

## Independence Day John 8:34-36, Romans 8:2

adapted from a sermon by Stephen Colaw @ SermonCentral.Com

Next Thursday, we celebrate our nation's 235<sup>th</sup> birthday. It was a little over two and a quarter centuries ago that the United States was born. A nation based on the revolutionary ideals of individual liberty and responsibility along with freedom of religion in a self-governing nation.

So, it is very appropriate for Independence Day to follow after Memorial Day, and for us in Bedford – D-Day, because the celebration of our nation's birthday is really a celebration of freedom. We must always remember that this precious gift of freedom we enjoy was had at a price which others paid. We must always remember that freedom isn't free. Freedom is very expensive. *We live in the land of the free, because of the brave!*

This ideal of national and individual freedom was one that our founding fathers believed valuable enough to risk everything on. They risked their fortunes, their families, their reputations, and their honor; paying with their very blood and the blood of their children for these freedoms we now enjoy. Today as we worship in security and comfort, we do so because thousands of young men and women have through the years given their lives and shed their blood on this and on foreign soil. They died in forsaken places with names not remembered so that we could continue to experience the joy and responsibility of freedom. In a letter to William Smith dated November 13, 1787, Thomas Jefferson wrote, "*the tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots & tyrants*" No, freedom is not free. The price is always paid in blood.

But, the blood spilled by American soldiers throughout our history is not the first time blood was spilled for our freedom. 2,000 years ago one man's blood was spilled upon the ground so that we could all experience freedom. As God's son, Jesus came into our world in order to seek and save us and give us freedom from a host of human maladies.

Jesus said to those who had believed in him,  
'If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples;  
and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free....  
if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.

John 8:31-36

This week we celebrate our independence from tyranny and bondage to an oppressive government, an independence won over 200 years ago. But should we not, daily, celebrate our independence from the tyranny and bondage of guilt, sin, fear, and death; an independence won over 2,000 years ago? Should we not celebrate and discover the depths of our personal independence gifted us by Jesus Christ?

If you want to be truly free, free from all that has tied your life down and buried you under a mountainous weight of fear and guilt, then this message is for you. Today we'll explore just three of the ways that Jesus sets us free if we will only have the faith to believe him and believe in him.

### **First we have Freedom from Guilt; our past can't haunt us**

Have you been dragging your past around? You know what I mean.

- You've done things in the past that have hurt others and have hurt you.
- You've failed miserably in the past.
- You've failed at marriage.
- You've failed at parenting.
- You've failed financially because of your own irresponsibility.
- You've failed at religion – it's just too hard to keep all those rules.
- Your past sins are an anchor that keep you earthbound when your heart longs to be more, to reach to the sky.

How would you like to be free from that guilt?

The key action by God that accomplishes this **is FORGIVENESS**

In a single victorious stroke of Life, all three burdens in our life --sin, guilt, death--are gone, the gift of our Master, Jesus Christ. Thank God! Here's how Romans describes God's act of forgiveness

since all have sinned  
and fall short of the glory of God;  
we are now justified by God's grace as a gift,  
through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,  
Romans 3:23-24

Because of the work Jesus did in winning your freedom, you don't have to carry your guilt around with you. You can release it and be free.

In the movie "The Mission" the story is told of Captain Rodrigo Mendoza. Mendoza was a slave trader in the mid 1700's. Mendoza and his men would enter the jungles of Brazil and Ecuador to raid the Indian villages and take prisoners to sell as slaves. He even went so far as to raid the Catholic missions to take prisoners from the Indians that were there.

In a duel over a woman, Captain Mendoza kills his own brother and falls into a remorse-filled depression, believing God cannot forgive him. However, one of the

priests from the mission San Carlos offers Mendoza a chance to seek penance. He must make the perilous journey of returning to the very same Indians that he had formerly enslaved. He must climb the falls while dragging his armor behind him to meet with them to ask forgiveness. Watch this scene from the movie as Captain Mendoza carries his guilt with him, seeking forgiveness.

