

MESSAGE - Were you There When Jesus Set You Free?

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SCRIPTURE Luke 4:16-21

<sup>16</sup> He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, <sup>17</sup> and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

<sup>18</sup> "The Spirit of the Lord is on me,  
because he has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners  
and recovery of sight for the blind,

to set the oppressed free, <sup>19</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

<sup>20</sup> Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. <sup>21</sup> He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

SCRIPTURE John 8:31-36

<sup>31</sup> To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. <sup>32</sup> Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

<sup>33</sup> 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?"

<sup>34</sup> Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. <sup>35</sup> Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. <sup>36</sup> So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

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Through this season of Lent we are on a discovery of many answers to the cross of Christ.

Answers to the questions of:

"did he have to die?"

"what does it all mean?"

Last week we looked at how, upon the cross, Jesus took our place, died the death that is really our punishment for sin....upon the cross it's as if Jesus is saying, "I'll go through it for you."

Today we look at the angle that the cross is not just about a punishment taken in our place, but a ransom paid for our freedom.

A ransom because we are captives.

We are slaves to sin....

- Doing what sin tells us

- Living according to sin's rules

- Captive to the human condition of broken relationship

- Something we cannot escape

- Something from which we need to be rescued

- Something that requires a hefty ransom because it's a powerful captor

Enter Jesus on a mission who declared to his disciples: "*the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*" - Matthew 20:28

But the question is: will we/do we live as freed people?

Let me explain using myself as an illustration.

I've done some stupid things in my life

- Said some harmful things

- Done embarrassing things

- Made errors of judgment

And while I know in my head that there is forgiveness, I don't necessarily live free of that stuff.

It can still hold me captive. I still feel those effects:

- I'm embarrassed

- I make justifications in my mind...

- I can rehearse those situations over and over and relive those moments

So while I know that God doesn't hold it against me anymore, I can still find myself captive and still oppressed by the effects of sin.

What to do? Is freedom really possible?

I had the opportunity to have a conversation with a young mom and her little boy....

- It was a gift.

- We got to talking about all of this.

She shared about the Bible study she was just in the night before and how they had studied Psalm 51: *my sin is ever before me...* And she said how it helped her to understand that God has released her from it. And in her words: "I see my sin. Thank you Jesus that you've got me covered. Now I'm free of it and now I can live beyond it. I'm not bound by it anymore." The joy that was on her face showed the freedom she felt. Her name was Kerry and I asked if I could share her words with you this morning.

"I can live beyond it now"

"It no longer needs to define me"

I'm no longer identified as stupid or selfish or jealous or sinful or need to be embarrassed. I no longer have to rehearse my justifications/rationalizations for my sins. I am no longer oppressed by my sin. I can live a new life.

As the line in 'O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing' goes: "He breaks the power of cancelled sin; he sets the prisoner free."

The hymn writer is posing that even cancelled sin has power over us

But Jesus overcomes that power and sets us free from the prison it puts us in.

Is that possibly what he meant when he said, "those the Son has set free are free indeed."

Is it possibly what he had in mind when he claimed in his mission statement the Isaiah text: "to set the oppressed free"

I believe that the start of it....but not the whole of it.

I believe that Jesus had a greater vision than the singular, individual being set free.

I believe he had a whole re-defined kingdom in mind.

I believe he had in mind the start of something new in the world.

That begins when we are released –

And it grows as we live a new life that brings about the release of others.

Let us look at it through the line in the Lord's Prayer that can be said in three different ways:

*Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us*

Release from holding sin against each other. Can you imagine what kind of peaceful world we might create?

*Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors*

Release from debt....can you imagine such a world that followed the instructions of the year of jubilee? Release from holding each other back through economic oppression.....

*Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us*

Release from punishments and imprisonments. Can you imagine such a world?

I ask because this is the world, the kingdom that Jesus came to establish on earth through people being ransomed and released.

Can you imagine the ripple effect in the world?

How something new – a new kingdom – can break into the world when we live as people who are freed?

The amazing thing is that in both of the passages we read this morning:

- The words Jesus spoke when he began his ministry and then he proclaimed that it had been fulfilled in their hearing.
- The words that Jesus spoke to Jewish leaders about how the truth would set them free.

In both stories, as the conversation went on, Jesus found resistance in both groups. The people in Nazareth wanted to throw him off the cliff. And with the others - Jesus knew they wanted to kill him.

So if the Son has made us free – will we live that way or not?

Will we accept the freedom or resist it?

Will we accept it for ourselves and not for others?

Will we really let the truth set us free?

Our Lenten question is: Were you there

Were you there when Jesus set you free?

Friends, we are there when we learn we really are no longer bound to the power of sin.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

L: Let us humbly come before the Lord:

**P: God of compassion, you know how we rebel against you. You know how we doubt and fear and hold back, when you call us to freedom and to partnership in Jesus Christ. Forgive us. Free us by the power of your cross, that we may serve you without fear. Grant us peace through Jesus Christ whose mission included bringing release and freedom for the sake of your kingdom on earth. Amen.**