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Appreciating Our Freedom

Intro: Shooting my shotgun out my bedroom window – Dad furious – I couldn’t wait to experience my own freedom! When Lisa and I were married – one of the first things I did was shoot out the bedroom window. (I had no idea how much freedom I had it at home – I took it all for granted!)

It’s easy to take our freedom for granted. (Had it for over 200 years) Many of the freedoms we enjoy billions of people around the world will never experience. (North Korea / China / Saudi Arabia / Iran) I realize our country is far from perfect and we have our issues, but we are free people. This freedom is something we should appreciate and not take for granted.

There are other freedoms that we as believers tend to take for granted; and that is our spiritual freedoms. Jesus came to set us free! (I have come to set the prisoners free) I think sometimes, we forget what that really means.

Gal. 5:1 “So Christ has really set us free... (NLT) Free from what? What has Jesus set us free from?

- Let me give you 4 freedoms that Jesus accomplished for us that I believe we should never take for granted.

I. We Are Free From Satan’s Tyranny

Col. 1:13-14 “For He has rescued us from the one who rules in the kingdom of darkness, and He has brought us into the kingdom of His dear Son. God has purchased our freedom with His blood and has forgiven all our sins.” (NLT)

A. We used to belong to a different spiritual king and kingdom

1. According to the word of God, there are only 2 spiritual kings and 2 spiritual kingdoms we can be a part of. Only 2 options. (explain)
2. Satan rules the kingdom of darkness. Why is it a kingdom of darkness? I want to try to explain this by using an actual country that’s dark.
3. Illustrate: North Korea – Dictator Kim Jong – Satellite photo – Country under-developed / Discuss how the Kim Jong controls information about the world so he keeps the people ignorant of what out there. Feeds them false information. It is a country literally trapped in darkness.
4. Satan wants to keep people in darkness. He wants to keep people cut off from God’s Kingdom of light. He robs them of potential / He wants to keep people

from realizing there is another option. He wants to confuse people to think incorrectly about God / Jesus / church / His people / He wants people to serve His evil purposes.

- Groundbreaking research (Barna research group) into the perceptions of sixteen- to twenty-nine-year-olds. What do they think about Christians? “hypocritical,” “insensitive,” and “judgmental,”
5. Some of you may still be in the Kingdom of darkness. Some of you may still be living under Satan’s tyranny. You don’t have to! Jesus came to set us free from this oppressive kingdom.

B. We now belong to Jesus’ Kingdom

1. When we gave our lives to Jesus, we were rescued out of the darkness and transferred into Jesus’ Kingdom of light. Can some of you remember your spiritual light-bulb moment? That moment when the darkness was pulled back from your spiritual sight and you saw? / you understood?
2. Jesus’ Kingdom is all about freedom. Just think about a person living in North Korea being smuggled out and placed in the US. Can you imagine the radical difference they would experience? The freedom! The opportunities that they now have available to them?
3. This is what happens when we give our lives to Christ. I am no longer controlled by an evil dictator. I no longer serve His purposes. I don’t have to obey His wishes. Now I serve the purposes of a free Kingdom and a loving King.
4. Now we have opportunities before us that never existed before. Now we get hear truth and live our lives based on this truth. I’m not controlled by the enemies’ propaganda anymore.
5. Today let’s appreciate being set free from Satan’s tyranny!

II. We Are Free From Sin’s Power

Gal. 3:22 “But the Scriptures have declared that we are all prisoners of sin, so the only way to receive God’s promise is to believe in Jesus Christ.” (NLT)

Gal. 5:13 “For you have been called to live in freedom – not freedom to satisfy your sinful nature, but freedom to serve one another in love.” (NLT)

A. Before Christ, sin’s power dominated our lives

1. Being a prisoner to sin means that sin controlled me. Sin had power over my actions / attitudes / thoughts / motives / It was the dominating force in my life. My core nature was sinful. I can’t stop sinning.
2. Even my noble actions (feeding hungry people – helping out a neighbor – stopping to help a stranded driver) came from an independence from God.
3. Many people don’t understand this. They look at many of their “good deeds” and think they matter to God. They think they count in eternity. They rank themselves against those who are really bad and think they’re OK.

4. What they fail to realize is that they are still in the Kingdom of darkness and they are living independently of God. If you are living independently of God doing your own thing, sin controls your life NOT God.
5. It would be like some North Korean doing some type of noble deed in their country and expecting it to produce American citizenship. You say that's ridiculous. Yes, but people think this way spiritually all the time. They think their behavior in this life counts for eternity even though they are slaves of another king and under sin's power.
6. Until sin's power is broken in our lives and we are delivered out of Satan's kingdom, we have only one option...to be a slave of sin.

B. After Christ, sin no longer is the dominating power

1. When we embrace Jesus and accept His forgiveness, the power of sin is broken in our lives. For the first time in my life, I don't have to be sinful. I have a choice.
2. We go from living independently from God to living dependently on Him for our forgiveness. Sin's power is broken when we embrace forgiveness that only comes through Jesus.
3. We now have a new power source in our lives we never had before. When we receive His forgiveness, God places His Holy Spirit inside us. The power of sin is removed and the power of God takes its place!
II Tim. 1:7 "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power!"
4. The problem with so many believers is they don't live in that new power that is inside them. It's as if they don't understand the power and authority they have now in Christ. They keep living like slaves!
5. Let's revisit our North Korean friend again. It would be like taking Him out of the country / placing Him in an apartment here in the states / and he hides inside his apartment everyday. You try to explain to him he has power and authority to go where he wants / own property / drive / shop / enjoy life / but he refuses to believe you.
6. This is how many Christians live. They are convinced they are slaves and that's how they continue to live. We can't live beyond what we believe. Let me encourage you to believe what Scripture says. Start thanking God for your freedom from sin. Start thanking Him for the power that's in you to live a life of freedom. It will slowly start becoming a reality in your life!

