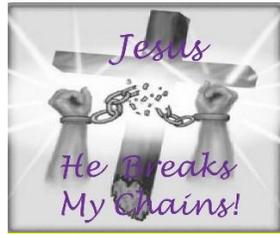


# Free from the Penalty of Sin



## Set Free

John 8:31-

We're beginning a new sermon series this morning called Set Free. We just finished out I Am Sent. In honor of this being the Fourth of July week and in honor of July, we think about the great freedom we have in this country, we will be talking about the freedom we have in Christ Jesus. If you have your bibles, open to John chapter 8. We are going to use this story to launch us into the series over the next several weeks. I hope you'll reach out, bring your neighbor, your friends, family, and acquaintances. Invite them to come and be with you. Our college kids are gone and we have a lot of people who vacation in the summer, so we've got room for your neighbors, friends, and family. We don't like to have a summer slump here at Hardin, so let's continue to reach out.

### Scripture

***"So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." They answered him, "We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, 'You will become free'?" Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly..."*** (The King James Version would say "Verily, verily" here. So all of you like me who has an ESV, let's mark out truly, truly and put verily, verily. I like that word verily, verily. Have you noticed when Jesus said verily, something really good happened? When He said verily, verily, wow, it was really big!) ***"I say to you, everyone who practices***

***sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."***

(Prayer)

Father, we are excited to talk about this freedom that Christ offers throughout the month of July as we talk about what we're set free from, and what we are set free to. Father, we ask this morning that you anoint us with Your Spirit. Don't let anyone in here be a hearer only and please don't let me be a speaker only. We want to be doers of the Word. Father, we are excited to talk about the freedom that we have in Christ Jesus. There are so many wonderful passages of Scripture that we could have chosen to use as a text this morning and throughout the whole month, but we thank You for the ones that You're guiding us to as we look at this neat thing about being set free. So when we think about I Am Sent, help us remember that we are sent because we are free, but many of the ones we are sent to are not free. Just as You set us free, they can be free too. Father, help us understand You use us in the plan, and that's so cool. You could have done it a lot of other ways, but You chose to use us and we thank You for letting us get in on what You're doing, and that's bring Your salvation to the whole world. We praise You and thank You, in Christ name, amen.

Can you believe it? This is the Fourth of July week. Because the fourth falls on Wednesday, some of our church is celebrating this weekend, and some of us will be celebrating next weekend. Some will celebrate this weekend and next weekend. I don't know about you, but I love the Fourth of July celebration. I promise you, several times this week as I think about celebrating what the Fourth of July means in this country, my mind will turn to that lady who stands in that harbor in New York. I don't have to get a picture out and look at her because I have a portrait hung in my mind and in my heart as a citizen of this great country. Miss Liberty, a gift from the country of France who we dedicated in 1886 because of the abolition of slavery. There she stands, her right arm stretched high as she stands one

hundred and fifty one feet tall, thirty-six feet around her waist, each eye in itself is about two and one-half foot wide. She proudly holds that torch. Her left arm hangs elegantly to her side as she clutches a tablet with the Roman numerals, July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1776. She has a seven-spike crown that glistens in the sun offering the hope of freedom to the whole world. That robe flows down her body to her ankle below. You don't have to look very hard to see that broken shackle, a symbol in the United States of America that no man will ever be slave to another man again. I promise you, many, many times this week, I am going to think about Miss Liberty as a proud citizen of the United States of America, as I enjoy the freedoms that this great country gives to me.

But, it always does and I'm assuming it will be no different this year, celebrating the Fourth of July always causes me to think about the true freedom that I have. When I think about that freedom, I don't think about a lady who stands on an island in New York City, I think about a man who hung on a cross, on a hill outside of the ancient city of Jerusalem nearly two thousand years ago. He too wore a crown, but not a crown with seven spikes made of copper; He wore a crown of thorns. Because He was a man like me, flesh and blood, blood flowed from that crown down His face. Before He was put on that cross, He was beaten to within an inch of His life. He too had a robe, a seamless robe, but it doesn't hang from His body, it lies at the foot of the cross and it will be gambled for. He who wore that robe to the cross will suddenly die, and another man will wear that robe home that day. When I examine that robe, I see that it is seamless, according to the gospel writer, John. It makes me believe that someone who made that robe for Him was close to Jesus and realized that while He was yet like me as a man, He was unlike me as a man in that He was sinless. There was no taking pieces of fabrics and sewing those pieces together, but a seamless robe, woven from top to bottom, to catch in character who He is in His nature. He is the sinless Son of God. He doesn't raise a torch or clutch a tablet, but those two hands who touched crippled legs, opened blind eyes, and brought hearing to the deaf, submitted again to the will of His Father. This time it was not to bring physical healing to anyone, but spiritual healing. So we see in the right wrist a Roman spike, and a Roman spike in the left wrist, but I know it was not those spikes that

