

- ***READ I Peter 2:9-16*** This past Tuesday, the vast majority of people in this country took some time to celebrate the founding and birth of this this great land. The creation of this country was founded upon the ideals of seeking a land, a nation that was free. The founding fathers and those who supported them wanted, more than anything else, to break the chains of oppression that they felt under the rule of a king thousands of miles away and across a great ocean. Since that day in 1776, there has not been a country on this earth that has enjoyed the prosperity or freedom that this country has. The United States of American is not a perfect nation by any means. We have our struggles because we were founded by and are supported by mere men, yet...I don't believe that many of us who are citizens of this nation would voluntarily give up that citizenship and the blessings of free speech, the right to bear arms, the ability to vote, and of course the ability to assemble for citizenship in some other place.
- However, might I suggest to you that while our citizenship as Americans is grand and comes with many blessings and benefits, the truth is that those of us who are in Christ...well we are a part of a greater people, a greater nation, a greater body that is God's own possession. Did you see that as we read **I Peter 2:9-16**? In this great text, the Apostle Peter reminds the reader that those who belong to God are a people who have received mercy. He says that the reality is that we are aliens and strangers in this land. Now, this doesn't mean that we are free to do anything we'd like since we're not firstly earthly citizens... he says that we need to respect those in authority. There are some who see freedom as a means of doing anything and everything they would like without any fear of opposition or consequence, but that just isn't true. Even in a nation of freedom there are laws, and the same is true for those who are citizens of God's heavenly Kingdom. Notice that Peter says in **v.16** that we are not to use our freedom for evil, but living as free men means that we are bondslaves of God.
- To be a bondslave of God simply means that we are now under His authority. Let's ask the question, if we are now under the authority of God as people of His chosen race, His royal priesthood, His holy nation... then what were we a part of before? The answer would be that we were kept under bondage by sin, and what a terrible place that was for any of us to be. Thankfully, through God's divine wisdom in sending Jesus, we now get to experience and enjoy Freedom in Christ for the chains of sin have been broken and we have been freed! Sure, we enjoy great freedoms as Americans, but we recognize that there are many disciples who don't enjoy these freedoms across. What keeps them going? What encourage can they find in their situation? I think it is the same encouragements that we ought to look to and focus on as Christians in this country. Let's take a few minutes to consider the Freedoms that we enjoy in Christ Jesus. Let's begin by looking at what we are freed from and then what this new freedom allows for us to do.

PRAYER**I. Free from the bondage of sin.**

- A. Paul lays forth a simple truth for us in **Romans 6:16**, and that truth is this...whoever we obey we are made the slave of. If we allow Satan and his temptations of our flesh to constantly win that battle then we are very much in the bondage of sin. Sin is our master, and it is who we obey and serve.
- B. In this situation we are powerless against sin, meaning we are powerless of ourselves to remove the stain of sin from our soul. Until that sin wiped or washed from us, we will continue to be in it bondage. We will continue to have no choice but to live in it and be under its burden and power. Thankfully, Jesus did something for us that can remedy our dire situation. Through His sacrifice, we can put our faith in Him, obey Him, and have the ability to be freed from the grips of Satan and sin.

- C. Few portions of Scripture paint a better picture of what this looks like than in **Romans 8**. Consider what Paul says on this idea of being freed from the bondage of sin by Jesus. (**Romans 8:1-17**) Notice a couple things specifically. Firstly, it is Jesus who sets us free from sin. (**v.2**) He did so because He first conquered sin in the flesh. (**v.3**) Secondly, whoever has his mind set on the flesh will continue to live in that way. As long as our focus is off of Jesus, we have no chance of going anywhere but towards the flesh. Thankfully Jesus, through His life, gave us the ability to not live according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. In this manner of living we have life! (**v.10**)
- D. That life, that freedom from sin will continue to be ours if we will continue to do those things that are according to the will of the Spirit of God. (**vv.12-17**) So in this life, freedom from sin means that we are not longer bound to sin because we don't live in that way, but we strive to live a life of righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ, and that faith brings us to a place where we live this life as free men.

