

176 – Set free through repentance

I hear the Scripture from **John 8:36** quoted often: “Whom the Son sets free is free indeed.” That Scripture came to mind this week, as I witnessed some of God’s kids seem to struggle with His version of freedom, because they were fighting their way through a religious version of it.

I would suggest that there is the appearance of freedom, which is external, and there is the reality of freedom, which is internal. As I watched the struggles within people over the past week or two, I saw quite clearly that they have never really gone free in the way I believe the Father intends and has spoken in His word. The individuals seemed preoccupied with doing something, or saying something, rather than being the changes they wished to see in themselves. Their words were in agreement with the Spirit that convicted them, but they acted almost as if the Lord’s character could be obtained or put on by saying or doing the “right things,” rather than surrendering entirely, becoming utterly vulnerable and unequivocally obedient.

John 8:36 (CLV)

If ever, then, the Son should be making you free, you will be really free.

Let’s look at the context of this statement. What led the Lord to say it and to whom was He speaking? Yeshua had just finished telling the crowd around Him, including Pharisees, that He is the light of the world, and He supports His testimony with that of the Father’s Who sent Him. He calls them on their sin, and He told them that when they exalted Him, they would know that He is and that He was speaking from and for the Father.

John 8:31-37

31 Jesus, then, said to the Jews who have believed Him, "If ever you should be remaining in My word, you are truly My disciples,

32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will be making you free."

33 They answered Him, "The seed of Abraham are we, and we have never been slaves of anyone. How are you saying that 'You shall be becoming free'?"

Remember, the ones questioning Yeshua are believers, not detractors, but they’re having a hard time grasping, let alone accepting, His words.

34 Jesus answered them, "Verily, verily, I am saying to you that everyone who is doing sin, is a slave of sin.

The Jews are focused on the idea of slavery to some *ONE*, but Yeshua is focused on the more important slavery, and He has just announced that everyone is a slave of sin. He doesn't have to say it in so many words; instead, all He does is point out their slavery because they know that everyone sins; no one denies it. It's in Man's nature to sin, because of the sentence of death, and the Law was given to Moses to call *attention* to sin, and provide some means of redemption for the inevitability of it. No one has *ever* lived sinlessly, other than Yeshua; therefore, when He says, "everyone who is doing sin, is a slave of sin," He knows that everyone hearing Him is included, as well as everyone who's ever lived!

35 Now the slave is not remaining in the house for the eon. The son is remaining for the eon.

36 If ever, then, the Son should be making you free, you will be really free.

Yeshua is making the distinction, not between master and slave, but son and slave. He has already put everyone there in the position of a slave and, again without saying it, He has also put Himself in the position of the Son.

"You think you're free now," He hints, "but the truth is you're slaves of sin; however when I, the Son, set you free from all of that – now THAT'S real freedom."

The individuals I spoke about earlier who seemed to be struggling with their own slavery versus the Lord's freedom, know Yeshua; they are filled with the Father's Spirit, but they act and sound like the real freedom of which Yeshua spoke in John 8:36, has passed over them. They seem bound to the sin that is highlighted by a twisted and – in my opinion – evil religious system. Their way of redemption is almost like a knee-jerk recitation of words they were taught to say whenever they got in trouble. Their actions belie their words; they don't follow up their lofty words with righteous actions that come naturally. Instead, they have to "work up" the actions so that they feel better, yet their characters don't change. This is exactly what Yeshua faced in the Jews of His day, who were utterly polluted and twisted by the Pharisaical religious conditioning of that time.

My question is, if Yeshua were speaking to you and me today, would He be relating to free people or slaves? How can we *KNOW* we are "really free" today? What does real freedom, in the Messiah, look like, sound like, smell like, and taste like?

The simplest answer is found in our study two weeks ago, titled, "*The reward and price of total surrender, utter vulnerability, and unequivocal obedience.*" Religion demands all three of those qualities; religion focuses on what to say and what to do in order to win God's favor and/or secure a position, which, in fact, is a futile exercise; it insults the Father; and

disrespects the Son's position and discounts His accomplishment. Neither the Father nor the son demand anything; instead, we find the Lord knocking, leaving it to us to welcome Him ... or not.

