

Reformation – 2024
Revelation 14:6-7
Romans 3:19-28
John 8:31-36

Cardinal Thomas Cajetan was the Pope's representative to Germany during the time that Martin Luther rose to prominence. Cardinal Cajetan had a great deal of churchly authority. Whatever he said carried with it the Pope's imprimatur. Cajetan was the doctrinal sergeant at arms, the theological enforcer, the keeper of the Roman Catholic theological peace. When someone, anyone, publicly departed from official Roman Catholic teaching and practice in Germany then the enforcer was on the case. A century before Martin Luther, a Czech theologian by the name of Jan Hus very vocally called into question some of Rome's faulty teachings and he was summarily burned at the stake. In 1517, Cardinal Cajetan was not one who suffered opposition. Rome had an iron fist in an iron glove and Cajetan was part of that fist.

It was Cardinal Cajetan who interrogated Martin Luther regarding his teaching about how man is justified before God. Imagine if the Pope's legate had been even remotely interested in what the Scripture actually said on the subject. Imagine if Luther had been keen to save his skin and had recanted his teaching regarding grace, regarding Christ's righteousness being given to us as a gift when we believe that Jesus, by His death, has made satisfaction for our sins. If I could very crudely paraphrase Cardinal Cajetan's position it would be this: "I don't care what the Bible says, the matter has been decided, the church has a well-formed body of doctrine and you, Martin Luther, are guilty of heresy because you are promoting teachings that are not in harmony with the Holy Church." Of course, Cajetan wouldn't be foolish enough to say that he didn't care what the Bible says but that's the long and short of it; he didn't. What level of conviction does it take to stand up to that kind of threat? Where does that conviction come from? Is the Bible your friend? Is the Bible your authority? If you had a long-held notion that you were convinced was true and you were shown how the Scripture asserted a different position, what would you do?

Jesus was having what could be described as an unpleasant conversation with some Pharisees, Jews who were challenging His teaching. It is a spiritual confrontation. John Chapter 8 is a verbal donnybrook, a "no-holds-barred" altercation between Light and darkness. The context in which this conversation takes place is super important, but do you believe that Jesus' teaching transcends that one day in which the conversation took place? What does He say? "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31). If you "abide" in my word... what do you suppose that means? If you saturate yourself with my teaching, if you absorb its content, if you plumb the depths of its meaning, if you hold it dear, if you honor it and savor it and learn it – that's what it means. Jesus isn't entering into a negotiation. This isn't a spiritual choice, many doors all leading to the same outcome. This is a binary reality – on/off, in/out, up/down. Jesus is presenting Himself as the sole avenue for those who want to escape slavery. The master in this slave relationship is sin. The slave in this master relationship is the sinner.

These are beautiful words that transcend each generation. These are beautiful words that invade every generation. "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31). Luther was interested in letting the words of

Christ shine in all of their splendor. Cajetan wanted the church to suffer no embarrassment. Luther discovered the grace of God in the Holy Scripture and the conviction that came from that priceless freedom would hazard any shame that man might heap on him. Cajetan was slave to a mirage, slave to a demented church's idea of works-righteousness. Cajetan was all in. What do you think of that? Do people attack the truth? Do some attack the truth with unbounded fury? Do some attack the truth with smug sophistication? Do some attack the truth with blasé indifference? Jesus' opponents were all in. What truth were Jesus' opponents attacking? Freedom; they were attacking the truth that Christ and His blood, Christ and His holiness, Christ and His death and resurrection, Christ and His grace were the source of freedom.

Jesus' opponents lied about their condition. "We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, 'you will become free'" (John 8:33). The Jews had been enslaved in Egypt, held captive in Babylon, and now were occupied by the foreign armies of Rome. Humanly speaking, their freedom was an illusion. Most of us love political freedom, national freedom. Individual freedom is a hallmark of the United States of America. But isn't there more? Jesus says that there is. "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:34-35). "Everyone who commits sin"; that is a pretty inclusive statement. Do you how badly sin wants to boss us around? Do you know what a merciless tyrant "sin" is? Do you want to give up your life to sin, to evil, to rank selfishness and the demonic hate of Satan? "I'm my own boss!" How much freedom is in those words?

When Jesus says that the slave does not remain in the house forever, what do you suppose He's talking about? Was Jesus thoroughly obedient to His Father? Yes, completely. He is the true Son who makes us sons and daughters by His blood, by His obedience, by His triumph on the cross. Whoever remains in the house remains in the house only by remaining in Him, in Christ, in the true Son. In myself, I am a slave to sin. You are the same as me. But we've been made free. By the work of the only genuinely free person that there has been, we've been made free. Freedom; it is found in Christ. Forgiveness is freedom. Grace is freedom. Christ's body and blood is freedom. Sin is vanquished as Jesus is lifted up, high and exalted, crucified as a captive, crucified as the sin-bearer, the sacrificial Lamb. Grace is the flood that came pouring out of His side in death... for you. Grace is the love of God that is present in His Holy Word. Grace is the love of God that is present in Holy Baptism. Grace is the love of God that is present in Holy Communion. God wants you free. Die in Christ and you will know eternal freedom. Die apart from Christ and slavery will be your lot forever.

One of the most magnificent statements from our Lord is this one: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life" (John 8:12). Do you know what the Lord Christ says about you? "You are the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14). What an honor! Light, grace, freedom, truth – these are proper to Jesus and He gives them to you. You have become a vessel of light, grace, freedom, truth. "A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:14-16).

Are you worried about what people say, what they think about Christianity, about you being a confessing Christian? Stop! We are too timid. We are too apologetic for what is beautiful and true and good. Grace, light, freedom, truth – the Reformation was built on rediscovering what God has done and how magnificent it is. The blood of Christ the King has redeemed us from sin and death. Celebrate *that*. We are saved by grace through faith, a gift of God, not by works. Stand tall with *that* in your heart and in your mouth. The Bible *is* our friend. We *will* abide in Christ's word and we will show ourselves to truly be His disciples. We welcome sinners from all quarters into this congregation. Grace is indiscriminate. **God's Riches At Christ's Expense** – Grace is the jewel of God's love in Christ. Luther, in the face of Cajetan's threats, did not recant. He said: "Unless I see from Scripture that what I have written is false I will not recant" (Martin Luther at Augsburg). Those are the words of a free man. Free indeed!