

May 22, 2005

Patchogue Church of the Nazarene

“What Makes One Free?”

John 8:12, 31-32, 36 NLT

Jesus said to the people, "I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won't be stumbling through the darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life."

31 Jesus said to the people who believed in him, "You are truly my disciples if you keep obeying my teachings. 32 And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

36 So if the Son sets you free, you will indeed be free.

Jesus is talking to three different groups of people in these verses:

The People (the curious)

In v12 He said to “the people” i.e. to all people. To all who would listen Jesus says, "I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won't be stumbling through the darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life." You have to picture this; Jesus is in the section of the Temple known as the treasury (v20). This is where people brought their offerings. It was here one time that Jesus watched as people brought their offerings and saw a poor widow give her two cents, yet commended (Mark 12:43-44 NLT) "I assure you, this poor widow has given more than all the others have given. For they gave a tiny part of their surplus, but she, poor as she is, has given everything she has."

In that area of the Temple was a great golden candelabra. These candles were lighted during the Feast of Tabernacles, which is the feast Jesus is attending. This was done in remembrance of the pillar of fire, which directed the child of Israel by night as they traveled in the wilderness escaping slavery in Egypt. (Ex 13:21-22 NIV) By day the LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.

This fire from God illuminated their way. It represented God's presence, protection and guidance. When Jesus says, "I am the light of the world" it means that in Christ, God became light personified. Jesus brought God's presence, protection, and guidance into the world in an approachable way. Now God could be known with an intimacy not possible before Jesus came into the world. But we have to allow Christ to enlighten us.

Jesus came for all people, Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews) God the Father speaking through Isaiah said to the Messiah, the anointed One, Jesus, (Isa 49:6 NLT) "You will do more than restore the people of Israel to me. I will make you a light to the Gentiles, and you will bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."

And so to all people Jesus says, "I have come to bring you God's presence, protection, and guidance. If you follow me you won't keep stumbling around in the darkness, trying

to feel your way around through the darkness and walking into walls. I will be the light that brings you salvation, that shows you the way in this life and will lead you to eternal life.” Can you relate to that? Are you someone who is not sure about how to live? Do you keep walking into walls, or down dead ends? Do you need guidance and protection? You need the light of God’s presence in your life. Jesus says, “I am the light of the world.” Some people, who heard Him say these things, believed Him.

The People Who Believed In Him (the convinced)

In v31 Jesus speaks to the people who believed in Him, or, a more literal translation here would be, those who “believed Him.” I.e. those who had a favorable impression of Jesus, they gave an intellectual assent to what Jesus said, but they did not, necessarily, make a decision to commit themselves to Jesus. Are you someone who is curious about what Jesus has to say, even agrees with what He has to say, but that’s all? As the following verses demonstrate, some of these new “believers” did not remain His followers for long. Jesus says to these who believed what He was saying, “You are truly my disciples if you keep obeying my teachings. And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” He talks to them about the real cost of being His followers. Which brings us to the next group Jesus addresses:

The People He calls True Disciples (the committed)

His true followers are not those who are just hearing what Jesus has to say and agreeing with it intellectually. Jesus says His true followers / disciples are “those who keep obeying My teachings.” True disciples not only hear or even just know His teachings but they keep obeying them (the word here literally means “to abide.” We are to live in and by His teachings). We do have to know what Jesus taught. This is why it is so important to study your Bibles (are you in the Bible on a regular basis?). The Bible is God’s revelation to us, it is His truth and it is God’s truth that we want in us, filling us so it will influence us. For truth is not really known until it is practiced. We can read something in a textbook but we really don’t understand it until we practice it. When you do what you read that’s when you find out if it really works, if it’s true. I went to hairdressing school. I read a procedure on cutting hair in a text book. I believed it. But it wasn’t until I practiced on some poor, terrified, victim’s hair that I discovered the procedure worked, and the more I practiced the better I got at cutting hair. I read in the Bible we should love our enemies. That meant love was not a feeling but an action. It meant that I wasn’t to wait until I had the right attitude toward someone before I should love them, rather I should love them, do good to them, if they are hungry feed them or if thirsty give them something to drink and then my attitude toward them would change. I believed that but I really didn’t know it was truth until I obeyed it. I knew a Christian and this Christian “rubbed me the wrong way.” I didn’t like the way he did things. What he did was not sin, I just didn’t like it. For example: if a group of us went out to eat, he would take the check and figure, right to the penny what each one owed. I would just split the bill, it there were three of us, just divided the bill by three. I don’t care if you had the coke and I only had water. Not him. He’d go around that table and say, “you owe \$7.22, and you owe, \$7.83 and I owe \$7.84). If his brother borrowed his car to run to the store, he would mark down the total miles and charge his brother so much per mile. We just didn’t do

such things in my family and I was actually having hate in my heart for him. The Lord, as you would guess, spoke to me about my attitude. I started to go out of my way to show love to this brother. (E.g.) I did not speak badly about him, if I was feeling bad toward him I would pray, for him and for me. If he needed something I would try to be the first one to help him or meet the need. And as I spoke better of him, did things for him and prayed for him, guess what? My attitude changed toward him just as the Bible said it would. You know, we became very close friends, and were even able to laugh at our differences. It is in the doing that we discover truth. That's what Jesus is saying in this verse, "Keep obeying my teachings. And you will know the truth, ... and the truth will set you free." Believers become truly free because they are free to do God's will, and thus fulfill God's ultimate purpose in their lives. The truth is God's revelation to us, His "Light" if you will. Knowing the truth means accepting it, obeying it, and regarding it above all earthly opinion.

Now, take a look at v36 "So if the Son sets you free, you will indeed be free." Notice that "truth" and "the Son" are used interchangeably, i.e. both "truth" and "the Son" sets us free. (v32 says, "the truth will set you free." v36 says, "The Son sets you free.") The truth is not just concepts it is God Himself. Jesus *is* the truth. Jesus promised freedom - freedom from slavery to sin, freedom to do what is right. That freedom begins when we acknowledge we are in bondage to sin. Only God can free us through His forgiveness, which He made possible by Christ's death in our place on the cross. Jesus' sacrifice did not free us "to do our own thing;" rather he freed us from doing our own thing so that we could serve him!

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I thought at one time that I was free to do whatever I wanted. The more freedom I wanted the more I felt like a slave. There were laws to keep and people in authority to obey and if I didn't there were consequences to be paid. Then I became a slave to my sinful habits and selfishness. I was destroying myself and those around me who loved me. I knew the teachings of Jesus were true, but that didn't help me. It wasn't until I started to trust and obey Him that I found true freedom.

What makes someone free? Having faith in Jesus, abiding in His Word, having knowledge of His truth, being true disciples – one that keeps on obeying His teachings – these are the things that will make a person free (not the curious, not even the convinced, but the committed).