

Abundant Freedom

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[0 : 00] Let me pray. Father God, please send your spirit. Without your spirit, we are blind. We cannot see the magnificence of the Lord Jesus.

We cannot see our slavery to sin. And so send your spirit, have mercy on us, that we might see his beauty, his glory, his magnificence, and that we might run to him.

And we ask it for your sake. Amen. It's time to see what I can do to test the limits and break through. No right, no wrong, no rules for me.

I'm free. For those of you who are unfamiliar with those lyrics, that's because of two reasons. You don't have young children, and particularly young girls. And secondly, because you weren't listening to my sermon earlier this year when I actually used this as an illustration.

[1 : 07] But they are the lyrics from, or part of the lyrics, from the song Let It Go in the Disney movie Frozen. It's sung by a character who is determined to not be the good girl that society wants her to be.

And instead, she would let go. She would express what she had been holding back inside. And she would live for herself and only for herself. And she declares that the moment that she does that, there will no longer be any rights or wrongs.

It will just be about her. And when there's no rights and wrongs, and it's just about her, then she is truly free. Now, that's just one example of what is called today total individual freedom.

It's the relative and the dominant worldview of the Western world. It's what we marinate in in our society day in and day out. It goes something like this.

What we need is to be free to live life as we see fit. And to work together to make the world a better and more just place to live.

[2 : 22] Religion, however, gets in the way of that. It constrains our freedom to live as we see fit. And so what we need to be is seculars, get rid of religion, and everyone will be totally free.

Now, the modern concept of freedom, according to sociologists, is the freedom of self-assertion. And you are ultimately free when you have the absence of all constraints.

Now, even though it is, in fact, ironically, the Christian faith that gave the world the concept of personal individual freedom, it is seen nowadays in our society as the arch enemy of freedom. Religion as a whole is seen as the arch enemy of freedom, but Christianity, particularly in the West. And as modern people, therefore, we have to ask ourselves, do you actually have to choose between freedom and faith?

Are they actually opposites to one another? Is it possible to follow Jesus, to be a Christian, and to actually be abundantly free at the same time?

[3 : 50] Now, I take it, I'm just going to take this for granted, I won't do a poll on this one. I take it that everyone in this room wants to be free. I won't bother even taking a poll on that. That you want to be free in the fullest and deepest sense.

That is, if the opposite of freedom is bondage and slavery, no one wants that. No one wants that. We all want to be truly free, and yet this is exactly what Jesus promises us here.

So, the outline in the St. Paul's app, my first point, constraining freedom. Verses 31 and 32 in John 8, Jesus makes a walloping statement and shows us the difficulty of freedom.

To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, if you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples, then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

Verse 32 promises freedom. But Jesus says in the verse before it, it's only if you hold to his teaching that you will get freedom.

[5 : 09] That is, to hold to his teaching is to embrace it, to obey it, to live it. It is so much stronger than just agreeing with it.

It's so much stronger than just assenting to it. Jesus is saying that we can only be free if, if, if, we accept his constraints.

And that's the exact opposite of what our society tells us, of what true freedom is. Philosophers nowadays talk about two kinds of freedom. negative freedom and positive freedom.

They describe that what is communicated consistently through our culture nowadays is regarded as total negative freedom.

It's freedom from any barrier or any constraints on our choices. positive freedom is freedom for.

[6 : 24] That is, using freedom to live in a particular way for the good of all. Not just me. And so what's described in society nowadays is freedom negative, total negative freedom.

and total negative freedom is simplistic and it's unworkable because it's never how freedom actually works.

True freedom is accepting the right constraints in life. Not no constraints.

So, I'll give you an example. I'm a diabetic. I'm a type 1 diabetic. This is not a pager. This is an insulin pump. So, everyone who says, oh, I thought pagers were, you know, gone now. No, no, it's not a pager.

