

True Freedom

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[0 : 00] Our psyche as South Africans is the idea and the ideal of freedom, right? We know all about freedom. During apartheid, we know our horrible history where most of our country weren't free and many people fought and died so that people of color in our country could live lives of freedom.

As we see in Nelson Mandela's famous freedom. We have Freedom Day on the 27th of April where we celebrate our first democratic elections.

Even our national anthem ends with the idea of freedom. Let us live and strive for freedom in South Africa, our land. And so we know and we understand this idea of freedom.

And yet despite all that, despite all the efforts of people who fought for freedom, despite how much of a major thing it is in our country's history, we still struggle to feel free in our lives, don't we? To feel at ease and free of the things that burden us.

In fact, a few weeks ago our outreach team went on the streets of Plumstead and we did a survey with the people of Plumstead and one of the questions we asked was on a scale of one to ten, one being the least and ten being the most free, and the average number that we were given was around three and a half.

[1 : 35] So, most people don't feel very free. We live in a free country and yet something is still keeping us from feeling free.

It turns out that true freedom is harder to get than we thought it was. Well, as I said earlier, we're going to be unwrapping the gifts that God wants to give us over this month.

That's what we're doing. We've already looked at two and this morning we're unwrapping the third one. We're going to look at freedom and how God wants us to experience true freedom. But the first thing we learn about it, the first thing we'll see this morning is that true freedom that we actually yearn for is something we could never get for ourselves.

Hard as we might try. And this freedom is expressed by the prophet Isaiah foreseeing some 700 years before Jesus, what Jesus would bring when he came to earth.

And it's in Isaiah 9, Midian's defeat. You have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor.

[2 : 53] So, I just want us to spend some time in this verse this morning. Now, it was originally given to the nation of Israel. And so, Isaiah spoke in terms that they would understand and the freedom he was talking about.

But maybe we don't because I don't know if you celebrate the day of Midian's defeat on your calendar every year. The Jews certainly did. That was a big thing in their history. But of course, 2,000 years later, we're not so familiar with it.

So, let me tell you why Midian's defeat was so important. So, we can read about this story. We don't have to read it now. In Judges 6 to summarize it.

Basically, Israel were in a time when they were under just great oppression from a nation called Midian. This very powerful nation with a huge army. And what Midian was doing was to defeat Israel.

They were going and raiding their crops, all the farms. And the moment farmers would plant stuff and it would grow, a Midian raiding party would come and destroy it, set it on fire.

[3 : 57] So, over time, the Israelites just had no food. People were actually underground trying to farm crops in hidden places just to have some food. But they were really under Midian's boot.

And if you've got no food, you don't need to fight an army of a nation that has no food because that's the most effective way to keep them suppressed.

And that's what Midian was doing. It was very effective. Israel were being destroyed. Remember, Israel had this special covenant relationship with God.

They prayed to God. God heard them and he raised up for them a man called Gideon, keeping them oppressed. And so Gideon raised up this army. He got all the people from all the different tribes in the villages together.

And they raised up a bit of a ragtag army to fight the Midianites. But it wasn't nearly enough of what they needed. The Midianite army was huge. But what was really interesting, and we read it and I'll just read to you what happened.

[5 : 02] Once he raised up this army and he is like, God, look, look at my army that I raised up. I hope this is enough. This is God's response to him. The Lord said to Gideon, you have too many men.

I cannot deliver Midian into their hands or Israel would boast against me and say my own strength has saved me. So, he raised up the biggest army he could, which is nothing compared to the Midianites.

And God then said to him, no, no, no, that's too big. And then God whittled his army down from 30,000 men to 10,000 men. And then he still said, no, that's still too big.

And it eventually got down to 300 men. That's only 300 men Gideon was allowed to take. And then they went at night and they invaded the Midianite camp under God's instructions.

And the Midianites had like 100,000 men. And it was at night and they made a noise and they surrounded the camp with their 300 men. And the Midianites didn't know what was going on.

[6 : 02] They woke up in the middle of the night and they started fighting each other. And the whole Midianite army was shattered and defeated because of these 300 men that God chose.

Now, the point of this whole thing, and the reason I'm telling you, and the reason Isaiah mentions it, is that this is a freedom that Israel remembered that they got, but they didn't get themselves.

They knew it. God made it obvious. He wanted to make it obvious by making sure they couldn't say, hey, we did it with our big army. That's why he made their army so small. Okay. So that was the point of the Midianite episode, that this is a freedom God gives his people that they could never get themselves.

And Isaiah is saying the same thing about the freedom that Jesus brings us. He's saying that true freedom that God wants to give you is something you could never get yourself.

No matter how hard you tried, it's a type of freedom you could never get through your own efforts.

