

The Gift of Freedom

Exodus 3:9-10; 2 Corinthians 3:17

Sunday, July 2, 2023 at the First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa

- Introduction

I remember reading an old interview in Life Magazine with young people in India who were members of the "Untouchables." The interviewer asked of their goals, hopes and dreams for their life. They didn't understand the concepts. They were born in a caste where such things were not allowed, so to think they could ever aspire to anything never entered their mind. We would find such a situation unthinkable and cherish all the freedoms that we have. I found it very sad to imagine life for people for whom freedoms have been denied for so long that they do not even understand that they have, or should have, options in life. Freedom has been denied to them by culture, and in other cases freedom is denied people by governmental force. But freedom is the domain of God and what God gives should not be denied by anyone else. There is freedom of life, and there is freedom of the soul, and the Bible speaks of both.

- Set the Stage

The first of our two passages for today is in Exodus 3. Moses, raised to be a prince in the mighty empire of Egypt, failed in his efforts to help the children of Israel and ended up running for his life, and spending 40 years herding sheep for his father-in-law. God speaks to him through the burning bush and tells him that He knows the sorrows of His people and He has come to deliver them. Admittedly, I wonder why He waited 400 years but it remains that God has the right to choose destiny, and He chooses freedom and deliverance for His people. If freedom is the gracious gift of God, does any government or culture have the right to take that away? Yet government, culture and individuals do just that.

- Judges 19-20

There is an episode in Judges 19-20 that is one of the most depressing of the Bible. In it, a man, a Levite no less, is in relationship with a concubine—a "sort of wife" and he leaves her on the front step of his dwelling to be murdered by a mob, an outrage that causes a civil war in Israel. Why such a story was included in the Bible mystified me until I read commentary written by a Black female theologian. She pointed out that this story is about the life of someone denied her freedom. It is in the Bible to give us a taste of what it is like to be treated as expendable property by another human being. This was life for a person denied her freedom. The God of Moses opposed that, and He saw to it that this sad story was enshrined in Sacred Scripture to let us know the value of freedom.

- Main Point:

Here's the main point: Freedom is a gift of God, and no government has the right to take it away. Some do so because they have the power. Sometimes culture does so because it has its own type of power as well. But freedom is not the decision of government or of culture. Freedom is the gracious choice of God and anything or anyone that takes freedom away from people stands in opposition to and is under the judgment of God.

- The Inner Freedom

In stark contrast to that is the passage in 2 Corinthians 3, which indicates that the presence of the Holy Spirit is the essence of freedom, and it connects freedom with the experience of the Holy Spirit that we all so desperately desire. This is verse 17 but let me read verse 18 as well to show by context the importance of the Spirit in having freedom. 2 Corinthians 3:17 says "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

So far I've spoken of freedom of people, basically to make the most of their own choices in life; a sort of social and political freedom. In the New Testament I find a different sort of freedom in the words of the Lord Jesus and of the Apostle Paul. It was of an inner freedom; a freedom from sin, from the fear of God and of death, a freedom to claim our heritage in Christ. Jesus spoke of freedom from sin when He addressed some of His disciples and told them that their choices can enslave them from the inside out.

- John 8:31-36 Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed in Him, "if you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." They answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can you say, 'You will be made free'?" Jesus answered them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, *whoever commits sin is a slave of sin*. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore, if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed."

- from fear of God and of death

Romans 8:15 For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father," and again in Galatians (4:7) where we are told that we are heirs of God in Christ, as opposed to being a slave. There is an inner freedom of the soul that is the essence of freedom.

- Conclusion

There may be other kinds of freedom, but I know of at least two; the freedom of life and of choice, and the freedom of the soul found in Christ. Tyrannical governments and evil cultures will try to deny freedom of choice, and in some cases freedom of the soul as well. God alone has the right to bestow or deny freedom, and I believe He chooses freedom. Cherish your freedom of choice and of life. Cherish even more the freedom of the soul and live your life in such fashion that you encourage freedoms of all types in everyone you influence.