

Freedom

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[0 : 00] For Bibles, you can turn once again to Ephesians chapter 1. We are thinking about verse 7 as we approach Easter.

! We read in verse 7, in Him, in the Lord Jesus Christ, we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that He lavished on us.

So we're thinking about the reality that Jesus gives true freedom. When we look at this verse, the key word, the word that jumps out at us, I am sure, is the word redemption.

And it's a word that belongs in the freedom family. And when we think about freedom, that's something I imagine we all want, and we all want in different ways. We value the freedom of choice or the freedom of expression. We hear people talking about the freedom to be me, and we understand.

Think about in a family. As children grow older, they say, we need more freedom. That's what they want. As parents, perhaps we are tempted to say, well, you need less freedom. When we're at work, we want freedom to use our talents to avoid being micromanaged, or we want freedom from all the distractions so we can focus on the task that needs our attention.

[1 : 24] Think about our time, day to day, week to week. How often do we want simply a free day in the calendar? Maybe just a few free hours so we can see the people we want to see, perhaps to do nothing and find rest or to pursue our hobbies or our interests.

Freedom matters in so many different ways. But how do we think about freedom? Often, perhaps instinctively, we think freedom is about freedom from. Freedom from rules. Freedom from authority. Freedom from demands.

But is there another way to define it? What if the freedom that we're pursuing all along really isn't freedom at all? What if we're missing what true freedom really is? We were at a family wedding this weekend, and it was a beautiful day, and in the evening, there was a few kids out on the lawn, and they were having the best time stargazing, looking at the moon, spotting a satellite.

And there was a sense of joy. And there was a sense of wonder. And I was talking with someone, and they were saying to me, I don't know, I don't know, the last time I looked up at the sky at night. There is wonder there, but sometimes we miss it. There is joyful wonder and freedom in the good news of Jesus. To hear this text is to hear a joy everywhere.

[2 : 56] Paul begins with thanks and praise, because in Jesus, there is the freedom to enjoy all of God's spiritual blessings. There is joyful freedom, because in Jesus, we can know the love of God as Father.

There is the joy and the freedom in Jesus of discovering God's goal for the universe, that the whole universe would be united under Christ, including us. But I wonder if we've missed the magnitude of God's mercy, if we've stopped gazing with joy at the wonder of God's redemption.

So today, we have a chance to slow down and to look up and to discover or to rediscover the wonderful freedom we have on offer to us in Jesus.

We're going to ask three questions. We're going to ask, why do we need freedom? And we're going to think about guilt, and we're going to think about sin. We're going to ask, where do we find freedom? And we're going to go to the cross of Christ.

And we're going to ask, how do we get this freedom? And we'll think together about God's grace and God's love. So why do we need freedom?

[4 : 13] This morning, we're going to borrow from a few classic movies from the 90s to help us. I don't know how many of you have seen the Truman Show. If you've seen the Truman Show, you'll know the central character is a man called Truman Burbank.

And halfway through the show, he discovers that his whole life is a sham. He's been trapped in a TV show that everyone around him is an actor playing a part.

And from that moment, the goal of Truman's life is to escape. And to escape Christoph. Think about that name. Christoph the director.

There's freedom in escaping. Now, I would suggest that movie helpfully captures what we might think of as our default setting when it comes to freedom. Freedom is escaping the director.

Freedom is escaping authority. If we go back to the book of Genesis, freedom comes. If we could just escape God and his word over us. Wasn't that the idea of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden?

[5 : 16] We've been tracing it for weeks. Adam and Eve, as they listen to the serpent, they begin to doubt God's generosity. And they stop trusting God's word.

And they question his love. And the root of sin is this desire to be free from the God who we don't really trust. We don't really trust loves us and has our best intentions at heart.

And so there is this misguided belief if we could just break those shackles, if we could escape the TV set, then there would be freedom. Jesus in John's gospel makes a really powerful statement and I think helps us if we're thinking in these lines.

He says to us, Everyone who sins doesn't find freedom. Everyone who sins is a slave to sin.

And it could be that in pursuing a false view of freedom, we're actually selling ourselves to that which would destroy us. Mercifully, Jesus continued, but if the Son sets you free, then you're free indeed.

[6 : 25] So when we come to Ephesians chapter 1 verse 7 and we come to this idea of redemption, the big idea, first of all, is that you and I, we need redemption.

The picture is a biblical picture of someone who has been sold into slavery. For some reason, got into a debt that we cannot pay off and cannot break free from.

And the only way to be delivered is by the payment of a price. A price that will be paid by another. The classic Old Testament redemption story is the book of Exodus.

And in the book of Exodus, we find that Israel as a nation, they are slaves. And the wonderful truth is that God himself will deliver. He will send Moses as mediator.

