

Theme: Your Reformation

John 8:31-36 (EHV)

³¹ So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you remain in my word, you are really my disciples. ³² You will also know the truth, and the truth will set you free." ³³ "We are Abraham's descendants," they answered, "and we have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say, 'You will be set free'?" ³⁴ Jesus answered, "Amen, Amen, I tell you: Everyone who keeps committing sin is a slave to sin. ³⁵ But a slave does not remain in the family forever. A son does remain forever. ³⁶ So if the Son sets you free, you really will be free.

In the catechism workbook that I use with our students here at our school there is a question that asks the students to, "Briefly describe the beginning of the Reformation." The answer that the work book is looking for, of course, is for the students to write something about Luther nailing the 95 Theses (or "sentences") to the church door in Wittenberg, Germany on October 31st, 1517. In these "theses" Luther wrote against the false teaching and false practice of the church's selling of "indulgences," pieces of paper sold by the church which the people thought gave them forgiveness of sins. This act on that day put into motion the events that have come to be known as "The Reformation." Historians point to that day as the beginning of the Reformation and so do we. In fact, it's the reason why we celebrate Reformation Day on October 31st.

But is that really the day the Reformation began? No. In fact, it couldn't have been! Before the Reformation began a different kind of "reformation" had to take place. Not on October 31st, 1517 when Luther nailed those 95 theses to the church door in Wittenberg, but when God Himself "reformed," or *changed*, Martin Luther's heart through the power of His saving Gospel message. Think of what that word "Reformation" means: A "re-formation," a complete change from one thing to another. God "re-formed," and changed Luther's heart from a dead, lost heart that tried to earn its own salvation through obedience and good works, to a living, beating, joyful heart of faith that knew and believed that Jesus had paid for all of his sins. A heart that knew Jesus' righteousness was what made him righteous in God's sight.

After comprehending this Gospel message for the first time, Luther famously said, "Now I felt as though I had been born again, and believed that I had entered Paradise through widely opened doors!" It was this Gospel of Christ, "**the power of God to salvation**" (**Romans 1:16**), that gave Luther peace and joy. It was this powerful Gospel message that moved and strengthened him to take a stand on the Word of God in the face of incredible odds. It was this Gospel that moved and strengthened him to work, teach, preach, and write tirelessly for the sake of the souls of his fellow man.

Do you ever wish you were part of the Reformation? Well, I'll remind all of us gathered here today that each one of us has also gone through a "reformation," like Martin Luther did. Through the power of His Word God Himself "re-formed" your heart and mine from stone-dead hearts of unbelief and opposition to Him, to living breathing hearts of faith that believe in Jesus for full and free forgiveness and eternal life. Praise God for that! The doors of Paradise itself have been flung open for you and me as well!

But I'm also guessing that, like me, you also have things in your life that still need a "reformation." Are there attitudes, behaviors, and speech in your life that need to be "re-formed" to be more Christ-like? How can such a "reformation" like that take place in us? Well, the same way the Lord worked a "reformation" in Martin Luther's heart; the same way He worked a "reformation" in our own hearts by bringing us to faith. Jesus outlines the procedure in our sermon text, "**If you remain in my word, you are really my disciples.** ³² **You will also know the truth, and the truth will set you free** " (**John 8:31-32 EHV**).

Jesus' Word is the key! He tells us, first of all, to **"remain in my word"** (v. 31). This word means to *live* or *dwell* in the Word of Christ. Notice, He doesn't say "Look at My Word every once in a while," or "Go to church and hear my Word at least once a month, and make sure you're there for Christmas and Easter." No! He says **"remain in My Word!"** That, He says, is the true mark of one of His disciples, or followers: **"If you remain in my word, you are really my disciples"** (v. 31).

Does this describe our use of God's Word? Are we always **"remaining"** in it—living in it, dwelling in it? No, we must admit, not like we should! Can you imagine if Luther had this same attitude towards God's Word that we often have? Imagine if he decided, "Well, I don't really need to go to church every Sunday in order to be a Christian," or what if he thought, "We really don't need to hold to everything in Scripture"? There would have been no Reformation! In the same way, how can we expect to experience our own "reformation" if we are only "remaining" in God's Word as little as possible? Just enough to keep our consciences appeased, or just enough to make us feel pretty certain that we're still Christians.

Luther dove into the Words of Jesus headfirst and he "lived" in it. He was said to have spent the first few hours of each day in prayer and meditation on the Word of God! A few hours—not each week, or each month, but each day! Imagine the powerful "reformation" God's Spirit could work in our hearts if we all would invest that much time and prayer into our most precious treasure of God's Word each day!

When Luther dove into the Scriptures he found exactly what Jesus promised in our text: **"You will also know the truth"** (v. 32). In the Bible, Luther found Jesus, the Savior Himself, the **"Word made flesh"** (John 1:14), the One who is **"the way, the truth, and the life"** (John 14:6). The **truth** that Luther learned through the Scriptures—the truth that we learn through the Scriptures—is the **truth** about our salvation. We learn that Jesus is God sent from God to save us from sin. We learn that we have forgiveness through Jesus' innocent death on the cross. We learn that Jesus leads us to our heavenly Father. These **truths** truly make us **free**!

Now, this is one of the most misunderstood and misused passages in the Bible: **"You will also know the truth, and the truth will set you free"** (John 8:32). Some of the Jews who heard Jesus speak these words did not understand them either. They answered Him in v. 33 of our text, **"We are Abraham's descendants," they answered, "and we have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say, 'You will be set free'?"** (v. 33). They thought Jesus was speaking of freedom from slavery or *physical* bondage. Is that what Jesus was speaking of?

No, the freedom Christ gives us through the **truth** of His word is much greater than being freed from physical slavery, even greater than being freed from a life-sentence in prison. Jesus explains in the closing verses of our sermon text that He is speaking of spiritual freedom, freedom from sin, **Jesus answered, "Amen, Amen, [Meaning: "truly, truly"] I tell you: Everyone who keeps committing sin is a slave to sin.** ³⁵ **But a slave does not remain in the family forever. A son does remain forever.** ³⁶ **So if the Son sets you free, you really will be free"** (v. 34-36).

Freedom from sin means full forgiveness, life and salvation eternally in Jesus. It means being freed from sin's power over us and having the ability now because of Christ's work and His Spirit's working in our heart through His Word to say "no" to sin. That was how Luther was set **free**! That is how we are set **free** and the gates of Paradise are opened wide for us as well.

Today we are celebrating the Reformation, but today and everyday can be the day we celebrate our own **Reformation**! The same Word of God that "re-formed" and transformed Luther's heart can "re-form" and transform our hearts and minds as well. God has promised great things for us, and has promised to do great things through us in His Word. **Remain** in it! In His Word God has told us the **truth** of our salvation in Jesus Christ. **Know** it! Believe it! This saving truth gives us true freedom: freedom from sin, freedom from death and hell, and freedom to serve God joyfully with a loving and thankful heart for all He has done for us. Be **free**! **"So if the Son sets you free, you really will be free!"** (John 8:36). May the Lord make this day, and every day, a true "reformation" for each one of us! Amen.