

, Freedom in Christ

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Preacher: Randy Matthews

[0 : 00] Well, it's great to finally be back with you here at the Leaches Ranch.

! And it's really amazing to see tents here.! I know you've been camping out all weekend, so you'd have a spot here. This truly is a very special place, Jordan and Jess.

Thank you for opening it up. And as we drove up, we thought it's not only just special because we gather here, but even their closest neighbors are dying to get in here.

And so, all right, let's close in prayer. It's actually, we had heard about the circles on the grass, and we actually found a circle.

When we first walked in, Jordan, they told us that our seat was on the other side of the trees. And, but we finally got into a circle, and it's so good to be here.

[1 : 09] I want to thank you for all of your prayers, especially when I'm away. Last year, I was away six months out of the year.

This year was going to be seven to seven and a half months. It was going to be the busiest year yet prior to coronavirus.

And so now, here we are halfway through the year, and I've only traveled 10 days. But I thank you for your prayers because the only trip I really got to take was to Myanmar.

And while I was in Myanmar, I got word on my phone that they were closing all the airports, and I had to cut that trip even in half and finally catch a quick flight from Myanmar to Thailand, Thailand to Malaysia, Malaysia to the Netherlands and the Netherlands home.

But I got in on March 13th, Friday the 13th, before all of the airports were going to have greater restrictions.

[2 : 20] I know people like you were praying, and it was such an easy trip home. It was amazing. I need to give you a quick report, but I really want us to get into God's word.

So let me just mention, I've got a prayer sheet for you, and it's over on the table right here with the water. But let me tell you that the prayer sheet is a little bit different than the ones I usually give out. What I usually give out is what I'm observing and what I'm seeing and what God is doing around the world. But this is a prayer report of people from Africa and Asia, and it's in their own words.

None of these words are my own. I've contacted key leaders that we're working with in Africa, in Nigeria, and over in Uganda, Kenya, Zambia, and the work is going on from even those countries. And I've asked them, tell us what God is doing in your life, in the life of your family, and in your ministry. And then tell us how we can pray.

[3 : 36] So I ask you to take one of these. I've also included over in Asia, Brother Moses, who is in Myanmar. And he is the one I was with before I cut my trip short and came back.

So please be sure to pick one of those up. What I've done is just ask you to take these prayer requests and to bring them before the Lord, because he's doing something in the midst of COVID-19 that couldn't be done if we were all free and all open.

Sometimes we can look at things and say, what a great hindrance. We've been in lockdown, and we've been in social distancing like we're doing here.

We can't even meet in a building. But I'm telling you that God is doing amazing things in the most unpredictable of times. He is going forward.

I love what Paul said, even in Philippians, when he was in lockdown. He was actually in jail. And he would say that this has actually happened to advance the gospel.

[4 : 51] It actually is bringing about a greater advancement of the gospel. Now, what God is doing is he is reaching out to people in their desperate need and bringing the gospel along with tangible love.

So I want to thank Shoreline, all the elders, and Dave. I know he's away with family today. But I just want to thank you for the support, because all of it is going to tangible love in Africa and Asia. Well, today, as we gather here, this is a very special weekend. It's a weekend in which we've celebrated July 4th.

Hopefully, you had a good day yesterday. What we're looking at in July 4th is the celebration of our own freedom as Americans.

True freedom. I love the Declaration of Independence and the way it begins that we hold these truths and we believe them to be just self-evident.

[6 : 01] They're just truths that all people would know. And one of the truths I wish we had acted on a little better as a country, that all men are created equal.

Had we really taken our own words at their face value and believed them self-evident, we could have avoided much heartache and much stress for many people, and we could have avoided bloodshed throughout the Civil War and many other things.

There were people that were urging us to hold all people equal, but we had to redefine some people, that they're less equal.

I pray that that day is changing in a new way. But that's a story and that's a message for another time. The Declaration of Independence says that God has given us three things, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

I believe those three are really held together. If we're not truly alive, we're never going to experience liberty and freedom and happiness or joy in the midst of that freedom.

