

From Bondage to Freedom

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon explores the various forms of bondage humans face and the freedom that comes through knowing Jesus Christ as the truth and being born again.

Scripture: Psalm 40:7, John 8:32, John 8:36, Hebrews 9:27

Topics: "Freedom in Christ", "The Truth that Liberates"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the transformative power of knowing the truth found in Jesus Christ, which leads from bondage to freedom. He explains that many are unaware of their bondage to the law, sin, the devil, and judgment, as illustrated by the Pharisees' denial of their condition. Jesus, as the Light and Liberator, fulfills the law, takes on sin, defeats the devil, and absorbs judgment on behalf of humanity, offering true freedom through faith in Him. The sermon calls for a recognition of our need for liberation and the importance of being born again to enter into the family of God, where true freedom resides. Ultimately, the message is a call to know Jesus personally to experience this freedom.

Transcript

Reading: John 8:12-51.

"Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (verse 32).

"If therefore the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (verse 36).

These verses speak to us of freedom by knowledge of the truth. You will notice that the declaration made by the Lord Jesus in these words about the truth making free immediately raised in those to whom He was speaking the whole question of bondage. Their instant reaction to His words was to repudiate the suggestion that they were in bondage. They said: "We... have never yet been in bondage to any man", and in so saying they gave themselves away very thoroughly. They showed how utterly blind they were, and they completely justified the words with which this portion commences: "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in the darkness." There is no need for a light if there is no darkness. The Lord Jesus made the statement that He was the Light. He knew right well how deep the darkness was, but they were not aware of that darkness and therefore they saw no need for Him. They were not aware of bondage and therefore they saw no need for liberation. It is just wonderful how this whole chapter justifies Him in declaring Himself as the Light and as the Liberator, because of the existing darkness and bondage, although those to whom He spoke were unconscious of it.

This chapter brings out the fact and the nature of the darkness and the bondage and then shows the way of deliverance, and that way is the Lord Jesus Himself. They said: "We... have never yet been in bondage". He will show them four ways at least in which they were in bondage and, inasmuch as they did not recognize any one of them, it is proved how utter the darkness is.

First of all, He will make it perfectly clear that they were in bondage to the law. That law stood over them as a master, as a judge, as something from which they could not get clear, from which there was no escape, to which they would have to capitulate by compulsion. They were in that way in bondage to the law. The first eleven verses of this chapter are a remarkable parenthesis. We will note how they form a part of this general matter. You notice that these rulers brought the woman taken in sin and said to Him: "This woman hath been taken in adultery, in the very act. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such: what then sayest thou...?" Of course, it was an utterly illegal act of theirs. They had a recognized court for such cases where the law was administered. They had no business to take it away from the proper quarter and bring it, as it were, to a private person, especially to one in whom they did not believe. But man will do anything to obtain an end upon which he is set and these rulers were out to entrap Him. They were trying to get Him to adjudicate and thus to bring Him into conflict with the Sanhedrin, the judicial court. We leave that, but notice the issue that arises: 'Moses said... what sayest thou?' Will He uphold Moses? If He does so, and pronounces judgment, He takes the place of the Sanhedrin and also immediately comes into conflict with the Roman authorities who, for the time being, have superseded Moses in the administration of the law. Will He set aside Moses? If He does, then He will be implicated in the sin. He will be condoning it, and will be a party to evil. It looks like a trap from which there is no escape.

He is sitting in the temple teaching and when they bring in the woman and make their charge and interrogate Him, He bends down from His seat and writes on the ground. They press Him with their question and all He says, lifting up His head, is: "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone...", and then stoops down again. When He has been writing a little while He looks up, and they are all gone. The Word says: "They... went out one by one, beginning from the eldest, even unto the last". Do you say that they are not in bondage to the law? He has brought the law home to them which they were trying to bring home on this woman. He has turned the weapon on to the accusers, and they who thought that they stood well with Moses have come under the lash of Moses and they cannot stand up to the law. If they could have stood up to the law of Moses, that woman would have been stoned, but they could not. The law judged them and condemned them. How proven was their state of bondage when they went out!

