

Free Indeed Part 3

Freedom From Bitterness

Once again we are talking about freedom. Last Sunday we talked about being free from materialism and bondage to its idea that I am what I have. We talked about being free from our bondage to appearance and the idea I am what I look like. Then freedom from the past, I am what I used to be; freedom from peer pressure, I am what my peers say I should be, and freedom from self, I am whatever I want to be. We have been set free by faith in Christ, for Jesus said “whom the Son sets free is free indeed.” But freedom for the follower of Christ is not freedom to do whatever we want to do. The bible says, **“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” Ephesians 2:10.** Freedom for the believer is found in our surrender and obedience to Christ. By surrendering our life to Jesus, we are free from the controlling power of sin and free then to be all God created us to be and free to do all he created us to do. We reach our full potential as human beings when we are free to do those good works for which we were created. We are the unique handiwork, the unique creation of God and he desires that we be free, released to be all he created to be. That’s the abundant life we find as we surrender our life to Christ and live in the freedom he provides.

Remember last Sunday morning we preached from this passage of Scripture. **“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.” Galatians 5:1.** Last Sunday night we celebrated communion, rejoicing in the fact that Jesus has set us free from sin, guilt and condemnation. We are free, but we mustn’t allow ourselves to become “burdened again by a yoke of slavery.” We are free, but we remain free by God’s grace and we participate in that freedom by our choices, our discipline, our surrender, by guarding our hearts against the things that would try to again enslave us (including the things we mentioned last week like materialism, peer pressure, etc.)

This morning I want to talk specifically about freedom from bitterness. Bitterness is something that potentially troubles all of us at some point. The opportunity to become bitter presents itself often in our lives.

The Greek word translated in our bible as bitter is built from a root word which means to pierce or cut, like if you prick your finger on a thornbush. An herb that was bitter was said to have a sharp or cutting taste to it. We then get a picture of a sharp little cut or piercing that leads

to bitterness and bitterness, figuratively began to suggest poison. Let me suggest some things, some cuts that can lead to bitterness and can then spread poison in our life.

Disappointment. Someone disappointed you, they let you down or wronged you. They said something unkind or untrue about you or your family. Life in general has disappointed you. Things haven't turned out the way you planned. Parents divorced, an untimely death, suffering chronic illness. Maybe you feel God has disappointed you and a bitterness has begun to affect your spirit and mind and body. You've become critical, angry, frustrated. You've prayed and God hasn't done as you asked or desired and bitterness begins to grow and spread.

Injustice. When we feel our rights have been violated we can become bitter quite easily. "This was my car, my property, my space and you violated it." We're Americans after all. We are quick to demand our rights. We feel we've been treated unfairly, unjustly, and that lingering resentment and anger from an injustice turns to bitterness. "I deserve better than this from God, parents, a spouse, a friend, my children, my family, my pastor, my teachers. It's not fair!" We sulk and marinate in our own resentment and pain and before you know it, bitterness fills our heart and mind. It colors everything. "I've sacrificed everything for my family, for my friend, for my church, and no one even cares." We sit on the porch and watch the world go by, wounded, resentful of others, angry and bitter. And speaking of angry.

Anger and jealousy. Unresolved anger as well as jealousy lead to bitterness. "I'll get even if it's the last thing I do." Anger is often an expression of bitterness towards someone. "Why does she get treated better than me? I work just as hard, better even. They just like her better. Well, I'll show her!" And the consequence of such anger and jealousy is bitterness.

The list could go on but you get the picture. It's often just a little cut, a small wound to our emotions but if not dealt with, it festers, turns to bitterness and poisons everything. One of the dangerous things about bitterness is that in the early stages it is hardly noticed. We look and act like everything is fine. We are friendly or at least civil to that person we wish would drop dead. We think no one even knows we have this feeling, this attitude. "This is just between me and the other person. I'm not hurting anyone else and the other person deserves to suffer for what she did to me." The trouble is bitterness has a root system that contaminates all of your life – spirit, soul, mind, body and it has a devastating effect on those around you as well.

