



New Day Church

Need a fresh start?

CELEBRATING OUR FREEDOM

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Who can tell me what July 4th is all about?

Nearly 230 years ago, the Second Continental Congress sat down and signed the Declaration of Independence. There were many names added to the page that day, but the one that always stands out is the one belonging to John Hancock. His is so big and bold you can't miss it. He said afterwards that he didn't want the British to have to get their spectacles to read it.

That was a historic day – and it is why we celebrate Independence Day every 4th of July. It's a day where we talk a lot about freedom.

It's also a day that resulted in a war. Great Britain didn't think that the idea of an independent United States was all that neat, so they fought hard against it. We finally won, but victory came at great cost.

That is why freedom is such a prized American value. We had to fight for it. People in many parts of the world have never experienced the kind of freedom that we take for granted today.

But we're not here to talk about America – we're here to talk about Jesus. And as I thought about what day it was, the following verse came to mind from Paul's letter to the Galatians:

Galatians 5:1

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.

Paul's not talking about political freedom. He's not talking about our national liberty. He's talking about something that happens in our hearts, and he says the reason Christ came was to give us freedom.

What is freedom anyway? We could define it the following way:

Freedom – the ability to act or move without hindrance or restraint.

If I'm free, I can do what I want, say what I want, go where I want. If I'm not, that means somebody else is calling the shots.

So why is Paul talking about freedom? What does that have to do with Jesus? To understand his point, we have to look at it from two different sides: **freedom FROM and freedom TO.**

Paul says that Jesus has set us free. That means that something or someone had to have been locking us up and controlling us. Jesus came and released us. So what has Jesus set us free from?

The obvious answer is sin. We know that Jesus died to take away our sins. But when we're talking about being set free, it's more specific than that. Jesus sets us free FROM at least 3 ways that sin holds us down. First, he releases from

The power of sin

We choose to do bad things on our own. Nobody forces us to do them. In fact, a lot of the time, we choose those things specifically because it's what somebody DOESN'T want us to do.

Former President Clinton has been out giving interviews about his new book about his life. He was just in Issaquah signing it. In the book he admits many of the wrong things he did, and in an interview he admits, "I did it because I could." He had power as the President of the United States to do whatever he wanted, and he made some bad choices.

We all choose the wrong things sometimes. But the funny thing is, the bad choices that were what we wanted to do soon take control and we can't stop.

Proverbs 5:22

The evil deeds of a wicked man ensnare him; the cords of his sin hold him fast.

Sometimes it's because we make such a mess that we can't get out of it. Sometimes we get addicted to what we're doing and what used to be fun becomes necessary to function. Did you ever see Larry Boy and the Fib from Outer Space? Jr. Asparagus told a tiny lie so he wouldn't get in trouble for breaking a plate. But that lie kept growing and growing and pretty soon it was so big that it picked him up and had control of him and he was in even bigger trouble than he would have been in the beginning.

When we finally get to a point where we give in to Jesus, and we admit that we have sinned, we get free from it. It's like killing off the part of us that was controlled by sin.

Romans 6:6-7

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.

That means we now have a choice. We don't have to do what sin tells us to anymore.

James 4:7

Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

Jesus frees us from the power of sin that can be so strong to control us. He also frees us from something else:

The pain of sin

Did you know that sin causes pain? God doesn't just randomly make rules to make life hard for us. He has our best interest in mind. When we choose to do things that aren't right, we might think that it's fun to do for a while. But in the long run, we'll find out that it hurts us and other people. David knew that.

Psalm 25:17-18

*The troubles of my heart have multiplied;
free me from my anguish.
Look upon my affliction and my distress
and take away all my sins.*

David knew that to take away his distress, to get free, he needed God to deal with his sin. That was the cause of what he was experiencing. Not all pain is brought on because of something we did wrong. But doing something wrong can almost always guarantee some kind of hurt or problem will follow.

It's one thing to be set free from sin controlling us. It's another thing to be healed up from the devastation that it causes.

Hosea 14:4

I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely.

God knows that dealing with sin takes healing. Many of us here this morning know that firsthand. We've felt the effects of sin and we've been broken by it – either because of our own sin or something somebody else has done.

I'm so glad that God goes beyond just forgiving sin or helping us change and that he wants to actually restore what's been damaged.

Psalm 147:3

*He heals the brokenhearted
and binds up their wounds.*

I like the way Luke tells the story of Jesus meeting a crippled woman.

Luke 13:10-13

On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, "Woman, you are set free from your infirmity." Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God.

Her pain was tied to a spiritual cause, and Jesus knew that healing her was setting her free. Whatever your hurts are, Christ wants to set you free from them.

He frees us from the power of sin, the pain of sin and also

The punishment of sin

How many of you kids have used a credit card? It's a great system, because you can buy things without having any money in your wallet. You just put your card in the machine and you can get whatever you want. The only catch is that eventually you're going to have to pay. You can put it off for a little while, but sooner or later, the things you bought on a credit card will all add up and you'll have to find the cash.

Sin is kind of like using a credit card. For a while it might seem like you're getting away with something and it doesn't really matter. But eventually, there's a price to pay. Sooner or later you'll have to face up to your actions.

Romans 6:23

For the wages of sin is death...