We make our application as we go along. Not only they but all are in bondage to the law in that way. God has uttered His law and has never taken one fragment away from that law. That law stands! It is comprehensive, detailed, it touches everything in life and in character. On the one hand, there is a whole comprehensive catalogue of: "Thou shalt not"! On the other hand, there is an equally comprehensive catalogue of: "Thou shalt"! And then the two sides are gathered up into one thing and if you are guilty of breaking the law at one point, you are guilty of the whole law. If you break down at one point, you are responsible for all the rest. We cannot stand up to that. We are in bondage by nature. God has spoken and we cannot get away from it. We are responsible for all that God has made known of His mind and His requirements on the side of "Thou shalt" and on the side of "Thou shalt not". We shall never get away from that for we shall have to answer for it one day. Every one of us will have to stand before God and answer to Him for His law, there is no escape. God will bring it home to us sooner or later and it will mean condemnation and judgment for every one. There is only one way of escape for we are all in bondage to the law by nature and we have all to answer for the law. Is there one who can say he has kept the whole

law and never violated any bit of God's commandment? It is not a matter of how many sins. If you only commit one violation of God's commandment, you are guilty of all the rest before God. The law is broken, you are proved a sinner and you might just as well go the whole way as far as your standing before God is concerned. The fact of sin is established and whether it be sin, more or less, there is judgment. The violation of the law at one point just means that we are sinners with a sinful nature. It is not SINS, but a NATURE.

Secondly, they were in bondage to sin. They said: "We... have never yet been in bondage to any man", but He said: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Every one that committeth sin is the bondservant of sin." Only a little while before they had been unable to stand up to that: "He that is without SIN among you" (not 'He that has not committed THIS particular sin'), "let him first cast a stone...". These very people had walked out and in walking out had admitted that they were not without sin. Now He says: "Every one that committeth sin is the bond servant of sin". So they were self-confessed slaves of sin. Oh! they would not have said it in word, but it had come home to their consciences.

Now, leaving these Pharisees aside, that does not need a great deal of enforcing so far as we are concerned. I do not think we would be in the place of religious Pharisees who would in word repudiate any bondage to sin, that is, by nature. None of us would say that we were sinless. But I ask you: Have you ever tried to stop sinning? Have you tried never to sin? Have you started a day and, in starting it, said, 'I will not sin today'? How have you got on? You know quite well that you are in bondage to sin, and there is no option about it. It is not something over which you, if you are not saved and in Christ, have the mastery; it is your master. We know quite well that outside of Christ sin has dominion over us and we are in bondage to sin. That is what the Lord Jesus makes clear and brings home here.

The third thing which comes in here is that they were in bondage to the devil. "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father it is your will to do." That is an awful thing to say, but He proved His case. And has it not proved that He was right? These religious Pharisees slew the Lord of Glory, and 2,000 years have proved that they did the devil's work, that the devil was behind it, that it was not the work of God and that what He said as recorded here was perfectly true, they were of their father the devil and they did the works of their father. They were, therefore, blindly in bondage to the devil.

This is a still deeper fact lying behind the state of every man and woman born into this world. They are under the tyranny of God's law, they are in the bondage of sin, but back of that there is the tyranny of the devil. What we have to recognize is that we are not merely dealing with sin, powerful as sin is in itself, but it is Satan himself back of the sin with whom we have to reckon. You cannot outwit the devil! You may try to take precautions against sinning, but you will find that you are up against - not some abstract thing but - a sinister, cunning intelligence who can trip you up just when you did not want to be, can get you at the time when you are off your guard, when you are tired and unable to stand up. It is all plotted, all thought out, all worked to a scheme. The devil is back of this sin business with his great intelligence as well as with his great power, and every man and woman outside of Christ is not only in bondage to sin, but in bondage to the devil. It is all very well for people to say that they are not going to sin again, that they are going to give up sinning. They cannot give up the devil like that. The devil is not going to be put off like that. They are not dealing merely with some habit, something into which they slip from time to time. They are in the toils and grip and dominion of the devil, and they have not only to be saved from sin, they must be saved from him. Even religious Pharisees were in bondage to Satan.

Then the fourth thing is brought to light here by the Lord Jesus and that is that they were in bondage to judgment. Because of this other threefold bondage, judgment rested upon them, the judgment of God. "Ye shall die in your sins", but that is not merely going out, ceasing to be. "It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this cometh judgement" (Heb. 9:27), and there is no escaping that. In bondage to judgment, that is, judgment stands as master of the situation for every sinner. So you see, what the Lord Jesus said about being in bondage is a very, very great thing, something which is true in all directions. When He said: "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" and the whole question of being in bondage came up, instantly they repudiated the suggestion, the insinuation. He proved His case and showed that they were very much more in bondage than they had ever thought.

That is how we are, but He said: "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free... If therefore the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." We have seen the one side: the bondage. Now we look at the other side: freedom by the truth. What truth makes free?

