

6/30/2019

“God’s Promise of Freedom”

Scripture: Exodus 6:2-7; John 8:31-32

Sermon Series: Standing on the Promises of God

Third Sunday after Passover

God has promised to set his people free.

Today is the Sunday before we the people of the USA celebrate our Declaration of Independence from Great Britain and our many freedoms, which some of us often take for granted or are sometimes denied, including that of religious belief and practice. So, I want to begin a new sermon series on “Standing on the Promises of God” by sharing what the Bible has to say about God’s Promise of Freedom.

Now, while these three points I am about to share are not exhaustive, I believe they give us a good perspective of God’s overarching love and grace in relating to these freedoms, which many of us also forget or take for granted.

First: God freed the Israelites from Human Slavery in Egypt.

The Book of Exodus (6:6-8) tells us . . .

*“Therefore, say to the Israelites: ‘I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. **I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am the LORD.’”***

God did fulfill that promise and made a covenant – a shared promise – with God’s people of Israel to live by in the Ten Commandments.

When we think about slavery, it’s hard to imagine that up to less than two centuries ago, human slavery was such a large part of our own nation’s way of life. As we celebrate our nation’s independence from England, I believe most or all of us would acknowledge the injustice done to so many for so long in this great land. And at least in part, that wrong was rationalized as justified by scripture. But at last, the promise of God for the freedom of God’s people Israel was seen in light of the Spirit of Christ, bringing freedom to all people in our nation. And our nation continues to work through and work out the

consequences of that sin and dark times, hopefully, relying on God's grace and vision.

Perhaps of equal concern to many in our country and world today is the renewed trafficking of human beings, most often women and children, and often as sex slaves. Statistics will show that this practice is not limited or isolated to a certain area. What is God's word and will on such an abomination? How can we be mouthpieces and representatives of God's hand and heart and voice in our day, as Moses and Aaron were to Pharaoh, or as some of the abolitionists were, or as those who stood against the abuses of child-labor just a century ago?

I noticed in this week's "Under the Bridge" newsletter that there is a fundraising concert **at Skyline UMC** in Wilmington, DE to assist in the effort to end human trafficking.

God fulfilled his promise long ago, and still sets people free from human slavery.

Second: Through Jesus Christ, God Set us Free From Sin and Death.

By continuing in the word and teachings of Jesus, we are true disciples. We come to know the truth of God's love and power through Jesus Christ over sin and death and are set free by the truth.

John's gospel records (John 8:31-36) . . .

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."

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?"

Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."

Beloved friends, God has saved us and set us free by grace. So, does that give us license to live however we desire? No.

As Paul said to the Christians in Rome, (Romans 6:1-7), "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? **We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.**

If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so

that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin -- because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.

Again, he later says in his letter to the Romans (6:17-23), “*But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. **You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.***”

*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.** For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

So, in and through Jesus Christ, God has set us free to live new and better lives to our greatest fulfillment, eternal life, and the glory of God!

Third: God Sets Us Free from Guilt and Shame.

Sometimes we may know or understand in part that God has forgiven us, and yet we do not fully believe or fully feel that we are truly forgiven and free. We may still hold on to guilt or shame. And some people feel that what they’ve done is not fully or truly forgivable. They just don’t seem able to let it go or believe that God has.

Certainly, part of being freed from sin is being able to acknowledge our wrongs and sins. Then we need to acknowledge and believe in God’s love and power to break sin’s hold over us. If possible, we should seek to make amends for specific wrongs to others. And through the process we should learn something from our mistakes and wrongs, so that we are and less likely to repeat them.

But in Christ, we can let go of the harmful guilt and shame associated with those things.

As Paul says (Romans 8:1-2), “***Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life has set us free from the law of sin and death.***”

As the letter to the Hebrews affirms (9:15), “***For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance -- now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.***”

James C. Hendrix of Indiana shared this story some years ago (Upper Room, 5/7/07). He said:

“My friend Brad stopped by my home one afternoon to install software on my computer. A young man of 28, Brad had become a Christian six months earlier. While

he worked on my computer, he talked about the ups and downs he had experienced since he had given his life to Christ. More than anything he wanted to please God, he told me, but images from his past continued to run through his mind.

Before becoming a Christian, Brad had spent much of his time drinking and partying. He told me that although the Lord had changed his life, he still felt guilty about his past sins. As Brad continued installing the software, we talked about repentance, and the work of God's Spirit in our lives. 'I guess I should forget about the past and trust God for forgiveness,' Brad said as he finished his work.

As Hendrix says, "When we drag guilt about our former lives around with us, we hinder our growth in faith. No matter how great our sin, God forgives when we repent. As we allow the Spirit to work within us, God will help us to let go of the past and move into the future."

Friends, just as God set the people of Israel free from slavery and bondage to their taskmasters of Egypt thousands of years ago, God through Jesus set all who would believe in him free from slavery to sin and death.

That freedom is available to each and every person, regardless of nation or age, race or gender, education, economic status, or other things by which we or others identify us. If you haven't received that freedom yet, I invite you to receive it now. Just pray with me, "Lord Jesus, I repent of my sins. I put my trust and faith in you. I ask you to be my Savior and friend, to teach me and show me how to live your way."

Those of you have been freed in Christ already, remember to let go of the past, and press on towards the goal of eternal life in Christ. Experience and live the abundance of God's love, power and life here and now! Share that love and life with others day by day. And rejoice in God's promise fulfilled!