New Freedom

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 17 March 2024

Preacher: Steve Jeffrey

[0:00] Human beings have always valued freedom, they've valued choice. A couple of millennia ago, Aristotle and Plato, two Greek philosophers, whose philosophy of the bedrock of Western civilisation, called for freedom of the individual and called for democracy.

Although for both Aristotle and Plato, it was only ever limited. They saw that freedom and democracy was to be limited, and amazingly, only for a certain slice of the population should have freedom.
All these centuries later, personal individual freedom is perhaps the only publicly shared and acknowledged moral value of our culture and society today.
Everything else is up for grabs except for personal individual freedom. In fact, one way or another, whether you're on the right or the left, you're arguing for personal individual freedom.
It's one of those values that is so clear and so self-evident in our day and age that very few are even bothering to explain what it actually is or means.
[1:26] It's just an assumption that we have. It's an assumption that is non-negotiable. The assumption is that choice is a good thing in life, and the more choice that we have in life, the more options we have in life, the happier we will be in life.

That's the underlying assumption of personal individual freedom. And along with this view is the view that any sort of authority in life that restricts my choices is inherently suspect.
This has been a trajectory for several decades in Western civilisation to the point where police forces nowadays in Western society are regarded as inherently suspect.
They were the people who used to constrain evil so that I could have choice. Now they're regarded as suspect themselves. We don't want anybody to have the right to tell us what we should think or how we should behave.
The only thing that isn't tolerated in our society is intolerance. Our society regards freedom as the highest good. That becoming free is the only heroic story we have left.
[2:56] And that giving individuals freedom is the main role of any institution or in our society in itself. And in fact, it's the role of society to give me freedom of choice.

That's the baseline cultural narrative of Western civilisation. The deepest core roots of our value system. And so today we're looking at a very important concept in living the new Christian life.
The freedom of the Christian. 1 Peter 2, verse 16. If you've got your Bibles there, not if you've got your Bibles, get a Bible, I should say. Open it up.
1 Peter 2, verse 16. Live as free people. It's a short statement. And it's a theme that runs through the entire New Testament.
And we see that and we go, Amen, Jesus, you got that right. Live as free people. The 16th century church reformer, Martin Luther, wrote an article called The Freedom of the Christian in 1520.
[4:04] And he summarised the freedom of the Christian like this. A Christian is perfectly free, Lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.

He went on to say that these two statements appear on the surface to contradict each other.
The Apostle Paul said the same thing in 1 Corinthians 9, verse 19. Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone. That's the paradox of the Christian life.
Christian freedom, through submission, service, obedience, is complete opposite to our culture.
And yet, because we breathe the air of our culture each day, Christians have a great deal of difficulty understanding what true, genuine freedom is.
And so that's what our journey is today. What is this new freedom that we have in Christ? So three points. You've got the St Paul's app there. The paradox of freedom. Experiencing true freedom. And taking steps to freedom.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

[5:20] So the paradox of true freedom. The way freedom is used in the Bible is so different the way it's used in society. I would argue that society has in fact got freedom wrong.

I preached a sermon on this, which you'll all remember, back in November last year, in John chapter 8 and 9, with the title Abundant Freedom.
You can get that online if you want to explore this a bit more. I'm going to go over a little bit of it here. Because this issue of freedom is so foundation to our value system in Australian society.
And we've got it so wrong. Look at verse 16 again. 1 Peter 2. Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil.
Live as free people. Live as God's slaves. That's what Luther was quoting there. Another way Peter might have put that is that we can live as free people because we are God's slaves.
[6:27] In fact, the whole first paragraph here is about serving others, submitting ourselves to others, giving ourselves to others.

Why? Why would we? Because we're free. That's why. Because the Christian is a slave to God.
And the reason we are confused by that is because our culture defines freedom in completely negative terms.
Not positive terms. It's completely negative terms. It's what philosophers call nowadays total negative freedom. Freedom is freedom from stuff.
Freedom from constraints. Freedom from restrictions. And to the degree that we are obeying, serving, or keeping a promise to someone is to the degree that we consider ourselves not free.
That's negative freedom. And there are two assumptions I'm working here. And we see both of these assumptions in the New Testament. Firstly, negative freedom, as our society defines it, is simplistic, unworkable, and it's actually an illusion.
[7:47] Because everyone is a slave to something. Everyone. Any commitment we make in life brings with it a constraint in life.