[7 : 18] So what hit me about this weekend is that we needed to talk about freedom in Christ. We needed to go back to the scriptures and preach the gospel to ourselves and once again find out one key thing, one key thought.

And that key thought is this, how to enjoy our freedom in Christ. You see, we may be free. There are many Americans that are free.

But are they enjoying freedom? What we want to look at today is how to embrace and enjoy the freedom that Christ has given us.

As Mike had mentioned, we're going to look in Galatians chapter 5 and we're going to explore how to enjoy that freedom.

I just want to say to you before I read a portion of Galatians 5, that if we're going to enjoy the freedom Christ has given us, we're going to have to do four things, and I'm going to tell you those four up front.

[8 : 30] We're going to try to unpack them in a short amount of time. So that means we'll have to be brief. But if we are going to enjoy freedom in Christ, we're going to have to affirm something.

The first thing to do in enjoying freedom in Christ is we're going to have to avoid something. And it is very real in all of our lives.

We're going to start with affirming something. We're going to avoid something. And then he says, when you get that in order, now you've got to aim at something.

There is a bullseye that God has for every one of our lives. He makes it very simple, and he's going to use terms like this.

The only thing that matters. There is a bullseye, and we're going to have to aim at something. And if we're going to enjoy Christ and the freedom that he brings, then we're going to have to activate something.

[9 : 36] It's something that is within us, but something we're going to have to activate. Marsha and I, during COVID-19, have taken up biking. And this is what they gave me for Father's Day.

They gave me a nice light. But as I hold this light up, which is to show all of the cars coming up behind me that, hey, I'm a bike.

Please go a little less speedy and watch us. If I don't activate the light, nothing is going to happen. So somehow I've got to activate. And there we go. Regardless of how far away we are, we can see a light if the power button is activated.

So what I want us to look at, even today, is how to take that fourth thing and actually activate something so that we can enjoy the freedom in Christ.

[10 : 40] Lord, we thank you. Thank you for the truth of your word. Thank you that it is alive and it's powerful. Help us today, Lord, to not just know that we're free in Christ, but to enjoy this freedom in Jesus' name.

Amen. You know, Chris Christofferson came up with a song many years ago and he called Me and Bobby McGee. And here's what he said about freedom in that song.

Freedom is another word for nothing left to lose. Nothing less or left to lose. That's a poor definition of freedom. If I'm bankrupt and I have nothing left, well, freedom is nothing.

I don't have anything, so I don't have any loss. I can insulate myself. I just don't have anything. But I want to firmly disagree with Chris Christofferson, even though I do like him as a country artist.

And by the way, if you didn't know it, country music is number one. Keep that in mind. I mean, I love it. I grew up in Texas, and if I could wear my boots all the time, I would.

[11 : 54] Freedom is not another word for nothing left to lose. Freedom is everything that all of us have ever yearned for. And not only is it what we've yearned for, if we read the Apostle Paul in Romans chapter 8, he says the entire universe is looking for freedom.

That this whole world is bound to decay. And the whole world, the entire universe, every person in it, and all of creation is yearning for freedom.

And into this yearning, Christ has come, as Mike has said. And Jesus died on the cross and rose again.

He has freed us. And he has also poured out his spirit within us. And again, in Romans, it says that is true freedom. So God has made us free.

So how do we enjoy it? How do we walk in this freedom? Well, here's what Paul says in Galatians chapter 5, verse 1. We'll just begin with the very first part of this verse.

[13 : 10] Here's what Paul says. For freedom, Christ has set us free. For freedom, Christ has set us free.

So let me tell you where I start when I want to enjoy freedom with Christ. I told you we've got to affirm something. And here is what we affirm.

We must affirm Christ has set me free. In other words, I need to declare the truth before I can live it. I need to affirm it. When Paul said it was for freedom that Christ has set us free, he just simply gives us a declaration.

