

Do You Want to Be Free? John 8:31-38

Intro

("What is Stockholm syndrome?")

In a 2013 BBC News Magazine article written by Kathryn Westcott, we learn about a somewhat obscure story that happened almost 50 years ago in Stockholm, Sweden. She writes:

Outside Sweden few know the names of bank workers Birgitta Lundblad, Elisabeth Oldgren, Kristin Ehnmark and Sven Safstrom.

It was August 1973 when the four were taken hostage in the Kreditbanken [Swedish bank] by 32-year-old career-criminal Jan-Erik Olsson - who was later joined at the bank by a former prison mate. Six days later when the stand-off ended, it became evident that the victims had formed some kind of positive relationship with their captors.

So much so that Westcott reports in her article:

In one phone call from the bank's vault to the country's prime minister ...(Kristin) Ehnmark begged to be allowed to leave the bank with the kidnappers.

"I fully trust [these men]. I am not desperate. They haven't done a thing to us. On the contrary, they have been very nice."

On one occasion a claustrophobic Elisabeth Oldgren was allowed to leave the vault that had become their prison but only with a rope fixed around her neck. She said that at the time she thought it was "very kind" (of the criminal who held them captive) to allow her to move around the floor of the bank. (Another one of the captives) said he even felt gratitude when (one of the criminals) told him he was planning to shoot him - to show the police [that] he meant business - but added he would make sure he didn't kill him and would let him get drunk first.

What happened? This incident provoked Psychiatrist Dr. Frank Ochborg to look into this strange phenomenon that he began to call Stockholm Syndrome - an attempt to explain a situation when:

The hostages experience a powerful, primitive positive feeling towards their captor. They are in denial that this is the person who put them in that situation. In their mind, they think this is the person who is going to let them live.

The most infamous case of this is probably the story of Patty Hearst - the young heiress to the Hearst media empire who was kidnapped at gunpoint only to be found on camera three months later holding a gun and robbing a bank with her kidnappers.

Our text this morning pulls back the curtain of each one of our lives and reveals to us that in ourselves we are spiritual hostages. We have been captured and enslaved, not by bank robbers or kidnappers looking for ransom, but by our own sin, and sadly, in our fallen nature, we feel an affection for this captor that enslaves us

In ourselves we are captive to sin - the sin that, apart from the grace of God we will die in and face the consequences - the judgment of God against us because of our sin.

Jesus teaches us something of utter, essential, eternal importance and he tells us how we can break free from our enslaving captivity and live a life of freedom to the glory of God

Do you want to be free? Jesus takes in and through what we need to know in order to be free - 3 points
I. The Evidence of Authentic Faith II. The Problem of Sin III. The Liberation that Jesus Gives

I. The Evidence of Authentic Faith

- A. Let's situate ourselves - Jesus is continuing to preach in the temple declaring his authority and life-giving grace - last week we heard Jesus saying that unless we believe in him - put our faith in him - we will die in our sins - they didn't understand but he told them that once he was lifted up - once he was lifted up to die on the cross and raised from the grave then his words would become clear
 - 1. v. 30 as he was saying these things many believed in him
- B. Our text - v. 31 Jesus continues to speak, specifically to the Jews who had believed in him as described in v. 30 - he informs these folks about the necessary evidence that reveals if faith in Jesus is authentic faith
 - 1. If you abide in my word - conditional statement
 - 2. You ARE truly my disciples - not will be - reveals what is going on in the life of someone who professes to believe in Jesus

What does it mean to "abide" in the word of Jesus? Those who embrace his teaching continue to hold to it, and they abide in it in the sense that they live in or dwell in the world as the word of Jesus defines it. (James Hamilton)

- a) Abiding in the word of Jesus - orienting one's life around the Scriptures - knowing and doing the will of God as revealed in this Bible that reveals the person and teaching of Christ - is the evidence of authentic faith as a disciple of Jesus
 - (1) Belief looks like something - it affects the way we live and what we love

Illustration: I love my wife - can feel whatever I want - dismissive - ignore - my actions show what is actually going on in my heart - not covenant love

If you love me, you will keep my commandments. (John 14:15)

