

July 4, 2021

ASKED & ANSWERED

...Shifting our mindset from expectation to revelation



Image by Sophia Hilmar

*"How can you
say that we
shall be set free?"*

John 8:33

Special Music: "Chain Breaker" Zach Williams

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JGYjKR69M6U>

Question 1

John 8:33 ..."How can you say that we shall be set free?"

Answer 1

John 8:36 "So if the Son set you free, you will be free indeed."

CHOOSING FREEDOM

Jesus died to set me free

But that simply makes no sense to me.

I don't have shackles, locks, or chains.

I don't feel that I'm restrained.

No locked doors, or bars of steel.

I don't believe my cage is real.

Even if God sets me free

I really have no place to be.

I'm not seeking greener grass

This cage of mine might just be glass

If I don't know my hands are bound

How can I know where grace is found?

Jesus tells me I'm bound by sin

That my closed cage lies deep within

Binds my heart with ropes of hate.

Born into this hapless state

I may not see it, but it's always there

My captured soul within its snare.

I truly don't know which is worse

To see the cage as blessed or cursed.

A blind man can be quite content

Living with a flower's scent

And never see the sun-filled sky

Or watch a rainbow with his eye

What do I miss if I don't engage,

Not let God's son remove the cage.

Free my spirit from unseen chains,

Using blood from holy veins

To snap the steel and make it real

Free my heart to hear and feel.

God, show me the beauty of your face

The nature of your boundless grace

Your love, your peace, your mercy seat.

Please show me why I'm incomplete

Let me see my chains entwined

Show me grace, let my heart unwind

Into the presence of your spirit.

Show me truth, don't let me fear it.

Give me vision beyond my sight

Give me a heart to make things right

Open the door of this gilded cage

As I taste freedom, truth engaged.

Show me how to spread my wings

Take flight and reach for Godly strings

That tie my heart to the soul of Christ

Knowing well His sacrifice

Breaks my unseen chains of hate

And lifts me up to heaven's gate.

It is difficult to talk about freedom if we don't see ourselves as held captive or restrained. Freedom means nothing unless we consider the alternative. Unless you understand oppression, you will never understand the value and cost of freedom. Those who signed the Declaration of Independence knew this. The First Continental Congress met from September 1774 to October 1774 to demand that the British Parliament rescind the "Intolerable Acts" that were the subject of colonial discontent. It was the Second Continental Congress that met in May of 1775, that finally led to the writing of the Declaration of Independence by Thomas Jefferson. It took him only 17 days to write it and 2 days for the Second Continental Congress to ratify it. But the document put a label on the conditions that were unacceptable the colonial representatives. What most people do not realize is that these men that we admire so very much, were part of an underwhelming minority with regards to the feelings of the common citizen of the 13 colonies. Most of the colonial population did not want war, because they did not feel oppressed. Yes, they had their grievances, and felt certain conditions were not ideal, but they did not see it as enslavement or overly burdensome. It took a lot of convincing to get enough men on board so congress could raise a small, ragtag army; an army that stood little chance of defeating the well-trained and over equipped British army. But once people began to see the bonds that the English throne was imposing on the colonists, and the obstinance of the crown to address those bonds, men rose up to change the course of history. Today, we give thanks for those men who stood strong in the face of adversity and chose freedom over bondage.

The question put forth in today's scripture is part of a larger passage and we should read the entire passage to put the question in context.

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?"

John 8:31-33

We can see by the entirety of this passage that the question is not really a question, but more of a confusion. The people do ask "How can you say that we shall be set free?" It is not an inference that Jesus might not be able to set them free. The confusion lies with the concept that the people do not believe that they are currently held in bondage.

Don't misunderstand. Living in a world of two governments wasn't easy. But this is not the world of slavery that the Israelites were forced to live in when they were in Egypt. At the time Jesus is speaking, they are ruled by the Roman empire, but subject to the laws of Israel which were based on the Judaic law. And do know, for the average Jewish citizen, they were not treated any worse than any other country that Rome had conquered and occupied. In truth,

the Roman government didn't pay much attention to them as long as they paid their taxes and avoided insurrection. I'm not saying that it was an easy life. The Jews felt oppressed because they had to pay taxes to the Roman government. But so did all the other conquered countries. Nobody likes to pay taxes. But the Jews felt that they did not need to because they felt that paying taxes to Rome was akin to bowing before Caesar, something that they believed was forbidden under Jewish law.

This is the reason that Mark 12:17 is so confounding in many ways. Jesus has been approached by the Pharisees in order to trick him, maybe get him to say something foolish. By asking Jesus if the Jews should pay taxes to Caesar, they felt they could split and diminish His following. If Jesus said that it was wrong to pay taxes to Caesar, then they could have Him arrested for treason. If He said that it was right to pay taxes to Caesar, it would be a contradictory statement to Jewish law, and again, they could have Him arrested and hopefully people would stop following Him.

Jesus' response astounds them because He didn't answer either way, but in a third manner:

“Why are you trying to trap me?”he asked. “Bring me a denarius and let me look at it.” 16 They brought the coin, and he asked them, “Whose image is this? And whose inscription?”

“Caesar’s,” they replied.

17 Then Jesus said to them, “Give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s.”

And they were amazed at him.

