

## Let True Freedom Ring John 8:31-47

It is a word that is etched in the very fabric of our Constitution and National Anthem. It is a word that is in the hearts and on the minds and lips of those who have since our inception fought for this nation. It is a word that is stained with the blood of those who sacrificed their all to retain it. Its words conclude the first stanza of *My Country, 'Tis of Thee*. "LET FREEDOM RING."

What are the sounds of freedom? How do they ring? Are they the shouts and shots that echo on the battlefield or from the trumpet blasts that sound victory? Are they the words and prayers said without fear of suppression by people heard in the sanctuaries across this land? Are they the ink etched in documents like the Constitution, the Bill of Rights or the Declaration of Independence?

It was 235 years ago that this nation was born. It was a freedom born not just on the will and determination of men and women who longed to be free from tyranny. This freedom did not happen just by accident. This freedom was more than the efforts of those who so bravely fought to secure a victory for the right to govern themselves. It was a freedom that was divinely granted, a freedom that was pre-ordained by God Himself to allow this land to become an independent nation. It is a freedom that has been preserved and sustained by those who live in this land of the free and home of the brave. Men and women have sacrificed much in these 235 years to retain those freedoms.

July 4<sup>th</sup> is more than just a birthday celebration for our independence. It is a celebration of freedom. Freedom is such a fragile teacup. Every day we teeter precariously on the verge of losing that freedom. How vigilant we must be to ensure that those freedoms so vigorously fought for are never compromised. How watchful we must be to ensure that those freedoms won on the backs and by the

blood of our forefathers who founded this nation are never taken for granted. Daily we must be thankful to God for granting us the privilege of being a part of this nation – a nation under God.

Freedom was a concept that men were willing to risk their very lives for. If successful they would be hailed as heroes. If unsuccessful they would be branded and killed as traitors. They risked everything they had. They risked their fortunes. They risked their families. They risked their reputations. They risked their lives. "LET FREEDOM RING"

Freedom is never free it comes at a tremendous cost to all who pursue it. Today we openly worship in the comfort of this building under the banner of a flag that allows us this privilege, this right. And yet there are those who seek to limit or eliminate these rights to worship as we see fit. Clearly outlined in the Bill of Rights is the concept of free speech and the freedom of religion.

**Amendment I: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."**

For decades these rights have been under attack.

In 1963, the Court found Bible reading over the school intercom unconstitutional, (*Abington School District v. Schempp*) and decided that forcing a child to participate in Bible reading and prayer unconstitutional (*Murray v. Curlett*).

In 1985, the Court found that state law enforcing a moment of silence in schools had a religious purpose and is therefore unconstitutional (*Wallace v. Jaffree*).

In 1992 the Court found that prayer in public school graduation ceremonies violates the establishment clause and is therefore unconstitutional (*Lee v. Weisman*).

In 2000, the Court ruled that student-led prayers at public school football games violates the establishment clause and is unconstitutional (Santa Fe Independent School District v. Doe).

“LET FREEDOM RING”

On Thursday morning of this past week Fox News aired a segment that cuts deeply into the fabric of our freedom to exercise our religious rights.

According to those interviewed Veterans who hold services and ceremonies at Houston National Cemetery have been told they can no longer mention “God” or “Jesus” because government officials have banned the words from being referenced in their funeral services.

A law suit is now pending against the Houston VA National Cemetery on behalf of several veterans groups for the privilege of honoring the deceased without censure of their prayers or services. They are citing “religious hostility” as reason for the suit.

VA Forbids Mention of God at Funerals for Veterans and Requires Families to Submit Prayer for Approval to the Government

VA instructs the VFW and a Private Funeral Home that they may not present the option of prayer to families

VA Tells Volunteers to Remove "God Bless" from Condolence Cards to Grieving Families

VA Closes Cemetery Chapel; Uses it for Storage  
“LET FREEDOM RING”

This past week in New York in an unprecedented move a same-sex marriage bill was rammed through the state senate with what has been deemed “a cloud of procedural irregularities and even physical coercion.” While the bill included exemptions for the conscious rights of religious organizations and churches, it did not provide those same rights for individuals. A town clerk in one city expressed her outrage that she was being forced to comply with signing such documents which went against her morals and religious beliefs.

