

“Finding True Freedom”
Talking Points Delivered by A J Johnson 06-30-19

Psalm 77:1-2, 11-20; Psalm 16; Luke 9:51-62;
Galatians 5:1, 13-25

*May the meditation of my heart and the words of my mouth
be pleasing and acceptable in Thy sight...*

I learned from Miss Lady this week as she was teaching the children’s musical portion of VBS, that there is a musical term called ‘a bridge’. It’s a place of music that allows the composer to advance from one musical section to another while keeping the same theme.

Church, this morning we are going to use an element of last week’s message as a bridge to this week’s message. Last week we looked at the miraculous healing and deliverance of the man who was possessed by many demons. Christ then sets him free from that which had him bound.

Yet, there were townspeople there as well. Townspeople who upon seeing the man delivered responded not in joy, but in fear. Perhaps in fear of realizing that Jesus was powerful enough to cast out demons, perhaps because they feared what else Jesus might do.

As God walks us over the bridge from last week to this week, it is with the knowledge that the townspeople, the herders, had Jesus directly in front of them yet asked Jesus to go away from them.

They missed a stellar opportunity to converse and get to know the The Great Miracle Worker, Jesus Christ. They missed an opportunity to ask Christ about this new found freedom He had brought to the man once possessed of demons.

And it is on this bridge of Christ ordered freedom that we will walk to our message this morning. And our scripture in

Galatians 5:1 says “for freedom, Christ has set us free. Stand firm, there, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery”

Paul here says in Galatians that we were called to be free.

However, his words of freedom come with a warning...

Stand firm in the place where you have been delivered to so that you won't fall back to where you were.

Don't use your freedom to return to the flesh. Don't return from where you came.

Paul instructs them to stay in that freedom, and not be caught all over again in the yoke of slavery.

It is easy to fall back into old patterns. To return to old mindsets. We are warned that we have to be careful not to miss the mark.

It is with Luke 9 our 3rd scripture reading that we are reminded that even though Christ paid our debt upon the

cross that we might have the freedom only Christ can deliver, there is a cost to following Jesus. Once we make that decision to follow Jesus, we can't look back.

Luke tells us simply and directly that our priorities will change as we follow Christ. And since we can't look backwards we are called to rely on Christ to lead us every step of our new path.

We had a brilliant demonstration of this last week in VBS. My hats off to the instructors who, after hearing from God, worked the theme "Walking with Jesus" into every aspect of their teaching and the fun and games. One of which was to do the 3-legged race, in which the children's ankles were tied at the ankle to another child.

Trying to run as one person with three legs, they soon learned the meaning of the Amos 3:3 scripture "Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?"

The kids were distracted by the shouts of other children excitedly cheering them on, and would take their focus off of walking in lockstep with the child they were tied to. If they hadn't discussed their strategy of how they were going to walk together, their lack of planning showed. It was a happy time, but a valuable lesson was being taught.

When we agree to walk with Christ, we cannot walk ahead of Him, or fall behind, we must walk in lockstep to where He want us to go. Otherwise we will fail to get to the destination He has planned for us.

Paul reminds us of the ever present reality that the flesh will seek to go it's own way, but the spirit filled life seeks Christ, loves God and desires to abide with Him.

Instead of this destructive fleshly focus, Paul advises a Spirit-focused life. The two are mutually exclusive. The flesh has its desires and the Spirit has other ones.

And how do we do that? Paul tells us, “rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Galatians 5:13)

Think about that for a minute. It is not enough to avoid that which had us bound, but we must actively work at doing something good. Paul’s words in Galatians walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

Walk in the newness of the Spirit that we have been given. Our access to the Spirit is indeed a gift. A gift that came with great cost, but not to us. The cost of this was paid on the cross of Christ. Once we accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, we are the recipients of the greatest gift ever. It is the gift that we could not earn and do not deserve. It can only be

received as a gift from a giver who has paid an exorbitant price that we might have it.

Paul's message to us is that "Freedom" is a valuable thing. And we must be careful. Once we are delivered from an event or an issue, or once we have received a blessing from God that results in our freedom, it can easily be used to serve one's self.

"Flesh" could indicate one's body (Galatians 1:16; 2:16, 20; 4:13, 14), or one's negative behavior (3:3; 4:23, 29). Whether it be for bodily/emotional realities or vice, one's freedom shouldn't be self-serving.

One modern day example of this that all of us see so frequently is the person who is in desperate need of a financial breakthrough. They pray and ask God and God blesses them with the finances or a job that fulfills that need. They rejoice and give thanks and then slowly move away

from God. Their prayer life begins to drop off. Church and Bible study attendance falls off.

Their zeal in serving the Lord is not as enthusiastic, and they begin to fall into the temptation to serve their desires to purchase new things...

Pauls' message is a warning. Freedom in Christ, does not mean freedom from Christ. Our devotion to Christ should increase all the more in a thank offering to Him for all He has done for us.

The law that the Jews served previously, had bound them to duty and had the potential to have them serving the law, or their religious rules and obligations, rather than serving the Living God. The law in that regard had become like a separation from God. But where service to the law bought bondage, Jesus Christ bought grace, mercy, and deliverance.

Paul tells us that we should keep focused on the Spirit. It is easy for us to become tempted to walk away once we get the blessing we sought after, because the flesh has a way of drawing us back in.

Instead of this destructive fleshly focus, Paul advises a Spirit-focused life. The two are mutually exclusive. The flesh has its desires and the Spirit has other ones.

The flesh seeks after its own selfish desires and thinks not of others but only itself. We have to be intentional to avoid that which is the flesh. Paul gives us a list of the works of the flesh..

Those whose lives are characterized only by the flesh will not inherit the kingdom.

¹⁹ The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.

“...and the like”, Paul says. That means that this list is not complete. There’s more out there he only pointed out just a few. We could probably add more to this list.

And Paul gives them a warning... there is a heavy price to be paid to those who follow that path. Those whose lives are characterized only by the flesh will not inherit the kingdom.

Paul gives us instruction on understanding and seeing that which is desirable for us to do because once Christ frees us from those things that keep us in bondage, he does not want us to choose them again.

And just so we are clear not only on how to spot the ‘fleshy things’ to avoid them, Paul gives us that important list of the fruit of the Spirit.

Galatians 5:22 “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.”

Our freedom in Christ, should draw us closer to Him. There should be evidence in the way we behave that Christ is the central part of our life. There should be evidence that we are indeed changed.

Our walk, our talk, our very countenance should reflect the presence of Jesus Christ, the love of God and the infilling of the Holy Spirit.

And what else do we do when confronted with the desires of the flesh? The Psalmist in Psalm 77 we read this morning the Psalmist says that he cried out in the night to God to hear him. But he declares that in his inmost being he calls upon his memory of God.

God who's ways are holy, who performs miracles, who controls the weather, who led Moses and Aaron and their people to safety and victory ... that God who does all that we should remember God's actions as well.

The very testimony of our memories of God sustains us and fortifies us that we can resist the temptation to leave the God we love and walk in the flesh.

The memory of God's goodness can strengthen us from the temptation to sin. And experiencing the Freedom found only in Jesus Christ is so worth it!

As we remember those things that God has delivered us from, let us not forget to proclaim God's goodness. It strengthen us

and makes it so that we enjoy our newfound freedom all the more.

Finally, the Psalmist in Psalm 16:2 “I say to the LORD, ‘You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing.’ 16:8 “I keep my eyes always on the Lord. With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken...my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me...You make know to me the path of life; you fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand’

Church, Christ sets us free. We must be on guard to resist the temptation to fall back into sin.

AMEN.