And the price that will be paid is the price of the Passover lamb to ensure the freedom of God's people. So when we hear the word redemption, it reminds us that we need freedom.

[7 : 23] But maybe it makes us ask the question, well, what does this have to do with us? I've never been a slave. I've not been sold. I feel quite free. To help us to understand what Paul says, there's a second idea within verse 7 that we need to recognize.

Verse 7, in him we have redemption through his blood. How does that redemption come? Through the forgiveness of sins or literally the forgiveness of our trespasses.

So moving from the idea of being sold into slavery to the idea of trespass. So we're familiar, I think, with the idea of trespassing. There is a portion of land or a site that is private.

And if we cross over the boundary line, then we are in forbidden territory. That might be a farmer's field. It might be a secret government site. You might see warning signs.

Trespassers will be prosecuted. Keep that image in your head. What is the line that we cross when we sin?

[8 : 36] The line that we step over is the line of God's law. Like Adam and Eve who ate the forbidden fruit. We trespass when we do what God forbids.

God says no and we say yes. And we trespass when we fail to do what God commands. God says yes and we say no. Think about the summary that Jesus gave of God's law.

We are to love God all the time, all the way. And when we fail, when we ignore God in His world, when we reject His rule over us, when we give our hearts to other things, when we don't honor His name or honor His day, we are guilty of sin.

We are liable to prosecution. We have trespassed against God and His law. Back again to Jesus' summary of the law.

We are not only to love God, we are to love our neighbor as ourself. And so when we fail, when we disrespect, or when we snub the other person, when we despise and dishonor them in our hearts or with our words, in our lust or in our lies, in our anger, our envy, and our pride, again we become liable to judgment.

[10 : 03] We have trespassed. We become slaves. And because God is God, He is both the King who has ultimate authority over us, but He is also the righteous judge who cannot simply turn a blind eye to sin, and He is also the holy God who hates sin and its effects in our lives and in our world.

So when I sin, when you sin, we trespass against God's command, or we pile up a moral debt that we cannot repay.

In a spiritual sense, we become slaves because of the guilt of our sin. In response to that one common answer that people might give, perhaps we might give, is to say, but I'm basically a good person.

I feel like looking back on my life, my good deeds, they outweigh my bad deeds. I feel like I've been a pretty good family member, a good neighbor, a good citizen. Surely God will accept me.

If you're here today, and that's what you think Christianity is, if you're trying really hard to prove yourself to God, or maybe you're new to Christianity, and you're wondering, is it some kind of moral self-improvement religion?

[11 : 38] And again, we need to hear what God says, because according to God, it is folly. No mere human can perfectly keep God's law.

And recognize, too, that it's not true. It's not true to say that our good deeds can ever outweigh our bad deeds, because even our best efforts, the Bible says, they still have defects.

The best thing that I do if I'm not truly honoring God with my heart, still sin. If I don't seek God's glory where I seek to be a good neighbor, the Bible says it's still sin.

Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin. And as importantly, we need to understand that trying to make our good deeds outweigh our bad deeds, that has never been and will never be God's way to save anybody.

Salvation does not come from balancing the records and the scales. Salvation comes from cancelling the record at the cross. And that's what Jesus came to do.

[12 : 44] And that's the fundamental freedom that you and I all need. So having said that, let's ask ourselves a second question, and it's this, where do we find this freedom?

Just to continue with a couple of different 90s movies, think about Braveheart. If you've seen Braveheart, think about that famous battle speech of Mel Gibson slash William Wallace as they're about to face the army of England.

Freedom for the land, freedom for the people, will require courage and cost and bloody sacrifice. saving Private Ryan, which tells the story of a U.S. squadron sent to rescue said Private Ryan from the heat of World War II to bring him home to his mother.

She'd already lost all his brothers. And freedom for Private Ryan in that movie came as many of that squadron died on their rescue mission.

[13 : 59] And again, sacrifice and cost brings freedom. It's a theme that plays through so many of our stories and it is right at the heart of Christian faith.

At the heart of Christianity is freedom that comes through costly sacrifice. And the one who sacrifices is Jesus, the Son of God, in order to be our Redeemer.

forever. That's why the note of this section is so full of praise and joy. So look back with me again at verse 7 and notice these two little phrases.

First of all, it's in Him, it's in Christ we have redemption and then notice we have redemption through His blood. So it's in Him, in Christ we have redemption.

So this is the idea that we find in the Bible of union, being united with Christ, with the idea of Christ as our representative. And again, this is something we're familiar with. We're familiar with it in the world of politics.