It's an insulin pump. I'm not, you know, backward in technology in any way. So, when this thing's vibrating, no one's contacting me except blood sugar levels.

[7 : 32] As a diabetic, if I chose to exercise my desires in life and my freedom by consuming whatever I wanted, chocolate cake, Tim Tams, burgers, Coke, rice, yes, I'm sorry, it is evil, rice, no constraints, no constraints whatsoever because that's how I exercise my freedom.

I'm free until I'm not. Until I'm not because my body would be a constraint on my life at some point. My body will put constraints on me. I am not free to eat whatever I want and free at the same time to have toes and feet, free to have, to be able to see the consequences of a non-compliant diabetic life is blindness and blood circulation issues and organs shut down and I can't run and I can't live, I won't be free to live is the bottom line.

So the question is, what if I, deepest desire of my life is sugar and also the other deepest desire of my life is actually to live? The two great deepest desires of my life are in conflict with one another and I have to choose which deep desire of my life is going to give me the most amount of freedom.

That is, I have to choose the liberating constraint on my life. True freedom is not the absence of constraints on my life, it is choosing the liberating constraint constraint on my life.

[9 : 30] It is the strategic loss of some freedoms in order to gain the more liberating constraint.

John Carson, really, I'm just quoting John Carson here and who better got to quote his commentary on John 8 where he says, true freedom is not the liberty to do anything we please but the liberty to do what we ought and it is true freedom because doing what we ought is what actually pleases us or if I was to put that in his commentary, doing what we ought is what brings us the most amount of joy.

But there is a barrier to our freedom. In verses 33 and 34 is my second point on the outline, Jesus shows us the ultimate barrier to our freedom.

They answered him, we are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free? Jesus replied, very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.

Remarkably what Jesus says here is that the biggest barrier to our freedom is inside of us. Our society tells us that the ultimate barrier to our freedom is outside of us.

institutions, it's social conventions, it's inequality, it's your family, it's the government, it's romantic partners, it's your job, it's a whole range of things outside of you that are the barriers to your freedom.

[11 : 28] It's that stuff outside of us that's getting in the way of us fulfilling our desires and our freedom in life. of course I'm not denying that there are oppressive forces in society and relationships, but what Jesus is saying here is the ultimate barrier to true freedom is inside, inside.

In verses 33 and 34 Jesus is addressing the same group that he's addressing in verse 31. That is, as we see in verse 31, the Jews who had believed him.

And what he wants to do to this group of people that he's currently faced with, he wants to show them their biggest problem. Their biggest problem. And here it is.

Notice he does not say that this group of people in verse 31 believed in him. very specifically John says they believed him.

That is, what John's doing here is he's putting this group of people currently talking to Jesus in the same category that he's already spoken about in John 6 and in other places in John.

[12:50] Those who have a fickle faith. And here already we are seeing that these people are getting ticked off with Jesus.

And by the end of this section, as Noliene read out to us, they're ready to kill him. Their biggest problem is what Jesus says in verse 34.

They are slaves. And unless the truth about Jesus, the gospel intervenes, they will always remain in slavery.

And they're completely insulted by this. They say, we are Abraham's descendants and we have never been slaves to anyone.

Now, of course, up to this point in history, in first century Palestine, there's hardly been a major power in the world that Abraham's descendants have not been servitude to. Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Greece, Syria, and even in that moment, while they're talking to Jesus, there's Romans everywhere.

[14:07] That is, it's not like they missed the obvious. They knew exactly what Jesus was talking about. They knew that Jesus was talking about an inward slavery.

And yet, in this moment, they are blind. They could not see their slavery. As Abraham's descendants, they thought they were right with God.

Now, God and us, we're okay. We've got the religious system, we've got sacrifices, we've got the temple, we're good. And Jesus says to them, no, no, no, you are not good.

Inwardly, you are slaves to sin. And shockingly, in verse 34, he takes the point even further. I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.

everyone. Everyone who has ever made a mistake, everyone who has never lived perfectly, that is just the surface issue.