Because let's be honest, whenever we try to get freedom in our lives, it doesn't really work, does it?

[7 : 09] Do you remember when you finished school? I remember when I finished school. Some of you are close to finishing school, and I know what you're thinking. I thought it too.

Once I finish school, I'll be free. And all of these constraints and these burdens and these teachers and the exams will be gone, and I'll be able to do whatever I want, whenever I want, and I will be free.

That's what I thought until we entered the real world and we realized that what we thought would be freedom really isn't freedom, is it?

Now there is this illusion of freedom. We think we're going to get free versions of this. You've got, you know, people who get addicted to drugs and alcohol because they start taking drugs and drinking, over drinking, getting drunk, because that's a form of freedom for them.

They're seeking escape from their stresses and their pressures in life. And they want freedom from that, so they see this as a way to get freedom. But what happens? They become enslaved to those things.

[8 : 13] The very opposite thing happens. People, sexual freedom as another example. I mean, we live in an age which is post the sexual revolution that happened in the 60s, 70s, you know, where sexual liberation was the big thing.

Or people said we can break free of the bonds of marriage, the traditional sexual ethics. Break free. Live how we want. Be who we want. And it's just, of course, developed to you can be whatever gender you want.

You can be whoever you want. You can have sex with who you want to. That's sexual liberation. To escape, to be free from marriage constraints. But you know what it leads to?

And statistics show us it's just led to more burdens. Broken homes, more unwanted pregnancies, more health issues. And yet we still are tempted to listen to those voices that say, just do what you

want.

Come on, that's going to be the best thing, isn't it? You're going to have the best life if you can just do whatever you want and be who you want to be. Break away from the constraints and be your authentic self because then you will feel true freedom.

[9 : 24] We see this in movies. We see it in series. We watch these people who have found their true selves and now they're free and they're trying to tell everyone else, you can be free too. Just do what you want, live how you want.

And that's the voices. But the truth is, and there's a reason for that. And we find it in the Bible why that doesn't work. Why being free and living how you want doesn't actually give you freedom. You know why? Well, perhaps the thing preventing our true freedom is not something out there. Perhaps it's something in here.

You see, that's what's reminding us. We can be free and yet we do and we don't feel free because truth is there's something in here that is still constraining us. This is exactly what the apostle Peter says.

Now, Peter was one of Jesus' closest followers. And he writes about the voices of his day who were also saying, and this is 2000 years ago, who were also saying, do what you want.

[10 : 29] Live however you want to live. There were people saying exactly the same thing, promising this freedom. But listen to what he says about them to Peter 2 verse 19.

He says, They promise them freedom while they themselves are slaves of depravity. For people are slaves to whatever has mastered them.

Why our attempts to get freedom never work. Because even if we break free from all the outside masters, the Bible says there is still something else mastering us.

Our own disordered desires. We obey what we want to do, right? Even if those things that we want to do are not right. And even if our conscience tells us they're not right, we can't help but obey them. We've got a master inside us. Our own disordered desires. Now the Bible calls this master sin. And the Bible says, as we heard earlier before our confession, all people have this master by nature.

[11 : 42] We have a sinful nature. We have a nature where we have this master in us that makes us do and say and think things that we know are wrong. Right? Think that you know you shouldn't click.

Or mistreating other people. Or slandering them behind their back. Or saying nasty things about them. Or thinking nasty things about them. You know, that's our master. And it's in all of us. None of us can deny that we've done those things. And so that's why no matter how free our society might be, no matter how much people in the past have fought for freedom, we are still all, as Isaiah says, under a yoke of slavery.

That is the bar across our shoulders that Isaiah speaks about. It's the sin inside us. Not something outside us. But it's what's inside us which is keeping us from being free.

Now you might disagree. You might say, no, I know that that's what you Christians believe, but I believe that everybody is born good. Sort of by nature we're good people.

[12 : 52] But you know what? The Bible has actually given us a very easy way to prove that this idea that we're all sinners is true. And it's called the law of God.

Take, for example, the law God gave to Moses at Sinai, the Ten Commandments. You may have noticed we've got the Ten Commandments up on our wall. Some people have often asked me about why do we have the Ten Commandments up on our wall as a church.

It gives the wrong impression. It makes it seem that, you know, you've got a whole lot of list of rules that you've got to keep. And that's what being a Christian is about. But that's not why, primarily, we have the Ten Commandments on our wall.

The Ten Commandments, God gave us his law not as a way to make us righteous. God gave us his law as a mirror to show us who we really are. It's a diagnostic tool.

That's why we have it up on our wall. So when we look at it, we realize there's something wrong inside us. You see, the law of God is meant to make us aware that there's something wrong and make us aware of our sin when we read it.

