

The Festival of the Reformation (transferred)
27 October, Anno Domini 2019
St. John 8:31-36
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

The freedom that all men seek and need will not be found through debate or legislation or treaties. It is found only in the Gospel - in the death of the Son of God who died once for the sins of all. This forgiveness frees you from the eternal guilt of your sin, the terror of death, and the power of the Old Evil Foe. Only the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, can grant that freedom. It is not for sale. You cannot earn it with your works. It is a gift that God gives because He is merciful. Christ has died for you so that you might be free, so that the iron gates of hell's prison might be shattered forever. And this priceless treasure belongs to all who believe this good news that is proclaimed to them, all who receive in faith the work that Christ Jesus has done.

This is our cause for celebration, not just this day but every day. Whether we are going about our daily business or sitting imprisoned because we bear the name of Christ, we are free. We are free from having to fear what men and the world seek to do us because they really can't do anything. We are free from having to live according to the desires of our flesh because the Lord has shown us how destructive those desires really are. We are free from chasing after the fleeting and empty things that the world believes are so precious and important - fame, success, wealth, popularity, health, ease. These are just vanities, a chasing after the wind we hunt down at the cost of our soul.

You are free, dear Christian. The chains of sin that bound you to eternal judgment were forever broken when the Lord Jesus who shouted "It is finished!" burst forth from the tomb in triumph. The filth and guilt of your sin have been forever washed away in the baptismal waters. No one can take this treasure from you. It is yours to throw away. Neither man, nor devil, nor angel are able to take it away from you. And the Lord Jesus Christ who bestowed this freedom upon you will never go back on His promises. The Son has set you free!

You alone can refuse this gift. You alone can reject what Jesus has done for you. You alone can deny your Savior by imagining that the promise is unsure or insufficient for your sin or that it is somehow contingent upon your own efforts to reform yourself. You alone can give up your freedom and bind yourself again to

slavery by unrepentance and continuing to walk in the ways of the flesh as though children of light have been freed to continue walking in works of darkness.

But the glorious Gospel still remains. And this day, again, your gracious Savior invites you to rest in the true faith that He has done everything necessary to save you. The all-sufficient Blood of Jesus, Blood which Jesus offers as true, life-giving drink, has set you free. By His Word the Son of God has loosed your bonds so that you may have true and eternal life. And all who repent of their sin and unbelief, no matter how far or often they have strayed, will freely receive the peace of Christ which surpasses all human understanding.

This peace cannot ever be found in works of the Law. The Lord clearly says through the apostle "For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin". God Himself unequivocally says we will not be justified before Him by anything we do. Therefore, if you comfort yourself with your own goodness or obedience whether you measure that by God's or man's law, the truth is a simple one - you will not be justified. No one can be because sinful man can only find one thing in the mirror of the law - failure. The law doesn't make us guilty, it exposes the ugly truth that we are - every last one of us. No one can claim moral superiority because all have fallen short of the glory of the one who can - God Himself who is judge. He alone is good. He alone is holy. And if we believe that we can stand safely before His judgment seat then we are fools who have been blinded by the devil.

It is this delusion that lies at the heart of all false teaching - that man is capable of justifying himself before God by works done of his own power. This is a vicious and demonic lie sown in the world by the devil and spread by his apostles to lead people away from the gracious salvation which God has prepared in Christ Jesus for all who believe and bind them in the slavery of death. And it is a wonderfully effective lie because it glorifies man and there is nothing man loves more than to be glorified, to think great things about himself. We love to boast about the good we have done, the sacrifices we have made, the hours and the money we have given and we imagine that these help us in God's sight, demonstrating how worthy we are of his love and favor.

But God hates these things when we offer them in place of the sacrifice of His Son. It is an offense to say that something we have done could replace or be equated to the death of Jesus for the sin of the world. We have nothing to boast of, not according to our works. Our works, even the best of them, bring with them our guilt and our unbelief. They are not done in pure faith, with a pure trust in God

and love for our neighbor. Chasing after enough good works to calm your conscience is an impossible task that will lead you either to false hope or the darkest depths of despair.

Righteousness is something that must be bestowed upon us by the only one who is righteous. And precisely in bestowing forgiveness and salvation upon sinners, is God's true righteousness seen. He doesn't for any reason owe us this salvation. We did nothing to merit the death of God's Son under God's judgment against our sin. Yet God, in His mercy, freely gave that very gift, the only means by which we could be set free from eternal judgment. What is pleasing to God is to receive this gift in faith - to believe that God has done exactly as He has promised, that He has paid the entirety of your debt that you may be free and that He has granted to you the adoption of sons through the waters of Holy Baptism.

This is true freedom. This is the freedom to which God has called you in Christ Jesus. This is the eternal Gospel that will continued to be preached until the day our Lord returns to bestow upon all the faithful the kingdom which He has prepared for us.

You are free because the Son has set you free. By His almighty and life-giving Word He has declared you righteous, forgiven of all your sins. May our gracious Lord keep you steadfast in this Word and the freedom which He has mercifully bestowed upon you.

In the Name of +Jesus.