

Someone once said, "You don't really appreciate freedom, unless it is taken away from you." I think I understand what that means now. Let's go out and have dinner tonight at the Lighthouse at Sumter Landing!" Sorry, all restaurants are closed. Boy, my hair is long. I need a haircut. Sorry, All barbershops and nail and toe nail businesses are closed. My knee is really bothering me, guess I'll get that knee surgery done. Sorry. No non-emergency procedures can be done at this time. There is a lot of stress around me these days, guess I'll head over to the beach at Siesta Key. Sorry, the beach is closed. Maybe I should turn on the news and find out what is going on. Oh, no it is Covid 19. As I listen to the media, they are trying to scare me out of my mind. They are telling me that Covid can kill you, especially if you have a compromised immune system. The numbers of cases seems to be growing in Florida. Even though the death rate is very low, they predicted 2 million deaths, and we are at 130,000 in the U.S., many of us are scared to go anywhere unless we wear a mask, wash our hands repeatedly, and stay 6 feet away from anyone. Don't you sometimes feel like a caged animal? Been stuck in this cage for 3 months now. In spite of all this bad news, we sometimes forget the good news of how richly blessed we are to live in this land of America. We are not caged animals. We are free. "Live Your Life Freely!"

There has been a lot of talk in the news lately about slavery. How African Americans were slaves to their white masters. There is a bill being proposed to pay all African Americans around 14 trillion dollars to make things right. Vicious anger is being generated against any political character who owned slaves or fought for the Confederacy. If a statue was built in their honor, it is to be torn down. In addition, we see Confederate flags removed from yards or as symbols for race cars, or sporting teams. Rhode Island is considering a name change. But the rioters are even tearing down statues of individuals who were opposed to slavery. The head of Black Lives Matters says that all white Jesus statues need to come down. So many angry people. People who want to topple our capitalist country and make it into a socialist or communist country. They seem to view freedom as doing whatever they want, even if it means silencing opposing viewpoints, destroying property or human life. But that's not what freedom is.

Even though formal slavery was abolished in 1865, every person here today myself included is a slave. That's right a slave. A slave is hooked up to a master that tells the slave where to sleep, where to eat, what to do. A slave cannot just wander off on vacation, or travel wherever they want to. A slave doesn't have any rights on the family inheritance. We are almost like inmates in a prison. So who is our Master? Our master is sin.

We are hooked to this master. We can't get away from this master. Every day, we show how helpless we are, because we say and do wrong things. We basically serve our Master Sin. Along with being a slave to sin, comes the horrible feelings inside of guilt. Guilt is knowing inside we haven't done what is right. Guilt is like a ball and chain we carry around with us. How can we be free of being a slave to sin? How can we be free of this guilt noose?

Look to Jesus to set you free from the chains of sin and guilt. Abraham Lincoln was the one who granted freedom to earthly slaves in the United States. Jesus Christ is the one who has freed all of us spiritual slaves. The Bible says in Romans 8:1 "*There is no condemnation for those who live in Christ Jesus.*" Would you like to live without condemnation? Guilt free? Without regrets? "*There is no condemnation for those who live in Christ Jesus.*"

In Christ. God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the

righteousness of God." Don't miss what happened. He took your statement flowing with red ink and bad checks and put his name at the top. He took his statement, which listed a million deposits and not one withdrawal, and put your name at the top. He assumed your debt. You assumed his fortune. And that's not all he did. He also paid your penalty. If you are overdrawn at a bank, a fine must be paid. If you are overdrawn with God, a penalty must be paid as well. The fine at the bank is a hassle. But the penalty from God is hell. Jesus not only balanced your account, he paid your penalty. He took your place and paid the price for your sins. Now we are alive, spiritually alive. We oneday have eternal life in heaven to look forward too. We are sons, as our text says, who belong to the family forever. Freedom from death. Spiritual Death and Eternal death in hell. We have so much to be thankful for as Christians.

Years ago an elderly man was walking in the park. He noticed a scruffy, mean looking boy, about twelve years old, with a rusty bird cage. Inside was a sparrow flying around and trying to get out of the cage. The boy was poking the poor bird with a stick and tormenting it. The man asked the boy what he was going to do with the bird. With a voice that exuded mean, he said, "I am going to poke this bird with this stick and then take it home and feed it to my cat." The man asked how much he wanted for the bird and the rusty old cage. The boy's eyes flashed with greed as he said, "Ten dollars and not a penny less." The man pulled out a ten dollar bill and took the cage. He opened the door and the bird flew free. How strange it would be if the bird decided to go back into the cage and be tortured by the mean boy.

