

October 30, 2022 at St. Matthew, Port Washington, WI

You are Free!

Jesus says it's true

Jesus made it true

“*Wir sind frei! Wir sind frei!*” My wife and I were in Germany in the summer of 1990. Seven months earlier, in November 1989, the Berlin Wall was knocked down and East and West Germany were united again. It took a while, though, for the communist influence over East Germany to fade away. We happened to be in Eisenach on the first day that the Markplatz was opened after being shut down for 45 years. The Markplatz is like Port Washington's farmers market, but much bigger. For 45 years, the people of Eisenach were not able to sell fruits and vegetables directly to each other. Everything had to go through a communist store. One older lady, who certainly remembered the open air market 45 years earlier, was ecstatic. She kept saying, “We are free! We are free!” You couldn't help being touched by her joy. As Americans, we make a big deal about our freedom. We are free to vote, to move where we want, pursue any job or career we want, and on and on. This morning, however, we rejoice because Jesus gave us a freedom that is much greater than any government can give.

Jesus explained to a group of Jews (:31-32), “**If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.**” Telling the Jews that they could be set free implied that they were not free. Understand that Jesus is not talking about earthly freedom. The Jewish nation had been enslaved by a number of countries during its history and, even at this time, the Romans controlled them. Jesus was talking about spiritual freedom – freedom from the guilt of sin and the horrors of hell. The Jews quickly argued back (:33), “**We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone, how can you say that we shall be set free?**” They thought that because they had Abraham's blood running through their veins that they had a free pass to heaven. They were trusting in their DNA and that would not save them. In loving concern, Jesus let them know that they were not spiritually free and they needed him as their Savior.

Jesus sincerely and emphatically explained (:34), “**Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.**” He was pointing out to them that when it came to spiritual matters, they were not free. They were slaves to

sin. A slave can not do what he wants. A slave has to do whatever his master makes him do. The fact that the Jews, and each one of us, can not stop ourselves from sinning means that sin is our master. Sin is anything less than perfection. Sin is rebellion against God, walking away from him and doing the opposite of what we should do.

If we were free from sin, then we would never do anything wrong, we would never use any foul language, we would never have a selfish or lustful thought. We would always be glad to help others and we would always say kind and encouraging things in the nicest way. But that's not our reality, is it? Reality is that we can not live a perfect life. Things that we regret come out of our mouths. We do things that we are not proud of. And our thoughts....Am I the only one who has bad thoughts that just pop into my mind without any effort? You and I are just as sinful as anyone else. It's not a surprise that the world is such a mess with wars and mixed up morality. It is not surprise that we often hurt and can easily become depressed and bitter. It's no fun being a slave to sin.

If you stand in the Markplatz in Eisenach, Germany, and look northeast up to the mountains, you will see the Wartburg Castle. That is where Luther hid for ten months when Emperor Charles V condemned him to death for saying what the Bible says: namely, that we are all slaves to sin but Jesus freed us from our sins through his perfect life, innocent death, and glorious resurrection. All of that becomes yours simply through faith, simple trust in the heart, apart from any good works that we do. Jesus said it's true and Jesus made it true.

Jesus said it's true

Martin Luther was raised to think of God as only an angry God who punishes sinners who are not good enough. Luther tried very hard to be perfect. He tried and tried and tried, but he could not. He was scared of God. His conscience tormented him. We know what that feels like, to feel guilty because you did something wrong and wish you could undo it. You know what it's like to fight against some temptation. Different people are tempted by different things. What sin is a struggle for you to avoid? The devil has a two-pronged attack. First, he tempts us to sin again and again and again. Then, when in a moment of weakness, we trip and fall into sin, he accuses us of being a scummy sinner who can not even hope for God's love, let alone getting into heaven.

