

55. The truth shall set you free

November 27, 2016

“Veritas vos liberabit” is a Latin version of this famous verse from the Bible. You may even have seen it in many universities and colleges as their school official seals, such as, Johns Hopkins University, Idaho State University, University of Portland, and Ottawa University. But their idea of the truth is much different than what Jesus meant in the portion of the Scripture we are going to study this morning.

I’m partly surprised and at the same time, not-really-surprised that they would dare to put it in their seals because they ought to know better. Every college professor should know that you can’t take a text out of its context. In fact, there’s a little saying – “Any text divorced from its context can become a pretext which is a false premise.” Jesus is not speaking about academic knowledge or acquiring facts. He’s specifically speaking of the knowledge about God Himself. That’s what is truly liberating mankind from the bondage that people don’t even realize.

The professors’ idea is that the academic knowledge which the students learn from their universities and colleges would set them free. But free from what?

It is one of the most well known Bible verses to believers and unbelievers alike, but at the same time, it is one of the most misunderstood verses as well. Let’s learn from the Author of the Bible what He truly meant.

A. ABIDE IN ME, YOU SHALL KNOW THE TRUTH

John 8:31-32 Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. 32 And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

You can say this simple phrase in 9 seconds plus, minus, but it takes a preacher to go on and on for hours to explain it. Jesus just knows how to communicate with people, does He not? Some of you are thinking, “Yeah, preacher. Why can’t you be like Jesus, we all would be home by now.” Sorry, Charlie. I ain’t Him. So you have to put up with me for the next 30 minutes.

Did you notice that Jesus is now speaking to the Jews who believed Him? Where did they come from? They were right there when He finished His last comment in v28-29. Let’s go back there to refresh our memory:

John 8:28-30 Then Jesus said to them, “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things. 29 And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him.” 30 As He spoke these words, many believed in Him.

These were the Jewish religious rulers and some of them started to believe Jesus as whom He claimed to be. Does it mean that everyone, who believed Him like them, get saved?

This section describes about those who believe and yet do not believe in Him completely. These people are inclined to think what Jesus said was true, but they were not prepared to yield their lives to Him with total dependence. In other words, they started to believe Jesus on an impulse.

To understand what Jesus said more clearly, we need to go to the Parable of Sower in the Book of Matthew:

Matthew 13:3-8 Then He [Jesus] spoke many things to them in parables, saying: "Behold, a sower went out to sow. 4 And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them. 5 Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. 6 But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. 7 And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. 8 But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

The group of people who were described by Jesus in v4-6 in this parable are the ones. You might have seen them in your Christian walk; or you might be married to one; or you might be the one. They say, "I believe in God. I believe Jesus is the Son of God and the Savior of the world. I believe that Jesus died for my sins and rose again from the dead." But their spiritual fruit is zilch, nothing, nada. Their after-the-conversion-life is no different than the before-the-conversion-one if that actually happened.

I really like what A.W. Tozer said in his fine book "Faith beyond reason":
"We must consider the person who becomes a disciple of Christ on impulse. This is likely to be the person who came in on a wave of enthusiasm, and I am a little bit suspicious of anyone who is too easily converted. I have a feeling that if he or she can be easily converted to Christ, he or she may be very easily flipped back the other way. I am concerned about the person who just yields, who has no sales resistance at all."

Actually, I'd rather go along with the man or woman who is thoughtful enough about this decision to say truthfully: "I want a day to think this over," or "I want a week to read the Bible and to think about what this decision means."

I have never considered it a very great compliment to the Christian church that we can generate enthusiasm on such short notice. The less there is in the kettle, the quicker it begins to boil. There are some who get converted on enthusiasm and backslide on principle!

We can see how Jesus felt about this type of person in chapter 2 of John:

John 2:23-24 Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. 24 But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men

In other words, their faith was not the saving faith in Jesus Christ, rather the acknowledging faith about Jesus Christ. I hope that if you have this type of faith, you grow into the saving faith in Him by abiding in Him.

How do you do that? I am glad you asked.

For that, Jesus brought up two very important topics in v31-32: Abide and Disciple.

1) Abide

The apostle John loves the word 'abide'. This word appears 17 times in the NT, but John takes 15 times in the Book of John, 1 John, and 2 John. One biblical scholar said, "Abide is a long obedience in the same direction with Jesus." What a great way to describe it!

The Greek word for 'abide' is 'meno' which means "to remain, to continue to be present".

So you may ask, "How can I abide in Christ?" Simple. Learn about His Word, the Bible. That takes us to the next topic, 'Disciple.'

2) Disciple

'Mathetes' is the Greek word for 'disciple.' It means 'learner.' Are you a learner of Jesus Christ? If your salvation from God is true, you should have a strong desire to know the Word of God; obey His commands from the Bible; and strive to grow in Him spiritually.

