

Set Free – 1 Peter 1:18-21
Sermon – Pastor Joe Davis
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INTRODUCTION

I want you to imagine with me for a moment, a prisoner in jail serving a life sentence for a very foolish and self-centered and anger-motivated choice she made while she was in college. At age 30, she's 10 years into her life sentence and likely has 50 to 60 more years to serve before she dies. Over the 10 years she's been there, she's gotten kind of used to life in prison. She knows what to expect every day, her meals are provided, she has books to read, movies to watch, she's made some friends, she has no financial worries, and she even gets to exercise and get outside each day for a while.

And as our prisoner compares her current life in prison to the troubled, abuse-filled life of her youth, she's actually come to feel that she's arrived at a much better existence. It's true that she can never leave the prison grounds; can never explore the world firsthand; can never have freedom to pursue her dreams or goals; can never have the joy of marriage and children; can never eat out a restaurant or visit Disneyland; and so much more. But the security, the comfort, the peace of knowing what to expect and never having to worry about where her next meal's going to come from, have come to seem like not-so-bad of a trade-off.

But one strange day, something very unexpected did manage to explode into her controlled and surprise-free world. As she finished the 5th chapter of a very good book and prepared to head to lunch, one of the prison guards knocked on her cell door and then turned the key to open it. With a big smile and even moisture in her eyes, the prison guard announced: "I have some amazing news you're just not going to believe! The woman you committed your crime against, has offered to serve out your prison term in your place. She said she's been burdened for you all these 10 years and agonizing over the life sentence you're serving. Despite what you did to her in that awful moment of anger, she loves you deeply as a friend and feels great mercy for you and wants nothing more in her life right now than to see you forgiven and free and starting a new life. So, if you're willing to accept

her offer, you can leave here today a free woman! She's even lined up some counselors and a few job offers and a chunk of money to get you started and help you work through your past and get on a better path in your new life. What do you say?!"

Talk about unexpected! This was unbelievable, and who wouldn't accept such an offer? So accept it she did, and that very day, after an emotional and tearful conversation with the woman taking her place, and after signing the legal papers for the exchange, our prisoner stepped out of prison a free woman with a whole new lease on life. That very day she made arrangements to start meeting with a counselor, she accepted one of the job offers, and she used some of the money to rent an apartment. Her new life was off to a very good start.

But sometimes starting is a whole lot easier than continuing and facing the day-to-day realities of life and jobs and money struggles and change. Though she had all the resources she needed, she soon discovered that freedom came with some serious challenges. When the chunk of money got used up and her job income wasn't keeping up with the expenses she had incurred;...when the counselor pried into the dark places in her life that she didn't want anyone to see; when she had to face the reality of changing her ways that had become so natural and comfortable; when family members showed up and tried to pull her back into their dysfunction; when these challenges began piling up, she began to lose perspective and to dream of her old, comfortable, secure life in prison.

She decided she was done with the counselor and that it was impossible for her to change. She just went back to relying on herself and all the old methods she had used to survive life in the past. She soon began stealing money from her work to help cover her expenses. And it wasn't long until her anger issues starting cropping up again at work, so much so that she soon lost her new job. And there with no income, having used up all her seed money, and having rejected all the help that had been given to her, she decided the best thing to do from here would be to commit another crime that would land her right back in prison. And that's what she did.

Given freedom, a new life, and all the resources she needed to live it through the great sacrifice and mercy of another human being, she decided it was too hard, too unpredictable, too risky, and she traded it all for the safety and security and

comfort of life in prison. But imagine that moment when she arrived back in prison and moved in right next door to that gracious woman who had bought her freedom with her own life. What a sickening feeling that woman must have had to see that her sacrifice was wasted...that the freedom and forgiveness and new life she had purchased at such high cost was thrown away and came to nothing.

