

Last Sunday of the Church Year (Series B)

November 22, 2015

Gospel: John 18:33-37

Epistle: Rev 1:4b-8

Lesson: Dan 7:9-10, 13-14

Psalm: Psalm 93

CLB Commentary: Dr. Gaylan Mathiesen

Jesus has just finished speaking to believing Jews about the power of the Word of God to bring truth and set us free. Tragically, however, His message was a mystery to the unbelieving Jewish leaders also present. Their response is interesting: they replied that they “have never been enslaved to anyone.” Really? What about Egypt? What about Babylon? What about their present situation under the Roman government? Even on the earthly level, the claim does not bear up under scrutiny. But Jesus did not respond on the earthly level; He went much deeper with His indictment: “whoever commits sin is a slave of sin” (NASB). Because they focused only on externals, the Jewish leaders did not recognize Jesus as God’s Son. They were unable to recognize, let alone admit, their slavery to sin. Rather than hearing gospel in Christ’s words, they could only hear a threat to their coveted positions of power in Jewish society.

So what were they depending upon for their salvation? For one thing, they brought up their ancestry—they claimed their place of honor as children of Abraham. This claim did not hold any weight with Jesus, however: “I know that you are Abraham’s offspring: yet you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you” (v. 37, NASB). They could not see that the promise of Abraham was alive in the flesh and standing before them, speaking the promise and the blessing given to the patriarch of Israel. Their hardened hearts could not receive the gospel He brought to them.

Still today, we need to examine our understanding of this gospel, since it is the very foundation of our faith and our assurance. Many of God’s people still base their assurance on externals—perhaps their family heritage or their pride in relative personal morality. Since our trust is in things other than the finished work of Christ, we end up in a state of spiritual arrogance that blinds us to our true spiritual need, and even hinders our love toward our neighbor.

If we go to the other end of the spectrum, we find those who indulge in spiritual license. Priding ourselves in avoiding legalism, we turn the gospel into a freedom to indulge the sinful flesh, deceiving ourselves with cheap grace that lulls us into the sleep of spiritual death. Here again, one

is a slave to sin. In the end, both legalism and license bring one to the same deadly place. Both are a form of idolatry. Certainly, there is no evidence of the fruit of Abraham's faith here either, and as with legalism, any assurance is a false assurance. You haven't truly grasped the gospel if you go on indulging the flesh. This false gospel brings a false assurance, and spiritual death. "Everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin."

The great Scottish commentator William Barclay put it this way: "In effect, Jesus is saying to the Jews: 'You think that you are sons in God's house, and that nothing, therefore, can ever banish you from God. Have a care; by your conduct you are making yourselves slaves, and the slave can be ejected from the master's presence at any time.' Here is a threat. It is a terrible thing to trade on the mercy of God--and that is what the Jews were doing. There is a warning here for more than the Jews." (The Gospel of John Volume 2, Revised, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975, p 24.) Yet, how different are the words that Jesus spoke, "If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free" (vv. 31-32). This is the true gospel that liberates, and the true gospel that He calls us to proclaim.