Revelation 3:20

Lo! I stand at the door and am knocking. If ever anyone should be hearing My voice and opening the door, I will also be coming in to him [or her] and dining with him, and he/she with Me.

21 The one who is conquering, to him [/ her] will I be granting to be seated with Me on My throne as I, also, conquer, and am seated with My Father on His throne.

22 Who has an ear, let him [/ her] hear what the spirit is saying to the ecclesias.

When Yeshua walked as a man, he said this in Matthew 11:28-30

Hither to Me, all who are toiling and laden, and I will be giving you rest.

29 Lift My yoke upon you and be learning from Me, for meek am I and humble in heart, and you shall be finding rest in your souls,

30 for My yoke is kindly and My load is light.

With Yeshua, humility was not a show; it was entirely genuine. How is it with you and me? Are we putting on a show for others, as if the Lord and the Father don't see? So we say one thing and do another? Do we say pious words but return to the behavior that tripped us in the first place? When we truly repent – not just say it, but do it – when we truly and utterly surrender our rights to ourselves, become utterly vulnerable and unequivocally obedient, we will naturally “produce, then, fruit worthy of repentance,” according to John's words to the Pharisees in **Matthew 3:8**. We won't have to try to be like the Lord, we won't be able to help it, because His character has been so worked into ours.

How are repentance and true freedom related, which is where we began our study in John 8:36? The key to answering the question, I believe, is in the first word, “IF.”

If ever, then, the Son should be making you free, you will be really free.

Yeshua began His ministry calling for repentance, as written in **Matthew 4:17**:

Thenceforth begins Jesus to be heralding and saying, “Repent [Change your minds]! for near is the kingdom of the heavens!”

This may sound like a stretch of interpreting the Father's word, but I'll risk it: I would propose that apart from true repentance – not words, but a genuine change of mind that results in an actual change of character – true freedom cannot come in this eon, and I

can't speak for the impending eon either. How can the Son make you and me free – to be “really free” – apart from repentance, a change of mind. However we were once minded, we deliberately set it aside for His mind. As the Apostle Paul said in **1 Corinthians 2:16**, “*Yet we have the mind of the Messiah.*”

I am suggesting, if not declaring, that apart from repentance there is no real freedom. Said another way, “Real freedom comes only on the heels of repentance.” Furthermore, we will distinguish real repentance from its counterfeit by the Father’s character working itself out in us. We will not have to WANT to imitate Him; rather, we will imitate Him, “*as beloved children,*” according to **Ephesians 5:1**. Think of it: kids imitate all kinds of characters easily; it’s their nature ... repentance brings back our ability to imitate the Father as easily as a child imitates his or her father or mother. We won’t be able to help it. In this eon, that and more is the real freedom, which the Lord can bring us into, until His Day, in which we will be entirely free.

Yeshua’s audience did not have the Spirit of Holiness; therefore, we may excuse their ignorance, as Yeshua did from the cross. We have no such excuse, however, to hold obstinately – and, I would suggest, religiously – to our lives as if they were ours.

You and I cannot claim ignorance. We do have the Father’s own spirit living in us and we know better than to live to ourselves. Yet, if we struggle to find freedom, I am saying tonight, that we can be sure our struggle is due to our own refusal to repent – not to say it, but to literally change our minds, and thereby provide the occasion for the Father to change our characters. As He does so, we will experience freedom as we’ve never known and could not have known before.

At the end of July, we shared a study called, “*The shorter the leash, the greater the life.*” I told the story of how the Father trained me to surrender to His leading, become utterly vulnerable to His probing and refining – which I never find pleasant to this day – and obey His instruction unflinchingly. I related how all that training led to today, when I feel freer than at any other time in my life. I tell you tonight that all of it was made possible because of repentance; by a genuine change of mind that changed my character.

