

“Free to What?” Independence

7.1.18

Romans 6:16-23



Reflection Questions for Personal Use or in a Group Context... (please consider the teaching notes prior to consideration of the reflection questions)

“Do you think there is any coincidence that a culture of self-expression and self-invention has also proven to be the culture of high-anxiety?”

“Would you describe yourself as, ‘free’? How would you know? What might be some ways of identifying your freedom?”

“What if your vision of life is not as robust as God’s? Do you believe that what God wants is for you to flourish? If so, why are you so hesitant to trust his way over your own?”

“Is there an area of your life in which you are more aware of your bondage? Could it be the result of trusting your desire for freedom more than God’s path to freedom?”

Teaching Notes...

We speak of freedom as “life without restraint”. The Bible speaks of freedom as “life constrained by love”.

Our entire lives seem to be motivated by this quest for “freedom”. To be unrestrained. To be autonomous. To be self-determined. To not have another’s will imposed upon us.

“The heart of liberty is to define one’s one concept of existence; of the meaning of the universe” (wrote three justices of the Supreme Court in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, the 1992).

If that is the heart of liberty--- if that is ‘true freedom’--- then God proves to be our biggest obstacle. Christianity *“limits freedoms”*. It blocks our path to ‘self-expression’. It is the suspicion that what God wants for me, may not align with what I want, and I am convinced that I know best.

At the epicenter of that interaction is the story of the “exodus” --- the freedom story.

The God-Story validates our desires for freedom, but what becomes challenging is our definition of freedom, and how it is realized. *What is the Exodus?* Literally, “a way out”. *A way out of what?* All that was enslaving us and prohibiting our experience of freedom.

“I have certainly seen... I have heard... I am aware... I have come down to rescue” (Exodus 3).

God’s consistent self-revelation is that of a rescuer. God wants you to be free and live freely.

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

The Exodus was not a movement from ‘slavery to freedom’, but from ‘slavery to covenant’. Rescue was for the purpose of relationship with the redeemer/rescuer. It was not simply that they were enslaved and simply needed to be cut lose to be self-expressive and self-explanatory. If they were freed, and left to their own self-directed course of action, they would replicate the same systems and patterns and simply have a change of ownership.

Freedom, by definition, is “the ability to do as you please”. The logical follow-up question is: “What pleases you?”

Let’s admit that everybody ‘*doin’ their own thing*’ sounds novel, but in reality, it’s chaos.

We were created to be free, but to live within the boundaries of love.

“You may freely eat...” (Genesis 2:16) 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. It establishes the enormity of our freedom: to make determinations that affect outcomes.

Our appreciation for and responsiveness to the boundaries will always be determined by the perceived motivation.

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!"*

Both God's permissive "yes" and his prohibitive "no" are demonstrations of his grace. Boundaries don't inhibit freedom. They allow for the proper expression of freedom.

The ironies of freedom:

If left to ourselves, we actually create the very circumstances which enslave us.

You can be free and assume you are in bondage, and you can, in reality, be in bondage and assume you are free.

We've never been on the receiving end of an 'intervention', so we assume we're free.

Ultimately, the freedom we seek results in conformity.

While we're busy doing "whatever we want", it robs us of our chance to be unique. We end up looking just like everyone else. Freedom is being released to be who you were created to be.

The Greeks defined freedom as, *"The ability to be and do that which you were created to be and do"*. Jesus says, then, that what is enslaving us is this propensity within us to seek fulfillment apart from him. To lead us away from what we were designed to be and do... under the guise of freedom. It's so appealing.

We seek freedom "from" God. Jesus said that true freedom is only to be found "in" God.

"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free". Galatians 5:1

"... the truth will set you free..." John 8:32 [he has just juxtaposed the notion of freedom with faithfulness to his teachings]

What is Jesus assuming? That...

- ... there is 'truth',
- ... it's directly linked to the experience of freedom,
- ... independent of him, we're not really free,
- ... our inability to recognize it prevents us from living freely.

You can't tell a good freedom story without some expression of self-sacrificial love. Sacrifice is what makes freedom so memorable.

It resonates with us because it suggests that our freedom was connected to someone else's sacrifice of love. The NT invites us to view the death and resurrection of Jesus through the lens of the Exodus.

Luke is one of the authors who offers the record of Jesus' death during the celebration of Passover: the Jewish people's freedom story, in celebration of God's promise to deliver his people, again.

Paul uses the imagery of 'redemption' in Ephesians 1:7, where he says, "*... he is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his son and forgave our sins.*"

Just as in the Exodus, God freed his people from the oppressive reign of the Egyptians, so in the cross, Jesus provides our liberty, not by defeating some military or political antagonist, but by defeating the real enemy of our lives... "sin".

"... in (him) we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins". Colossians 1:13-14

The fullest experience of freedom is realized in surrender to love.

We can only really be free when we surrender to God and to surrender to God means that we loosen our grip on everything else that we are trusting for life. But, that also means that to acknowledge dependency is to experience freedom in its broadest sense.

We love because there is no "*condemnation*" (Romans 8:1); no chance of being separated from love (Romans 8:35). Our lives reflect the ease and freedom that is engendered by love.

"I'm free! Free to what?"

- ... to be the "beloved of God", even when others reject or hurt you.
- ... to be secure in your God-identity, even when people demand that you perform.
- ... to be joyful even when people disappoint you.
- ... 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 give the shirt, to not be satisfied with simply meeting the "*daily-God-requirements*". Living freely!