

## Free Indeed Part 5

### Pierce My Ear

We've been talking about freedom for the past few weeks. In the first sermon I told you freedom was not the absence of rules, that's chaos. It is not freedom from God, that's hell. Freedom is not the power to do as you please, that tends to become selfishness. Freedom is the power to choose to do what is right. Freedom is found in choosing to be what you were created by God to be and doing what you were created by God to do. Freedom is choosing to live as God intended you to live! We've spent these past few weeks trying to "flesh out" just what freedom means.

At various times in this series I have referred to the paradox, the mystery that is found in our spiritual freedom. I have told you that the only way to be truly free is to surrender yourself, your life, your all, to the Lord. It sounds like slavery, it seems counter-intuitive, but it is in fact the very essence of true freedom. The Apostle Paul, born a free man, born a citizen of Rome and a proud Israelite, a Pharisee, referred to himself as a bondservant of the Lord Jesus Christ. He discovered true freedom came from abandoning the pursuit of pleasure and self and giving oneself to God.

In case you think this is some crazy new concept I've dreamed up. Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan in 374, a teacher of St. Augustine, wrote, **"To belong only to God is to enjoy true freedom. That man is truly free, a true Hebrew, who is entirely God's. Everything that he possesses shares in freedom." ... Ambrose**

Turn to Deuteronomy 15. Every few years I've shared a message from this passage of Scripture. This passage speaks about the treatment of what we might call indentured servants. I realize the idea of servants or slaves is appalling to us and our modern sensibilities, but slaves and slavery was common in the ancient world. Slaves were everywhere.

The circumstances mentioned here involved fellow Israelites who because of some kind of financial setback, perhaps due to drought or crop failure, they could no longer pay their debts. They then sold themselves to another Israeli to pay off their debt, working as indentured servants. The servant worked hard, without thanks, without pay, doing what they were told to do and longing for the day when they could be free.

Jewish slaves or servants were to be treated fairly and this passage in Deuteronomy 15

explains exactly how it was to work. God set a limit so that no one could be forced to work as a slave or servant for more than six years. **“If a fellow Hebrew, a man or a woman, sells himself to you and serves you six years, in the seventh year you must let him go free. And when you release him, do not send him away empty-handed. Supply him liberally from your flock, your threshing floor and your winepress. Give to him as the Lord your God has blessed you. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you. That is why I give you this command today.” Deuteronomy 15:12-15**

It sounds like the perfect deal. You work for six years as an indentured servant and then in the seventh year you gain your freedom as part of God’s plan for justice and mercy. There was and is always something redemptive in all of God’s dealings with us. And not only are they released from bondage and their debts are settled, but they are to be given liberally from the flocks of the owner, and given grain and wine as well. Certainly no one would pass up this opportunity to regain their freedom. But look at what verse 16 tells us. **“But if your servant says to you, ‘I do not want to leave you,’ because he loves you and your family and is well off with you, then take an awl and push it through his ear lobe into the door and he will become your servant for life. Do the same for your maidservant.” Deuteronomy 15:16-17** (An awl in case you don’t know, is “a small, pointed tool for piercing holes in leather, wood or other soft materials. Think of an ice pick.)

Think of what is being offered. You can be free, your previous debt forgiven, the slate wiped clean. In addition, you are given animals, grain, wine and sent on your way. Or....you can have what’s behind door number 2 and choose to remain a servant for life. What will it be?

It sounds like a “no-brainer” doesn’t it? Apparently there were plenty of people that chose to remain as slaves forever. What would make them stay when they have been offered freedom? Let me suggest a couple of things as we make some observations about this passage.

First of all, understand what is at stake. The decision you are about to make was for a lifetime. “He will become your servant for life.” Talk about a major decision. There was no turning back. This was for life. Why would anyone choose to be a servant for the rest of their life? It was going to cost them everything. Why wouldn’t they choose their freedom?

As we’ve talked about freedom over these weeks, remember I said **Freedom without discipline leads to bondage**. Freedom to drink all you want can lead to alcoholism. Freedom

to indulge your appetites can lead to bondage, addiction, destruction.