[15 : 06] The Prime Minister signs a peace treaty and a whole nation enjoys that peace. Or a sports team wins a trophy and every supporter of that team shares in the victory.

This idea of representation matters because what Jesus, our head, does as our Redeemer is ours as His body.

And what Paul is telling us here is that Jesus, our representative, He frees us from our debt of sin.

Remember, we are sold as slaves because of our guilt and Jesus comes to represent us, to free us from our debt of sin by taking our guilt on Himself, by taking the liability on Himself.

Now, maybe we're really used to that idea, but let's just think personally about it for a moment.

Think with me of the worst sins that you have been guilty of.

think for a moment about the most shameful words or actions of your life. Even just scan through the last seven days and think about those moments of regret.

[16 : 38] And then hear Jesus say, place all of those sins on me. I will be regarded for you as the worst sinner who ever lived.

I will take all of your guilt. We heard Colossians chapter 2, the assurance of our forgiveness, and there's a wonderful image there of there being a written record of all our moral and spiritual debt before God.

God. And as Jesus dies on the cross, that record of debt is nailed to the cross as Christ is nailed to the cross.

And Paul's message is that Jesus endures the condemnation that we deserve so that we can receive salvation from Jesus, our representative who takes our guilt and gives us his righteousness. And the effect of Jesus dying on the cross for us is that our record is ripped up because the payment is made in full and it will never be asked of us.

[17 : 56] When I trust in Jesus, when you trust in Jesus, you are totally free from any condemnation. In Christ Jesus, you will never experience God's justice against you because it was fully met in Jesus.

That's what it means to be in Him. In Him, when He is our representative, when we're united to Him by faith, what is true of Jesus is true for us as His people.

So when Jesus dies for sin, we are to reckon and regard ourselves as having died to sin too. As justice is satisfied against our sin as it's placed on Jesus at the cross, our debt is cancelled.

When Jesus is raised to new life, we, with Him, are justified and not condemned and we enjoy resurrection life with Him.

And that's why we can say you can find freedom, God's freedom, at the cross of Christ. It's in Him. we have redemption.

[19 : 08] But the second phrase backs this up, doesn't it? In Him we have redemption through His blood. Because that really underlines what is the cost for us to be free?

What's the price that is paid? And the price that is paid is the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. That to be saved and to enjoy freedom for us means being saved by sacrifice.

Jesus dies in our place to cover over and cancel our sin. Now what do you think about when you hear the word sin? Sometimes we might think it's out of date.

Perhaps we hear it and sometimes it comes across as offensive. Sometimes we want to limit it and justify ourselves, well I'm not doing any worse than others. We're not guilty of any gross immorality. What does God think about sin though? Do we understand that God thinks that all sin is infinitely offensive against an infinitely holy God?

[20 : 23] Those sins that we write off as small, well maybe they didn't harm anyone else, it was just in my thoughts. Never a small thing, but always an act of cosmic treason.

It's turning our back on God or positively shaking our fist at the God of the universe. Sin is serious, and sin is worthy of death.

The cross shows us that, but wonderfully the cross also shows us God's mercy because it's the blood of the Son of God which is spilled. Think about that for a moment.

Who stands in our place, whose blood is shed? It's the Son of God. And it's the infinite worth of Christ Jesus and His blood that covers the infinite offense of our sin.

God's God's love. love falls on Him so that when we are covered by His blood, it's God's mercy and God's love that falls on us.

[21 : 36] That's why we celebrate God's freedom through Jesus. If you're here today, you're not a Christian. I wonder if you ever feel a sense of guilt, perhaps in your conscience, perhaps fearful at the mention of God and the idea of God's judgment.

Maybe you're here today and you sense that something is missing, there's something that you need. Today there is an invitation to come to Jesus, Jesus, to look to Him to be your Redeemer, to understand that our debt is so great, only a divine sacrifice could pay it.

And Jesus, the Son of God, has paid it, and has paid it in full, so you don't have to. So you can come to Jesus in faith as your grace rescuer, the one who came to smash the shackles of sin, to unlock the dungeon, to storm the gates, to purchase your freedom at the cost of His own life.

But let me speak to those of us who are Christians. When we fall into sin, as we know we do, when we are tempted to despair, as sometimes we can be, when we doubt God's love, when things grow

dark, the answer for us is the same.

We come to Jesus, we look to Jesus, as Murray McShane put it so helpfully, for every one look at ourselves. we take ten looks at Jesus.

[23 : 36] Let me encourage you today to look to Jesus as your great high priest. Two things Jesus does for us as our high priest, he sacrifices for you and he prays for you.

On the cross, in that sacrifice, he has fully paid the penalty for all of your sins. Justice has been fully met, that record of debt, the letter now reads paid in full, his perfect sacrifice has more merit than all of our sin, he is able to cover it.