“LET FREEDOM RING”

This is just a small sampling of issues throughout this free land where the exercise of religious rights, our religious rights are being undermined and forbidden. We must open our eyes and ears and speak against this discrimination or the ring of freedom will be snatched from our very way of life. This week’s issue of Time magazine asks whether or not the Constitution still matters. It is again under attack by those who wish to change it because they believe its principles to be outdated for today’s culture.

Signed by 56 men on July 4:1776 the Declaration of Independence begins with these words:

When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

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. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty,

to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.  
“LET FREEDOM RING”

For centuries man has sought after and fought for what he believes to be freedom. The dictionary defines it as the liberation from the control of some other person or arbitrary power. It further defines it as being able to act or move without hindrance or restraint.

We have in the past and continue to pray for Christians around the world who cannot move about freely to express their faith. They are restricted by governments and ideologies contrary to their faith in Christ. They have no religious freedoms, yet they have a freedom that no military or government or individual force can ever take away. And while our own religious freedoms may be in jeopardy, we share a brotherhood in this freedom we have through Christ. Our Lord Himself talked about this freedom they could know and have. It was a concept totally foreign to His audience.

Turn to **John 8**. Here we see how we can let true freedom ring and how such freedom is obtained. We'll pick up His dialogue in **verse 31**.

Man has long sought after a freedom that cannot be won by legislation or feats attained through victory on the battlefield. Many want freedom from this or freedom for that. They pursue their kind of freedom in the courts or on the streets or through the media. Like Adam and Eve they believe that true freedom comes from a lifting of all the restraints they feel suppress them. Kids run away from home because they feel their parents repress them. Families split apart because one spouse wants greater freedom. The grass has to be greener on the other side of the fence, right? What we think is freedom is greater suppression. The prodigal son wanted his freedom. When he came to his senses he realized that he had chained himself in bondage.

Given everything imaginable to sustain them, including intimate fellowship with God in a sinless condition in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were told by God that they were free to move about the Garden and take care of it. Eat what you want, do what you want, go where you want. There's only one rule. Don't eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Otherwise, the rest is, well, paradise. With that one exception, it was for their pleasure to enjoy. How would you like to live with only one rule? Maybe that's freedom to you. Wouldn't that be great?

But Satan came along and told them that one rule was really bondage not freedom. When Satan spoke those words to Eve **“has God said...”** he was casting doubt on their freedom. He was claiming that God was holding them in subjection by limiting what they could and could not do. For God to tell them not to eat of the fruit of that tree He was putting the kibosh on their freedom. He implied that God knew that if they ate that fruit they would truly be free. God was spun as the great cosmic killjoy. If they really wanted to be free go ahead and take a bite. Instead of giving them the freedom they thought they had been denied in that moment of deception their disobedience cast them into bondage. Bondage is subjection to some force. The force they became bound to was sin. It would influence decisions and dominate behavior. Paul will call it the old nature or the old man. We know that to be true in our lives, don't we? Paul would remark that what he knew he shouldn't do is what in fact he did, and what he knew he should do, he didn't. Sin. Bondage. Lack of freedom.

According to **Proverbs 5:22** **“The evil deeds of a wicked man ensnare him; the cords of his sin hold him fast.”**

In **Hebrews 12:1** the writer exclaims that sin easily entangles us. It trips us up. Sin is not freedom, it's enslavement. To the Romans Paul described sin as our master reigning over us.

The song writer so aptly asks “would you be free from your burden of sin?” How do we become free?

We are held captive by what we thought would free us. By revolting from God we have become slaves to a new master, held in the grip of sin.

