

# Made Free by the Son

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*The sermon emphasizes that we are all in bondage to the law, sin, Satan, and judgment, but we can be set free by knowing the truth in Jesus and being born again.*

**Scripture:** John 8:32, John 8:36, Romans 8:1

**Topics:** "Freedom in Christ", "The Nature of Bondage"

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## Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes that true freedom comes through knowing the truth, which is embodied in Jesus Christ. He explains that many are unaware of their bondage to the law, sin, Satan, and judgment, and that only through Christ can one be liberated from these chains. The sermon illustrates how Jesus fulfills the law, atones for sin, overcomes Satan, and bears the judgment meant for humanity, thus offering true freedom. Sparks highlights the necessity of being born again to enter the family of the free, emphasizing that liberation is found in a personal relationship with Christ. Ultimately, he calls for a recognition of our need for Jesus to experience this profound freedom.

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## Transcript

Let us look at verses 32 and 36. These give us a key to the chapter:

"And 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."

That speaks 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, that they repudiated the suggestion that they were in bondage. Said they: "We... were never in bondage to any man..." and in so saying they betrayed themselves 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; 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 darkness and bondage existing, although they were unconscious of it.

Thus this chapter brings out both the fact and the nature of the darkness, and of the bondage, and then shows the way of deliverance, and that way is the Lord Jesus Himself. They said: "We... were never in bondage..."! He will show 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 was.

#### (1) Bondage to the Law

First of all He will make it perfectly clear they were in bondage to the law. In bondage to the law in this way; that 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 shall see how they form a part of this general matter. You notice that these rulers brought the woman taken in sin, and said to Him: "Master, 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 court, 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 with a view to getting an end upon which he is set, and these rulers were out to entrap Him. They were trying to get Him to adjudicate, and to bring Him into conflict with the Sanhedrin, the judicial court. We leave that, but notice the issue that arises: "Moses commanded... 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 they are not in bondage to the law? He has brought home to them the law they were trying to bring home to this woman. He has turned the weapon on to the accusers, and they, who thought they stood well with Moses, have come under the lash of Moses, and 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 do it; the law judged them, 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 whole of both sides is gathered up into one thing: 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, of His requirements, both on the side of: "Thou shalt"; and on the side of: "Thou shalt not." We shall never get away from that, but shall have to answer for that one day. Every one of us has got to stand before God, to answer to Him for His law, and 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, but 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, so far as your standing before God is concerned. The fact of sin is established, and, whether it be sin more or less, it is judgment.

## (2) Bondage to Sin

Then note they were in bondage to sin. They said: "We... were never in bondage to any man." 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, to face that: "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone...." These very people have walked out, and in walking out had admitted they were not without sin. Now He says: "Every one that committeth sin is the bondservant of sin." So that 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 want 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 concerning which you, if you are not saved and in Christ, have the mastery; it is your master. We know quite well that out of Christ sin has dominion over us, and we are in bondage to sin. That is what the Lord Jesus makes quite clear, and brings home here.

## (3) Bondage to Satan

The third thing which comes in, 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 two thousand 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, that they were of their father the devil, and the works of their father they did. 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 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, which can trip you up just when you do not want to be tripped up; 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 they are not going to sin again, that they are going to give up sinning. They cannot give up the devil like that, he is not going to be put off so easily. 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 have to be saved from him. Even religious Pharisees were there, in bondage to Satan.

#### (4) Bondage to Judgment

Then the fourth thing is brought to light here by the Lord Jesus, and that is 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, but after this the judgement," 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 He said about being in bondage is a very, very great thing, a thing which is true in all directions. When He said: "And 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.

#### Christ - the Truth Making Free

That is how we are, but He added: "And 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 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"! And it simply amounts to this: Ye shall know Me, and you will be set free. What does it mean in this respect to know Him as the truth, and 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.

#### The Law Fulfilled, God Satisfied

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, one iota, the whole law was fulfilled by the Lord Jesus for us. Everyone has been beaten by that law, but God has never said: "Well, you cannot fulfill that law; I will let you off." Never! He said: "You have to face that!" Impossible! Well, what is the way of escape? God will have His law fulfilled! The Lord Jesus came and said: "I will fulfill it, and when once it has been fulfilled, it can be taken out of the way." 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) to do thy will, O God." And He did it perfectly, and, having fulfilled the law and made it honorable, He put it out of the way, and introduced the dispensation of grace, so that we sing now:

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. But we must remember it all hangs upon Who Jesus Christ was. No ordinary man could do this universal, heaven-and-earth, time-and-eternity work. Only one who had been placed in a unique position of universal representation could effect this.

#### Sin Atoned for, Man Justified

The next point is sin. It is the truth in Jesus over against bondage to sin. "Him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf...." His soul was made an offering for sin. "A full atonement he hath made." "But 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.

