

**Already Free!**  
**July 5, 2020**  
**Tony & Jo Ann**

How have you been experiencing life this week? Jesus said that He came so that ***we would have life "more abundant" (John 10:10)*** -- literally "superabundant" -- exceedingly bountiful in both quantity and quality. He said the life He gives is overflowing in every good way. He also said that ***we would know the truth and that the truth would set us free (John 8:32)***. Yet, so many of us have trouble believing that Jesus' promises really apply to us ... so we end up settling for lives that are anything but free.

And because Jesus was human as well as divine, He understood that we would struggle... so He promised that after He returned to the Father, another would come who would guide us into all this truth... and more... empower us from within to live in Christ's freedom... the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Since Pentecost, we have been looking very practically at what it means for us to live the life of the Spirit. This week, the Independence Day holiday allows us to focus on the even greater freedom that is ours in Christ. And we are living in a world right now where that spiritual freedom matters... because when we are truly free...

- We can recognize and move with the Spirit's nudges in every moment
- We can live the abundant life of Christ... regardless of our circumstances
- We can participate in God's kingdom purposes... no matter what the world around us may look like
- We can stop being controlled by externals, and live from the inside-out
- We can truly be the people God created us to be...

So let's not settle for anything less than the more abundant lives that Jesus has set us free for. This was his core message, by the way, which is shown in how we kicked off his public ministry. One Sabbath Jesus did what you are doing... he went to church! He went to the synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth for worship. The scroll was handed to him and he turned to the book of the prophet Isaiah. Why Isaiah? Because of all the Old Testament characters, Isaiah seemed to understand best how God's kingdom was intended to make people free. These are the words that Jesus read that day in Nazareth: ***The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. (Luke 4:18-19, from Isaiah 61:1-2)***.

Wow... this was good news! Still is! God had not forgotten us in our human chains of pain and brokenness but had a mission and desire to set us free. *It was a vision of what could be, what would be, and, in fact, what God had actually begun...* long before, in the Garden. There, the first man and woman had lived in near total freedom, harmony, and intimacy with each other and with their Creator... with only one minor limit, a limit that actually preserved their freedom. They could always choose. Well, they *did* choose. And their choice to refuse the love of God... and the similar choices of their descendants meant that the world that Isaiah lived in, and the world Jesus lived in, had little left of the original freedom and intimacy of the Garden.

But God wasn't done! Isaiah knew that... he had glimpsed what God's heart was, and so he promised that God would do something to restore our freedom. Isaiah died without seeing that promise fulfilled, but 700 years later Jesus stood up and read his words to his own hometown.

And the story says that he then **rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."** (Luke 4:20-21).

What was Jesus saying?... that freedom had now come!... that the promise of Isaiah was now fulfilled... and that he.. Jesus!... was the one who would give it to us. And we see this throughout his ministry... Jesus kept saying, **"The kingdom of God is at hand!"** He described it as entirely inside-out from their world... the poor would inherit, the sad would rejoice, the persecuted would be blessed, the marginalized brought to the center, the hungry fed, and the righteous celebrated. It would not happen overnight... in fact, it would only happen as fast or as much as we would allow it. His kingdom of freedom would not be imposed upon us, but would be offered like a precious gift to those who had ears to hear and eyes to see.

And, then, to give proof and power to this announcement of God's kingdom, Jesus spent the next couple of years freeing one person after another from the chains that had bound them. In fact, let's continue just a bit with Luke's story of Jesus' ministry.

- After escaping his neighbors in Nazareth who tried to stone him, he went to the nearby town of Capernaum and freed a demon-possessed man (Luke 4:31-36).
- And then he went to Simon Peter's house there in Capernaum and freed Peter's mother-in-law from a sickness that had laid her low (Luke 4:38-39).
- And then many people flocked to him and He healed more diseases and cast out more demons (Luke 4:40-41).
- And then he freed Peter the fisherman from his sense of failure by giving him lots of fish to catch and calling him to something better than catching fish (Luke 5:1-11).
- Then he freed a man from leprosy... both from the disease and from the stigma placed on him by others who thought that suffering was a sign of sin or God's displeasure (Luke 5:12-16).
- Then he freed a paralyzed man from his disability, so he could walk... and, more importantly, he freed the man from his sin (Luke 5:17-26).
- Then he freed Levi/Matthew the tax collector from his habit of exploiting people and invited him to something far better (Luke 5:27-31).
- And let's mention one more... Not long after, Jesus was criticized for breaking some of the rules of the Pharisees...and in the conversation that followed he freed his disciples from seeing God as just a powerful rule-maker and instead as a Father. He showed them how God's way of life was designed to *give* life and joy, not take it away.

