

“The Soul Needs Freedom”

Date: October 11, 2015

Place: Lakewood UMC

Text: Psalm 19:7-14; Romans 8:5-8

Theme: Sin, Freedom, Soul care Occasion: Soul Keeping series

The soul needs freedom. Desire is not a bad thing; in fact it's a good thing. But when you want something too much, it threatens to take God's place in your life. It will lead you to make bad decisions and it will put you on an emotional roller coaster.

In the movie *A Christmas Story*, one of the kids is given a double-dog dare to touch his tongue to a frozen flagpole on a December morning. (Let's take a look) Instantly his tongue is frozen fast to the icy metal, and from that moment on, he isn't going anywhere.

He is stuck, a slave to his tongue. His freedom will come, if it comes at all, only with a lot of pain. We get double-dog dared all the time. Make it about sex. Make it about money. Make it about security.

That tender object frozen to the flagpole is your soul. It craves to be free, but we're not sure what that means. You see, we're terribly confused and conflicted when it comes to freedom. The soul cries out to be free.

But the common misconception is that Christianity stands in the way of our freedom. A lot of people think that if you become a Christian then you lose your freedom – to do the things you enjoy. The image a lot of people have is that God is like a cosmic Scrooge who just wants to keep people from having fun.

But sometimes, many times, when we use our freedom to do whatever it is that we want, our soul, like a tongue to the flagpole,

gets stuck. So, when we become Christian, do we trade one form of slavery for another? Do we give up slavery to sin and then become a slave to God, who just wants to keep us from having fun?

When we bind ourselves to God, to a code of morality that transcends our own particular tastes and opinions, we gain freedom. I believe the soul is actually revived by law. Psalm 19:7 says, “The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul.” I believe it.

Think of freedom coming in two flavors, two kinds of freedom if you will. There is the freedom from external constraints, somebody telling me what to do. This is freedom *from*. But there is another kind of freedom that might be called freedom *for*.

There’s the freedom for living the kind of life I was made to live, freedom for becoming that man I most want to be – freedom *for*. The kid stuck to the flagpole by his very tender tongue, pursued freedom *from*. Nobody was going to tell him what to do. But in doing so, he lost his freedom *for*.

Now he was stuck, he couldn’t do the things he wanted to do. Our culture craves freedom from external restraints. People want to be free to do whatever they like. “You’re not the boss of me!” is our battle cry. Freedom from external restraints appeals to all of us.

But I do not believe it’s the freedom the soul needs. When Nelson Mandela was imprisoned by captors, he did not have very much freedom *from*, but there was a freedom inside him that was much greater than what his guards had.

The deeper freedom – the freedom that the soul needs – is the freedom *for* becoming the person I was designed to be.

Because of a thing called sin – the soul sits in its own prison, having locked the door, and to its surprise, thrown away the key. So, how do we get the freedom that our soul craves? This is the great irony about freedom. To become truly free, you must surrender.

Now, surrender is not a very popular concept. It goes against everything we know about being free. Wars are not won by surrendering. Football games are not won by surrendering. But surrender is the only way to achieve freedom for the soul.

The alcoholic comes to a place where she admits she lacks the willpower to quit drinking. She surrenders her will – her freedom – to a Higher Power, and through the act of surrender receives power to be free not to drink.

It's a model that has healed millions of people through Alcoholics Anonymous. But it's not limited to the abuse of alcohol. It applies to every human soul. If you want to free your soul, you acknowledge there is a spiritual order that God has designed *for* you.

You are not the center of the universe. You are not the master of your fate. You are not the captain of your ship. There is a God, and you aren't him. The day of spiritual awakening happens when we realize that we have been sitting on God's throne, and we climb off of it, and let Him take His place.

True freedom comes when you embrace God's overall design for the world, and your place in it. This is why we see such a strong connection between God's law and soul-freedom. The psalmist writes "I will always obey your law, forever and ever." And immediately adds, "I will walk about in freedom, for I have sought your precepts."

(Psalm 119:44-45)

God's law was given to us, not to force us to obey a list of rules, but to free our souls to live full and blessed. The enslaved soul is sick and needs reviving. In the early centuries of the church, people began to speak of "the cure of the soul."

You see, at the core, the disease that really threatens the soul is sin. Sin, in all of its forms, denies my soul its freedom. I become a slave to sin. John Ortberg, in his book "Soul Keeping," talks about concentric circles of sin, much like the circles of a shooting target.

On the outer rim of the target are the sinful acts that people commit. These are particular behaviors – lying, cheating, gossiping, stealing. And deeper things, like hatred, abuse, rampant greed, violence, jealousy, and lust.

The Bible says that we're all sinners. If we deny that we have sin, not only do we call God a liar, but our soul cannot be free.

The next ring on the target goes deeper and has to do with our orientation. The Bible sometimes refers to our sins, but in other places it will address sin.

Sin is a deeply entrenched pattern that lives just below the surface, insidious, like a disease that leaks out of us without any effort. My sinful acts are premeditated; my sinfulness is more like a habit I can't control.

Finally, at the center is the bull's eye – the explanation of why we sin in the first place. We can't help ourselves. You won't find the phrase "original sin" in the Bible, but the story of humanity's fall from God's grace in the garden describes our condition.

Something is broken or wrong in our very nature. There is a leaning toward sin that is just there in every human being.

Therapy will not cure our sin problem. More education will not cure our sin problem. Exercising more will power will not cure our sin problem. At the core of who we are is this inclination toward sin. It is deeply embedded in our souls, and it is literally killing us.

That's the bad news. Here's the good news. Jesus Christ can free us from the power of sin. We can be set free from the power of sin by recognizing it is there, daily seeking God's forgiveness and strength, and striving to live the way he designed us.

It is only when we surrender to God and his ways that our souls experience freedom. We may stumble along the way, for no one is perfect. Even after I accept Christ into my life as my Lord and Savior, I still struggle with sin. But we serve a perfect Savior who is patient, and always ready to forgive us when we fail.

When evangelist Billy Graham's wife, Ruth, died in 2007, she chose these words to be engraved on her tombstone. They had nothing to do with her amazing life. She saw the words while driving on a highway during construction season. There were miles of orange cones, several detours and lots of equipment and machinery.

She finally came to the last one, and this final sign read, "End of construction. Thank you for your patience." Ruth Graham understood that as long as we're alive God will be working on us, and then we will be free. On her tombstone it reads: "End of construction. Thank you for your patience."

Construction today. Freedom tomorrow. Grace for the journey.
Thanks be to God. Amen.

Sermon borrowed heavily from John Ortberg's book *Soul Keeping*, Zondervan: Grand Rapids Michigan, 2014, pp. 141-151.