

Real Freedom

The gospel for this coming Sunday (Reformation Sunday) is John 8:31-36. This text is about the Jews not wanting to admit that Jesus was the Son of God.

Jesus is speaking within the context of the Feast of Tabernacles (Jn 7:2–8:59), which commemorated Israel's sojourn in the wilderness after having been freed from the slavery of Egypt. During this sojourn, God gave to Israel the way of the Law. This section continues the theme of John's Gospel that Jesus is himself the true Torah of God, the Word of God who is the way of discipleship that leads to the Father. Jesus has just indicated that he does nothing "on [his] own" but does only that which the Father teaches him, and so he pleases the Father "always" (Jn 8:28–29). The Jews understand their identity as grounded in Abraham and in their loyalty to Moses (cf. Jn 9:28). True discipleship, however, is found in Jesus, who is the way to the Father.

This chapter is something of a heavyweight in John's Gospel. First, Jesus is challenged to render judgment in the case of the adulterous woman; the accusers obviously expected Jesus to fail and be embarrassed regarding that situation. Then Jesus' "light of the world" message beats the Pharisees with their own words regarding proper application of the Law. Thereafter the Savior uncovers sin and works faith in the hearts of some of the listeners. The verses following our text explicate the question not of religious liberty but of spiritual freedom. This is followed by Jesus' charge that some of his hearers are beholden to Satan—no sweet little Jesus here! And finally, we hear one of the great dogmatic statements of the New Testament: "If anyone keeps my word, he will never see death. . . . Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am" (8:51, 58).

Verse 30 concludes: "Even as he spoke, many put their faith in him." He had been speaking of his faithful imparting of the Word of the Father in word and deed. Against this background the Lord goes on to address these (and all) adherents to the faith, warning against any "faith" unwilling to be formed and reformed by the faith revealed in Christ. Jesus' summons to the truth stands in stark contrast to the lie and the father of lies, which have enslaved Christ's believing opponents (cf v 44). As with other such bold contrasts (e.g., light/darkness, 1:5; life/death, 5:24; blind/seeing, 9:41), John's Gospel delineates the unmistakable difference between the truth and the lie, and between the disciple who remains in Jesus' word and the "disciple" who will not.

Then Jesus speaks directly to those "Jews who had believed in him, 'If you abide in my word.'" *Abide* means "to remain in, to live in, to dwell in." "In my word" is where the true disciple of Jesus needs to remain. How do you remain in the faith? You remain in Jesus' Word. The Word of God is faith's bread and butter, faith's fuel, and the air faith breathes.

We still have Jesus' Word today. His Word leads us to Him and keeps us with Him. The mark of true followers of Jesus is that they remain true to His Word, where they learn the truth, and the makes them free.

In Jesus and His teaching will are free from sin, death and Satan's rule, and thus free to serve God with a pure heart.

Prayer: Grant that I may remain faithful to your Word until my last hour, O Lord. Amen. (TLSB)