held Him to that cross. It was His love for me and His love for you. They brought His legs and brought them together and one more time drove a spike through them. Not a statue, but the Son of God, the Son of man, fought for every breath that day on that cross. While physically there was not a shackle lying on the ground, in my mind knowing the full intent of why He was dying, I see that shackle that He broke. Not a shackle that set man free from other men, but a shackle that was broken that caused man to be captive to the true man, the man inside of him. It was liberty that truly enlightens the whole world. For see, when I think about freedom, the statue of liberty is second in my mind. When I think about freedom, I think about the cross of Jesus Christ. I know the Bible teaches us that because of Christ's death on the cross, we are free. Not just free, we are free in deed. What we will learn during the first part of this month is that we have been set free from the penalty of sin, we've been set free from the power of sin, and one day we will be set free from the presence of sin.

As we close out this month, we will see not just what we've been set free from, but what we've been set free to, and that is to practice the presence of God in our lives on a daily basis. So I have the task this morning of opening the Word of God with you and us thinking about being free from the penalty of sin. When we read the book of Romans, we know it is Paul's letter to the Church of Rome because he's desperately wanting to take the gospel to end of the world, and the end of the world is Spain. He's wanting to get to Spain, and so he wants the Roman church to support his efforts so he writes this great theological letter to them. As he writes that letter, he basically reveals to us how we got in the mess that we're in, and it all started with a man named Adam. Paul is going to tell us that through this one man, Adam, sin entered the world and death through sin. Thus, death spread to all men for all sinned, most scholars believe, in Adam. What Paul will do in the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter of Romans is share how Adam got us in the mess, but Christ, ultimately, gets us out.

When we think about what Paul's writing about, our mind goes back to the first man in the Garden of Eden. In the Garden of Eden, we're introduced to what we call in the church the penalty of sin. It's my goal this morning, if I accomplish this goal, that when the sermon is over, you will know what

the penalty of sin is and how you've been set free from that penalty as a believer. But if you're not a believer, hopefully you'll come to understand why you do some of the things you do, and then hopefully you too will want to be set free from the penalty of sin. you remember the story, God creates this man named Adam, gives him a great home, a great job, great hobbies, and then he is alone so God makes a wife for him. But when God introduced Adam to his environment, He just gave him a tour. Imagine going on a tour with God, you see your great home, you see this garden, you see all these trees that God planted in the garden and God says you can eat that one, that one, that one's for you too, that one's for you, but this one; don't eat it. This is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It's not a good tree. As a matter of fact, there will be a penalty. I'll have to penalize you if you eat of this tree. As a matter of fact, Adam, I'm telling you that the penalty is not going to kick in until years later, for in the day you eat, on that day you will die. In the Hebrew, it is 'dying, you will die.' You know the story. He is married to Mrs. Universe. They're running around in the garden naked. They're not ashamed, not hiding anything from each other, not hiding anything from God. they are just enjoying life in the garden, and then one day the serpent shows up and says to Mrs. Adam, "Man, I see ya'll enjoying all the trees in the garden, why aren't ya'll eating from that one? I don't see a fruit plucked off that tree." Eve says to the serpent, "Well, we're not supposed to eat of that one, for if we eat of that one we will die. Even if we touch it, we'll die." "Oh, come on; you surely don't believe a holy, loving God would kill you if you eat of that tree! You know He is really holding out on you, don't you? You know it's the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and if you eat of that tree, you will be just like Him. You'll know good and evil." You know what she did, right, she ate. She didn't just eat; she gave some to her husband. Being a good, submissive husband like all of us husbands are, he did what she said and he ate too! As soon as he ate, life was never the same. How can you be living in a garden, naked and unashamed, and then eat a forbidden fruit that God told you not to eat, saying if you eat it there will be a penalty, a death penalty? When you eat and the death penalty kicks in, life looks different. All of a sudden, he saw himself, he saw her, and they went in opposite directions. They started grabbing leaves. They learned to sew,

and they didn't just hide from each other, they hid from God. Are you with me? Then here comes God, "Adam, Adam! Where are you?" "I'm over here, God." "In the bushes?" "Yep." "What are you doing in the bushes?" "I'm hiding from You." "Adam, you..." "Yes, I did, God. I ate of the tree that You told me not to eat of." "Adam, why did you..." "It was that woman You gave me!" Do you see what the death penalty does? It causes us to see life differently, but when we get caught, we don't own up to what we did. We want to shift the responsibility. We want to shift the blame to somebody else because it's ultimately somebody else's fault for what we did. So God just turns to Mrs. Adam and says, "Mrs. Adam, did you?" "It was that serpent!" Scripture doesn't tell us, but I'm sure the serpent said it was the devil who made me do it.