There are several sections to this Gospel by John. The first section has to do with life and the second section has to do with light. Each one of these sections circles round the Person of the Lord Jesus. When He is dealing with life, the central declaration is: "I am the life", and when He is dealing with light and truth, the central declaration is: "I am the light". So all that is being said focuses upon Him. "Ye shall know the truth" - 'I am the truth'! It simply amounts to this: you shall know Me and you will be set free. What does it mean in this respect to know Him as the truth and to be made free? It is not just knowing the fact of the existence of the Lord Jesus. It is not just believing that there is such a Person. It is knowing what He stands for, what He means.

What is the truth in the Lord Jesus which stands over against the bondage of the law, by which we are made free from that bondage? It is this, that, while God never reduced His law by one fragment or one iota, the whole law was fulfilled by the Lord Jesus for us. Every one has been beaten by that law, but God has never said: 'You cannot fulfil that law, I will let you off'. No, He said: 'You must face it!' That is impossible, so what is the way of escape? God will have His law fulfilled! The Lord Jesus came and said: 'I will fulfil it and when once it has been fulfilled it can be set aside.' It could never be set aside until it was utterly fulfilled and so He fulfilled the law to God's perfect satisfaction on our behalf. "Lo, I am come; In the roll of the book it is written of me: I delight to do thy will, O my God" (Psalm 40:7-8). And He did it perfectly and, having fulfilled the law and made it honourable, He put it out of the way and introduced the dispensation of grace so that now we can sing:

"Free from the law, oh, happy condition!

Jesus hath bled and THERE is remission!

Cursed by the law, and bruised by the Fall,

Grace hath redeemed us once for all."

The truth in Jesus by which we are made free is that He has satisfied God in the matter of the law.

The next point is sin: the truth in Jesus over against bondage to sin. "Him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf"; "Thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin"; "Our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation"; "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed". The truth in

Jesus by which we are set free from sin is that He has dealt with the whole sin question on our behalf, and that deliverance from the bondage of sin is a full deliverance in the Lord Jesus as the Sin-Bearer, but we must always keep the emphasis upon what HE IS FOR US and not upon what we are apart from Him!

The same thing is true in relation to the bondage of Satan, the grip and tyranny of the devil. In the words of the Lord Jesus prior to the Cross: "Now shall the prince of this world be cast out"; "the prince of this world hath been judged" (John 12:31; 16:11). Later, the Apostle Paul, reflecting with Divine illumination upon what took place in the unseen at Calvary, writes: "having put off from himself the principalities and the powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it" (Colossians 2:15). And as the outcome of that the Apostle exclaims: "Thanks be unto God, which always leadeth us in triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest through us the savour of his knowledge in every place" (2 Corinthians 2:14). Calvary was Christ's victory over the devil on our behalf and because of what He did there we are set free from the bondage of Satan. Remember again that it is a matter of abiding in Him by faith!

Then the bondage to judgment: If He took our place in sin, under the law, under the power of Satan, and then destroyed all those, He has destroyed the consequences of all those, namely judgment. In His Cross He received our judgment and the judgment due to us was exhausted upon Him. Prophetically, the Psalmist put these words into His mouth: "All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me" (Psalm 42:7). That was the judgment of God going over His soul as He represented us. Blessed be God, you and I in Christ do not have to face this judgment. It is past for us, but all these things remain for those who are outside of Christ.

There is one other thing which must be noted. "If... the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." "If the SON...". It is very impressive how often that title is used in the Gospel by John, and, alongside of it, "the Father". The name "Father" occurs one hundred and eleven times in the Gospel by John. "The Father" and "the Son" are familiar terms. Then it is impressive that, recognizing those familiar terms, at the beginning of the Gospel you have so much about being born again. "As many as received him, to them gave he the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were BORN, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh...". To Nicodemus He said: "Ye must be born anew". That is a family thought. There is the Father, there is the Son, but to be in that family you have to be born into it, and if the Son shall make you free that means that you are in the family. Jesus said: "The bondservant abideth not in the house... the son abideth" (John 8:35). If you are in bondage to the law, you have no place in this family. This is a family of the free ones, of the free-born. How are we to be set free from the bondage to sin, to Satan, to judgment? By being born again. The Son makes free. It is given to the Son to give eternal life to as many as He will, and we receive eternal life when we are born again. That is the gift which Christ, the Son, gives us. It is eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord. How are we set free? By being born again and brought into the family. We become members of a family of those who are free from all these things which speak of bondage.

If we are rejoicing in that great liberty which is ours in Christ, then our great desire is that others should come into it too. We do not know and we do not judge anyone - that is for each one to decide - but our desire is that we should ALL know the truth and that the truth should make us free. If you do not understand those terms, let me put it this way: you should know the Lord Jesus in a saving way and then you will be set free from the law, free from sin, free from Satan and free from judgment.

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