A true disciple is 'Word oriented.' That is the main reason why we study His Word here at Calvary Chapel. What else is there other than God's Word to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?

If you have no desire to read the Word of God consistently and to learn about Him and to obey what He teaches us, you cannot really say that you are a disciple of Jesus Christ. I am not saying that you are not going to heaven after you die. That is not my place to judge, but you have to do some serious self-examination in your heart.

If the carnal things around you appeal to you more than seeking the truth through the Bible, you have a major problem that you must take care of immediately. First, you need to repent to the Lord and seek His guidance to go back to your first love and secondly, start to learn about Him through the Bible.

If we are Jesus' disciples, we must abide in His Word. There is no other way. To be a follower of Jesus – the Word made flesh according to John 1 – is to 'abide'.

Listen, not all truth is God's truth. But all of God's truth is truth at all time.

2 Timothy 3:6-7 For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, 7 always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

There is nothing like the freedom we can have in Jesus. No money can buy it; no social status can obtain it; no works can earn it; and nothing can match it. But tragically, how few Christians really walk in it! It can never be found except by abiding in God's Word and being Jesus' disciple.

B. A SLAVE OF SIN

John 8:33-34 They answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can you say, 'You will be made free'?" 34 Jesus answered them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.

Can you believe this? These Jewish religious rulers had some serious amnesia and a classic case of total self-denial. It is like waking up someone who was dozing says, "I wasn't sleeping. I was just checking out my eyelids." Yeah, sure! There is a puddle of drool under his chin.

Ever since the nation of Israel was formed in the land of Egypt, they were slaves to the Egyptians for 400 years; while they were in the Promised Land, they were con-

stantly occupied by the Philistines, Moabites, Ammonites, Canaanites, termites, and just about every other "ites" in their history; the ten Northern tribes were taken to be slaves to Assyria; later the two Southern tribes – the tribes of Judah and Benjamin were taken to Babylon; they also were enslaved by Medo-Persia; followed by Greece. And presently, the very time this conversation was going on, Rome had Israel in its iron fist.

I need to stop here to answer some people's mind boggling question: "What do you mean that I am a slave? I am not a slave to anyone. I am a free man." Physically, yes. But not spiritually, because if you are not a born-again Christian, you are a slave of the devil without your knowledge; but if you are a born-again Christian, with your full knowledge, you chose to be a servant of God Most High.

If you are not a born-again Christian, first, you are a slave to your own sin due to your sinful nature that you were born with and your continuing sins. Second, to remove your guilt of that sin from the back of your mind, you probably go through religious things like these Jewish people – coming to church once in a while to appease your guilty conscience and thinking that you'll get enough brownie points from God for that bad sinful day.

John Charles Ryle, who was the first Anglican bishop of Liverpool, England in 18th Century said accurately, "The power of self-deception in the unconverted man is infinite." How true!

Insensitivity to God's truth in His Word is a deadly sin and it is the previous stage of personal destruction. Bounded by the slavery of sin and blocked by a cold stony impenetrable heart against God's truth, unfortunately the majority of the human race will perish away.

In v35 Jesus' reply was dealing with the spiritual aspect of freedom. Sin enslaves because every act of disobedience to God creates self-imposed alienation and generates a trend to further disobedience that inevitably makes escape impossible. Sin can possibly be overcome, but the attitude and habit of sin are right there to bring down the person who is addicted. The structure of the Greek word of "whoever commits sin" in v34 is in the present tense, which implies a continual and habitual sin rather than an occasional lapse.

C. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A SON AND A SLAVE

John 8:35-36 And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. 36 Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed. 37 "I know that you are Abraham's descendants, but you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you.

A slave has no security, because he can claim no family ties that bring an obligation toward him. But the son of a family has permanent status within it. Jesus enlarged this analogy by stating that while a son is rightfully a partaker of family privileges, the Son can make anyone free as He wishes.

Jesus explained that the difference between spiritual freedom and bondage is a matter of whether one is a son or a slave. The slave may live in the house, but he is not a part of the family; and he cannot be guaranteed a future. Jesus may have had Isaac and Ishmael from Genesis 21 in mind here.

How can slaves of sin be set free? Only by the Son of God, Jesus Christ. How does He do it? Through the power of His Word.

Ephesians 1:5-7 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved. 7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace

D. APPLICATION

1) Life leads to learning, and learning leads to liberty.

When we obey His Word, we grow in spiritual knowledge; and as we grow in spiritual knowledge, we grow in freedom from sin.

2) If the carnal things around you appeal to you more than seeking the truth through the Bible, you have a major problem you must take care of immediately.

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