

## Free Indeed Part 8

We are wrapping up this series of messages dealing with freedom. Among other things in this series we've talked about freedom from materialism and freedom from bitterness, freedom from bowing to peer pressure. We talked about living counter-culturally and resisting that constant pressure to submit to the lifestyle and values of the world rather than submitting to the values of Christ and his kingdom. I believe one of the things we need to resist is the cynicism that permeates our culture. This morning I want to focus on freedom from cynicism.

Cynicism is an inclination to question the sincerity and goodness of people's motives and actions. Cynics believe people are always motivated by selfishness. Everyone is a hypocrite. Cynicism expresses itself in statements like: "nothing is as it seems, nothing is worth committing to, no one is worthy of my trust, there is nothing in this life worth dying for." Cynicism is life devoid of hope. It is an approach to life that suspects everyone, everything, every action and every motive. Everyone has an ulterior motive, a hidden agenda. Everyone is motivated by self interest and greed. There can be no such thing as real love or selflessness. Remember 1 Corinthians 13 and Paul's statement that love believes all things and hopes all things? That's inconsistent with cynicism. A cynic doesn't believe anyone or anything and there is not much reason for hope.

Cynicism is one of the defining spirits of the age. We lost our innocence decades ago. In America we doubt, question and de-construct everything. There is no such thing as a good guy or a hero anymore. The only hero in the movies is an "anti-hero", flawed with only a slightly less selfish motive he out-cheats the bad guy and saves the day. That's the good guy in today's culture. Historians go back in history and question the motives of the hero's of our past. We impose present-day sensibilities on 200 year old behavior and then question the motives and intentions. "No one could be that honest, that generous. There had to be an ulterior motive."

Cynics will argue that optimists are naive, persons of faith are unenlightened, believing the bible is to be ignorant and deceived. And here we are, wading into the cultural fray with the good news of Jesus Christ, his death, resurrection and his offer of eternal life and cynical society looks at us with contempt or pity or both.

To the cynics I would say, Christians are not naive. We know our own sinfulness and that of humanity, but we remain hopeful because of Christ and the resurrection. Michael Green wrote, **"The Christian....is a realist, well aware, as his Scriptures no less than his**

**observation tell him, of fallen human nature. He knows that, left to themselves, people are incurably selfish. The cross reminds him of what human wickedness is capable of. The resurrection reminds him of how God can overrule it.” ...Michael Green**

Cynicism occurs when circumstances, conditions, events and our responses to them, blind us to God’s love and God’s purpose and promise. Cynicism occurs when you stop at Calvary and never see the empty tomb. Cynicism scoffs at grace and consequently resigns itself to failure and defeat. Cynicism can’t believe in and will not expect mercy and thus turns to judgment and death. Cynicism looks at human nature and abandons hope. But understand, cynics don’t usually turn to cynicism as a philosophical world view. **Cynicism is usually arrived at experientially.** Enough has occurred to make them bitter, to cloud their view and outlook on life, to cause them to abandon hope and to have long ago given up on their hopes and dreams.

You may not consider yourself a cynic, but perhaps you’ve been hurt, disappointed and you’ve become cynical about life and relationships and God. You can’t see much reason for holding on to hope. Hope is just foolish and naive optimism isn’t it? But I would argue the reason for holding on to hope is based on the reality of God’s grace, the assurance of God’s promise and purpose for our lives.

Maybe you’ve had a dream, a vision of what you were going to do with your life and then all hell broke loose. Everything changed in a moment, in one terrible conversation, one tragic event or betrayal and now you are ready to abandon God’s promises, lay aside your hopes and dreams and give up. Let me point you back to a central figure in the Old Testament that had exactly that experience. We’ve talked about the Exodus of Israel for the past couple of Sundays but today let’s go back to the very beginning of the story and look at a young man named Joseph.

Genesis 37 tells us that Joseph was the beloved son of Jacob. He was the son of Jacob’s old age. A handsome young man of 17 when he had a dream and God planted something in his mind and heart. He didn’t understand what it meant nor God’s timing in all of it, but it was a word from the Lord nevertheless. He told his brothers about the dream. To put it in Oklahoma farm terms, Joseph said, “we were all bailing hay in the field when my bale stood up and all your bales gathered around and bowed down to my bale.”

Joseph had a second dream and this time the sun, moon and eleven stars bowed down to him. His father interpreted the dream to represent the family and asked, “Will your mother and I and your brothers come and literally bow down to you?”