[15:28] Your faults on the outside are just your surface issue. Deeper down, you are enslaved to sin, captivated by sin. sin is a power in our hearts, over our lives that make us do the bad things.

Sin sets itself up against God, it sets itself up against other people, and every person, according to Jesus, is enslaved to it. And yet every person is blind to the deepest reality of it.

I remember talking to someone not that long ago who said, yeah, I'm not perfect, but it didn't bother them.

They're just like, because I'm just like everyone else, but they're blind to the deepest reality of that sin and what it means. That's the point of chapter 9, which we didn't read, but I want to include, we cannot see our sin, and we cannot see the depth and the horror and the implication of our sin, and therefore the freedom that only Jesus can give us from our sin.

There are so many freedoms that we can make for ourselves, particularly in the Western world, world, but not this one, and for the most part in life, we go about our existence unaware that we're not free.

[17:21] We are deeply enslaved to sin. Let me try and land this.

It's a little bit of a pun, really, but you'll get there in a minute. Let me try and give you a definition of freedom. You are fully free when you have the desire, the ability, the opportunity to do what will leave you with no regrets forever.

The ability, the desire, the ability, the opportunity to do what will leave you with no regrets forever. We take that as a definition of freedom. Let me think about land this and talk about freedom and parachuting.

You have always wanted to experience the freedom of parachuting. You pay your money and you make it to the airport to the plane and hop on the plane without an accident.

Tick that box, you have the freedom of opportunity. ability. You've done the classes and you know how to parachute. Tick that box, you have the freedom of ability.

[18:41] You're up in the plane, you look out the door, ready to jump, tick that box, you have the freedom of desire. This has been, I just cannot wait to jump out of this perfectly good plane.

You're not frozen by fear. This is the moment you've been living for. Opportunity, desire and ability all line up and so you jump. And as you free fall, you are enjoying the exhilaration of it all.

Yes! Until the moment you discover your parachute's defective. And in the moment you discover your parachute is defective, you are enslaved to the forces of gravity.

You cannot do anything about it. What you are doing so happily and so free is going to kill you. You are enslaved to destruction.

You are what you are unaware of is right from the get go. Before you even set out to the airport, you were already enslaved to destruction.

[20 : 05] But you are unaware of it. you couldn't see. You were blind to that reality. And it feels like freedom right until you pull that ripcord or the instructor does it for you.

And in that moment all the exhilaration, all the freedom will prove to be an illusion. In 30 seconds you'll be dead. You will be dead. And in John chapter 8, Jesus is trying to help these people and us see that sin has enslaved us.

And that religion and the moral effort and pursuing self-assertion is nothing more than a defective parachute.

only he can set us free. The Bible tells us that the wages of sin is death and unless that wage is paid, we are not free.

In John 8, Jesus doesn't unpack what actually that means, what sin is, but the rest of the Bible does. And I just want to pick on, there's a number of ways that it describes.

[21 : 25] I just want to mention two relatively briefly. First of all, sin is resisting our creator, resisting obeying our creator.

Deep inside the human heart is an impulse that resists anyone telling us how to live our lives. Anyone telling us how to live our lives.

I've never had to instruct any of my children how to do that, how to resist instruction. Never had to do that. My parents didn't have to teach me about it either. All sorts of things will bring out that impulse in our hearts.

Parents, the state, schools, institutions, clubs imposing boundaries and expectations, but the ultimate trigger deep in our hearts is God himself.

When God tells us how to live, this is the difference. when God, our creator, tells us how to live, it's like the owner's manual instructing us how to live, so to speak.

[22 : 35] As the creator, he designed life to function a particular way. It's the same way that my car manufacturer, I've got this manual in the glove box to how to get the most out of your vehicle.

vehicle. And there's a heap of warning instructions of what not to do with it. You know, don't go beyond this depth of water, it's not a boat, you know.