Well, my friends, this is what Peter wants us to avoid at all costs in our new life with Christ: the horrible outcome of wasting the freedom and new life and incredible resources Jesus purchased for us at the greatest of costs. And Peter makes it clear that it will not sit well with Jesus if we return to prison after he's paid the price to set us free. Let's read verses 17 through 21 of 1 Peter chapter 1. Last week we focused on verse 17, and now today we'll continue the thought Peter began as we look at verses 18 through 21. Here we go:

17 And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, 18 knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. 20 He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you 21 who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

May the Lord bless the reading of his Word.

*Conduct yourselves with fear...*with reverent awe of Almighty God who is now your very own Father and who's Spirit dwells within you. This is what we looked at last week. And we also looked at the first of four reasons why we should conduct ourselves with fear. Peter told us we should do this because our Father is the One who impartially evaluates every person's deeds throughout their lives, and there will be an accounting one day of what he finds. For those who haven't accepted Christ as their Savior and Lord, this accounting will inevitably condemn them to eternal separation from God because no one will be declared righteous before a holy God through their own works. All of us fall short of the glory of God (see Romans 3:23).

But for those of us who have accepted Christ and become his disciples, we've been clothed with him and with his righteousness, and therefore we will never have to suffer the wrath and punishment of a holy God. However, we will still give an account of whether or not we lived the new holy life of freedom Jesus purchased for us on the cross, or whether we stayed in or returned to prison and our old comfortable, but self-centered ways.

So today, we're going to look at 3 more reasons Peter gives us to conduct ourselves with fear...3 more reasons to take seriously the pursuit of being holy in all our conduct, like our holy Father, and to live the free life he has in mind for us.

OUR FREEDOM IS FROM THE EMPTY WAYS OF THE WORLD

The first of these 3 reasons is found in verse 18. And it's this: *Our freedom is FROM the empty ways of the world.* Through Christ, we've been ransomed, set free from prison. And the prison we've been set free from is *the futile ways inherited from our forefathers.* Jesus purchased our freedom so we could walk out of prison and leave behind these futile and empty ways of living life. That's what he freed us from. So to continue in these ways is to stay in prison when the door to our cell has been opened wide and the guards are saying, "You're free to go."

Now the word translated "futile" means "void of result" (*Vine's Expository Dictionary*). In other words, we've been set free from the ways of living life that do not and cannot bring the results we're looking for. They promise to bring results, but they always leave us disappointed. It's that idea again of striving after the wind; trying to grab hold of something that can never be held. Peter described these futile ways in verse 14 as ***the passions of your former ignorance.*** The idea is living our lives by whatever we want, whatever feels good, whatever gets us what we think we want...just letting our sinful desires and selfish interests be our ultimate guide for life. "Looking out for number one" above all. This is what Jesus freed us from and to continue to live this way is to waste the price he paid and stay in prison.

This is a reason to conduct ourselves with fear because Jesus is not going to take it lightly if we stay in or return to our prison cell, when the ransom he paid was to get us out of there. What an insult to stay in prison when he's paid the price for

our freedom. It is for freedom that Christ set us free. Amen?! Take seriously the call to live free and walk into Jesus' ways of living life that do actually bring the results we long for.

OUR FREEDOM WAS PURCHASED AT THE HIGHEST OF COSTS

The second reason to conduct ourselves with fear – to be pursuing holiness in all our conduct – is this: *Our freedom was purchased at the highest of costs.* Look again at our passage, verses 18 and 19:

18 ...you were ransomed...not with perishable things such as silver or gold, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

There was an incredibly high cost paid to buy our freedom – it didn't come for nothing or at a great bargain price. Listen to what Psalm 49:7-9 tells us about the cost of ransoming just one human soul:

7 Truly no man can ransom another, or give to God the price of his life, 8 for the ransom of their life is costly and can never suffice, 9 that he should live on forever and never see the pit.

No human being could ever come up with the price needed to ransom the life of just one other person. ***The ransom of their life is costly and can never suffice.*** "Never" is a pretty absolute word, isn't it? And yet Jesus conquered "never" for us. He came up with the infinitely costly price needed to ransom our life – his own precious blood, ***like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.*** The eternal, glorified Christ, very God of very God, Creator and Sustainer, humbled himself and took the form of a frail human being and became perfectly obedient, even to the point of death on a cross. This was the only price sufficient to buy our freedom, to ransom our lives, and to save us from hell.

