

Text: John 8:31-36 (Pew Bible pg.1060)

Title: Celebrate Freedom

INTRODUCTION

ILLUSTRATION – Earlier this year Nan and I spent a week in Boston. Our visit there mostly revolved around a trail that snakes its way through Boston where it carries visitors back in time to places that were significant in our nation’s quest for independence. It is called the Freedom Trail. One of the stops on the Freedom Trail is the Old State House. It was from a balcony of the Old State House on July 18, 1776 that the Declaration of Independence was first read to the citizens of Boston.

Well this morning I want us to take a walk on another Freedom Trail. I will not read to you from the Declaration of Independence; but I will read to you from what might be called our Declaration of Dependence upon the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ. It tells us of a freedom from slavery, not to a tyrant across the seas, but freedom from a tyrant in our soul. I’m talking about freedom in Christ. Turn with me to John 8:31-36. Jesus is addressing some of his own people, the Jews. Read vv.31-36.

1. FREEDOM PRECEPT – “FREEDOM IN CHRIST”

Keep your Bibles open to John 8. Throughout the service this morning we’re going to make our way along this spiritual freedom trail. The freedom we’re talking about is freedom that is found *only* in Jesus Christ. It is a freedom that is *real* freedom.

John 8:36 - If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

You know we are a free nation filled with slaves. Most Americans are slaves living in a free land. People need to be set free from hurts and habits and hang-ups ... free from besetting sins and selfish living ... free from the fear of death ... free from legalistic religion ... free from unforgiving spirits and bigoted hatred ... free from the tyranny of not knowing whether or not they have done enough to get to heaven when they die.

And this freedom is found only in Christ. And we need this freedom because...

- **We are in bondage to sin (v.34)**

John 8:34 - Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.

When Jesus talks about “everyone who sins,” He’s not talking about an occasional sin. He’s talking about habitual sin ... a lifestyle of sin. And that’s our condition apart from Christ.

The word for “slave” refers to a person who is completely controlled by someone or something else. And particularly here Jesus speaks of people who are completely controlled by sin. We cannot escape on our own. We are owned and dominated by another.

But there’s a second part to this. We are in bondage to sin and...

- **We are blinded by sin (vv.31-33)**

We are in bondage and we don't even know it. Now look at...

John 8:31 - To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.

Notice it says that these people "believed him." Back in v.30 it speaks of others who "put their faith in him." There's a difference. So in v.31 we have a group of people who are intrigued with Jesus, but have not come to be convinced of their sinfulness and trusting in Him.

John 8:32 - Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Look at how they respond to the Jesus' statement:

John 8:33 - 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?"

They were so blinded by their sin that they had conveniently forgotten that many times in their nation's history they had been slaves ... in Egypt, in Babylon. They were blinded to the point that Jesus was driving home. Sin does that to us. They had not only been literal slaves, they were also spiritual slaves ... slaves to sin. And Christ offers to set them free.

John 8:36 - So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

He offers freedom from the tyranny of having to work to earn our salvation ... freedom from the condemnation that belongs to us because we are hopeless in ever perfectly keeping the law. Listen to what Paul says:

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

Romans 8:2 - because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.

Romans 8:3 - For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man,

Romans 8:4 - in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.

This is the freedom that is found only in Christ. And aren't we grateful that we live in a nation where we have the freedom to pursue freedom in Christ and to proclaim freedom in Christ?

Now let's rejoin the Freedom Trail in John 8. We've talked about this freedom in Christ, but we need to understand the second precept:

2. FREEDOM PRECEPT – “FREEDOM UNDER AUTHORITY”

This is not freedom *from* authority, but freedom *under* authority ... under the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Word.

John 8:31-32 - 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.”

To “know” in this verse means to possess information. The truth has to get into you before it can set you free. And that truth gets into you when Jesus gets into you. He is the way and the truth and the life.

ILLUSTRATION – I love the story of the boy who is flying a kite. The little boy attaches the kite to the string and he runs with it until the currents of air take the kite high into the sky. There is the kite with its long tail flapping in the wind. The boy carefully maneuvers the string to fly his kite. But then something strange happens. The kite speaks to the little boy. “Set me free. Cut the string. I want to soar up higher, but you are holding me down with this string.” Well the little boy granted the kite's wish, and he cut the string. Everyone who has ever flown a kite knows exactly what happened next. The kite didn't soar higher into the sky; it flopped and floundered and fell to the ground. What the kite didn't understand is that the thing that he thought was holding him down was really holding him up.