[13 : 57] I mean, when we look at those laws, the Ten Commandments, nobody would disagree that they are really good. They agree that those are good laws. If every society and every person kept just those ten laws, we wouldn't need any other laws.

Society would be great. This world would be a great place to live if people could just simply keep those ten laws. If you still disagree with me, try, here's a challenge, try for a week from now till next Sunday to keep those ten laws.

See how you do. I promise you, you will fail. You won't. Keep them for a week, a day, let alone a week. Which proves to us, God's law proves to us, none of us are really free.

Me, we're all under a yoke and it's not something outside there, but it's something in here. In ourselves. That is keeping us from being free. It is sin and that sin is what keeps real freedom from us.

As Jesus said, we heard it earlier in John chapter 8. All who sin are slaves to sin.

[15:05] That's what he said. Everyone who sins is a slave to sin. It proves that we have a slave master. But Christmas, now this is why Christmas is such good news.

And saying, I know you are under slavery. I know you are bound to this power. And I know you can't free yourself from it. No matter how good you try to be, no matter what disciplines you put in your life.

I know that you can't free yourself from it. And that is why I have come to free you from it. To free you from something you cannot free yourself. And that is the freedom that Jesus brings to us.

If you want to know why freedom is a gift of Christmas, it's because of this. It's because Jesus comes to free us from the thing that we cannot free ourselves from. So, once in the synagogue, Jesus quoted from Isaiah.

And he said this about himself. And it caused quite a stir. I'm going to read it to you from Luke 4, verse 18. Jesus said, The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.

[16:16] The sight for the blind to set the oppressed free. And that caused quite a stir there in the synagogue and the village that he said it.

Because, remember, they were under Roman rule at the time. And so, Jesus said, He is coming to liberate us, finally. He is the new Gideon.

He is going to conquer our enemies. But actually, as we read on, what we discovered Jesus meant was that to truly free us. He had come to free us of this deeper slavery we are all under.

And if that is not broken, we can't be. Not to take over the government as people thought he was going to. Because, you remember the Palm Sunday, we celebrate his entry into Jerusalem.

People let out palm branches. And a lot of them, most of them thought he is coming to take over. He is coming to free us from our physical enemies.

[17:17] And they were very surprised when instead he went to the cross. Not to the castle to rule. He went to the cross. Why did he do that? Well, because what he did there was something that no one else in history could ever have done.

For the sins of others. And absorb on himself the consequence of and the slavery of other people's sins. That's why what happened on the cross is so profound.

And it's unique in history. So that, because of that, when a person comes, Paul puts it this way in Romans 6.

Listen to what happens. And he's talking now about Christians who have come to believe in Jesus. He says, See what he says.

When a person comes to believe in Jesus, the old self is crucified with him. They, the Savior, they die on the cross there with him. They die there too.

[18:35] And when they do, sin's power over them is broken. And from that moment on, they start to live a new life. Where their sin and their desires no longer rule over them because there is a, a nuddle there.

But they're no longer bound to obey it like they once did. That's what happens when a person comes to believe in Jesus because of what he did on the cross. So I was trying to think of a way to illustrate this point this week.

And there was a, there was a packet in a tree outside in our parking lot. I don't know if you, if you saw it for the last few weeks. It had been bugging me.

Every time I came to work in the morning, there was this packet and it had been caught at the top of the tree. And it was blowing in the wind. It was there for a few weeks. And every time I came and I looked at it, it was more sort of bound up in the tree.

And I thought, you know, maybe the wind will free it the first few times. But then I realized the wind just made it worse. And so this week I couldn't stand it anymore.

[19 : 42] So Dylan and I got the ladder and I climbed up and I got up there. And the only way I tried to pull the packet, it was so bound up in the twigs that the only way to free it was to break the branch right off.

And then once I'd broken it off, I could come down the ladder and then untangle it from the twig that it was in. Now, why am I telling you about a packet in a tree?

Because I got back to my office and I thought, there's my illustration, actually. Because that, that is what God does for Christians. Because we're tangled up in sin.

And the more we go in life, the more and more tangled up we get. And the less we can, we can possibly free ourselves. And we need outside intervention to come and break the thing that's holding us.

And that's exactly what Isaiah says God does. He breaks, he shatters. In Jesus, God has, has shattered the thing that we could not escape from.

[20 : 46] That we were just getting more and more and more tangled up in. God breaks sin's hold on people. And then once he breaks that hold. Now, when I broke that packet off, it still had branches and leaves in it.

Okay. Once he breaks his hold on us, we still have temptations. We still have the process of untangling us. Once he's broken that power, he can slowly but surely untangle that and untangle sin's effects in our lives.

And that is true freedom. When God does that for you. That is freedom inside. That is spiritual freedom. That we need this freedom before we can enjoy any other freedom in this world.

