

Free Indeed Part 7

We have been talking about freedom for the past several weeks. The Scriptures tell us it was for freedom that Christ set us free and we are to stand firmly in that freedom and not be enslaved again to any kind of bondage or sin. We talked last week about Israel's deliverance from Egypt and used it as an example of what deliverance and freedom from sin looks like. We said then people with a slave mentality couldn't possess a land of freedom. One generation died in the wilderness and it was the next generation, born in freedom that went in to possess the promised land. God has set us free from slavery to sin. Like the generation born in the wilderness, we have been born into freedom in Christ, but we must stand firm and resolute in that freedom.

We said last week in order to stand in the freedom Christ has provided we must stand with God and his word regardless of the present culture. The Israelites did what God told them to do, even though it may have seemed foreign to them after 400 years of Egyptian influence and culture. Regardless, they obeyed God and followed his commands.

Last week we pointed out there is a line of distinction or differentiation between God's people and the world. God told Pharaoh he would "make a distinction between Pharaoh's people and God's people" and he did. In terms of how we live our lives, there is to be a distinction between followers of Christ and those who follow the ways of the world and sin.

We mentioned as well that we must be willing to re-order our priorities according to the Lord's purposes if we are going to remain free. God gave the Israelites a new calendar with new traditions and feasts and festivals, with a new rhythm to their life, new diet, new understanding of what is good and what is evil, what is holy and what is unholy. He has set us free and to remain free we must re-order our priorities and our lives according to his purpose and plan.

This morning I want to consider some additional principles for living free found in the story of Israel and their exodus from Egypt. Turn to Exodus 12. Let me remind you of the circumstances of the Exodus. The Israelites have lived in Egypt for 430 years. They arrived as guests during a famine but were later enslaved by the Pharaohs and had remained through the centuries as slaves in Egypt. Now God was preparing to bring them out of their bondage and take them to the land he had promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and their descendants forever. God sent Moses as a deliverer and when he asked Pharaoh to set the people free,

Pharaoh refused. God then sent plagues upon Egypt to persuade Pharaoh to release the Israelites. He refused until finally the Lord brought things to a head with a plague of death to every firstborn male in Egypt. This event involved the institution of the Passover. Following God's instructions, the Israelites killed a lamb and placed blood on the doorposts of their houses and then roasted the lamb and ate it in their house. The Lord told them he would pass through the land and when he saw the blood applied to the doorposts he would pass over their house and family but if the blood was not applied, the firstborn in the house would die. (12:13).

God gave them a commandment that after he delivered them from Egypt, they were to commemorate the Exodus every year in what became known as Passover. As part of the Feast of Passover, the Israelites were told to make bread but not to use leaven. This commemorated the fact their deliverance from Egypt came so quickly they didn't have time for the bread they were baking to rise. They ate what they called matzah – think pita bread or tortillas, made from flour without leaven or yeast in it. It became known, in conjunction with the Passover, as the feast of Unleavened bread and it commemorated their hasty departure and deliverance from Egypt.

Leaven in the Scripture is often used figuratively as a type or symbol of sin or wickedness. Jesus warned us to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, the Sadducees and Herod. Paul cautioned us that a little leaven will leaven the whole loaf. But Jesus also said in Matthew 13:33 that the kingdom of heaven is like leaven. So what is leaven? Webster says leaven is "sour dough, which mixed with other dough... produces fermentation in it and makes it light." According to the *Bible Background Commentary*, "Leaven was produced from the barley content of the dough that fermented and served as yeast. Small amounts would be kept from one batch, allowed to ferment, then used in another. With no 'starter' set aside to ferment, the process would have to begin again, taking seven to twelve days to reach the necessary level of fermentation."

Leaven or yeast is the stuff that causes dough to rise. It changes the composition of the flour when it is introduced, causing it to rise. In a spiritual sense then, **Leaven is a symbol of that which changes the composition or the nature of the substance into which it is introduced.**

I said often in Scripture leaven is used as a symbol of sin or wickedness. As part of the Feast of Unleavened bread, the Israelites were told to remove all of the leaven from their

household. They searched out the leaven in their homes and destroyed it. God commanded the Israelites, **“Eat unleavened bread during those seven days; nothing with yeast in it is to be seen among you, nor shall any yeast be seen anywhere within your borders.” Exodus 13:7**

Here is the principle we need to remember. **If we are to live in freedom we must search out and destroy the leaven (sin) in our lives.** It is part of how we are to live free. Nothing with yeast, nothing of sin is to be tolerated in our life or seen among us. God calls us to purity.

