THE TRUTH ABOUT FREEDOM

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TEXT: Galatians 5:1, 13-15

INTRODUCTION

ATTENTION-GETTER: Once, in the 1820’s, a little boy called Sam was playing in the yard behind his house. During his pretend fighting game, he knocked over the outhouse.

Now Sam was upset and worried that he would get into trouble so he ran into the woods and didn’t come out until after got dark. When he arrived back home, his pappy was waiting for him. He asked suspiciously, “Son, did you knock over the outhouse this afternoon?”

“No, pappy,” Sam lied.

“Well, let me tell you a story,” said the father. “Once, not that long ago, Mr Washington received a shiny new axe from his father. Excited, he tried it out on a tree, swiftly cutting it down. But as he looked at the tree, with dismay he realized it was his mother’s favorite cherry tree,” his pappy paused.” just like you, he ran into the woods. When he returned, his pappy asked, “George, did you cut down the cherry tree?” George answered with, ‘Father, I cannot tell a lie. I did indeed chop down the tree.’ Then his father said, ‘Well, since you were honest with me, you are spared from punishment. I hope you have learned your lesson, though.’ So,” the Sam’s father asked again,” did you knock down the outhouse?”

“Pappy, I cannot tell a lie anymore.” said the little boy. “I did indeed knock down the outhouse.”

Then his pappy father spanked Sam boy red, white, and blue. The boy whimpered, “Pappy, I told you the truth! Why did you spank me?”

Pappy answered, “That’s because George Washington’s father wasn’t in the tree when he chopped it down!”

SCRIPTURE: Galatians 5:1, 13-15: *It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery…. 13 You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. 14 For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”15 If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.*

PRAYER

1. At this time of year we celebrate our national freedom and remember the signing of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776.
   1. We live in a free nation.
   2. This freedom inspired a young theology student named Samuel Francis Smith.
   3. In February 1832, young Smith was sorting through some music that had been brought over from Europe and came across a German melody that happened to strike his fancy.
   4. He glanced at the words at the bottom of the page and noticed it was a patriotic song.
   5. But it was a song about another country.
   6. He tapped out the rhythm of the tune and began to write his own words to the music. These are the words he wrote:

My country 'tis of thee, Sweet land of liberty, Of thee I sing: Land where my fathers died, Land of the pilgrims' pride, From every mountainside, Let freedom ring!

1. As we study through history we find that millions of people have given their lives for the protection and advancement of the freedom Samuel Smith wrote about.
   1. The chimes of “freedom” ring across America.
   2. We live in the land of the “free”.
   3. But this morning we must ask ourselves the question, “What does it mean to be free?”
   4. We need to discover the truth about freedom.

* 1st of all…

FREEDOM IS NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE

1. That is certainly what Thomas Jefferson had on his mind when he penned the Declaration of Independence.
   1. Freedom allowed this country to govern itself, free from English authority.
   2. The desire for national independence inspired Patrick Henry to shout that immortal phrase, “Give me liberty, or give me death!”
   3. And many died for the cause of that freedom.
2. On July 3, 1776, the night before the Declaration of Independence was signed, John Adams said, “I am well aware of the toil and blood and treasure it will cost us to maintain this declaration.”
   1. And indeed, national freedom proved costly to the signers of the document.
   2. Richard Stockton of New Jersey was pulled from his bed by British soldiers, cast into prison, and died shortly thereafter at the age of 51.
   3. John Hart was chased away from his dying wife and their thirteen children, his farm was destroyed by fire, and he was a fugitive for over a year.
3. National freedom is one thing for which we have been willing to die for.
   1. So, at this time of year when we ask the question, “What does it mean to be free?” we think of national independence.
   2. The second answer to our question, “What does it mean to be free?” is this…

FREEDOM IS PERSONAL LIBERTY

ILLUSTRATION: An elderly lady driving a big, new, expensive car was preparing to back into a parallel parking space when suddenly a young man in a small sports car zoomed in ahead of her.

The woman angrily asked why he had done that when he could tell she was trying to park there.

His response was simply, “Because I'm young and I'm quick.”

The young man then entered the store. When he came back out a few minutes later he found the elderly lady using her big, new car as a battering ram, backing up and then ramming into his car.

He very angrily asked her why she was wrecking his car. Her response was, “Because I'm old and I'm rich.”

* That could probably be defined as a misuse of personal liberty.

1. Personal liberty is one of our most prized possessions and is believed to be an inalienable right of human beings.

We have amended the U.S. Constitution to guarantee freedom of speech, freedom to travel, and freedom of religion.

1. One of the most dramatic events of the 20th century was when the Berlin wall came down.
   1. For 40 years the people of East Germany were denied personal freedom.
   2. They couldn't travel freely.
   3. They couldn't speak in protest and had no freedom of religion.
   4. Suddenly, freedom shook the world.
   5. The wall came tumbling down, and people who were once in bondage had personal freedom.
   6. They could speak out, worship, and travel freely.
   7. And as we watched the news accounts we could only imagine what the people of East Germany were feeling as they experienced personal liberty—many for 1st time.
   8. When we ask the question, “what does it mean to be free?” our minds focus on personal liberty.
2. Another answer to our question, “what does it mean to be free?” is that;

FREEDOM IS SELF RULE

1. Now we come to a definition of freedom.
   1. The dictionary says that freedom is “exemption from external control, interference, or regulation. The power of self-determination.”
   2. In other words, freedom is self-governance independent of outside interference.
   3. Freedom is self-rule.
   4. That is what the signers of the Declaration of Independence had in mind for this country, and the Bill of Rights guarantees personal self-rule up to a point.
   5. Self-rule is fundamental to freedom.
2. Jesus told the story of a young man who longed for freedom.
   1. He took his inheritance, went off into a foreign land, and wasted his wealth partying with the heathens.
   2. When his money ran out, he found himself wanting to eat hog slop.
   3. He was at the bottom of the barrel—but at least he was free!—or so he thought.
   4. He had self-determination, self-rule, freedom.
   5. But for the prodigal son, liberty had lost its luster.
   6. He said, in essence, “If this is freedom, I would be better off being a slave.”
   7. He went back home, ready to give his freedom for the security of servanthood.

