

“TRUE FREEDOM”

by Rom A. Pegram (7/3/16)

(*Maybe some of you have heard this story before, but it's certainly one worth repeating...*) I want to start today with a story—a story about Johnny & his sister, Sally, who were visiting their grandparents on the farm. Johnny was given a slingshot to play with out in the woods. He practiced in the woods, but he could never hit the target. Getting a little discouraged, he headed back for dinner. As he was walking back he saw Grandma's pet duck. Just out of impulse, he let the slingshot fly, hit the duck square in the head, and killed it. He was shocked and grieved. In a panic, he hid the dead duck in the wood pile, only to see his sister watching! Sally, his sister, had seen it all, but she said nothing...

Well, after lunch the next day *Grandma* said, "Sally, let's wash the dishes." But Sally said, "Grandma, Johnny told me he wanted to help in the kitchen." Then she whispered to him, "Remember the duck?" So Johnny did the dishes...

Later that day, *Grandpa* asked if the children wanted to go fishing and *Grandma* said, "I'm sorry but I need Sally to help make supper." Sally just smiled and said, "Well that's all right because Johnny told me he wanted to help." She whispered again, "Remember the duck?" So Sally went fishing and Johnny stayed to help...

After several days of Johnny doing both his chores and Sally's ... he finally couldn't stand it any longer. He came to Grandma and confessed that he'd killed the duck. Grandma knelt down, gave him a hug, and said, "Sweetheart, I know. You see, I was standing at the window and I saw the whole thing, but because I love you, I forgave you. I was just wondering how long you would let Sally make a slave of you."

Folks, this is the weekend (July 4th) where we celebrate our freedom in this country. But, *what is true freedom?* And, in light of the story of Johnny & Sally, what is it that keeps us from it? As believers, we're told to go to God's word for guidance & for direction. So, *what about true freedom?* What does God's word have to say about that? You may be surprised. Just listen to Paul's words (Romans 6:15-23, NLT)...

Well then, since God's grace has set us free from the law, does that mean we can go on sinning? Of course not! ¹⁶ Don't you realize that you become the slave of whatever you choose to obey? You can be a slave to sin, which leads to death, or you can choose to obey God, which leads to righteous living. ¹⁷ Thank God! Once you were slaves of sin, but now you wholeheartedly obey this teaching we have given you. ¹⁸ Now you are free from your slavery to sin, and you have become slaves to righteous living. ¹⁹ Because of the weakness of your human nature, I am using the illustration of slavery to help you understand all this. Previously, you let yourselves be slaves to impurity and lawlessness, which led ever deeper into sin. Now you must give yourselves to be slaves to righteous living so that you will become holy. ²⁰ When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the obligation to do right. ²¹ And what was the result? You are now ashamed of the things you used to do, things that end in eternal doom. ²² But now you are free from the power of sin and have become slaves of God. Now you do those things that lead to holiness and result in eternal life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but

the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.

We're all slaves! Did you hear that? Now, seriously, don't get hung up on the word 'slave' in today's lesson! The Greek word here is ... *δοῦλος* ... which means *slave* or *servant* ... and more often than not—in this New Testament culture, it was a *voluntary* situation. So, in the context of Romans 6, slavery was very much a part of their culture ... where families *chose* to serve other families in exchange for their livelihood ... and eventually just became part of one big (and, many times, happy) family—serving one another out of love. Those who served did it with a great deal of pride & honor & joy. Paul, out of *this* context, was bringing up the point that we are all slaves or serve something or someone in this life. Does anyone here have a job? You get my point. But, the question today is, WHAT OR WHO will we *choose* to be slaves or servants of? What or who will we choose to serve?

WE HAVE A CHOICE...

And here it is...

WILL WE CHOOSE TO BE SLAVES OR SERVANTS OF SIN? Verse 19b tells us, "Previously, you let yourselves be slaves to impurity and lawlessness, which led ever deeper into sin." Paul, of course, is implying here that ... *this should no longer be the case!* And verses 20-21 go on in this way: "When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the obligation to do right. ²¹ And what was the result? You are now ashamed of the things you used to do, things that end in eternal doom."

Have you ever felt *imprisoned* in your life—so consumed by something or someone that you just couldn't shake loose from whatever it is ... on your own? The truth is, many people are slaves to many *negative* things today—things that are harmful ... and 'sin' is at the very root of those things. For instance, think about some of the things people are 'imprisoned' by today:

- Addictions, like to *drugs (including alcohol)* ... like the university professor, I read about recently, who started using marijuana in college ... and had to resign from his position at the university because of the drugs affect on his mind; anything that we can no longer control, but has control over us ... ends up being a prison for us...
- Or, how about prisons of *lust*? We hear about crimes related to this prison, but we don't hear about this silent reality in many people's lives; it is a reality that our minds can become imprisoned by ungodly thoughts to the point where we're no longer in control...
- Or, the prison of *an uncontrollable tongue*; some people cannot seem to speak without using God's name in vain, spreading rumors, or telling lies ... as if they're under some kind of supernatural power (*sin*)...
- Or—lets get down to real life here ... the prison of *food*; how many of us have a tendency to use food 'to sooth our souls' ... only to have trouble eating healthy after awhile?

