

## 277 – but free from what?

In St John Chapter 8 last week we noted Jesus' promise to those Jews who believed in His messianic claims, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free", and "If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (vv 31-32 and 36, KJV).

But free from what exactly? What does Jesus mean by this assurance of freedom as we continue in His word as His disciples, thereby knowing the truth and being made "free" by the truth? As always when faced with such a question we start by asking for the Holy Spirit's guidance (eg., John 14.16-17, 26 / 15.26 / 16.13). Then we identify the context of the particular word, phrase or passage, before applying the old saying, "The Bible is its own interpreter", by using cross-references, a Concordance, possibly a Lexicon (which gives a detailed description of every Hebrew or Greek word in the biblical text), and finally, if still necessary, perhaps a Bible Commentary too.

The context of John 8 is one of growing antagonism between the Jewish authorities and Jesus. After the famous incident of the "woman taken in adultery" (vv 1-11), there came further hostile questions addressed to Jesus as the Pharisees challenged His clear messianic claims. Jesus' answers convinced some of His listeners (v 30), and it is to these new Jewish believers that His words about truth and freedom are addressed (vv 31-32). But they didn't like what He told them! – and objected, "We are Abraham's seed, and we have been in slavery to no-one, never! How do you say, You will become free?" (v 33, Literal). (In one sense this was humbug, as the sight of Roman soldiers in their streets made all too plain).

But Jesus was speaking of a different form of slavery, and told them, "Truly, truly I say to you, everyone practising sin is a slave of sin" (v 34, Lit). In verse 35 He emphasised as an example the great gulf between the rights of a mere slave and those of a true, free son. It was by their believing in Him that Jesus' followers had their status totally exchanged, leaving behind their former state of being slaves to sin and being granted now their full freedom as sons. The key for this wonder was and is of course the Son Himself: He alone is free from sin, and thus He alone is able to bring about this freedom from sin for those who will believe in Him as Messiah, Lord and Saviour (v 36 / Hebrews 4.14-16 / John 1.12-13, 16-18, 29).

So here is the gospel plainly spelt out. Freedom from the bondage of sin and the gaining of salvation from God is no longer based on the keeping of the Mosaic Law (on which the Pharisees were so keen, and which, because of sin, is impossible to achieve anyway, eg., Romans 3.19-20). Rather, by God's grace, freedom and salvation are granted by simple faith in the Person, promises and deeds of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself (Romans 3.21-28).

We frequently come across this theme elsewhere in Scripture, for which only a few examples must suffice here. We think of the Exodus itself, from slavery to freedom in the Promised Land (Exodus 3 and following). In the synagogue at Nazareth Jesus read from Isaiah 61, " ... to preach deliverance to the captives ... to set at liberty them that are bruised ... This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears" (Luke 4.16-21); and from Romans 6.14-18, including, "For sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye

are not under the law, but under grace ... Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness"; and, " ... and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (from II Corinthians 3.17); and finally for this time, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death" (Romans 8.1-2).

So the freedom we are given by faith in Jesus releases us from the demands of the law, the domain of sin, the grip of death and the doom of judgement, and grants us instead the status of children of God, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ" (see Romans 8.14-17).

Next time we can consider what this freedom is to mean for us in practice, but for now we humbly receive and rejoice: for, Yes, as the Son makes us free, we are truly free indeed.

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