. He couldn't legally drive a car or anything like that. He had arrest hanging over his head all the time. And of course, he would go to trial and he would get a longer sentence next time. It would be in a much harsher regime prison; it wouldn't be in the relatively comfortable open prison regime. He wasn't free. It worried him all the time, and he said so.

And I tell you these things, because you think, "I'll be free from God. Free from moral restraints. Free from any thought of religion, or of seeking Him, or serving Him." Why

you should want to be free from Him? He is the kindest Lord. Life with Him is the best life possible, and yet that's what sometimes we want. You can never be free. There is a day you have to stand before Him and answer why, and why you've ignored Him and done these things. You escape from God? Remember, you're victim to the power of sin in your life. You have no communion with Him, no lights and understanding, no meaning, no purpose, no future rest, no peace with God. You're not free. You're a victim, very much like the situation of prisoners of war in wartime. And with great courage, many would try to escape. And who here doesn't know about the tunnels and the attempts to escape from POW camps? It was hard work. It could go on for months and months, digging with no proper implements. Hard, dangerous, and hot. Finally, the tunnel was completed, and, in so many cases, you emerged at the other end, but where actually had it got you? Now, I am not decrying it, a very courageous and noble thing to do. But where had it actually got you? You were still in enemy territory. You were probably only a few yards outside the camp perimeter. You were still subject to be shot and hunted down. You would be missed. You were not free. Oh, some did actually manage to get home. It's amazing and that's wonderful, but many didn't. They had a miserable time. They nearly starved. And if it was winter, they nearly froze. And eventually, they'd be captured, and some of them would be shot for their efforts. We're talking about innocent people. I don't want to give the impression that they were criminals. Of course not. But they weren't free.

All the labor of getting away from God, all the labor of persuading yourself He is not there, and He's no good, and you don't want Him, and you want to be free from Him, and you want to make your own way, and live your own life, and do whatever you want to do, and sin as you wish. That there are no moral values. That the Bible isn't true. All these efforts. You'll never be free. No, you'll be just subject to another group of forces, and horrors, and unhappinesses. So, you try to shut off all thoughts of God. You try to devise distractions, but you're never free. The only freedom is to find Christ, and to be set free from sin, and pardoned, and forgiven.

If I may tell you of another case, I may have mentioned this before at some time, but some years ago there was a woman, and she came from Denver in Colorado, and she went to university. She was a very bright young woman and she went to a good university and a good course in the USA there, but it was the time of the Vietnam War, and she felt very strongly about this, that it was very wrong. And so she was something in her university days of a political activist and joined the protest movement, but, unfortunately, the people in this particular group she was in were quite criminally minded, and they were so carried away they decided to join in the scheme to try to arm Black Panthers to cause trouble, and civil unrest, and commotion, and things like that. She was one of her group that raided a National Guard depot, and raided the armory, and took arms and ammunition. Then, they raided a bank, and, in the course of the bank raid, a police officer was shot. And of course, they were pursued, and most of the party were arrested. She was one of two who got away and was never arrested. The ringleader was sentenced to death. His chief accomplice was sentenced to thirty five years imprisonment. And this lady, as a young woman, she was on the notorious FBI Most Wanted list for years. They went to great lengths to hunt her down, and she found a place she could

settle, and she became a teacher. She also opened a restaurant, and she got on quite well. But you know, she couldn't live with herself. She wasn't free. She was agonized by her situation, and what she'd been involved in, and what she'd done, and after twenty three years she gave herself up. They sentenced her to twelve years, of which she served half. Well, that's enough about this lady who was carried away as a student.

But it's a picture of us. What a tragedy if you're young, and you think you want to escape from God. Why? And you think this world is much better, and you persuade yourself He isn't there. That He doesn't exist, and you give yourself away to unbelief and atheism, and you do what you want, and you say, "I'm free. I'm free from all that. I've got rid of it. I've rejected it." You're not free. You're not free. You're subject to your sin, to the propaganda of this passing unbelieving world. You're subject to all the disappointments, and shocks, and griefs of life, and you have to face God one day, and your conscience will frequently cry out. You're only free to sin. You're only free to succumb to the world. Yes, you're free to be unhappy, but how does the Lord free us?

Dear friends, just think for a moment of the cost of liberty. What would it cost to be forgiven by God and to be given favors in life by God if I've rejected Him and I've sinned against Him? Think of what it must cost. I have rejected God. I haven't just rejected a politician. I haven't rejected an ordinary person. I've rejected God, my Maker, my Sustainer, the One who's given me every gift and every power that I have. I've rejected Him. What a terrible thing. What a price for that ever to be corrected. He's my Ruler, my Lord, and I've spat in His face and rejected Him. Perhaps I've insulted Him. I've certainly insulted Him to others and decried Him. I've certainly stolen from Him. What price to be forgiven? Whatever would it cost? I've judged Him, the Judge of all the earth! I've said, "You are no good! I despise you, and I reject you, and in effect I execute you. As far as I'm concerned, you are not there. You do not exist." What's the price for forgiveness? I've ruined His property. I've defiled my heart. I've sinned with pride, and lies, and all kinds of things and deeds. I've refused to pay homage. I've refused to love Him, and honor Him, and serve Him. What price to be forgiven?

What would it cost, now that I've broken all of His laws. I can't pay a price for that. What price to buy citizenship after all that? Citizenship in the kingdom of God in heaven? What price to buy the friendship of God and go to His glorious, eternal home. And the astonishing thing, don't you think it is amazing? Don't you think it is astonishing, past all human capability, that Christ, when we've done all that to Him, should say, "I will go into the world, and I will take his place and suffer and die to bear the punishment due to him for all that." Amazing love! Divine love! Nothing like it in this world! Not the sum total of all human love that there ever has been or there ever will be could equal the love of such a Savior who would come and pay a hideous price, taking our punishment for us to buy our citizenship, and our pardon, and our release, and our freedom.

Oh dear friends, the freedom which Christ gives! If the Son therefore shall make you free, you shall be free indeed! Wholly free! Eternally free! If the slave has somebody who pays a price, a ransom price, pays for the slave to set him free, he's free! But only for life. Free indeed means free now and forever. That's a freedom only given by Christ. Ye shall

be free indeed, free entirely, free eternally. What a freedom! You are free judicially! When you stand before God, you shall be treated as not guilty. Not a stain, not a blemish on your record, because Christ has paid the price for you. You will be free spiritually to enjoy Him and know Him eternally. You'll be free forever. Years ago, preachers used to talk about the five RE's. RE. Five RE's. It's a bit elaborate, but it's our freedom. Reconciliation with God: free indeed. Reconstruction by God: a new nature, a new life, a new character is mine. Reeducation by God: I understand the Gospel and the plans of God from His Word. Re-inclination: my whole desire system is different. I now want to honor Him, and live for Him, and please Him. And I see things His way. And reclassification: I'm now a child of God, a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. All of this purchased by Christ for those who come to Him.

Oh dear friends, why would you want freedom from God when Christ gives you the only true freedom that there is? How much we need Him, and how much we must come to Him and yield to Him.

Let's pray together.

O God, our gracious heavenly Father, help us, O Lord. Deliver us here that we should not totter and stumble through life under a cloud of condemnation governed, and driven, and restricted by earthly forces and sins. O Lord, set us truly free. Show us our need. Bring us to salvation. Pardon and forgive our sins and bless us even this night. We ask these things in the name of our Savior for His sake, Amen.