

CHRIST THE LIBERATOR

"If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." John 8:36.

There is something innate in the human heart which causes all of us to desire freedom. We dislike restrictions; we would be free from them; we would live as we please. But, is that freedom? No, it is a big mistake to think that in doing as we please we are exercising true freedom. It is a certainty that we must give an account to God.

The history of man is a record of one long struggle after freedom. There have been different phases of freedom for which men have striven. Among them are three.

1. Political freedom.

Political slavery is a terrible evil. To live, to think, to speak and to act at the permission of another is a terrible thing. One wonders if it would not be better to die than to live in that condition. Political freedom affords opportunity for so much that is good and ennobling, and its opposite involves so much that is debasing.

If we could call back the veterans of 1776 and ask them what it cost to establish this nation of freedom, George Washington would say, "Come with me to Valley Forge. Behold, in the snow, the bloody footprints of my soldiers."

If the men of the Alamo were asked, "What did it cost to establish the Lone Star Republic of Texas?" David Crockett would reply, "Come with me to the funeral pyre and behold the torch applied to the bodies of 185 men that the flame of liberty might be kindled in the hearts of all true Texans."

One may go to the battlefields near Chattanooga, Tennessee, where the ground was soaked with the blood of brothers, in order that we might have a great nation united in liberty, justice and freedom for all men. Our land had to run red with blood that we might have a united nation.

If the men of the first World War were called back from St. Mihiel and Argonne Forest and asked what it cost to stand for democracy in the world, they would have to tell us that "In Flanders fields the poppies grow, beneath the crosses, row on row."

If we ask the men of our day what it cost to stand for freedom, they would have to come back from Africa, Italy, Europe, Bataan, Corregidor, Iwo Jima, Korea, yea, from around the encircling globe, to picture to us the oceans of blood poured out for freedom.

Because our forefathers were willing to endure all types of hardship and suffering and to die, this is known as the "land of the free and the home of the brave." We do not know the bitterness of bondage because our emancipators have gone to the world of spirits after having bequeathed us an heirloom of liberty. Because of their bequest, we should revere and honor their names.

2. Religious freedom.

Since political freedom costs a lot of blood, we should not expect religious freedom at any cheaper price. The Pilgrim fathers would tell us that religious freedom costs blood. The 20,000 victims of St. Bartholemew's Day, who were slain because of their religious convictions, are a silent witness to the cost of religious freedom. The 42 Baptist preachers who were whipped and imprisoned in the colony of Virginia between 1766 and 1778 bear testimony that blood is the price of freedom of worship. Religious liberty is freedom to worship God according to the dictates of one's

conscience, unhindered by civil or ecclesiastical authority of any kind. And we must remember that this freedom will have to be maintained at the price of blood.

3. Soul freedom.

Political coercion may imprison the body and intellectual error may degrade the mind, but the most abject and fatal bondage is that of the soul under the dominion of Satan. Men are in bondage mentally. They are full of unbelief and blindness to spiritual matters. Their wills are in bondage to Satan, and he is an awful tyrant. Intellectual freedom means deliverance from ignorance, which is the source of so many errors, and deliverance from prejudice.

Since political and religious freedom were paid for at the price of blood, we should expect soul liberty to come at ever a greater cost.

If we were to ask the Apostles what soul liberty cost, they would answer, "We cannot tell you. We saw Jesus wipe His brow in Gethsemane and His handkerchief was red with blood." If we should ask Mary what it cost, she would say, "I stood by the cross and saw the blood drip from the wounds, but I can't tell you what it cost." If we were to ask God the Father what it cost to free man from the shackles that bind his soul, He would answer, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." If Christ were called on to tell us the price of soul freedom for man, He would refer us to His cry from the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

Christ was the champion of freedom. He wanted others to have and enjoy freedom too. Yet everywhere He turned He found men who, in one way or another, were enslaved. Sometimes they realized it; sometimes they did not.

Those to whom Christ was speaking in our text were, as a matter of fact, not prepared to receive His teaching on freedom. Nor should we be too severe with them for that failure. We should ask ourselves if we are ready to listen to Him and respond as we should. For if anything is certain, it is that Christ's freedom is far different from the notions that most of us have.

I. The Character Of Christ's Freedom.

Some things may be ruled out very quickly. For instance,

1. It is not exemption from suffering.

The common ills of life do not cease to prey upon us when we give our allegiance to Christ. Even though He was faultless, He was not without pain.

2. It is not exemption from temptation.

Christ's liberty does not exempt us from temptation. However, it is encouraging to remember that freedom is not destroyed by temptation.

3. It is not a guarantee of physical liberty.

Wherever His will is done and His spirit prevails in society, men will not be coerced or enslaved. But, that is a picture of an ideal order which thus far has never existed in this warped world of sinning humanity.

Christ's freedom is something that we can possess within, even when we are under pressure from without. Was Peter in prison Christ's free man? He was. Were Paul and Silas in the Philippian dungeon Christ's free men? They were. They were far more free than the jailer who fastened their aching feet in the galling stocks. Were the countless gallant souls who were hidden away in the catacombs, or who were herded into the arena to be

devoured by wild beasts, or who were fastened to the stake in order that their bodies might be fed to the torturing flames, people who knew anything about freedom? They were.

