Free in Christ – Galatians 5:1-15

If you were with us last week, you'll know that we spent our time reviewing Psalm 19. And in doing so, we were reminded of some basic beliefs associated with being a true Christian. First, and foremost - God is real and He is the creator of all things, including mankind. Every genuine believer must confess that God is the only true God and as part of this confession, must strive to put Him first, above all other things in life. We also learned how God is continually revealing Himself to us; through creation, through His powerful Word, which includes the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and through the Holy Spirit which permanently resides with each believer. King David did a wonderful job in Psalm 19 of pointing out just how impressive God truly is. This morning we are going to build upon these basic and paramount beliefs and look at what it means to live free because of Jesus.

In a couple of days, we will celebrate July 4th, which is a big day for America. It's the day set aside to acknowledge and celebrate this country's freedom from British rule. As I was thinking about this annual celebration with the cookouts, dedicated events, fireworks, all the red, white, and blue decorations, it caused me to pause and think about what this truly means for the Christian. You see, the founding fathers of this great nation wanted to experience liberty on a more personal level, and they hoped this could be achieved through a government which based its decisions on the majority consent of its citizens. They also hoped that the citizens of this great nation would base those decisions on guidance from our Creator. Found in the Declaration of Independence are these words:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, 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.

Unfortunately, what began as a cry for freedom from British aristocracy on a national level, has turned into a modern, and extremely liberal cry for personal freedom. As a result, our nation is now on a path which seems destined to dismiss and eradicate the belief that God, our Creator, is the author of true freedom. In the meantime, national freedoms are being cast aside in favor of the pursuit of personal happiness. As your friend and as your pastor, I feel I must warn you against the dangers behind such a pursuit. If we desire personal happiness over the morality of God, then we can only look in the mirror and find the heart of a person not much different than that of Adam and Eve when they chose to rebel against their Creator. The result of that rebellious choice is why we find ourselves and our nation in the situation we are currently in. **Sin is IN and God is on the way OUT!**

But there is hope! Is there anything fundamentally wrong with happiness? NO. In fact, the Bible speaks of happiness, but God's Word stands in direct contradiction to the way in

which our culture defines happiness. What exists today is the pursuit of temporary happiness and is often accomplished at the expense of others and outside of God's way. King Solomon warns us of this in Ecclesiastes. In his book, he teaches that anything accomplished by man on his own, is vain. He says in Ecclesiastes 1:2 and at the end in 12:8 that, *"All is vanity."* Is there anything wrong with thinking that true freedom brings happiness or that happiness means one is free? Again, the answer is NO. But again, this selfish belief stands outside of God's way and will only lead down a path of eternal discomfort.

So, the question we need to answer this morning is this: If freedom as we know it is quickly eroding, what can we do? Are we to issue our own cries for freedom? Afterall, crying out for freedom is nothing new and can even be seen in Paul's writing to the Galatians. Look with me in chapter 5 of Galatians. Let's read verses 1-15. **Read Galatians 5:1-15.** We see in verse one that the cry for freedom cuts right to the heart of the hearer.

Where is it that our freedom can be found? That's right, in Jesus Christ! It is Jesus Himself who frees us. Paul understood this better than most. This concept of being free in Christ can be found throughout Paul's writings. Places such as Romans 6 and 8, Ephesians 4, 1 Corinthians 7, 2 Corinthians 5, as well as throughout his letter to the Galatians. In our text here, Paul explains what being free in Christ truly is. He lists some things that placing our faith in Christ frees us from in verses 1-4.

In verse 1, he says, "stand firm". What are we standing firm in? **Our faith.** Why is this important? Genuine Christian freedom is experienced only through justification by faith and not through observance of the law. A better way to say that is just how Paul says it in verse 4: *"You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen from grace."* Paul wants everyone to know that your right standing with God, your full acceptance by God, only comes through your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. And it's not your works that accomplish this, but the work of Jesus on the cross coupled with the grace of God that delivers you from remaining bound in your sin. That's what all the talk about circumcision is about. Circumcision represented taking the old-testament covenant law and believing that following them along with faith in Jesus would make one "right" with God. Or at least that's what was being taught in Galatia. Paul is simply stating to the Galatians and to us that this is not true. Because of Christ, we are free from sin and from the bounds of the laws of the old covenant.

To sum it up, Paul teaches us, that living the Christian life and remaining righteous in the eyes of God can only be accomplished through receiving God's grace through the blood of Jesus Christ. It's a reminder of what Paul had previously said to the Galatians back in chapter 2. **Read Galatians 2:20-21.** *"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who lives, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in*

the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose." It is Christ and Him alone where we find God's grace and the gift of salvation.

In verses 1-4, Paul lets us know that Jesus frees us from sin, He frees us from the law, He frees us from constantly trying to earn God's favor, and He frees us from the curse of spiritual death. <u>Can you confidently say those things about yourself this morning</u>? Have you put your faith in Jesus and the things He frees you from, or are you continuing to put your faith in the lies of man?

Paul says something in verse 5 that is critical to understanding Christian freedom. He says, "for through the Spirit." When we accept Jesus and receive God's grace, we receive the additional gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit changes us. The old self is removed. The Holy Spirit turns a cold heart into a warm heart. The Holy Spirit puts new desires into our mind and into our hearts. The Holy Spirit is the one who begins the sanctifying work of our salvation in us. It is then, and only then that we become born again. A new person. An adopted son or daughter of God. Christian freedom means we get to enjoy what we were made for; we get to embrace who we were made to be; we get to worship God in Christ through the Spirit! Look at that, Christian freedom brings with it true happiness, or as the Bible correctly refers, JOY!

While there are other things we could discuss from this passage, let's look at one final consideration. Look at verse 13. Paul lets us know; true freedom doesn't come through putting self-first. Freedom comes when we serve one another. It is our faith that frees us to follow the words of Christ, as repeated by Paul in verse 14. *"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."* Look at what happens if we ignore this great command. Paul says we will bite and devour and consume one another. What sounds better; love and serve or bite, devour, and consume? I guess it's the condition of the heart that determines how one answers that question. Christian freedom means freedom together. We are better together. We are stronger together. In Christ, we are free to love others as Christ loves others. In Christ, we are free to serve others as Christ serves others. In Christ, we are free to bless others as Christ blesses others. In Christ, we are free from sin. In Christ, we are free from Spiritual death. In Christ, we are free to one day stand before God as rescued, redeemed, and sanctified. In Christ, we are free!