

Free Indeed Part 4

Free To Live

I sat in my study Friday morning thinking about this sermon, repeating those words over and over, free to live, free to live. I kept thinking, “Am I free? Am I free to live, to live as Jesus wants me to live? To live as he called me to live? What are the things that bind me and prevent me from living for Jesus?”

Two weeks ago we talked about some of those things that bind us and prevent us from truly being free. Materialism and peer pressure and so on. Last Sunday we talked about the poison of bitterness and how it keeps us from being free. This morning I want to focus our attention on the subtle and persistent pressure to enslave us to the values of our culture. This may not be a great sermon, but I feel in my heart and spirit it must be said.

Our culture, the prominent values and ideas of American society, expressed through media, the arts, government, education, the courts, and a multitude of other ways influences all of us, individually and collectively. When the bible talks about “the world”, much of the time it is referring to the cultural values and lifestyle, the point of view of secular society. “The world” refers to those that live without Christ, without obedience to or submission to God and his word, who live still in slavery to self and sin. As followers of Christ, we are his people, his church, called out from the values of the world and committed to living according to God’s word, according to God’s commandments and principles. We live by faith and consequently we have a different set of values. We are committed to a different way of life, a different world view, a different perspective, one with eternal values, based upon God’s word.

Here’s the deal: as redeemed followers of Christ, our values and our lifestyle will almost always be in conflict with the values and lifestyle of the world. Our worldview will be different because we are citizens of heaven as well as citizens of America and that results in conflict.

My concern is that the subtle and constant pressure of our secular culture is shaping us into the world’s mold. We are being shaped and formed by the world instead of by the word of God and the redeeming work of the Holy Spirit. Stop and think – what are the greatest influencers of the church today? Culture or the word of God? The spirit of the world or the Holy Spirit? I’m afraid of the answer. Remember again the passage from Galatians – **“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. We are called to take a stand, to remain free in Christ – free to live for him and by his principles and not those of a secular culture. Read on down in this chapter to the 13th verse. **“You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.”**

Galatians 5:13

This is the life we’ve been called to, to live free in Jesus, not indulging our sinful nature, not living like the world and a culture that ignores and rejects and even mocks God, but living as redeemed sons and daughters of God, called to live counter-culturally as light in a dark world, serving one another in love!

I read this week a couple of notable quotations from the writings of G. K. Chesterton. He wrote, **“The Church is the only thing that frees a man from the degrading slavery of being a child of his age.”** **“We do not want, as the newspapers say, a Church that will move with the world. We want a Church that will move the world.” G. K. Chesterton**

We, the church, are going to have to make some hard decisions as to whether we will bow to the cultural pressures and become children of this age or will we stand firm as obedient children of the King. If we choose to remain free in Christ, to truly be his followers, it means we will have to live counter-culturally and there will be a price to be paid.

Our culture has redefined words like choice and freedom. They’ve become euphemisms for selfishness and sin at any cost, but freedom is something different for the follower of Christ. The bible tells us Christ set us free, not so we could indulge our self in sin, but so we could serve one another in love. It was for freedom that Christ has set us free and we must stand firm and refuse to go back into bondage to the world and its’ system. We are free to live for Jesus. Free to serve him, to obey his word. We have been set free so we can live counter-culturally, to say no to the world and say yes to Jesus and his word.

This is the way God explained it to Moses and Israel after delivering them from Egypt. **“I am the Lord your God. You must not do as they do in Egypt, where you used to live, and you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you. Do not follow their practices. You must obey my laws and be careful to follow my decrees. I am the Lord your God.” Leviticus 18:1-4.** The Lord told his people they were not to adopt the standards and values and practices of the world, but the Israelites constantly forgot the freedom

and the uniqueness to which they were called and returned to the bondage of the world. The Lord called Israel and he calls his church to a distinctive lifestyle, a life of holiness and obedience to the Lord. But Israel said they wanted to be like the nations of the earth. They wanted to live like the world and sadly it seems, so does much of the church in our culture.

Psalm 106 says of Israel, **“...but they mingled with the nations and adopted their customs.” Psalm 106:35.** They chose what they thought was freedom to be like the world and found out that kind of freedom was actually the path to sin and slavery, judgement and death.

It's interesting how attractive the world can be. The world is good at marketing sin, bending the rules enough to convince us its all for the best. It just seems natural to go along, to buy into the logic and values of the world. We don't want to seem out of step do we? So we live by the world's standards instead of God's standards. We even justify adopting some of the world's standards in an effort to be a more relevant witness. After all, Paul said he became as all men that he might win some so it's okay for us to compromise our standards and live like sinners in order to win them to Christ. Really? Is that what Paul was saying? You might want to read that passage again in 1 Corinthians 9 because Paul indicates he was still living under the law of Christ. Church, we are to live lives of obedience to God, regardless of the cost and regardless of the pressure brought upon us by our culture or our peers. We have no choice but to live counter-culturally as we stand firm in the freedom of Christ, surrendered and obedient to him.

Look at what Jesus said, **“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.” John 15:18-19** We are scratching our heads wondering why the world doesn't like us. The world hated Jesus first and they will hate the church as well. Trying to win the world over by watering down the gospel won't work. One European bishop suggested recently the church should “reposition itself on spiritual, moral and cultural beliefs.” Really? Repositioning ourselves for what? Judgment? The world will love us if we choose to belong to the world, but we belong to Jesus. He set us free so we could live for him!

Jesus said, **“My kingdom is not of this world” John 18:36.** But we live and act as if our kingdom is of this world most of the time don't we? Jesus set us free so we wouldn't be bound to this world or focused only on building a kingdom here. Jesus said to lay up for yourself

treasures in heaven. We are to be investing in the kingdom of Heaven and not worried so much about how we can get ahead here. This is all temporary. That's living counter-culturally.