John Weatherford was imprisoned in Chesterfield County jail in Virginia for the crime of being a Baptist minister. "He preached at the door of the prison as long as allowed the privilege; when refused that, he preached through the grates of the windows. So great was the opposition that an effort was made to put a stop to that also. Soldiers were stationed outside the windows, and, when in his enthusiasm he extended his hands through the bars, they were slashed with swords. These scars he carried to his grave, being remarked upon by those attending his burial. In order to prevent their hearing, a brick wall was erected ten or twelve feet high before the prison and the top thereof lined with glass bottles set in mortar to prevent the people from sitting on the top of the wall to hear the Word. Weatherford devised means to overcome this. A handkerchief was to be raised by the congregation on a pole above the wall, as a signal that the people were ready to hear. His voice being very strong, he could throw it beyond the impediments and convey the words of life and salvation to the listening crowd. Souls were blessed and converted by his preaching. Of those who felt they had experienced the renovating influence of divine grace, nine wished to follow their Master by being buried in baptism. Elder Christian (Chastain) of Buckingham came, and in the night or perhaps about twilight, these persons were buried in baptism."

Thank God, there is such a thing as liberty of the spirit, even where and when there is captivity of the body!

II. The Content Of Christ's Freedom.

1. It is deliverance from the bondage of the mind.
"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." The bondage of the mind is the bondage of error. How to get rid of that imprisonment is one of life's most urgent problems. It is good to know that truth is, that man may know the truth and that the knowledge of the truth brings freedom. Christ said, "I am the way, the truth and the life." Truth does not help us to free ourselves, but it makes us free.
2. It is deliverance from the bondage of the will.
Christ said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin." This world is tragically full of people who are walking illustrations of the truth of this statement. You are free to sin if you desire, but you are not free to escape the consequences of doing so. You commit sin, but ere long sin will commit you to its own prison house. Our actions, which are wrong, are so easily repeated. Repeated, they become habits. As habits they become masters. We should be so thankful that Christ delivers from the bondage of the will.

"He breaks the power of cancelled sin,
He sets the prisoner free;
His blood can make the foulest clean,
His blood avails for me."

3. It is deliverance from the bondage of the spirit.
The bondage of the mind is broken by the victory of truth over error. The bondage of the will is broken when Christ comes to us with God's loving forgiveness. But, in addition to that, there is a promised deliverance from the bondage of the spirit. By "spirit" here is meant the desires, drives and dispositions that lie back of the conduct.

III. The Condition Of Christ's Freedom.

It is entirely possible to seek freedom in the wrong manner. A very striking example of this is the Prodigal Son. He desired freedom. He resolved to have it and to enjoy it, but he determined to have it in his own way and according to his own conception of it. To his father he said, "Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me." In other words, said he, "Let me be free to do as I please, to go where I wish, and to use what I have as I like." The result is well known. Instead of enjoying freedom, he had to endure the most complete and degrading slavery.

Beware of false freedom. Every good thing is imitated by Satan, who is the master counterfeiter, and hence, the word "liberty" has been used for the very basest of purposes, and men have misnamed the devil's offspring by this angelic title. Our text implies that there is a false liberty in the clause, "Ye shall be free indeed." There were some who professed to be free, but were not so.

Basically, all freedom comes from God. Noah's experience bears this out. It was God who released David from the tyranny of the giant Goliath. It was the same God who preserved Jerusalem from Sennacherib's army. The Psalmist was right when he said, "The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer" (Psalm 18:2). Freedom comes from God.

How may true freedom be obtained? Real freedom is based on truth and is imparted through sonship. True freedom comes to us through the Son. Christ stands before you possessing perfect freedom--freedom from ignorance, freedom from error, freedom from prejudice, and freedom from sin. He claims the ability and the prerogative to make you free indeed. Perhaps you are aware of your need of freedom--moral freedom, spiritual freedom, freedom from a torturing conscience, a terrible captivity of will, the guilt of sin before God, and the power of sin within yourself. You may have advanced from a mere consciousness of need to an indescribable longing to be free from the penalty and the power of sin. Who then can snap these chains and break these fetters and set you free? Christ alone is able to break the power of sin. He alone has found the answer acceptable to God and adequate for man's need.

Christ is the great emancipator. His aim is to make all men free. He provides deliverance from past guilt, exoneration from the punishment of sin, liberty from the fear of death, admission into the family of God, the supply for our needs, the privilege of prayer, and the security of His promises.

"Once I was bound by sin's galling fetters,
Chained like a slave I struggled in vain,
But I received a glorious freedom
When Jesus broke my fetters in twain.

"Glorious freedom, wonderful freedom,
No more in chains of sin I repine!
Jesus, the glorious Emancipator,
Now and forever He shall be mine."

Thank God, real freedom is possible. In His infinite mercy God has opened a way by which it may be received. "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."

Christ gives freedom by giving Himself. He is forever free; and where He is invited to come, there liberty has its home and its happiness. The mighty Son of God will take a sin-bound man by the hand and lead him out into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

While riding on the driver's seat of a public coach, Henry Drummond was working with his usual, prayerful skill to win the coachman to Christ. The man's reluctance to accept Christ was due to his fear that a certain habit by which he was bound would not be overcome.

"Suppose," said Drummond, "that your horses ran away and you lost control of them as they raced down a steep hill. What would you do?" The man confessed that he would be helpless. "But suppose," said Drummond, "that someone sat by your side who was really stronger, and more skilled, than you are. What would you do?"

"I should give him the reins," came the quick reply of the coachman.

"Of course," said Drummond, "and your life has got out of control. It is running away with you. Jesus Christ, stronger than you, because He is God, asks for the reins of your life. Turn them over to Him."

Thus Drummond gave to the coachman the secret of a life made free, when he challenged him to turn over the reins of his life to the Lord Jesus Christ.