Freedom for this servant, might be what got him in trouble and in slavery in the first place. He had been free to make his own choices, free to be his own master. No one could tell him what to do. Perhaps it was that freedom he exercised that had nearly destroyed him and led to personal failure, bondage and finally to servitude. He may not want to return to that kind of freedom.

The truth is, we've all been there in our hearts, living in this kind of freedom, doing as we pleased, making our own choices, acting as though we were master of our own destiny. We could manage our own lives, thank you very much and we didn't need God or some ancient rule book to tell us how to conduct our affairs. The problem was, or is, we aren't capable of managing our lives when it comes to our eternal destiny and our spiritual condition. You may be a success in every area of life and business, but what have you done about the guilt you bear for the sins you've committed? How will you stand before a holy and just God knowing you have failed to live up to his standards? You have broken his commandments. How will you manage that? Can you manage your life into eternity? The truth is, you can't. And when life suddenly derails and you are still at the controls, where will you go and to whom will you turn?

We feel like we are in control and we are free to do as we please. But freedom apart from a relationship with God through Christ is like riding on the Titanic. Oh, it's freedom all right. The captain says, "Everyone is free to come to first class whether you paid for the ticket or not. Do as you please. Eat, drink, have fun. Don't worry about damaging anything. There are no rules, just have a good time." You know why don't you? Because the ship is sinking! It's doomed. You are free to do whatever you want, live any way you want, make your own rules, but the truth is, you are a slave on board a sinking ship and there will be no survivors.

But there is an alternative. You can find real freedom by becoming a forever servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. You can choose to make him the Savior, the Lord and Master of your life. To keep the metaphor going, he is captain of the only ship that is going to make it successfully through this life and into heaven and he invites you to come aboard and journey with him. Let him do as the master did for the servant in Deuteronomy 15, let him pierce your ear through to the doorpost and choose to become his servant forever. It is a life-changing, life transforming experience. It is surrender and freedom all together. I've heard so many people say, when they

have accepted Christ as Savior, “For the first time in my life, I feel truly free.” The weight of their sin has been lifted as they come in repentance and in faith to Christ, asking for forgiveness and cleansing of their sins.

When we come to Christ and surrender our life to him, we then come under new management, new ownership. We realize as the Hebrew servant did, that we are better off with the Lord as our master. We realize that serving Jesus and surrendering to him is the only way to have true freedom, to have real life, both here and for eternity. It’s time to stop living for ourselves and start living for Jesus as Lord of our lives.

What would make someone choose to be a servant forever? Perhaps it is that longing to be truly free. But notice what else the Scripture says. **“But if your servant says to you, ‘I do not want to leave you’ because he loves you and your family and is well off with you...” Deuteronomy 15:16.** What makes us choose to stay? Love is the key. We respond to God’s extraordinary love for us. The bible tells us, **“God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Romans 5:8.** While we were still sinners, in rebellion against God, Christ died for us. How can we refuse to give ourselves to the one to whom we owe our very lives? We should have died on that cross, bearing the penalty for our own sins, but Jesus took our place. No wonder we choose to stay. With love and gratitude we say, “Pierce my ear to the doorpost, Lord. I know what you did for me. I know your love for me and in return, I surrender my life to you.”

The Apostle Paul wrote, **“And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.” 2 Corinthians 5:15.** We live for him because he died for us! What amazing love and mercy.

The songwriter wrote, **“O love that will not let me go, I rest my weary soul in Thee; I give Thee back the life I owe, that in Thine ocean depths its flow may richer, fuller be.”...George Matheson** This is the love that draws us to the doorpost and the awl. Pierce my ear to the doorpost of the one whose love will never let me go, that in that perfect love our lives will “richer, fuller be.” Our lives will never be the same when we surrender all to Him.

What makes us choose to remain a servant? The Deuteronomy passage says we realize we love the master and we are “well off” with him (it has been good for us). We recognize we are more free as a servant than we ever were living on our own, doing as we pleased.

