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"Freedom Worth Celebrating"

John 8:31-38; Romans 6:5-7

Introduction:

The Fourth of July is a day of patriotic songs

It's a day of warm sentiments celebrating the freedoms that we enjoy.

Freedom is a really a strange thing.

When you don't have it, you desperately want it.

When you do have it, you take it for granted.

So, once a year it is good to think about how we got to where we are today.

It is good to consider how different things would be if the Revolutionary War had never been fought.

We have come into this place this morning to Celebrate our freedom we have in the United States of America . . .

And we've also come here to worship and celebrate the Lord Jesus Christ.

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I propose this morning to begin with to talk about another freedom that is worth celebrating.

In fact, I would contend that it is a more significant freedom than the one we celebrate in our nation today.

In several places in the Bible we read that becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ is often called "***being set free***".

For example, in John 8:31-36 we read,

"To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?" Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."

This is a message we need to affirm on days like the 4th of July.

Most Americans would respond like the Jews.

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Any hint that they are not already free would be met with scoffing and disdain.

But as Jesus said to his countryman, so we say to ours, "***when the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.***"

Now these are easy words to say . . . but what do they mean?

Today I want to remind us of what we are set free FROM and what we are free FOR.

I. WHAT WE ARE SET FREE FROM

Before we can celebrate being free, we need to understand what we were freed from.

The Colonists back in the times of the Revolutionary War certainly knew what they wanted freedom from.

They wanted to be free from state religion,
They wanted to be free from taxation without representation, and
They wanted to be free from being controlled by a distant land.

These were some of the things they wanted to be free from.

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As Christians it is valuable for us to note what we have been freed from.

First - We are Set Free from Sin

In Romans 6 we are told that when we place our trust in Christ we are set free from sin.

1 "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? 2 God forbid. How shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer in sin?"

Now, there are some who would raise an eyebrow at these words.

Why? Because many in church circles who would say that sin is anything but dead in our life and experience.

Folks, listen to me, no where in my Bible or yours does it say that we are saved to keep on sinning.

But I want us to see what others have to say about this:

Paul said in verse 11

11 "In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus."

Peter said in I Peter 2:24

24 “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.”

We have died to sin's penalty.

When we place our trust in Jesus Christ we are receiving what He has done for us.

The Bible tells us that in Jesus **"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God"** (2 Cor. 5:21)

In simple terms: Jesus was our substitute.

He was punished for our crimes.

An innocent man took our place.

He gave Himself so we could go free.

He paid our debt.

He suffered our punishment.

When we become a citizen of the United States of America we become the beneficiary of the work done by others.

We are granted freedom that someone else worked for.

In the same way, when we pledge our allegiance to Jesus Christ (and mean it) we are free from the judgment of sin.

Secondly, We are saved from Sin's Power.

This is the one we have trouble believing.

Let me see if I can paint you a picture.

Before the Revolutionary War the colonists were subject to the control and regulations imposed by England.

They could impose taxes and place other restrictions on these Colonists.

But when freedom had been won, England no longer had any power over the Americans.

Now, the effects of Great Britain's influence certainly remained.

There were habits, beliefs, traditions that continued to be practiced.

In some respects the Colonists were still British (or European) in the way they lived. However, the British no longer had any real power over them.

When Paul tells us in Romans 6 that "***anyone who has died has been freed from sin***" this is what he is talking about.

Sin no longer has any authority over us even though the pattern of sin may still have an effect on our lives.

It takes a while to learn new patterns and behaviors, but we no longer HAVE to sin, we no longer desire to sin.

Sin's authority over us has been overthrown.

That is why the Apostle Paul said in Romans 8:1

1 "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus"

The literal translation here is: "***Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who do not live according to the sinful nature but live according to the Spirit***"

Now . . . practically this **means several things,**

We must remind ourselves that we are free . . . that the old way/the old self has no real power over us.

Destructive habits can be overcome! We have the Holy Spirit's power to overcome habits that are hurting to our physical bodies and emotions.

But how do we do this?

1. We should immerse ourselves in the Word of God.
2. One of the best ways to overcome something negative is to replace it with something positive.
3. We must learn the ways of God and see that God's way is so much more superior than the way we used to live in sin.
4. We should immediately confess sin when it gains victory in our lives and strive to live as people freed by grace.

The Apostle John gives us instructions on how to do this: I John 2:1-2

1 “My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. 2 He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.”

But Sin is not all we are set free from.

Thirdly - We are set Free from Fear.

The most common command in Scripture is this one, **"Fear Not!"**

The Bible tells us that,

We do not need to fear death (Psalm 23:4; Hebrews 2:15)

We do not need to fear enemies (Psalm 3:6)

We do not need to fear adverse circumstances (Psalm 112:7; Proverbs 3:25)

We do not need to fear criticism (Isa. 51:7)

We do not fear God's judgment (1 John 4:17)

Let's be honest. It is a lot easier to say, "Don't be afraid" than it is to not be afraid.

How many times were we told by our parents, "don't be afraid" **but we still were afraid?**

We are told by a Doctor that "there is nothing to be afraid of" as we go into surgery . . . but, we are still afraid.

Why? It is because of the unknown.

The Bible's counsel is simple: we can face the unknown, unafraid because we do not face it alone.

We face unknown situations holding the hand of the Almighty God.

He is the Ruler of the universe.

Death is not feared because Jesus has overcome death.

Our enemies cannot scare us because ***"greater is He who is in me than He who is in the world."***

We can face hard times because we know that ***"all things are working for the good of those who love God and are called according to his***

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purpose" and because we know **"nothing will separate us from the love of God."**

We do not fear the criticism of men because Jesus says the one opinion that matters is the opinion of the Lord.

We do not fear God's judgment because Christ has suffered in our place.

These things are truth.

The challenge for you and I is to learn to stand on the truth.

We learn to believe these things as we dare to trust God and find Him faithful to His Word.

God has promised to protect us, lead us, provide for us, and to see us home to **"the place He has prepared for us."**

Listen to me Believer - There is no need for worry or to have fear.

One more thing I want to share with you,

Fourth - We are Set Free From Our Past.

God's forgiveness gives us a new beginning.

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The Bible tells us that **"Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool."** (Isaiah 1:18).

In other words, even though we are deeply stained from a sinful life, God will make us clean and fresh again.

Don't you want to believe this?

Are there things in your past that you continue to beat yourself up over?

Don't you wish you could really believe that you were forgiven?

Let me speak boldly, my friend: "Stop doubting God!" Believe in His Word!

I know that there are people who have not (and perhaps will not) forgive you. I face that in my life.

I know that we sometimes don't forgive ourselves.

But we must remember that the Judge of the Universe has purged the charge from our sinful past record.

In God's eyes we have a new beginning.

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We have a fresh start!

We can't change the past . . . and we don't have to.

We CAN live differently from this day forward. This is what God has set us free for.

Now . . . if you think about it.

Isn't freedom from sin, freedom from fear and worry, and freedom from the past worth celebrating?

II. WHAT WE ARE SET FREE FOR

When our Founding Fathers signed the Declaration of Independence they were not just trying to be free FROM things.

They wanted to form a country that would allow people to speak freely, believe freely, and would allow individuals to govern themselves.

They were moving from something TO something.

This is also true of our Christian faith.

If we see Christianity only in terms of the past we have missed an important part of the equation.

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Christ did not only set us free FROM sin's penalty, sin's power, worry, fear, the past

He set us FREE to be Children of God.

He set us free for Godly living.

He set us free to live a life of Holiness.

The Hebrew writer said this in Hebrews 12:14

14 Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; for without holiness no one will see the Lord.

I Peter 1:16 says, ***“Because it is written, ‘Be holy; (for I the Lord God) am holy.’”***

We are Set Free to Live in Fellowship with God.

Righteousness and Holiness are synonymous with one another.

- If God tells us to be Righteous – He is literally telling us to be Right with Him.
- If God is holy, which He is – and He tells us to be Holy – then we must strive to live a Life of Holiness.
- And folks, there is no way you and I can be holy until we have experienced the fullness of God's Holy Spirit.

Now many people in the church world don't find this picture appealing.

They see heaven (the place of ultimate fellowship with God) as a place where a bunch of sober and smug looking people exist in an atmosphere of complete boredom.

The image of angels strumming their harps on a cloud is not one most people are attracted to.

But living in fellowship with God is not a matter of walking around with a cherubic smiling and singing hymns. No, it is something far more substantial.

It is having access to the God of the universe when we need guidance

It is constantly being in the presence of One who knows us, yet loves us

It is living with a security that comes from knowing He will never leave us or forsake us

It is walking with one who never makes a mistake . . . His advice is always right, He will never disappoint us, and will always lead us in the way that is best for us.

It means being friends with the One who created, and is the source, of our joy. He is the one who puts the "life" in life.

It is having a perspective on life that helps us see beauty in the world and in the people around us

It is being empowered by the one who helps us to make a real difference in the lives of those around us.

It is living life with the eager anticipation of a life that is to come.

It is seeing aging not as "getting close to the end" but "getting close to home".

God has set us free to know a life that we didn't even know existed.

Mankind has always viewed God as One who was distant, unapproachable, detached.

But in Christ we draw near to God.

Let me ask you, have you ever

heard the whisper of God as He directs you in some fashion?

felt His peace in a time of crisis?

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Had the Bible come alive as if it were speaking just to you?

Been used by God to bring real change in the life of another?

Been brought to tears of joy as you considered the amazing character of His love and grace?

Found your burdens lightened as you sang of His goodness?

Felt a quiet confidence as you left the graveside of someone you loved?

If so, you have tasted some of what it means to live as a Child of the King.

You have experienced some of the richness of His fellowship.

It is not dreary.

It is not boring.

On the contrary, it is the most wonderful experience the world has to offer.

We are Free to Draw on His Strength David prayed, "**Keep me as the apple of your eye;**

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hide me in the shadow of your wings." (Psalm 17:8).

Scores of times in the Bible we read about being under God's wings.

Do you understand that picture?

It is the picture of protection.

God will protect us.

He will stand by our side.

The prophet Isaiah (40:28-31) pens these immortal words,

"Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."

Do you hear what is being said?

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We do not face the world alone!

He is our strength.

When we are at the end of our rope, we are not at the end of our rope . . . because there is more than the rope holding us up!

There are times in life when we feel we can't go on.

There are times when the mountains seem too big.

But those are the times when we must realize that we do not face these things in our strength alone.

God stands with us.

Stephen Curtis Chapman puts it well,

His strength is perfect, when our strength is gone. He'll carry us when we can't carry on. Raised in His power, the weak become strong. His strength is perfect. His strength is perfect.

Do I speak to an exhausted saint?

Do I speak to one who feels so beaten up by life that they can no longer carry on?

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Then, dear friend, I urge you to draw on His power and strength.

Crawl up in His lap and let Him put His arms around you.

Hold tight to His hand.

Step back into the shadow of His wings.

He has promised that we will be ***"able to do all things through Christ who strengthens us."***

If you trust Him . . . you will get through this.

Don't look at the obstacle . . . look at the Lord.

Don't fret over the problem . . . rejoice over the One who will give you the strength you need.

This is one of the benefits you have in Christ.

There are so many other benefits of living in the freedom that comes in a relationship with Christ Jesus.

Truth is, we don't have any idea what all the benefits are.

But I do want to share with you the reflections of Charles Spurgeon.

Take note of the many benefits he lists.

you shall be free to call yourself God's child, you shall be free to say, "Abba, Father," without rebuke, you shall be free to claim the protection of that Father's house, and the provision of his bounty; you shall be free to come to his knees with all your trials and tell him all your grief's; you shall be free to plead his promises and to receive the fulfillment of them too; you shall be free to sit at his table, not as a servant is permitted sometimes to sit down when the feast is over to eat leftovers, but you shall sit there as a well-beloved son, to eat the fatted calf while your Father with you, eats, drinks, and is merry; you shall be free to enter into the Church on earth, the mother of us all; free to enjoy all her ordinances; free to share in all those benefits which Christ has given to his beloved; and when you die, you shall be free to enter into the rest which remains for the people of God; free to enter the New Jerusalem which is above; free to her streets of joy; free to her great banquet which lasts for ever; free to the heart of God, to the throne of Christ, and to the blessedness of eternity. [Metropolitan Pulpit vol. 10]

CONCLUSIONS

I hope you agree that although the freedom we celebrate as citizens of this land is wonderful, it is nothing compared to the all-encompassing freedom that we have received in Christ.

This morning we have chosen to dwell on this greater freedom.

As we have done so we have been led to some inevitable questions.

The first is this: **Have you entered into the freedom that is offered by God through Christ?**

Have you pledged your allegiance to the Lamb of God?

Are you looking to Him alone as your means of salvation?

Have you turned to Him with the rebellion of your heart and asked Him to cleanse you through the work of Christ?

If not, you don't understand the nature of this freedom.

It is possible that you have been left disinterested by this whole topic.

But it is also possible that God's Spirit is at work in you and that you hear these words and your heart burns to know this freedom.

If so, then it is time to stand with Jesus.

It is time to turn to him with whatever faith you have and give your life to His control.

If you will do this . . . you will truly be free for the first time in your life.

You might want to use words like these,

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I recognize that I am a slave to sin. I have run from you for long enough. Today I place my trust in the work of Christ. Today I receive His sacrifice on my behalf. Today I declare Him to be the Lord of life and invite Him to be the Lord of my life. Lord, set me free. Set me free to walk with you for the rest of my life. Amen.

If you prayed that prayer, then your spiritual Declaration of Independence has been signed and you have a greater reason to celebrate than at any other time in your life thus far.

Welcome to the family of God!

But there is a second question.

This one is for those who are walking in freedom. Brothers and sisters, when was the last time you celebrated what God has done for you?

How long has it been since you wept for joy at the glory of what you have been given in Christ?

How long has it been since you kicked back and laughed or smiled at the wonder that God loves you.

This Fourth of July I hope you will make this an extra special holiday.

While everyone is celebrating their national freedom step back in the depth of your soul and give a cheer to the Lord of heaven.

When you have your cook out, in addition to being grateful for the food on the grill, give thanks for the Bread of Life.

When you place your hand over your heart in honor of our flag and country, remind yourself of your greater allegiance to the King of King and Lord of Lords.

Celebrate with zeal. And when people ask why you are celebrating this way, tell them "I'm celebrating My Independence Day" with a knowing twinkle in your eye. Who knows, they may ask what you mean by that . . . and then you can tell them how to be really free.