In these stories and many others we see Jesus setting people free in so many different ways... *physically, spiritually, mentally, emotionally, relationally*. And the people who were freed were delighted... as were the watching crowds... just as we are delighted in hearing about these wonderful acts of freedom... because we all know what it's like to be held captive for far too long... and to long to live in true freedom. They wanted to know that the reality they had been living didn't have to stay that way forever... and Jesus had good news for them...and for us... the good news

that I mentioned at the beginning of this message... ***“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (John 8:31-32 NIV)***

This is incredible news!... particularly when we remember that the Truth Jesus is referring to here is not a series of religious rules or doctrines. The Truth Jesus was talking about was Himself... “I am the Truth.” In other words, those who know Jesus and live in the radical values of His kingdom... WILL be set free. That’s why he was so bold preaching that day in Nazareth... because He had come to give them the deep, joyous freedom that only He can give...

In His earthly ministry, He was able to free a few... but after His death and resurrection, His promise of freedom became a reality for anyone and everyone who would receive it. The Apostle Paul put it this way: ***Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin. (Acts 13:39 NIV)***

Notice the language: “IS set free”...not “WILL BE free someday.” Freedom has already come... here and now, not only back there and then. If we are in Christ, we are now already free...

Yes ... Jesus was very clear about the radical nature of the freedom He gives ... in John 8, Jesus says that ***if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.*** The word Jesus used here for “free” is a word which means “to liberate from bondage ... to set one free from another’s control.” It was the language used in his culture for freeing slaves. And years later, Paul echoed Jesus’ words in his letter to the Galatians: ***For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. (Gal. 5:1 -- NRSV)***

Greek slaves were released in a very specific way. A price needed to be paid for their freedom, but slaves had no money. So the owner desiring to free a slave would go to a temple and the now former owner would pay the price and sign a legal document saying that the slave’s freedom had been purchased by a god. The document contained the words “for freedom.” The freed slave then belonged to the god who had purchased his or her freedom -- and could never be enslaved again.

So, when Paul tells every follower of Christ – “For freedom Christ has set you free” – he is referring to this custom... and he uses the Greek aorist tense which describes action which happened and was completed in the past ... In essence, Paul is saying: ***“Christ has set you free once and forever -- it is completely finished – and He set you free for freedom – so you would live free and never be enslaved to anyone or anything again. So stand firm in your freedom and never, ever choose to live in bondage again.”***

When Jesus said *free*, He meant *free*. Jesus did not give you a qualified or a limited freedom. Jesus did not make you mostly free or almost free. No – in Christ, you are *absolutely, utterly, totally free*. It is that profound. That simple. And that complete.

And it is at this point that the legalists start arguing, ***“Well, maybe Jesus and Paul did say all of that... but don’t get carried away! We’re free... just not THAT free.”*** :) And when they do that, they take away the core of our faith. Jesus was actually very clear... “If you know and continue to live in My truth ... If you love Me fully ... then I will make you free. And whoever I make free is free indeed.” THIS is the radical good news of the gospel ... We were once bound to sin, captured by our own appetites – but Jesus purchased our freedom. And when we put our faith in what He’s done – we entered into a new relationship... we belong to him... we are no longer bound to anything but free for abundant life. And because this is true, real and a point of fact no one, nothing else, can ever take us captive again. Jesus set us free... for what? “For freedom!” There are no

disclaimers, contingencies, or qualifications. If you know Christ by faith, you are free. Period. And that means some really awesome, radical, even controversial things...

Like, being free means you are even free to sin. We're free! We don't have to sin anymore. We have the freedom to say no to sin and yes to love, joy, mercy, holiness. But we can still *choose* to sin if we want to! We have the freedom to choose to receive God's love or to refuse God's love, to do what God invites or NOT to do what God invites...every single day. I hear a lot of Christians say things like "well, I sin every day." Paul would say, "Well, stop that!" He told the Galatians: ***You were called to freedom, brothers and sisters, only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence...." (5:13 – NRSV)*** He's saying, "Look, you are completely free in Christ – you even have the freedom to sin. But why would you want to? In Christ, everything is permissible – but use your head – not everything is wise or helpful. So why do it? But you always have the choice..."

So, being free in Christ means you are free to sin but you don't have to anymore! Being free in Christ also means that even when you do sin – God still loves you. We will never be perfect in this life... and there are times when we will act in ways that are less than loving toward God, our neighbor, ourselves, and even our enemies. It's important for us to remember that our freedom doesn't free us from the consequences of our actions. As free people, we are responsible for our choices. so when we act in sinful ways, we are accountable for the fallout of what we've done. Even so... though God may not always be pleased by your actions -- God will never stop loving you. Scripture declares that NOTHING can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus – and if free means free, then nothing means NOTHING.

What assurance that even when we make unloving choices, God continues to love us. But that doesn't mean that the people around us will! And sometimes, others condemn us when we haven't done anything wrong! So, third...