III. We Are Free From Legalism's Bondage

Gal. 4:5 "God sent Him (Jesus) to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law..." (NLT) (rules / regulations / religious codes)

Gal. 4:9-10 "...why do you want to go back again and become slaves once more...trying to find favor with God by what you do or don't do..." (NLT)

- A. Before Christ, we try to earn our approval before God
1. At the core of religion is legalism; trying to earn approval from God by what you do or don't do. So many people are trapped in this bondage. They think God's opinion of them is tied to their behavior.
 - Recent religion in America survey: 92% believe in God – It would be interested to know what they believe God thinks about them? My guess is that it is based upon their behavior. (God likes me when I'm good...etc) Eternity is determined by my behavior – cosmic scale
 2. This is the predominant belief of all religions. (behavioral system) What bondage! How do you ever know if you've done enough? How do you know if you've gone too far? This breeds spiritual insecurity.
 3. I can't begin to tell you how many Christians are still stuck in this bondage even after giving their lives to Christ. They're still trying to make God love them...earn approval. What bondage. What fear!
 4. They tend to make other people around them miserable as well. WHY? Because they have a list of the approved behaviors that everyone should adhere to. They believe everyone should follow their list.
 5. I've dealt with many of them over the years. I've been told to change the way I dress / my phone message was inappropriate / the music we played with the youth / They are rule keepers instead of followers of Jesus. Bondage!
- B. After Christ, we enjoy unconditional approval
1. When we give our lives to Christ, it's not our behavior that makes us acceptable, it's Christ! Our approval is a settled issue because we are now forgiven. It is the sacrifice of Jesus that makes us approved before God!
 2. Therefore, our approval before God is a settled issue for all eternity. It is unconditional never to change. It has nothing to do with my performance as a Christian. He doesn't love me less when I have a bad day / failure!
 3. Read Romans 8:31-39: This is what God thinks of you today. (Screen)
 4. Embracing this freedom is what gives me hope / allows me to approach God / makes me want to try again / For me personally, this has been one of the most liberating truths I have ever embraced. This truth freed me to relate to God on a much more intimate level. Set me free from performance.
 5. Can you thank God for setting you free from the bondage of legalism / from religion / rituals / and bask in His unconditional approval.

IV. We Are Free From Death's Ultimate Victory

I Cor. 15:26 "The last enemy that will be abolished is death." (NASB) This is a victory that we are still anticipating. It is yet to come.

I Cor. 15:53-55 "For our perishable earthly bodies must be transformed into heavenly bodies that will never die. When this happens...then at last the Scriptures

will come true: Death is swallowed up in victory. O death where is your victory? O death where is your sting?" (NLT) Someday, resurrection will conquer death.

A. Currently, death gets the last word

1. What do I mean? Death gets the final say. No matter how I live this life, death is just a reality we all have to embrace. Death is the enemy, that no matter what you do, always wins! Death is 100% certain.
 - I've lost count how many funerals / memorial services I've done. Even the ones that are for saints that have graduated to glory, there's still a sting that accompanies death. Death is painful no matter how you look at it.
2. Why does death need to be overcome? Because death was never part of God's original plan. It was never a reality we were ever to experience. God created us as eternal beings to physically live forever in His presence.
3. Death became a reality when Adam and Eve sinned. The Bible tells us that the wages of sin is death. Death is a result of sin. Death became an enemy. Death became the result of a fallen world.
4. Therefore, for freedom to be complete, we must be set free from the physical limitations we experience not just the spiritual. We have to be set free from physical death itself. The last enemy has to be conquered!
5. God created a physical world / God's physical world is good / our physical bodies are part of that world, and it needs to be set free.

B. Someday, we anticipate the final victory through resurrection

1. The Bible tells us that death will someday lose when God gives us new, glorified, resurrected bodies made to live forever. Death will have no power over these bodies.
2. Resurrection is a major theme in the Bible (OT and NT). This is why Jesus' resurrection is so significant. Jesus set's the stage for our resurrection. If the grave had no power to hold Him, it has no power to hold us! Jesus already defeated the grave. It has already lost!
3. Sometimes I think we over-spiritualize eternity. We think of our existence in some ghost-like spirit form hovering about. Yet, this is not how the Bible describes it.
4. Eternity is physical. A physical place / made up of physical objects / inhabited by physical, resurrected people who will live forever. (never grow old / never gain weight / high cholesterol / aching joints / no deformities)
5. Can you see the hope this brings? Shouldn't the quadriplegic look forward to a physical body that works? The blind / deaf / the handicapped / The hope of a physical body that works!
6. What about our reunions. They're physical. Seeing those who have died in Christ physically – hugging / touching / embracing / We will not just see our loved ones again, we will hold them! Wow!

7. I praise God that death is not going to have the ultimate victory...We are in Christ! That is a freedom I am SO looking forward to and one we should never take for granted.

As we celebrate our national freedom this weekend, I want to encourage you to take the time to thank God for the freedom we have in Christ.

- We are free from Satan's tyranny
- We are free from Sin's power
- We are free from Legalism's bondage
- We are free from Death's ultimate victory

All I can say is that it is good to be free! If you have never experienced the freedom that I have been talking about today, there's only one way to experience it. Accept Christ into your life. Embrace Him and the freedom He wants to bring to your life. He's ready to set you free. Will you willing to receive it?