Bitterness has a devastating root system.

Look at what the bible says, **“See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.” Hebrews 12:15.** Bitterness as we said can start with just a little cut, a small offense. Perhaps no one can even see the wound, but that little offense opens a cut and unless you deal with it, a seed of strife or bitterness is planted and the root begins immediately to grow in your inner man. All this underground root activity is going on while everyone thinks everything is just fine. Maybe you even tell yourself everything is all right, and then suddenly the root breaks through the surface. A bitter root grows up and it causes all kinds of trouble.

Have you ever seen a weed growing in the flower bed and started to pull it and suddenly realize there is a massive root connected to this thing? You pull and pull and realize it is deep and strong and larger than the weed itself. It’s run all under your flower bed. That’s what a root of bitterness is like. That root system can wreak havoc in your spirit and in your life. It can effect all of the relationships in your life. It defiles relationships.

The word for defile in this passage means “to stain, to contaminate, to pollute.” Bitterness not only puts a stain on us and our character and personality, it pollutes the environment around us. It isn’t just what happens to you. We’ve all witnessed it. A wife or husband becomes bitter at their spouse and that bitterness poisons the children and grandchildren. The poison of bitterness is like a paralyzing drug. You can’t move on with your life because bitterness has you paralyzed. You aren’t happy so you want everyone else to be unhappy. Frozen in time by the poison of bitterness, you rehearse the wound, the offense, and inflict pain on others because the root is bitter and the only kind of fruit you can produce is bitter fruit! That’s why the writer of Hebrews said to be on the look out, “see to it” that no bitter root springs up. From a little cut, bitterness can paralyze and poison everyone around you.

Bitterness involves bondage. In Acts 8 Peter and John were ministering in Samaria when a sorcerer named Simon began to follow them. He wanted to buy the gift of God that he saw and Peter said to him, **“I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin.” Acts 8:23.** King James Version uses the word “gall”. “I see you are in the gall of bitterness”. Gall means bile, poison. Peter said “I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and controlled by sinful choices.” If you have allowed bitterness to grow in your heart and life, you will find it restricting and binding your choices. You aren’t free to love, free to forgive, free to move on in your life.

Bitterness ensnares and imprisons you. You are being controlled by bitterness, responding to others and behaving in ways the Holy Spirit doesn't want you to respond. Bitterness is a controlling bondage and you need to be free!

Bitterness grieves the Holy Spirit and hinders the work of God. The bible says, **“And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” Ephesians 4:30-32.** The grace of God and the life-flow of the Holy Spirit and His work are hindered in our life when we are full of bitterness. The work of a church is hindered if there is bitterness in the church. Wouldn't it be sad if our personal bitterness kept others from being touched and changed by the grace of God? Bitterness costs all of us in multiple ways. It's time to get rid of all bitterness as the Scripture says.

Bitterness spreads and defiles with its poison but there is a place of freedom and victory that is available to us today. We don't have to remain bitter. What do we do?

Freedom from bitterness requires surrendering your life to Christ. Surrender is essential to our freedom. Through faith in Christ as Savior and Lord, we surrender our life to him, placing control of our life and our choices in his hands. When we surrender our life to him, it means we surrender everything, past, present and future, all we have, all we are, how we view life, everything is surrendered to him. Let's think about this for a moment.

Think about our perspective when we've allowed bitterness to creep in. We look at life and think, “It's not right that someone betrayed me. It's not fair that she died. It's not fair that he divorced me. Why didn't God fix this? Life's unfair. God's unfair and I have every right to be bitter.” That's our perspective.

When we surrender our life, including our perspective to the Lord, we start to realize we don't have enough information or insight to become bitter. We don't know what the end will truly be, or what might have happened. We really don't know what would have been best for us. We aren't God.

