

FREE INDEED
(Romans 8:1-4; John 8:34-36)

7.5.21

INTRODUCTION

Freedom. As a nation, on this fourth day of July, we are celebrating that most basic feature of our country: Freedom — and its very close relative, “liberty.” The very document that declared our freedom from England due to our desire to become an independent nation shares this fundamental idea: *“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness — Thomas Jefferson, Declaration of Independence, 1776.* When Jefferson used the word “unalienable,” he meant to say that the rights he would be referring to were seen as being incapable of being refused or rejected, or transferred to another, and therefore were being deemed by the new nation as absolute, and forever nonnegotiable.

Americans cherish their freedoms and liberties and display that affection in many ways. One of our favorite patriotic hymns, “America,” opens with the words: *“My country, ‘tis of thee, sweet land of liberty.”* A whole lot of us enjoy the freedom of the open road as we and our families use the holiday to grab some vacation time. And many of us recently experienced a very graphic picture of freedom when our governor recently declared the COVID-19 mask mandate finally over. And in a nation where people very proudly remind us of their rights — whether it be the right of free speech, or the right to bear arms, or whatever else it might be — those conversations don’t even exist unless the country declaring those rights is free to protect them.

Some of our greatest leaders have spoken so very eloquently about freedom and liberty. In his opening remarks at the dedication of a cemetery in Gettysburg, PA, in November 1863, President Lincoln began that brief speech — only 273 words in length — by noting that, some 87 years prior, *“our fathers brought forth upon this continent, a new nation, conceived in liberty.”* In fact, in the final sentence of this treasured piece, Lincoln expressed his fondest hope, *“that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom.”*

Some 78 years later, another leader renowned for his eloquence, Franklin D. Roosevelt, expressed his idea of freedom while giving his State of the Union speech to Congress in January 1941. In that speech, given while Europe and Asia were convulsed in war, he looked beyond that frightening moment in history to his vision of a future world, as he said, *“founded upon four essential human freedoms. The first is freedom of speech and expression. The second is freedom of every person to worship God in his own way. The third is freedom from want. The fourth is freedom from fear.”* As he expressed these freedoms in terms of applying both to everyone in the world and anywhere in the world, these four famous freedoms became the philosophical foundation for the United Nations.

And some 20 years later, in his first words as president, John F. Kennedy said: *“We observe today not a victory of party but a celebration of freedom,”* later addressing all those listening around the nation and around the world: *“Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend,*

oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty.” Wow — not only might freedom be costly, but that president was saying that this nation would be willing to foot the bill. Freedom must be really valuable — and extremely cherished. And, for Americans, it is.

The dictionary defines freedom as “the power or right to act, speak or think as one wants without hindrance or restraint,” and liberty as “the state of being free within society from oppressive restrictions imposed by authority on one’s way of life, behavior, or political views.” The fact is, that has always been one of the great attractions of this country to people around the world — that, in coming here, they could live, work and play in a place built on those understandings. In fact, the very monument that welcomes people to the United States through New York City — the Statue of Liberty — contains these words of that specific kind of welcome: “*Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free*” — Emma Lazarus, “The New Colossus” (1883).

All of these are great words, reflecting the awesome blessing God has so graciously granted us by placing us in this country, a particular blessing for which we should be particularly thankful. As Telly Savalas playing in the 1970s crime drama, “Kojak,” once observed: “This may not be the greatest country in the world, but it sure beats whatever’s in second place.”

But the Bible teaches us about another freedom, a greater liberty, than anything that will ever be found in this world. While Roosevelt’s “Four Freedoms” were a vision and a hope for a future time, the freedoms we have been given in Christ are realities — things we can know for certain right now. And they are freedoms that will last for eternity. Many of us know from studying American history what freedom looks like here, but let’s take a few moments to study what the Bible has to say about freedoms Christ offers, about the liberty that He purchased on the cross, as we celebrate this day dedicated to those two priceless ideals. But **let’s begin with a moment of prayer.**

TEXT (Romans 8:1-4; John 8:34-36)

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus — Paul, Romans 8:1.

OK; first for some Biblical context — which is necessary because Paul starts chapter 8 with the word “therefore,” indicating that he is presenting a conclusion, and that conclusion is based on what he has been teaching toward the end of the previous chapter. Paul had just finished presenting himself as a prime example of what is going on spiritually in all our lives; he says this: ***For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do — this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. . . . What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? — Paul, Romans 7:18-20, 24.***

Paul is pointing out the awful conundrum that has existed since the Garden of Eden: A sinful, imperfect humanity tasked with obeying the law of a sinless, perfect God. That is the great impossibility, made even more impossible by the fact, as David so clearly pointed out: ***Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me — David, Psalm 51:5;*** in other words, I’m a sinner before my feet even hit the ground. Add to that the sad truth that

Paul wrote just a few short chapters previous, that *all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God* — *Paul, Romans 3:23*. Talk about the irresistible force — sin — meeting the immovable object — the perfectly complete holiness of God. And David makes it so clear: *For You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness; no evil can dwell with You* — *David, Psalm 5:4 (NASB2020)*. Pardon my grammar, but it don't look good. But then that merciless, unchanging, unyielding truth concerning our wicked sin nature comes face-to-face with that same God, now driven by something greater than our sins — the power of His mercy, His grace, and a love beyond our wildest imagination, as Paul so joyfully writes: *Thanks be to God, who delivers me (from all that wretchedness of mine that I've just explained) through Jesus Christ our Lord!* — *Paul, Romans 7:25a*. Now that's something to celebrate!

All of which brings us back to Paul's triumphant conclusion, announcing to all of us that, because of what Jesus accomplished on the cross, *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus* — *Paul, Romans 8:1*. Remember what we had read to us earlier, Jesus reading from the prophet Isaiah while attending a synagogue service in Nazareth? *“The Spirit of the Lord is on Me, because He has anointed Me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”* And then, with every eye trained on Him, He said: *“Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing”* — *Luke 4:18-19, 21b (quoting Isaiah 61:1-2a)*. That was Christ's way of saying, “Mission accomplished; Isaiah's words are completed.” Because of His total devotion to the will of His Father and His plan of salvation, simply by Jesus being on the planet, the ultimate reason for His coming was as good as done. So, because of the work of God completed through Christ as prophesied by Isaiah, *“to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke”* — *God speaking, Isaiah 58:6b*, Paul's conclusion is the awe we read in these words. Along with Paul, we have been delivered.

And delivered from what? Condemnation — both from our sinful nature, and from Satan's accusations against us. Those accusations have now been destroyed *for those who are in Christ Jesus*. And the Greek informs us of how complete that deliverance from the condemnation of sin is: There is literally “not even one” sin with which we can be condemned, “not even one” fail to which Satan can point and accuse — which means that condemnation which, in the Greek, comes from a legal term meaning “an adverse sentence or verdict,” is silenced. It has to be; for those who are in Christ Jesus, all the sins that would have required that adverse sentence or verdict have been erased. There is no crime for which a Christian can be sentenced because there is no charge remaining on the books — “not even one.” Never was the sentence, “We find the defendant NOT guilty,” more appropriate than in this case. And what does the judge say upon hearing a verdict of “not guilty”? “The prisoner is now free.”

So, our first freedom: FREEDOM FROM CONDEMNATION. Which also means, icing on the cake so to speak, that we are freed from having to revisit old sins. Our past is clean, our present is clean, and our future is clean. Talk about a clean sweep!

So why are we free from condemnation? Why does being “in Christ Jesus” make any difference? Paul explains in the next verse: ***[T]hrough Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death — Paul, Romans 8:2.*** So what he is saying is that Jesus enabled the Holy Spirit to take up residence in our lives, that residency setting us free from the requirements of the law because the indwelling of the Holy Spirit allows us to be seen as meeting the requirements of the law. In other words, this is all about what Jesus accomplished, and nothing whatsoever about what we might accomplish. We have been changed from the “filthy rags” by which Isaiah described us in Isaiah 64 to an unspotted, unblemished “garment” reflecting the purity of Christ Himself. You see, the law of the Spirit is synonymous with the power of the Spirit. We are now indwelt by something besides our sinful nature. We are now empowered by Christ’s spirit, allowing us to be enabled to live a life pleasing to God, reflecting the life of Christ that accomplished so completely that very same thing — living a life pleasing to God.

Which brings us to our second freedom: FREEDOM FROM HAVING TO FULFILL THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE LAW. Paul explained it this way while preaching in a synagogue during his first missionary journey: ***“Through [Jesus] everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses” — Paul, preaching in Pisidian Antioch, Acts 13:39.*** By the Holy Spirit indwelling us, the perfect law of God, perfectly fulfilled by Christ, is now just as perfectly fulfilled in us. Good thing, too; we couldn’t meet the requirements of the law if we tried.

And then Paul continues writing to Rome: ***For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit — Paul, Romans 8:3-4.***

So, what’s happening here? Once sin entered the picture, the law became powerless in terms of salvation. The law is necessary because it makes us aware of sin, but that know-ledge by itself doesn’t save us; it only condemns us. And we would be stuck in that place if something wasn’t done. So, Paul explains what God did, that we were helpless to do: He provided a sin offering — an offering so complete that it offered to wash away the sins of the entire world. He made His Son that sin offering, pouring every last bit of all our sins on Jesus so that He would receive every last bit of condemnation that sin deserved. So there is therefore now no condemnation for us because God poured all His condemnation on His Son.

Which brings us to our third freedom: FREEDOM FROM HAVING TO PAY FOR OUR SINS. Jesus did that, once for all, once for every. That’s the offer that God made through the cross to every single person on the planet — that every last righteous requirement of the law has been satisfied for us if we live with Jesus Christ in us.

And that also means — little bonus freedom here — that, with being freed from paying for our sins, we are simultaneously freed from the fear of death. Death is no longer something to be feared but, instead, something to look forward to. Have you ever been jealous of somebody who has died who you knew was saved? You can be. Why? Because death brings us into the presence of God. That’s why Paul was so excited in sharing with the Philippians:

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain — Paul, Philippians 1:21. The ultimate “sting” of death — the fear — is replaced by something infinitely greater because it’s based on Christ Himself — the confident hope of life everlasting — in the very presence of God.

