

Being Free, Living Freely

Text: Galatians 5:1

7-2-17



Reflection questions... [please consider the teaching notes, first, as a basis of your reflections]

“I’m free! Free to what?”

“How aware are you of your desires? What are you carrying? How is it shaping you? What if releasing something meant renewed freedom to embrace Christ and be embraced by him?” (Philippians 3)

“Ask God where he thinks change is needed in your life.” (maybe chewing your nails is not your biggest issue. Perhaps that truth doesn’t go deep enough: inner parts, Psalm 51)

“Reflect on the daily choices that you are making which support such life-threatening patterns.”

“Pause to consider the lies that you are currently promoting (believing) about yourself which are preventing you from living freely.”

If your life is producing ‘foolish’ behavior, somewhere along the line, you have given yourself over, to self-destructive patterns of thought.

Every place of captivity (enslavement) in our lives is the result of a faulty narrative; a faulty belief system. It is, as Paul says, the “exchange of truth for a lie” (Romans 1).

“Decide on Jesus as your source of truth and adopt practices which are consistent with your area of need” (e.g. If you tend to criticize or comment on everything, perhaps ‘eating fish on Fridays’ is not the resolution. Maybe determining for one week to refuse to make such statements and pause to ask God ‘why’ you feel the need to always assess the other?)

Teaching Notes...

“These walls are funny. First you hate ‘em, then you get used to ‘em. Enough time passes, you get so you depend on them.” [Morgan Freeman’s character, “Red”, in *The Shawshank Redemption*]

It always reminds me of the prisoner with whom I interacted in Dayton, OH, who advised that, upon his release, he was going to commit which would ensure his speedy return to incarceration. He told me that he didn’t “know that world” (freedom). At least prison afforded him 3-squares and a place out of the elements.

There are so many “paradoxes” associated with freedom:

→ We speak of freedom as ‘life without restraint’; the Bible speaks of freedom as ‘life constrained by love’.

→ You can be free and assume that you are in bondage, and you can actually be in bondage and be convinced that you are free.

→ The things we freely choose often create the very circumstances which enslave us.

“Don’t use your freedom as an excuse to do whatever you want to do and destroy your freedom...” Galatians 5:13

The Israelites had been introduced to this unique, Creator-God through a totally unprovoked, self-initiated movement of rescue. They would then be asked to simply live in response to this developing understanding of this God.

The Egyptians prayed to gods, built temples to gods, not in reverence--- not as a means of confidently following them--- but as an attempt to secure a favorable response. They were capricious. They were volatile. They could not be trusted.

The Jews were becoming increasingly familiar with a God who was providing for them, even the most tenuous of circumstances, and whom they were learning to worship out of a place of gratitude, not obligation.

Our journey has always been offered to us as the movement from bondage to liberty; from slavery to freedom. What becomes apparent is that our struggle is not always in the “breaking free”, but in “living freely.”

The truth is, we all find ourselves on this journey to live freely. We know what it is to be captive to fear, to food, to substances (of various kinds), to anger, to depression, to worry, to shame. It’s why so many of us resonate with this Story.

We, too often, find ourselves feeling as if we are no longer ‘choosing’ life, but life is being ‘chosen’ for us.

We know where we’ve been and we are discovering God’s vision for us--- God’s vision of us--- the people God dreams for us to be. We realize that, at present, we are a little of both, but we are finding that God has provided *“a pathway in the desert”* (Isaiah 43:19).

Freedom is, first, an announcement; a proclamation.

It’s the declaration that establishes the conditions for freedom. It is made by one who has the authority and power to secure liberation.

“So, if the son sets you free, then you are truly free...” John 8:36

It frees us live in such a way that life is no longer being imposed upon us, but in some real way, we become responsible for the kind of life that we envision and the choices we pursue in order to realize such a life. **Sounds great, huh?**

The human dilemma: we have consistently demonstrated that we prefer predictable dysfunctionality to risky freedom.

“It’s easier to get people out of slavery than it is to get the slavery out of people” (source uncertain).

Our initial posture toward captivity is anger and resentment at all of the limitations and restrictions being imposed upon us. Gradually, we begin to adapt to our surroundings. The walls seem to provide some form of ‘structure’ and some warped sense of comfort for us. We arrive at the place where freedom becomes more terrifying than captivity.

Bondage, then, is not a weakness that we overcome, but a condition from which we must be rescued/saved.

