

## Freedom

Sermon – Pastor Joe Davis  
Union Baptist Church – 3/19/2017

Well, this is a special day to celebrate AWANA and I appreciate you parents coming to support your kids and hear what they've been up to for the past 7 months on Thursday nights. Before we get started with the AWANA section of our service today, I just want to share a brief message with you all that I'd like to call, "Freedom." I've been given the "freedom" to speak about 10 to 15 minutes today, so I'll do my best to stay within my time frame!

Freedom is a word we can all love, isn't it? You might say it's as American as apple pie and baseball. And in fact freedom, you might be surprised to know, is why we do AWANA here at Union Baptist Church. I'll explain that statement shortly. But before we start talking about freedom and how it relates to AWANA, it might be helpful to understand the opposite of freedom...what we know as slavery. What does the word slavery mean to you? What images come to mind at the mention of the word slavery?

Most likely your mind immediately jumps to thoughts about early American history, Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War. Perhaps you may think of the classic book, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*...a book that paints a horrifying picture of what actual slavery was like for black people in the first half of the 19th century...where real people like you and me were trapped in a life where they had no rights, no freedoms, no say in how they would spend their time, and could be brutally mistreated and abused and even killed by their owners with no consequence... where the children of slaves could at any moment be taken away from them and sold to someone else to be used or abused however they pleased. Just imagine your own son or daughter being taken away from you and sold to some stranger and you'll start to get the idea of how brutally horrific is a life of slavery.

But you're probably breathing a sigh of relief right now because you know that in America at least, slavery is ancient history. Thanks to Abraham Lincoln and those who gave their lives in the Civil War and many others, slavery as it was known in America in the 1800s is a thing of the past. But I'd like to ask you today, do you have any personal experience with slavery? Would you say that you are truly

free? Can you think of any forms of slavery in your own life? Are you the master of your own destiny and can honestly say that nothing and no one has control and power over you? We can all thank God that the buying and selling of human beings is outlawed in America, but I would argue that a very real and powerful slavery of a spiritual sort is still alive and well not only in America but everywhere around the world.

But let's move to a more positive subject: FREEDOM. More pleasant thoughts pop into mind, don't they? How would you define the word freedom? Probably one of the most common definitions of freedom today is the idea that freedom is the ability to do whatever we want. But have you ever followed that definition of freedom in your own life and found that in the end it actually led to slavery? Perhaps in the exercise of your freedom you decided to enjoy alcohol and lots of it, but soon found that your freedom to give it up was gone...your "freedom" choice had led to addiction, a very real form of slavery. Perhaps in your pursuit of freedom, you decided to browse through a pornographic magazine, but soon found that you kept wanting more and more to the point where it's now destroying your marriage and you can't seem to let it go. Sounds a lot like slavery, doesn't it? Perhaps as a free person you decided you wanted lots of money and made the pursuit of it the focus of your life, but as you did so the people you loved took a backseat and now you're all alone with your precious money and all the great toys you got. Perhaps in your "freedom" living, you decided to hold onto bitterness and anger towards someone who hurt you and now you find yourself a bitter and angry person who easily explodes on other people, and often on the ones you love the most. In other words, you're a slave to your anger.

Well, I think you get the idea. All of us here can probably identify many areas of our lives where our pursuit of "freedom" left us a slave and unable to break free on our own. Do you feel like a slave to anything in your life today? Do you feel powerless to break free? Well, if you do you're in good company, because all of us have been there. In fact, listen to how the Bible in Ephesians chapter 2, verses 1 to 3 describes the way all of us were before some of us discovered the one true path to real freedom. It says:

***Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. 2 You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—***

***the commander of the powers in the unseen world*** [sounds like slavery, doesn't it?]. ***He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. 3 All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God's anger, just like everyone else. (New Living Translation)***

Because of our disregard of God and our many so-called “freedom” choices, we all, every one of us, found ourselves held captive in the worst type of slavery...chained to the most brutal owner imaginable: the devil himself whose only interest in us is to use us, destroy us and keep us from finding our true freedom. You see, the devil (and yes, I believe with my whole heart that he's real and very active today)...the devil offered each of us a freedom illusion that's actually the worst type of slavery...one that chains us up and leads us into full rebellion against the one true God and subjects all of us to his wrath and anger. Thinking we're “free,” we're actually the worst of slaves and completely incapable of escaping or buying our own freedom.