In John 8 Jesus has been in a discussion with a group of people explaining to them that He is the light of the world. After being challenged about the credibility of His testimony Jesus indicated that His testimony was true because of His self-authentication. He knew who He was. He was competent to give testimony about Himself because as God He knew who He was and He knew where He was going. The Pharisees on the other hand thought they knew who Jesus was but really were ignorant of Him and were therefore invalid witnesses about Him.

After this discussion it says that many put their faith in Him. How many there were is not recorded and neither does it indicate that this is a saving faith, they paid attention to what He said, but didn't really commit to Him. The implication is that many believed who He was but did not take the step of repentance and trust in Him that He was the long awaited Messiah. This is further evidenced in the passage because they continue to relate themselves as the offspring of Abraham.

To those who believed who He was Jesus went on to explain a mark of that faith. He says in **verse 31** if you really want to be His disciples then you need to hold to His teachings, you need to do what He says. Then, and only then, will you know the truth and that truth will set you free. Jesus was saying that for you to really be free a person must know and believe the truth about Him, that only through faith in Him could a person truly be free. Man has long sought after a freedom for a soul that is in bondage to sin. Jesus is here offering man freedom from that bondage.

What then is the truth Jesus is referring to? How do we attain such truth? Pilate would ask Jesus that question at His trial. “**What is truth?**” Was Pilate mocking Jesus and really asking what does truth really matter? Who can really know it? Or was he in all seriousness stating that truth is a difficult concept to know or find?

**“If you hold to My teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”**

What truth was Jesus referring to? Was it philosophical truth that cause men to wax old in their pursuit of trying to figure out what truth is? Was it scientific truth that pieces facts together so that the obvious conclusion can be what we call truth?

Jesus is stating that through Him and in Him a person can know the truth: truth that is real, that is genuine, without pretense. The truth Jesus is referring to is that through Him a person can be free from sin, free from bondage to sin, free from sin's penalty, free from sin's presence, free from sin's past. Only through Him can we truly be free. Only by living in Him, only by yielding to His Spirit, only by obeying His Word can we truly be free. If you know that truth about Him and believe that He is the Messiah, the Savior you will be free. **Eph. 1:7; I Cor. 15:57; Rom. 8:1-2; Gal. 5:1**

We seek freedom in so many ways, but to be truly free comes only by God through Christ. There are many who wave a banner of freedom for this or for that, but Jesus says that if you really want to be free you must believe what the Bible teaches about Him.

We think freedom comes without borders, without restraints, without rules. The Jews thought their freedom came because they were descendants of Abraham. Notice their argument in **verse 33**. They wondered how Jesus could free them when in their minds they weren't slaves. Their past and present condition certainly was lost to memory.

They failed to mention that they were slaves to Egypt or slaves to the surrounding nations after the initial conquest of the land during the days of the Judges. They didn't mention bondage to Assyria or Babylon or the Persians or to the Romans. In their minds they were free because they were Abraham's offspring. Doesn't that make us free? They failed to see their true bondage in sin.

But then Jesus wasn't speaking about political freedom. He didn't come into the world to free them from political bondage. He came to free man from bondage to sin. That's the kind of bondage He spoke about in **verse 34**. And then Jesus notes how a person can be free. It is through the Son. In the previous section He had already identified Himself with the Father, making claim to His rightful position as Son. It is through the Son we are free.

In answer to the question posed by the songwriter "would you be free from your burden of sin? There's power in the blood of the Lamb." **Isaiah 53** identifies this lamb as the Messiah. Jesus was saying that only through Him could a person find true freedom. Jesus taught that He was the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one can come to the Father except by Him. If you know and believe and receive that truth about Him, it will set you free. His shed blood is how the Son will set you free.

The Jews thought they were free but were still held by the bondage to sin. Jesus offered to them the opportunity to believe in Him for salvation. It is the same offer of freedom that has been extended throughout history to you and me.

In 2005 Newsweek ran an article in which through interviews found that 85% of those who claimed to be Christians believe that there are multiple routes to heaven. Truth to them really is relative. Truth is what you believe it to be. Frances Shaeffer noted that during the Enlightenment men thought you could know the truth through reason. He went on to state that during what is now called the postmodern

world, truth is not knowable. Truth he says exists within the ever changing societal norms: truth is changing with the times, changing within cultures, changing within customs. Truth is fluid. Truth is subjective. Truth is relative.