Because be assured, Jesus is going to come back a second time. And he's going to break this world free from all that constrains us from being able to live the lives that God intended us to live.

But he came the first time to break us free from the first and primary thing that keeps us bound, which is our sin. And it's only because he's done that that he can come a second time to this inner freedom that we need.

[22 : 00] I want to tell you the story of Carol. True story. I saw her testimony on the Internet. She was a woman who, from her teenage years, got involved in drugs, heroin.

And she became an addict very quickly and lived a lifestyle where she just lived for the next fix. And began selling drugs as well to make money so she could buy the drugs that she needed.

And she got caught. And she got 11 years in prison. But when she was in prison, she was sharing a cell with a Christian.

And this Christian told her about Jesus. And she asked for a Bible because prisoners were allowed to have believers and believe in him. And she changed her life there in prison.

She said, when I believed in him, it's as if a weight that was weighing me down for my whole life suddenly came off.

[23 : 09] Which is interesting. Because Carol, when she came to believe in Jesus, finally felt the freedom that she'd been seeking all her life in other things. And what was interesting is that she felt external freedom, but she found this true internal freedom that Jesus brings.

And that is the freedom that Jesus offers you and me. And that is the freedom that Jesus gives you and me. Because your greatest burden in your life is not your work stresses or your boss or your financial worries.

Your greatest burden is your sin against your God. And that is what Jesus came at Christmas to free you from. So, before I finish, I just want to tell you how to get this freedom if you don't yet have it.

The question is, well, how do I get that? Well, there are two things Jesus says you need to have this freedom. The first is truth. In John chapter 8, verse 32, Jesus says this.

You will know the truth and the truth will set you free. The truth will set you free. You see, you need to know truth before you can be set free because you need to know who Jesus is.

[24 : 32] You need to know the truth about who he really is so that you can believe in him. And that is, by the way, what we're here as a church to do. That is our entire reason for existing is to help you to know the truth about Jesus.

That's why we run a course multiple occasions throughout the year called Discover Jesus. We're running our next one in February. If you're interested, no matter who you are, you don't have to be a

Christian. In fact, it's meant for non-Christians to come and learn who Jesus is, to investigate the facts.

If you're interested in the truth about Jesus, then you can look at our Connect app and sign up and we'll get hold of you. But do, if you haven't investigated Jesus, look into him because it's the truth about him that he says will set you free.

And so test that claim. But that's to be free. To give up your own efforts to be free. I want to read to you something that Jesus said in Matthew 11.

He said, Come to me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

[25 : 51] Now, what's really interesting, did you notice there, he said that to have this rest and this freedom, you need to take his yoke. It's the same language that Isaiah used of the thing that God breaks us free from the yoke.

But Jesus says to do that, you need to take on my yoke. So he says he's come to break us free of the yoke, but that requires that we take up another.

In other words, freedom does not mean doing whatever you want. Freedom does not actually mean, in the Bible's language, freedom is not living under your own rule, but freedom comes from living under his rule.

Someone put it this way, Jesus doesn't set us free to do whatever we want to do. He sets us free to do what we ought to do. Because this is true freedom.

True freedom is the ability to obey God and choose his will for your life. That is true freedom. And if you're not a Christian, you don't have that.

[27 : 02] Even if you think you do, you don't. You can't choose that. You may think that you are free to do what you want to do and live how you want to live. Maybe you are, but you're not free to want what you should want.

You're not spiritually free. You're still bound inside. And so come to Jesus. Find the truth. Lay aside your own efforts to be free and follow him.

Take up his yoke, which will give you rest for your souls. But I want to speak to you if you are a Christian this morning and you have trusted in him. You need to know from this that you have a freedom that you might not realize you have.

Because Jesus died, he broke sin's power over you. Think about that. Think about what that means for your life and the sins you struggle with.

You don't have to obey your sin anymore. Because he died for you. Because he broke, he snapped, he shattered that yoke when he died.

[28 : 08] Those temptations that you have that you struggle with, those repeated patterns, you can change and you can stop letting them rule all because of Christmas.

All because of what God sent us, his son who came to break sin's power over his people so that we can begin to experience the true freedom our souls long for now and look forward to a world that will be free of all evil and sin one day.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Oh Lord, we worship and thank you for the gifts that you gave us at Christmas.

That you are a God who loves us even though we are fallen and sinful, that you have made a way to save us and you have sent your son to break sin's power over us so that we can live new lives. I pray, Lord, for anybody here this morning who has not yet experienced that freedom. I pray that you will enter in, that you will help them to know the truth about Jesus and help them to unwrap this gift that you have given them, this gift of true freedom.

[29 : 23] And Lord, to learn to say no to the sins that you've broken us free from. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.