That's a pretty heavy price tag for sin. But Jesus has already paid it for us.

Have you ever played Monopoly? Sooner or later, chances are you'll get sent to jail. That's just the way it goes when you play that game. When that happens, what you want to have is this card: Get out of jail free. That means you can skip doing time.

Jesus gives us his get out of jail free card. The second half of Romans 6:23 says

Romans 6:23

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

He takes away the punishment for sin – not by looking the other way and forgetting about it, but by experiencing the punishment himself on our behalf.

Those are three big ways Christ sets us free. But Paul says Christ didn't just set us free FROM something...He set us free TO something, to do something. It was for FREEDOM that Christ set us free.

What are we freed TO, now that Christ has dealt with sin?

Go to God

We don't have to be afraid to talk to God. We don't have to wonder if he hears us. Thanks to Jesus, we have a new kind of access to God.

Ephesians 3:12

In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

Have you ever tried to call a famous person, either an actor or singer or politician? They don't put their phone numbers in the phone book. You can't get access to them that way. Through my job, I've sometimes needed to track down an actor for a commercial or video we were producing, and they can be very difficult to track down.

What you need is to find out the name and number of their agent. That person knows how to get in touch with them and they can give you access to them you wouldn't have otherwise.

In a way, Jesus, as God's Son, is God's agent. He's the way that we get access to God the Father. He puts us in touch and lets us go to God, because we've got his authority to do so.

One of the biggest obstacles to talking with God is when we've got sin in our hearts. If you've ever tried to pray when your conscience is bothering you, you know how hard it is. When Jesus frees us from sin and forgives us, he takes that barrier out of the way and makes it easy to communicate with God on a deeper level.

So we're free now to go to God. We're also free to

Grow with God

Take a look at this barrel. How much water can it hold? The laws of physics say that it can only fill up as high as the lowest board.

A very important lesson to learn in being a Christian is that we can only grow as far as we've repented. If there's still some area of sin that we haven't dealt with, then we're not free to grow past that point. It will keep us stunted.

If we're free from being punished for sin, then somebody might think, "Cool. I'm off the hook. I can just keep doing what I'm doing." But that's not how it works.

Romans 6:15-18

So, since we're out from under the old tyranny, does that mean we can live any old way we want? Since we're free in the freedom of God, can we do anything that comes to mind? Hardly. You know well enough from your own experience that there are some acts of so-called freedom that destroy freedom. Offer yourselves to sin, for instance, and it's your last free act. But offer yourselves to the ways of God and the freedom never quits.

All your lives you've let sin tell you what to do. But thank God you've started listening to a new master, one whose commands set you free to live openly in his freedom!

We give up our freedom when we choose to keep doing the wrong things. But we grow in our freedom as we look to do what God wants.

Psalm 119:45

*I will walk about in freedom,
for I have sought out your precepts.*

God's precepts are his commandments. As we seek them, we will find ourselves growing – which is something we could never do without Christ.

One final point is that we're freed to

Glow for God

It's great to know that God can change me and help me grow as a Christian. But if all we're concerned about is what it means for us personally, that can become pretty selfish. God gives us freedom so we can help other people – so we can glow for God and help other people see his light.

I went to a wedding Friday night and was talking to a friend who's a recovering alcoholic. And he said, "You know, God didn't deliver me from alcohol to go be a hermit. He freed me so I can help other people in the same situation, and as I help them, it helps me grow in my own deliverance."

1 Peter 2:16

Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God.

Christ set us free not just for our own benefit, but also to serve others. Nelson Mandela spent twenty seven years in prison in South Africa for promoting freedom for black South Africans. When the government finally released him, you would think that was victory for him. But he knew that it was only the start. He wrote, "...to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others."

We started out this morning talking about the Declaration of Independence. Did you know that at that time, John Adams estimated that probably 1/3 of Americans were loyal to Great Britain. It wasn't a universal decision. Not everybody wanted freedom. Some really liked the way things were.

Have you ever heard of the Stockholm Syndrome? In the summer of 1973, a bank robbery got botched in Stockholm, Sweden, and the robbers ended up taking four people hostage. They held them for six days. And at the end of that time, the hostages were so brainwashed that they refused to be let go. They refused to testify against their captors.

One of them even became engaged to one of the people who had been holding her prisoner.

Being held captive by sin can mess with our minds to the point where we aren't even sure we want to be free. We may resist being rescued. And God doesn't force his freedom on anyone. You have to want it for yourself.

Giving in is always hard. Recognizing our need to be rescued is where it begins.

It's fitting to celebrate the Lord's Supper on Independence Day, because it was on the cross that Christ paid for our liberty. Our freedom came at a cost.

As we prepare to remember what he did, ask yourself what kind of freedom you're needing this morning. Is there some sin that still has power over you? Are you in a world of hurt and needing Christ to heal your pain? Maybe you can't forgive yourself and you need reassurance that Christ has taken care of the punishment of sin? Are you seeing evidence of that freedom in your life? Is there an area where your growth has been stunted? And is there someone else you can help by sharing your experience of God's freedom in your own heart?

Jesus said these words:

Luke 4:18

*The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners.*

He's here this morning, proclaiming that freedom to you. You can make today your own Independence Day, and experience true freedom that only comes from knowing Christ.