

## Slavery or Freedom

### *Prayer*

We are a blessed people! In this country we are rich... Even though it might not feel like it, even the poorest among us are in the top 5% of the world's richest people. So why when those of us that have all the basic needs of life are presented with Christ is it so difficult for us to share the good news with others?

In Matthew 19:24 and in Mark 10:25 we read that it is harder for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God than for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle. When we consider this from our perspective we think of the Bill Gates and Oprah Winfrey's of the world. Yet from most of the world's perspective we are the rich men and women...

How many people do you think would come to my office for pastoral care and counsel if I were an unmarried, eighteen year old third generation pastor who had everything handed to him on a silver platter? If you came up the answer... around about none... you are correct. So why?

When we go through life's experiences we learn wisdom, we develop and grow.

### 2 Corinthians 1:3-5

*Praise God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! The Father is a merciful God, who always gives us comfort. He comforts us when we are in trouble, so that we can share that same comfort with others in trouble. We share in the terrible sufferings of Christ, but also in the wonderful comfort he gives*

### James 1:2-7

*My friends, be glad, even if you have a lot of trouble. You know that you learn to endure by having your faith tested. But you must learn to endure everything, so that you will be completely mature and not lacking in anything. If any of you need wisdom, you should ask God, and it will be given to you. God is generous and won't correct you for asking. But when you ask for something, you must have faith and not doubt. Anyone who doubts is like an ocean wave tossed around in a storm*

Many people connect with Jesus when they are at the end of their rope. When they have nowhere else to turn.

### Luke 7:41-47

*Jesus said to the Pharisee, "Simon, I have something to say to you." "Teacher, what is it?" Simon replied. Jesus told him, "Two people were in debt to a moneylender. One of them owed him five hundred silver coins, and the other owed him fifty. Since neither of*

*them could pay him back, the moneylender said that they didn't have to pay him anything. Which one of them will like him more?" Simon answered, "I suppose it would be the one who had owed more and didn't have to pay it back." "You are right," Jesus said. He turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Have you noticed this woman? When I came into your home, you didn't give me any water so I could wash my feet. But she has washed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You didn't greet me with a kiss, but from the time I came in, she has not stopped kissing my feet. You didn't even pour olive oil on my head, but she has poured expensive perfume on my feet. So I tell you that all her sins are forgiven, and that is why she has shown great love. But anyone who has been forgiven for only a little will show only a little love.*

Should our love of Jesus depend on our circumstance? If we have suffered little should we love him any less? We must be cautious to avoid the trap that so many in North America have fallen into... We are in the top 5% of the World as a result of circumstance many have not come to a crisis or a defining moment when Jesus was the only answer to their struggle. Many attend church for other reasons such as duty or service. While there is nothing wrong with this, there has been no defining moment where these individuals have been set free.

That said... there are many forms of slavery.

Some people become slaves to destructive habits such as pornography, alcohol or drugs. Others become slaves to destructive relationships. Some are slaves to dead end jobs. Some are slaves to financial difficulties. Some are slaves to abusive relationships with spouses, parents or even children abusing their parents in their old age. Some have suffered trauma or grief and are slaves to their emotional cage.... Even if you do not fit any of these criteria, if you have not found Christ you may be a slave to sin.

Consider that here in the church is the most insidious slavery of all... Are you a slave to religious rules and regulations? Are you bound by a spirit of legalism or held bound by a religious stronghold?

All slaves have a common goal, a kindred spirit and a will to be set free!

So... Why did Jesus come? Luke 4:18, 19 (Cf. Isaiah 61:1)

*Jesus said: "The Lord's Spirit has come to me, because he has chosen me to tell the good news to the poor. The Lord has sent me to announce freedom for prisoners, to give sight to the blind, to free everyone who suffers, and to say," This is the year the Lord has chosen. "*

Jesus came to set us free...

We are told not to return to the yoke of bondage in Galatians 5:1

*Christ has set us free! This means we are really free. Now hold on to your freedom and don't ever become slaves of the Law again.*

So did Christ set us free to be bound up again in legalism?

No the scripture tells us that it is for "Freedom" that he set us free. He didn't set us free for duty or obligation. He set us free so that we could be free indeed!