From the way He answered, the Pharisees could not find a reason to arrest Him either under Roman or Jewish law.

When we look back to our question today, we see that the people asking the question of **“How can you say that we shall be set free?”** are truly trying to understand what Jesus is talking about, not questioning his authority or power. They may have felt somewhat oppressed by the Romans, but they did not believe that they were slaves to the Romans. Although they were not citizens of Rome, they were a part of the Roman Empire. The question that they are asking here is **“If we aren’t slaves or captives, how can you say that we shall be set free?”**

Jesus knows that He has to put His answer in context or no one will understand what He is trying to say. He puts His answer into three parts, a path of logic.

1) Vrs. 34: “Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.”

He makes this very simple. He speaks to them as their teacher. It doesn't have the same tone as when He speaks to religious leaders. He's here to teach. They have chosen to be here to learn.

Everyone (which is all of us) who sins is a slave to sin. That sin hangs on us like a rotting coat. It becomes a part of who we are. And the only solution is to cast off that coat. But that is easier said, than done. Most people do not understand that the rotting coat of sin is a prison, a festering cell of rancid waste. It's like we are blind to it. Instead of seeing it for what it is, it looks like a fine and neatly pressed respectable coat to our eyes. We can even feel its warmth.

Have you ever talked to someone who hasn't bathed in days and you can smell the stench on them, but they seem to be oblivious to the smell. That's how sin works. We can get so accustomed to it that it loses all it's stench to us but is obvious to everyone around us.

We don't see sin as a prison that is binding us and keeping us from having a complete relationship with our Heavenly Father. We often don't even notice our offensiveness. We grow accustomed to the stench of sin. Jesus is telling us that we are bound with the chains of sin and don't even realize it. And then He tells us what that really means.

- 2) **Vrs. 35: “Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever.”**

Jesus is defining for us this concept of slavery by using an analogy. Slavery was common in the Roman Empire, including Israel. There were a lot of reasons one could wind up being a slave to someone else, but most often it was because of unrequited restitution: Think about an inability to pay a debt; financial debt, debt of honor, contract debt, etc. The end result being that the debtor is forced into a relationship of slavery to the creditor which also meant that the creditor absorbed any assets that the debtor has had the time. No matter who that creditor is, the debtor is in complete obligation to satisfy the creditor’s wants and needs until such a time that the debt is satisfied (which was seldom). The owner did not even have any obligation to care for the debtor or meet their needs in any way. They could take the slave’s life on a whim, and no one would lift a finger to help them.

The one thing that every slave knew was, barring a miracle, escape from the situation was next to impossible. And as well as a slave served his or her master, they would never be a part of master’s family.

The relationship of a son was totally different. A son might get disinherited or disenfranchised, but they were always a part of the family.

This becomes Jesus' way of explaining to his followers the essence of their relationship with God. While a person is enslaved by sin, even if they don't realize it or the extent of it, it doesn't have to stay that way. A person can become a child of God and be released from their chains.

In other words, we don't have to be slaves. By accepting God's gift of freedom and salvation, we can become his children, a permanent part of His family, no longer slaves to sin.

3) Vrs. 36: **“if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”**

This is a declaration from Jesus and one that often got Him in trouble with the religious leaders. When Jesus said things like **“Your sins are forgiven,”** or **“Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father”**, or **“if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed,”** or any other phrase that hinted that He might be more than a man or He was sent by God to be among men, trouble followed.

When Jesus says things like this, He is claiming authority, authority that the Sadducees or Pharisees are unwilling to acknowledge or accept. They are not even willing to open their minds to the possibility that Jesus might be an emissary from God, much less the prophesied Messiah or The Son of God.

But, once again, we have to understand that Jesus isn't speaking to the Sadducees or the Pharisees, but to His followers. When He tells them **“if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”** He is telling them that He does have the authority to set them free. The authority to cast out sin, the authority to open their cages, untie their ropes, remove their shackles and chains, so that they can come into a true and right relationship with their Heavenly Father.

The problem we face as humans is that we don't want to acknowledge or confront our own sin, and we certainly don't want anyone else to bring it up either. When they do, we cringe and find them judgmental. We forget that God never put us in the judge's seat. That chair is reserved for Him. When we take on that role, we are stepping out of our role as created and into the role of creator. What makes us believe that we have that right to push God out of a chair that reserved for Him just so that we can sit in judgement of others.

How patient God is with His creation, nudging us back in line and reminding us of who we are in this universe. When we ask a question like **“How can you say that we shall be set free?”**, Jesus reminds us of our chains, shows us our restraints, gently peels back the skin of our hearts and lets us see the darkness that dwells inside, so that we can better understand how He is going to rid us of that darkness by cleansing us and making us whole again.

He brings the darkness of our sin into the light and allows us watch as he removes that darkness and stench from us. We simply cannot free ourselves from it. We have to rely on the mercy and grace of our all-loving God. To do otherwise would be akin to operating on our own hearts. But Jesus, the Great Physician, can and will do it for us. What He will accomplish will be perfect. When He does His healing and closed the last stitch, **“you will be free indeed.”**

AMEN

Copyright © 2021 Rev. Walt Wellborn

Scripture references provided under copyright by:

**THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, NIV® Copyright ©
1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission. All rights
reserved worldwide.**