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"YE SHALL BE FREE INDEED"

JOHN 8:31-40.—MARCH 12

Golden Text: "Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin"

THIS LESSON is a brief report of one of our Lord's discourses while at the Feast of Tabernacles, referred to in our last lesson—probably delivered on the last, the great day of the Feast. Many who had heard his discourse on the Water of Life that he could give and on himself as the Light of the World, were well convinced that "never man spake like this man"—convinced that he was a great prophet, or teacher at least, that he was sent of God, and, this being true, that he could be none other than the long-expected Messiah. Addressing these believers, our Lord intimated to them that they were not yet fully his disciples—that discipleship would imply a desire to hear his message further and a willingness to obey it at any cost. His words were: "If ye continue in my words, then ye are my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free."

SHARPER THAN A TWO-EDGED SWORD

The Apostle points out the fact that the Word of God is quick (living) and powerful and sharper than a two-edged sword, able to separate and divide and distinguish

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as nothing else will do, both the thoughts and intents of the heart. We see this illustrated in our Lord's words. He uttered the truth, important truth, blessed truth, helpful truth to those in a right condition of mind. Nevertheless, in those in a wrong condition of mind his noble words stirred up envy, resentment and an evil spirit. This must necessarily be the case always. Truth, as our Lord points out, is represented by the light, error by the darkness, and there is continually an antagonism between these. Where one is, the other is correspondingly lacking; where one comes in, the other departs proportionately.

Apparently many of our Lord's hearers were favorably impressed with these utterances; apparently the multitude of those who heard him were so much on his side that the officers of the Sanhedrin failed to take him; apparently the division of the people concerning him was quite

largely in his favor. The expression, "Never man spake like this man," and the declarations that they " marvelled at the gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth," and that they said, "If this be not the Christ, when the Christ cometh can he do greater things than this man doeth?" all imply that there was a strong undercurrent of sentiment in his favor; and the fact that the chief priests and Doctors of the Law were jealous of him to the extent that they sought his death, also implies this attitude of the multitude. But he followed the course of duty instead of the course of worldly wisdom and self exaltation.

It was necessary that he should present the truth to those who were believing, that it might sift and separate amongst them, that those of proper attitude of heart might be brought nearer to him and to the Father, and be prepared for the great change which would date from the time of his death and resurrection and the pouring out of the holy Spirit. It was necessary, also, that others not of the right condition of heart should be repelled, "That seeing they might see and not perceive," not become disciples indeed, not be made free, because not really the children of the Truth; that they should not fully recognize the Messiah, not be prepared for the blessing of Pentecost, but, on the contrary, be left in their blindness, in which six months later they would cry before Pilate, "Crucify him," "Away with such a fellow from the earth," "His blood be upon us and upon our children."

PRIDE AN OPPONENT TO THE TRUTH

Touch a man's pride and you arouse his whole being. Blessed, therefore, and favorably conditioned are the humble, the meek and the lowly of heart. They are not only better prepared to receive the good tidings respecting the Kingdom, but will be better prepared to follow the footsteps of the Master in the attainment of the Kingdom. Pride is generally in error and hence frequently comes into contact with the Truth, as in this case. There was nothing really or properly offensive in our Lord's words, "The Truth shall make you free:" it was the power of the Truth in the words and not any rudeness or unkindness of the sentiment that aroused the wrath of the hearers—the expression wounded their pride.

This pride seems to be a part of the difficulty of the Jew from that day to this. The Apostle intimates this in his quotation from the Prophet respecting their fall, "Let their table become a snare, a recompense unto them." The peculiar blessings of God upon that people ensnared them, for instead of appreciating the fact that they were not more worthy than others, they trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others—they thought of themselves as being more worthy than others of divine favors, revelations, etc. So in this case our Lord's hearers resented the thought that the Truth could make them free. If our Lord had said, You who are free, being my disciples, shall bless the heathen and deliver them from the yoke of bondage, the

sentiment would have called forth approval and he would have been well thought of.

And this, indeed, would be the strict truth—the Lord’s faithful disciples, the Israelites indeed, are the channels through whom the Lord will ultimately break the shackles of sin and death from off the Gentiles, the world and also from Israel. But in order for anyone to be the Lord’s disciple, he himself must be made free, and it was to this the Lord referred, and it was this thought that angered those who had a few moments before believed on him. How could they regard him as the Messiah when he spoke thus slightly of the Jewish nation and implied that in some sense of the word they were bondsmen? No; they had been bondsmen for awhile in Egypt but they now were free, was their argument.

