

“Ain’t Nobody Born Free!”
 Sermon for July 30, 2017
 Text: Ephesians 2:1-7; John 8:31-47

The Social Contract by Jean-Jacques Rousseau. "Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains. One man thinks himself the master of others, but remains more of a slave than they are." This is a great one-liner by a Romantic philosopher, who was regarded by his philosophical colleagues, to barely make it into the second rate category. However, his professional standing is not our concern; his error is. There is nothing in Ephesians 2:1-7—or John 8, for that matter, which supports this false declaration. Not even a smidgen—as in not even the tiniest amount of support. **And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the prince of the power of the air . . .** (Ephesians 2:1-2c) Everyone who is born is born a slave—they walk in trespasses and sins, following their master, even Satan, **the prince of the power of the air**. So, that is ground zero. We all begin life in spiritual captivity!

This isn't the cheeriest bit of news! And many people object to it. But Paul didn't make this up; he learned it from the Lord Jesus. We have in John 8, Jesus' doctrine on this matter of the **deadness. . . in which you once walked**(vv. 1-2a) : **truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.** (John 8:34) So it follows, that if we are willing to affirm that *we are all sinners*, we should also admit that this means *we are slaves to sin*. The Jews **who had believed him** had been “balking” at Jesus' word: **If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples.** (v.31) That wasn't the real problem though, that problem was: they wanted to believe that because they were of Abrahamic descent, that they had been “born free.” We can't know if Rousseau was aware of this passage, but his declaration expresses a sentiment that has been around for over seventeen hundred years! Believing that they were “free,” Jesus' words, **and you will know the truth , and the truth will set you free**, totally rubbed them the wrong way! It offended their proud flesh! For it is mankind's proud flesh that wants to believe man is born free—and resists the truth about **the sins in which you once walked**.

The Jews answered him, defensively: **We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, “You will become free.?”** There are none so blind as those who will not see! Nor none so unfree as those who are the slaves of sin. Remember Paul's words **And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the prince of the power of the air** for he continues with **the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passion of our flesh, *carrying out the desires of the body and the mind* and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.** (vv. 2d-3) It is important to catch the universal scope of Paul's indictment of the entire human race! There can be no mistaking the **you were dead**, the **in which you once walked**, and the **among whom we all once lived** as including everyone in the **children of wrath** category **like the rest of mankind**. So, I reaffirm, “Ain't Nobody Born Free!”

Still, it's a hard sell. But unless we establish firmly in our minds that everyone born is born into slavery, **dead in the trespasses and sins**, or born into a setting of spiritual bondage to the prince of the power of the air, and know our current spiritual need because we are serving **the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience** (which included us)—remembering that **everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin**—we may underplay our need for a Savior. Everyone needs a Savior because nobody is born free. Oh, people do love to believe that they are born free (as free as a lion in the wild, free as the wind), they also want believe that man is essentially good (man was created **very good** and formed in the **image of God**). *Both of these notions undercut the impact of the Fall and the corrupting influence of sinful rebellion!* Paul does not make that mistake! Beloved, these true things are made lies in order to keep the unwary in spiritual bondage! And only the truth can heal their sight and set them free! We lost the **very good-ness** and defaced **the image of God** and enslaved ourselves to the **prince of the power of the air**.

Blind slaves are we?! Yes. *And*, **dead in our trespasses and sins**. This is not the ordinary/natural usage of the word “dead,” it conveys a certain numbness, insensitivity to what's going on around us—as if we were asleep at the wheel! Typically, people around us do not know their actual condition, or their true nature. *And that's a problem! A really big problem.* And the situation is dire, unless **God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, made us alive together with Christ—BY GRACE YOU HAVE BEEN SAVED.** (vv. 4-5) So, while we are not born free, we are born-again free! **Free in Christ is free indeed.**

And, of course, that is exactly where Jesus takes the disgruntled Jews, **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.** (v. 35-36) Despite this being really obvious, Jesus is explaining all this before the fact—Paul is referring to the same truth after the fact. Same truth in different settings. Our friends, our lost family members and neighbors are all this side of the cross! Their need is for the risen Savior, but they just don't know it yet. What will it take to wake them up?

It will take a shock treatment. Jesus confronts his opponents with: **I know that you are offspring of Abraham.** It is always good to agree with the other side when and where you can. **You are the offspring of Abraham**, but there is a problem here: **yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you.** (v. 35) What, murder?! Whence comes this violent strain? It comes from **the prince of the power of the air!** He is full of malice and hatred and, yes, murder. He infects all his slaves with the same sentiments—we learn it all from him. What is so shocking is that we soak it up, we imbibe in it! “What, you think that we are by nature murderers? Born blind? Slaves to sin?” Well, yes. Because that is the case . . . with everyone, no exceptions.

Now they seem outraged, **we have never been slaves . . . Abraham is our father!** (v. 39) Fine, and what good has it done you? What good has come to you by virtue of your biological descent from the father of our faith? Just because you deny something doesn't mean it isn't true! If you had Abraham's faith, then you would be doing as well as he did! But you are, I observe, **faithless** children. **If you were**

Abraham's children, you would be doing the works that Abraham did, but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. Well, do we recall what Abraham did? Isn't he the one who believed God, had faith in God, and God **reckoned him to be righteousness**?! Yes, that is what Abraham did. But you, **You are doing the works of your father**, the devil—even Satan. Incidentally, the atmosphere at this point in the discourse is intense, heated and volatile.

The transparently convicted Jews reiterate their specious claim: **Abraham is our father**, by way of a negative claim: **We are not children of sexual immorality. We have one Father—even God.** (v.41) I wonder if we can unravel the mess that they are in? What they mean by **sexual immorality** is that they are not illegitimate children, that they are not the by-product of adultery, faithlessness, or infidelity. Perhaps, on a biological plane, their claim might be true; but on the spiritual plane—the one on which we are discoursing!—their claim is baseless: *their behavior, their works betray their true nature, their depravity*. Be that as it may, Jesus responds: **If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from the Father and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me.** (v.42)

From this we must gather that Jesus' identity (as the Son of God) and Jesus' mission (to save lost sinners) are one, inseparably linked. *But only those who are born of the Spirit can see, affirm and know it.*

John 8:43 Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. 44 You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

45 But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me.

46 Which one of you convicts me of sin?

If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? 47 Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.” (ESV)

“Ain't nobody born free.” And **only those who have been raised up with Jesus, and seated with him in heavenly places** (Eph. 2:6) get it. John 8 explicates Ephesians 2: we have a fuller understanding of what it means to be **dead in trespasses and sins . . . a slaves and sons of disobedience. . . walking in the passions of our flesh and carrying out the desires of the body . . . by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.** (vv. 2d-3)

That is why we must pray for all who are born enslaved to sin. We must pray them out and up! Our prayer should be an intercession: Lord, quicken; Lord, raise them

to life . . . awaken them. Use me, use anyone . . . anything to end their slumber and bring them true freedom and eternal life. We see how grave their circumstance is. Sever their relationship to the prince of the power of the air, forgive their trespasses and sins, have mercy on them as you have had on us! Cause the blood of Christ to prevail for them! Make the work of the cross their way of escape! Love them. Help them. For as it is they cannot help themselves and unless you interceded we are of little use to them. Act. Come, Lord Jesus. For we earnestly desire them to be saved and you to be glorified.

Amen.