You sign a contract at work, you are no longer free. Your second assumption of the Bible is that no person is truly free from constraints.
Then we all need to choose the most liberating constraints in life. That's the choice we make. And this works right through society as well.
It works in my life. I've mentioned this illustration before. I'll do it again just for your sake. Attached to me here on one side is a microphone. Attached to me on the other side is an insulin pump. I'm a diabetic.
Type 1 diabetic. Now, what if I chose as a diabetic to exercise my personal freedom by detaching the pump from me and eating whatever I chose in life?
[8:49] Chocolate cake. Tim Tams. Rice. Yes, rice is evil. Rice. Burgers. Coke. No constraints. I am free to do what I...

You doctor cannot tell me how to live my life. I'm free. What happens when your free choices and passions contradict other free choices and passions in your life?
On the one hand, I want to eat any food that I want to eat. But on the other hand, I want good health and experience life. Once upon a time, before insulin pumps and insulin injections, the diagnosis of diabetes was a 15-year death sentence.
So the only option before me, if I want to live my life beyond 15 years, is to choose one constraint over another constraint. I need to constrain one element of freedom on my life in order to experience another element of freedom in my life.
That is the way it works for all of us. True freedom is not the absence of constraints on my life. It's choosing the liberating constraints on my life.
[10:11] It's the strategic loss of some freedoms to gain the more liberating constraints and freedoms.

And the liberating constraints are the ones that are in line with our design. I remember years ago now, I was a very new Christian and I was reading a book by the English pastor John Stott.
I can't remember the name of the book, but I remember one illustration that he wrote in the book that was so vivid for me 30 years ago that it's very vivid for me till today.
And I continue to use this illustration. I get it from Stott. It goes something like this. Imagine right here, up on the stage right now, I had a fishbowl. With a fish in it.
And this fish, let's call him Eric, is cruising around his little fishbowl and he sees all these people out here getting up, going to the bathroom, on their phones.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

[11:21] Some listening. And he says, I wish I was like those people out there. I mean, look at them. They can wear what they want.

They come and go as they please. Here am I, just circling around in my little fishbowl. Again and again. I wish I was free like those people. And little Eric decides to escape.
And so he catapults himself up from the depths of his bowl, managed to flip over the top. He hits the stage and then flops onto the floor. And he's flipping and he's flopping and gasping for breath.
Is he free? He's no longer constrained to his fishbowl. Is he free? If you've ever seen a fish out of water, that's what it's not free at all.
It's dying. That is, the fish is not designed. It hasn't got legs. It hasn't got lungs. It's not designed to be on the floor helping itself to the toilet like we do.
[12:26] It's not designed for that. It's designed for the constraints of water. And providing it is within the water, it is as free as it needs to be. And the moment that you pick up little Eric and put him back in the fishbowl, away he will go.

Depends how long he's been out of the water, I suspect. But he'll do his little kick and away he'll go.
Don Cartzer puts it like this in his commentary on John 8.
Christian faith declares that there is a God who created all things with a purpose.
Our God created us for himself. And so we are only truly free if we accept his constraints on our life.
And those constraints are service of God and of others. And when we choose primarily a primary allegiance to God in our life, we're actually choosing freedom and we are choosing life.
[13:44] So that moves me to my second point. There's three things that I want to highlight from 1 Peter. And I'm not constrained to 1 Peter 2. I'm looking over several passages in the end of 1 Peter here.

Three things I want to highlight. There are many more in 1 Peter, but there are certainly many more in the New Testament in terms of what we are free from.
So firstly, we have freedom from uncontrollable and enslaving emotions and desires. I get that from chapter 4 verse 2. As a result, they do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God.
Peter is talking here about Christians. He's saying that as a result of being born again, the new birth that we have, which is back there in chapter 1, following Jesus means that we no longer live for evil human desires.
Now, I've mentioned this before multiple times, but I'm going to say it again because I don't expect you to remember it, is that Peter is using a Greek word here that shows up constantly in the New Testament.
[15:00] It's the word epithymia, epithymia, which means an over-desire. Verse 3 refers to living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing, and detestable idolatry.

Now, we tend to think there that Peter is saying, you Christians, stay away from those terrible parties. For you, that may be the case.
But even here, that's not what Peter's talking about. The word lust that he uses isn't referring to sexual lust. It's the same word that he uses in verse 2 for over-desire, an over-desire.
So Christian freedom is freedom from over-desires. Freedom from desiring things that are so intense that it drives you, but it will never, ever satisfy you.
Never satisfy you. For instance, health is a good thing. Health is a good thing.
[16:13] On the other hand, a hypochondriac is a person who has an over-desire for health.