SIN AND DEATH, SLAVE-MASTERS

Supporting his previous statement, our Lord thrust a probe into their wounds, which had a good effect doubtless upon those in the right condition, but only an angering effect upon the majority. His words were, "He that committeth sin is the slave of Sin." In agreement with our Lord’s words we recall the Apostle’s expression, "Ye were sold under sin"—into slavery to Sin; and again he represents that the whole world are slaves to Sin and Death. Sin and Death are personified as cruel monarchs reigning over the world of mankind, and that the only ones freed from their galling yoke are those whom Christ has made free through the Truth, those who through the Truth have become his servants, his followers. What a precious lesson there is here for those who are in a humble attitude of heart and comprehend the slavery, longing for the liberty proper to the sons of God. All those learning this lesson, all those realizing the power of sin and death reigning, must desire freedom before they are properly prepared to follow Jesus, to walk in his steps and thus seek deliverance.

For over six thousand years Israel had been under the Law, and all of them who were of the right condition of heart found just what the Apostle Paul expresses in Romans 7, that to will to do right was present with them but not the ability to perform; that sin had such a hold in their members, in their flesh, that their best intentions were unable fully to control their words and thoughts and deeds. In other words, all Israelites indeed must have realized that through the fall, through the weakness of their flesh, they were unavoidably the servants, the slaves of sin, and all true Israelites looking up to the perfect law of God, the law of liberty, must have desired freedom from sin and ability to obey the divine command and thus to attain the great reward promised. Those of our Lord’s hearers who were Israelites indeed must have seen the matter from this standpoint, and have felt the force of our Lord’s words and

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have desired that the truth should make them free from the bondage of Sin and Death.

The majority, proud, boastful, conscience-seared, heady, high-minded, were incensed at the truth. They tauntingly repudiated the truth, declaring that as Abraham's seed they never were in bondage, thus rejecting the only avenue of escape from their slavery, their only channel for freedom, because there is "none other name given under heaven and amongst men whereby we must be saved," delivered, set free from sin and death, than the name of Jesus. Our Lord promptly exposed to them the hollowness of their pretensions. Pointing to the malice, envy, hatred, murder, which filled their hearts toward him as the result of his statement of the truth, he called upon them to witness that they had little of the disposition or works of Abraham, for they were even now desiring to kill him simply because he had told them the truth, because he had told them truths which Abraham could not tell, because he was proffering them assistances which their relationship to Abraham could not secure aside from him. No wonder the Scriptures declare, "They hated him without a cause," hated him because he told them the truth—the darkness hated the light. The same is true to-day as respects nominal spiritual Israel. There is a boastfulness and pride which objects to the truth because it more or less condemns all and makes manifest that very few indeed are free from the control of Sin.

"CHILDREN OF THE LIGHT"

Although they were not mentioned and probably were few in comparison to the multitude and probably made no demonstration at the time, we doubt not that there were some in the audience who were Israelites indeed, and in whose hearts our Master's words found lodgment, bringing forth much fruitage subsequently. These were Israelites indeed in whom there was no guile, no dishonesty, neither deception of others nor deception of their own hearts. They knew themselves to be sinners, unable to come up to the standards of the Law; they realized that they were indeed as the Lord had said, slaves of sin and imperfection; they desired to follow the perfect law of God as they discerned it with the eye of their understanding; they wondered and hoped if it were possible that this great Teacher had some words of truth, some message from the Lord which would relieve them from their great burden. These were in the attitude so graphically described and pictured by the Apostle Paul in his words, O, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this dead body? My mind desires to serve the law of God, but I have in my flesh all the imperfections and weaknesses of heredity and I am unable to do as I would.

Our Lord did not go into the details to show how the truth would make free; he merely stated the proposition, realizing that it would attract those who were of right condition of heart as the magnet attracts steel. It was not time to explain the truth that would make free. First he must redeem the world—he must die for our sins, be resurrected, changed, received up into glory and present a

portion of the merit of his sacrifice on our behalf. When this had been accepted of the Father, the due time would come for the truth on this subject to be understood by the proper class, the Israelites indeed, and then he would shed forth the holy Spirit to guide his disciples into all truth on the subject and to give their hearts a full assurance of faith and to give their intellects full understanding of how God could be just and yet be the justifier of them that believe.

Under the enlightening and guiding influences of that Spirit, we now see what our Lord's hearers before Pentecost could not distinctly discern. We see that Israel was the house of servants and could not abide in the house of the Lord, in the place of his favor forever, but only temporarily would they occupy the place to prepare the way for and make types for the Gospel house of sons. "For Moses verily was faithful as a *servant* over all his house [of servants], but Christ as a son over his house [of sons]." Ah! now we can appreciate that the Son makes free—free indeed those who come unto the Father through him.

