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FREE INDEED! Michael B. Beaugh  
Exodus 20:1-3; John 8:31-36 July 5, 2009  
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Every Fourth of July, this nation explodes. We thrill to the sounds of patriotic music as bombs are bursting in the air. It is our way of celebrating the events that brought us independence as a nation. The American Revolution that culminated in the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776 rested on the notion that we on this continent had the right to be free from the control of any another nation. We have zealously guarded that freedom. We declare to the world and remind ourselves that we are the freest nation on earth. Not perfect, but our Declaration of Independence says "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."

Since we are in a house of worship this morning, I want to point out two things.

**First, the framers of the Declaration of Independence believed that the right to freedom comes from God.** They had good reason for believing that. The Bible reveals that God is a Liberator. God created us for freedom. God wants us to be free.

All of us are familiar with Ten Commandments that God gives Moses in Exodus 20. Look at how God justifies giving the laws that are to govern His people Israel. "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, *out of the house of slavery.*"

The enslavement of the Israelites began when Jacob and his 12 sons and their families moved to Egypt to escape a devastating famine in their land. At first, the Egyptians welcomed them. Then the Pharaoh had a change of heart. He saw these foreigners as a labor pool. They were pressed into slavery. For 400 years, they made bricks for the pharaohs' projects, their temples and palaces and government buildings. For 400 years they were not free. They had no rights. They could not travel or go wherever they wanted to go. They could not find a new job or move to another town. They did what they were told to do. For 400 years. Every child born during that time knew he or she would spend a whole lifetime as a slave, helping others get rich while barely existing.

Finally, it says in Exodus 2, God heard the cries of these slaves. They were crying for help. God remembered the promise made to Jacob and his 12 sons that God would make of them a great nation and give them their own land. So God recruited a liberator, a man named Moses and Moses led maybe as many as 2 million of his people to freedom. They walked right out of

Egypt, actually running for their lives from Pharaoh's army. And they were free.

But the strangest thing happened. As they headed east and north to the land God was to give them, they watched the bright lights of the Egyptian cities disappearing behind them. Life in the wilderness was tough. They decided slavery might be better than living in the desert where there were no Big Macs and no cell phone reception. They begged Moses to turn around and go back. They wanted to trade in their freedom for the certainty of a job even if it was a pretty lousy existence.

But you know what Moses said? He said, "No way. We're not going back. That is no way to live. It is no way to live because God wants you to be a free people. And God has even better things in store for you."

The Declaration of Independence calls freedom an "unalienable right" endowed on us by our Creator. **You know what I fear? That if we get rid of God as the foundation of our nation, we will turn back.** If we forget that God is the author of freedom, we might decide to trade in our freedom for the kind of certainty that slavery provides. If we get rid of God, how will we know when we have crossed the line, when we have gone too far? Here is what I fear. Not that we might become slaves of another nation, but that we might become slaves of our own desires. Haven't we seen that in our ongoing financial downturn? Haven't we seen that in those who have been slaves to their own greed and have brought suffering on many others?

Isn't it strange that we the freest so easily chain ourselves to mountains of debt and jobs we don't like to have the things we don't really need? Could it be that the financial downturn is a message from God? This is no way to live. Our willing slavery to things threatens our very existence.

**And so here is the second thing of note.**

The freedom God made us for goes far deeper than national independence. It goes far deeper than the right to elect our own officials. It goes far deeper even than the freedom to worship as you choose.

**The ultimate freedom God made us for is what Jesus in John 8 calls freedom from slavery to sin.** Apart from this freedom, there is no freedom that matters or lasts.

You may think that extreme, exaggerated, but it seems to me that we have ample historical proof. You may have proof in your own life. When slaves to sin, there is no freedom. There is only chaos, grief, despair, and death. Until we deal with the sin and repent of it, there is no freedom.

Jesus tells us in John 8, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples." Okay, so there is a mark of discipleship. That is our mission to

make and grow disciples of Jesus Christ. Then Jesus goes on. "And you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." Another word for "disciple" is freedom fighter. Our mission is to make and to grow freedom fighters.