He isn't telling us at that point to do anything with it. He just simply declares it. Christ has set us free. And I have taken from this a key application for my life.

[14 : 10] If I am going to enjoy freedom in Christ, I need to first affirm the freedom that he has given.

How do I do that? Well, I think I do just like the Apostle Paul. I simply follow him. And here's what he did. He simply stated it.

He simply spoke it. You know, I love what Paul said in Romans chapter 10, verses 8 to 10. Here's what he said.

I'll read it to you. The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart. That is the word of faith that we proclaim.

Because if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

[15 : 06] For with the heart one believes and is justified. And with the mouth one confesses and is saved. You know, I love what Paul always develops.

If we have genuine faith in Christ, it will always move from the inside out. It will begin in our hearts and it will make its way into our lives.

Jesus said, be very careful. If you're a hearer only and not a doer, you are of all people most foolish. It's this inside out part of faith that not only moves from my heart into my life, but it is also in my heart and it moves over my lips.

And this is what Paul is speaking of. We need to affirm our faith. Now I want to tell you, most of my Christian life, I've been a believer over 45 years.

And most of my life, I haven't spoken, even in my own time alone, what I believe. And I want to tell you why.

[16 : 21] Because I thought it was just about meditating and getting this truth in my head. And I never really thought about speaking it. And then a group of people started saying, oh, name it and claim it.

Start speaking it. And it happened. And all of a sudden, I didn't want to be like them either. And so I got quiet in my faith. And then God reminded me, preach the gospel to yourself before you preach it to others.

Speak it. And I want to tell you that a journey that I've been on for the last 10 years. When I get alone with the Lord in the morning, the first thing I do is I always thank Him. I say, thank you, Lord. A thousand times thank you. I enter into His courts with praise. The second thing I do is I begin to speak my faith.

I want to speak it to my own heart. I want to speak it in the heavenlies. I want to affirm what I really believe. And I'll tell you what I do. I'm not telling you you need to do this.

[17 : 28] But what I do in my own private time with the Lord, every time I get up, and this happens daily, every morning, is I recite from memory Psalm 23.

It just energizes my faith. When I speak to myself and I speak throughout the universe, the Lord is my shepherd.

I shall not want. I am not going to live. And this isn't about material things only. I'm not going to live and want. God will supply everything I need for the calling He's given me.

I will go forward. And then I just recite all of it. The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. You know, I believe that there's a part of our Christian life, if we want to enjoy freedom in Christ, we need to start speaking to ourselves.

Speak to ourselves before we speak to others. You know, there are a lot of things in Scripture we could speak out loud. I wrote down just a few of them for myself.

[18 : 39] Number one, I am free from my sins. Revelation 1.5. According to Revelation 1.5, through the blood of Christ, I am free from sin.

And so I can declare that. And it affirms my faith when I talk it. I am free from my sins. Doesn't mean I'm perfect. Doesn't mean I will never fall to temptation.

What it means is, Christ has eternally set me free so that I can walk in the way of God. When I choose not to, that's my problem.

But I'm going to declare my faith according to Revelation 1.5. I also speak out. I am free from condemnation. Romans 8.1-2.

I am free from condemnation. And I speak it. I want my heart to believe it. And I want the universe to hear it. Number three, I am free from Satan's power.

[19 : 44] Hebrews 2.14. I am free from Satan's power. I can walk free from the works that he is trying to do in me. And then the next verse in Hebrews 2.15.

I am free from the fear of death. And I want to tell you that means something to me. Because when I was a boy, the greatest fear I ever had was the fear of dying.

And Christ has set me free. Now I go into places where people are dying. They're being killed. And I want to tell you, not because I've got anything special.

It has nothing to do with me. Everything to do with him. He has freed me from the fear of death. And now I can have courage to go into places I normally would never have gone.

I declare my faith. I am free from the fear of death. And then I just simply give one more. But there are hundreds we could say. Another one that I declare.

