

33. The truth makes you free

May 15, 2011

I remember the comment that was made by former Arizona Governor Bruce Babbitt who was seeking to be a Democratic Presidential candidate in 1992, but became the Interior Secretary during Bill Clinton's administration. When he had to drop out of the Primary Election because of lack of support for him, he quoted the Bible verse "The truth shall set you free" out of context to say that he was dropping out of the race.

"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 official school seals, such as The California Institute of Technology – a.k.a. Caltech, 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 that in their seal 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 speaking specifically of the knowledge about Himself. That's what's truly liberating mankind.

Their idea is that the academic knowledge which the students learn from their universities and colleges would set them free. I don't think so.

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 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 Him, 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?

The section is described about those who believe and yet do not believe. 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 whom 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 He was talking about in John 8; 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 the way A.W. Tozer said in his fine book "Faith beyond reason": First, 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 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

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 brings up 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 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 of Sahuarita. 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 learn about Him, 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 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 – is to 'abide'.

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 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 have some serious amnesia and a classic case of total self-denial. It is like waking up someone who was dozing, "I

wasn't sleeping. I was just checking out my eye lids." Yeah, sure! With a puddle of drool under your chin.

Ever since the nation of Israel was formed in the land of Egypt, they were slaves to the Egyptians for over 400 years; while they were in the Promised Land, they were constantly 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 slaved by Medo-Persia; followed by Greco-Macedonia. And presently, the very time this conversation was going on, Rome had Israel in its iron fist.

One commentator 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, 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" 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 entail an obligation toward him. 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 in mind here from Genesis 21.

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

Just a side note, some of you may have heard about a total false claim by Harold Camping about the date of rapture – May 21st, 2011. According to my Bible, Jesus said that no one knows including Jesus Himself. If Harold Camping somehow knows, it means that he is better than Jesus. What audacity and what a prideful heart!

Matthew 24:36-37 But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. 37 But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.

One thing I do know for sure about the date of the Rapture, it will not be May 21st, 2011 for sure. You can count on what the Bible says, not some silly old man. This kind of false prophecy brings a bad name to Christianity.

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. 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.