

THY STRONG WORD BESPEAKS US RIGHTEOUS.

Reformation - Oct 31/Nov 3, 2019

John 8:31-36 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." They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?" Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."

Dear Christian Friends:

On October 31, 1517 Martin Luther posted 95 theses meant for scholarly debate. Twenty months later, Luther got his debate. It was the summer of 1519 in the city of Leipzig. Professor Johann Eck was Luther's opponent. The debate began unremarkably. But Eck steered the debate to a topic that would put Luther in a tight spot. Eck made Luther declare where he stood on the authority of the Pope and the councils of the church.

Now, at this time, Luther still regarded the Pope as the leader of the Church. But Eck forced Luther to say something many considered heresy. Luther said that the pope did not have God's authority. The Pope was just a human leader. Likewise, church councils could and did make mistakes. Luther said that the only true, reliable authority was the Bible. God's Word reigned supreme; not the Pope; not the church and her leaders.

Sola Scriptura – That's Latin for, "By Scripture Alone." That is a bedrock of the Reformation and our faith. That's because only God's Word can save us from sin's wages of eternal suffering in hell. Only God's Word can both tell us about Jesus and then also give us Jesus because only God's Word can create faith. When we have faith in Jesus, we are right with God. So, we celebrate the Reformation by using a line from the hymn we just sang. **THY STRONG WORD BESPEAKS US RIGHTEOUS.**

“Bespeak,” is an old word that means, “to indicate or signify.” So, God’s Word indicates that we are righteous. God’s Word points out that, by faith in Jesus, we are free from guilt and sin and the damnation our sin causes.

That’s what Jesus was talking about in our text. **“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”** To be a disciple of Jesus means you believe in him. You agree his Word is truth. You put his Word into practice. **Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”**

When the Jews heard that, they basically said, “Hold on, there, Jesus. What do you mean, **“the truth will set us free?”** We already are free. We are not slaves. We are not in prison.” **[The Jews] answered [Jesus], “We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?”**

In two short sentences the Jews made two drastic errors. Yes, they were Abraham’s descendants. Ever since the Jews entered the Holy Land, they were never slaves, technically. But over the previous 800 years, the Assyrian, the Babylonian, the Persian, and the Greek Empires had all conquered the Jews and controlled the Jews. And in the days of Jesus, the Roman Empire ruled over the Jews. So, the Jews were bad at history.

They were worse at religion. Jesus says, **“I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.** The Jews did not realize it, but they were slaves to sin. The slavery to sin is the worst because **the wages of sin is death**—that is eternal death in hell. And everyone is a slave to sin because everyone sins.

But that’s where God’s Word comes to the rescue. Jesus speaks his Word. The Holy Spirit uses that Word to create faith in our hearts and minds and souls. Then faith does its work. Saint Paul said in our Epistle Lesson, **But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the ... [the Scriptures] testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.**

So, God’s strong Word gives us righteousness. That’s because God’s strong Word gives us faith in Jesus. By faith in Jesus, the blood of Jesus washes away

all our sins. That sets us free from sin. Then we are right with God. **THY STRONG WORD BESPEAKS US RIGHTEOUS.**

That's why Martin Luther loved God's Word so much. Luther discovered that only God's Word could create the faith that makes a sinner righteous. The Pope could not do it. Church councils could not do it. The great teachers of the church could not do it. No, only God's Word had God's power—the power to set sinners free from sin, guilt, death, and hell. And only God's Word had the power to set believers free from the grip of a false church with all its heresies, hypocritical leaders, and corrupt practices.

Now, today, you and I appreciate all this. We joyfully say, “We are Lutherans. We are heirs of the Lutheran Reformation. We have never been spiritual slaves to anyone. We have the Word of God!”

Oh, yes, we are Lutherans, just as surely as the Jews were Jewish. We are heirs of the Reformation just as surely as the Jews were descendants of Abraham. And we are not slaves to the Pope. But like the Jews, we can be slaves to other evil powers and not even realize it.

For example, today political correctness tries to enslave our minds. The media and our culture pressure us. They say, “LGBTQ is a healthy lifestyle to be celebrated, not to be condemned by your ignorant bigotry. Abortion should be safe and legal. A woman's control of her reproductive rights must remain the law. You can't blame drug addicts for their addictions. They are victims of greedy, unscrupulous corporations. And every religion is equal. So, you Christians dare not claim that you are the only ones who have the truth. You dare not say you Christians are the only ones who really know God.”

Now, generally speaking, you and I can identify and avoid such anti-Scriptural slop. But there is another danger—a greater danger to our faith than political correctness. It's a danger the Jews faced. They fooled themselves into thinking that because they were Jews, they had to be right.

We can fall into a similar trap. We can think, “We are Wisconsin Synod Lutherans. We believe in the inerrancy of Scripture. So, whatever the WELS says must be true. If a seminary professor writes an article, it must be true. If

our synod's leadership publishes a pamphlet, it must be true. If you slap the WELS sticker on something, it must be true." And here's the most dangerous assumption of all—"if our pastor says it, it must be true."

Now, don't get me wrong. I am not trying to dishonor our synod or accuse the WELS of rampant heresy. But we do face the danger of mindlessly accepting something as true just because *the synod says so*. But the synod—and your pastor—they only speak God's Word. God's Word is the truth. God's Word alone has power to declare and give the forgiveness of sins. If your synod and your pastor speak God's Word in its truth and purity, then you must listen to them. But don't ever put your trust in man. Put your trust only in God and God's Word.

And that brings us to another danger to your faith. It is not the Pope in Rome. It's that little pope who sets up his throne in your heart and rules over your mind. This little pope inside you says, "I am the supreme leader of my religion. I have authority over God's Word. I can interpret the Bible any way I want to. If I don't like what the Bible says, I can veto it by my own authority. I get to make my rules for what I believe."

Well, thankfully, God's Word is stronger than that little pope sitting on the throne of your heart. God's Word is stronger than blindly following church leaders just because they carry the WELS label. And God's Word is stronger than all the politically correct garbage that pollutes the internet and airwaves. Yes, God's Word is strong enough to smash and defeat all the powers of Satan. God's Word is strong enough to raise us out of spiritual death to a new life of faith. God's Word is strong enough to give us Jesus Christ and the forgiveness of sins in his Name. **THY STRONG WORD BESPEAKS US RIGHTEOUS.** Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia without end! AMEN.