Being free in Christ means that even when other Christians judge or get angry at what you do – God does not get angry or condemn you. It was the religious crowd that most harshly condemned Jesus' freedom – they were always judging Him for violating their rules. The religious crowd is no different today. If you live in the freedom of Christ – then just like Jesus – the religious crowd will misunderstand and judge you. But don't let them confuse you or steal your freedom or joy – because, again, scripture is clear that even when others condemn you, God never will: ...***There is (when?) now (what?) no condemnation for (whom?) those who are in Christ Jesus, (why?) because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. (Romans 8:1-2 NIV)***

Here's another implication... being free means that God still loves. Seriously! There is nothing I can do to make God love me any more, and nothing I can do to make God love me any less. God's love is never dependent on our choices. It never has been.

Does that sound startling? That's gospel! :) And because God's love is unconditional, being free means that even if you sin, God will still be gracious to you. God will still be good to you. There are Christians who believe that we enter the Christian life by grace through faith but then once you're in the door, the rules change! .. and what you began by grace you finish by works. They burden joyful new believers with a ton of rules and regulations, and crush the life and freedom right out of them. But the Bible is clear -- what God does or doesn't do in your life is not dependent on how well, or how poorly, you perform. Jesus said that ***God causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. (Matt. 5:45 NIV)***

Sure, we all live with the consequences of our behavior, but God's goodness and care for EVERY person isn't altered one bit by what we do or don't do.

When Jesus said free, He meant free. If you are a follower of Christ, you are truly and utterly free. It is that profound... simple... complete... and THAT scary. Yes, real freedom in Christ scares us to death. The *legalists* are scared to death because:

Freedom threatens their control and power. There are lots of Christians who will require things of you that Jesus never required... and tell you that God is angry with you when He isn't... and make you feel ashamed and guilty about things you don't need to be ashamed or guilty about. They do this thinking the only way to get a Christian to do what's right is to scare or guilt them into it. Jesus did not agree with them: *"They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them.... Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" (Matt. 23:4,13 – NRSV)* Freedom in Christ scares legalists because it threatens their power to control others.

It also scares them because Freedom threatens their pride. A lot of legalists' energy and identity goes into being right. They like to hold up all that they do right... and condescend to other Christians who do things wrong. But genuine freedom eliminates self-righteousness – because freedom in Christ makes everyone equals. No one is more loved or more special because they are the right denomination... or the right race or the right gender... or have all the right answers. We are ALL loved and special simply because we belong to Jesus. Freedom in Christ scares legalists because it threatens their superiority and pride.

Okay, those are some reasons why freedom in Christ scares legalists to death. But what about *the rest of us* – most of you listening in are not legalists... we know that. But many of us still aren't living the abundant, fully free life in Christ. Why not? Because freedom scares us to death, too! And that's mostly because we don't trust ourselves...

We don't trust ourselves to make good choices. If we're really free, then our choices are our own responsibility. And if we make our own choices we run the risk of being wrong – of making a mistake -- so we give up our freedom and let others make our decisions for us so we'll have someone else to blame if things go wrong. We live in a "gotcha" culture that is almost always looking for someone to blame... someone other than me. :) And that feeds into this fear that if I make wrong choices, everyone will know that I screwed up.

And we're afraid of making wrong choices because often we don't trust ourselves to resist temptation. Many of us think that if we were really free... if we weren't bound by rules...we would lose control and not care about anyone else and sin like crazy and ruin our witness to those who don't believe. Do you worry about that? The question to ask ourselves, of course, is, Why? Why don't I trust that if I were free to do anything I wanted I would want to do what's good, instead of what's bad? You know what's wild? That Jesus trusts you more than you do! Jesus is willing to take the risk that underneath it all what you really want to do is follow Him, love Him, please Him. After all, you're free because the Free One has come to live within you. He has joined His Spirit with your spirit, and you are one spirit with Him. Listen to his nudge.

This is the freedom of life of the Spirit... but what does it mean to live out this freedom in our everyday lives?

Sometimes when we talk about freedom, people can start feeling bad because although they know a lot of this in their heads, they have areas in their lives where they feel anything but free.

... distorted thought patterns that trap them... disordered desires that distract them... hidden addictions that enslave them. And the enemy of our souls likes to keep our focus on those things so we get frustrated and discouraged. We've all been there, done that...

But God has better invitations for us this week... God's freedom offers so much, but especially in the times we are living in, our freedom in Christ invites and allows us to live in the:

Joy of God's freedom. Freedom is not a burden that God is putting on your shoulders. It's a joy that is meant to lift you up... to excite and energize you... and to empower you to go ahead and live the abundant life in Christ that is already yours... to be the amazing person God has already created you to be! Your freedom is meant to be a source of joy... not only for you, but also for those around you... and for the Trinity... who have already welcomed YOU into their eternal dance of joy. This week, accept your freedom and celebrate that although you're not perfect... in Christ, you are already a new creation... are already washed, sanctified, justified... and set free for freedom!

