

Freedom in Christ
July 3, 2022
Y. Joe Kim

“Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, ³²and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” ³³They answered him, “We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, ‘You will be made free?’” ³⁴Jesus answered them, “Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. ³⁵The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. ³⁶So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.” (John 8:31-36).

1. July 4th

Happy Independence Day! Tomorrow is the Fourth of July. It is one of the most important American holidays. On this day, we celebrate the US independence from Great Britain and the birth of the United States of America.

In the 1770s, American colonists thought of themselves as citizens of Great Britain. However, trade was restricted and the colonies had to rely on imported goods from Britain for supplies because Britain needed money to pay for its war debts.

Britain decided to increase the regulations and taxes on colonists and the colonists felt these requirements were not fair. After protests and boycotts, in April 1775, the colonists fought the British army at the Battles of Lexington and Concord and was followed by the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776.

The colonists wanted to be treated fairly. But when that did not happen, they wanted to be independent from Britain. The celebration of the Declaration of Independence is a celebration of political and economic freedom. This week we remember and give thanks for these freedoms that the founders fought for at the Revolution.

2. True Disciples, the Truth, and Being Free

John’s Gospel chapter 8 tells us that we also need spiritual freedom. Jesus says, “***If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, ³²and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free***” (8:31-32). We notice here that discipleship, the truth, and the freedom in Jesus are closely related.

Jesus points out that the disciples are those who remain in his word. What does “remain in his word” mean? “To remain” means to listen to his word and follow his will. The Four Gospels tell us that many people listened to Jesus and followed him, but only eleven disciples and a few women remained faithful followers.

If we learn from Jesus, he says we will know the truth. What does “the truth” mean? In the Old Testament, the truth means God’s law. Psalm 119:142 says, “***your law is the truth.***” In John 14:6, Jesus says, “***I am the way and the truth and the life.***” So the truth is Jesus himself who does what God wants him to do. Jesus says, if we know that Jesus is the truth, he will make us free.

What does Jesus mean by making us “free?” In verse 34, Jesus says, “***Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin.***” Jesus personifies sin as a person who controls or dictates us. The act of committing sin reveals that the one doing the act is under the power of sin. That’s why Jesus says to them, “***you look for an opportunity to kill me because there is no place in you for my word.***” If the word of Jesus does not remain in us, we will go against the will of the Lord because we do not know what the Lord wants us to do.

Jesus’ talk of freedom annoyed the Jews. They challenged Jesus saying “***we are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, “you will be made free?”*** (verse 33).

The people claimed that they had never been slaves to anyone. But that was not true. The Jews were captives in exile in both Egypt and Babylon. During Jesus’ time, the Jews were also under the control of the Romans.

Why did the people not admit that they were subject to other nations? It was because the Jews believed that even if they were an enslaved people, their spirit was never enslaved and instead was in the Lord. Jesus stresses that the disciples are those who want to do the will of God. So Jesus says that the disciples are free from sin because they follow the will of the Lord.

Jesus declares that if we are in Jesus Christ, we have freedom. Jesus gives us freedom from sin, guilt, and death. Romans 6:23 says, “***For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.***” We are free from sin and have eternal life in Christ because of what Jesus did for us upon the cross. This is the good news of Jesus that is meant for everyone.

3. Juneteenth

Freedom is a very important value for Black people. Are we so glad that they are free from slavery? On June 19, we celebrated Juneteenth Independence Day. It is also called “Freedom Day” or “Emancipation Day.” This is the day we celebrate the end of slavery in the United States after the Civil War.

If you didn’t know that much about Juneteenth, you wouldn’t be alone. According to a 2021 poll by Gallup, roughly 60% of Americans know little or nothing about Juneteenth. As a matter of fact, I learned about it when the garbage was not collected on June 20th this year.

Juneteenth and July 4 are important days to give thanks for our freedom in this country. Here is an excerpt from the Declaration of Independence. **“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”** Equality and freedom are the important values that were the cornerstone of Juneteenth and American Independence. These two values are God’s gifts for everyone.

4. Enslaved to God

It is very interesting to notice that Paul talks about not only freedom but also being enslaved. He says in Romans 6:22, **“But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God.”** Although we are free from sin, our lives are still dependent upon the Lord. We are created in the image of God and called to do God’s will on the earth.

5. Conclusion

When we celebrate the independence of our nation, we are reminded that the early Americans risked all they had for our freedom. We also notice that there are many people in the world do not have the freedoms that we enjoy. Many people in the US and around the world still suffer discrimination, exploitation, inequality, and slavery. There are many people who do not have spiritual freedom that we have through Jesus Christ.

In today’s scripture, Jesus says that if we continue in his word, we are truly his disciples and we will know the truth, and the truth will set us free. We give thanks to the Lord for the political, economic, and spiritual freedom that we have in Jesus Christ.

6. Application

This week we celebrate the founding of our nation. How are we going to celebrate the birth of America? Are we just enjoying this holiday through fireworks, parades, concerts and family gatherings and barbecues? Or have you ever thought about how to share God's gift of freedom with others?

Galatians 5:13-14 says, "***you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters, only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become enslaved to one another.***" ¹⁴ ***For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."*** Paul reminds us that we are called to freedom not to follow the desires of our sinful nature but to love one another as a slave serves his master.

I would like to remind you again that there are so many people in the US and around the world who still suffer discrimination, exploitation, inequality, and slavery. We have to do our best to get rid of injustice in our world.

I have a more practical suggestion for you. Last Sunday Sunday School children received pins. It was one of the most unforgettable moments that I experienced at Swift Memorial Church. Last month the New England Annual Conference was held in Manchester, NH. At the Conference I've learned that 56% of the UMCs in the New England Conference do not have Sunday School programs. If we have no children at church, we have no future. My hope for our church is that we have more children than adults. You might think that is not possible because we have not many children in our community. But that is not true. In Rainbow school there are many children.

Loving strangers are not easy, but loving children is not that difficult. I hope as we celebrate the Independence Day, we can pay more attention to the children in our family and in our neighborhood. If we show them how much we care about them and invite them to our VBS, they will be very grateful. The gift of freedom that we received through Jesus Christ will transform the lives of children and they will enjoy the freedom we have. May God bless America! And I pray that our nation would be a paradise on earth. Amen.