It has instructions on fuel and servicings and warnings of wrong use. Go against the manual and the design of the car is a violation of its purpose and it will destroy your investment and it could even destroy you.

If God says you must not lie, you must not steal, you must not commit sexual immorality, you must forgive, you must be generous, you are violating your own design when you don't.

Your own soul, you're violating your own nature. You are moving against yourself. And it will always lead to loss of freedom every time we move against ourselves.

[23 : 57] Now I don't have time to unpack it here, but recently I preached a sermon called Generous Forgiveness that shows how that might work. We are made in the image of a God who is a forgiving God.

He calls us to forgive when we don't. It momentarily feels good not to forgive. forgive. Let's be frank. It does momentarily feel good not to forgive.

It's a power move. But lack of forgiveness means we hang on to it until eventually bitterness grows and in the end we are the ones hurting.

Hurting ourselves as the original hurt gets played over and over and over again in our hearts and we hurt ourselves to the point that other relationships in our lives get hurt as a result of it.

The impulse of the human heart to resist God is a movement against our own nature and it means that we are the ones enslaved.

[25 : 05] Another way the Bible defines sin is self-centeredness. That is using other people to serve our own needs first. That's why the modern idea of freedom is so popular because it connects with that desire of self-centeredness to use people for our own sakes.

What that means is we can either be free in the modern sense or you can be free in a biblical sense to love but you can't do both.

You can't do both. You can't be free and love. You can't be free in the modern sense and love. Self-centeredness always destroys love which is our ultimate freedom.

There is no greater liberation than to feel and to be loved well. The affirmation that comes from love liberates us from fears and from self-doubts. It frees us from facing the world alone.

Our friends, our partners are crucial to helping us navigate the hard times as well as achieving our goals. But the minute we get into such a relationship is the minute that we must surrender some freedoms to experience the freedom of love.

[26 : 28] You can never experience the freedom of love without relinquishing your personal freedom. freedom. That's a concept that the modern idea of love knows nothing about.

The more you give up your independence for each other, the deeper the love will be and the freer you will feel. If we have a definition of freedom that is self-centered and free from all constraints, it will destroy you, it will destroy your freedoms because you will never feel loved.

You'll never know the freedom of genuine love. So who's going to free us from this slavery to sin? That's my next point.

Verses 35 to 36, we saw the source of true freedom. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the son sets you free, you'll be free indeed.

A servant might get to live in the mansion, they might get to drive in the limousine, they might get to accompany the owners on overseas trips, and even have a great relationship with the boss.

[27 : 52] Think of the good guys in Downton Abbey, downstairs, upstairs, get on really well, but they're not part of the family. family.

And it's all based on good works. If you do your job, you obey the rules, you can exist in that environment, when you don't, you're out. Simple as that.

It's a different relationship with the children of the owner. One relationship is based on good works, the other relationship is based on unconditional love. love. So it's crucial that we understand that Jesus is not calling us here to increasing religious activity.

Religion in slaves, only unconditional love will set us free. The only way the sin in our life will be dealt with is if the son himself sets slaves free.

And we see how he does that right at the end of this conversation. Verse 58, very truly I tell you, Jesus answered before Abraham was born, I am.

[29 : 11] Now, for all the grammar people out there, you think, oh, Jesus is, you know, should have spent more time at school. You know, we expect him to say before Abraham was, I was.

When he says I am, he was making a very clear connection to the personal name that God gives to Moses at the burning bush when he says, who are you God?

And he just says, I am who I am. Exodus 3. And Jesus takes that name up upon himself here. And that's why they picked up stones to stone Jesus immediately.

He is claiming the divine name for himself. I am your creator. I am your God. I am the logos, the logic of the universe.

And it's an outrageous claim. Jesus here claims to be the all-powerful, all-present, unrestricted, totally free God.