That's what a hypochondriac is. It's an over-desire for health. They're anxious constantly about their health. They are anxious and they are miserable, and so is everyone around them.
There's nothing wrong with romance. But an over-desire for it is a problem. Likewise for security, career, status, etc. And over-desires control us.
It's the New Testament version of idolatry. When something threatens that thing that we have an over-desire for, that's when the emotions start to rise.
And they become uncontrollable. Whenever someone in front of me is angry, one of the first things I'm thinking of is what over-desire have I triggered here in this person?
[17:30] The second freedom that new life in Jesus brings into our lives is the freedom from circumstances.

Chapter 5, verses 5 to 7, we read, Part of the freedom that we have in Jesus is that we don't have to be controlled by anxiety anymore.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

Now, that doesn't mean that you'll never be anxious and you'll never worry. But it does mean that that anxiety and that worry doesn't have to paralyze you with fear.
I don't want to say any more than that. Third one is the freedom, the new life that Jesus brings into our lives, is the freedom to serve people.
All of chapter 2, verses 13 to 17, is talking about social contracts. Submit yourselves to the Lord's sake to every human authority.
[18:47] That's citizenship, social contract. Show proper respect to everyone. That is also citizenship, social contract. In society, it's all about neighbourliness.

Love the family of believers. That's church membership. We are told here to live as free people because we are God's slaves and that gets worked out in our service of others.
You'll see that as we go through 1 Peter as well and the New Testament. How does that work? Why would I need to be a slave of God in order to serve other people? Well, in his book, Making Sense of God, Tim Keller references an interview that's conducted with the famous French novelist, François Salon.
It's for a French magazine. This is many years ago. She's being asked about her life and how her life has gone. And at one point, the interviewer asked her, then if you had all the freedom that you wanted, Sagan says, So there's a woman who has completely embraced the modern understanding of freedom.
She's right to see that the modern understanding of freedom and love for others as being polar opposites to one another.
[20:32] She's right. She's identified that. The more you are in a love relationship, the more you lose your freedom. The deeper the relationship goes, the less able you are able to live as you please.

But I would ask François Salon and I would also ask our society and potentially you, when do we most feel joy?
When do we most feel alive? When do we most feel secure and settled? When do we most feel loved? When do we most feel like a fish getting thrown back into the fish bowl?
Is it when things have gone well at work? Is it when you've done that deal? Is it not mutual love relationships?
Now, I'm not talking here about purely romantic relationships. I mean relationships where I am loved for who I am. That's when we feel the greatest sense of freedom.
[21:57] That's why the modern definition of freedom has gone way too far. Way too far. In his book, The Happiness Hypothesis, American social psychologist Jonathan Haidt writes this, He's not a Christian.

He's an atheist. The modern definition and assumption of freedom is basically a veil for self-centeredness and finding hope in yourself and finding joy and freedom in yourself.
It's just a veil for self-centeredness. Selfishness is, in fact, the enemy of love. Love is the fuel that our lives run on.
And when it does run on it, we feel truly free. Christian freedom is a freedom for love. So, lastly, what does it mean to take next steps to experience more and more of this freedom?
There is a reality that none of us, even those who have been Christian for a long time, are still not that free from enslaving emotions. We are often paralyzed by fear and we are often not free from our selfishness, particularly in the Western church.
[24:00] So, how do we grow taking steps into a greater freedom in life? There are two practical things. Very quickly, the first one is, is not to be afraid of making promises.

This point comes up from a bunch of places in 1 Peter. For instance, chapter 5, verse 5, it says, In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders.
Now, that's a verse there about church membership. It's saying that when you join a church, you are making a promise. You make a promise to serve others.
When you get married, you make a promise. Have you ever noticed, this is a side point, not in the script, how often I've been to marriages, and particularly a secular marriage, where the person doing the wedding ceremony says, today's all about love.
And I want to go, actually, no, it's not. You'll notice that in the vows. It's actually not about love. It's actually about commitment. Loves are given by the time we get here.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

[25:20] It's actually, a wedding ceremony is actually a ceremony about commitment. That's why I'm there signing it off on behalf of the government. Amen. When you get married, you make promises.

When you become a citizen, you make promises. When you get baptised, you make a promise. When you get confirmed, which is happening in a couple of weeks, you make promises.
Don't be afraid to make the promises that teach your heart to move away from selfishness that will enslave you into love relationships. And so I would encourage you to take your next steps here at St Paul's.
In worshipping God, loving your church family and serving the world, it is for your freedom. Your next step is for your freedom.
And the second thing and the most important thing here is to look to Jesus on the cross. Chapter 4, verse 1, Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude. Have the attitude of Jesus Christ.
[26:29] What's that attitude? What's chapter 4, verse 1 referring to? Philippians 2 puts it like this. It's saying the same thing as Peter. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus, who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used for his own advantage.

Rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant being made in human likeness and being found in appearance as a man. He humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross.
Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.
Jesus has gone from the highest heights to the deepest depths for you and for me.
Not because we are worthy, not because we are lovable, but because he is all driven by the unconditional love and obedience to the Father's plan.
[27:44] We have to see what he's done for us again and again and again. That's why for and more is crucial.

You will not live the Christian life if you're not doing it. I don't care what heritage of theological knowledge you've got from the past. If you are not constantly in his word gazing at his glory and his sacrifice for you, you will not grow.
You will not take your next steps to freedom. I don't know how much I need to say that. Over and over again for 18 months.
We have to see it again as a famous Christian song which we did the rounds decades ago now, which had this line in it, he who flung stars into space to cruel nails surrendered.
Jesus, the Son of God, totally and utterly free, free for all of eternity in a mutual love relationship with the Father and the Son, mutually indwelling, fully giving each other of serving the other, in mutual love, broke free from that.
[29:14] Firstly, becoming constrained by human flesh, the invincible God without any limit became a baby, reliant upon a woman whom he created, then constrained by being nailed to a cross.

And then the eternal God who always existed in blazing light, the one who never had a beginning, was constrained for three days in the darkness of the tomb. Jesus Christ surrendered his infinite freedom so that you and I could be free.
Free from selfishness. Free from self-centeredness. He became enslaved to free us from our sin. The sin of rejecting God, the sin of disobeying God, the sin of choosing life our way, the sin of I need to take this for me, I need to do this for me.
Free from all of that. And free from all of that. As John Gospels tells us, if the Son sets you free, you'll be free indeed. So what is the next step you are taking?
Think about the next big step you are taking. Is it because the Son has set you free? Or it's because I'm choosing freedom for myself?
[30:54] If the Son sets you free, you'll be free indeed. Trust him, trust him, he is so very good. And if you trust him, you will experience freedom like you've never experienced before.

Freedom from sin, freedom from guilt, freedom from shame, freedom from condemnation, freedom from enslaving emotions and desires, free from what people think of you, free from needing to

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

prove yourself, freedom from fear, freedom from loneliness, free from the fear of failure, free from the fear of sickness, free from the fear of insecurity, free from the fear of death.
To give allegiance to God will inquire trust for sure, but he is trustworthy. He's not calling us to do anything that he's already done for himself, already himself, out of love for us.
The fuel in our tank of obedience, of surrender, of submission, of service, is the unconditional love of the only lovable one.
And so, the more we trust him, the more we are committed to him, the more we conform to him and obey him, the freer we will become, as he himself is truly alive and free.
[32:14] If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. look to Jesus and take your next step. I'm going to ask Gary to come up and read the Bible.

We did it backwards today, deliberately, intentionally. It's because if I've asked Gary to read the Bible, before I preach that message, you will read all these sections in 1 Peter and automatically bring to bear all of your prejudices and your excuses.
Now there's none. 1 Peter chapter 2, reading from verse 13.
Please follow in your Bibles or on the screen. Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority, whether to the emperor as a supreme authority or to governors who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.
For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil.
[33:35] Live as God's slaves. Show proper respect to everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honor the emperor. Slaves, in reverent fear of God, submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh.

And then to chapter 3 from verse 1. Wives, in the same way, submit yourselves to your own husbands so that if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behaviour of their wives when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.
down to verse 7. And then to verse 7, husbands, in the same way, be considerate as you live with your wives and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life so that nothing will hinder your prayers.
Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult.
On the contrary, repay evil with blessing because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. And to chapter 4, verse 1.
[35:05] Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude because whoever suffers in the body is done with sin.

As a result, they do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil, human desires, but rather for the will of God. For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do, living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry.
They are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless while living and they will heap abuse on you, but they will have to give an account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.
Verse 7. The end of all things is near, therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray.
Above all, love each other deeply because love covers over a multitude of sins.
Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.
[36:21] Chapter 5, verse 1. To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed.

Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over me, not because you must, but because you are willing as God wants you to be, not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve, not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.
And when the chief shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.
In the same way, you who are younger submit yourselves to your elders.
All of you clothe yourselves with humility toward one another because God opposes the proud but shows favour to the humble. anderen conning todos no yap■ Mohammed faz compartil pero iz■ isto■■

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host