

## Independence Day Weekend

July 2, 2023

Galatians 5:1, 13-25

Freedom. It's a word that we, as Americans, love. Freedom comes in many forms. Radio commentator Paul Harvey once talked about a group of scientists who were determined to teach a chimpanzee to write. For fourteen years, the scientists labored diligently and patiently with this chimpanzee, providing things in its cage to enable it to form certain syllables. Finally, the day arrived when it seemed that the chimpanzee was actually going to construct a sentence from the symbols it had been learning. Word went out, and other scientists crowded into the room and gathered around the cage. The scientists could hardly contain themselves as they pressed around the cage to read the history-making sentence. This is what the chimpanzee wrote: *"Let me out! I want to be free."*

As Americans, we often boast that we are the *home of the brave* and the *Land of the free*. We boast that we have the freedom and rights to make our own choices. This week we will once again celebrate our Independence Day in our country. This is good. The freedoms that we have in our country are a blessing from God. We should give thanks to God for those blessings. But what is freedom? When we think about *free*, we think of being *"unrestrained."*

Yet, there is a limit to freedom. Think of it in this way. A fish is restrained to live in water. It absorbs oxygen from the water, not from the air. If a fish is "freed" from the river and put out on the grass to explore, its *freedom* will soon bring death to that fish. In order for that fish to survive, it cannot be totally unrestrained from the water. What would happen if you boarded a plane to go on vacation, and suddenly the pilot would decide to let the plane be *unrestrained*. What would happen if he just shut down the engines and see what happens? What would happen if the doors were opened and now you could be free while the plane is still in the air, and you would not have a parachute? That sound pretty ridiculous, doesn't it. Yet, Satan is good at making the ridiculousness look good.

Satan wants us to believe that if all the restraints that God has placed on us are removed, we will be free. It's appealing, isn't it? It worked in the Garden of Eden. **"Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'" ... "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."** (Gen. 3) If we left to our own choices, we will choose to follow our sinful nature.

It worked in the Garden of Eden; it would work among the Galatians. So, Paul warned them. **"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.... You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh."** Paul wanted his Galatian believers to know that they had been set free in Christ. That freedom came for a price. There is a price that comes with freedom. The freedoms that we enjoy today in our country came at a price. As John Adams signed the Declaration of Independence, he said: *"Whether we live or die, sink or swim, succeed or fail, I stand behind this Declaration of Independence. And if God will it, I am ready to die in order that this country might experience freedom."* When God looked at this sinful world, he made a promise that he would set it free. He would send his one and only Son to shed his blood for sin. That is the only freedom that we can truly enjoy.

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.

How would they cherish that freedom? **"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. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other."** 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 freedom!

God did one thing better than just unlocking the door of the cage of the chimpanzee. 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.

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.