

INDEPENDENCE DAY Message – Freed to Serve

7/1/18 – Pastor Randy

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, ¹² training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. – Titus 2:11-14 (ESV)

“...how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. Therefore, he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.”
– Hebrews 9:14,15 (ESV)

Today, as we prepare to receive the Lord's Supper together I want to relate the truth about the redemption - the freedom - secured for us through the cross of Christ to two historical events in the history of America.

In just a few days, on July 4th, we will celebrate the anniversary of our nation's independence. On July 4th, the Continental Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence. Though the vote for actual independence took place on July 2nd, from then on the 4th became the day that was celebrated as the birth of American independence.

There is an irony surrounding our celebration of independence day. While our declaration of independence begins with a statement that our right to liberty is endowed to us by our Creator, the people of our nation are more and more frequently demanding liberty from their Creator.

Less than two weeks ago a much less known and celebrated event enjoyed its 153rd anniversary. June 19th (Juneteenth) — also called Freedom Day and African American Independence Day — honors the day in 1865 when Union soldiers arrived in Galveston, Texas, with this message: “The people of Texas are informed that, in accordance with a proclamation from the Executive of the United States, all slaves are free.” That sounds great but the problem was

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that this was 2 1/2 years after President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, and still several months after the 13th Amendment was passed by Congress, officially abolishing the institution of slavery. It was great news but late news. It serves as a reminder that laws mean nothing until communicated and enforced.

July 4 is a great day in American history but it is also marred by the stain that our nations founders had given in to the pro-slavery forces and their descendants had expanded it. A second irony surrounding independence day is that it commemorates a liberty that was realized by some people, but not all people living in our nation. How could that be? The painful reality in our history is that our forefathers celebrated a new found freedom for themselves while simultaneously denying freedom to others.

In 1852, Frederick Douglass delivered one of his more famous speeches, one that later came to be called "What to a slave is the 4th of July?" He said, "What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July? I answer: a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him, your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciations of tyrants, brass fronted impudence; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade, and solemnity, are, to him, mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy – a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages."

At the heart of the Christian faith is the concept of redemption which can be defined as the act of liberating someone or something from captivity or bondage through the payment of a price by the "redeemer". One of the most biblically rich descriptions of God is "Redeemer". God is in the business of setting people free!! Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty!

A proper understanding of God's plan of redemption as it is revealed through the Old and New Testaments is helpful for two reasons: It informs our understanding of the true meaning of liberty and it stimulates within us a

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passion to pursue liberty and justice for all.

To gain a full, robust understanding of God's plan of redemption for the world we need to start with the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. To a great degree, the exodus event provides the background and basis for understanding and interpreting the redemptive work of Jesus. The Exodus is the first great redemptive work of God and it serves as a model for God's future and final redemptive work through Christ. The exodus is the story about God's divine miraculous intervention to redeem or liberate the Israelites from their bondage to the Egyptians. In doing so He proved himself to be faithful to the promise He made to Abraham; that He had chosen Abraham to be the father of a great nation that God would bless and make a blessing to the world. The key takeaways from the story of the exodus are:

1. God is "Redeemer". He worked through Moses but God said, "I have seen the suffering of my people at the hands of their slavemasters. I have heard their cries and now I have come to deliver them from their oppressors.

2. Their redemption turned them from slaves to sons. God said to Moses, "I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians." (Ex. 6:7) God later reminded the Israelites about his redemption with these words: "You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself." (Ex. 19:4)

3. Their redemption was secured by the death of an innocent. The Passover lamb was killed so the Israelites could be spared death and set free.

4. God redeemed His people so they could serve Him and do His will.

Over and over again in the book of Deuteronomy God reminds them how He redeemed them from Egypt as the basis for his appeal to them to live holy.

The exodus event establishes God's essential character and mission: God is Redeemer: One who absolutely hates and is opposed to injustice and acts to redeem the oppressed. Now what the exodus event did not reveal but which was revealed once the Israelites began their journey to the promised land and throughout the rest of their history - especially through the exile period - was that we need a redeemer to not only rescue us from the sin outside of

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us; we need someone to redeem us from the sin inside of us.

In the exodus story the Israelites appear to be only victims. When we read the prophets, especially those who prophesied during the exile period of Israel we discover God promising a two-fold redemption. God promised to come through his Messiah and liberate His people from the nations that had oppressed them. But He also promised – and this was His primary concern – to deliver them from their own evil ways! By the time we get to the cross, Israel knows full well that they need a two-fold redemption.

So while the exodus event reveals God redeeming innocent victims from their victimizers, the exodus also foreshadowed the final and full work of redemption that God would bring about through Jesus' atoning death and resurrection. This ultimate work of redemption is one that frees us from ALL evil: Evil without and evil within.

Redemption conveys the notion that while sin is something that we are responsible for and bear guilt over, sin is also an oppressive power that has us in its grips and from which we need outside deliverance. Sin is a slavemaster that we can't escape without God's intervention.