Now, watch this. God pronounces judgement on the man, the woman, and the serpent. Then God holds a council meeting. In the council meeting, here is what the end of Genesis 3 says. God said to someone, I don't know if it's God the Father talking to God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, or if it's God talking in a heavenly council meeting, but God says the man has become just like one of us, knowing good and evil and we're going to have to bar him from the tree of life and kick him out of the garden. Wow! Can I confess something as a pastor to you guys? I got saved at thirteen and I started teaching Sunday school at fourteen. I'm fifty-seven years of age, which means I've been doing this a long time, and I've never been able to put my finger on exactly what was happening when the serpent said to Eve, "If you eat this fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, you will be like God." Then after they eat and are now under the death penalty, now separated from God, in that state of sin, God says to somebody in Heaven, "they are just like one of us now." how can you be like God after you sin and you're sitting under a death penalty? I don't know if this is of the Lord or if I'm delusional, but this morning about 3:45 a.m., I got it. I got it! See, when God says in the day you eat that's the day you'll die, dying you'll die, the word, death, in the Hebrew literally means 'to separate, to be separated.' We know that physical death is a separation of the spirit/soul from the body, but something happened in the garden with Adam and Eve long before their spirit/soul was separated from their body. They died spiritually. They, as a body/soul/spirit being, were in the

presence of God in the garden, and all of a sudden when they sinned, on that very date, in the moment they sinned, they died spiritually, separated from God because they made a choice to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. When they ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the Bible says they became like God. It makes sense to me that they should have known what good and evil was before they sinned, so what's the Bible talking about? Here is what I believe, for the first time; I hold the right to change my mind. What makes sense to me is when they ate of that tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they made the choice to now, just like God, be able to determine for their own selves what is good in their lives and what is evil in their lives. Did that make sense to anybody? Up until this moment, they were trusting God to be God, and for Him to reveal what's good and evil. But now, it had been there all along, God had given them the choice to self-determine in their own lives, in other words, to be god of your own life, instead of having God as god of your life, not capital God, but little god. All of a sudden, you have Adam and Eve running around determining what's good for them, and what's bad for them based on what they want to do, rather than trusting what God says is good and bad.

Does that make sense? That's the only way I can understand how something can happen in America and one group of people and another group of people living in the same state, in the same county, in the same neighborhood, one see it as the right thing to do and the other see it as the wrong thing to do. How is that possible? How can we be so divided as a nation as we come to celebrate freedom in America? It is because God gave us the choice to self-determine ourselves, and we chose that instead of wanting to live under the sovereign rule and reign of God. What that actually is, is a death penalty. It actually causes us, as god of our own life, to make decisions that just further and further separate us from God who is holy, holy, holy. What that brings is a group of people living under a death penalty, who do not run to God, but they run away from God, and unless God sought them, they would never come to Him because it's just so much easier to blame somebody else for what's happening in your life rather than owning up to the fact that you blew it.

Have you ever noticed throughout the Bible that one of the biggest judgments of God is against people who say what He said is good is evil, and what He says is evil is good? We are living in that age. We're living in the age in which people no longer want to trust in what God says is right and wrong, and they want to trust in what they want to do as being right. What Scripture teaches is that is evidence of us being under the penalty of death. We're not right with God. That's what Jesus is teaching in John chapter 8. He's teaching to the Jewish people that He is the light of the world, "He who follows in Me will not walk in darkness, but have the light of life." He knew they were in the crowd, but they weren't really following Him, so He says hey guys, unless you believe I am He, you're going to die in your sin. a few of them began to believe, and He turned to those who believed and said, verily, verily, I say to you, unless you abide in My Word, you are not my disciples. If you abide in My Word, you are My disciples. The truth, you'll know it, and it will set you free. They said, hey, we don't have a need to be set free; we've never been a slave to anyone. Abraham's our father! We go to synagogue every week! Jesus said he who practices sin is a slave of sin. Can I just pause and say if this was true two thousand years ago, it is still true today. If you and I live a lifestyle of sin, we are a slave of sin, and Jesus said the slaves will not be in the house forever, only the son will be in the house forever. Then He says if the son set you free, you shall be free.

