

Freedom

July 4, 2021

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Happy July 4th to the Saint Bartholomew's family! July 4th is always a day that I look forward to every year because I get to hang out with family, eat good food, play games, watch fireworks. Lots of fun. And I really feel blessed to be in the United States and having been born here. We definitely have our issues. But I believe that the Lord has used this nation for good. For example, consider how the outcome of World War II was impacted by U.S. involvement. There is no way to know what the outcome would have been without the U.S. But I think that God used the United States to help the Allies defeat Hitler and Japan. And I thank God that the Allies did defeat Hitler, Nazi Germany, and Japan.

July 4th reminds us about three things that we'll be talking about today. Number one, that freedom is not free. There is always a cost. Two, that we are free from something and free for something. And three, that we have a responsibility to help others get free.

Now think back to 1776. It was a struggle to gain our freedom from the tyranny of the British Crown. It was a slow process. In fact, it took years to gain enough support in the colonies for freedom from the British. The people here endured much to gain that freedom, there was a cost to gain freedom. Many people lost their lives or livelihoods in the struggle to gain freedom. The signers of the Declaration of Independence knew what that cost would be. But they were all willing to pay that cost for the chance to be free. The same can be said of all those who gave their lives fighting the British in the Revolutionary War. The same can be said of all the men and women that have served in the armed forces. All of them have been willing to pay the price for freedom.

And with freedom comes the question of what we are to do with it. We are free from something but with that comes responsibility. In the case of the United States, after freedom was won, we were free from the tyranny of English rule, but we had a responsibility to use that freedom for some purpose; to help the citizens to be free, to stay free, to support the cause of freedom and to positively impact the world. How are we doing with that today?

And how are we doing with our responsibility to help others get free? Think back again to World War II. Europe was under the control of a socialist dictator, Hitler, and Mussolini his fascist ally. Meanwhile our friends in Europe, the British and the French, were wanting freedom. They needed help. We sent our troops in to fight for their freedom. We lived up to our responsibility to use our freedom to help others get free.

As I have already stated, I feel blessed to have been born in the United States; to be a US citizen. But if that is where our focus is we miss the mark. Because as disciples of Jesus Christ our real citizenship is in heaven. That is our primary citizenship. In effect, disciples of Christ are sojourners in this world. The only question is which citizenship has priority in our lives? Our temporal, earthly citizenship or our eternal, heavenly citizenship? So, if we love our U.S. citizenship more than our heavenly citizenship we fall from, "Look at what God has done through the U.S." to "Look at how great we are. We are great because we are American." The

fact is that God is great and we are His servants. And that holds true whether we, who are citizens of heaven, are also citizens of the U.S., or Great Britain, or China, or wherever else. If we are citizens of heaven, then we are servants of God first.

The basis of our citizenship in the United States is being born in the United States. But the basis of our citizenship in heaven is the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. Because without Him there is no remedy for sin. Sin separates us from God. It keeps us captive, in effect without Christ we all are slaves in need of freedom. Sin is tyrannical. It is King George III on steroids. Thanks be to God that Christ gave Himself up on the cross on our behalf to reconcile us to the Father. Because of Him we are free from the tyranny of sin. That freedom was not free. It cost.

All who believe in Christ, all who confess that He is Lord and believe that He rose from the dead will be saved (Romans 10:9). We are saved from eternal separation from God, what is called the second death. We are free, and He who the Son has set free, is free indeed (John 8:36).

We are free from the tyranny of sin. But remember that when we have freedom from something, we also have freedom for some purpose. What is that purpose? In a general sense, our purpose is to work for the kingdom of God. We are to spread the Gospel. And we are to live lives as servants of Christ and not as servants of sin. Paul stated this clearly in Romans 6:15-19.

What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be! Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness? But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification.

Without Christ we were all slaves to sin resulting in death. With Christ we have become slaves of obedience to Him resulting in righteousness. And what is the result of righteousness? Life. Freedom from the tyranny of sin, and freedom from death. Freedom to now devote ourselves to obedience to God's will. Freedom from, freedom to.

