

To be Truly Free
"If the Son has set you free, you are free indeed." John 8:36

Declaration of Independence: We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

Frederick Douglass, a national leader of the abolitionist movement in the 1800's who himself was a former slave, articulated the pain of what this day meant for the American slave in a public address that he gave on July 5th, 1852, 11 years before the emancipation proclamation.

"Are the great principles of political freedom and of natural justice, embodied in that Declaration of Independence, extended to us?...I say it with a sad sense of the disparity between us. I am not included within the pale of this glorious anniversary! Your high independence only reveals the immeasurable distance between us. The blessings in which you, this day, rejoice, are not enjoyed in common. The rich inheritance of justice, liberty, prosperity and independence, bequeathed by your fathers, is shared by you, not by me. The sunlight that brought life and healing to you, has brought stripes and death to me."

"Notwithstanding the dark picture I have this day presented of the state of the nation, I do not despair of this country. There are forces in operation, which must inevitably work the downfall of slavery. "The arm of the Lord is not shortened," and the doom of slavery is certain. I, therefore, leave off where I began, with hope."

And on June 19th, 1865 (now known and celebrated as Juneteenth), two years after President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, the last of the American slaves living in Texas, all 250,000 of them were finally set free.

Just as Frederick Douglass shared the hope he had in spite of the reality in which he lived, I want to share the hope that we have as followers of Jesus Christ because of the reality we get to live in him.

Freedom in Christ:

"All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." Romans 3:23

"...the wages of sin is death." Romans 6:23

"Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty of our sins." Romans 3:24

"Now, you are free from the power of sin...and though the wages of sin is death, the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 6:22-23

To be truly free is to know and believe in the one whom God has sent, to receive his free gift of salvation; salvation that came through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus so that we could be saved from the wages of sin, from death to eternal life and saved from the power of sin, from bondage to freedom in Christ.

"...the thief comes only to steal, kill and devour but Jesus came to give us life and life more abundant." John 10:10. Satan knows what freedom in Christ will do for those who embrace it and walk in it. So, he will do everything in his power to keep us from experiencing true freedom and instead, lure us into seeking a counterfeit freedom in the things of this world.

Counterfeit Freedom through Knowledge:

"Then God said, Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us." Genesis 1:26

"Then God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it." Genesis 1:28

"...there is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death." Proverbs 14:12

To be truly free is to live under the rule of King Jesus, who is the way, the truth and the life.

Counterfeit Freedom through Wealth & Power:

“Jesus told him, “If you want to be perfect, go and sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” But when the young man heard this, he went away sad, for he had many possessions.” Matthew 19:21-22. If we are not careful, we too, like the rich young ruler, can become consumed by wealth and power and eventually, we no longer own our possessions, but our possessions own us.

Counterfeit Freedom through Kings and Kingdoms:

“...controls the course of world events; he removes kings and sets up other kings.” Daniel 2:21

Policies and laws can impact the freedoms that we experience here on earth, but our true freedom is rooted only in Jesus and no earthly king can ever take that away.

Spirituals “affirm a complete trust in God to make right in the next world what was done wrong in this world. . . .The Spirituals provided an emotional security for oppressed slaves during turbulent times. Since slaves had no economic or political security in this world, they put their trust in Jesus whom they believed would make everything all right.” Benjamin Mays, a son of former slaves who became president of Morehouse College.

That is the power of being truly free in Christ. It is not limited to what we face here on earth. It is not hindered, obstructed, dependent upon any system, institution, community or person...we are free because the Son has set us free. And the truth of that freedom gives us the hope that endures through any pandemic, any political party, any personal adversity because Jesus is the solid rock on which we stand today and forevermore.

From Bondage to Freedom:

Satan’s agenda - “He has always hated the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, it is consistent with his character; for he is a liar and the father of lies.” John 8:44b

God’s agenda - “You will know the truth and the truth will set you free.” John 8:32

Purpose and Power of Freedom:

“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.” Galatians 5:1

“For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don’t use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love. For the whole law can be summed up in this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Galatians 5:13

“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one - I in them and you in me - so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” John 17:20-23

With freedom comes great responsibility...the greatest of which is to love one another well. What one thing can you do to serve one another with humility and grace? What one thing you can do to bring peace and unity? How we love demonstrates how free we are.

So this day, let it be more than a day that we celebrate the birth of our nation and the founding principles of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Let us remember and celebrate the birth of our true independence in Jesus and may that be what spurs us forward toward being a people who truly live free showing the world how they too can experience a freedom that surpasses anything and everything this life has to offer.