Joseph’s brothers were so jealous they decided to get rid of him. Jacob sent Joseph to check on his brothers who were grazing the flocks near Shechem. As he approached Joseph’s brothers said, **“Here comes that dreamer!” they said to each other. ‘Come now, let’s kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we’ll see what comes of his dreams.’” Genesis 37:19-20**

“Here comes that dreamer.” You may remember that Jacob, Joseph’s father was a dreamer as well. In Genesis 28:12, Jacob was running from his brother Esau when he stopped to sleep and dreamed of a ladder ascending up into heaven and in the dream he heard the voice of the Lord speaking to him. Can’t you imagine Joseph as a boy saying, “Dad, tell me again about your dream. Tell me about the ladder and the angels.” “Joseph, I saw it as plain as day. And the Lord stood above it and told me, ‘The land you are on, I will give it to you and your descendants. And I will go with you and will bring you back to this land and someday all the nations of the earth will be blessed through your family.’”

You can hear Joseph saying, “That’s quite a dream isn’t it Dad? Are you sure it will come true?” “God spoke it son. I may not understand it all. I don’t understand the timing of it. I may not even live to see it fulfilled, but I won’t let go of God’s promises and I won’t stop believing!”

Now God had given Joseph a dream, just as he had given a dream to his father Jacob. And although he didn’t understand it all, I think he knew somehow his dream was part of the promise of God to his father and grandfather. His dream was part of keeping their dream alive.

Joseph had a dream. It was God’s dream, but the brothers, like brothers sometimes do, wanted to put an end to Joseph’s dream. “Let’s kill him and see what becomes of his dreams.” Joseph then experiences a series of events that could have turned him into a cynic. He could have decided no one was trustworthy. “You can’t rely on anyone, not family, not your boss. God may give you a dream but you can’t even trust God because he doesn’t fulfill his promises.” Joseph could have given up hope and become a cynic, but look what happens.

Genesis 37:23-24. Rather than kill him, Joseph’s brothers stripped him of his robe and threw him down into an empty cistern. When Midianite traders came along headed for Egypt,

they sold Joseph to them as a slave. They went home and to their father they presented Joseph's robe which they had dipped in goat's blood, and told him Joseph had been killed.

Meanwhile, Genesis 37:36 tells us Joseph was sold to one of the Pharaoh's officials in Egypt, a man named Potiphar, the captain of the guard. Joseph served Potiphar well and because the Lord was with Joseph, everything in Potiphar's house and business prospered. But then, more trouble comes in the form of Potiphar's wife. The bible says Joseph was young, strong, handsome and Potiphar's wife tried to entice Joseph to sleep with her. He refused, saying, "**How could I do this wicked thing and sin against God?**" **Genesis 39:9**. Here was a young man with integrity. He refused to sleep with Potiphar's wife so she finally accused him of rape and Potiphar had Joseph thrown into prison.

Genesis 40 tells of the time he spent in prison. While there the Pharaoh's cupbearer and his baker were thrown into prison along with Joseph. They both had a dream and Joseph interpreted the dreams for them. He told the cupbearer his dream meant within three days he would be restored to his job but the baker's dream meant in three days he would be hanged. Joseph told the cupbearer to remember him when he was freed. It happened just as Joseph said, but the cupbearer forgot Joseph.

Two full years passed with Joseph languishing in an Egyptian prison. Two years in prison, knowing you were unjustly accused, you were innocent, knowing you had helped the cupbearer but he had forgotten you. Your brothers literally sold you out, Potiphar's wife lied about you, the cupbearer forgot about you and now maybe God had abandoned you as well. Perhaps God had forgotten about the dream he showed you and you might as well forget it yourself. Forget the promise. "So much for my brothers bowing down before me. They hope I'm dead and really I'm as good as dead in this prison." If there was anyone who deserved to become cynical Joseph had to be the guy. Thinking everyone was out for themselves, no one could be trusted, everyone was motivated by selfishness and greed, betrayed by family members, employers, friends. I think life would have made me cynical by this time if I was Joseph. Forget the promise, forget God, just look after yourself because no one else will look after you.

Look what Psalm 105 says about Joseph. This Psalm talks about the faithfulness of God in behalf of Israel. It tells of their history and of the famine that came and of how God provided for them. In the NASB it reads, "**He sent a man before them, Joseph, who was sold as a**

**slave. They afflicted his feet with fetters. He himself was laid in irons. Until the time that his word came to pass, the word of the Lord tested him.” Psalm 105:17-19**

The Lord sent Joseph to Egypt. Well, it didn't look that way to Joseph. It looked like he had been hijacked by his brothers and sold into slavery. Here he is in chains and notice what verse 19 says: “Until the time that his word came to pass, the word of the Lord tested him.” NIV reads “till the word of the Lord proved him true.” The word of the Lord tested him, it proved him, it revealed what he was made of. That's what tests do.