- And then there are prisons of *fear* ... prisons of *insecurity* ... prisons of *boredom*...
- Finally, there's that prison of *attitude* ... an attitude that just consumes us; we don't like it; those around us don't like it, but we just can't shake it on our own; I'll get back to that one...

Perhaps *you've* tried to get free from one of these prisons, only to find out that you're powerless to get free ... *though you have a real thirst for a different life*—one free from those things that enslave you. If you know that longing, it's because God wants you walking closely with him ... and has placed that longing within you...

But, *what a tragedy it would be to go through life ... thirsty ... and to never have that thirst for righteousness quenched!* What a tragedy it would be to go through life ... never knowing the freedom that God promises to those who choose to follow him! Thankfully, **we have a choice**... WILL WE CHOOSE TO BE SLAVES OR SERVANTS OF SIN (anything in this world that tears us apart from God), or...

WILL WE CHOOSE TO BE SLAVES OR SERVANTS OF GOD? Verse 19c—if we go back to that for a moment—goes on to say: “Now you must give yourselves to be slaves to righteous living so that you will become holy.” It's *the act of surrender* ... that makes us slaves or servants. It's *the voluntary act of surrender* to the One who loved us first ... that makes our relationship all about LOVE ... with an attitude of LOVE. It's *the voluntary act of surrender* ... that gives us the by-product of *true freedom*; we no longer have to even think about getting through this life *on our own!* Let me give you a real-life example...

Just a few short years ago (Katrina), we had a miraculous mission trip to Mississippi. The group from South West Wisconsin, as a whole, accomplished building the better part of 2 houses in 7 days. However, in the midst of God being glorified through the work of many hands, we had a minor set-back; we discovered that there'd been a robbery on the second day of the week. Let me explain...

As our leadership team pulled up to the elementary school that we'd reserved for our evening worship, we noticed right away that the window in the door near the room we were using was broken out—glass everywhere! Immediately, we had a sinking feeling in our stomachs. Upon entry, we were greeted by two people from the District Office of Hancock County Schools who said, “We're sorry.” We then went over to look at our equipment, only to discover that 3 electric guitars, 1 amplifier, and 3 computers were missing. It all seemed like a bad dream, as we spent the better part of that day with both the District Office personnel ... and the Sheriff's Department. After a great start to our mission week, *this is not what we'd planned. It is not at all how we had expected the week to go; but, in the midst of this situation, we had a choice. I had a choice!* Because of this very troubling situation, would we be slaves to fear, or would we trust God to be our Deliverer and get on with the rest of the week?

We prayed (even right in front of the Sheriff's Dept. investigators) ... and, as we prayed for God's grace, **God helped us to let go of.**

- **The anger** felt toward those who had committed this crime (and there was some); we began to pray for them, asking God to touch their lives ... and lead them to Christ...
- **The invasion of our personal lives**—having our personal belongings *handled & taken*; we began to pray that the instruments & equipment lost might somehow get into the hands of some needy Christians who would use them for God's glory...
- **The sentimental loss** & memories connected to what was taken...
- **The thought of the monetary loss**, realizing that when we commit our lives to Christ, *it's all his anyway* ... and we don't get to choose how God will use us ... or 'our stuff' ...

Folks, **the Holy Spirit was faithful to remind us of the truth of scripture that tells us that *God is in control ... and God loves us ... and God will not allow anything to happen in our lives that would hurt us, eternally speaking.*** There's always a bigger picture than what we see; the Word of God continually tells us that...

So, *God gave us a freedom, in the midst of this very trying situation, from fear & anger & self-pity* ... that could have consumed our mission week. The sin of an ungodly attitude, at this point, could have led to death—the death of a week of work & worship that was supposed to glorify God! Instead, God gave us 'true freedom.' In John 8 (vv. 31-32), Jesus reminds his followers: "If you obey my teaching, you are really my disciples..." Then, here comes the by-product of this relationship in v. 32: "...you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." The truth that God was in control, regardless of our situation, set us free that week—set us free to do God's work, to complete what God had sent us to Mississippi to do...

Upon returning from this mission trip, I finally had some quiet time, picked up one of my favorite devotionals ... and began to read this (Coincidence? God-incidence?)...

"Wherever God sends us, He will guard our lives. Our personal property and possessions are to be a matter of indifference to us, and our hold on these things should be very loose. If this is not the case, we will have panic, heartache, and distress." In other words, we'll become imprisoned—slaves to self-centeredness & self-pity...

Doesn't God have a great sense of humor? You can call it coincidence if you like ... but I'd rather call it a God-incidence ... which I believe is what it was...

Now, listen to me carefully: Whatever is in your past, whatever you have done ... and the devil keeps throwing it back in your face—whatever it is, *you need to know that God was standing at the window; He saw the whole thing!* The truth is, God has seen your whole life! And, **God wants you to know that he loves you ... and that you are forgiven.** But here's something else: **God is also wondering how long you're going to let the devil make a slave of you!** Slavery to sin—anything that separates us from

God (even a wrong attitude)—is not God's idea; God's idea is 'slavery to righteousness' or 'true freedom!'

True freedom is ... freedom from whatever imprisons you, steals your joy, consumes you to the point that God can no longer work freely in your life ... or a part of your life! And, the GOOD NEWS is ... *this freedom is ours in Christ ...* if we will just submit to the love relationship God so desperately wants to be in with us. According to the Apostle Paul, we all serve something or someone; so, *who* will it be for you?