# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

 **“The Truth Will Set You Free”**

**John 8:31-38**

**March 3, 2019**

“Who is Jesus?” This morning our Bible text will reveal to us that Jesus is the one who can set us free from the guilt and burden of sin. Elsewhere Scripture tells us that Jesus can set us free from the eternal consequence of sin, the consequence being eternal separation from God, but the focus of our text this morning is on how sin impacts us in our daily life and what Jesus can do about it. I invite you to turn with me to John 8:31-38

Jesus said to the people who believed in him, “You are truly my disciples if you remain faithful to my teachings. And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” “But we are descendants of Abraham,” they said. “We have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean, ‘You will be set free’?” Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave of sin. A slave is not a permanent member of the family, but a son is part of the family forever. So if the Son sets you free, you are truly free. Yes, I realize that you are descendants of Abraham. And yet some of you are trying to kill me because there’s no room in your hearts for my message. I am telling you what I saw when I was with my Father. But you are following the advice of your father.”

Remain faithful to my teachings; you will know the truth; the truth will set you free. Jesus teaches in verse 34 that everyone who sins is a slave of sin. Who among us has ever sinned? “All have sinned,” says the Apostle Paul, and you and I are among the all. The Bible tells us that God decides what sin is, and the standard by which he judges and affirms what is good and what is evil is his own moral character. Everything that God would do if he were us, he requires of us; everything that God would never do if he were us, he forbids us to do. So, to say that all of us have sinned is to say that all of us have failed to do what God requires, and we have done what God forbids. What, then, does Jesus mean when he says that you and I, who sin, are slaves of sin?

Jesus is teaching the truth that sin has a terrible ability to dominate our lives, to control the way we live in response to our sin. When we sin, we feel guilty because we have not lived as God would have us live. We feel ashamed, worried what people would think about us if they found out what we had done. And, most damaging of all, we become anxious about what God thinks of us. We wonder whether God will accept us, as sinners, or whether he will treat us as we deserve.

To get what you deserve has always been a popular concept. It teaches that if you’ve done good things, you will be rewarded with good things. But if you have done bad things, you’re going to pay big time. So, says the view of God based on this concept, the way to please him is by being sure that you do more good things than bad things in your life. But, if your bad outweighs your good, look out! This is how sin enslaves us. It causes us to worry about the scale of good versus bad in our daily living, whether we are doing enough good to outweigh the bad; it brings doubt about our eternal salvation when there is a sin in our past that we believe is particularly bad, one that hardly any amount of good can overcome; and, because we are ashamed of our sin and feel guilty about it, we think God is ashamed of us and will leave us in our guilt. It is therefore critical that we hear Jesus’ next truth: “If the Son sets you free, you are truly free.”

To be set free from sin’s enslavement is to receive the teaching of Jesus about God’s grace. God’s loving mercy interrupts, so to speak, the consequences of our sin. Who is the one who has taught us that we will get what we deserve? It’s not Jesus! Later in this eighth chapter of John, Jesus will identify Satan as the one who perpetuates the falsehood that you get what you deserve, for he is a liar and the father of lies. Satan is the one who wants us to wallow in our guilt, to hide because of our shame, to doubt God’s salvation because of the severity of our sin. Satan wants to keep us slaves to sin – Jesus wants to set us free. And the means of freedom from slavery to sin is confession.

“If we confess our sins to him, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all wickedness” (1 John 1:9). To confess our sins means to admit to God that we have fallen below his standards. We have not been guided by his moral character, doing what he would do and avoiding what he would avoid. Instead, we have done what our selfish, prideful self has guided us to do. To confess it to refuse to make excuses for our sin. Our sin is not our spouses fault, or our kid’s fault; we didn’t do it because we had bad parents. Similarly, to confess is to refuse to compare our sin with someone else’s sin, to say that while we may be bad we’re not as bad as him, or her. And, to confess is to refuse to make light of it, admitting we did a bad thing but excusing it by saying that it could have been a lot worse. To confess is to admit that we were wrong, and that we can’t fix the problem by ourselves by trying to be good, or by trying to make our sin less bad than it is.

Confession, though, is hard. The temptation when we sin is to think that we can hide it from God, just like we try to hide it from others and even try to hide it from ourselves. It is exactly when we try to hide our sin from God, from others, and from ourselves that it will enslave us. We all know the story of the very first sin. Eve ate of the fruit that God had forbidden, and gave some to her husband and he ate it as well. Remember what happened next? God came walking in the garden, but on this day Adam and Eve were not there to walk with him. They were hiding themselves from God. God knew what they had done and when he asked them about the sin, Adam blamed Eve and Eve blamed the snake. As a result, they were banished from the garden. I wonder how their story would have been different if instead of blaming others for their sin, they had confessed it. We will never know what could have been different for Adam and Eve, but we do know how it can be different for us.

Max Lucado tells the story about Johnny and Sally who were spending the summer with their grandmother. Johnny had a slingshot and enjoyed shooting rocks but he hardly ever hit his target. One day when he was in his Grandma’s backyard he saw her pet duck. On impulse he shot at the duck and unexpectedly the stone hit, killing the bird. Johnny panicked and hid the bird in the woodpile, only to look up and see his sister watching. After lunch that day, Grandma asked Sally to help with the dishes. Sally responded, “Johnny told me he wanted to wash the dishes today, didn’t you Johnny?” So Johnny did the dishes.

For the next several weeks he did virtually all the chores around the house. Sometimes because it was his turn, and sometimes because of what his sister had seen him do. “Remember the duck,” Sally would whisper. After a while he grew tired of doing all the chores, and decided that any punishment from his grandmother would be better than doing all his sister’s chores, so he confessed to killing the duck.

“I know, Johnny,” his Grandma said, giving him a hug. “I was standing at the window and saw the whole thing. Because I love you, I forgave you. I wondered how long you would let Sally make a slave out of you.” Johnny thought his confession would harm his relationship with his grandma, when in reality the one who loved him was only waiting for him to admit his sin so he could be freed from his enslavement. What, then, are you and I waiting for? The truth of confession will set us free from slavery to sin.