

## **REAL FREEDOM**

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John 8:36. I'm going to speak on the subject of real freedom. "If the Son of man, therefore, shall make you free you shall be free indeed."

Our country is all about freedom. Freedom is a great and cherished word of our heritage. Maybe if there's any danger that we have in our country and any danger we have as individuals in respect to the word "freedom", it might be our misuse of freedom. Freedom has a permissive side to it that if freedom is not understood correctly, we lose our freedom in the midst of a kind of easy, permissive tolerance.

So what I want to share with you today is simply three kind of definitions of how real freedom comes to our lives.

The first one is a rather technical definition.

Freedom is living up to your fullest potential within the laws or the rules set forth which govern the development of that potential. Real easy two word definition, right?

I think I can illustrate it through a tennis match. If you are a good tennis player you have freedom. If you are a bad tennis player like me you don't have freedom. I have freedom as a bad tennis player to hit the ball all over the court. I'm lucky sometimes if I get it across the net. I'm very lucky if I can return a volley. In fact I really don't like tennis that well because the last time I played tennis when I swung my racket I managed to bring my racket round so hard that I konked my nose on the thing.

But a good tennis player knows that there's a net. There are boundary lines and knows how to fully develop their potential between the rules, the boundary lines, the guidelines that are established for the playing of the game. The freest tennis player of all is the one that can develop their fullest potential to play the game most excellently within the boundaries, guidelines, and rules that have been established.

That's the way it is, friends, with moral and spiritual freedom. When you break a moral or a spiritual law you are not really exercising freedom. You are losing freedom because only in the development of potential within God's laws – morally and spiritually – can we find personal, inward, emotional freedom.

I shared last Sunday night in church how last Saturday I got very depressed. I was depressed because my children were gone and it was beginning to sink in and I got so depressed that by the time Jewel returned home from some things that she was doing I was downright irritable. My irritability led me to quarreling. Here I am God's man of faith and power ready to preach on Sunday morning, having an argument with my wife on Saturday night because I'm depressed and anxious.

What happened was while I was angry I had lost my emotional freedom that God had intended. I had violated the scripture that says "Be angry but sin not." That is, anger has its place but not in the kind of testy spirit that I had. Anger ruined the freedom that was in the relationship and the freedom could only be regained through forgiveness.

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That's the way across the board with all of our relationships with one another and with God. Sexual relationships that are outside God's will whether they are fornication or adultery or homosexuality break the freedom and the power of the individual. God's laws that he has ordained for us in our morality are as firm and as fixed as the laws of gravity. As the laws of the physical world. You know the power of that law if you break it. You have freedom as someone has said to go up into a ten-story building and to walk out on a window ledge and jump into the air. But your freedom ends once you've left the window ledge. And another law takes over – the law of gravity – and you're no longer free.

That is the way it is in terms of our commission of sin. We're free to do the sin but one it has clutched hold of our life we have lost our freedom morally and spiritually and we're unable then to go on to develop our potential as persons.

There are all kinds of illustrations of this in the moral and spiritual realm. I am alarmed by the rising rate of alcoholism and realize that a person is free to drink. But how often it is the case that once one begins to participate the freedom is gone as a person becomes addicted to that which they thought was a legitimate exercise of freedom.

A fundamental basis of freedom is knowing where the limits are. Knowing what is in bounds and what is out of bounds. American freedom, our freedom as a whole nation, stems from living within a set of laws. A set of rights. A set of civil rights. You break the law and you lose your freedom. At least that is the way the system was designed to be.

No one is free to play a game any way he or she wants to play. Neither are we free to live life as we think best. Jesus says to us, if the son of man sets you free you will be free indeed. Only can we experience freedom in our lives if we govern our lives by the umbrella of his authority and accept his will and his call and his commands for our lives. Only then can we develop our fullest freedom.

A second definition of freedom, which stirs in my heart, is that freedom comes through the exercise of discipline.

I think I learned this pretty well trying to come out of the Grand Canyon. One of my real goals of life was to ride a mule down to the bottom of the Grand Canyon. I think I shared this last August. We got there and didn't have reservations and the mule rides were all booked so I looked at the easy trail down the rim and I said to the kids, Let's go down. It took us only an hour and a half to get down to a certain point. We thought maybe mother would be getting worried about us, we'd better come back. It was an interested 3½ - 4 hour trek back up. I learned that I had lost my freedom to climb. I lost the freedom to climb because I had not been faithful to the discipline of physical exercise.

In our country today we are facing enormous challenge to our freedoms. Freedom is kind of a watchword of a permissive society. But freedoms are never kept when there is a breakdown of discipline. True freedom only comes to the disciplined person. The freedom of a student enrolled in a grade school to do well stems directly from their disciplining themselves to study. That goes true for high school and college and grad school. Your ability to excel and to be free within your sphere of discipline comes as a result of your personal discipline to bend yourself to the task.

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Those in our society today who live without discipline in their lives Jesus' word comes "If the son of man sets you free you'll be free indeed." One of the things the Lord wants to do for us is to give us disciplines.