[20 : 45] I am free to live as God wants me to. I am free to live as God wants me to. Romans chapter 6 verses 5 to 11.

Friends, God wants us on this July 4th weekend to not just think about what it means to be an American as opposed to a Nigerian or a Ugandan.

He wants us to look at the freedom that we have in Christ. And the first step in enjoying it is affirming it. Let's go to the next one.

The second thing, if I'm truly going to embrace freedom and enjoy the freedom that Christ gives, I need to avoid something.

I need to avoid living in my own power. I need to avoid living in my own power.

[21 : 48] Let me read Galatians 5.1. For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm then and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

That yoke of slavery, Paul develops. And he calls it legalism. It's living by the law. And here is the thing about living by the law.

Everyone who lives by the law believes they can do everything in the law. But there's a problem. If you believe that you can keep all of God's law perfectly, if you think you can do that, then you're caught in a trap of performance.

It's living in your own power. Very quickly. In 1999, the first time I'd ever had the chance to go to Israel, I was there in Jerusalem.

I was inside the old city and I was speaking with a merchant. He had had many Christians come to speak to him about Jesus. And he did not want anything of it.

[22 : 54] I knew that I would not be able to say much. And so I did something uncharacteristic of my life. I listened before I spoke. That's a good advice.

And so I listened to him. I just let him speak. And here's what he told me. He says, I believe, and all of us who were here in Jerusalem would believe, that God would never command me to do something I could not do.

And I thought, wow, what a view that I can perform to perfection. God would never give me a command I couldn't keep.

And I told him, I just said, well, here's one difference between you and between me as a Christian. Let me just say, let me give you a command.

It's not in your Bible, but it's in mine. And here's what Jesus told me. He said, be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. And that brings me to a place of humility.

[24 : 01] I cannot do that in my own power. You see, one of the reasons Paul addressed legalism the most is that he wanted us to enjoy freedom in Christ, but he wants to break us out of the mold of constantly trying to be perfect and failing and living in this discouragement that comes.

I don't know if you've seen the movie Saving Private Ryan, but the movie begins. A man who shows up at a cemetery. He's older.

He's shaky. And there's a look on his face that isn't what I would call joy. The story unfolds that he was wonderfully rescued by some soldiers in World War II so that he wouldn't die like his brothers. And he would be able to go home to his mother, the only one to live out of his family who had participated in the war. And even though he had been freed from death, even though he did not die, this man seemed to have a brokenness.

You don't know much about that until you watch this horrific movie, very realistic, in my opinion, about war. And you get to the very end.

[25 : 31] The very end when the character played by Tom Hanks is lying there with a bullet in his chest and he's about to die. And he breathes two words to Private Ryan.

Earn this. Earn this. And rather than setting him free, it actually enslaved him. And he lived out his entire life saying, I can never live up to that.

If I gathered one thing out of saving Private Ryan, it was I can't do it in my own power. No wonder Paul would say in Galatians earlier, in Galatians 2.20, I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.

And the life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. You see, the problem with legalism is it takes Christ off the throne of giving us grace.

And we fall away from the grace principle. And when we do, there is little joy to be had. If I am going to enjoy the freedom that Christ gives, I must affirm my faith that Christ has set me free.

[26 : 51] But I must avoid living in my own power, trying to pull myself up with legalistic righteousness.

Now Paul has much more to say on the area of this. This whole idea of joining the law and trying to be perfect.

But I want to move to the third point as I give just an overview from Galatians 5. The third thing, if we're going to enjoy freedom in Christ, is we've got to aim at something.

We've got to make it our bullseye. We've got to say, this is the purpose of my life. This is why I'm left on earth and I haven't been killed by COVID-19. Here is the center of the target.

What is that center? Well, it's found in Galatians 5, verse 6. Here's what it reads in the ESV.

[27 : 54] For in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision or uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.