Now in John 8, some of those listening to Jesus took exception to his implication. They took his words personally. They resented the implication that they were slaves. In a moment of historical amnesia, they claimed that they had never been slaves to anyone.

Jesus could have asked them about Exodus and their 400 year stint in Egypt, but instead he went for the heart of the matter. "Everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin." There is no freedom in sin. There is no escaping it. There is no way to get rid of it. It takes control and won't let go. And it is the very thing that brings an end to freedom.

In a masterful use of metaphor, Jesus says in verse 36 that the only way to quit being a slave in a household is to be set free by the Son. The same is true of sin. You can't just walk out on sin. The only one who can do that is the Son, in this case, the Son of God, Jesus himself.

Now, are you ready for a shock?

**The freedom that the Son gives us is the freedom to love your neighbor as yourself.** That's not possible to do so long as we are slaves to sin. Free from slavery to sin, we are able to exercise the ultimate freedom, a divine freedom, the freedom to love others as God first loved us.

In Galatians 5, the Apostle Paul must have shocked the first Christians. Many of them no doubt were slaves in a literal sense. He says, "For freedom, Christ has set us free." Then he tells them in verse 13, "Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become *slaves to one another.*"

In one of his Nooma videos, Rob Bell recalls seeing bumper stickers that say "God bless America." He says God already has blessed America. He reminds us that we represent 6% of the world's population and yet consume 40% of the world's resources. If you own a car, you are among the 8% of people in the world who own cars. The other 92% see you driving and they know you are rich beyond their wildest dreams. We take clean water for granted and as a right. One billion people never have clean water to drink. We eat beyond what is healthy for us, while 800,000,000 people will not eat a single meal today. 300,000,000 of those are children. Every second, someone dies from starvation. The amount of money it would take to feed every person for a year is equivalent to the amount we spend on ice cream each year. God has blessed America.

According to the Bible there is only one reason God promised to bless Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. There is only one reason God blesses us. So we

can become a blessing to others. So people will come to see in us the very nature and spirit and essence of God. So people will turn their hearts to God and give glory to God through His Son Jesus Christ.

The Bible ties freedom to giving. Being freed by Christ, we are empowered to give. By giving, we lead others to their own freedom in Christ.

**Here are my final thoughts this morning.**

Every time we baptize someone in the name of Jesus Christ, we ought to shoot off fireworks.

Do you realize how radical baptism is? It is a revolutionary action. It is like saying King George III is no longer our sovereign. We refuse to pay him taxes. Baptism identifies us as belonging to only one Lord, one master, one sovereign. It marks us as citizens of a different kingdom with different values. We march in a different army. We listen to only one commander in the field. We are not only his children, but also his soldiers, soldiers whose weapons are truth and compassion, faith and forgiveness. We are dangerous because we subvert the systems of power simply by refusing to play along.

Every time we divide and share the bread and the cup at the Lord's Table, we ought to shoot off fireworks.

We come to this table dragging the dead weight of our sins. We come to eat and drink the life of the Son who sets us free. It works like Popeye's spinach. We explode with spiritual strength. We shed the shackles of self-indulgent sin, and go away with new agendas, with a new game plan. We go out into the world as a danger to those who want to control us, who want to take advantage of us, who want to use us for their own purposes. We will not go quietly into the night. We will not give in. We are on a mission. It is a mission that has both earthly and eternal consequences. We will not stand down or turn back. In freedom, we will love our neighbor no matter the cost. We will go and we will give and we will sing the freedom songs that inspire our hearts and give glory to God.

Every time someone repents and escapes the bondage of some enslaving sin, we ought to shoot off fireworks. Every time someone sacrifices what they have to reach out a helping hand to those who do not have, we ought to shoot off fireworks.

All of these are Declarations of Freedom. They are victories over an enslavement that reaches to the depths of our souls. They are evidence that God has stormed the citadels of hell. God has broken the chains of slavery. They are signs that God has set us free.

"If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed."