

**Freedom – John 8:31-38**  
**James Muldoon - Carey Baptist Church – 24 August 2008**

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There's something within every human being on this planet which makes us want to be free. We cherish freedom of speech, a free press, free trade, religious freedom, freedom from oppression. Freedom is very important to us.

Some people regard Christianity as a great enemy of personal freedom. They regard it as an iron net, a straitjacket which does not allow people to expand or grow. "Christians," they might say, "are not free to think for themselves. They just have to do what the church tells them."

There are many passages in the Bible which talk about freedom. And they all talk about freedom as something good. **John 8:31-38** is one such passage. Jesus is talking to some Jews who had heard his message and who felt drawn to it, but who were unwilling quite to commit themselves to him and his way. That prompts him to talk to them about slavery and freedom.

### i Slavery

**v31-34** talk about slavery. Jesus says, "**I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.**" Sin, according to the Bible, is missing the target morally. It's when you set standards for yourself and then fail to reach them. More precisely, it's when you fail to reach the standards which God has set for you. Here are a few examples of God's standards: you are never to misuse his name, never to swear, never to be disrespectful to your parents, never to hate, never to lust, never to steal, never to tell lies, never to envy, never to be greedy. Every one of us has failed to reach such standards perfectly. And what is more, we keep on failing to reach them, no matter how hard we try.

So Jesus' words here are profoundly disturbing. He's saying that people who habitually sin are slaves to sin. They are under the control of sin. They do not have freedom.

Sin, of course, is a terrible master. It brings misery and disappointment. And, in the end, it brings hell. That's what **Romans 6:23** means when it says that "**The wages of sin is death...**" Furthermore, try as you might, you cannot escape from being a slave to sin on your own.

Be honest with yourself. You have sinned, haven't you? You keep doing it. You know that it leaves you hollow in the end. Left to yourself, sin has enslaved you. You are completely and utterly trapped in it. You need freedom.

### ii Freedom

So in **v35-36**, Jesus gives his recipe for freedom. He says, "**If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.**" By "the Son", he means himself, the Son of God. And he claims to be able to set people free.

How did he do it? He paid a price. He bought us. And he gave us freedom. The price, astonishingly, was his own life. Christianity revolves largely around one extraordinary event, a day about 2000 years ago when Jesus was nailed to a cross and killed. He did that to pay the price for our freedom. If the wages of sin is death, then, as he died, he took the wages on behalf of people like you and me. He took death on our behalf. He paid the price for us. He became the redeemer, the slave-freer, you need.

How, then, can a man or woman enter into that freedom today, 24 August 2008? You need two things: faith and repentance.

The first thing you need is faith in Jesus Christ. You need to trust him as the only one who can forgive your sin, the only one who can free you from your slavery to sin, the only one who can deliver you from going to hell and grant you a home in heaven. You need to trust him, trust him alone, trust him completely. That is the heart of the Christian message. It's not about going to church or being nice or dressing funny. It's about trusting Jesus Christ. You need faith in him.

And the second thing you need, repentance, goes hand-in-hand with it. Repentance is seeing your sin, feeling sorry for it, confessing it to God, and turning away from it to live for him.

That is how to start a Christian life. That is how to be freed from your slavery to sin. You need faith and repentance. You need to trust Jesus Christ to free you, you need to confess your sin to God, and you need to start to live for him. Have you done that?

This might not sound like true freedom to you. It might sound like swapping one form of slavery for another. Christians do owe obedience to God. But it's precisely here that true freedom is found. True freedom is not creating your own meaning and purpose with a completely blank slate. It's living life according to your true nature. That's why the church's Reading Festival leaflets said this: "Freedom is not the opportunity to create meaning from nothing, but the discovery of eternal definitions from which to make meaningful choices."

Christians believe that human beings were created by God. Therefore the way to be most free is to live life according to the nature he has given us. That's true in the physical realm, in the realm of relationships, and in the moral realm. The best way to live is according to his standards. That sort of way of life suits our nature best. So in a sense we do become slaves to God's rules. But they are liberating rules. They are liberating because they encourage us to do what we ought to do. And we do them gladly because doing what we ought to do pleases us. Living life God's way is to enjoy true freedom. (Not that Christians always keep God's rules 100% faithfully. This side of eternity we won't be perfect. But we do aim live lives which accord with God's standards.)

True freedom, then, comes through Jesus Christ. Are you free? Do you have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ? Have you repented of your sin? If not, please stop and think. Please reflect on Jesus' profoundly disturbing words: "**Jesus replied, 'I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.'**" But reflect also on His profoundly liberating words: "**'If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.'**" May you too find freedom in the Lord Jesus Christ.