I actually like the old 1984 NIV version and the way it translates from the original language.

Here's what it says. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. The only thing that counts.

One thing that I aim at. There is only one thing that counts. And that is my faith coming alive on the outside. And I express it in loving other people.

Paul is going to talk about the fruit of the Spirit. But I want us to catch this principle right here. Faith is the root. Love is the fruit.

[28 : 52] Faith is the root. Love is the fruit. And so what Paul is telling us is that the aim of my life is not to live in comfort or for myself, but to give myself away.

And when I do, I enjoy freedom from great discouragement. I would even venture to say freedom from many forms of depression.

Let me explain. My wife told me the story that on Shark Tank, have you ever seen Shark Tank? I kind of like Shark Tank.

It's kind of a really cool thing as these business whizzes all set out. Other people pitch something and then they tell whether they agree with it. Well, they'll support it or they won't.

Well, one of them on Shark Tank, his name is Robert. Those of you who have seen it, you know who I'm talking about. Raise your hand if you know Robert on Shark Tank.

[30 : 01] All right. Four or five of us. All right. Let me tell you about Robert. Robert is from Eastern Europe. He immigrated to the U.S. Perhaps even his parents did. I don't know the full story.

He's a believer. He actually put his faith in Jesus and he walks with Jesus. But let me tell you what happened. In the midst of making millions, he lost the thing that was most precious to him.

His wife divorced him. His wife said goodbye. Robert thought his life was over. He even contemplated suicide.

He went to see his pastor and his pastor said, I have something for you, but you're going to have to commit a year of your life to get it. I know you feel like everything's over and you want to lie down and die.

But I'm telling you something. I've got something for you, but it's going to have a price to you. And it's going to cost you one year of your life. And he said, well, what is it?

[31 : 04] Because nothing else seems to matter. And his pastor said to him this. There's a rescue mission. I'm going to take you there. And I want you to commit one year to serving people who have absolutely nothing.

And after a year, you still want to kill yourself? Go ahead. Kill yourself. You want to end it all? End it all. If your life isn't better, let's put it to the test.

You can go ahead and die. And guess what happened? His life was transformed. Because you see, one of the great transforming elements in enjoying freedom is aiming at loving others.

And my faith expressing it that way, it pulls me out of every doldrum. I want to tell you that you here at Shoreline have actually lived this out.

Many of you don't even know it. I receive monthly support from Shoreline. I have committed to Shoreline that 100% of what you give me goes into ministry.

[32 : 17] I don't take any of it for my own personal life. 100% is used in ministry. And I want to tell you that because of your sacrifice to give, you have actually hit the bullseye and loved others.

Charles, he's a pastor in Uganda. He contacted me on Facebook Messenger. And he said, many people in our village and in our small town, which I've been to, Bugiri, in Uganda, all dirt roads.

He said, we're starving to death. We're actually starving to death. The roads are washed out because of the rainy season. I said, well, listen to me. What is the government doing?

Is there any government program? Is anyone offering food to the poor? Yes. But our people can't get there because the roads are washed out. I'm telling you, we're dying. I said, how about you?

How about you? What about you and your family? We have three days provisions and then we don't have anything. God showed me that out of contributions that have been given, we needed to give.

[33 : 35] And so that began one of four installments so that not only would his family be taken care of and then the people in the church, but they could be a witness of love to the people in Bugiri.

Shoreline, thank you. Because you hit the bullseye. You didn't know it at the time. But what has happened is we aimed at love and we actually hit it.

Here's what Charles said to me after we sent money and it actually saved his mother from dying. He said to me, he says, thank you for your golden heart and for your tangible love.

Tangible love. I've never forgotten that. And it reminded me of 1 John 3.18. Let us not love in word or talk, but in deed and truth.

Charles in Uganda says, thank you, Shoreline. And he doesn't even know any of your names.

Thank you for hitting the bullseye.