Satan's ultimate goal in your life and mine is to take us back into the cage of the law. He wants to torment us with the thoughts that we are not good enough for God's love. Satan wants to keep us as slaves. The Law tells us what we should and should not do. Satan loves to show us where we have failed to live up to what God expects of us. He holds the law of God before us like a mirror. A mirror can show you a blemish on your face, but it cannot remove the blemish. The law shows us our sin, but it cannot be used to remove the punishment of sin.

We can only be freed through Jesus. The law leads us to Christ in the sense that we are led to see there is no hope for us in ourselves or any other religion.

To God, all lives matter. Paul reminds us "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ." No matter what the color of your skin. We are all free. We have a permanent place in the family of God.

What if you were living in a Muslim country? In a Muslim country the mosques offer forgiveness of sins to people who show they are worthy by praying five times a day, fasting on the month of Ramadan, and showing acts of kindness and mercy. In American I can still find Christian churches that tell me that the debt of my sin is so large, I cannot begin to do anything to forgive even a small part of that debt. We may have a huge national debt, but the good news is that our personal debt of sin has been removed completely by Jesus.

"As Americans we are not only spiritually free, but physically free. One of the most, iconic symbols of our freedom is —the Liberty Bell —hangs magnificently in the city of brotherly love. In 1751, the Pennsylvania Assembly ordered a bell from a London foundry to commemorate the commonwealth's fiftieth anniversary of William Penn's 1701 Charter of Privileges: Pennsylvania's original Constitution. Penn wrote of the liberties afforded by a people who trust, solemnly profess, and worship — in his words — the "Almighty God being the only Lord of Conscience, Father of Lights and Spirits; and the Author as well as Object of all divine

Knowledge, Faith and Worship; and in Jesus Christ, the Savior of the World." In August 1752, the bell arrived from Britain's shores. However, its rim cracked upon the clapper's first strike. So, two local foundry men, Pass and Stow, offered to recast the bell. Their first attempt did not fare well: the bell sounded horribly, and still it cracked again — despite their attempts to make the bell stronger. They refused to give up; and as such, the men recast the bell for a third time. Above their names, this declaration from Leviticus 25:10 is inscribed: "Proclaim LIBERTY throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof."

We have so many wonderful freedoms and blessings. We are living in a land with vast natural resources. We have huge reserves of natural gas and oil. We don't have to depend on Saudia Arabia for energy, we are energy independent. Thank God that we are utilizing these natural resources. We have farm lands that produce abundant crops, oceans and rivers and lakes, vast forests including the redwoods of California. It was Abraham Lincoln who once wrote: "We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of heaven; we have been preserved these many years in peace and prosperity; we have grown in numbers, wealth and power as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us." Along with the blessings of prosperity comes the responsibility of not forgetting the Lord.

In addition to vast resources, we are blessed to live in a land of freedom. We are free to worship this morning without fear of being arrested for our beliefs. We have the freedom to walk our streets without fear of being mugged and robbed. Thank the Lord for the police who are there to protect all races. We live in homes or apartments that are air conditioned. Newspapers are delivered. Planes arrive safely. The garbage trucks pick up the garbage. The light switches deliver electricity. Grocery stores bring in fresh food. All of these are blessings we enjoy from the hand of our bountiful heavenly Father. "Praise the Lord o my soul and forget not all his benefits!"

This land is also blessed by people who know God's unfailing love. The psalmist David says that the Lord "crowns you with love and compassion." Our nation has been privileged to be a nation that enjoys showing love and compassion to other people. Beneath the Statue of Liberty are the words, "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free. The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

Even more important than the evidence of human love is the revelation of God's unfailing love that comes to us on the pages of the Bible. America is a beautiful land, because it is a place where Moms and Dads still teach their children the important words, "Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so. Little ones to him belong. They are weak but he is strong. Yes, Jesus loves me, yes Jesus loves me, yes Jesus loves me, the Bible tells me so. May God bless America, the land that I love and you love, and may He stand beside her and guide her. We need his guidance now more than ever. Lord, Please help our country, and allow us to remain free.