

Text: John 8:31-36 November 5th, 2017.

Oh Lord Sanctify them by the truth. Your word is truth!

What if there was only one copy of the Bible in this room and it got lost under a pew and wasn't found again for 40 or 50 years. "That's silly Vicar, that would never happen!" Well it did in the 1st reading, before the time of King Josiah. Or what if the only Bibles around were in Latin and you couldn't read them. Then you came to church and the whole service was in Latin and you couldn't understand it, and your pastors didn't really care, as long as your body was in the building. And this wasn't just for one service, but for your entire lifetime. That would make it pretty difficult to ever really read or hear God's word wouldn't it. This is what the situation was like in Germany before Martin Luther came onto the scene.

These things might seem absurd, and yet they are history! They really did happen, the people of Israel lost God's word and forgot about it. The priests leading up to Luther's time had started taking directions from the Pope instead of caring about what it said in Scripture. In both cases, God's people were forgetting about God's word. They forgot the very words of Jesus. But today as we celebrate the Reformation, we celebrate God's word. We celebrate Scripture alone, and we remember the very words of Jesus. **Remain in my word, then you will know the truth, and this truth will set you free.**

You might hear that phrase "the truth will set you free" tossed around a lot. But most of the time when people say it, they mean someone who has lied will be set free when then tell the truth. But in the context Jesus is not talking about telling the truth, but about knowing the truth that will set you free. Jesus was talking to a crowd of Jews and Pharisees, testifying to them that he was the light of the world and was sent from the Father to do his will. And many of the ones listening were probably thinking, "Get a load of this guy, he thinks he's the light of the world. He's apparently been sent straight from God. Yeah right, sure thing Jesus."

But many who were listening did believe what Jesus said and its to these ones that Jesus speaks words for the ages. "If you remain in my word, you are really my disciples." Listen to what I am saying and you will know me. Accept my testimony, for I am teaching you the truth. Believe that I am who I say I am, the Great I AM, then you will know the truth. This is the truth on which everything in all of life depends. This is the truth from the mouth of Jesus, this is the truth from God himself. This is the unchanging, objective and ultimate truth spoken by the Way and the Truth and the Life. Jesus was teaching this truth to the people face to face, encouraging them to remain in it, to take hold of it, to believe it and live it. And even as he spoke, some of the Pharisees rejected it and refused to remain in his teaching.

Ever find yourself refusing to remain in his teaching? Do you fare any better than the Pharisees who rejected it right away? Any better than the Israelites at the time of Josiah, who forgot about God, worshipped other gods and lost the Scriptures altogether? Any better than the Pope and the priests at Luther's time who were adding and subtracting to the word instead of remaining in it? At first you might think, "Well yeah I haven't been as bad as those guys about staying in God's word."

But give it a second thought. What truly is the struggle of every American? What is the threat that takes us away from God's word? BUSYNESS! The daily race of life slows down for nothing as we zoom from one thing to another, constantly on the move! Got to get to work, got to pick up the kids, then strait to practice. Got to get dinner on the table. Got to answer all the emails in my inbox. Got to get my workout in. Got to keep in touch on Facebook. Need to stay up to date on my show. And oh yeah, I got a minute or two left in the week to sit down with my

Bible. Or maybe I can even multi-task and listen to the audio track while I'm doing something else.

Our focus on God's word, our priority for Scripture alone can slip away just as easily as it did for any of the people I mentioned before. But Jesus' word remains the same. Remain in my word and you will be my disciples. For his word is truth, the one thing in all of life that we really need to know. His word was written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, and by believing you may have life in his name. His word is the lifegiving truth that he is the Savior of the world, the perfect substitute for you, and the pleasing sacrifice for all your sin. This truth isn't just a bunch of words or some lifeless teaching in a dusty book, this truth creates faith. It makes disciples, it brings eternal life to all who believe it. This truth goes out with the power of the Holy Spirit and it does not return empty, it accomplishes its purpose.