[34 : 49] And if we can do this every day in our own lives, we find a freedom. The greatest freedom I need is freedom from myself. Freedom from my insecurities.

Freedom from my pride. Freedom from my own self-importance. Oh, may God free me from self-pity. I need freedom from myself.

And the only way I can walk in that freedom is to aim at someone else. So Paul made it very clear. Christ has set you free. Affirm it.

Avoid trying to live in your own power. But I want to give you the bullseye. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself in love. And then last of all, here is the last thing.

We need to activate something, and that's Galatians 5.16. But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

[35 : 46] If we jump down to verse 25. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. What do I need to activate?

I need to activate the power of the Holy Spirit in my life. Now, some people will say, wait a minute. I thought I got all of the Spirit when I put my faith in Christ.

You did. You got all of the Holy Spirit. He came to indwell you. If you put your faith in Christ, He lives within you. But it is not a guarantee that because He is in my life, His power is being lived out in my life.

I need to activate that power. And the way I activate is to walk. The way I activate the power of the Holy Spirit is let Him guide, and I follow, I walk.

If I'm walking with the wisest person the world has ever known, I want Him to take the lead. It would be foolish for me to tell the Holy Spirit, shouldn't we go this way?

[37 : 02] You know, most commentators, if you read them in Galatians 5, they will talk about walking in the Spirit with one word, guidance. A second common word is empowerment, guidance and power.

And I walk in the Spirit when I let Him guide my life. Now, this is content for a whole series of messages.

I want to conclude by telling you something from my own life. I often read in Galatians 5, walk by the Spirit.

And I never really understood what it meant. Good thought. As I would talk with other good, solid, evangelical, Bible-believing Christians, I would say, what does it mean to walk by the Spirit?

When we come up with ideas of depend on the Spirit, rely on Him, yes. But often what's missing is what most commentators pull out is guidance. I need Him to guide me.

[38 : 13] I need Him to guide me how to take this Word of God and actually put it into practice. Show me. Help me. Because if all I do is revolve around principles and I never have the power to put it into practice, who am I?

I need your help. And here's what God has shown me over time. And it's taken a long time because I'm pretty dense. Here's what He's shown me.

Before you can walk, you have to wait. Before you can walk, you have to wait. And God wants us to wait in His presence with our Bible open and the Spirit guiding every morning.

Wait on the Lord. And what I find is that the Holy Spirit not only guides me into the truth of His Word, but He shows me how to live it.

I just want to simply say, if you want to enjoy freedom in Christ, we're going to have to do some walking. And the only way I can walk is if I first wait and I listen.

[39 : 33] Perhaps if there's another time, we can explore this more fully. But I just want to say to you, Shoreline, let's affirm Christ has set us free.

Let's avoid trying to live in our own power. Let's actually aim at our faith becoming so active that it's lived for others. And then last of all, let's walk by the Spirit's power in what may be His greatest sermon ever.

Martin Luther King Jr. stood out right there with the Lincoln Memorial behind him. And the last words of his message that brought everyone to a standing ovation were these words.

Free at last. Free at last. Thank God Almighty. I'm free at last. May the freedom that Christ has borne for you, may it be lived out.

And may it not just be some nice thought in a dusty book. May it be lived out. And may this weekend of freedom be a new day to increase your joy.

[40 : 51] Let's pray. Father, thank you for the most marvelous plan the world has ever known. That you would send your only Son, your beloved Son, to come to this earth with one purpose in mind, to die for us and free us.

To give us freedom. Freedom to truly live now and a freedom to live forever. Oh, how we thank you. Thank you. And Lord, as many of us, we may have expressed that we have freedom in Christ, but perhaps we haven't enjoyed it.

Would you lead us in the path of enjoyment? that our joy in you would soar and that we might see others soar as well because we're aiming at the right target.

Lord, thank you for Shoreline and thank you for the joy of being here. Holy Spirit, work mightily in us in Jesus' name.

[42 : 07] Amen. Amen. Thank you.