[Insert Video Clip Here]



Just as Rodrigo Mendoza found forgiveness at the hands of those he had violated, so we too find forgiveness in the nail scarred hands of the one we have violated and betrayed. Just as the people he had sinned against cut his guilt away from him and set him free with forgiveness, so the God we have sinned against cuts our guilt away and sets us free with the forgiveness he offers in his Son, Jesus Christ.

Wouldn't it be nice to know that you don't have to drag your past around with you? Wouldn't forgiveness be a breath of fresh air? You can have that forgiveness. Jesus, the Son, offers it to us. When we come to him and let him set us free, we are FREE INDEED! ... Free from guilt.

**But there is another freedom that he offers to us: Freedom from Consequence**  
Because Christ died in our place, our past can't determine our future.

We know that when the law is broken there will be consequences. Sometimes we escape the legal consequences of our misdeeds, but there are still consequences.

The guilt we just talked about is a consequence of our sin. And there are others as well. But there is one ultimate consequence that, no matter how hard our heart and how seared our conscience we must all face. **The ultimate consequence for sin is that of death.** Not physical death, but eternal spiritual death.

The Bible teaches that one day we will all face God's judgment of our life. But in a surprising twist of God's grace, we can either face that judgment unforgiven or already having been completely forgiven of all the consequences of our sin. This is how Romans describes God's method for setting us free from the consequences of our sin.

For the wages of sin is death,  
but the gift of God is eternal life  
in Christ Jesus our Lord.  
Romans 6:23

Eternal spiritual death is a severe consequence; according to scripture this ultimate consequence for our sin is one that we cannot pay. But we do not have to. The penalty for our sin has already been paid. If we would receive it as a gift, our sinful record can be fully wiped clean, after which God sees us as no longer guilty. The legal term for what has been accomplished for us by Jesus Christ is **VICARIOUS ATONEMENT**

“**Vicarious**” literally means: done by one person as a substitute for another. In baseball, a pinch hitter goes to bat for another player who for some reason cannot hit the ball himself. “**Atonement**” means to make reparation for one’s sin. By his act of vicarious atonement, Jesus paid the penalty for our sin.

Jesus Christ took our place and personally dealt with the consequences for our sin. It’s not that the ultimate consequences won’t be required, it’s that he has already paid it for you. This is how the prophet Isaiah describes Jesus’ substitution of himself for us on the cross.

Surely he has borne our infirmities  
and carried our diseases ...  
he was wounded for our transgressions,  
crushed for our iniquities;  
upon him was the punishment that made us whole,  
and by his bruises we are healed.  
Isaiah 53:4-5

In John 19 we read the story of the death of Jesus Christ. At the very end, just before he died, Jesus called out “***It is finished.***” At least that is how we translate what he said in most Bibles today. But the Greek word translated “finished” is actually a commercial word that means, “*It is paid, the debt is paid in full!*” As Jesus hung on that cross, he was paying our debt in full; thus setting us free from the ultimate consequence of our sin.

Now don’t misunderstand what Jesus did for you and me. In our life, there are still consequences for our sin. When we choose to speed or run that red light, we still get the ticket and we still have to pay. When we drive drunk, or stoned, or texting, we may not only get killed but other people might also lose their life as a consequence of our sin. When we cheat on our taxes there are still penalties. When we defile our marriage vows and commit adultery, the trust in our relationship is still broken; the marriage may still come to an end.

Those are the **temporal consequences** of our sin. That is the nature of life. You cannot set something into motion and expect that there will be no repercussions from it. But when Jesus sets us free, he frees us from the **ultimate consequence**. We do

not have to pay God for our sins. We are made right with him. Eternal death and eternal separation from God are consequences that we won't have to face because Jesus has already faced them for us ... that is if we have accepted his gift of forgiveness; if Jesus has set us free.

In Jesus Christ we have freedom.

Freedom from guilt: We have been forgiven, our past cannot haunt us.

Freedom from the ultimate consequence of our sin: Christ paid our debt, our sin cannot condemn us.