We can also live in the beauty of God's freedom. What's more attractive?... a Christian who does good only because they think they have to, or one who does good because they choose to? The answer is obvious, isn't it? Dutiful submission to a legalism hardly ever wins anyone to faith... who wants to live in that kind of fearful burden? But goodness resulting from freedom is attractive!... and so unusual, actually, as to make people sit up and take notice. That's why Peter told the early Christians to live in front of nonbelievers in such a way that ***"they will see your beautiful works and have a reason to glorify God"*** (1 Peter 2:12 TPT). Indeed, they will!

We can also live in the peace of God's freedom. In the midst of the confusion and fear that is rampant in our world right now, we could all use more peace, couldn't we? And that peace is already ours... through the freedom we already have in Christ. You see, true peace is not the absence of conflict... it is experiencing the presence of the Prince of Peace in and with us in the midst of any conflict. How can that happen for us? By living in the truth that sets us free... as Paul told the **Romans (5:1 NRSV)** -- ***...since we are justified by faith NOW, we have peace with God NOW through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access NOW to this grace in which we stand NOW...***

As you choose to live into what is already true of you... you will find that sin really has lost its power over you... you really can make different choices... and your thoughts, habits, attitudes really can become those of Jesus... and the guilt and fear really can lose their control... and you really can experience the peace that passes all understanding...

So... if all of this is true, and it is... why aren't we living it? Why don't we experience the joy, beauty, and peace of freedom more often? Maybe because we don't really trust, down deep inside, that what the scriptures say about freedom, God, and us is really true? So here's an exercise for all of us this week... Every time you are aware of being trapped... or afraid... or hear the voice of accusation whispering in your ear... respond with this... *Thank you, God! That's not true of me anymore. That's not who I am. In Christ, I am already free! I am not captive to anything.* And then trust the grace of the One in whom you stand... and encourage others to do likewise.

To help you do this, we have posted a handout to the website... a reminder of only a fraction of what is already true about you in Christ... and the truth shall, indeed, set you free. Feel "free" to download and put this in a place where you will see it each day... so that you can remember the truth that in Christ, you are ALREADY loved... ALREADY free... ALREADY empowered to live the life God dreamed for you, and all of us, long before any of us were ever born. :)

Join us in this closing prayer, wherever you are...

*Thank you, God, that in Christ Jesus I am free! I am no longer captive to anything but You. There is nothing hindering me from living in joy, beauty, and peace. Thank you, God, that in Christ Jesus I am already free. Amen.*

## **IN CHRIST:**

### **I am accepted...**

John 1:12	I am God's child.
John 15:15	As a disciple, I am a friend of Jesus Christ.
Romans 5:1	I have been justified.
1 Corinthians 6:17	I am united with the Lord, and I am one with Him in spirit.
1 Corinthians 6:19-20	I have been bought with a price and I belong to God.
1 Corinthians 12:27	I am a member of Christ's body.
Ephesians 1:3-8	I have been chosen by God and adopted as His child.
Colossians 1:13-14	I have been redeemed and forgiven of all my sins.
Colossians 2:9-10	I am complete in Christ.
Hebrews 4:14-16	I have direct access to the throne of grace through Jesus Christ.

### **I am secure...**

Romans 8:1-2	I am free from condemnation.
Romans 8:28	I am assured that God works for my good in all circumstances.
Romans 8:31-39	I am free from any condemnation brought against me and I cannot be separated from the love of God.
2 Corinthians 1:21-22	I have been established, anointed and sealed by God.
Colossians 3:1-4	I am hidden with Christ in God.
Philippians 1:6	I am confident that God will complete the good work started in me.
Philippians 3:20	I am a citizen of heaven.
2 Timothy 1:7	I have not been given a spirit of fear but of power, love, a sound mind.
1 John 5:18	I am born of God and the evil one cannot touch me.

### **I am significant...**

John 15:5	I am a branch of Jesus, the true vine, and a channel of His life.
John 15:16	I have been chosen and appointed to bear fruit.
1 Corinthians 3:16	I am God's temple.
2 Corinthians 5:17-21	I am a minister of reconciliation for God.
Ephesians 2:6	I am seated with Jesus Christ in the heavenly realm.
Ephesians 2:10	I am God's workmanship.
Ephesians 3:12	I may approach God with confidence.
Philippians 4:13	I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me.

As a result ... **I am free...**

**Thank you, God, that in Christ Jesus, I am free!  
I am no longer captive to anything but You.  
There is nothing hindering me from living in joy, beauty, and peace.  
Thank you, God, that in Christ Jesus I am already free!  
Amen.**