- 3. And the fruit of that abiding = you will know the truth - through the word of Jesus - and the truth will set you free
- C. True disciples of Jesus are revealed by those who believe in Jesus as evidenced by allegiance to Jesus and obedience to his word and who experience the freedom that comes by living in the truth of Jesus - HIS WORD not some general sense of "truth"
- D. Some Jewish folks in the crowd had believed in him - but Jesus knows their hearts and the reality that one can have the willingness to believe some things about who Jesus said he was but Jesus has a category for belief that leaves one outside the kingdom of God - because people who authentically, savingly believe in Jesus are people who have experienced the miracle of the new birth and now are people who love to live in and according to his word.
 - 1. Experience a life of learning from Jesus, following Jesus into greater and greater spiritual freedom

Illustration: This is a sobering statement that cuts into any kind of “easy believism” - sinners prayer - add in some Jesus - life change - produced a generation of shallow Christianity

If potential converts (children or adults) are so unfamiliar with basic Bible doctrine that they can understand nothing more than “asking Jesus into their heart,” they probably should wait to make a commitment, until they understand the gravity of sin, and Christ’s offer of forgiveness. Of course, Christians should never make the gospel more complex than it needs to be, but we don’t want to make it trite, either. (Thomas Kidd)

E. Application

1. Jesus himself warned of the kind of believing that doesn’t touch down on our lives producing a desire for more of Christ, trusting in and obeying Christ more - living in increasing conformity to his word as we hear and do his will

[21] “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord, ’will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. [22] On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name? ’[23] And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness. ’(Matthew 7:21-23)

2. They believed - they called him Lord - they even had profound spiritual experiences - underneath it all was an unwillingness to abide in his word - live according to his word - revealing that their faith was not authentic
 - a) Salvation by grace alone through faith alone - but one cannot be unchanged by the grace of God

By sketching genuine faith in such stark terms, Jesus is standing true to a pattern we find elsewhere: he is never interested in multiplying numbers of converts if they are not genuine believers, and therefore he insists on forcing would-be disciples to count the cost. (D.A. Carson)

3. Stark terms - Sobering - needed in our day - Billy Graham

II. The Problem of Sin

- A. v. 33 - as is their practice they push back on what Jesus is saying
 1. You talk about freedom but why would we need freedom? We are offspring of Abraham - children of the promise – no one has ever enslaved us! Someone is forgetting the Jewish captivity and enslavement in Egypt among a bunch of other countries that invaded and enslaved Israel in OT history
 2. Likely understood he was speaking of spiritual enslavement - we do believe in God – no one can enslave our hearts
- B. v. 34 Jesus answered – truly, truly - I tell you the truth emphatically - everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin!

Sin is rejecting or ignoring God in the world he created, rebelling against him by living without reference to him, not being or doing what he requires in his law—resulting in our death and the disintegration of all creation. (New City Catechism)

1. Anyone who practices sin - everyone - all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God
2. Sin is not neutral - it is not making mistakes - every time we sin, we are opposing the will of our holy Creator and God to whom we are all accountable

- a) They are unaware - apart from Christ we all mostly are blind to our sin - the idea of being a sinner is offensive - excuse our sin - minimize our sin - deny our sin - all the while enslaved by sin

...sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it. (Genesis 4:7b)

- (1) Feral animal - teeth bared - crouching - ready to pounce
- b) Temptation to sin promise joy, relief, freedom - Sin's out to get you - sin's out to enslave you - because we are born in sin - in ourselves we are helpless to do anything about it - the natural fallen impulse is we aren't much interested much in talking about sin

For Jesus, the ultimate bondage is not enslavement to a political or economic system, but vicious slavery to moral failure, to rebellion against the God who has made us. The despotic master is not Caesar, but shameful self-centeredness, an evil and enslaving devotion to created things at the expense of worship of the Creator. (D.A. Carson)

Illustration: The legendary ancient century emperor Genghis Khan ruled over the largest empire in history - estimated that he killed 40 million people - countless wives and slaves - all the while unaware that he himself had the most vicious master just like the rest of us - a slave to sin

C. Application

Illustration: The blinding and enslaving power of sin is such that we give ourselves to it, believing the false promises of satisfaction, relief, and joy - when it doesn't deliver we go back again and again defending ourselves - - Stockholm syndrome

Sin is pleasurable for a season - my teen years - Heroin addict joy - more and more less and less return - hollowed out - dead