Many years ago, when my kids were little, I took a rambunctious dog through an obedience school, so that even my son could walk him on a short leash, even though the dog’s mass was maybe 3 times that of my son’s. As long as the dog surrendered to the leash, was vulnerable to and obeyed our commands, he could go places and be freer to run and swim and play than if he failed to hearken to those commands. At those times,

his life effectively ended, and he became a slave again, until he demonstrated genuine repentance.

Repentance is more than a confession of wrong or an apology accompanied by a plea for forgiveness. Asking for and receiving forgiveness is worthwhile, certainly, but it cannot substitute for the change of mind that repentance is, and the change of character that repentance brings.

The Apostle Paul wrote about the difference between worldly sorrow and Godly sorrow: to the Corinthians in his third letter:

2 Corinthians 7: 9-10

*Now I am rejoicing, not that you were made sorry, but that you were made sorry **into** repentance. For you were made sorry according to God, that in nothing you may suffer forfeit by us.*

10 For [the] sorrow according to God is producing repentance for [or into] unregretted salvation, yet the sorrow of the world is producing death.

The word, sorrow, in Greek, means, “*pain, grief, annoyance, affliction,*” according to Thayer’s Lexicon, and the CLNT-KC calls it “*an evil, depressing feeling, the opposite of joy.*”

Paul says, “*I’m rejoicing, because the sorrow you felt was so uncomfortable, so grievous, annoying, and produced such affliction, that you changed your minds.*”

You and I will know that any sorrow we may experience is the world’s or is according to God, by the landmarks Paul gives. We can know – not wonder, but KNOW – that we have experienced “*the sorrow according to God,*” or “*the world’s sorrow,*” because the world’s sorrow “*is producing death,*” while “[*the*] *sorrow according to God is producing repentance for [or into] unregretted salvation.*”

2 Corinthians 7: 11

For lo! this same thing – for you to be made sorry according to God – how much it produces in you of diligence, nay, defense, nay, resentment, nay, fear, nay, longing, nay, zeal, nay, avenging! In everything you commend yourselves to be pure in this matter.

2 Timothy 2:22-26

Now youthful desires flee: yet pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace, with all who are invoking the Lord out of a clean heart.

23 Now stupid and crude questionings refuse, being aware that they are generating fightings.

24 Now a slave of the Lord must not be fighting, but be gentle toward all, apt to teach, bearing with evil,

25 with meekness training those who are antagonizing, seeing whether God may be giving them repentance to come into a realization of the truth,

26 and they will be sobering up out of the trap of the Adversary, having been caught alive by him, for that one's will.

We would all agree that Yeshua is free, and when we are in Him, we may also go free and live free in Him. Here's the picture that Paul painted in Romans 6. Here we see that the lack of freedom is death, and the Sin that resulted from it. His point is that we will be slaves to something.

Romans 6:4-10

We, then, were entombed together with Him through baptism into death, that, even as Christ was roused from among the dead through the glory of the Father, thus we also should be walking in newness of life.

5 For if we have become planted together in the likeness of His death, nevertheless we shall be of the resurrection also,

6 knowing this, that our old humanity was crucified together with Him, that the body of Sin may be nullified, for us by no means to be still slaving for Sin,

7 for one who dies has been justified from Sin.

8 Now if we died together with Christ, we believe that we shall be living together with Him also,

9 having perceived that Christ, being roused from among the dead, is no longer dying. Death is lording it over Him no longer,

10 for in that He died, He died to Sin once for all time, yet in that He is living, He is living to God.

Isaiah 26:3 (ESV)

You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you.

Isaiah 26:1-3 (CLV)

In that day, this song shall be sung in the land of Judah:

Behold, we have a strong city;

And our salvation shall He set for walls and rampart.

2 Open the gates, and a righteous nation shall enter,

One that is keeping truths.

*3 A stabilized bent You shall preserve in peace,
In peace because it trusts in You.*

I doubt that there is a soul who does not value freedom, but I also suspect that many do not truly understand what being free means or what it looks like practically. I believe freedom is found in the Messiah, through repentance.

When we become more like Him, we will do more like He would do – not the other way around. We would demonstrate our salvation; we would display His character for the world to see and marvel at, and want in on.