The devil especially gets at the unbelievers by undermining the Bible. I could talk for hours about the validity of the Bible and how thousands of

manuscripts corroborate each other. What really amazes me, though, is how the Bible, which was written thousands of years ago, can describe what is going on in our hearts. The Bible is constantly current. Sadly, the devil has convinced many people that the Bible is only some Jewish folklore with old fashioned morals, like something your great-grandma would tell you. But great-grandma is gone and the world has changed. So what if I sin? We are free Americans. We can live whatever way we want and no one can say it's wrong. The devil tricks people into thinking that they are expressing their freedom when they walk away from God and commit whatever sins they want. Like the Jews at the time of Jesus, they do not understand that they are slaves to sin and dying. They need a Savior.

While Luther stayed at the Wartburg Castle, he translated the New Testament into German so that people could read the Bible for themselves. I imagine him sitting back and smiling as he translated this section from John 8. Do you want to know how to be free from sin and guilt, how to escape the clutches of the devil, how to calm your troubled conscience? It's right here in the Bible. Jesus said (:31-32), **“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”**

The Bible gives us a message that you can not find anywhere else in the world. The world says that there is no such thing as a free lunch. You have to earn whatever you get. The Bible gives us a message that comes from out of this world. It comes from God himself. Only the Bible has such comforting words as (Mt 11:29), **“Come to me all you who are wearied and burdened and I will give you rest.”** Or (Jeremiah 31:3), **“I have loved you with an everlasting love.”** Or (Hebrews 13:5), **“I will never leave you or forsake you.”** Or (Matthew 9:2) **“Your sins are forgiven.”** The Bible is especially the story of God's love for you. The truth is that – yes, we are sinners, but Jesus came to free us from sin and death. We know that because, as the simple child's song says, “The Bible tells me so.” Jesus said it, that settles it. You are free from sin and death, free to go to heaven.

Jesus made it true

In order to free us from sin and death, however, Jesus could not simply SAY that we are free. If someone is a slave, you can not just tell him, “You are free,” when he is still has chains locked around his ankles. Jesus had to do more than just talk the talk. He also had to walk the walk. He had to make our freedom true unlocking the chains of sin and death.

Jesus explained (:35,36), **“A slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”** Jesus is describing a scene at a large estate where the owner had a son as well as many slaves (which was common in that time and culture). The father and son ran the estate. The son has the authority to set slaves free. But giving a slave his freedom would cut into their profit margin. If the son wanted to set slaves free, he have to pay the price for their freedom.

We can not free ourselves from the guilt of our sins. We can not stop ourselves from getting older and eventually dying. We were like slaves with chains around our ankles. But Jesus paid the price for your freedom when he died on the cross. Even though Jesus was perfect, he let himself get blamed for every imperfection in our lives. As he hung on the cross for all the world to see, he let himself get punished for our rebellion against God. Since Jesus took the punishment that we deserve from God, we know that God will not punish us. All of your sin is gone. You are forgiven. The cross of Christ is the key that unlocks the chains of sin.

When the devil nags your conscience, tell him, “Not today, Satan. Not today. Jesus took my sins away. You can not make me feel guilty.” Because of what Jesus did for you, you are not just free from the punishment of sin, you are also free to do the right thing. When the devil tempts you, you can say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions and live self-controlled, upright and godly lives. (Titus 2:12). You can show love and kindness to others, even though they do not deserve it, just like Jesus showed you and me love and kindness when we did not deserve it. Sin does not control us or define us, because Jesus is our Savior. He died to pay for your sins and he rose again to give you life after death.

A pastor friend told me about the time he visited one of his members who was dying. The guy had been a successful businessman. He worked hard and accomplished a lot. As my pastor friend visited him and shared the good news of salvation with him one more time, the man said with joy, “I have never felt so free.” He did not have to worry about any projects that were not finished. He did not have to be concerned any more about the economy or his retirement savings. He did not have to stress about anything. Most importantly, his sins did not trouble him because he knew that Jesus took his sins away. He was not afraid of death because Jesus turned death on earth into a doorway to heaven. The freedom and peace that he enjoyed is the same freedom and peace that Jesus gives to you. Because of Jesus, you are free here and eternally. Amen.