

The Great Call of Freedom

It's been a couple of Sundays now since I preached. Last Sunday I could barely squeak out a sound and I am grateful and thankful for your prayers and that I am able to be back in the pulpit today. You may remember that two weeks ago we talked about the fact we have been called to live according to a higher standard because we have been called to serve a greater purpose and the only way we can live our lives by that higher standard and fulfill that greater purpose is by living a Spirit empowered life. That sums up the sermon in one long sentence.

Last week we celebrated Independence Day. How blessed we are to enjoy such incredible freedom in this nation. I've been in nations where freedom was greatly restricted and I'm always grateful and relieved to be back in America. We need to be careful and vigilant or the day may soon come when some of our cherished freedoms are taken from us. We must never take our freedom for granted.

Just to remind you, a little civics lesson this morning, that part of the freedom relies upon the first amendment that states, **“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”**

Those freedoms have been promised to us; the right to those freedoms has been guaranteed to us by our founding documents and the good faith of the citizens of the United States. But those freedoms have been secured for us and delivered to us by the sacrifices of men and women who have been willing to serve their country and their fellow citizens and to even lay down their lives when called upon in honor and in service to their country. Freedom isn't cheap. It comes at a great cost.

I know Ric recognized our service men and women and veterans last week, but if you don't mind, if you have served the United States in one of our Armed Forces at any time, would you stand so we can recognize you and show our appreciation to you.

You recognize that freedom comes at a cost. Sometimes at a great cost. But it is not just those who wear a uniform that bore the cost of freedom. Let me share a copy of a letter I have that explains something of that cost to a member of one of our families. Nell Artz is one of our faithful members. She and her sister Ruth Christopher,

were both members here at Carbondale, but they along with their brothers grew up in the West Tulsa Assembly of God. She had two brothers, Cy and her youngest brother, the baby of their family was named Ermal. Their last name was Pinkley but the guys in his squadron called him "Pinkey". He was a navigator flying bombing missions over Germany in WWII. I want to read part of a couple of letters that Nell's mother, Mrs. Pinkley received from members of his crew. (Read letters)

We honor Ermal Pinkley, and the members of his family that are here today, and the families of all of those who gave their lives in the cause of freedom.

As believers and followers of Christ, the one who gave his life for us that we might experience freedom from the sin and guilt and shame that comes from our sinfulness – we understand that **The freedom we enjoy is free, but it is not cheap.** It was won for us at a terrible price, the death of the sinless Son of God. Freedom is free but it is not cheap.

We also understand that **Freedom demands sacrifice.** Countless thousands of men and women have sacrificed so much including their health and their life so we could be free. World War I and II and Korea and VietNam and the Gulf War and Iraqi Freedom and more. So many sacrifices. And our freedom from sin and guilt and shame required the ultimate sacrifice as Christ took our place upon the cross and bore the penalty for our sins. Freedom requires sacrifice.

In addition we also recognize that freedom requires a choice to remain free. Ermal Pinkley and thousands like him gave his life so that Europe could be free from Nazi terrorism and so that America could remain free. But Europe is starting to make choices that will likely eliminate some of its freedoms. America may be headed down that same path. **Freedom purchased demands a continual choice to remain free.**

The same is true when we speak of our freedom in Christ. Freedom was secured for us by the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, but freedom purchased for us demands a continual choice to remain free. Let me show you what the Bible says about this. Turn with me to Galatians 5. Beginning at verse 1 the bible says, "**It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.**"

Paul continues in verse 13. "**You, my brothers, were called to be free. But**

do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.”

We have been called to freedom but let's understand what that freedom means for us. Let me share with you a few observations about this passage of Scripture.

First of all, Paul says it was for freedom that Christ has set us free. When we look at the context in which Paul makes this statement, he is speaking to a church that has been influenced by teachers that were telling them in order to be saved they would also have to keep all of the Jewish laws and rituals as well. It was not simply salvation through faith in Christ but it was faith plus the keeping of all the Jewish laws. They were being pulled back into the bondage of trying to earn God's love and acceptance. Paul says Christ has set us free from trying to earn God's favor. We are now accepted by God and we have access to him and his help, we enjoy his mercy and his favor through faith in Christ alone, our Savior and Lord.

We are no longer burdened down trying to earn God's favor. We couldn't ever do it. We couldn't ever be faithful enough or perfect enough or holy enough to keep the law in its entirety. But Jesus met the demands of the law for us, died in our place and for our sins and now he has called us to come walk in his freedom. Now we can take off the yoke of bondage that has us bent down in shame and the guilt of our sinfulness and we can stand up-right in his righteousness, his "up-rightness."

So this is the freedom that Christ has secured for us. This is the freedom to which he calls us. Freed from the curse of the law and free to walk in the assurance of his grace. I am saved by grace through faith in Christ. Hallelujah.