He's done that as your great high priest, but recognize where is Jesus now? Jesus is in heaven, he's in glory, he's at the Father's right hand, and what's Jesus doing now? He is constantly praying for you.

I came across this phrase from the Puritan Thomas Goodwin this week, he says this, the life of Jesus and the intercession of Jesus keeps God and us friends.

Our relationship with our Father is steadfast and sure because Jesus ensures it. He mediates to ensure our reconciliation.

[24 : 53] salvation. So if you are in Christ today, your past sins, your present sins, your future sins are all covered by the sacrifice of Jesus and the praying life of Jesus.

And so our security does not rest in ourselves, it rests in him. His perfect sacrifice, his perfect prayers, so you and I, we get to look, we get to rest, and we get to rejoice.

And that takes us towards our third question. How do we get this freedom? So think about what we've said so far. We need freedom because of our guilt and our sin.

And Jesus came to secure freedom by his death on the cross. I hope for all of us, God is helping us to see, to see why this matters. To see why we need our idea of freedom to include a freedom to know God and to know life with God and to receive his forgiveness so we can be assured of his love.

But it leads us to that one final question. How do we get this freedom? And it takes us to one last connection with another of those 90s movies. Back to Saving Private Ryan.

[26 : 17] So the closing scenes of the movie, we find Private Ryan, so he is rescued from the front lines and he's taken home to the States where he lives out the rest of his days and we find him, an elderly man, visiting the grave of one of those soldiers who purchased his freedom at great sacrifice.

And there at the gravesite he remembers words spoken to him. and those words were, earn it. And what we see and sense is that Private Ryan is haunted by those words. Have I done enough with my life to earn that sacrifice?

it was a terrible burden upon his shoulders. Friends, this is not the gospel.

That is not the message of Christianity. And that's really good news. It's really good news when we understand God is perfectly holy and just.

[27 : 37] And that without perfect, 100% perfect love and obedience we could never earn our way into the freedom of forgiveness. That is good news when we understand God doesn't expect that.

He knows that we failed. He knows we will always fail. And he's provided a way. He's given to us a better message and a better story. that Jesus, his son, he has earned it for us.

And it has nothing to do with your worth. And it has nothing to do with your work. And it has everything to do with his.

In preparing for Easter, I've been reading a lovely little book by John Piper. It's called 50 Reasons Why Jesus Came to Die. And one of those reasons is this. Jesus died to show the wealth of God's love and grace for sinners.

Look at the last clause, the last phrase in verse 7. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us.

[28 : 53] God's overflowing grace poured out on us. How do we see it? We see that grace in the degree of his sacrifice to save us from the penalty of sin. So we've already said it.

Who is it that dies on the cross? It is Jesus. Remember, Jesus' name means God saves. Who is Jesus? According to verse 3, he is none other than the Lord.

Who is Jesus? According to verse 3, he is Christ. He is the anointed king. So it's the eternal son of God who becomes one of us. He is the one who dies on the cross. Now think about that for a moment.

Think about the immense cost to God the Father and God the Son in our freedom, in our redemption. Cost to the Father in sending the Son he loves.

Cost to the Son in lovingly sacrificing for us. And wonderfully understand the Bible says that both Father and Son freely chose it in love to purchase our freedom.

[29 : 58] And see this grace too in the degree of our unworthiness. God didn't look at us and say, there's a guy, there's a girl who'd be perfect for my kingdom.

That's not the way it works. In fact, he spells it out in chapter 2, the opening verses of chapter 2. It is rebels who are redeemed, Paul says.

It is the disobedient who are delivered into God's kingdom. It is objects of God's wrath who are made objects of God's love.

And all of that to the praise of his glorious grace. So that for you and I to experience freedom from Jesus, freedom from guilt and sin, freedom to enjoy life with God, the love of God, what do we need to do?

We need to fall into the arms of our loving God and Savior. And if we have any doubts, if we have any suspicions about the goodness of God, about the good intentions of God for us, God's love, let me urge you to look again to the cross.

[31 : 20] Consider the cost that the Father and the Son paid that we might go free. Because, friends, this is true freedom, to be free of the guilt of sin that would condemn us to death and to hell.

true freedom is enjoying eternal life from God and with the God of love. True freedom comes through Jesus' death for us on the cross.

And that freedom comes all because of God's love and God's grace. This is the deep, deep love of Jesus, which is vast, unmeasured, boundless, free.

And we're going to sing of it in a moment. It's a love and it's a freedom that you and I can receive today. And we can rest in it every day.

And when we're in Jesus, we will rejoice in this freedom for all eternity. Let's give thanks as we pray. Amen.