

What I Want To Be When I Grow Up: Free From The Past?!?

Reconnect – January 4, 2009

Text: John 8:31-36, II Corinthians 3:16-18

Key Thought: If we will let Him, Jesus will set us free from the pain of our past hurts and mistakes.

Jesus said to the Jewish people who believed in him, “You are truly my disciples if you keep obeying my teachings. And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” “But we are descendants of Abraham,” they said. “We have never been slaves to anyone on earth. What do you mean, ‘set free’?” Jesus replied, “I assure you that everyone who sins is a slave of sin. A slave is not a permanent member of the family, but a son is part of the family forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will indeed be free.” (John 8:31-36, NLT)

Intro: "New Year's Day" - U2 - and "Resolutions"

- *[play the song, to the long guitar solo]*
- "I will begin again, on New Year's Day" - it was written as a peace song, but as I listen to it, well, it seems to fit, doesn't it?
- And so it's the new year - 2009 - we're almost out of the "Oh's"
- **Let's talk resolutions** - anyone want to share any? Anyone here manage to achieve any of their last year's resolutions? Or remember any of theirs from last year? Is there anyone here who *refuses* to make New Year's resolutions, and if so, why?
- Mine aren't starting until tomorrow... !

Starting "fresh"

- The new year is a great time to start fresh, though, isn't it? We can make resolutions because it is a time when we can slow down a little bit, take a deep breath and look ahead to the future
- No matter what happened in the past year, whatever hurts or mistakes or problems that came, it feels somehow like it's been set aside, at least for a day or two - the "reset" button has been hit, and we have a chance to make some changes
- There's a reason they call it "new" - like getting a new shirt for Christmas - you put it on for the first time, and there's no stains or rips - and that's a big thing for me, you can ask my wife
- It's a *new* year, and history does not apply

Lurking history

- Or does it? Once we're back to work and back to our normal routines, life seems to come crashing back in - and that can be a good thing, but too often history seems to follow us and catch us when we're not looking - like the leftovers you miss in the back of the fridge, until it's too late
- Have you ever felt like that? Like there was something that you just couldn't seem to get past?
- Maybe it was a hurt you suffered - a health problem you can't seem to bounce back from - or maybe someone else hurt you, however they did it

- Sometimes it's the family we grew up in that we can't seem to shake, and the holidays can be a grim reminder of that, either in their presence or their absence *[my family situation]*
- Or maybe it's a mistake that you made - a memory that haunts you, of a choice you made, and as it seems to go, the regrets build with the years that go by - or it's a combination of both

Free from the past?!?

- How do you and I shake that? Go to therapy, and make the therapist the happiest one in the room? Buy more self-help books? Meditate? Take a vacation? Run up a credit card and try to spend it away?
- Or maybe just deny it - shut it down, lock it away, and try to leave it behind
- But that's easier said than done - and even if we convince ourselves that we are unaffected by our past, the people closest to us can see the difference
- To be free - really free, from the effects of it - what would that look like - and who can make it happen?

Jesus on freedom

- Jesus had a conversation along those lines with some people who thought that they knew Him – thought that they believed in Him – thought that they had Him at the centre of their lives
- Let me read it once more this morning, from John's biography of Jesus:

Jesus said to the Jewish people who believed in him, "You are truly my disciples if you keep obeying my teachings. And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." "But we are descendants of Abraham," they said. "We have never been slaves to anyone on earth. What do you mean, 'set free'?" Jesus replied, "I assure you that everyone who sins is a slave of sin. A slave is not a permanent member of the family, but a son is part of the family forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will indeed be free."

A closer look:

- "Jewish people who believed in him" – John is accenting this, and we'll see why in a minute – these are people who are giving Him a shot in their lives – they're thinking he might be on to something, and so they're willing to give him a try
- But that doesn't really ever satisfy Jesus – he wants more than that – so he decides to try to shake up what they think they know – a little cognitive dissonance
- "truly my disciples if you keep obeying my teachings" – you're really my close followers – you're really imitating me, if you keep doing what I say – that sounds pretty obvious
- And then he leads them one step further – if you do that, he says, then you'll know the truth, and the truth will set you free
- John is doing a little foreshadowing here, because that word truth is one of his key themes – he has Jesus talking about it again and again, to the point where in a few pages, Jesus will say that he is the way, the truth and the life