[30 : 22] And how does he set us free? Well, when they picked up stones to kill him for blasphemy, that was just simply a foreshadow that they would in fact kill him.

and it will be his plan to be killed in order to make us children of God. Jesus Christ, God the Son, giving up his ultimate and infinite freedom, came into this creation with all the constraints of human existence sins, and eventually surrendered himself to death on a cross, and death so that we, the slaves, slaves to sin, could have the freedom of being children of God.

for he was bound to a cross and death so that we could be free and live. We also told in the gospel that as he died for our sin, the world was plunged into darkness.

As he himself was plunged into unimaginable darkness, as he was judged for the sin of the world and all the despair and the rejection that he felt in that moment as he moved into death.

And he did that so that we who exist in the darkness of sin, who cannot see his glory and his majesty, might have the light of life.

[32 : 00] That we might see his beauty, that we might see that he is the source of true freedom and life forever. From the manger to the cross, Jesus Christ gives up his freedom bit by bit to set us free from slavery to sin.

And once we see that what he has done for us, it transforms us from a slave to a child, from duty to choice. this is the truth about the sun that causes the blind to see, for darkness to be extinguished, death to be defeated, eternal life granted and freedom experienced.

lost. I read the story recently of a tandem skydiving incident that went horribly wrong.

A man was on his first ever parachuting jump celebrating his daughter's birthday, absolutely loving it, looking forward to it, absolutely loving it, particularly he said the freedom of the free fall was just exhilarating until 12,000 feet and the instructor pulled the rip cord and it didn't work and then the instructor pulled the reserve cord and it didn't work and at 12,000 feet all the exhilaration went into enslavement to gravity in that moment and just before they hit the ground this young experienced skydiver turned the parachute around and put him between the ground and this dad.

He died and the dad lived. He sacrificed himself. If you are not a Christian sitting in this room or listening to this online, open your eyes, eyes, eyes of your heart and realize that the life you are living is enslaving.

[34 : 26] You are not free and you know you're not free. Don't care what possessions you've got, you are not free. Death awaits us all, the final mockery of everything that we're built in our lives.

open your eyes and see that only Jesus, the one who has died and risen again, only he can set you free.

Understand that he has absorbed your punishment. He has been enslaved for you and understand he did it knowing, knowing before he created the world that the parachute that he was taking on was defective.

He knew it. He sacrificed his life for yours and so I plead with you, come to him today. Come to him today.

Take on his liberating constraints and be truly free for the first time in your life and free forever without any regrets.

[35 : 40] If you're a Christian in this room, online, it is utter foolishness for you to envy and pursue not just envy but to pursue the so-called freedom of those who jump out of the airplane of total negative freedom and sin and revel for an exhilarating moment, just for a moment, in the free fall of greed, the free fall of fame, the free fall of sex, the free fall of power, the free fall of comfort, the free fall of adventure, the free fall of security, blind to sin.

And Jesus and eternal death. How dare we try to keep a foot in both worlds, thinking that we get a freedom from both?

That is the very definition of fickle faith in John 8 31. Ascending to Jesus and living as I choose.

Jesus. And if you read through John chapter 8, Jesus condemns it. I call you to surrender. I call you to take your next step.

Too many want to believe Jesus but not fully surrender to him. It's the very definition of fickle faith. When we here at St. Paul's consistently ask you, what is your next step?

[37 : 17] Are you taking your next step? We are asking what is the next liberating constraint that you're going to take on for your life?

That's what we're asking. How are you going to conform more and more to God's word? Back in verse 31 when Jesus says to these people, his disciples are those who hold to his teaching.

The word hold means to abide in, to align your life with repeatedly again and again and again and again.

If you are stuck in a rut, the very first thing I'm calling you to do is to repent. Repent. Align yourself to God's word.

Take God's word into your life and live into how he has designed you. It is taking on his liberating constraints. And as we do align ourselves to the Logos himself, our design, we are fully free, fully free in its truest sense.

[38 : 38] and you do by I think