“I have seen the oppression, I have heard their cries... and I have come down to rescue them.”

Exodus 3:7-8

It takes an act of God to break us free. It always begins with a ‘cry’. Sometimes it’s a cry of undirected expression of fatigue and frustration. Sometimes it’s a cry for help, directed at someone we believe either responsible for our predicament or able to bring some sense of resolve.

Our freedom is never complete in deliverance. It can lead us to the ‘water’s edge’, but never force us to choose. There are powerful forces at work, both from within us and from outside of us, that attempt to limit the freedoms of our movement.

We were created for freedom, not independence.

“Let my people go so that they might worship me” (Exodus 10:3).

“You may freely eat...” (Genesis 2:16) The command announces our capacity for freedom. It suggests that within those boundaries, you have a great deal of liberty to securely explore what inspires and ignites you.

“You may not eat...” with freedom comes necessity: both our right to choose and choosing what is right.

Grace is found both in the **provision** and the **prohibition**. The “yes” and the “no”.

God sets us within the context of such beauty and delight and says, in effect, there is no need to deprive ourselves of anything good, as long as we allow God to define “good” and establish the boundaries of our freedoms.

If you don’t trust in the goodness and the good intentions of the One establishing the boundaries, you will always be prone to ‘push-back’. Every breach of the boundary says to God, in effect, *“I don’t trust you!”*

There’s nothing passive about freedom or living freely.

Grace will always encourage and even empower our freedom to choose rightly. It will even provide compassion and mercy when such freedoms are abused; but, it will never determine the choice for us.

The shape of our journey--- our condition and conditioning --- is determined by what we desire and what you carry.

We naturally associate discipline with rigidity or some punitive response. In reality, discipline actually gives direction to our freedoms.

Often what we want is “deliverance”, without the nagging necessity of discipline. But even deliverance does not eliminate our continued need for grace and discernment (*“... go and sin no more”*, John 8:11).

God will always remain limited in his capacity to restore us as we continue to make room in our lives for that which proves to be 'self-destructive'.

There is a conditionality to freedom. It is always an “if/then” proposition. “If you... but if you....”.

John 8:32 “... the truth will set you free...” [one of the most frequently misquoted passages of scripture]

“Know the truth, and...” We can say that we “know” (experiencing; interacting with) the truth when we are responding appropriately to it and representing it well through our lifestyle (e.g. when I ask the doctor if he knows this procedure, I’m not asking if he has accumulated a sufficient amount of information about it, but if he has practiced/performed the procedure, successfully).

Know that the truth will ultimately set us free, but, at first, it is really painful; it's something we would rather avoid.

So, if Jesus IS truth, then any area of our lives that does not conform to his intentions and interpretations--- how we should respond to truth--- will never result in the freedom that truth is meant to provide. Ours is a “revelatory” faith, so we are not attempting to formulate our own new, innovative thought-solutions, but simply thinking God’s thoughts with him.

“I’m free... to what?”

... to be the “beloved of God”, even when others reject or hurt you.

... to do everything without “*complaining and arguing*” (Philippians 2) because you see yourselves as working with others for a common purpose; deferring to others without getting your own way.

... to be secure in your God-identity, even when you feel the demands to perform.

... to be generous when all I have is (2) fish and (5) loaves of bread and I am staring down a hungry crowd (Luke 9:16).

... to be gracious even when others judge you.

... to go the extra mile; to keep your promise when it’s easier to excuse your failure; to not be satisfied with simply meeting the “*daily-God-requirements*”.

Living freely! Unrestricted expressions of love.

I think freedom is most appealing when our circumstances have left us feeling so hopeless and so helpless that we have no choice.

It is, at that juncture, where grace and the human spirit meet where...

... Hope is exchanged for despair

... Mystery is chosen over predictability

... Growth is preferred over comfort

... Trust proves more desirable than explanations.

To join God in the on-going struggle to be free and to bring freedom to others. That's what it means to be fully human and fully alive in the Story of God.

In the process, at some point, Egypt must no longer be an option. As long as Egypt remains in our imagination, we will grumble, we will complain, and we will romanticize a less-than-desirable past.

Along the way, there will be mysterious provision (manna: 'what is it?') from the least likely of sources (water from rocks). We will be asked to receive only what is sufficient for the day. No hoarding grace. We will learn that we cannot survive on 'bread alone', but on the sustaining and nourishing word of God.