

## 030 How Well Acquainted Are You with the Emancipation Proclamation?

Message by R Bruce Montgomery ~ Grace Church ~ 1/17/2016  
*Romans 6:17,18 and John 8:34*

### Emancipation Proclamation

One hundred fifty-three years ago **President Abraham Lincoln** issued the **Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863**, as the nation approached its third year of bloody civil war. The proclamation declared *"I do order and declare that all persons held as slaves" within the rebellious states "are, and henceforward shall be free; and that the Executive government of the United States, including the military and naval authorities thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of said persons."*

Who issued it - President of the United States of America.

Who enforced it: the government including the Armed Forces.

Who was its target – the slaves within the rebellious states.

What it did – released them from the bondage of other humans who “owned” them.

When it went into effect – was a declaration, but issued before the defeat of the Confederacy. So although it was the “law of the land,” freedom was not yet realized by those still in slavery.

As we know, once the Civil War was won, the negro slaves still didn’t have full civil rights as citizens.

It took the efforts of many people over many years, including Martin Luther King, whose birthday we celebrate tomorrow.

But I’m not here to give a history lesson and talk about Abraham Lincoln’s proclamation.

I’m here to talk about another emancipation proclamation.

Issued by One greater than the President of the United States.

It’s scope was much broader, unlimited in fact, for it applied to everyone in every time and every place.

What it does. Sets us free from the worst slavery possible - the slavery to sin.

It is realized instantly upon one’s acceptance of Jesus Christ. There are no delays, no intervening steps that must be taken.

**John 8:31, 32** *To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. <sup>32</sup>Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”*

A pervasive myth that keeps popping up in one form or another is, ***“It doesn’t matter what you believe as long as you’re sincere.”***

Have you ever heard that? It sounds so good, so tolerant. It is politically correct. *“Different strokes for different folks. You believe what you want; I’ll believe what I want. We’re both cool.”* The only problem is it is naïve and logically absurd and dangerous to hold such a belief!

Because sinful men and women want to do evil, sinning freely without feeling guilty, it is expedient to view all truth as culturally determined, and argue that no morality or law is supreme.

The frightening consequence is anyone who rejects the possibility of absolute truth commits eternal suicide by rejecting the only path to true freedom and eternal life.

In contrast to the transient speculations of people, the Bible teaches timeless truth – truth that is absolute for all people in all cultures at all times – truths about God and man, good and evil, life and death, and especially the way of salvation.

These words in **John 8** are directed to those who are inclined to think that what Jesus said was true. But they had not yet yielded to him with whole-hearted allegiance.

It’s not enough to just hear the gospel and in a moment of enthusiastic response acknowledge the truth of what Jesus says about himself. *“Even the demons believe, and tremble.”*

We must *“hold to the truth,” “remain in the truth,” “abide in the truth,” “live in the truth.”*

Being a *disciple* is to become a *learner*. It involves studying his words, and obeying them, putting them into practice in our own lives.

By studying and applying God's word we open our minds to receive truth. It is an ongoing progressive process, an ever-upward spiral. As you learn more, further truths are revealed to you, and you as you obey them you become increasingly more and more liberated.<sup>1</sup>

He's not talking here about scientific truth or historical truth, but spiritual truth – things about our own nature, the nature of God, the way of salvation, God's plan and purpose.

As God's Word takes hold of our lives, the myths, the superstitions, the legalism that have taken our minds captive are dispelled by reality, by truth.

The result is that **with truth comes freedom!**

- Freedom from self-deception and delusion.
- Liberation from the world's way of thinking, with its fixation on the "here and now," its obsession on pleasure at the price of morality.
- Freedom from self-centeredness and pride which run unchecked over the needs and feelings of others.
- To use Celebrate Recovery's terminology, freedom from our destructive "*hurts, habits and hang-ups*."
- In short, Jesus promises freedom from sin and evil!