Remember we said leaven changes the nature and composition of the substance into which it is introduced. In a negative sense leaven changes the nature of what God has ordained for us and turns it into what we desire for ourselves. The rabbis referred to leaven or yeast in a spiritual sense as an inner force. Leaven as sin is that sinful nature or that inner force rebelling against God and drawing us into sin. This is why we have to search it out and remove it. All of it. We can't allow even a speck of yeast or leaven to remain because even a tiny amount will grow and spread in our soul and corrupt what God has intended for us

Notice the Lord said nothing with yeast in it is to be seen among you nor anywhere within your borders. A thorough search was made in each household to remove anything and everything with yeast in it, nothing that had been fermented remained. One source said in Jewish history some wealthy Jews built an extra kitchen into their homes which they used only during the eight days of Passover to insure not even a speck of leaven would be used. My point is we should be as thorough in our search and as intolerant of sin in our lives as the Jewish people were of the leaven in their household. We've become so tolerant of sin we don't even think of removing it from our lives or our household. Sin doesn't belong within the borders of our lives as God's holy people.

In Matthew 16 Jesus warns of the leaven of the Pharisees. **“Be careful,” Jesus said to them. “Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” Matthew 16:6**

The next verse says the disciples discussed among themselves what Jesus meant by that statement and finally they understood. **“...he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” Matthew 16:12**

The yeast or leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees had infiltrated the teaching of God's word and had changed the nature and composition of its' truth. The leaven of the Pharisees had

changed the nature of God's good news of salvation and reconciliation into a message of legalism and works. There was no grace or mercy, just law and works and pride in their own self-righteous efforts. They thought their works and effort would commend them to God. The Pharisees even went beyond the word of God, adding their own man made traditions. ("God said this but if you want to please him you need to go beyond.") It was a works based salvation that refused to hear Jesus' message of good news and salvation for all who would trust and obey. As they worked harder than others at keeping their laws, they became self-righteous judges and critics of everyone else, pointing out other's sins while ignoring and covering their own.

We have to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees as well. As leaven invisibly works its way into the dough, legalism and judgmentalism can work its way into our spirit. We have been saved by grace alone. It is not grace plus works or anything else. Good works are evidence of his grace working in our life, but it is his mercy that saves us and not our efforts or works. Apart from Christ we have no righteousness of our own, nothing to commend us to God. We've all sinned and come short of his glory. That's why we can't set ourselves up as judges. We know our righteousness is as filthy rags. We stand in the righteousness of Christ alone. Guard your heart against the leaven of the Pharisees. It is by his grace we are saved and by his grace we remain free indeed!

While the leaven of the Pharisees meant adding to God's word (their traditions and works), the leaven of the Sadducees meant subtracting from God's word. The Sadducees didn't believe in miracles. They didn't believe in the resurrection. They didn't believe in angels, in an immortal soul. Their religion was devoid of life, hope, and the supernatural. Theirs was a type of religious fatalism that led to a preoccupation with power and wealth and position in this life. After all, if there is no resurrection, then get all you can while you can.

Jesus tells us to search out the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees, get rid of it and then guard against it coming back. Don't let their leaven turn you into a self-righteous judge, pointing at others sin but ignoring your own. Don't let their leaven change the nature of your faith into a materialistic, life-less, hope-less religion. Stand firm in the faith that has been delivered to you. Hold to the truth we are saved by his grace. He has placed His Holy Spirit within us and we walk in his power and his anointing. Hold to the truth that God still does the miraculous. Stand in the truth that we have eternal life in Christ and he is preparing a place for

us where we will live with him forever. Don't let the leaven of the Pharisees or the Sadducees corrupt your faith. Stand in the freedom of Christ!