- “know the truth” – not just with your head, like the answer to a Jeopardy question, but to really know it – to experience it, to be intimate with it, to be up close and very personal with it – if you experience the truth, he says, then the truth will set you free – meaning, ultimately, himself
- But this phrase is used all through our society – it’s perhaps one of the most well-known sayings of Jesus, even if it might not always be attributed properly
- “but we are descendants of Abraham... we have never been slaves of anyone... what do you mean ‘set free?’” – this is where things start to get funny – they’re claiming that because they are part of God’s chosen people from the beginning, that they would never have a truth problem, or need to be set free – that they’re already good to go on that, and Jesus is just icing on the cupcake
- Yes, they are biologically descended – but they’ve forgotten the history between him and them – like 400+ years as slaves in Egypt – and then oppressed again and again through their history as a nation, culminating with being conquered in turn by the Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians and most recently, the Romans
- They are in an occupation situation, and they have the nerve to say that they aren’t slaves to anyone! Talk about being in denial! They can’t even see that they don’t have social or physical freedom, let alone any other kind – they’re still slaves, even then, but not seeing that they need to be set free
- “I assure you, everyone who sins is a slave of sin” – Jesus starts talking about slaves and family, and that puts this a few degrees of understanding away from us – a metaphor we’re grateful to have mostly left behind in our world, but a reality of Jesus’ time on every corner
- He starts off by saying, “Look, look, listen to me here” – his phrase of emphasis that we find throughout his biographies when he really wants people to catch what he’s saying next
- Why is he talking suddenly about slaves and free? He says that slaves aren’t free, because they’re not family – he says that in response to the people, who have said that they’re free, because they ARE family – in other words, he’s countering their claim to being family by saying, um, actually, not really
- But he says then that if they really WANT to be a true part of the family, the family that he is the Son of, then they need to follow Him and let him set them free, truly and totally free – because it all starts with Him, not them

Free from the past?

- Which of us hasn’t fantasized at some point or another about being free from our past? Not having made that mistake, or screwed up like that, or been a victim
- People come to Jesus, and some ask Him to be free, and some feel that they’re free already – but to both sets of people, Jesus says “let me set you free” – from pretense, from hurt, from pain, from the controlling effects of our past that can hamper us again and again
- The first clip I played is from a new TV show called “Fringe”, where the father has been in a mental hospital for 20 years, and is struggling to adjust to a world that has changed so much, and a son that has been alienated – he is bound by his past at every turn
- I have a friend that I’ve known for over 20 years – smart, funny, lots of friends, extremely talented
- And yet, he’s experienced reversal after reversal in his life, because he pushes everyone around him away – and when you meet his parents and experience the dynamic that he grew up in, you know why

- He hasn't been treated especially well by those in the church – but he's been limited again and again by what he can't leave behind
- He's a good friend – and more than that, he's a reminder to me of God's goodness and help in my own life – "there but for the grace of God go I"
- I haven't deserved that help – that's why they call it *grace* – but somehow, God has given it, and he has helped me to not experience the limitations of my past
- III. – my profile in the homestudy for CAS – full of highlights!
- I pray that he will experience what Jesus is talking about here – for people that are willing to come clean and admit that what they have is not enough – to really bear down, and hear the truth from those around them, who love them enough to tell it clearly but gently
- Jesus wants to forgive us the wrong we've done and heal the hurt we carry – and He is able to do it very quickly, even instantly – but we must know the truth and let that truth set us free
- Otherwise, we're confined to a jail cell, and we're the only ones who don't know it locks from the inside, and no matter how much those outside the door try to reason with us, we refuse to hear it
- Our society and the pop philosophy we hear so much doesn't help, either – the victimhood where you're always a victim once you experience a tragedy, or the addiction that gets called a disease –and maybe it winds up a disease, but it didn't start that way, and it doesn't have to end that way, either

The offer:

- Jesus' offer is better than just taking care of the details for us – it's the offer of himself – of friendship and a place beside him, in his family
- Listen to this quote from a writer named John Ortberg, on the life of faith:

"The central promise in the Bible is not 'I will forgive you,' although of course that promise is there. It is not the promise of life after death, although we are offered that as well. The most frequent promise in the Bible is 'I will be *with you*.'... When God himself came to earth, his redemptive name was *Immanuel* - God *with us*. When Jesus left, his promise was to send the Spirit so that 'I am *with you* always, even to the end of the age.'"

(John Ortberg [God Is Closer Than You Think](#) Zondervan 2005, p.16)

- We can't truly ever be free from our past – that's called amnesia, and it's a disorder – but we can stop being bound by it, stop being a slave to it and the destructive patterns in our lives, stop having it dictate our present and our future
- Instead, we can put it in its proper place, like a well-put-together picture album or a scrapbook – where everything has its place, and you can open it, check it out, and then put it away again *as you choose*

Key Thought:

If we will let Him, Jesus will set us free from the pain of our past hurts and mistakes.

“...whenever someone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. For the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord – who is the Spirit – makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image.” (II Corinthians 3:16-18, NLT)

Taking Jesus up on his offer:

- Getting to know him better – digging in to a Bible – asking lots of questions to people who have been in this for a while – speaking to him regularly and asking for his guidance – and get yourself around people who are following him – hang out with them, be with them, gain strength and life from them
- He is already at work, and this is something that he dearly wants to give you – he can’t stand to see you in pain, just like a parent feels just as much pain as their child does when they’re suffering

Conclusion: "Whatever You're Doing" - Sanctus Real

- *[play the song/video]*
- Divided, together, distant, intimate, resolving to grow closer - that's the promise of New Year's Day, and even better, the promise of God as we let Him into our past to make it right

Response: Discussion/Q&A