

**Sermon – Freedom**  
**Sunday September 19, 2021**

Good morning!

Just a quick announcement before we begin today's message.

On September 27<sup>th</sup>, we're going to have a Town Hall meeting to talk about potentially re-starting a second worship service.

If you're already on our distribution list, you'll be receiving an email tomorrow with the Zoom link. If you're not, you can go to the webpage on the screen and request the link.

**[ONLINE HOSTS/PPT: [www.cornerstonechurch.ca/TownHall](http://www.cornerstonechurch.ca/TownHall)]**

Last week, we began a new series called *Signposts of Hope in a Suffering World*.

During this series, we'll be looking at the book of John and exploring seven themes that serve as "signposts."

Now, what's a signpost? A signpost points to something. Turn to the person next to you and point at them. I know your parents told you it's rude to point, but this is to glorify God.

So what do John's signposts point to? A few things.

- **They point to our deepest human longings.** There are desires and yearnings that all people at all times have always had.
- **They point to the fact that our world isn't as it should be.** When we look around, we just know that this isn't how things are supposed to be.
- **They also point to how God is at work in Jesus to set the world right.** Jesus came to earth to establish his kingdom and to set things right. He entrusted this mission to the church, and since then God has been at work restoring the world through his people.

Last week, we looked at the signpost of Love. This week we're going to look at the signpost of Freedom. I'm indebted to Pastor Tim Keller for a sermon that he preached on this topic.

Now what comes to mind for you when you think about freedom?

Two movies come to mind for me. The first is Braveheart. Remember that scene at the end when William Wallace, played by Mel Gibson is being tortured?

The magistrate offers him one chance to ask for mercy so that he can die a quick death. The crowd becomes silent. They want to hear what Wallace will say. But instead of crying "mercy", what one word does William Wallace cry out? *Freedom!*

For William Wallace, freedom means freedom from English tyranny and independence for the Scottish people.

The other movie I was thinking of is the movie Frozen. How many of you parents remember the song *Let It Go*? How many of you parents hate the song *Let It Go*?

*Let It Go* is the song Queen Elsa sings as she runs away. It's a song about her new-found freedom to do whatever she wants. Listen to the words.

*It's time to see what I can do  
To test the limits and break through  
No right, no wrong, no rules for me  
I'm free*

For Elsa, freedom means freedom from responsibilities, rules and limits.

What does freedom mean for you?

When most people today think about freedom, they generally think about *freedom from*. Freedom from rules, external constraints and restrictions.

That's why you hear people say: *You can't tell me what to do. It's a free country. I can do whatever I want to do. Don't you dare try to take away my freedom.*

Have you watched the news lately? How many people are angry about some kind of external constraint? How many people are offended that a perceived freedom is being taken away?

Why is that? It's because deep down we think freedom means being free to do whatever I want to do. To live without rules or restrictions. We think *that's* freedom! But that has nothing to do with freedom at all.

Think about it. If you're above the age of 19 in Ontario, you're free to drink as much alcohol as you want. But do you know what happens if you do that?

It will affect your judgment, your behaviour and your health. Over time, you might lose your job and your relationships. And when you realize the damage it's caused and you try to stop, do you know what you'll discover?

You'll discover that you can't stop. Because you're addicted. You thought you were free. But in fact you gave away your freedom.

You see, the freedom to do whatever you want to do will cost you a much greater freedom. The freedom for peace, joy and meaning. The freedom to love, serve and bless. In other words, the freedom to live the life God created you to live.

Jesus addresses this in our passage today. Our passage comes from John 8:31-36.

**To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."**

**They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?"**

**Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.**

What I want to do today is talk about freedom. We're going to do this by looking at three questions: *What is real freedom? What keeps us from being free? How do we experience the freedom Jesus gives?*

First, **What is real freedom?**

In verse 32, Jesus says, **Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free. (v. 32)**

So what is real freedom? According to Jesus, real freedom is knowing the truth. In the original Greek, to *know* something means to see it the way God sees it.

We think freedom means the freedom to do whatever I want to do. But is that what God thinks?

In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, a Belgium duke by the name of Raynald III was captured by his younger brother Edward. Edward built a special room for his brother in his castle. He even promised to restore everything back to him including his title and property.

So what was the catch? In order to get everything back, Raynald would have to leave his room. What was so hard about that? Well, Raynald was extremely overweight. He was so big in fact, that he couldn't fit through the door.

Knowing his brother's love for good food, do you know what Edward did? He had his servants deliver platters of his favourite foods every day.

So instead of losing weight to get out of his prison, Raynald grew bigger and bigger. And whenever someone accused Edward of being cruel, he simply said this: "My brother is not a prisoner. He may leave when he so wills."

Raynald stayed in that prison for 10 years. It wasn't until after Edward died that he was finally released.