In the Church in Galatia men and women were being pressured to return to religious bondage, yet the apostle Paul stands firm in his advice:

Galatians 1:6 - Don't abandon Christ

*I am shocked that you have so quickly turned from God, who chose you because of his wonderful kindness. You have believed another message, when there is really only one true message. But some people are causing you trouble and want to make you turn away from the good news about Christ*

Galatians 3:1-5 – Don't be stupid

*You stupid Galatians! I told you exactly how Jesus Christ was nailed to a cross. Has someone now put an evil spell on you? I want to know only one thing. How were you given God's Spirit? Was it by obeying the Law of Moses or by hearing about Christ and having faith in him? How can you be so stupid? Do you think that by yourself you can complete what God's Spirit started in you? Have you gone through all of this for nothing? Is it all really for nothing? God gives you his Spirit and works miracles in you. But does he do this because you obey the Law of Moses or because you have heard about Christ and have faith in him*

Galatians 3:10-13 – Don't be Cursed

*Anyone who tries to please God by obeying the Law is under a curse. The Scriptures say, "Everyone who doesn't obey everything in the Law is under a curse." No one can please God by obeying the Law. The Scriptures also say, "The people God accepts because of their faith will live." The Law isn't based on faith. It promises life only to people who obey its commands*

Galatians 3:23-26 – Don't be a prisoner

*The Law controlled us and kept us under its power until the time came when we would have faith. In fact, the Law was our teacher. It was supposed to teach us until we had faith and were acceptable to God. But once a person has learned to have faith, there is no more need to have the Law as a teacher. All of you are God's children because of your faith in Christ Jesus*

Galatians 4:6-9 – Don't be a slave live free

*Now that we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts. And his Spirit tells us that God is our Father. You are no longer slaves. You are God's children, and you will be given what he has promised. Before you knew God, you were slaves of gods that are not real. But now you know God, or better still, God knows you. How can you turn back and become the slaves of those weak and pitiful powers*

Galatians 5:1 – You are Free!

*Christ has set us free! This means we are really free. Now hold on to your freedom and don't ever become slaves of the Law again*

Galatians 5:13 – Freely serve one another in love

*My friends, you were chosen to be free. So don't use your freedom as an excuse to do anything you want. Use it as an opportunity to serve each other with love. All that the Law says can be summed up in the command to love others as much as you love yourself.*

So... if you have never come to the realization you've been a slave or have been bound, how can you celebrate freedom?

Why do you serve God this morning?

- Guilt
  - God never intended Condemnation to be a motivating factor
  - Conviction is of God Condemnation is of the enemy
- Pressure
  - There is no one else to do it
  - My family expects it of me
- To Please other People
  - How many people are in the church
  - How big is the offering
  - How many baptisms this year
  - How many conversions this year
- Pride
  - Do I desire recognition
  - Do I desire a title
  - Do I desire to be above someone else
- To Earn Salvation
  - Fire insurance
  - Salvation by works

How about these reasons instead:

- Because he has set me free – Galatians 5:1
- Because he doesn't distance himself from my sorrow
  - John 11:35 – Jesus wept
  - Psalms 56:8 – Keeps my tears in is bottle
- Because he will never leave me nor forsake me
  - Hebrews 13:5
- Because I am his special treasure
  - Deuteronomy 7:6
- Because he has given me eternal life
  - John 3:16
- He has made me joint heirs with him and he has given me a kingdom that cannot be shaken
  - Hebrews 12:28 - Kingdom
  - Romans 8:17 – Joint Heirs

What are some of the benefits of Serving God?

- It makes me grateful for my freedom and liberty
- It takes me out of the competition with other men and women
  - We are all equal - Galatians 3:28
- We learn that service to each other is the same as service to Christ
- We learn that all people have worth and value
- Our focus goes off ourselves and onto others

In North America we have the hurting, the lost, the dysfunctional and when they truly discover Jesus, they embrace him with everything inside them. They are zealous and they want all that Jesus has for them. When an alcoholic is healed and they have their life and health back, they are so grateful. Many times they have abused or assaulted friends and family and to simply know that someone still loves them. This is enough. When a father has lost his children due to drug abuse and he comes to the Lord and is able to get his life back on track. When he can see his children again and simply rejoice in their presence it is enough. God restores and heals the broken hearted.

Others are so full that they look at what Jesus offers them with contempt. Like the rich man, they have everything they need. They do not experience suffering in the same way. For a rich man suffering isn't about food or shelter it is about want and desire. I want a bigger boat or a fancier car. It is not about getting the base needs fulfilled? No matter how much a person has, it is never enough? Did you notice that a person will always want more. They become slaves to money, power or position. How many wealthy families are dysfunctional because dad or mom is the CEO of a major corp. and has no time to spend with his wife or kids. They have everything material that they want and yet their lives fall apart.