#### Satan Overthrown, Man Delivered

The same thing is true in relation to the bondage of Satan. "Now," said He, as He went to the Cross, "shall the prince of this world be cast out." "...The prince of this world hath been judged." And, reflecting, with Divine illumination, upon what took place in the unseen at Calvary, the Apostle says: "He stripped off from himself principalities and powers, and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in his cross." And as the outcome of that the Apostle says: "But thanks be to God, who leads me on from place to place in the train of his triumph, to celebrate his victory over the enemies of Christ" (Conybeare). 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.

#### Judgment Suffered, Man at Rest

Then the bondage to judgment. If He, of His own free will, without being personally involved by birth or nature, took our place in regard to sin, and as under the law, and under the power of Satan, and then destroyed them all, He has destroyed the consequences which follow them - judgment. In His Cross He received our judgment, and the judgment due to us was exhausted upon Him. The Psalmist, prophesying of that, put prophetically these words into His mouth: "All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me." That was the judgment of God going over His soul as He represented us. Blessed be God, you and I in Christ are not to face judgment. It is past for us, but all these things remain for those outside of Christ.

#### The Family of the Free

There is one other thing which must be noted. "If therefore 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 "John." And, alongside of it, "the Father." The name "Father" occurs one hundred and eleven times in John's Gospel. "The Father," and "The Son," are familiar terms. Then it is impressive, recognizing those familiar terms, that you have at the beginning of "John" so much about being born again. "But 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 flesh..." and to Nicodemus: "Ye must be born again." 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 you are in the family. He said: "The bondservant abideth not in the house... the son abideth...." 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 of 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. It 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, our great desire is that should be the joy of all. If you do not understand those terms, we will 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, free from judgment.

#### A Curious Feature

We have noted in chapter 7 that the general character of this Gospel takes a turn, and a new aspect of the Person and work of Christ is introduced. With that chapter the matter of light is brought in, but when we reach the section which is marked by chapter 8, this "light" assumes definite form, and that form runs through to the end of chapter 9. The first eleven verses of chapter 8, as it will be noticed, are something in the nature of a parenthesis. They seem almost like a curiosity. This will be recognized by the absence of any sense of continuity between verses 11 and 12. Verse 12 seems to throw back to verse 52 of chapter 7. Why is this? What is the explanation of this curious feature? Whether John himself knew why or not, there is here one more remarkable instance of a progressive spiritual history being followed. We shall see this as we proceed.

#### The Person of Christ Before the Doctrine

There are two sides from which this parenthetical fragment can be viewed, the natural and the spiritual. The natural is that which relates to the trap which was set for Christ. These Jewish leaders, seeking to ensnare Him, brought this woman, as they said, taken in sin, and presented to Him this query: "Moses commanded... what sayest thou?" When all the factors are taken into account, it would seem to be a trap from which escape would be exceedingly difficult, if not impossible. In laying it they would consider, if He set Moses aside, there would be a clear case against Him before the whole Jewish world, and especially before the Jewish Sanhedrin. Such an attitude would also involve Him in a charge of Himself being a party to sin. If, on the other hand, He stood with Moses, and agreed to, or demanded the stoning of this woman according to the law, two things would happen. He would come into collision with the Roman authorities, who for the time being had superseded Jewish law, and then also He would bring a very large social feeling against Himself, for morality had become very lax, and it would be difficult to be popular, if such extreme measures were applied in such directions. There may have been other features, but, on the face of it, this seems to be a reasonable interpretation of what was going on. The probability is that the latter alternative is the weaker surmise, and that, inasmuch as so often He had taken a place of superseding Moses with His: "...but I say unto you..." they would be content to get Him into moral implications of seeming to condone this sin, against which Moses had so severely prescribed.

With this trap before us, and - as they who laid it might think it to be - one from which there is no escape, we are able to see why the Spirit of God has placed this incident where it is, when to the human mind it appears to be so unconnected with the narrative. In three ways it serves the main purpose of bringing out the glory and greatness of Christ. Before we consider those three ways, let us notice, first of all, that it does stand at the threshold of a new section, and it is not so much a mere incident that becomes the focal point of attention, but the Person. This reminds us that it is the Person Who is always presented first, before the doctrine, and that all that which follows emanates from and works back to Him. This is a law

which governs everything in the Scriptures. Teaching is never something in itself, and we are not to be governed by a system of doctrine, however high and good. What is essential is that everything shall be related to the Person, for it is the Person Who makes the doctrine live, and Who governs it. Apart from the living presence of the Lord in our lives, the teaching resolves itself into something merely theoretical.

Now, as to the above-mentioned trap, and the three ways in which the main object of John's Gospel is served by it.

### The Superiority of Christ

Firstly, there is the escape from the trap. This escape is magnificent. It is not merely cleverness. Mere cleverness would simply resolve itself into extrication from a difficulty, but here the issue is so much more far-reaching, and leaves standing tremendous moral and spiritual factors, which challenge the world, and especially this religious world. It is not merely that those who sought to capture Him have been frustrated in their purpose, or disappointed of their object; they are left with something to think about, and that something for them raises the ultimate issues between themselves and God.

Then secondly, as being a part of those issues, something has been done, which no one but Christ could have brought about. Meet any of these Jewish leaders in the course of daily life, and seek by argument or by accusation to bring home to them conviction of sin, and to precipitate the effect of such conviction, that is, a slinking away under condemnation - such a thing would have been impossible. They were so utterly satisfied with their own righteousness. Were they not the people, God's chosen, possessing the oracles, within the covenant? Were they not always thankful that they were not as other men were? No! nothing could have been a more thankless task, than to try to bring sin home to their consciousness. But here it is done, and they themselves have provided the very ground for it. No one but the Lord Jesus could bring home to Jewish hearts condemnation because of sin. Here we see, what we have said above, to be so true; that it is not doctrine, the philosophy of Christianity, the morality of the Christian religion. Such would utterly fail in cases like these, but the whole question of sin and condemnation is related to the Person; "and this is the condemnation, that light is come": "I am the light..."

### A Change from Law to Grace

The third thing which inheres in this parenthetical fragment, is that of the change of the dispensation. From time to time as we have moved through the chapters of this Gospel, we have remarked upon the fact that chapter 1 is the seed-plot of the whole Gospel, and that what is there in fragment, is developed subsequently. This is true with regard to the passage under consideration. In chapter 1, verse 57, we have: "The law was given by Moses; but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." What an example of that is here. They said: "Moses commanded..." That was the law, and by that law this woman ought to die. But how magnificently through Jesus Christ grace and truth came in. But for this there would have been no escape for the woman, so far as the law was concerned. But while grace does not condone sin or make it less sinful, grace provides a way of forgiveness and salvation. The law was turned back upon the heads of these Jewish leaders themselves, and smote them in condemnation; grace found a way of escape for this one, whom they had sought to destroy on the ground of having violated the law, and yet concerning which law they themselves are proved not guiltless.

Proceeding further into chapter 8 we find that, with this which we have mentioned standing at its threshold, it contains an emphasis upon the fact that Christ is the Light, that man by nature is in darkness, that darkness means bondage, and that liberty comes through knowledge of, and obedience to the truth. Christ

is here set forth as the revelation of God, and as such He is the Truth; therefore the knowledge of Him, and obedience to Him, is the way of liberty and of light.

Christ Writes on the Ground. God Writes in the Dust.

Various interpretations have been given to Christ's act of stooping down and writing on the ground. Some have thought that He was writing the sins of the Jews. Others have been content with the simple explanation, that He was merely showing contempt for the accusers of this woman in their contemptible conduct; or, at best, indifference to their attempt to catch Him.

May it not be there is something deeper and richer than this in His conduct? His actions were always so full of meaning, and seeing that He was the perfect embodiment of the Gospel, may we not expect to be led by this act - seeing that it was so deliberate and repeated - to some larger eternal reality? God has written His mind in dust more than once in this world's history. Indeed, this has been His deliberate and chosen way. In Adam He wrote an expression of Himself. In Moses the finger of God wrote Divine thoughts on tables of stone. These were objective expressions of the mind of God; that is, they were something outside of and apart from God Himself. In His full and final expression He, in grace, stoops right down to men to associate Himself with them, and in humanity gives an expression of Himself for their salvation first, before judgment. This stooping down is revealed in the letter to the Philippians, chapter two. From God-equality to man-likeness, and deeper yet He has stooped to deliver from the curse of the Law and the death of sin. He has written in the dust of this earth, for all - this woman taken in sin, and all others - that "There is... no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus... the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made... free from the law of sin and of death" (Romans 8:1,2). "God... hath... spoken unto us in his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things..." (Hebrews 1:1).

What an inscription! What dust! What grace and truth! "...He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14: 9).

He could well afford to seem indifferent to the Law and its exponents, to have no interest in their case (as some have interpreted His act) when He well knew that with Himself had come, securing on the one hand a perfect satisfying of God in man representatively, the Law fulfilled and its regime ended, and on the other hand a dispensation of grace: a transition from the outward to the inward, from the transient to the permanent, from the earthly type to the heavenly reality. It is all in the deepest meaning of Sonship.

Chapter 9 following is really a part of this one thing, and while it introduces several extra factors, it becomes a grand object-lesson of the truth enunciated in chapter 8. We shall, therefore, pass immediately into the next chapter.

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