So what's the point of this story? The point is this: Our definition of freedom doesn't make any sense. To be free can't mean that you can do whatever you want to do. Why?

Because you and I want so many different things. And these desires usually conflict.

- You want to escape the prison, but you also want to eat good food.
- You want a better body, but you also don't want to work out.
- You want to save money, but you also want to have nice things.
- You want to be a better parent, but you also don't want to make the time.
- You want to overcome your addiction, but you also want the pleasure.
- You want to experience God's peace, but you also want to continue at a hectic pace.
- You want to grow closer to God, but you also want to stay in control.

You can't gain freedom by doing whatever you want. Why? Because your desires will conflict with each other.

**The only way to truly be free isn't to pursue every freedom you desire. It's to give up the "lesser" freedoms in order to gain a "greater" freedom.**

This means choosing the desires that are most important, that will lead to life.

Michael Jordan had the freedom to make plays and drain clutch shots. But he could only do that because he gave up his freedom to slack off and not workout.

Miles Davis had the freedom to improvise and create amazing jazz music. But he could only do that because he gave up his freedom to not practice and try out new ideas.

But do you know what the best example of this is? Marriage. Imagine being married but you want to be free to do whatever you want. So you go out late every night, you buy expensive things, you make big decisions without checking in.

How does you think that will work out? Do you think you'll be free to enjoy a great marriage? Of course not! Because the freedom to enjoy a great marriage isn't about doing whatever you want. It's about giving up lesser freedoms to gain a greater freedom.

Real freedom isn't freedom from, it's freedom for.

It's not freedom from constraints (to do whatever you want to do). It's freedom for living the life God created you to live.

**[ONLINE HOSTS/PPT: Real freedom isn't doing whatever you want; it's living the life God created you to live.]**

It's the freedom:

- To love
- To serve.
- To know God's peace.
- To give your life away for others.

Real freedom isn't doing whatever you want. Real freedom is living the life God created you to live.

So **What keeps us from being free?**

The idea that we're not free implies that we're slaves. And this can hard to admit. It certainly was for the Jews. When Jesus challenged them, they became angry.

They said, **"We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?" (v. 33)**

Do you realize what a ridiculous statement that is? Look at the history of Israel. They were slaves in Egypt for 400 years. They were exiles in Babylon for 70 years. And at the moment, they were under Roman rule.

How could they say they've never been slaves?

But Jesus ignores this. Instead, he talks about a different kind of slavery.

**"Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin." (v. 34)**

Do you know what the most oppressive form of slavery is? It isn't political, it's spiritual. Sin is the ultimate form of slavery.

So what is sin? Here are two thoughts.

**First, Sin is a violation of how things were designed to work.**

Most people think of sin as breaking the rules. Like the Ten Commandments are a set of rules and if you break them, you've sinned.

While this is true, the commandments are more than just a set of rules. They're statements about how life really works. You see, God designed the world to work in a certain way.

This past summer, a red engine light came on while I was driving on vacation. But I kept driving because I wanted to get to the nearest mechanic and also became I'm stubborn. Along the way, more lights came up. Then my car started to beep. Then my car just died. And I was left stranded on the side of the road 4 hours away from home.

Driving my car despite the red engine light was more than just breaking a rule. It was violating the way the car was designed.

It didn't matter how much I wanted to get to the mechanic. When I pushed my car to do what it wasn't designed for, what happened? It broke down.

That's a picture of sin. **When you sin, you're not just breaking an arbitrary rule; you're violating what you were designed for.** You're going against your nature and the way things work. And do you know what happens when you do that? Something will break.

For example, God calls you to forgive. Of course, you're free not to forgive. But what happens when you do that?

Your relationship will fall apart. You'll become resentful, bitter and miserable.

When you fail to forgive, you're not just breaking a rule, you're violating your own nature. And that's not the freedom God created you for. Because sin is a violation of how things were designed to work.

**Second, Sin demands your worship but will always let you down.**

The truth is, we all worship something. Whether you know it or not, there's something in your life that you're living for. It could be:

- Your career
- Your image
- Your possessions
- Your relationships

Whatever that thing is, that's your "god." It will demand your worship. It will demand your allegiance.

But here's the problem. Even after you've given everything to that god, do you know what will happen? It will always let you down.

Listen to these words from American author David Foster Wallace.

**"If you worship money and things... then you'll never have enough. Worship your body and beauty... and you will always feel ugly. Worship power and you will feel weak and afraid."**

Don't you see? You don't belong to yourself. You're going to live for something. And if that thing isn't God, it will always let you down.

Many of you know about that.

Maybe you find your significance in work. Getting things done, especially when you get recognition, feels so good. So you're always working. But the problem is, there's always more to do. So you're tired and overwhelmed. And whenever you do make time for your family, you're irritable and angry. You're basically miserable wherever you go.