II. Free from the eternal punishment of sin.

- A. But not only can we live this life as free men, but we can also look towards the next life with anticipation and not fear because freedom in Christ not only means we are freed from the bondage of sin, but we also are freed from the eternal punishment of sin. Back in **Romans 6:23**, Paul warns the Christians in Rome of what awaits them if they choose to submit themselves to sin. Remember, we get to choose who it is we will serve (**6:16**), and Paul let's them know that the choice to continually pursue sin will ultimately result in eventual eternal death.
- B. If they continued living as sinners, then they would earn their wage of eternal death...which is exactly what Satan wants. He wants all people to suffer with him for eternity in hell. However, Jesus offers freedom from this eternal punishment, and Paul discusses that a few verses before.
- C. **Romans 6:17-22** speaks to us about the transition that takes place from us formerly being slaves of sin, but we switched allegiances and now seek to serve God through Jesus. This means that we are seeking to live holy lives and to be sanctified. (**v.19**) Through living a sanctified life, we can come to obtain the grand benefit of eternal life instead of eternal death. Now, this doesn't mean that we will be freed from any immediate punishment or consequence of sin, but we can look forward with a happier outlook. The freedom in Christ allows us to look to the future in hope instead of fearing the punishment that awaits the sinner.

III. Free from the guilt of sin.

- A. But not only can we look to the future in hope, but we can truly leave the past behind us. The guilt of our past sins can be left in the rearview mirror and we no longer have to be burdened with that guilt for the power of Christ lifts that guilt of confessed and repented sin from us. Would you consider Paul's words on this thought from **Philippians 3** with me?
- B. This chapter of Paul's letter to the Philippians is all about moving forward. He begins this portion of his letter by considering his past. He considers all of his previous life before Christ, and that includes the horrible things he had done in persecuting the church. Paul hated his previous life, even referring to himself as the worst of sinners in **I Timothy 1:15**. Yet, he was able to move past the guilt of his previous sins by focusing his attention on the future and pressing towards it. (**vv.8-16**).
- C. Paul was able to stay focused not because of any freedoms he had by something of this world, but he was able to do so because he recognized the perfect freedoms that came with being a citizen of Jesus's Kingdom. (**vv.20,21**) He pressed on because of his freedom's in Christ Jesus, and we can be encouraged to do the same.

- D. Sure we might be disappointed and we might regret decisions of our past. I have those regrets and wish I could go back and change things just like some of you probably do. However, our regrets don't need to be accompanied by guilt because guilt can leave us with this unclean feeling that Satan will take advantage of. He will seek to turn that guilt into something that paralyzes us and causes us to not be useful in the Kingdom of God. Remember, Paul didn't see himself as perfect, yet he pressed on in his freedom in Christ and used his freedom not for evil, but to do good in the kingdom of God.

IV. Free to serve and approach God.

- A. Our freedom from sin's bondage, eternal punishment, and guilt allows us to move forward in our lives and use the freedom of Jesus for good and godly actions. We must take full advantage of this lighter burden!
- B. But the truth is that we are always carrying a yoke or burden in some way, meaning we are under the control of something. Even being free in Christ means we still carrying His yoke, but we know from **Matthew 11:28-30**, that His yoke is much easier to bear than of sin. But it is also much easier to bear than the yoke of the Law and its demands of perfect law keeping. (**Gal. 5:1**)
- C. The freedom that we have in Christ allows us to lay aside those yokes and burdens and instead devote ourselves fully to God in service, devotion, and adoration. Paul's numerous writings on the battle between the flesh and the spirit illustrates the fact that we cannot serve two masters. We cannot serve Satan and God together. (**Galatians 5:16-18**) Thus, if we are striving to live in the freedom that Jesus extends then we will only do those things which are good and right. Remember back to **1 Peter 2:16**, we use our freedoms in Christ to only do that which is good...not that which is evil.
- D. But not only do we see to do that which is right through our freedoms in Christ, but we are also able to approach God in a way that we were not able to before. While enslaved to sin, we were not given the ability to approach God because in our current condition we could only expect to receive condemnation and rejection because of our sin. (**Isaiah 59:2**) But in Jesus...not only is God's face not hidden from us, but He encourages through the mediation and intercession of His Son to approach Him without fear. (**1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 7:25**)
- E. We can come to Him without fear because of the love that is perfected in the freedom that His Son gave through His sacrifice. (**1 John 4:17,18**) We can come before Him in this life, and we can ultimately come before Him in the last day because of our freedom in Jesus. We can stand before Him, we can pray to God, and we can make requests of Him because of our freedom as being a part of His specially chosen people. Praise God that we are made free to serve and approach Him through Jesus.

It is certainly true that we can take pride in our freedoms as Americans. We ought to rejoice and take full advantage of those freedoms by serving God in a way that so many are not privileged to do. However, I hope that we will remember that the freedom we have been granted in Christ as citizens of the Kingdom of heaven extend beyond the borders of this country to all people who call upon His name in faith and obedience. May we always keep first things first and exercise our freedoms in Christ above all things, even if our freedoms are diminished in this nation. May God help us to continue to act as free men in Jesus by always seeking to do that which is right, and may we show our appreciation not in shooting off fireworks, but with praise, honor, and devotion every day.