

## Independence Day Weekend

July 3, 2022

Galatians 5:1, 13-25

Years ago, an elderly man was walking down a street. He came upon a boy about 12 years old sitting on a park bench with a rusty bird cage. Inside was a sparrow that he was torturing by poking it with a stick. The man asked the boy what he was planning to do with the sparrow. With an evil grin on his face he said, *"I am going to poke it with this stick and then I am going to take it home and feed it to my cat."* The man was shocked and asked, *"How much do you want for the cage and sparrow?"* The boy said with a greedy smile on his face, *"Ten dollars, not a penny less."* The man pulled on the ten dollars, gave it to the boy and walked into the park. Then he let the bird go free, put the cage down and crushed the cage with his foot.

Satan hates the Gospel more than anything else. Satan is unwavering in his attacks on us. He keeps poking us with the law. He uses every weapon at his disposal to torture us to eat us up. He wants us to be kept trapped in the cage of sin. He wants us to feel helpless. Then God comes along and sets us free. He wants us to treasure that truth. **"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."** Think of how many wars have been fought in the name of freedom? Our nation has fought many battles and spilled the blood of many soldiers just so we can have freedom here this morning. We thank God for the freedoms that we enjoy in our country. But the freedom we have in Christ could not be won by human blood shed on the field of battle. It was gained for us by the blood of Christ shed on the cross to pay the ransom price for our sin.

We have freedom in Christ. Freedom is a wonderful thing, isn't it? It's that feeling you get when school is over for the summer and three months of fun await you. It's that feeling that you get when you are at the park going as high as you could go on a swing. It's the feeling that you get when you leave on a family vacation and new adventures lie ahead of you. It's that feeling like a day off, and you really have nothing you have to do. It's that feeling that you get when sitting in the shade on a nice summer day with a drink in your hand. Freedom is a wonderful thing. But we also know what it feels like when freedom goes away. We know what it feels like when summer comes to an end. We know what it feels like when vacation comes to an end and it's time to go to work again. We cherish freedom.

Paul wanted his fellow believers to cherish the freedom that they have in Christ. Paul's letter to the Galatians has a lot to say about freedom. There were some who were teaching that Christ did not bring complete freedom. They taught that you must also keep certain rules and do certain things to truly be free. Yet, what does Paul say in our text? **"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free."**

The picture is that of someone coming along and unlocking the door of our prison and says that you are free. Who is that someone? Christ. Maybe you have heard the story that goes something like this. Grandma and Grandpa were watching their young grandchild. The child had done something really naughty. Grandma picked up that child and said to him: *"we don't do that in this house."* She picked up the child and placed him into one of those pack-n-plays. She told him: *"you are going to have a time out for the next two minutes."* You can guess what happened next. He started crying his head off. She left him cry and went into the other room for the next two minutes. About 1 minute into the time out, things got completely silent in the other room. She begins to think that maybe he climbed out or escaped his prison. When she went into the other room, she saw that the child hadn't climbed out. What happened was that grandpa had climbed in. Grandpa was so upset that this young child was crying and facing his punishment alone that he said that he was going to climb in and be there with you. (It wasn't me; but I would probably consider it.)

God did one better than that. He looked at this world that was being held as a prisoner of sin. So, what does he do? He climbs into that prison of sin. He doesn't do that to just be with us as we face punishment. He did this so that he could be punished for us. Why? So that we can be truly free. **"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free."** God saw how we can't meet the demands of his law, and so he sends Jesus to set us free. He sets us free from the punishment of sin. Jesus goes to the cross. Through his suffering and death, the Father took all that weight of guilt of sin off our backs. He set us free.

Yet, freedom always has some constraints. Just because a child is free to run around in the yard with a baseball, he isn't free to throw that ball through the neighbor's window on purpose. Just because I have a driver's license, it doesn't mean that I can drive as fast as I want and where I want. Just because I have freedom to say what I want, it doesn't mean that I can say things that intentionally hurt someone else.

Christian freedom doesn't mean that I can do anything that I want. It means being free to do what God has created me to do. He created us to serve him and to serve others. That's what Paul means when he speaks about freedom in our text. **"But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other."** Instead, he says: **"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit."**

On this holiday weekend, celebrate the freedoms we have in our country. Give thanks to a gracious and loving God who blesses his people. But also celebrate the freedom in Christ. As you stand in Christ, no one can take that freedom away, even Satan himself. **"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free."** Amen.