Now we are ready to answer two questions:

Q#1: What is "liberty"? What does "redemption" or true freedom look like?

A. Liberty, as the scripture defines it, is the freedom to be who God has created us to be not the freedom to be who we want to be. It is the freedom to do the right thing, not the freedom to do "my own thing". Freedom to pursue God's will, not the freedom to pursue other gods.

Any so-called freedom that offers the individual freedom from God, is no freedom at all. In Peter's second letter he wrote,

"They brag about themselves with empty, foolish boasting. With an appeal to twisted sexual desires, they lure back into sin those who have barely escaped from a lifestyle of deception. They promise freedom, but they themselves are slaves of sin and corruption. For you are a slave to whatever controls you. - 2 Peter 2:18,19

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Peter addresses the foolishness of thinking that the freedom to satisfy our perverse desires is freedom. It promises one thing but delivers the opposite. It promises freedom but produces captivity to corruption.

Paul wrote to Titus about our the salvation we have from:

*“...our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us **to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.** - Titus 2:11-14 (ESV)*

We are redeemed FROM rebellion TO do good works (i.e. God-works)

B. Freedom from personal sin is the ultimate freedom and it can never be corrupted by the removal of physical, political, or economic freedom. Many people have found ultimate spiritual freedom from sin even while suffering under physical bondage. Paul spirit was free as he sang while in chains in prison. John was exiled to the Island of Patmos but no one could exile him from the presence of the Spirit that lived in him!

C. The NT does not require Christians to passively tolerate injustice against others or ourselves although it does require us to refrain from returning evil with evil. We must not overlook the immediate meaning of the exodus story and make it only about God redeeming us from our personal sins. He cares about the injustice we suffer from without. He has promised to destroy all evil when he returns!

In Acts 23, Paul sought justice for himself by sending his nephew to reveal to a Roman commander about a threat against Paul's life. Then we read that the Roman commander secured protection for Paul and actively sought justice for him composing a letter to Felix, the Roman governor on Paul's behalf. James spoke out vehemently against some wealthy individuals who had oppressed the poor by hoarding and withholding the wages from their workers. He wrote,

“Look here, you rich people: Weep and groan with anguish because of all the terrible troubles ahead of you.... The very wealth you were counting on will eat away your flesh like fire. This corroded treasure you have hoarded will testify against you on the

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day of judgment. For listen! Hear the cries of the field workers whom you have cheated of their pay. The cries of those who harvest your fields have reached the ears of the Lord of Heaven's Armies."

Q#2: How should we live in light of the biblical revelation of God as the "redeemer of mankind"?

1. We have been freed to serve... so others can be free from the sin within them.

Frederick Douglass, with great insight wrote, "Thus is slavery the enemy of both the slave and the slaveholder."

In other words, the oppressor is himself oppressed. He oppresses others because he is himself oppressed by sin. The scripture is clear that not everyone will accept the offer of redemption from sin through Jesus' atoning death. However, it is also clear that genuine faith in Christ leads to becoming a new creation in Christ, with a transformed heart by the Holy Spirit. Knowing that the Holy Spirit alone has the power to transform the heart and hands of the sinner makes evangelism the top priority of the church. The greatest potential solution to injustice is by changing the heart of the perpetrator of injustice. When the heart is bent on doing evil, the law proves to be very limited in its effectiveness at curbing evil. For every one law you can write, an evil mind will find two ways around it.

2. We have been freed to serve... so others can be set free from the sin outside them.

He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing.¹⁹ Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. – Deuteronomy 10:18,19

Imagine you discover in your workplace that a female co-worker is being harassed by a company executive and she has been threatened that if she files a complaint or doesn't give in to his advances she will lose her job. What is the proper response? Does this boss need someone to share the good news of Christ with him so he will be come to faith in Christ, repent of his sin and stop his harassment? Of course, that would be the best scenario. But just as

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this man needs to be redeemed from his bondage to his lusts, this woman needs to be redeemed from her oppressor. A righteous Christian response would be to utilize the company's whistleblower policy and help this woman receive justice.

The ministry of a Christian attorney is not only to share the good news of Christ with those in his/her sphere of influence but to use his/her expertise in the law to seek to obtain justice for others.

The redemption we enjoy; the redemption we celebrate; the redemption we sing about and shout about; the redemption we give thanks to God for must become the redemption we work to bring to others.

The two NT texts we began with have specific phrases which I highlighted:
a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions

who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. -

As we celebrate the fourth of July let's remember that the liberty and freedom we enjoy for ourselves is not for ourselves, but so we can be a blessing to others. The New Covenant redemption from sin offered to us through Christ is the fulfillment of the Old Covenant promise to Abraham. It was a promise to bless Abraham's descendants so they could go and be a blessing to the world! Jesus came to free us from sin so we could be a part of liberating others from sin; from the sin within them and the sin against them.

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