**Finally Christ gives us Freedom from ACCUSATION:** We no longer have to live in fear

There is therefore now **no condemnation** for those who are in Christ Jesus.  
**For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free** from the law of sin and of death.  
Romans 8:1-2

How nice is it to not have to run and hide? How nice is it to not have to worry about what someone else will find out about you? How nice would it be to be free from all accusations and the fear that your sins are going to be discovered? That would certainly be a freeing experience.

How would it feel to be free from all accusation? Would you have a sense of relief? Would you have a sense of release? Would you feel as though a weight had been lifted from your shoulders? Would you feel free? How would you feel to know that there was no accusation, no condemnation, that could be brought against you?

How is it that Jesus even sets us free from accusation? It is because, when we accept God's gift of forgiveness, provided to us by his son Jesus Christ, God's indwelling Holy Spirit then rebirths us as His child... A new being, **totally blameless** before God. No one can bring a charge against us that hasn't already been paid by Jesus, and washed away by the Holy Spirit. **God sees us as Holy and Blameless** (Colossians 1:22)

Thus, We can stand before God and our fellow man without fear accusation. Now, being free of accusation does not mean that no accusation will come. We will certainly face accusations of all sorts in this life. Many are well deserved because of what we have done in our past. People have seen our sins and our mistakes and they want to know why we now claim to be different. This shouldn't threaten us. It should be an opportunity to share with them the transformation that Jesus brings to our lives.

But we need not fear accusation. We are now free of guilt. We are no longer subject to blame. The account has been laid to rest and we can live without fear of a hidden past being brought to light. It has already been brought to light and dealt with.

Let me try, by way of a story, to illustrate how forgiveness can set us free from the penalty, consequence and accusation of our sins.

There once was a boy named Billy. One day, upon finding his grandfather's sling shot, he asked his grandfather if he would teach him how to shoot it.

So grandfather took him into the back woods and began to teach the boy. Grandfather then told Billy to go and practice for a while; *but never to shoot at anything he didn't want to hit.* Billy kept practicing alone, and kept missing everything he shot at.

However, on his way back to the house, Billy saw his grandfather's duck and decided to try his aim with the sling shot once more. HE carefully took aim and shot at the duck. The rock hit his mark! The duck fell over dead!

Filled with guilt, Billy took the duck, buried it in the ground. As he looked up he saw his sister, Sally standing there watching him attempting to hide his deeds. Sally and Billy went back into their grandparents' house. As they did so, Billy told Sally not to say anything. Sally said, sure, no problem.

The kids' grandfather told Sally to go into the kitchen and help her grandmother wash the dishes. Sally said, "*Billy is the best dish washer in the family, he would love to wash the dishes. Remember the duck she whispered to him.*" Billy washed the dishes that night.

The next day Billy's grandfather said, "Billy, let's go fishing. Sally, your grandmother needs your help around the house, so stay here and help her out."

Sally responded, "*Billy hates fishing but loves housework. Isn't that right Billy?*" Billy stayed at home that day while Sally went fishing.

This went on for several days. Sally blackmailed Billy into every unpleasant chore around the farm and out of every enjoyable opportunity.

Finally Billy had had enough and he decided to confess his crime. Much to his surprise, his grandfather said, "*I know you killed the duck. I saw you through the window. I also saw your sister standing there watching you. I forgave you when it happened because I love you. I just wanted to know how long you would let yourself be your sisters slave.*"

You see, when we don't turn to Jesus, confessing our sins and allowing him to cleanse us, we are slaves to our past and to our guilt and we are susceptible to accusation. But once we come clean, we are free from accusation. We are no longer a slave.

When we come to Jesus, the Son of God and let the Son set us free,  
we are FREE INDEED.  
Free from guilt.  
Free from the ultimate consequence of our sinful lives.  
Free from accusation.

This week we celebrate the birth of our free nation. More than that, we have already commemorated the sacrifice necessary to give us the freedom we so deeply love. But there is a greater freedom than that of personal or political freedom. There is a freedom we can have in Jesus Christ if we will place our trust in him, if we will accept his offer of forgiveness.

Jesus bled and died; he gave his life, so that you and I could be free. If you have not accepted his sacrifice for yourself and the freedom it brings, will you do so today?