

Self denial - Freedom for prisoners  
John 8:31-36

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Bridget was 18 and was experiencing some troubles at home. She got involved on the internet and met this seemingly nice bloke in a chat room. She left home, moved in with this guy in Auckland and experimented with drugs that made her feel so good. He turned out not to be such a nice bloke and soon she was selling her body on the busy street corners of the city. Parents and friends pleaded for her to come back home so they could all make a new start. But, she too shot back, “look, this is a free country — I can do what I want”. Was she really free or had she become a slave to her boyfriend and drugs?

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Many of us long for truth in religion too. God healed me? Did Jonah really get swallowed up by a big fish? Does God really hear my prayers, because sometimes I don't know...I just don't know.

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I know I will be criticised for saying this, probably misunderstood, but I am not a big fan of the word “sin.” I know there are Christians who condemn other Christians for softening the word sin and accuse them for trying to be all PC. Well there maybe something in that but too often, I think it is a word that is used by the powerful to shame and control those with less power. Too often sin is used to point the finger at someone else's behaviour rather than looking at our own failures. Too often sin, or rather I should say sinlessness is just another thing for us to achieve in our achievement-based, your-value-depends-on-your-successes type society in which we live.

I don't like the word “sin.” Not because I don't believe we are sinful, but just all the bad baggage the word carries in today's culture. But as I was reading recently I read of a guy who used the word “brokenness.” We live in a world of brokenness.

Imagine if that was the word Jesus used, “I tell you the truth, everyone who is broken is a slave to brokenness.” And we all are broken.

- Some of us live with so much pain that we no longer pray for a long life, but a short one.
- Others of us are caught in an endless cycle of believing that the clothes we put on each morning for work or school will somehow make us more valuable and attractive to the people around us.
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This is the truth, Jesus says. And the truth will set you free.

Yeah, but how? But how does hearing all of this depressing stuff that we are broken people living in a broken world set us free?

I once heard a story about woman who, after attending a worship service, went up to the pastor and said, “Nice sermon pastor. I liked what you said about God loving us all.” And then she added this, “But if God really knew who I was, I don’t think he would love me.” This woman had only heard part of the story that day. Yes, she heard that God loved her, which is a good thing to hear. The problem is that she didn’t believe it...because she hadn’t heard the other half of the story. You see, God speaks two words of truth to us, not just one. The truthful word of God that she heard was this... “I love you.” But somewhere in the midst of the announcements and the closing hymn, the second word of truth from God got lost. She didn’t hear it. And it sounds like this, “I know who you are. I know what you’ve done. I know what grips you and holds you captive. I know what tortures you in the night hours.”

This woman heard that God loved her but she didn’t believe it because she didn’t hear the truth about herself. And it is painful to hear, like hearing that your sister is died. This woman needed to hear that God knew who she was. Not that God knew her as just one among the other 7 billion others, but that God knew her specifically and her all about her brokenness.

And then Jesus said, “Everyone who is broken is a slave to brokenness.”

Jesus is saying, “I know who you are. I know about your life and how messed up it is.” He puts his finger right on it, right on the infected wound that we all carry with us, because until the pus and the dirt is cleaned out, how can there be any healing? Until our brokenness is revealed, until the truth about us has been named, how can we believe the words of that traditional blessing – May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord’s face shine on you and be gracious to you. May the Lord look upon you with favour and give you peace.

If you abide with Jesus, if you hang around the teachings of Jesus, then you will know the truth. Two truths, in fact. The first is that God knows who you are. God knows your life. And the second that God loves you beyond measure. May these truths set us free.

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