TRUTH MAKES FREE INDEED

The truth which our Lord gives us to make us free indeed has various parts, various aspects. First, we need to realize our enslavement to sin and the hopelessness of our own efforts to extricate ourselves and obtain liberty. Some learn this lesson of truth much more quickly than do others, but it must be learned before we are ready properly to appreciate the next lesson, which is that our Lord Jesus died that he might thus cancel the power of sin upon humanity—that he might thus relieve us judicially from the divine displeasure and sentence of death, and that he might thus have the right ultimately to set free the captives of Sin and Death.

The third lesson to be learned is that the time for actually setting free the world, appointed in the Father's plan, is the great seventh day, the Millennium, the seventh-thousand-year day. Then he who bought the world with his precious blood will, according to the divine plan, dissolve the curse and set in operation the various agencies and methods of the Millennial Kingdom for the mental, moral and physical uplift of the world from its dead and enslaved condition—some actually in the tomb and others hastening hither—all are to be set free from the bondage of death, all are to be granted the opportunity for coming into the glorious liberty of the sons of God, liberty of freedom from sin and its dominion and liberty of freedom from death, the wages of sin.

The Apostle points out to us that the whole creation is groaning and travailing, waiting for that day and for the sons of God, under Jesus, the great Chief-captain and High-priest, to be the deliverers. The Apostle Peter points out that whosoever at that time will not avail himself of the great privileges and blessings of liberty and return to the Father's family will be destroyed in the Second Death.—Acts 3:23.

NOW ARE WE SONS OF GOD

Another lesson which the holy Spirit teaches us through the apostles and prophets respecting this liberty where with Christ makes free, is that those who can now exercise faith in him and who earnestly crave this liberty, may in a certain sense be made free from sin and death now—in this present life—while outwardly to all appearances subject to similar conditions with the world. This faith salvation is the one which is in operation during this Gospel age. Blessed are those who have the eyes of faith and ears of faith, for they may receive this liberty in advance of the world, in

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advance of the Millennial age, and, receiving it into good and honest hearts, may receive still further blessing.

This liberty is justification, and of its comforting and blessed effects upon the hearts of God's people, the Apostle speaks (Rom. 5:1) saying, "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God." The truth gives us this peace—believing the scriptural statement that Christ died for our sins and rose for our justification, accepting him as our Redeemer from the shackles of sin and the serving of sin and reckonedly being brought from death unto life. From this standpoint we realize that we are acceptable with God, although we are still actually imperfect, we see that God accepts our best endeavors to obey his law as instead of actual obedience, and that his justice is compensated or fulfilled by the imputation to us of the righteousness of our Lord Jesus, who died for our sins. The Apostle tells such that they are freed from the slavery of sin that they may come into the service of another—even Christ.

"ACCESS INTO THIS GRACE"

Being thus by faith released from sin, the next step proper for the believer is to realize that he cannot keep himself, that he cannot maintain his liberty for himself, and to flee to the great Redeemer, who offers protection and assistance to all those who consecrate themselves fully to him—to all those who become his disciples. By justification they are free, but still in danger of being overtaken by the snares of sin and the wiles of the Adversary. To be free indeed, positively free, securely free, they need to make an alliance at once with the Lord Jesus, to give their hearts fully and completely to him, to accept his will, his word, his guidance, in every matter. But in turn the Lord is particular and will not receive these upon any terms, but only upon the condition of a full surrender to his will. Ah, they say, that means then another slavery, a slavery to Christ Jesus, instead of a slavery to sin. True, the giving up of the will is the strongest kind of a bondage, and this is exactly what the scriptures represent as being the course and the proper course of those who would be similarly free from the dominion of sin and death. The Apostle declares that being

made free from sin we became the servants [Greek, the bond-slaves] of righteousness and of Christ.—Romans 6:20.

We might well hesitate about getting free from one bondage and getting under subjection to another; but when we realize that to be the bondservants of Christ means to be the bondservants of that which is right and good and true, and in harmony with the Father, and that it is to the best interests of ourselves and all concerned, we rejoice thus to place ourselves unreservedly under the control of him who hath so loved us as to purchase us with his own precious blood. Surely we are safe in his hands! Those who seek to use liberty for themselves, those who boast they have a mind of their own, and will of their own, know not how dangerous is their position, and that surely they will succumb eventually to the wiles of the Adversary and to the ensnarements of sin. Only those who follow the course of full consecration to the Lord are wise. There is not only rest and peace, and joy and liberty for the sons of God now, but, additionally, O wonderful thought, to these the Master has proposed that they shall be his Bride, his associates in the Kingdom, his joint-heirs throughout eternity!—Romans 5:1.

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— February 15, 1905 —



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