And considering this incredibly high cost he paid to set us free, we should keep a healthy and holy fear of squandering and wasting the freedom he bought for us. If you offered up your own life to set someone free from prison and they decided to stay there or return after a few hours of freedom, how would that affect you? I think you'd be none too happy! And yet that's what it's like when we don't take

seriously the call to holiness in our daily lives...when we don't pursue Christlikeness and use the incredible resources we've been given to do so...God's Word, prayer, fellowship with other believers, worship, the power of the Holy Spirit, to name a few. Conduct yourselves with fear because your freedom was purchased at the highest of costs. Don't throw it away!

CHRIST CAME FOR US TO TRANSFER OUR FAITH AND HOPE TO GOD

And this brings us to the third reason why we should conduct ourselves with fear during our time on this earth: *Christ came FOR us to transfer our faith and hope to God.* Look at verses 20 and 21:

20 He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you 21 who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

Jesus is eternal God, pre-existent and foreknown even before the world was spoken into existence by the word of his power. And what he would one day do in humbling himself to be born a human baby and living an obedient life even to death on the cross was also foreknown even before the first word of creation. But though it was foreknown by Father, Son and Holy Spirit, it was only fully revealed in these last times. And why was it revealed? And why was this plan carried out? For the sake of you. He came here to live, suffer and die for you.

Voluntarily and for your good and your freedom, he set aside his glory to come pay the highest of costs to set you free from the self-centered and empty ways you were trapped in and the penalty you were going to have to pay. He owed this to none of us. Nothing required him to come. God would have been perfectly justified and righteous to make each of us pay the full penalty for our rebellion against him and our suppression of his truth. And yet, his abundant mercy, his love for all those he created, his goodness, his gracious nature...all these wonderful attributes of our good God, motivated him to take the initiative to rescue us. This is personal. He came for you. He came for me. Though we had done nothing to deserve it.

But also, as we look at these 2 verses, we notice that he came for you and I so that he could do something for us that would affect everything else in our lives. He came to transfer our faith and hope from empty things of the world, from false gods, to the one true God. Previously we were putting all our faith and hope in ourselves and in things completely incapable of fulfilling our faith and hope...things void of result. Our faith and hope were both terribly misplaced. They were in the temporary, fleeting, passing things of this earth that always leave us disappointed and empty and longing for something more. But Jesus came for us so that he could shift our faith and hope from these empty things to the only One capable of satisfying us, guiding us, loving us perfectly, and giving us what we need for life in this broken world. And if your faith and hope truly do shift in the way Jesus has in mind, if we really do put all the eggs of our hope in one basket – in God and his kingdom and the inheritance he has for us – this will have a radical impact on how we live our daily lives.

In the discipleship group I'm leading right now we've been studying various ways we can intentionally spend time with God for the purpose of seeking after him and making ourselves available to him so he can change us and guide us into his purposes. Our most recent book reading was two chapters from a book called, *Celebration of Discipline*, by Richard J. Foster. I'm not giving a full recommendation of the book – there are a few ideas in it that I'm not 100% on board with. But there's a chapter in the book that truly is profound, and it's dealing with what he calls the Discipline of Simplicity. I bring this up now because the idea he presents as Simplicity is exactly what we're talking about here. It's a person placing all their faith and hope in one place, and it's a Discipline because it's an act of the will, it's a choice we each have to make and keep making each day. Foster describes it as a choice to "will one thing." In other words, we have one purpose, one passion, one hope, one faith that guides everything else we do. That's simple, isn't it? We're not torn this way and that and chasing this today and that tomorrow. We're focused on one thing every day and in all we do. That simplifies life dramatically. You can cancel your subscription to "Simple" magazine!

