

Weekly Study of Sunday's Message.

September 17, 2023 "30 days to freedom ... who do you want to be? Icons."

I Intro.

It's almost fall 'y'all. Ready for some cooler weather? Things have cranked back up and we want you to be a part of this great community. We hope you are fed and ministered to by NCC, and that you can be an essential part of us moving forward. We have many ways you can plug into life at NCC. You can find all those through our website, app, and social media sites. Our app is the best way to livestream our services, but you can also livestream on FaceBook and YouTube. You can revisit past services, sign up for events and even give. We're encouraged by your presence when you gather with us. New and familiar faces join us every Sunday. If you join us online, we appreciate your presence. We are 100% committed to our virtual attenders. We are your church family, and if there is anything you need, prayer, or anything else, please let us know. This is our weekly devotional that gives you some specific things to work through from Sunday's message. Whether you were able to participate in this service or not, this devotion is free-standing. You can use it to help you dig deeper into your own spiritual walk. We hope you find this tool helpful on your spiritual journey.

II Recap.

Here we are on the third Sunday of this series, **"30 Days to Freedom"**. A 30 day commitment to a few practices and habits that would free us from all the things we allow to creep into our lives. If we learn and do these things well, we could experience true freedom as Jesus promised. Not just the ability to choose our preferences like the world defines freedom, but real freedom. The first week we began with the first step towards freedom. And we began to flesh out an understanding of freedom that isn't controlled or determined by things outside of us. It's an internal groundedness that holds us in place no matter what is happening in our world around us. Last week we talked about identifying the things inside of us, idols, that limit our freedom. These things may feel like freedom, the ability to choose, but they typically begin to trap us. Today we talk about being an icon. A representation of something greater and of the nature of the artist that created us.

III Sunday.

We used a good bit of scripture Sunday, but we want to unpack the word icon first. An icon is an image of any kind that represents something else. Usually sacred, and bears the style of the artist that created it. We see paintings, stained glass, statues, and more that tell us some great truth, some amazing story, and reflect the heart and nature of the artist. You can see where I'm going here, but let's first just talk about iconography.

Who are some of your favorite artists? Why do you like them?

What does their art say to you?

Because this particular lesson is built on the idea we are an icon of God, we want to have a little conversation about what that means. Read the classic passage associated with creation, and we'll talk about it a bit. **Genesis 1:26-27.**

What jumped out to you about this passage?

What does it say about God? What does it say about our God image?

Do you struggle with what this actually means? Why or why not?

Being “*created in God’s image*” has always kind of been difficult for us to interpret what it means. Do we have God’s nature, attributes, abilities? What does it mean to bear God’s likeness? We could argue the specifics of this. The basic truth seems to be that we are iconography of God. We reflect what matters, is important, and tells the story of God. When others see or experience us, they ought to be able to find God in who we are. The reason this is important is several fold. One, if we are a representation of who God is, then we ought to do all we can to protect it. Two, if we are an icon of God, then whenever we don’t live to reflect the nature of God, we can always return to that relationship. Which leads us to our next scripture. Another famous passage that has what we’ve called before a generic specific. A specific account that has led to a generic understanding of this. Let’s go ahead and read that next passage. **Luke 15:11-24**. And yes, we know we cut off the end of the story. That is an essential teaching, but not necessary for this particular point.

Did you notice anything new from this passage?

What was the conversion moment for the younger son?

What does it mean that the understanding of the nature of his father came before his recognition of his actions?

I have never really noticed or have been impacted by this truth before. But it seems the reason the youngest son came to his senses wasn’t because he was first convicted of all the bad choices he had made. He does eventually mention those. The first thing we see is that he knew the heart and nature of his dad. That he, as a son, bore the image of his father. And that realization then moved him to feel the weight of the poor choices he had made. A piece of art that has been mistreated or hidden for years is not less valuable. It has the same value as if it were in perfect condition. We just don’t see or appreciate it until it’s restored to what it was originally.

No matter how far we’ve drifted from the life God created and intended for us. No matter how many idols we’ve placed before God. We are and always will be a priceless icon bearing the image of our artist creator. Sometimes we just need to be reminded first so we can make the choices to live into that truth. And it’s that truth that will set us free.

What does it mean to be an icon, the image of God?

How would that change how you see yourself? How you would see others?

What would it take for you to make this an integral part of your daily life?

IV Challenge.

The closing challenge is to just read **1 John 3:1-3**. It’s a beautiful short passage about our God’s love for us. We tend to make following Jesus, and knowing God, as this grind it out, a painful and joyless existence. Yes, there is a tremendous amount of real effort, and work that goes into living the life Jesus came to bring us. We don’t just drift into it. However, there are so many promises that once we truly understand and dedicate ourselves to the flow of following Jesus, that there is this wholeness, inner joy and peace that comes with it, that the work and effort aren’t drudgery. They’re just the path to this better life.

Once we realize we are deeply loved. We are a beautiful icon of the nature of God. Then this work of following Jesus will bring us the freedom we’re actually craving.

Be beautiful. Be an icon. Be free!