The commands of God's Word don't hold us back, they hold us up. Jesus calls us to a freedom that is under the authority of His Word. It's only as we hold to and obey the teachings of Jesus that we find freedom from our selfish, sinful attitudes and actions.

Paul talked about this in...

Romans 6:14 - For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.

Romans 6:15 - What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!

Romans 6:18 - You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

That's why the Bible says that we are to then offer our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable unto God. Join me as we pray.

So we rejoin the spiritual Freedom Trail in John 8. This freedom we find in Jesus Christ is a freedom under authority, but it is also...

3. FREEDOM PRECEPT – “FREEDOM FOR SERVICE”

Now this is not specifically stated by Jesus in John 8, but it follows logically from other parts of the NT. We are not set free to serve our own selfish desires and purposes, but the desires and purposes of God. And when we become “slaves of God” we are set free to serve others.

Galatians 5:13 - 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.

ILLUSTRATION – I grew up in a military home. My dad served twenty years in the Air Force. I spent most of my growing up years around Air Force bases. My dad enlisted in the Air Force just before I was born. He wanted to serve his country that afforded such freedom. And when we begin to follow Jesus, we follow Him into the freedom to serve God and others.

Now we rejoin the spiritual Freedom Trail in John 8 for one more freedom precept:

4. FREEDOM PRECEPT – “FREEDOM FOREVER”

Now back to John 8. Jesus uses a little mini-parable in v.35.

John 8:35 - Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever.

In biblical times slavery was pervasive. And there was an obvious difference between a slave and a son. The slave was property; the son was family.

ILLUSTRATION – To put it in more contemporary terms, think of it this way: Last week I had a repairman come to fix something. He was allowed to come into my home because I had “employed” him, if you will, to do so. He was in my house to do a job. Though this young man happened to be a friend and a member of our church, he is not a son. He would not think about going into the kitchen and opening up the refrigerator to get something to eat or drink. He would not think of plopping down on the couch and turning the TV on to watch ESPN Sports Center. However, if one of my daughters or their husbands or one of grandkids came in, they have perfect freedom to do that. And, if that repairman had not been a brother in Christ, the relationship we had was purely business. But it’s different with a child.

John 8:35 - Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever.

Romans 6:22 - But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life.

Romans 6:23 - For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We’re not like runaway slaves who will one day be recaptured and forced back into slavery. This eternal life we have is eternal freedom. Do you have that freedom today? Are you sure that you are on the Freedom Trail that will one day take you into the very presence of God in heaven?

CONCLUSION

We're living in some desperate days as a nation. But there have been many other desperate times in our nation's history. In fact when the First Continental Congress convened in Philadelphia in September of 1774, it was a desperate time. There were 56 delegates at this meeting, including two future presidents ... George Washington and John Adams. Those in attendance felt an urgency that they needed to pray so they called on a local pastor, Dr. Jacob Duche, to pray for the deliberations. After reading a passage of Scripture the pastor prayed:

“O Lord, Heavenly Father, High and Mighty, King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Look down in mercy we beseech Thee for these our American states who have fled to Thee from the rod of the oppressor and thrown themselves on Thy gracious protection desiring to be henceforth dependent only on Thee. Take them, therefore, Heavenly Father, under Thy nurturing care give them wisdom and counsel and valor in the field. All of this we ask in the Name and in the merits of Thy Son and our Savior. Amen.”

The entire assembly was moved by the Scripture reading and prayer. John Adams recorded that the prayer time was enough to melt a heart of stone. He recounted how tears will the eyes of those who attended. Well, God heard their cries to heaven and after eight years of war the states won their independence.

And these are desperate days in which we live. Our nation needs to turn back to the God whom our forefathers knew was our only hope. He was their only hope ... and He is our only hope. Just days before we celebrate yet another anniversary of our nation's Declaration of Independence may the church declare her dependence upon the Lord God.