Maybe you're stuck in the past. You've been hurt before and find it hard to trust. So you've learned to be guarded. But what was once a way to protect yourself has now poisoned your heart. You feel like everyone is out to get you. You take offense at every little comment. You assume the worst of everyone. And now you've become bitter, resentful and negative.

Maybe you're trapped in an addiction. What started out as a one-time thing to deal with the pain has become an obsession. And now, no matter how hard you try, you can't stop. Your life is spinning out of control. You're terrified that your secret will come out. You live in constant fear and shame.

How do you get free of the hold sin has over you?

Many people have found freedom through an amazing program we run at Cornerstone called Freedom Session.

**[PPT: Freedom Session image]**

Freedom Session is a 30-session program that we offer online. It's helped people deal with issues like broken relationships, depression, anger, addiction, sexual woundedness and abuse.

Through video teaching, small groups and personal homework, you'll gain the strategies, tools and support you need to break free.

We have an Info Night coming up this Thursday. If you're interested in learning more or signing up, check out our Freedom Session page.

**[ONLINE HOSTS/PPT – [www.cornerstonechurch.ca/FreedomSession](http://www.cornerstonechurch.ca/FreedomSession)]**

This leads to our final question, **How do you experience the freedom Jesus gives?**

Jesus says,

**Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. (v. 35-36)**

You and I have a deep longing for freedom. Why? Because that's what God created you for. Freedom from sin, anxiety and fear. Freedom to be loved and to love. Freedom to serve, bless and make a difference.

The Bible is a story of God's desire to give us this freedom. We see it in the Exodus. God's people were suffering under Pharaoh in Egypt. But God hears their cries and what does he do?

He raises up Moses to confront Pharaoh. He inflicts plagues on Egypt. He leads his people through the Red Sea and into the wilderness, eventually bringing them into the Promised Land.

This was the greatest act of deliverance for the people of Israel. To remember it, every year they celebrated with a feast. Anyone know the name of this feast? It was called Passover.

Passover was a reminder that not only was God faithful in the past, but that he will continue to be faithful in the future. It was a way of saying, "God, you set us free from slavery all those years ago and now we're looking to you to do it again!"

How many of you are looking for God to do it again? To deliver you from the bondage of sin, fear and death. To lead you into greater freedom.

- Freedom for joy even when life is hard.
- Freedom for peace even when so much is going on.
- Freedom to love even when people are difficult.
- Freedom to hope even when you can't see a way.

Let's take a moment now to encourage someone this morning. Turn to your neighbour, look them in the eye and tell them, "God, will do it again!" If you're watching this online, type that in the chat.

The truth is, you'll never find freedom in an idol. Idols will promise you everything but leave you with nothing.

**The only way to have freedom is to give your life to Jesus and make him your Master.**

Because only Jesus can satisfy you. Only Jesus can meet your needs. And even if you fail him, he won't walk away. Instead he'll forgive you and give you grace.

What other god does that?

For if the Son sets you free, you are free indeed.

I wonder how many of you are longing for the freedom only Jesus gives. To have real freedom means giving up your lesser freedoms in order to gain a greater one. It means giving up your sin and your idols to live the life God created you for.

For hundreds of years, the Jewish people celebrated Passover. Over time, they would pray that God's Messiah would come. That the Anointed One would bring about the True Exodus and release them from their present slavery once and for all.

Many years later, Jesus came on the scene. As he prepared to go to Jerusalem to die, he chose to do it when the people were celebrating a certain feast. Anyone know which one? Passover.

It was during Passover when Jesus goes to the cross. Because at the cross Jesus says, I've heard the cries of my people, I've come to overthrow the Great Pharaoh, I will release the captives from their bondage, and I will set you free so that you can be my people, my agents of freedom in the world.

Jesus died on the cross for you. So don't let sin make you a slave any longer. Don't give your worship to any idol. Because money didn't die for you. Your career didn't die for you. Only Jesus died for you.

And if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

I'd like to invite the worship team to come back up now as we pray.

Heavenly Father,

Thank you for the cross. Thank you for Jesus, who didn't consider his own freedom on the cross. But instead gave up his freedom so that we could be free.

For those of us here or online who are living for some idol. Who are tired and disillusioned. Who feel defeated and enslaved, I pray that the good news of Jesus would set them free. That they would no longer give their life to an idol that will let them down, but that they would give their life to Jesus who loves them and died for them.

And if that's you and you want the freedom Jesus gives, say "I give my life to you Jesus." Or you can type that in the chat.

Thank you Jesus for your freedom. It is for freedom that you have set us free. So help us by your Spirit to live more into your freedom, not to do whatever we want, but to give up our own freedom, to take up our own cross, so that we can follow you, loving others and being agents of your freedom wherever we go.

For those of us who are trusting you in a difficult season right now, and I know there are many of us here. We declare as your people that you have set us free and we look to you now to do it again!

Do it again God – this is our prayer. In Jesus' name

Amen