Remember the questions God asked of Job when Job felt he knew enough to judge God as being unjust and unfair. Questions like, **“Have you ever given orders to the morning or shown the dawn its place?” Job 38:12.** Or, **“What is the way to the abode of light? And**

where does darkness reside? Can you take them to their places? Do you know the paths to their dwellings.” Job 38:19-20. When we surrender our life completely to the Lord, our perspective, our view of things can begin to change. When we begin to view life from God’s perspective we realize we don’t have enough information and we can’t see into the future, but, **“...We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” Romans 8:28** Don’t become bitter over the way things have turned out, instead, surrender the outcome to Him. God is still at work. You’re still alive. All things are still possible. The apostle Paul said, **“...being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion...” Philippians 1:6** We don’t have enough information to be bitter or to blame God. He isn’t finished yet. Wait and see what he has in store!

“But they offended me. They hurt me. They lied about me. I won’t ever get over what they did to me. They violated my rights and I deserve to get even.” The bible says, **“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.” Galatians 5:20.** Guess what? Dead people don’t have rights and they cannot be offended. You call a dead guy names and he doesn’t take offense. He doesn’t let it bother him. He doesn’t get even and he doesn’t get bitter.

Listen, I surrendered my rights when I made Christ my Savior and Lord. “I’m yours Lord. If it doesn’t bother you then I don’t want it to bother me.” “Yes but they said...” I know. And I’m not suggesting you become a door mat for everyone to wipe their feet on, but you’re becoming bitter over some little things, little offenses that maybe weren’t even intentional. Let it go! Don’t allow yourself to become bitter over some offense because you feel your rights were violated. Surrender it to the Lord! When you surrendered your life to him, you surrendered it all to him didn’t you? Every right and privilege and plan and purpose of yours now belong to him. We are free to be servants of the Lord Jesus Christ!

I think Christians need to develop thicker skin anyway. I’ve seen Christians just looking for a reason to be offended by someone or some church. “That preacher didn’t even shake my hand.” “They wouldn’t even talk to me.” There is nothing sadder than a bunch of bitter Christians, mad at each other and mad at the world. Surrender your offenses to Jesus and let go of the bitterness.

Let me point out again, the bible says, **“You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.” 1 Corinthians 6:19-20.** Everything you have, everything you own ultimately belongs to the Lord. I’m not going to be bitter because you scratched my car or broke my best casserole dish because, after all, I don’t really own it. I don’t even own myself. It all belongs to Jesus. He bought and paid for me so he can do with me and my possessions as he desires. I’ve surrendered it all to him.

Surrender your right to be angry, to get even, to hold a grudge, to be bitter at someone, all the wounds and offenses of the past, surrender all of this to Jesus! Instead of looking for reasons to be offended and become bitter, be quick to forgive and be free. Remember that as you forgive others, the grace of God will flow to you and forgiveness comes to you. Jesus said, **“For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.” Matthew 6:14-15.** Unforgiveness cuts off that flow of God’s grace into your life and bitterness will then take over and begin to poison you and everyone around you.

It’s time to surrender that bitterness to Jesus. Surrender is the key to freedom. Surrender your life to Jesus and be free to live as he intended, free of bondage and slavery to sin, to guilt, to condemnation, to bitterness and unforgiveness. Free to live a holy life in Christ.

Are there areas in your life of rejection, anger, disappointment, maybe they haven’t really turned to bitterness, yet, but you’ve been hurt, wounded, rejected, and you are having a hard time dealing with that? You are having a hard time forgiving and letting go of it. You recognize you need to surrender it to the Lord before it turns to bitterness in your heart.

Or perhaps you recognize there is bitterness in your life in some area but you want to be free. I encourage you to surrender your life, surrender your right to stay angry and bitter, surrender your need for revenge or to get even, surrender the wounds and even the ones who inflicted the wounds, surrender them all to Jesus.

Some of those wounds go way back to childhood even. You look back and see a root system of bitterness that was there in your family and it’s been poisoning you and everyone in your family. Stop now and cut it off at the root. Surrender it all to Jesus. Ask him to set you free. Tell him you don’t want to live with bitterness any longer. Surrender it all to Jesus, rest the outcome in his hands and be free indeed!