

The Truth Shall Make You Free

*“Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him. If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed. And ye shall know the truth, and **the truth shall make you free**” (Jno 8:31-32).*

This article is being prepared a few days before July 4, often called “Independence Day,” the day on which Americans celebrate the birth of their country’s independence. This day commemorates the adoption by the Continental Congress (on July 4, 1776) of *the Declaration on Independence*, which declared to the world “that these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be free and Independent States.” Underlying this Declaration was the belief that Americans were a separate people, and not British subjects.

This intense desire for political, economic, and religious freedom in the hearts of our forefathers motivated them to take drastic action. They knew all too well that freedom is neither free nor cheap. The American Revolution, or “The American War of Independence” (1775-83), concluded with the 13 English colonies becoming the United States of America. The freedom for which our forefathers dreamed, fought, and died continues to this day. But this freedom was not easy to obtain, nor has it been easy to keep. We still remember the Alamo and Pearl Harbor. We must not forget the heroic dead in Flanders Field, or Corregidor, Korea, the jungles of Vietnam, the steaming desert sands of Kuwait, and Iraq. Whatever else you may think about these conflicts, you must surely agree that they all reflect the high cost of freedom.

We must surely appreciate the valiant efforts of those whose genius, struggles, and death gave birth to the freedoms we enjoy, and all too often take for granted. But such men as Jefferson, Adams, Revere, Washington, etc., were not the first to recognize the value of freedom. Long before these men ever breathed the breath of life, Jesus made the supreme sacrifice in behalf of freedom. He left the portals of glory, lived among men, and died on a cruel cross in order to make freedom both a possibility and a reality. During His earthly ministry He addressed the subject of freedom. This is what our opening text, John 8:31,32, is all about. In view of the value of freedom these words deserve and demand a closer scrutiny.

In the eighth chapter of the gospel according to John a discussion which took place between Jesus and the Pharisees is recorded. Jesus stressed the fact that He is “*the light of the world*” (v. 12), and that the Father in heaven bore “*witness*” to Him (v. 18). Prophetically, He spoke of the time when they would lift “*up the son of man*” (v. 28), and He further declared that “*I do always those things that please the Father*” (v.29). According to verse 30, “*as He spake these words, many **believed on Him.***” And it was those who “*believed on Him*” that Jesus addressed in verses 31 and 32. In view of the discussion that followed, wherein the Pharisees took issue with the words of Jesus, and which concluded with them taking up stones to cast at Him, we surmise that their belief in Him was superficial. Perhaps they regarded Him as a Messiah, but not as **the** Messiah. Or perhaps they were so wedded to their carnal views of the kingdom that they could not accept the words of truth which Jesus so eloquently spoke..

To those Jews which believed on Him, Jesus said, “*If ye continue in my words, then are ye my disciples indeed.*” Not disciples in **need**, nor disciples in name only, but “*disciples **indeed.***”

Jesus further said, “*And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you **free***” (v. 32). Implied in this statement is the fact that those Pharisees were not free, but they **could** be free. The Pharisees, as usual, missed the point. And they took issue with Jesus. They said, “*We be Abrahams’s seed, and were never in bondage to any man*” (v. 33). Really? Had they forgotten their own Decalogue wherein God prefaced the Ten Commandments, saying, “*I... Brought thee out of land of Egypt, out of the house **of bondage***” (Ex. 20:2). Had they forgotten Syria? Or their bondage in Assyria? Or the 70 years’ Babylonian Captivity? Had they forgotten that they even then were oppressed by Rome?

On the other hand, perhaps the Pharisees referred to their own indomitable sense of independence. Regardless of what others had done to them they never forgot that they were Jews. They were “*Abraham’s seed*” (. 33). Or so they thought!

Physically, Jesus knew they were Abraham’s seed (v. 37). But the freedom Jesus had in mind was based on spirituality, not nationality. Hence, Jesus said, “*If ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham*” (v. 39). Abraham was a man of faith. He did not argue with God. When God commanded, Abraham responded. He “*sojourned in the land*” of Canaan, but his real interest was not in that land. Rather “*he looked for a **city** which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God*” (Heb. 11:9-10). Abraham’s connection with these Pharisees was based purely on human race, not on God’s grace. The real seed of Abraham are those who belong to Jesus Christ in Whom all social, sexual, and racial barriers are broken down (Gal. 3:27-29). The Pharisees missed the point. They were enduring bondage and thought they were enjoying freedom! They prided themselves on being the children of Abraham, and knew not that Satan was their father, and that they were his children! (John 8:44). Jesus charged those who claimed to be free as being the servants “*of sin*” (John 8:44). They were in the **bondage of sin** — the worst form of servitude!

Please compare John 8:32 with John 8:36,. In the former “*the truth*” makes one free. In the latter, “*the Son*” makes one free. “**Disciples indeed**” (v.31) can be “**free indeed**” (v. 36). Jesus, “*the Son,*” is the Agent Who brings freedom. “*The truth*” is the agency which “*the Son*” uses to bring freedom. The Pharisees missed out on this freedom because, as Jesus said, “**My word hath no place in you**” (v. 37). There is no way one can accept Jesus and at the same time reject His word!

This brings us to the amazing paradox. To be free, one must submit to the servitude of the word. Being “**free indeed**” is based on becoming “**disciples indeed**,” and being “*disciples indeed*” is based on continuing in His word, John 8:31.

The freedom Jesus brings is precious indeed. Those who commit sin are the servants of sin (John 8:34). Think of the misery this taskmaster causes! Consider the anguish of those who have given themselves over to lust, drugs, alcohol, greed, and avarice. Like the “*wretched man*” of Romans 7:24, they discover that they are “*carnal, sold under sin*” (v. 14), and are forced to conclude that “*what I will to do, that I do not practice, but what I hate, that I do*” (Rom. 7:15). But the true student of the Bible learns that Jesus is able to “*deliver me from this body of death*” (Rom. 7:24), and that it is accomplished through “*the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus*” (Rom. 8:2), or by the gospel.

Jesus brings freedom. Freedom from the habits and enslavement of the flesh. Freedom from spiritual lies, falsehoods, and deceptions. Freedom from sin, its guilt, and penalty. Freedom from the fear of death. Freedom not to be and do what one **ought not** to do and be — but freedom to do what he **ought to do** and to be what he **ought to be**. This kind of freedom not only makes one “*free indeed*,” it makes one happy indeed! No wonder the eunuch, rising from the waters of

baptism, “*went on his way rejoicing*” (Acts 8:39)! He was happy indeed because he was “*free indeed.*”

But servitude continues. One is either a servant of sin or a servant of righteousness (Rom. 6:17-18). But this kind of servitude brings forgiveness, peace of mind, happiness, hope, and, yes, true freedom. Thank God for the freedom which Jesus provides! Friend, are **you** “*free indeed?*”

*** —B. Witherington