In Mark's gospel Jesus also warned against the leaven of Herod. **"Be careful," Jesus warned them. "Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod." Mark 8:15.**

What was the leaven or the yeast of Herod? Remember, leaven changes the nature of the substance into which it is introduced. Herod wanted to change the gospel by making it the friend of the royal court and the palace. He wanted to tame Jesus and the faith. He wanted to be entertained by Jesus but not changed by Jesus. Herod wanted a little bit of religion but he didn't want it to require anything of him. He didn't want to face the truth. The yeast of Herod wants to take the sharp edge off of Jesus and New Testament discipleship. The leaven of Herod says "love Jesus but live life your own way, on your own terms."

In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul is writing about sexual immorality in the church. (In particular a man had slept with his father's wife, his stepmother). Paul warns them to not tolerate such sin. He tells them, **"Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast – as you really are." 1 Corinthians 5:6-7**

You can't have it God's way and your way because that little bit of sin, that little bit of yeast or leaven that you allow, it works its way through the whole batch of dough, through your whole life. That little bit of compromise soon grows and begins to change and affect your whole life. It affects all of your choices, it colors all your decisions, it affects your relationships and dominates your life. Get rid of the old yeast. Paul continued with his warning, **"Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth." 1 Corinthians 5:8.** We are to live pure lives, lives without leaven, without sin and compromise, lives of sincerity and truth.

We need to search out the leaven of Herod that tries to infiltrate our life and the life of the church. We have to rid ourselves of leaven that corrupts the truth of the gospel and robs our life with Christ of its purity and holiness. Beware of the leaven of Herod that wants to marry the church to the world, to incorporate a lifestyle of sin into the church in exchange for prestige and popularity. We have to get rid of the leaven and be the holy people God has called us to be.

Let me finish with this thought. The bible tells us not only were the Israelites to not take

time to let the dough rise, they were to eat the Passover meal dressed and ready to go. **“This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the Lord’s Passover.” Exodus 12:11**

To live in freedom we must keep in mind we are on a journey to a land of promise. This world is not our home! After 430 years of living as slaves in a land not their own, they were being set free and heading for home. They weren’t planning to return, not even for a visit. They were leaving for good! Wave goodbye to the chains that shackled you, the whips that beat you, the harsh treatment, the pain and struggles of slavery and say hello to freedom.

For us as followers of Christ we live in freedom and remain free as we realize we are on a journey through this world. We don’t need to anchor ourselves to anything this world offers because we won’t be staying that long. We have been set free and we’ve set our sights on another land, on a heavenly home. We don’t need to get attached to “stuff” here. Jesus said we were to lay up treasures in heaven where thieves can’t steal and rust and moths can’t destroy.

We used to sing that song, “this world is not my home, I’m just a passing through, my treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue. The angels beckon me, from heaven’s open door and I can’t feel at home in this world anymore.” Houses and land, fame or wealth, it doesn’t really mean that much because we aren’t going to be here that long. Freedom says “I’m not bound to this world, I’m bound to Jesus. I’m attached to His people but not to things of this world.” Some of us grasp onto the things of this world like this is all there is, this is all we’ve got. Friends, we need to understand the freeing power of living as pilgrims and aliens, passing through, on our way to heaven. Living as pilgrims on our way to heaven is living free indeed.

Understand one last thing about this journey: it required preparation. **If we are going to live in freedom it means we must be prepared to leave in a hurry!** The Israelites had to get everything in order because they were leaving in a hurry. If there was any of the lamb left, they were to burn it in the fire. There wouldn’t be any left overs. Get your shoes on and your cloak tucked into your belt. When the Lord says go there won’t be time for stragglers, for last minute packing or preparation. Get things in order, eat with your staff in your hand because you will be leaving at a moment’s notice.

I’m not trying to turn this into a funeral sermon, but I want you to be free. I want you to live free and part of our freedom is found in being prepared. Get your house in order because we

are leaving in haste. You won't have time to get relationships all in order. Do that now. You won't have time to go around asking people to forgive you and make amends. Do that now. Get rid of malice and wickedness and bitterness and leaven and sin. Get prepared because we are leaving in haste, whenever the Lord says.

Is everything in order? Get ready. Get the leaven out. Get the lead out. It's almost time to go!