I'm saying this death penalty that we may be under this morning as a non-believer in Christ there's no hope. There is nothing I can do in and of myself to undo what I did wrong, and I'm under a sentence of death. I'm spiritually separated from God and there's no hope for me. One day I'm going to pay the penalty of dying in my sin. If I die in my sin without Jesus, I'll spend eternity separated from Him forever and ever. Even if I stay in hell forever, dying and going to hell forever won't begin to pay the debt I owe God. How dare I think I can live a moral life! How dare I think I can do an act of goodness! Paul was clear in the book of Romans that by the works of the law, no one could be justified for the law wasn't given to bring justification. The law was given to bring the knowledge of sin. Did you catch this? There's a book that's got every deed in it. We're hopeless. We're under the death penalty unless there could be somebody who could

do for us what we can't do for ourselves, and you know who that person is. In case you don't, His name is Jesus.

Let me tell you what the Bible says about Him. He was just like you and me, a real man, but unlike us in that He was sinless. He came and was obedient to the law to fulfill the law. As He perfectly obeyed God and lived His life under the law, He revealed He is holy, holy, holy. No sin. Because there was no sin in Him, there was an infinite amount of value in His life that He could go to a cross, and on a cross, lay that infinite life down. The value in the infinite life of Christ could pay, once for all, the sin debt of all human people of all time. Wow. Peter said, "He Himself bore our sins in His body on a tree that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His stripes, we are healed." Peter also said, "For Christ suffered once, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the Spirit." Paul would say, "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God and are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith." It would have been one thing if God would have taken all the pre-salvation sins of Ricky and put them on Christ, and then put the ones I've committed since then, and all the ones I'm going to commit on Christ, but when you take all my sins and then put Billy's, Paul's, Steve's, yours, and the sin of the whole world! What is the penalty? Separation from God! On the cross, Jesus cried out, "My God, my God! Why have You forsaken Me?" You know why, and I know why. Paul would write to the church of Colossians and say you who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having canceled the certificate of debt that was written against you, having forgiven all your trespasses. He set it aside, nailing it to a cross! As we live under a death penalty and choose for ourselves what's right or wrong, God is holding us accountable, and there is a certificate that's got all your indebtedness on it. Do you know what happened to that certificate? Do you know what happened to that list of page after page in my life? He wiped it clean, and He nailed it to a tree in the person of His Son Jesus Christ so that I could be forgiven, so that I could be set free, so that my eyes could be opened to the truth that I'm not the same guy I used to be. I am no longer under the death penalty

because I've been made right with God by faith in the shed blood of Jesus on the cross. Wow.

Can I just ask this question? Imagine our state found you guilty of a crime that was worthy of death and you committed it. We had you locked away on death row in one of our Kentucky prisons, and we just served you your last meal. There was no doubt you were guilty and you're going to lose your life. While that guard is taking you to the room where we're going to end your life, you come to that room, and through the window, you see a person already in the chair. Your first thought is that he's going to go first, they're going to make me watch, and I'm next. Then the warden meets you there and says, I just want you to know this man hasn't done what you did, but he loves you enough that he wants to trade places with you and wants us to judge him instead of you, so we're going to judge him for what you did. When he lays down his life, we're going to set you free. You watch him die. And as soon as he's legally dead, they take the shackles off your legs, the shackles off of your wrists, and they roll out the red carpet for you, and escort you out of the prison. When you walk out of that prison, there's a new car there that takes you to a new home. You've got a new job and a new life. How many of you might investigate and try to find out the name of the guy who died in your place? What if you had heard there had been a book written about him? Would you get the book? Would you just put it on your coffee table? Would you just put it on your desk, or would you actually open it up and read it? Would you read it just to read the book, or would you read it to get to know the man who died in your place and brought you a new life? In the next few days as people were getting to notice you, who were supposed to be dead, seemed to be alive, and begin to ask you what happened, how many of you would tell about what a great prisoner you were, or would you tell this amazing story about a guy who died in your place, and you've now done enough research that you know who he is and why he did it? How many of you would talk about him? I mean, what if nobody even asked you? after a few hours, wouldn't you just be bursting to tell someone that the reason you're not on death row anymore, the reason you're not the little god of your life anymore, the reason you're not calling the shots in your life, the reason you're not determining right from wrong and wrong from right is because of a man

who died in your place? Wouldn't you do that? Now it gets better. What if three days later, you hear the report that the man who died suddenly got back up and he's alive? How many of you would try to find him? How many of you would want to hang out with him? How many of you would invite him over to your house? How many of you would invite him into your life? You would, wouldn't you? Then why don't we read the book? Why don't we talk about Jesus? He died in your place to release you from the penalty of death. He brought us this brand new life! We are free...we are free from the penalty of sin. We have resurrection power living inside us.