**John 8:33 They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves to anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?"**

Jesus' word's about freedom infuriated some of his listeners, because they didn't like the suggestion that they weren't free – just like many people today resent any similar suggestion.

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<sup>1</sup> Which words? All of them. If we are Christ followers, we aren't free to manufacture our own religion. We don't pick and choose the bits of his teaching we find attractive. It's not up to us to approve what we see as suitable, but reject what we're uncomfortable with. As Paul wrote in **II Timothy 3:16** all Scripture is God-breathed (inspired).

It's a rather ridiculous response! It ignored much of their history and the reality of their current circumstances!

Their ancestors had repeatedly been slaves: slaves to the Egyptians, the Philistines, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Greeks.

And now their country was overrun by Roman soldiers enforcing the rule of Caesar. They might not have literally been slaves in the sense of being the personal possession of any one Roman but they were slaves in that their destiny was not in their own hands.

The coins that jangled in their purses bore the image of Roman's emperors. What the Romans said dictated their lives. It's unrealistic to call a nation occupied by enemy troops free!

Their dignity rested on their relationship with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. While we can admire their patriotism, they totally missed the point of what Jesus was talking about.

This freedom he's talking about is not derived from religious or racial identity.

**Vs. 34 Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin."**

Jesus isn't referring to freedom from social or economic or political bondage – he's talking about freedom from spiritual slavery.

Sin is a cruel taskmaster. It shuts you up in your cramped, narrow, miserable experience and prevents you from experiencing true freedom.

Just like in Jesus' day, people today just don't want to acknowledge the truth of their sinful condition. If we suggest to someone that they are in bondage, they will resist and deny the idea. The more enslaved he or she is the more he/she will resent hearing the truth. "*There's nothing wrong with me! Who are you to tell me there's something wrong in my life? That I'm a slave to anything? That I need to find freedom?*"

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

The hope for Jesus' listeners, and for us today, does not lie in the ancestry of Abraham, but the action of Jesus on the cross. Their only way for sinners to be released from sin's grip and

penalty is to be united by faith with Jesus Christ, who in his death and resurrection provides deliverance

True freedom comes through knowing the gospel and being committed to the Lord Jesus and serving him. And this means a life of righteousness.<sup>2</sup> Anything else is really slavery, no matter what the world may promise you through its lies and false teaching.

In the book of Romans Paul goes into great detail about how we are no longer slaves to sin, but are now slaves to righteousness.

**Romans 6:17,18** *But thanks be to God, though you used to be slaves to sin you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. <sup>18</sup>You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.*

Jesus redeemed us, which means he bought us out of slavery to the cruel taskmaster sin. He paid the price for our redemption with his own blood.<sup>3</sup>

The same action on the part of Christ that delivered us from sin's slavery simultaneously has made us slaves to God (**verse 22**) and righteousness (**verse 18**).

It may seem a paradox to refer to this new state of belonging to God as "slavery," for it is such a vivid contrast to our previous condition.

We have a new owner, a new identity, a new boss. The Bible teaches that it is in this new "slavery" that we find true freedom.

By true freedom I don't mean autonomy, a license to do absolutely anything I please. Our true place is with God, his will is our will even as a slave has no will of his own.

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<sup>2</sup> The kind of freedom Jesus was talking about was not liberty to do anything we want. If we want and choose sin, it leads to bondage.

<sup>3</sup> I Peter 1:18-19 *For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, <sup>19</sup>but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.*

None of us is fully independent. There is no "neutral ground." You are either one or the other – a slave to sin and Satan or a slave to righteousness and God.

There is no human being who is absolutely free to do anything he/she may want to do.<sup>4</sup>

The only being in the universe who is *totally* free is God. Everyone else is limited by someone or something.

Don't deceive yourself. Sin is bondage. It enslaves us so that we aren't able to escape its grasp. Don't listen to anyone who tells you that sin is harmless. It leads to death.