What are you going to do Joseph? Here is your test: Will you remain true to God and hold on to the dream, hold on to the promise even when nothing is turning out as you expected? Even when it looks like God has forgotten you and left you in prison? No one is bowing down to you or serving you, instead you are a slave and a prisoner. Will you hold on to the promise of God or will you give up, fall into cynicism and abandon your hopes and dreams? Two years in that prison, falsely condemned. “Where is God? Why is this happening to me? What about your promises Lord? It's never going to happen so I'm giving up. God can't be trusted. No one can be trusted!”

“Until the time that his word came to pass, the word of the Lord tested him.” God was up to something. God was positioning Joseph for greatness, for deliverance, for freedom. God's great purposes were about to be accomplished. But Joseph would have to refuse to become cynical and hardened. He would have to keep on trusting the Lord, keep resting in his faithfulness, keep believing in his word. Joseph would have missed all that God had for him, the fulfillment of all the dreams and hopes and promises, the salvation of his family and his people if he had allowed cynicism to embitter and hardened his heart.

Perhaps Joseph had every right to become cynical and bitter. Instead, he held on to the promise of God. He had a dream God gave to him and he would not allow that dream to die. Perhaps you feel you have every right to be cynical after the disappointment and trials you've experienced. May I suggest you rethink that. You may be going through a test, but if you will hold on to the promise the way Joseph did, “until the time that God's word to you comes to pass”, then you will see the glory of God. Then you will experience his freedom, his glory, his provision.

You know what happened. Imprisoned for two years when Pharaoh has a dream that no one can interpret and the cupbearer remembers. “There was a slave in prison that interpreted a

dream correctly for me.” Joseph is brought from prison to the palace before Pharaoh. He interprets the Egyptian ruler’s dream and Pharaoh makes Joseph the second most powerful man in Egypt. Overnight he moves from the prison to the palace, from slavery to freedom and power. You can become cynical and give up, or you can keep believing, keep holding on to the promise of God and watch God do what only God can do.

Jacob had a dream as a young man and heard from God. As an old man before he died (Genesis 49-50 tells us the story of Jacob’s death) he made Joseph swear that he would take Jacob’s body to Canaan to be buried. All the promises hadn’t come to pass yet. Everything God said to him hadn’t happened yet. It still wasn’t all his land. The nations of the earth weren’t all blessed by his family yet. But Jacob had a dream. He had a promise from God and he believed God would honor his word even if he didn’t live to see it. “Bury me in that land God promised.”

Joseph had a dream. His brothers asked “what will become of Joseph’s dream if we sell him – if he is tested and tried.” The answer? Joseph held on to his dream in spite of their evil efforts. And the result? After Joseph revealed himself to his brothers in Egypt, he told them. **“You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.” Genesis 50:20**

Joseph held to the promise. He refused to become cynical and stood in the freedom that comes with trusting in God’s faithfulness and God’s promises. Joseph lived to be 110 and saw his great, great grandchildren. When he died, he died full of faith, with hope, with his dreams still intact. But not all of the promises had been accomplished. Joseph knew there was a bigger plan and purpose of God behind all of this. There were bigger dreams than just his brothers bowing down to him in an Egyptian palace. Joseph’s dream was part of Jacob’s bigger dream, of a people possessing a land of milk and honey. Of a people whose God is the Lord and they would serve him in the land he had for them.

Look what Joseph told his family. **“I am about to die. But God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.’ And Joseph made the sons of Israel swear an oath and said, ‘God will surely come to your aid and then you must carry my bones up from this place.’” Genesis 50:24-25**

Joseph was saying “I chose to remain free, to hold on to the promise and not become a slave to cynicism and unbelief. I chose to keep on trusting and believing, in spite of adverse

circumstances, in spite of what did or did not come to pass. I chose to hold on to the dreams, in spite of slavery, prison, betrayal, or anything else. When I die, bury me in that land God promised to us. I haven't seen the fulfillment of all the dreams and all the promises, but someday it will happen because God said so. Someday you will go home to Canaan land so take me with you."

In spite of our circumstances, in spite of the testing, in spite of the timing as you wait for God's word to come to pass – Don't lose hope. Don't give in to cynicism. Hold on to the promises of God. Maintain your trust. Even if it takes a life time and beyond. Keep trusting and believing. You belong to the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. He is a God of promise and He is faithful. He has come to set you free and to keep you free from cynicism and despair. Trust in the Lord!