We are called to freedom and as we said earlier, we must recognize that freedom is free but it is not cheap. It cost the death of Christ on Calvary. And the freedom secured for us requires our continual choice to remain free.

So Paul tells us to stand firm in that freedom and don't become burdened again by a yoke of slavery. Don't go back to thinking we can earn God's favor by our good works. Salvation is through Christ alone.

"Great. So I'm free from guilt and shame and free from the curse of the law so now I can live as I choose. I'm going to heaven because I'm saved and it doesn't matter how I act or how I live. Right?"

Well, what does the bible say? We read it in verse 13. **“You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature...”** Here is where we continually choose to remain free. This is where we exercise diligence by standing firm. God has called us to freedom, but we are not to allow our freedom to become an opportunity for sin to gain ground in our lives. The Greek word being translated here in this passage is used in a military context to refer to a base of operations. The bible is saying don't allow your freedom to become a base of operations from which the enemy can gain an advantage in your life and then pull you back into slavery and bondage to sinfulness.

John Stott wrote, **“Christian freedom is freedom *from* sin, not freedom *to* sin. It is an unrestricted liberty of approach to God as his children, not an unrestricted liberty to wallow in our own selfishness.”** ...John Stott

Freedom is a wonderful thing but remember freedom requires a continual choice to remain free. It requires diligence and appropriate restraint to make sure that liberty doesn't become license to indulge our sinful nature. When that happens, liberty turns to license and eventually back into slavery and bondage. (We could probably say the current financial mess we are in is an example of allowing our freedom to take us back into bondage because we failed to exercise restraint.)

The freedom Christ calls us to, the liberty we enjoy in Christ as we said, is freedom from sin, not freedom to sin. It is not liberty to indulge our flesh - our sinful nature - as we please. Rather than indulging our sinful nature and desires, what does the Bible say we are to do? The bible says **“Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.” Galatians 5:24.** We have declared that we will stand firm in our freedom. We will not allow our lower nature, our sinful nature, to rule over us again. We are free to make godly choices and we will not submit to bondage again to sin or sinfulness. We understand that we have freedom to come to God through Christ and freedom to live by the Spirit but we will not use that freedom to indulge our sinful nature again. We will choose to remain free!

Not only will we not use our Christian freedom to indulge our sinful nature, but the second thing Paul tells us is we will not use our freedom to take advantage of our neighbor. Paul wrote, **“But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature;**

rather serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' Galatians 5:13-14

Allow me once again to quote from John Stott's commentary on this passage: **"Christian freedom is no more freedom to do as I please irrespective of the good of my neighbor than it is freedom to do as I please in the indulgence of my flesh. It is freedom to approach God without fear, not freedom to exploit my neighbor without love." ... John Stott**

Here is what Christian freedom is all about. It is freedom to serve God in obedience and freedom to serve others in love. It is not the freedom to serve ourselves, it is the freedom to serve others. Interesting isn't it? It is one of the paradoxes of our faith. He has set us free so we can become servants of God and servants to others.

We are free, not to indulge ourselves but to obey God. We are free, not to indulge our sinful nature but to honor God and serve others, to bless God and to bless others, to please God and to help others. We have been called to freedom in order that through the help of the Holy Spirit we can fulfill the law. Notice that. The entire law is fulfilled or summed up in this single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Serving God as we serve others. Loving God as we love others.

Paul is writing to a church remember when he says **"If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other."** **Galatians 5:15.** He is telling us there are no winners when Christians fight and war with each other. No one wins in a church fight because we are the body of Christ. Fighting with each other means fighting against the other parts of our body. You lose with every blow that is thrown and landed.

We've been called to freedom. Not freedom to hurt each other, not freedom to sin against God or against others, but we've been called to freedom to bless and serve and live for Jesus with all our heart and soul and mind and strength and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

Paul writes in verse 22-23, **"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law."** You are free to indulge in those things. There is no law

against these things, no restraint required. No one will ever say “I think you are too loving, too joyful, too peaceful, too patient, too kind, too good, too faithful, too gentle, too self-controlled.”

We’ve been called to a life of liberty. Go crazy in loving Jesus and loving others. Go wild with joy and peace. Go berserk this weekend in exercising patience with your kids and your spouse. You are free to show kindness to the max all day long.

This is the freedom to which we have been called: Freedom to approach God not based on works but by his grace. Freedom, not to indulge our sinful nature but to run wild in his mercy and grace and love and joy and peace and patience and kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Freedom to love and serve our neighbors, our friends and family, the members of Christ’s body. Freedom to love one another as Christ loved us.

This is what Christian freedom is all about. This is the freedom for which Christ has made us free. We are free. Reverence the price required. Honor the sacrifice made. And celebrate the life of freedom to which we have been called.