With freedom comes responsibility. Which is a quote attributed to Eleanor Roosevelt, and perhaps others have also said it. But it is really a biblical principle stated by Christ in Luke 12:48, "but the one who did not know it, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few. From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more." That verse is more commonly memorized as, "To whom much is given, much will be required."

We have been given freedom in this country by God. The bill of rights outline many of those freedoms. But with that freedom comes the responsibility to use those rights in a righteous manner. And not to fall into tyranny again. We cannot have a positive impact on the world if we allow ourselves to be subject to tyranny again. Because of Christ we have freedom from sin, which is true freedom. But we must use our freedom not to fall into sin again, but to live our lives with righteousness. We cannot make an impact for the Kingdom of God if we allow ourselves to be slaves to sin again.

Many U. S. citizens have given their lives for the cause of freedom. And we remember and honor their sacrifice by maintaining that freedom, by fighting for it ourselves, by reminding others of that freedom. In the same way, Jesus Christ gave His life for our freedom from sin. And we remember and honor His sacrifice by living for Him, by abhorring that which is evil and clinging to that which is good, and by spreading the good news of salvation to all.

It would be easy to give up. It would be easy to refuse to fight, and just surrender. But it would be wrong to do so. We could think about all the people that refuse to listen to the truth. But what did God say to Ezekiel? “I am sending you to them who are stubborn and obstinate children, and you shall say to them, “Thus says the Lord God.” As for them, whether they listen or not – for they are a rebellious house – they will know that a prophet has been among them.” Ezekiel 2: 4-5. We are to speak the truth to people whether they listen or not.

Their listening or not listening is on their head. The speaking is on ours. We have been set free from the law of sin and death. And we therefore have the responsibility to bear witness to the truth of the Gospel. Do not be concerned that people do not accept the truth. They are not really rejecting us, but rather they are rejecting Christ. And that is tragic because they need Him! Just as we need Him.

What would our lives be like without Christ? That is simple, we would be miserable. We would still be slaves to sin. We would be controlled by sin rather than by God. Does that work out well? No. It is tragic. Someone took the time to introduce us to Christ. Shouldn't we do the same for others no matter if they listen or not?

And we might be tempted to think about insults and difficulties that may come our way as a result of our witness. But that is just propaganda of the enemy. I am reminded of a scene from the movie, “Saving Private Ryan.”

Captain Miller and his small squad of soldiers, have to find Private Ryan who was attached to an airborne unit that dropped somewhere in Northern France just before D-Day. He has been discharged home because his three brothers have all died. The squad comes to a small town where a German says over a loudspeaker, “The Statue of Liberty is caput.” Captain Miller says, “The Statue of Liberty is caput. That's disconcerting.” But he does not allow the enemy propaganda to deter him from his mission.

Paul did not allow the enemy propaganda to deter him from his God-given mission. He knew the freedom he had in Christ, and he wanted others to know that freedom too. So he would not allow his own weaknesses, or insults, or persecutions get in the way and even saw them as opportunities for God to work. That is why he said, “I am well content with

weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong." 2 Corinthians 12:10.

And that needs to be our attitude also. Striving forward always in Christ. Running the race, living in the freedom that we have in Christ, completing the mission that God has given to us.

Mission is the key word. The founding fathers of this nation fulfilled the mission they had to win freedom from the tyranny of the British crown. The United States, along with the allies, fulfilled the mission they had to win freedom for the citizens of Europe from the tyranny of Hitler and Mussolini. But most importantly, Jesus Christ fulfilled the mission given to Him by God the Father, to win freedom from sin, and its consequence of eternal separation from God, for all who would put their trust in Him.

On this July 4th, and when this day comes every year, always think about three things. Think about the men and women that have given their lives so that we can be free, and about Christ who gave His life that we can be truly free. Think about what we are free from and what we are to do with that freedom as a nation, and about how we are free from sin and have a responsibility to live upright and godly lives. And think about all those that pursued freedom sharing that need with others, and about how we, citizens of heaven who are truly free, need to share the Gospel with others. All of that summed up in one word, 'mission.' That is what July 4th reminds us of as those who are sojourners in this life and whose real citizenship is in heaven.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen!