The Truth Sets You Free

John 8:12-59

Key Verse: 8:31,32 “To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

May 14th, 2018 is the 70th birthday of Israel. The Israelites had been nation-less for the last two millenniums, until the end of World War II produced many independent countries around the world, including Korea. A span of 70 years has been a familiar length of time in the history of Israel because they were liberated from the Babylonian captivity after 70 years as prophesied by Daniel and Jeremiah. Freedom is welcomed and valued by all people of all nations, but it is costly. Freedom is not free. Some must pay the costly price for freedom as we have learned in human history.

In today’s passage Jesus proclaimed himself as the light of the world, and he promised freedom. The freedom he promised is not political freedom, but spiritual freedom. This spiritual freedom also is not free, but costly. Jesus paid the price for our freedom. Let us study 1) why is Jesus the light of the world, 2) how and from what Jesus freed us, and 3) how can we enjoy this freedom today.

First, Jesus is the light of the world. (12-30) Jesus’ conversation in verses 12-59 is the extension of 7:38 and 39, while Jesus was still in the middle of the Feast of Tabernacle. There were two big ceremonies performed for the Feast of Tabernacle. The first one was a water-drawing ceremony which commemorated the water which gushed out from the rock in the wilderness. The second one was a lamp-burning ceremony in the temple courts to honor God who had led their ancestors by cloud by day and by fire at night in the wilderness. They set four big lamps burning in the temple while people were singing and dancing under the lamps. The glowing light from the lamps brightened the city of Jerusalem. At the end of the Feast, Jesus proclaimed that he is the light of the world. Look at verse 12. “***When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.***” What did he mean when he said that he is the light of the world? Definitely he reminded them of God who had delivered their ancestors from slavery in Egypt and led them into the promised land. Now Jesus himself became the light for them. Jesus will guide them into the promised land and protect them from their enemies.

People, who do not know where they came from and to where they are going live in a shadow of darkness. They are like the Israelites who did not know where to go and what to do after coming out of Egypt. Jesus is the light for us. He will guide us into the promised land and teach us where to go and what to do. Jesus said in verse 14, “***Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going. But you have no idea where I come from or where I am going***.” Jesus came from God the Father and is leading his people to his eternal kingdom of heaven.

In verses 15-20 Jesus pointed out their ignorance. They did not know who God is because they did not know who Jesus is. Jesus said, “***You do not know my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also.”*** (19, 20) Jesus is the revelation of God. If they knew Jesus, they would have known God. Our God is compassionate and gracious. He cares the poor and the needy. He also opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. If they knew the Son, they would have known God the Father. Darkness is the absence of light. Because they did not have Jesus in them, they lived in darkness.

In verses 21-30 Jesus explained why he is the light of the world. In verse 21 Jesus said, “***I am going away and you will look for me, and you will die in your sin. Where I go, you cannot come.***” In this verse Jesus predicted his death and resurrection. But they did not understand what Jesus said. They sneered at Jesus, saying that he would kill himself. Jesus repeated the words “***you will die in your sins***” three times in verses 21-23. This meant that they would die as the price of their sins. Those who die in their sins have no hope. They live in the darkness of sin and death. No matter how great are leaders on this earth, if they die in their own sins, they live in darkness. They are not the light of the world. But Jesus did not die in his own sin. He died for our sins. Through his death and resurrection, Jesus became the light of the world. Through his death and resurrection, Jesus brought us eternal life. John 1:4 says, “*In him was life, and the life was the light of men.*”

Jesus said, “***I am he***” two times in verse 24 and 28, that he is the Messiah who came from God and who could save his people from darkness of sin and death. Verse 30 says that even as he spoke, many believed in him. I pray that we all may believe Jesus’ word so that we may have the light of life. Pride accompanied by ignorance makes us remain in darkness. This is the hour for us to hear Jesus’ word and follow him. Read verse 12.

Second, the truth sets us free. (31-47) Last week I had a chance to talk with a young man who was struggling with an inner conflict. He confessed that he was not free from the sense of shame before he came to the cross of Jesus, who died for his sins. It took a long time before he came to realize that he had been enslaved by the sense of shame. Like this young man, people suffer from the power of sin. Some are oppressed. Others are depressed. Still others are addicted and abused by something which constantly damages their body and soul. Jesus spoke to the Jews who had believed him in verses 31 and 32. Let us read verses 31 and 32. “***To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free***.” If anyone who wants to follow Jesus, they must hold to Jesus’ teaching. The verb ‘hold to his teaching’ means ‘continue in his teaching’. They must continue to listen to him and to live according to his teaching. When we hold to Jesus’ teaching, we will know the truth and the truth will set us free. What is *the truth*? The truth is to know who Jesus is. Jesus said earlier, “*If you knew me, you would know my Father also*.” (v19) Jesus said in 14:6, “*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*.”