How about fame?

We look at the children of Hollywood. Consider Brittany Spears, Lindsey Lohan, Demi Levato or the Olson twins. It is all drugs, dysfunction, unhappiness and sorrow. How long does a marriage last in Hollywood?

We seek wealth, fame and fortune and yet these Gods all leave us wanting. We are slaves to them.

There is an old song that comes to mind... the lyrics go: "Well it might be the devil or it might be the Lord but your gonna have to serve somebody."

Here is the Good news. When we serve Jesus we are FREE! We are free indeed. It is for freedom that he set us free. We are no longer bound, we are free hallelujah we are free.

Romans 6:16-18

*Don't you know that you are slaves of anyone you obey? You can be slaves of sin and die, or you can be obedient slaves of God and be acceptable to him. You used to be slaves of sin. But I thank God that with all your heart you obeyed the teaching you received from me. Now you are set free from sin and are slaves who please God*

So... I have looked at poor and rich people. But for me there is a Humungous elephant in the room... It is perhaps the reason that the church in North America is suffering so much.

Let me ask this question this morning...

Are you a slave to yourself?

Have you made your own wants and desires the God you serve?

Ask yourself:

- Do I serve other peoples needs or do I serve my wants and desires?
- Do I prioritize what I want to do above what God wants me to do?
- When I see others suffering do I think:
  - Welfare will take care of it
  - The church will deal with it
  - Let's send the pastor over
- Do I try to distance myself from the suffering of others
- Do I believe that my way to do something is the only correct way
- Am I so overwhelmed by the great needs of the world that I create a bubble for myself that I feel that I can take care of and control?
- Do I limit my caring to family, or friends, or perhaps the church

You see the world is a daunting place and Jesus is equipped to be God. We are not. We can be slaves to poverty, we can be slaves to sports, we can be slaves to jobs, we can be slaves to good works; we can even be slaves to ourselves. What it comes down to is that we want to exert some control over the crazy world that we live in. We cannot cope with the scope and magnitude of the hurting and so we isolate ourselves.

When we do this, our self-worth goes into the toilet. We try to delude ourselves into believing that we are making a difference in the small niche we have carved out, but really deep down we know that there is so much more that we could be doing, but we can't cope with it. Essentially we try to manage what only God can manage.

We rely on ourselves and take on a burden that was never ours to bear.

When we are servants of Christ he doesn't look at the result, he looks at the intent and rewards the intent with the result. God can do anything. He is teaching us to let go and simply serve his great plan. His ways are not our ways.

When we stop serving all the other gods in our lives, including ourselves, and focus on what he has told us to do, we live happy fulfilled lives and are astonished at the miracles he brings to bear and amazingly he uses us... He takes our experiences and life lessons and utilizes them to help others.

What it comes down to is Fear vs. Faith. We try to control all the aspects of our lives that we think we can - and then hand God the dregs and say: "Well let's see what you can do with my leftovers before I give you the real stuff."

We are afraid to let go and let God and so we build our security on our ability and financial security.

I am not saying that these things are not important. In fact the bible tells us not to be slothful in business and to take care of our families. What I am saying is wherein do we place our trust?

How many thought that we would see major banks in the US closing 20 years ago. How many thought the US economy would tank so severely that they would be taking loans from China. How many thought that the security of NATO and NORAD would be there to protect Canada from its enemies forever. How many people 20 years ago thought they would be buying water today?

When we place our security in the things of this world we will be disappointed, but when we place our security in God eternal, his promises endure.

I challenge you this morning to choose to walk in faith. I challenge you to let go of your fear and build the foundation of your life on the Rock that is Christ Jesus. If we are to be happy and free we must be secure in him.

Fame, fortune, power and control are illusions of this world; they pull you into slavery. There is only one way to security and that is through believing on the Lord Jesus Christ. Believing isn't just a feeling, it has a cost... we take our trust in our own abilities and in ourselves alone out of our hands and we place our future in Jesus hands.

This morning God has not asked you to move the rock of the suffering and need of the world, he has only asked you to be obedient and push it. He is watching for this obedience so that he can reward you richly. When we realize that only God can move the rock, he then lets us move it.

We can live in slavery or we can be free. It's up to you and it up to me. God doesn't interfere with our choices, but like a good father he stands ready to reward his children.

So what's it to be will you be a slave or will you be free?

*Prayer*