If this was freedom, the prodigal was not so sure that freedom was such a great idea.

* 1. These things that I've mentioned, National Independence; Personal Liberty, and Self-rule, are all answers to the question, “what does it mean to be free?”.
  2. But they are only answers to the question when we ask it concerning “what does it mean to be free as a citizen of this world”.
  3. They are not answers that should be given up—and we must thank God that we have these freedoms in this great country of ours.

1. But we find the New Testament has a different definition of freedom.

* According to the Bible:

FREEDOM IS SPIRITUAL LIBERTY

1. The Scriptures tell us that true freedom comes only when we yield control of our lives to Jesus Christ.
   1. The popular definition is that freedom is self-rule.
   2. But God tells us that true freedom only comes when our lives are ruled by Christ.
   3. Self-rule didn't work for Adam and Eve, and it won't work for us.
   4. Too often, self-rule means that we are ruled by our human appetites.
2. The prodigal son tried to be free by exerting self-determination, but he soon discovered that self-rule landed him in bondage.
   1. He couldn't be free on his own.
   2. And so it is with every one of us.
   3. We try to exert our freedom by ruling ourselves, but we soon discover that we are still enslaved by sin.
   4. No matter how hard we try, sin holds us captive.
   5. No matter how fast we run from the slavery of sin, it catches up with us and enslaves us.
   6. When we rule ourselves, we are not free.
   7. Our only hope is to give up self-rule for Christ's rule—to trust Him to set us free.
   8. The paradox of the Gospel is this: freedom comes only as we allow Christ to control our lives.
   9. The greatly loved Bible teacher Henrietta Mears knew the secret of true freedom, and she wanted her students to know it too.

With young people in mind, she said, “A bird is free in the air. Place a bird in the water and he has lost his liberty. A fish is free in the water, but leave him on the sand and he perishes. He is out of his realm. So, young people, the Christian is free when he does the will of God and is obedient to God's command. This is as natural a realm for God's child as the water is for the fish, or the air for the bird.”

1. God in His infinite mercy gave His Son to set us free.
   1. The bonds of sin had to be broken so that mankind could experience true liberty.
   2. God sent His Son to die on a cross so that you and I might be free from sin.
   3. As we give up control of our own lives to Jesus Christ, we have true freedom.

ILLUSTRATION: When the Emancipation Proclamation, the document that set the slaves free, was taken to Abraham Lincoln for his signature, Mr. Lincoln took the pen in his hand and slowly, firmly wrote his name.

That signature would free people who had been enslaved for decades.

After he signed the Proclamation, Lincoln said with conviction, “That will do!”

1. As the nails tore into Jesus' hands and feet, as He hung between heaven and earth, as the sword pierced His side, God was signing His name on our Emancipation Proclamation.
   1. When Jesus breathed His last, He cried out, “It is finished”.
   2. That will do!

* 1. God had done the work that would set us free.

1. We now come to our text in Galatians 5:1.
   1. Paul told the Galatians, *“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.”*
   2. By giving Christ control of our lives, we have been set free.
   3. Why then do so many Christians want to go back to the slavery of self-rule?
2. The pilgrims came to America because they wanted freedom of religion.

* 1. Later, the constitution guaranteed personal freedom.
  2. We have fought wars for those freedoms.
  3. Hundreds of thousands of Americans have died to preserve the freedoms that we enjoy.
  4. Can you imagine, after all of the war and struggle for freedom, someone saying, “Well, I think that we should give up our freedom of worship and our freedom of speech. I think America should go back to being an English colony.”
  5. Such a thing is unthinkable.

1. Christ has set us free from sin's bondage.
   1. That freedom cost Him His life.
   2. We cannot free ourselves.
   3. We have to depend on God to set us free.
   4. But now that we are free in Christ, why do so many want to take control of their lives away from Him and go back to self-rule?
   5. Do we want to go back to the slavery of sin? Never!
2. If you want to know the truth about true freedom, don't look in the dictionary for a definition.
3. Look to the cross.
   1. For in giving Christ control of our lives we find true freedom—freedom from the chains of sin.
   2. And whatever we do, we must not return to the bondage of sin's slavery.
   3. We must stand fast in the liberty by which Christ has made us free.

CONCLUSION

ILLUSTRATION: Officer Peter O'Hanlon was patrolling on night duty in northern England some years ago when he heard a quivering sob. Turning in the direction that it came from, he saw in the shadows a little boy sitting on a doorstep.

With tears rolling down his cheeks, the child whimpered, “I'm lost. Take me home.” The policeman began naming street after street, trying to help him remember where he lived. When that failed, he repeated the names of the shops and hotels in the area, but all without success.

Then he remembered that in the center of the city was a well-known church with a large white cross towering high above the surrounding landscape. He pointed to it and said, “Do you live anywhere near that?” The boy's face immediately brightened. “Yes, take me to the cross. I can find my way home from there!”

1. My friends, let me take you to the cross and I guarantee you that you can find your way home from there.
2. PRAYER/INVITATION