Well what's the one thing to be chasing after and allowing to guide everything we do? Foster describes it this way: "The central point for the Discipline of Simplicity is to seek the kingdom of God and the righteousness of his kingdom *first* [above all] and then everything necessary will come into its proper order." That sounds

very biblical doesn't it. *Seek ye first...and all these things will be added to you.* God and his kingdom become the center, the core, of who we are and all we do. That's the simplicity Jesus has in mind for us as our faith and hope are shifted fully to God.

Now the thing about faith and hope is that they are inward realities...they involve the mind and the heart and the soul, and yet they cannot help but affect our bodies, our actions, our daily lives, what we do. We choose how to live, what to do, what to spend our time on, based on where our faith and hope are placed. Listen to how Foster expresses this same truth: "The Christian Discipline of Simplicity is an *inward* reality that results in an *outward* life-style...We deceive ourselves if we believe we can possess the inward reality without its having a profound effect on how we live." In other words, if our faith and hope are fully shifted to God, it will inevitably begin showing up in our actions, in how we live, in how we spend our time.

Foster goes on to illustrate how this will affect the way we talk, what's important to us and the way we handle our possessions. He says: "Experiencing the inward reality [of Simplicity] liberates us outwardly. Speech becomes truthful and honest. The lust for status and position is gone because we no longer need status and position. We cease from showy extravagance not on the grounds of being unable to afford it, but on the grounds of principle. Our goods become available to others...Simplicity sets possessions in proper perspective...[It's] the only thing that sufficiently reorients our lives so that possessions can be genuinely enjoyed without destroying us...Simplicity sets us free to receive the provision of God as a gift that is not ours to keep and can be freely shared with others...The inward reality of simplicity involves a life of joyful unconcern for possessions...[and] it has nothing to do with abundance of possessions or their lack. It is an inward spirit of trust...If what we have we received as a gift, and if what we have is to be cared for by God, and if what we have is available to others, then we will possess freedom from anxiety. This is the inward reality of simplicity...[and] to experience the liberating spirit of simplicity WILL affect how we live."

CONCLUSION

Folks, this is a powerful picture of how the complete transfer of our faith and hope to God and his kingdom – the transfer Jesus came to bring about in each of us – will affect how we conduct ourselves in this world that's not our home. Have you fully made that shift in your heart, your mind, your soul? Is all your faith and hope centered on God and his kingdom, or are you still looking for hope and fulfillment and joy in what you can try to grab a hold of in this world? Are you willing one thing in all you do?

Let's leave behind that complicated, exhausting life-style of chasing after God along with 10 other things that sound interesting and fun. Let's learn to "will one thing" in our lives and breathe a sigh of relief as we loosen our grip on the rest. ***"But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you"*** (Matthew 6:33). We've heard that verse so many times, but let's take it to heart and embrace the simple life Jesus has in mind for us. Jesus, at the highest of costs, did everything needed to bring us to the eternal life of simplicity – the life of seeking God and his kingdom in all we do. If you want the simple life, this is it!

With his precious, infinitely costly blood shed on the cross, Jesus made the one way for every person in the world to be ransomed, to be set free from prison, and to walk into the new world of true freedom – the world of peace with God, forgiveness, and a new power-filled, wisdom-filled, life with God in his kingdom for his purposes – a radical new life that leaves behind the ways of the old kingdom, the old prison, we were trapped in. That prison was the kingdom run by the Father of lies who always told us to put ourselves above everything else, including God, and to use whatever means necessary to protect and exalt ourselves and get what we think we want. Let's never go back there again. Let's get out of that cell and shut the door to it for good! And let's conduct ourselves with fear of ever going back there, knowing the incredible high cost Jesus paid to get us out.

Put off your old self. Don't comply. Don't give in to those old, selfish ways that come so easily to all of us. And if you do, repent and keep seeking, keep praying, keep believing, keep using the resources God has given us to live the new life of freedom...His Word, continual prayer, fellowship with other believers, worship,

the indwelling power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit, and so much more. The new life of freedom has its challenges. It's not as predictable as life in prison and there are many temptations and forces trying to take us back there. But the benefits, the freedom, the glory of the free life in the presence of God, the results that actually come, and the future that awaits those who endure is so worth it!