There is a growing and troubling trend among some churches and seminaries and Bible schools and mission agencies and among many professing Christians. This trend is called Chrislam. It is the blending together of two major world religions - Christianity and Islam. There are some prominent protestant preachers and teachers who support this idea that there are alternative ways to heaven. While the term may be fairly new, the concept is not. It comes from a term called "syncretism." It is the attempt to reconcile contrary beliefs, often while melding practices of various schools of thought. The term means "combining." The idea of syncretism was used during the conquest of South America. As the Spaniards swept through the land as part of Christianizing the conquered people Catholic priests would "baptize" them into Catholicism often without ever giving the gospel. Under threat of death thousands were converted. However, they were allowed to continue their heathen religious practices while incorporating the practices of the church into their worship.

The concept is alive today in Chrislam which seeks to combine Islam with Christianity, so that a person can profess to be a Christian and continue to practice Islamic traditions or vice versa.

Jesus said if you want to be free from sin, if you want to get to heaven, there is only one way, not many. It is through the Son who will set you free. Jesus said there is only one truth and He has revealed that truth to us through His Word. If you want true freedom, we must believe what He says about Himself in the Bible. We must believe what the Bible says about Him. **I Corinthians 15:3-4**

The remainder of this passage is a debate between Jesus and these Jews about who their real father was. They claimed to be sons of Abraham. Jesus said that if Abraham were truly their father they would do what he did. He had faith in the coming Messiah. Instead of seeking to kill Him they would follow Him.

You may have heard recently that during the opening ceremony of the U.S. Open NBC chose to edit out a portion of our pledge of allegiance. They omitted the words “one nation under God.” Though blatant it does not change the fact that we are a nation founded by and blessed by God.

The Jews sought to omit Jesus as the only way to the Father, but that doesn’t change the fact that what Scripture teaches is true that Jesus is the only way. **“Know the truth, and the truth will set you free...if the Son will set you free you will be free indeed.”**

**Have you been attempting to gain freedom through any variety of things, but find yourself still in bondage?** Like the Jews you may be thinking that you are free all the while you are in captivity.

I like going to the zoo. I especially like to see the big animals – the lions and tigers and bears. The zoo has created an environment similar to their own native habitat in which they can do what they would normally do. They run, they jump, they swing, they swim, they climb. They are given plenty of room to move around all the while thinking they are free, yet they aren’t. There are high fences and steep walls and large barriers to keep them caged up.

We may think we have all the freedom in the world, but are really in bondage. We’re held captive by sin. Let today be the day you become liberated. Let today be your independence day from bondage to sin. Today may your spirit cry “LET FREEDOM RING.” Today let the Son set you free. If you know the truth about Him, let that truth liberate you.

Cast off the oppression of sin and let Him free you and you will be free indeed. Don’t be like those described by Jesus as people who were unable to hear with an inability to respond.

Paul states that those who don’t understand can’t comprehend what is being said because they don’t have the Spirit of God. To them the truth is just foolishness (**I Corinthians 2:14**). On the other hand Paul in writing to the Corinthians later will exclaim that **“the Lord Jesus is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom.” (3:17)**

Today if you have believed and received the truth, God’s Spirit is within you and He has given you freedom.

At this time as we celebrate our independence as a nation let us give thanks to God who made it possible.

It is fitting as well for us to give Him thanks for the freedom we have from sin made possible through His Son who is the only Way, the only Truth, and the only Life. If you have the Son you have life, you have freedom, if you don’t have the Son, you don’t have life, you are in bondage.

It cost a great deal to become a nation that is free. The price for this freedom continues. **Thomas Jefferson wrote, “the tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots.”**

To become a citizen of heaven the cost was also great, but this liberty never again has to be paid for with other or ongoing shed blood. Christ only needed to die once to secure our freedom. **Is that the freedom you now have?**