Started with porn - ended up with prostitutes

1. Because all who practice sin is a slave to sin that means everyone apart from the grace of God is a slave to sin no matter your background
 - a) The religious Jews in the crowd thought that their religious and ethnic background gave them a pass when it came to sin Religious/ethnic background doesn't excuse - Christian because I'm American
2. Explain away and excuse sin - I'm a go-getter (impatience), I'm just sharing an interesting story (gossip), I'm just speaking my mind (sinful criticism), I've had a long day I need to blow off steam (fire up Porn hub)
3. It promises good - it is a captor - die in sins
 - a) Worried about government overreach - oppression - how much more this cruel and fatal oppression

III. The Liberation that Jesus Gives

- A. Jesus came to save us and rescue us from this cruel master - he came to set us free from the enslaving and deadly power of sin!
- B. v. 35 - slaves aren't part of the family - slaves are kept on the outside of the family - who knows who is received and loved within a family - the children - the son remains forever
- C. There is one Son - He is the one Son of God who never sinned and who is therefore always received with joy by God the Father and this son - if he sets you free from the enslaving power

of sin, you will be free indeed and you will find yourself in the house of God - as a beloved child of God

1. He's in the business of setting enslaved sinners free - free from the condemnation for our sin, free from the enslaving power of our sin, free to serve the living God - how does he do it?

[3] For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. [4] But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, [5] he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, [6] whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, [7] so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:3-7)

2. Jesus Christ - our God and Savior appeared - revealing the goodness and kindness of God - He saved us - not because of anything good we have done - but through all that Christ has done
 - a) He died on the cross as our sinless substitute - taking our sin and judgment - dying in our place for our sin - defeating sin and Satan and death - rising from the dead
 - (1) By his mercy justifying sinners - forgiving our sins - more!!!! - regenerating our hearts by his spirit - counting us as righteous before God so that we are received with the same affection and love as Christ himself
 - (2) Making us heirs of God with the hope of eternal life!!!
 - (3) Hallelujah what a Savior! What a liberator!
- D. Call to unbelievers - world calls sin liberation - deadly
- E. V. 37 - they aren't enjoying this - they would like to kill him because they are not included in the number of his disciples because unlike v. 31 - my word finds no place in you
 1. I speak on the authority of the Father - God himself - you on the other hand do your father's will - we will see - the devil
- F. Application
 1. Gratitude to the one who has personally, generously, kindly, graciously set us free! Walk through our lives in a new way:

When my parents were liberated, four years before I was born, they found that the ordinary world outside the camp had been eradicated. There was no more simple meal, no thing was less than extraordinary: a fork, a mattress, a clean shirt, a book. Not to mention such things that can make one weep: an orange, meat and vegetables, hot water. There was no ordinariness to return to, no refuge from the blinding potency of things, an apple screaming its sweet juice. (Anne Michaels, *Fugitive Pieces*)

2. Enslaving power broken - presence remains
 - a) Grace is not opposed to obedience. Grace makes it possible - desirable - grace empowers our efforts

[12] Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, [13] for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. (Philippians 2:12-13)

3. The point of our redeemed lives is loving and serving God and loving and serving others - reflecting the life and desire of our Savior

Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. (1 Peter 2:16)

4. Having experienced mercy and grace - We love to hear our Master's will for I find my delight in your commandments, which I love. (Psalm 119:47)

True freedom is not the liberty to do anything we please, but the liberty to do what we ought; and it is genuine liberty because what we ought now pleases us. (D.A. Carson)

5. The absolute non-negotiable necessity is to abide in his Word - pathway to freedom - listening to God - and by his grace - through his Spirit obeying God

The reason many Christians are not experiencing spiritual freedom today is that while they may be Biblically literate, they are not Biblically obedient. (Kent Hughes)

6. Been in the Word? Abiding?

a) Sunday classes next month to help with spiritual discipline and pursuing godliness - conformity to Christ

b) We know his word - promises - blessed are the pure in heart

7. Stuck - get help

a) Don't make peace with your sin - Stockholm Syndrome - today is the perfect day to repent - grace to forgive - grace to empower

Close

A word to overly-sensitive conscience - 1 look at sin - 10 looks at Christ

Some are loath to do good because they feel their hearts rebelling, and duties turn out badly. We should not avoid good actions because of the infirmities attending them. Christ looks more at the good in them which he means to cherish than the ill in them which he means to abolish...though sin cleaves to what we do, yet let us do it, since we have to deal with so good a Lord...Christ loves to taste of the good fruits that come from us, even though they will always savor of our old nature. (Richard Sibbes)

So good a Lord - let no redeemed child of God leave here condemned - he looks more at the good in our faltering attempts at obedience - Christ loves to taste of the good fruit that comes from us by his grace

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