The only sensible reaction to sin is to turn from it, and seek the Lord. He alone can save us. Nothing he desires more. The whole purpose of Jesus coming was to ***seek and save the lost***.

The ***form of teaching*** (vs. 17) is a reference to the gospel. The Christian teaching includes of course the Old Testament, but there is a contrast between the gospel perspective of the Scriptures and the Jewish misinterpretation and application which Jesus and Paul faced in their day. It is the same thing as what Jesus referred to "*the truth*."

Nb. (1) does NOT say, as might be expected, you believed the teaching. Rather that you wholeheartedly obeyed. When we come to Christ our faith has an intellectual element (we believe

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<sup>4</sup> We all serve someone or something. It's just a matter of who or what. Some are slaves to their work, busyness, achievement. They can't shut down their laptops for more than a couple of hours, and their cell phones appear to be surgically implanted in their hands.

Some are slaves to things, possessions, stuff. They are driven by the fantasy that contentment can be found in having things. They don't even stop securing more long enough to enjoy what they already have.

Many are enslaved to seeking approval of others. They magically mutate into whatever shape they thing will gain the approval of another. Their emotions cycle between self-acceptance and self-loathing, depending on whether they are receiving affirmation or criticism.

Increasingly common are people who are slaves to the god of themselves. We call them narcissists. They relentlessly demand the attention, admiration, time and nurturing of others. But, like the other forms of slavery, it only leads to greater emptiness.

in something); an emotional element (our hearts are touched) and an element of the will.

We may believe in him in some sense, but unless obedience is present, whether we are truly saved is questionable at best. The whole Christian life is summed up in our obedience to God. Jesus asked, “**Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord’ and do not do what I say?**” **Luke 6:46.**

Nb. (2) does NOT say the teaching I entrusted to you to take safeguard. NO, rather we have been entrusted to it! This proclamation, this gospel, this word of truth needs no protection, rather it protects and changes you!

**Proverbs 30:5 Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.**

**Every word is flawless** - a word used in Psalms to describe silver that has been refined.

All of the Bible is trustworthy and dependable - nothing impure, nothing deceitful, nothing untrue in it. What other book can you say that about? What other author can claim that there is absolutely no error contained in his writings? Scripture comes from God and reflects his character. In him is no error, nothing false, nothing misleading. And the same can be said of his word.

Second part of the verse says **he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.**

Don’t keep trying to “make it on your own,” relying on your own strength and wisdom. Nothing honors God like turning to him in every time of need. Let God and his word be your shield!

If you respond in obedience to God’s word, and take refuge in him by committing yourself to his inspired words, you will discover that He will indeed be your shield, giving you peaceful rest and confidence, protecting you from all terrors and all your enemies - both internal and external - including death.

## Conclusion/invitation

This morning you have heard the good news! “*The truth will set you free!*”

If Jesus sets you free, **you will be free indeed.** Free from

- condemnation,
- judgment,
- spiritual ignorance,
- Satan’s lies,
- and spiritual death.
- Free from the myths, the superstitions, the habits, the sins that have enslaved you.
- Free to choose the right,
- free to choose the best,
- free to keep on growing,
- free to do and become all you were created to do and be!<sup>5</sup>

Being emancipated from sin’s dominion is liberty indeed. The power of sin usurped authority over us, stole us from God, making us its slaves. We never rightly belonged to sin. We weren’t created to sin, for sin to have power over us.

Freed by Jesus from that power we can at last fulfill the purpose of our being. Just like a bird is free to use its wings to fly, or a flower to expand its pedals and bloom, or a fruit tree to produce fruit, we are free to obey our Creator and our Savior in newness of life.

The liberator of your soul is here this morning, stretching out his arms to you! Will you come to him, and be saved? “*If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.*”

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<sup>5</sup> This is not a freedom to do whatever we wish according to the dictates of our own fallen selves, but a freedom from our fallen selves and the power and guidance to live good and holy lives pleasing to God.