Do you think you're a pretty good person, at least compared to a lot of people in the world? We can always find someone who's worse than us, can't we? Do you think you think your good deeds outweigh your bad and you can free yourself from slavery anytime you want and redeem your own soul from the penalty of sin, which the Bible says is death, hell and separation from God forever? Well, God shares with us a much different perspective in the Bible he's given us and I want you to listen carefully to what it says in Psalm 49, verses 7 to 8. It says this:

***7 No man can by any means redeem his brother***  
***Or give to God a ransom for him —***  
***8 For the redemption of his soul is costly,***  
***And he should cease trying forever —***

The redemption price or the ransom price of a person's soul is costly beyond anything any of us could ever pay and we're instructed here to cease trying to do it forever. No amount of good works or human willpower can ever earn your freedom from slavery or the freedom of any other person. Sounds pretty hopeless doesn't it?

But fortunately for us, there is One who has paid the cost to free us from slavery forever, and it's God Himself. And he did it because he's good, he loves us, and he's full of mercy. MERCY...that's another beautiful word like freedom, isn't it? God's mercy means that he has kindness and goodwill toward us and understands the terrible condition of our slavery...so much so in fact that he himself was willing to pay an incredibly high cost, more than any of us could ever imagine, to buy our freedom. Even though we were in full rebellion against him and serving as a slave to his arch enemy, the devil, he loved us with a great love that caused him to take action on our behalf. While we were still sinners and slaves, he sent his one and only beloved Son, whom we know as Jesus Christ, to make a way for each of us to gain true freedom forever. Listen to how this is described for us in the Bible in Galatians chapter 4, verses 4 through 7:

***4 But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, 5 so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. 6 Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" 7 Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.***

This is the transformation and true freedom that God makes possible only through the work of his Son, Jesus Christ, on the cross...from a powerless slave to the most brutal master in existence, to an adopted son of the one true God...from being held captive by a cruel tyrant, to being able to call the most perfect and good King your very own Father. And this good news, my friends, this amazing path to true freedom, is why we do AWANA here at Union Baptist Church. We want to offer this beautiful message of hope and freedom to everyone that we can, including each of you here today and all the precious young people we get to spend time with each Thursday evening.

But there's an important thing you need to know today: each person has to personally accept this amazing gift of freedom and new life that Jesus Christ has offered to you through his death on the cross and resurrection from the dead. It's not enough to just believe that it's true, you need to accept it for yourself. Take yourself back to slavery in the 1800s for a moment and imagine how tragic it would be if a wealthy person came to pay the purchase price to free a slave and offer him a new life, but the slave said, "No thanks. This is the only life I've ever

known and I'm just going to stay here. It's a terrible life, but I'm used to it and at least I know what to expect." Well, it would be even more tragic if any of you here today did the same with the eternal freedom, forgiveness of sins, adoption as sons and daughters, and new life that's ready and waiting for all those who will simply repent of their sin and believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord.

Jesus Christ called people to repent and believe in the good news. That was his message of hope. To repent literally means to "change one's mind" about something. To repent then is to change your mind about sin. Sin takes many forms (lying, cheating, hating, committing adultery, selfishness, not loving people, not honoring God as your Creator, and on and on)...things all of us have done at some point. But the heart of sin is rebellion against God...acting as if the One who created us doesn't exist or if he does, isn't worthy of our praise and honor.

To repent of sin then is to go from being in denial about it or thinking it's something you must have to survive, to taking full responsibility for your own sin and seeing that it's serious enough to require the death of God's son on the cross to redeem your soul from it. See your sin, own it, and decide it's something you want to leave behind and replace with Jesus and the freedom only he can bring.

When you're ready to do that, listen to what will happen in the words of John chapter 1, verses 12 and 13. Speaking of Jesus, it says this:

***12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.***

For each person here today who will simply repent and accept the gift Jesus has offer, believing in him and receiving him as your Savior and Lord, Jesus will make you a son or a daughter of the living God, and cause you to come alive spiritually. He'll free you from slavery to sin and give you the power to say no to it and finally break those sin patterns that have held you in slavery all your life. Will it be easy or instantaneous? No. But God will transform you over time when you come to new life in him and begin walking in relationship with Him and other believers... when you learn to know him through the Bible and walk by the power of His Holy Spirit he will give you at the moment you trust him.

Do you want true freedom today? There's only one place to find it. Repent and believe in Jesus in Christ and begin walking with him now and into eternity. Let's close with some familiar words from Jesus about freedom and where it comes from:

***31 So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." 33 They answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, 'You will become free'?" 34 Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. 35 "The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever. 36 "So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.***

If you want to be free today, come talk to me and I'll help you get there. As you leave today, there will also be a paper you can pick up that has some key verses in the Bible that tell you how to come to new life in Christ. It also has a prayer you can pray to repent and invite Jesus to be your Savior and Lord.