

**Easter Sunday**  
***The Blessed Constraints of True Freedom***  
**4-24-10**  
**Text - Various**  
**Scripture Reading - John 20:1-31**

I think loss of freedom is one of the main things that keep people from following Jesus.

- People know that if they decide to follow Jesus they're going to have to change their lives. They're going to have to give up their freedom to live their lives *their way* and begin to live their lives *Jesus' way* instead.
- Jesus makes this fact perfectly clear in Luke 9:23-25...
  - **Luke 9:23-25 (ESV)**  
<sup>23</sup> And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. <sup>24</sup> For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. <sup>25</sup> For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?
- This fact was a HUGE hold up for me 13 years ago when I was first considering following Jesus.
  - I knew that to follow Him would require me to make a *radical priority shift* in my life, and I didn't want to make it. I loved my life just the way it was, and I wasn't interested in changing it.
  - My priorities had always been Me first, Others second, and God last and that had worked out just fine so far.
  - I knew Jesus called His followers to put God first - Others second - and Themselves last. Though I had the Others second part down, I knew putting God first and myself last was going to be VERY difficult.
- Though I very much feared the priority shift, and I very, VERY much questioned whether I would *ever* be able to actually do it, I eventually broke down and decided to follow Jesus anyway *because I'd come to believe in Him*.

- o Through reading the Bible as a skeptic, hearing the Gospel faithfully preached week in and week out at MOB, through the prayers of my believing wife and her friends, and through the birth of my daughter Eva, God opened my eyes for the first time to what I now FIRMLY believe to be *true reality*.
  - God is real, Heaven is real, Hell is real, and Jesus is real. There is a spiritual battle being waged all around us, and our souls are on the line. There are only two sides in the battle, and all of us are on one side or the other. We're either for Jesus or we're against Him, there is no in between, and the side we choose will determine our eternal destiny.
- o When you come to believe that that's the way it is, you really have no choice but to follow Jesus, whether you like it or not.

But in giving up my precious freedom to follow Jesus, I came to realize three important truths about *true freedom* that I'd never realized before.

The first truth I'll state briefly at the beginning and then touch on it often throughout.

True freedom is the key to true joy.

- If you are looking for true, rich, indestructible, everlasting joy *that is not dependent on your circumstances*, you will find it *only* in true freedom.
- Here's a litmus test to see if you have the true joy I'm talking about.
  - o Think about the one thing in your life that brings you the most joy.
  - o Now, ask yourself the following two questions, "Could it be taken away?" and "What would happen to you if it were?"
  - o If your answers to these two questions are "Yes" and "It wouldn't be good" you should listen *very carefully* to what I'm about to share with you this morning.

The second truth I learned about true freedom was this...

True freedom lies not in doing whatever we *want* to do, but in doing exactly what we were *meant* to do. In other words, in doing what we were *born* to do.

- “Converse Weapons, that’s the shoe that let’s Magic do what *he was born to do...*”
  - Magic Johnson *was born* to play basketball. So was *Michael Jordan*.
    - 6’6”, huge hands, huge vertical, great quickness, great strength, and perhaps the most competitive spirit of all time.
    - “How do you deal with the pressure of being Michael Jordan game in and game out?”
      - “When I’m on the basketball court I feel totally at home, totally at ease, totally in my element...”
      - Playing basketball was what Michael Jordan *was born to do*.
      - There was nothing he’d rather do. There was nothing that brought him more joy and contentment.
- True freedom lies in doing what we were *born to do*. We typically understand this in terms of the gifts, talents, or passions we’ve been given.
  - Some people were born to dance
  - Some were born to sing
  - Some were born to work with their hands
  - Some were born to work with children
  - Some were born to teach
  - Some were born to lead
  - The list goes on...
- When we figure out what we were born to do, *in this sense*, and then do it with all our might, we take a big step toward true freedom and the true joy that accompanies it. But there’s another step we have to take.

- The Bible teaches that not only has God created us with special gifts, talents, and passions that He wants us to develop, enjoy, and use for His glory, but He has created us with a special *purpose* as well - *to know, love, and follow Him*.
- This is clearly taught in Genesis 1-3. God's original intent for mankind was for them to rule over and enjoy His magnificent creation *under His loving authority*. God would walk with them, they would walk with God, and nothing would ever come between them, not even death. As God put it at the end of Genesis 1, the whole set up was, "VERY good."
- That is, until mankind fell into sin. When Adam and Eve foolishly opted to *exercise their freedom* and come out from under God's all-wise, all-good, all-loving authority by eating from the *one tree* God had forbidden them to eat from, everything changed. Their perfect relationship with their perfect Creator was broken, sin and death entered the world, and things have only spiraled downward since. Though there remains in each of us a glimpse of our God-given purpose to know, love, and follow Him, for most of us it is so covered up by sin that it is almost unrecognizable.
- But *thankfully*, it hasn't entirely disappeared. We see evidence of it in the lives of people around us every day. Those who are the most content and the most fulfilled are not necessarily those who are the most gifted and the most talented, *but rather those who are loving others and doing what is right*. Those who are following *God's ways*, even if they're doing so unknowingly, have more joy in life because they are doing what they're *meant to do* as image bearers of God. They are living out their God-given purpose and thereby exercising *true freedom*, even if they don't know it.
  - The immoral Hollywood superstar vs. the morally upright minimum wage worker
- We see further evidence of our God-given purpose to know, love, and follow God in the lives of those who seem to have it all, people who are gifted, talented, and passionate *as well as* good, and loving, and kind. Strangely enough, *even these*

*people* often struggle with discontent. *Even for them*, something is still missing.

- o The Rich Young Ruler (Matthew 19:16-22)
  - What must I do to have eternal life? Keep the commandments.
  - This I've done. *What do I still lack?*
  - Sell everything you've got and *come follow me*
  
- o What was He missing?
  - The most important piece of all, *the key to true freedom and true joy, a relationship with Jesus.*
  
- o Jesus Himself talked about the importance of this relationship in John 17:3...
  - **John 17:3 (ESV)**  
<sup>3</sup>And this is eternal life, that they *know you* the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.
  
- o And the Apostle Paul, another man who seemed to have it all *until He met Jesus*, talked about the importance of knowing Him like this...
  - **Philippians 3:7-8 (ESV)**  
<sup>7</sup>But whatever (was to my profit, I now consider loss) for the sake of Christ. <sup>8</sup>Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing (greatness) of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ
  
- o The missing piece of true freedom and true joy for the rich young ruler *was Jesus*. He'd come to the right place, but he was unable to see the answer sitting right in front of him. He was so blinded by sin, that he thought money was more precious than the pearl of greatest price, *Jesus Himself*. He passed on knowing and following Jesus to hang on to his wealth, and thereby he passed on true freedom, true joy, *and eternal life* as well.

- o We are all tempted to do the same. *What is it that stands between you and true freedom this morning?* What is that you fear to lose in following Jesus? For me, one of the big things was basketball.

What does all this have to do with Easter? Everything!!! The third and final important truth I learned about true freedom was this...

True freedom is only possible because of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

- **1 Corinthians 15:17 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile *and you are still in your sins.*

- Our sins are what separate us from true freedom. They were what separated us from it in the beginning and they are what separate us from it today.
- Jesus' lived and died in order to take care of the sins that separate us.
- Jesus' was resurrected in order to assure us that the work was finished.

DO YOU BELIEVE???

- If you do, then respond. Don't be afraid. Follow Jesus!
- If you don't, don't give up! (doubting Thomas)