The Apostle Paul warned us, **“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” Romans 12:2** Don't conform to this world. God's plan for us is that we “be conformed to the likeness of his Son.” (Romans 8:29) and not the likeness of the world. We must make that choice to live with our mind renewed by God's word. We approach life with an eternal perspective, with a redeemed world view, with the wisdom of God at work in us. Paul said through the world's wisdom the world didn't know God, but we have the mind of Christ. We are free to live for Christ and not conformed to the world.

There is a cost involved in living counter-culturally, living for Jesus instead of living for the world. Jesus already said the world would hate us. Listen to the apostle Paul's description of the apostles. **“For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men. We are fools for Christ... Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world.” 1 Corinthians 4:9-10, 13.**

Living free in Jesus may earn you the title “scum of the earth.” Hardly a popular title, but better to be free in Jesus, made alive in Christ than to be a king on earth yet separated from God, bound to sin and death and headed for hell.

James said, **“...don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who becomes a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.” James 4:4**

John wrote, **“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.” 1 John 2:15-17.**

What does all of this have to do with freedom? I'm telling you that we have been set free so we can live for Jesus, so we can live counter-culturally, not succumbing to the pressures to conform to the world but to live like Jesus. We are not to be enslaved to the world or to love the world. We have been set free so we can say no to the world and yes to Jesus. We are to be conformed to his image and not that of the world.

I know it is a radical call. When you read those Scriptures we just quoted and think about our life with Christ – look at what he is calling us to! It's not popular, but it's right. It's not inclusive, but it's true. It's a call to obedience and it's a warning to us to examine our hearts.

Years ago I read a book called *Please Don't Squeeze the Christian Into The World's Mold*. In it the author wrote about what he called the “by product of mass production and mass consumption.” He said our culture in its desire for more has placed value on what he called junk. Sadly, it's not just junk products, but its junk lives. Consider this. The author mentioned four qualities of junk: **fast, cheap, trivial, disposable**. He wrote, “First, it's fast: instant coffee, overnight successes and condensed bibles. Our lives have become a desperate war on time and if quality and value are among the casualties, then so be it. Second, junk is cheap: life is short so we must grab for all the gusto we can get. To work for anything is a waste of precious time and effort since everything can easily be replaced by something else. Third, it's trivial: when our lives are filled with a blur of passing objects, events, ideas and people, we can't afford to attach much meaning or value to any of them. Finally, it's disposable. Why not? If it's cheap and trivial and there's something new just around the corner, then its foolish sentimentality to hang on to the old.” Scott Sernau

I think he has hit upon a truth regarding our culture. Remember what I said at the beginning about the persistent and subtle influence of the culture. This is only one example. But over time, we've embraced these values as our own. In our relationships and even in our relationship with God, it has to be fast. If we don't get immediate results from God, or from a sermon or a church service, we leave and look for something else. We expect cheap discipleship. We don't want to pay a price. We want resurrection without the cross. We want blessing without obedience, heaven without holiness. Freedom without surrender. We fill our spiritual lives with the trivial. Our theology is on our car bumpers and our church signs, we get our discipleship training from prosperity preachers and we never take the time to build relationships with the body of Christ because we rush in and rush out of the 60 minute service with just enough inspiration to satisfy us for the week.

Okay, maybe I'm being too hard on all of us, but I'm concerned about the future of the church, about our future.

The world says “get it fast, forget quality, don't waste your time with discipline, forget

obedience to God, do as you please. If you mess up, just start over and don't worry about the consequences. If relationships don't work out, throw the spouse and kids away and move on. Life's too short to mess with building a marriage or anything else when you can just dispose of it or him or her and get a new improved even better one with no effort, no commitment, no remorse, no consequences.

Jesus set us free so we could and would live differently. To live counter-culturally. To be conformed to his image and not to the image of the world. He calls us to faithfulness, to obedience and surrender, not to fame and success. He calls us to take up a cross, to be a spectacle before the world not a friend to the world, to please him and not ourselves, to serve others and not the world.

Jesus says to be transformed by the renewing of our mind, to be free and to stand in that freedom and not be bound to the world and its values. The world says we want fast. Jesus says commit to the long haul. The bible says it is the one that overcomes and endures to the end that will be saved. The faithful life of a disciple of Christ is long obedience in the same direction.

The world says we want cheap. We don't want it if it costs too much. Jesus says come to him. His grace is free, but living for Jesus will cost you everything you have and everything you are. Grace is free, salvation is free, but it is not cheap or trivial.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Lutheran pastor executed by the Nazis wrote about what he called cheap grace. **“Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.” “When Christ calls a man he bids him come and die.” ... Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

The world says nothing lasts so don't place too much value on anything or anyone. Jesus says we are part of the kingdom of God. His kingdom is not about trivial things like meat and drink but righteousness, peace and joy. The life we have in Christ was not secured for us with trivial things but with the precious blood of Christ himself. In Christ we recognize the sacredness of life and relationships because we are created in his image. We place value upon life because he purchased us with his own life and blood.

The world says we want everything to be disposable so if it doesn't work or if we aren't

happy with something or someone, we can just throw it or them away and move on to the next new thing. Jesus says I want you to come enter into a covenant relationship where things are lasting and eternal.

The world says we offer you freedom. Come find yourself, serve yourself and be happy. Jesus says, I have come to set you free. Come surrender your life to me and you will find yourself and then go serve others and discover what true freedom and joy are all about.

Be free. Transformed by his grace to live counter-culturally. Not surrendering to a world system that is decaying but surrendered to Christ and to a life that will know no end. Renounce the way of the world and our culture that values fast, cheap, trivial and disposable for that which is eternal, beyond prize, immeasurable in importance and everlasting.