

Independence Day

The truest celebration of freedom is experienced by those who celebrate as sojourners in the land, liberated by Christ, and looking forward to their promised eternal home.



Hebrews 13:14; 1 Peter 2:11; Galatians 5:1; John 8:31-36

July 5, 2020

(Hebrews 13:14) ¹⁴ For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.

(1 Peter 2:11) ¹¹ Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul.

(Galatians 5:1) ¹ It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

(John 8:31-36) ³¹ To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. ³² Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." ³³ They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?"

³⁴ Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. ³⁵ Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. ³⁶ So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

COMMUNITY – CONNECTING WITH ONE ANOTHER

- How would you explain why Americans celebrate the Fourth of July to someone from another country?
- In what sense are Americans free? In what sense would you say many Americans are still in bondage?
- Would you say you are enjoying true freedom in Christ the way He intends for you to? Why or why not?

Americans celebrate the Fourth of July in commemoration of the Declaration of Independence of the United States on July 4, 1776. Though this day was a declaration of freedom from the British monarch, many Americans still do not experience full freedom due to their bondage to sin. As Christians, we have been granted spiritual freedom in Jesus Christ. Still, in a sense, many of us do not functionally operate out of that freedom, pridefully choosing sin and a focus on non-essential matters, instead.

CONTENT – EXPLORING GOD'S STORY

Have a volunteer read Hebrews 13:14

- What is the city we anticipate? How does knowing our ultimate destination impact our perspective about the place we live right now?

The reference to a "city" that does not last could be Jerusalem, but the second reference to the city that is "to come" refers to the heavenly Jerusalem. We can live rightly in our present city only when we know where our ultimate loyalty lies. Our focus should be on the eternal—we are to view all earthly circumstances and respond to them in the spirit of freedom Christ provides.

- The Hebrews who received this letter did not have many of the freedoms we celebrate in America. They were losing their businesses and property, they were being bullied, and some of their Christian friends had been martyred for their faith. How would this verse have encouraged them? How would this passage have challenged them, given the cultural climate?
- Notice the verb "seek" in verse 14. What are some ways you are seeking the city to come? How does your life demonstrate a focus on Jesus and His eternal kingdom?

Have two volunteers read 1 Peter 2:11 and Galatians 5:1

- For what reason did Peter say we are all still at war?
- What did both Peter (1 Peter 2:11) and Paul (Gal. 5:1) indicate we must do to have victory in that war?
- In what way does seeing ourselves as sojourners and exiles in this land help us stand firm in freedom and not submit again to the slavery of sin?

We are right to be grateful for the freedoms this country affords, but we must understand that there is still a war being waged. Both Peter and Paul challenged Christians to stand firm in their freedom, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Christ had set them free from spiritual slavery. We also must not exchange the freedom we have in Christ for slavery to religious legalism (yoke of slavery). Jesus Himself is the truth that sets people free. The truth of His person and work is what gives a believer freedom from sin and freedom to connect with God.

Have a volunteer read John 8:31-36

- How did Jesus' listeners misunderstand what He was offering? How was their concept of "freedom" different from His?
- In addition to the illusion of salvation through ancestry, what else does the truth of Jesus free a person from?
- What do you think Jesus meant by the words "free indeed"? How does Jesus offer freedom beyond even living in a free country?

The United States prides itself on freedom, freedom our ancestors fought for. We should be proud of this since our nation has fought hard for it, and since our democratic freedom has led the way for other nations to also obtain these freedoms. However, our nation has not done a good job in defining what freedom really means and how our freedoms should be used. Is a person trapped in addiction truly free because they live in America? Jesus pointed out that the most enslaving influences of life could be our own addictions and compulsions, our own sin. This was true for the Jews of Jesus' time, and it is true for us today. Just as these Jewish people thought they were automatically free by virtue of their lineage; we often think we are automatically free by virtue of our American citizenship. But our nation, which has taken the lead in procuring freedom, would do well to follow the One who took the lead in defining it: "So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (v. 36).

COMMISSION – ENGAGING IN GOD'S STORY

- What needs to happen in order for you to be "free indeed"? What enslaving sin do you need to seek freedom from?
- How can this group help one another reject the pursuit of empty "freedom" and pursue true freedom found only in Christ?
- How do we encourage others to seek true freedom through sharing the gospel?

PRAYER: Thank God for the promise of an eternal home and the way that impacts our perspective and behavior as we live as sojourners in this land. Ask Him to help you experience true freedom in Jesus. Invite His Spirit to reveal the areas where you are pursuing false forms of freedom. Ask that He would empower you to resist these temptations and pursue true freedom in Him.

Hebrews 13:14

This verse adds two features to the appeal for commitment to Christ. First, Christians live for the future, not the present. No matter how appealing life in the present is, believers are looking for the city that is to come. Christians look for a reward which lies ahead.

Second, Christians enjoy togetherness. We must not allow our practice of Christianity to degenerate into self-seeking individual choices. Believers who move forward for Christ like a mighty army find encouragement from common commitment and enthusiasm.

1 Peter 2:11

Many false rumors circulated about Christians. They sometimes were accused of weakening families. After all, family stresses did arise when one family member trusted Jesus as Savior and others did not. This stress was particularly acute when a wife trusted Christ and not her husband. Christians in some places were accused of cannibalism. Did they not meet weekly to eat the flesh of a man (misunderstanding of the Lord's Supper)? And others claimed Christians participated in immoral and even incestuous activities (misunderstanding of the "love feast" or fellowship meal that often accompanied the Lord's Supper).

Peter reminded these believers they were called to live as those set apart to God's service. Their lives were to exhibit a total transformation from the pagan lifestyle they had known prior to meeting Jesus Christ. If they simply lived so as to reflect the holiness of their Savior and God, they would put all such slanders to rest.

Galatians 5:1

Christ died to set us free from slavery to the law. Our responsibility is to stand firm and not to fall back into law and sin.

Christ has freed believers from the law. Yet these Galatians were returning to a yoke of slavery. Depending on the law for life and salvation makes a work animal out of you. Someone else controls and steers your life by means of an instrument connected around your neck. You become a slave, obedient to every direction. Any system—pagan idolatry or moral legalism—with dos and don'ts can make slaves of its followers. It seems the false teachers were trying to get the Galatians to take up the yoke of the law. Paul countered, "Take the Spirit's gift of grace. Become what God wants to make you, not what you can make yourself. Be free from anyone's yoke. If you want to be a slave, let Christ be your master."

John 8:31-36

8:34 Jesus explains the statement of verse 32. All people, even descendants of Abraham, are slaves to sin. This slavery is internal, not external, meaning that no one can flee. This type of slave can only be freed by a Redeemer.

8:35-36 The discussion then looks at two types of people in a household—a slave and a son. The slave is not a permanent member of a household but a son inherits the household, thus a son will be given power. In this instance it is a proclamation that Jesus as the only Son of the Father can offer a new truth that slaves will be freed and receive the inheritance of the household.