Jesus sets us free from three things: First, Jesus sets us free from the curse of original sin. In the beginning Adam disobeyed God, and his sin brought death to the world. This world was cursed by Adam’s sin. But Jesus obeyed God and brought life to this world. Through his obedience he removed the curse which came from Adam’s sin. Jesus came to reverse the curse. In Jesus we all have eternal life. In Romans 5:10 Paul said, *“For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous*.” In 1 Corinthians 15:22 Paul continued, “*For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive*”. Jesus changed our destiny from curse to cure.

Also, Jesus sets us free from the slavery of sin. Sin has power to make people slaves. Jesus said in verse 34, “***Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.***” A slave has no rights for himself. He must obey his master. A woman who was caught in the act of adultery was a slave to lust. The religious leaders who tried to kill Jesus were slaves to hatred. They had no power to control themselves because they were enslaved. Jesus came to set us free from the slavery of sin. Jesus said in verse 36. “***So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.***” Jesus set us free from sin and death by paying the ransom for us. He bought us by his own blood. There is power in the blood of Jesus. Jesus also set us free from the power of sin because the blood of Jesus has power to save us. Hebrews 9:14 says that the blood of Jesus cleanses our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God. Hebrews 9:15 also says that Jesus died as a ransom to set us free from the sins committed under the first covenant.

Dr. Charles Stanley said in his book “*Forgiveness*”, that hatred is like holding a hostage in our heart. This means that we will not let our hatred go until our enemy pays the price. So there is no freedom or peace in our heart unless we forgive our enemy. Jesus forgave us our sins so that we may have freedom. Jesus prayed for our forgiveness. Jesus demonstrated his forgiving love on the cross so that we may practice his forgiving love.

Last, Jesus sets us free from the chain of ignorance. The Jews who came to Jesus did not understand the meaning of the freedom which Jesus mentioned. They opposed Jesus saying that they had never been slaves of anyone. (33) In fact, the Jews had been enslaved by Egypt for 430 years and by the Babylonia for 70 years. In Jesus’ day they were ruled by the Roman Empire. They insisted that they were not slaves because they were Abraham’s descendants, which meant that they are God’s chosen people. Jesus refuted that they were Abraham’s descendants because they tried to kill him. Abraham’s descendants would not kill the innocent Jesus, but would love him. Jesus said that they tried to kill him because they were descendants of the devil, who is a murderer and liar from the beginning. They were ignorant and arrogant. Because of their ignorance and arrogance (ignor-rogance) they became children of the devil. Jesus wanted to cut off their chain of ignor-rogance by teaching the truth. They would know God when they knew Jesus.

There was a young man who was searching for an answer for his life and salvation. He did not know why he had to live on this earth and where he was going to after he died. But when he heard Jesus’ teaching, he got the answer for these questions: He came from God and is going back to him. He lives for the glory of God while he lives on this earth. Jesus set him free from the agony of his life.

Third, before Abraham was born, I am (48-59) How did the Jews respond to Jesus’ words? They said that Jesus was a Samaritan and demon-possessed. To the Jews, being called a Samaritan was a sign of contempt because the Jews did not associate with the Samaritans. Jesus defended himself, saying that he was not demon-possessed, but glorifying God the Father. (50) Also he said that whoever obeys his word would never see death. (51) These words made the Jews more upset. They said that Abraham died and all the other great prophets also died. They asked if Jesus would be greater than Abraham because he said that whoever obeys his word would never see death. Jesus said that Abraham, whom they thought to be their father, would rejoice at the thought of seeing his day and that Abraham saw it and was glad. (56) In fact when Abraham heard God’s promise of blessing in Genesis 12:3 which says, “…*and all people on earth will be blessed through you*.”, he saw a vision for the Messiah who would come as his descendant. Abraham was glad in heaven when he saw Jesus was born as one of his descendants.

The Jews confronted Jesus saying, “***You are not yet fifty years old and you have seen Abraham!***” (57) They meant that it was impossible for Jesus to have seen Abraham, who had lived around 1,500 years ago. What did Jesus say to them? Let us read verse 58. “***Very truly I tell you, “Jesus answered, “before Abraham was born, I am***!” Jesus meant that he had existed even before Abraham was born. In other words Jesus is the eternal God who was, who is, and who is to come. (Rev 1:8) Who dares to say that he has existed before the creation of the world, but God alone? One famous Russian scientist began to read the Bible to disprove its authenticity and to justify his atheism. But the more he read the gospel of John, the more he came to believe that Jesus is God. He could not but confess that Jesus is the Lord and God of creation because there is no man on this earth who dared to say that I am he.

In today’s passage we learned why Jesus is the light of the world and how he set us free. By setting us free from Adam’s curse, Jesus became the light of the world. By setting us free from the power of sin, Jesus gave us true freedom. By teaching us the way of salvation Jesus leads us into his wonderful light. I pray that we all may follow Jesus, holding to his teaching so that we may have the light of life. Amen!