Remember the story Jesus told of the prodigal son? The son wanted to be free, free of his father's authority and his father's rules. He took his share of the estate and went to a far off country where "he squandered his wealth on wild living" the bible says. After he lost all his money he found himself in the worst condition imaginable for a young Jewish boy. He is an indentured servant feeding hogs for someone, actually starving. His desire for freedom has led to bondage. The bible says, **"When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.'"** Luke 15:17-19

The prodigal son realized what we've been saying: freedom is not found in doing as you please, freedom is found in surrendering to the Father! Freedom is found in the Father's house! The prodigal got up and headed home. He realized there was only one place to be, only one person to turn to. He headed home to his Father.

Why did the servant in Deuteronomy choose to stay? Because he realized the only place to be was at home with the master. There is no one else to turn to. There is no where else to be.

There was a time in Jesus ministry when the bible tells us many of his followers turned back and left him. Jesus asked the twelve, "will you leave me too?" Peter answered, **"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."** John 6:66-69.

Why choose the awl and the doorpost? Why not choose freedom and going your own way? Because where else would we go? Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. With him we know we are well off. With him we have true life, abundant life, everlasting life. I would rather be a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, poor and unknown by this world, than to have all the wealth and fame of the world and be lost without God. Where else can you go? No one else can offer you true freedom and life!

We recognize freedom is found in a personal relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ. We recognize freedom comes, not from serving ourselves, but serving God, giving ourselves to him. We recognize that he loves us so much he gave his life to redeem us from sin and bondage. We recognize we are well off with him rather than on our own so we say, "Master, Savior, pierce my ear to the doorpost. I choose to be your servant for life." And we step to the

doorpost with our face turned towards our Lord and Master and as he pierces our ear to the doorpost we hear him speak with words of redemption and grace, “Not a servant but a son, a daughter. Not a servant but a child of my own, a child of my love and mercy and grace. You will not be a servant forever, you will be my child, a child of redemption.”

The bible says, **“For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father’. The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.” Romans 8:15-16.**

This is the working of grace! This is what happened to the prodigal son, running home to ask to be a servant for life in his father’s house. “I’m not worthy to be a son again, just let me be an indentured servant to pay off my life time of debt I owe.” But the father ran to the boy while he was still a long way off. He called for a robe to cover the rags of the son’s disgrace. Shoes for his feet and a ring for his finger, he extends his mercy to a wayward, freedom seeking boy.

And we come home to the Father’s house today. Tired of seeking our own way, hungry, starving, broken, weighed down by sin and its heavy wages, its sad consequences. We come to our Heavenly Father, because we know he loves us, because we know it will be well with us. We come home asking only to have our ear pierced to the doorpost. “Father, I’ll be your servant forever. Pierce my ear.” And he whispers to us, “Welcome home, son. Welcome home daughter. Come live in the freedom of life in your Father’s house.”

We stand at the doorpost. “Lord, I don’t want to ever leave you. Not now. Not ever. I love you and I know I am better off with you. With you it is well with my soul. You are my life. I choose to remain with you. I choose the awl. Pierce my ear through to the doorpost and let me remain with you, serving you, loving you forever.”

Isaac Watts, the great songwriter penned those immortal words, **“Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were a present far too small; Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.” ... Isaac Watts** The call is for us to come to the father’s house, to the doorpost to surrender our selves to him. It means giving yourself completely to him, but oh, what we receive in return – we receive Him. We receive a life with Him, our life redeemed, renewed and restored in him. We receive the joy of our sins forgiven - our guilt and our shame gone. We receive fellowship with the eternal God. We receive an inheritance as sons and daughters. We receive life as it was meant to be. Life with Christ, free to live in him.

Years ago the group Glad sang a song written by Steve Croft.

**“Pierce my ear oh Lord, my God**

**Take me to your door this day.**

**I will serve no other God**

**Lord I’m here to stay.**

**For you have paid the price for me**

**With your blood you ransomed me**

**I will serve you eternally**

**A free man I’ll never be**

**A free man I’ll never be.”**

Are you ready to surrender your life to Him forever? To have him pierce your ear to the doorpost? Surrendering your life to Christ, the only way to live free indeed!