Drugs and alcohol addiction are part of a breakdown of discipline. Real freedom cannot come. The break up of a family in our society stems from a breakdown of discipline. A breakdown of commitment. The gay rights movement – my heart inwardly bleeds for the lack of personal, spiritual and moral freedom that manifests itself by crying out for tolerance when what is really happening is the individual is crying out for freedom of the soul. That the homosexual lifestyle can never offer. I'll be glad for the day in America when homosexuality goes back into the closet. The breakdown of discipline. Abortion on demand. The breakdown of discipline that even we Christians fail to be involved in the political process.

Freedom is only kept when people are vigilant for freedom. We of all people should be the people to be involved in the political process. Never confusing with the political process with the kingdom of God. We know we're not going to bring in the kingdom of God by electing a particular political party or president. But at the same time we can be leaven and salt and part of our being submissive to the government in our culture is to be partners with the constitution, which gives us the right to participate. Even in the church we face problems with freedom floaters. Persons who float from place to place and from program to program and from religious entertainment opportunity to religious entertainment opportunity. Without personal spiritual discipline and commitment. Real spiritual freedom and real spiritual growth only takes place within the sphere of discipline and commitment. Commitment to people, commitment to a church, commitment to a faithful place of service. Discipline is freedom.

Could I ask a personal question: what dreams do you have that are going unfulfilled simply because you're not disciplined? The Lord wants you to be free. I think if our country has anything to offer it's that the sky is the limit. You can shoot for the stars. Your dreams can come true. Almost in all human history there has been no society that has afforded that kind of opportunity. You can be anything, you can do anything. You can set your goal as far out as you want. With God's help you can do it. But it's going to take discipline.

What dreams has God put within your heart to do that he's awakening and saying, "Come on, my child! Be disciplined and you can reach those dreams and goals." What dreams or desires does the Lord have for you that go unfulfilled for the lack of discipline?

So many people are looking for a ministry and they're wondering how in the world they can get a ministry. They want to know what their gifts are and what special place God has called them to. If they would only realize that the way to get a ministry is just to be a servant. If you're a servant you'll always have a ministry.

Commitment, discipline. God is telling us that true freedom comes when we commit ourselves. Commit ourselves in personal spiritual disciplines of prayer and study of the word and giving. Commit ourselves in disciplines of sharing and taking responsibility for others whether it's within the church in a Sunday school class or a children's work experience or something in the community that God calls us to. To have a faithful place of responsibility.

I think a third definition of freedom is that freedom comes as a gift from God himself.

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Freedom is a gift. Jesus says, "If the Son has set you free you will be free indeed." I believe that God has raised up America and has given us the gift of freedom. Whenever God gives splendid gifts he also requires a good deal of responsibility. Jesus said, "To him whom much is given much shall be required." Privilege brings responsibility.

Probably like you periodically I feel guilty about being so privileged. Why wasn't I born an Albanian rather than an American? Why wasn't I born an Afghan citizen rather than an American citizen? You and I are uniquely in a privileged situation. God has reasons I'm not fully aware of. God has given us freedom. I think one of the reasons why God keeps us free in this country is because this country has a Christian community that is willing to share the light of the gospel with the ends of the earth. Never has there been a country in human history that has so been concerned about promulgated the message of Jesus Christ to the ends of the world. I believe the stop doing that is the day our freedom begins to unravel.

On a personal spiritual level, God has given me freedom from the law of sin and death. True freedom is knowing that God has set me free from the curse of sin, which is death. Things which I could not free myself from – from my sin nature and from my death nature – God has given me freedom from through Jesus Christ who died in my place and in your place. True freedom.

I can never forget the sight 5 or 6 years ago when I was in the Holy Land near Mt. Carmel. For some reason this is etched in my mind. A crazy kind of visual scene. As we were driving along there were some telephone wires stretched across the landscape high up in the air. As I looked there was this huge black bird that was hanging upside down on the wires. I thought that is the most unusual sight. What is that bird doing? Chinning himself? The more I looked at that bird as we drove along I realized the bird was dead. There evidently must have been a fray in the electrical wire insulation so that when it landed with his claws on the wire it had touched the live thing and it had no grounding and *bang!* The law of electricity was so strong that that bird couldn't let go until somebody cut him loose. That bird was held captive by the law of electricity. By the law of death.

Somehow that came in my mind as an example of how Jesus Christ sets us free from the law of death because all of a sudden I had this crazy thought. What if there was enough life in the bird to resist the law of electricity. So that when electricity sent its deadly message to the bird, life would emanate out of the bird and flow back into the electricity and all the transformers between there and Tel Aviv would be blown to smithereens. Because a greater principle was at work that the principle of death by electricity. The bird would come to life having singed all the telephone poles in the neighboring miles. Tremendous thought!

It struck me as human beings that we are all outside of Jesus Christ subject to the law of sin and death and when death grabs hold of us without Christ there is no hope. But when Jesus Christ comes into life a higher law takes over than the law of sin and death. It's the law of liberty. It's the law of life, which sets us free in Christ Jesus. Only Jesus Christ can give the higher kind of law and he blows all hell's fuses when he does.

Our country's freedom stems from the declaration of independence July 4, 1776 a day we honor today. But our freedom in Christ stems from our declaration of dependence that we make upon Jesus Christ who died for our sins and gave us life. In him alone is real freedom. Have you taken your freedom from him? [end of tape]