The people at Jesus' time had an advantage. They got to hear the truth straight from the source, the Messiah, who came full of grace and truth. But we have a different advantage. The message of Jesus, his word and his testimony, did not leave us when he ascended to God's right hand. His word remains for us today on the pages of Scripture. It has been preserved for us in all its purity. We have full and free access to it, study Bibles, Bibles that can fit in our pockets, Bibles on our phones. God has taken every truth that he wants us to know about himself and put it into one place and he has promised to speak to us in that place. Scripture alone is the place where God reveals himself and all his love to us. It's his invitation to come and learn and believe in his Son, the Son who was sent to die and take away the sins of the world. Continue to study Scriptures, learn about Jesus, **remain in his word, and you will be his disciples and you will know the truth.**

Part 2 What happens when you know the truth, but you don't believe it? The Pharisees were staring the very embodiment of truth in the face, but they didn't see it, and they certainly didn't believe it. Jesus told them, "If you remain in my word, then you are my disciples, and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free." But they didn't want Jesus' truth, they wanted a different truth, something that was more about them. Jesus wanted to set them free, but they didn't want his freedom, they thought they were already free. "We are Abraham's descendants, we have never been slaves of anyone." We have our own freedom!

That statement certainly wouldn't hold up in God's court, for the people had been physical slaves in Egypt. Then Jesus brings up a more shameful slavery, for "truly I tell you, everyone who keeps committing sin is a slave to sin." You are slaves, you are not free. You are slaves because you refuse to listen to my word and come to me to have freedom. You think you're God's children by bloodline, but you're dead wrong. You are adding your own ideas and they aren't true. You are not God's children, rather you are slaves to sin and slaves don't remain in the family forever.

What does that mean "slaves don't remain in the family forever"? It be like having a beautiful furniture set, premium top of the line sofa and recliner chairs, matching coffee table and end tables, and then there's that dingy old beat up recliner that your husband has had since college. The seat is worn and the arms are torn and the recliner gears don't work. When the family moves, and packs up the furniture, does that beat up old recliner go with? No! That beat up recliner doesn't belong to the set, it doesn't get a permanent place in the new house among the pieces that belong in the set, it gets thrown in the dumpster. It was temporary and now it's time is up.

In the same way Jesus says, “A slave doesn’t remain in the family forever.” He’s there temporarily but he certainly isn’t a true member. So it is with those who are slaves to sin. They aren’t true children of God and they get cast outside. The Pharisees were trying to be God’s children by their physical heritage. They weren’t concerned about Jesus and his word. At Luther’s time a similar thing was happening, the priests were cutting out the most important truth of the gospel. They were replacing it with works, like simply the act of being in church, or buying a piece of paper that said your sins were forgiven.

Do these add-ons and intruders to God’s truth still remain with us today? Is there a little piece of your heart that still thinks you’re safe just because you’re a church member, or because you showed up today? God will make me his child as long as I go to the physical building where his children meet. As long as I do the deed, it doesn’t really matter if I actually listen there or read God’s word on my own. We are slaves to thinking we can make our own truth, that we can fool God with outward appearances.

But our idea of truth does not set us free, it makes us slaves. The truth that Jesus teaches us, that is what sets us free. The Son who is God’s true and perfect child makes us free and makes us fellow children. If the Son sets you free you will really be free. You will be free from slavery to sin, free from death and hell, and free to live the life of a redeemed child of God.

Isn’t that what that word “redeemed” really means? It was as if we were slaves in the slave market, chained to our master the devil, and Jesus was moved by compassion for us. He came and bought us back with the price of his blood and freed us from those chains, and then he says, “Come join my family, be my brothers and sisters, for we have a gracious Father.” Jesus the Son sets us free with the truth of what he has done for us, with the price he paid for us. And then he doesn’t just send us on our way and then says have a nice life. He teaches us with his word how to live in the freedom of forgiveness. He teaches us to remain in his word, to learn from Scripture alone, and to be free from all the bonds of the devil.

So how do we exercise that freedom? How do we remain in the truth that sets us free? Make time for that word, make it your best time, your first-fruits time. Read it with passion and purpose, reflect on it, take it to heart, memorize it. Don’t let it be like your New Year’s resolution, start it the 1st and end it the 2nd. Make a plan, or use a Bible reading plan. There are tons of different plans you can use to daily study the Bible and stay on track. There are Bible reading plans in the entry way this morning. Take one along with you today and you can even use your plan with someone else, so that you can encourage each other to keep going. Use your opportunities to meet with others to study the Bible. Vine and Branches is a great way to grow closer to Jesus and to each other by studying the word. We have Adult Bible study and Sunday school that happens right after church today. Get all you can get of the words of Jesus. And all these things are not just something to do for the sake of doing it. You will grow closer to Jesus as you listen to what he tells you. “Remain in my word and you will know the truth, and that truth will set you free!”