And now from Paul’s words in Romans, we’ll jump backwards to the gospel of John, where Jesus puts His own words to the freedom with which He offers to grace us, beginning with:

“Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin — Jesus Christ, John 8:34.

That is an incredibly humbling thought — that, no matter our brains, our talent, our bank accounts, no matter anything, the best, the very best, that we could ever hope to be on our own would be a slave to sin. And, as if to underscore Christ’ point, our slavery to sin is one of the most consistent themes you will find in the entire Bible. The Old Testament tells us:

The evil deeds of the wicked ensnare them; the cords of their sins hold them fast —

Solomon, Proverbs 5:22. It is just as Peter would describe it many centuries later: ***[P]eople are slaves to whatever has mastered them — II Peter 2:19b,*** which very much echoes

something Paul said earlier in his letter to Rome: ***[Y]ou are slaves of the one you obey —***

Paul, Romans 6:16a. And what’s worse, as slaves to sin, as Christ pointed out, ***Now a slave has no permanent place in the family — Jesus Christ, John 8:35a.*** We are separated from God both here and in eternity. Yet, upon coming into the family of God, Jesus says that, at that point, we belong to the family of God ***forever.*** As He said: ***“[A] son belongs to [the family] forever” — Jesus Christ, John 8:35b.***

And then Christ concludes with some of the greatest words in Scripture: ***“So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” — Jesus Christ, John 8:36.*** So because Christ set us free from sin, that freedom will also last ***forever.*** That simply underscores how complete is the truth and certainty of what Jesus has accomplished. Nobody, anytime, anywhere, will ever know a greater, more permanent freedom than the freedom we find in the life, death, resurrection and salvation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Which brings us to one more freedom: FREEDOM TO KNOW ETERNITY IN THE

PRESENCE OF GOD. Paul explained the final, ultimate process so well: ***You have been set***

free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. . . . But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life — Paul, Romans 6:18, 22. There is no better outcome than that!

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APPLICATION

So, as we look back at these four freedoms, we also see that in being freed from sin, we have now become ***slaves of righteousness*** because, as Christians, we are now ***slaves of God.*** There are some interesting dynamics in the Christian life — freed to be slaves, surrendering our lives to be free. But we need to remember that our being able to be slaves of God is wholly performed by God’s grace, given us every day through His Son’s Holy Spirit, which continues to teach us and guide us in a life that daily will become more pleasing to the Father. This is a slavery of adoration and praise because, by what Jesus did, we have been given life where no life was possible — which means we get to live, no matter our circumstances, by continuing to rejoice in the freedoms our gracious Father has granted us through our Lord Jesus Christ. All praise, honor and glory to Him!

And while these freedoms are ours to be able to enjoy right now, we have something beyond our wildest imaginations waiting for us — and that is eternity in heaven. And while, as a Christian as well as a pastor I will always speak out when I see our society moving in a way that is contrary to Biblical faith, I am also aware that, as great as this country truly is, it is a product of this world. If that is so, just as surely as heaven and earth will pass away, America will one day pass away — which means we have even more reason to focus our hearts and minds and lives not on what is, but on what is to come. And what is to come will be permanent and perfect — and forever. Not a bad future to look forward to, huh?

CONCLUSION

What a mighty God we serve — reminding us of one of the greatest takeaways we will ever know which we shared last week: We serve an all-powerful God, our Father due to an all-powerful Son, who has filled us with an all-powerful Spirit. It is that everlasting power that continues to pour grace for every day and every tomorrow we will ever face, constantly reminding us of the God who loves us, who has saved us, and has an eternity waiting for us.

And that is the greatest freedom of all: That by God through Jesus Christ, we have been freed from the slavery of sin to be able to live in all the freedoms of faith in God through Christ — that by now being indwelled by the Holy Spirit, we are truly at liberty to worship God as King of kings and Lord of lords, and also to worship Him in relationship as our Father.

But I was thinking as God was leading me in putting this message together: There is likely not anything new here, likely not anything you haven't heard many times before. But I can think of no greater way to celebrate our national Independence Day than by having your own life surrendered to God through Jesus Christ, beginning your own life of independence from sin and all its consequences, trading all that in for a life accompanied by Christ through His Holy Spirit while waiting for the day when God through His Son calls us all home. This side of heaven, that decision will never be too late. If your life has that need, and if those words are speaking to you, right here, right now, come see me after the service. Through God's grace and power, let's make that right.

In the meantime, on this great Independence Day, and on every day, as Christians, we can revel in being free from condemnation, free from the requirements of the law, free from having to pay for our sins, and free to anticipate the incredible eternity we have to look forward to in the presence of God Himself, possibly singing His praise at that time from one of the great traditional spirituals, which concludes: "Free at last, free at last, thank God Almighty, we are free at last!" Let's pray!