

INDEPENDENCE SUNDAY

“Freedom!”

John 8:31-36

One of the most intense movies you will ever see is a movie that was directed by **Mel Gibson** and depicts Scotland’s struggle for independence in the early part of the 14th Century. It’s entitled *“Braveheart”* and it won 5 Academy Awards, including Best Picture of the year and Best Director. *Are you familiar with it?*

It’s not a movie for the faint of heart. It graphically gives you a feel for what war was really like back in the Middle Ages. Not only did Mel Gibson direct this movie, he has starred in the leading role by portraying the famous and fearless Scottish warrior, **William Wallace**.

This story, half-historical and half-mythological, tells the tale of how a common man, William Wallace, a farmer, rallies a whole kingdom to courageously and valiantly fight for their freedom.

Scotland was being oppressed by a wicked tyrant—**King Edward the 1st of England**, who was also known as *“Longshanks”* because he was so tall. This ruthless ruler was bound and determined to grab the kingdom of Scotland for himself, but Wallace, who has already lost his father and brother and wife to this brutal regime, is not willing to just rollover and play dead and allow this kind of oppressive tyranny to reign and rule in the land.

So he gathers the farmers and the merchants and the common laborers in the land and forms an army to fight against King Edward the 1st and they win victory after victory after victory against tremendous odds. But in the end, Wallace is betrayed by a friend and captured by King Edward the 1st and convicted of treason.

King Edward the 1st commands William Wallace to bow down and admit and recognize that he’s the king, but Wallace refuses to bow down and be a loyal subject. And so, instead of just beheading William Wallace, King Edward the 1st decides to torture him.

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He is taken to a public square in London where people holler at him and jeer at him and spit on him and throw rocks at him...and he is hung to within an inch of death. King Edward the 1st doesn’t just want him to die—he wants to make Wallace beg for mercy.

And so they torture him as he is stretched by his ankles and wrists. They cut him. The executioner says, *“Just plea for mercy and I’ll end this quickly.”* But he doesn’t plea for mercy. Awed by his courage, the people of London who are watching this execution begin to yell for mercy to be shown to him.

Finally, William signals to the executioner that he wants to speak. The executioner thinks that he is going to finally beg for mercy. But using the last bit of strength he has in his body, William Wallace cries, *“Freedom!”* And it’s this cry and this memory that inspires the people of Scotland to fight on for and ultimately win their freedom.

Freedom is a powerful word. It is a driving concept. Men have fought battles, gone to war, left behind families and homes and businesses, even sacrificed their very lives for freedom. Someone has said it like this: *“Freedom is only a word until you have been close to losing it.”*

For over 200 years *“Freedom”* has been the battle cry of this country. It was what inspired **Patrick Henry** to say, *“Give me liberty or give me death.”* It is what motivated and moved courageous young men—most of them not even in their twenties—to storm the beaches of Normandy that momentous morning June 6, 1944, knowing full well that many of them if not most of them would never make it through safely.

Before every ballgame in every sports arena we celebrate in song the fact that we live and dwell in *“the land of the free.”*

As **General Omar Bradley** once said, *“No word was ever spoken that has held greater hope, demanded greater sacrifice, needed more to be nurtured, blessed more the giver...or come closer to being God’s will on earth”* than this word *“freedom.”*

And so for the past several days we have been celebrating our freedom

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here in America with fireworks and parades and family picnics. But on this **Independence Sunday**, as Christian believers, I want us to not just think about and celebrate our freedom as a nation, our freedom as a people, our political and personal freedoms; but the greatest freedom of all—the **spiritual freedom you and I can have through Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior**.

Political freedom is often temporary—kingdoms come and kingdoms go, nations rise and nations fall, civilizations ascend to glorious heights and civilizations descend and decay and decompose and become unbelievably decadent.

But spiritual freedom cannot be crushed or subdued or imprisoned. *How is it that old patriotic hymn puts it?*

**Faith of our Fathers! Living still
In spite of dungeon, fire and sword;
O how our hearts beat high with joy
When-e'er we hear that glorious word!**

**Our fathers, chained in prisons dark,
Were still in heart and conscience free;
How sweet would be their children's fate,
If they like them could die for thee!**

Spiritual freedom knows no bounds or bonds or barriers. I want you to listen to what Jesus said in the book of **John**, the **8th chapter**, beginning with **verse 31**.

To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

They answered him, “We are Abraham’s descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?”

Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”

John 8:31-36 New International Version

It’s that last verse that I want you to grab a hold of and cling to and focus upon this morning. **“If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”** I want us to celebrate together this morning an independence that will last for all of eternity.

You will notice on the communion table that elements have been prepared for us to celebrate the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. Jesus said to us, **“Do this in remembrance of me”** (Luke 22:19 New International Version). *What is it that we are to remember and focus upon during this time of Holy Communion? What should we be thinking about?*

One of the things we should be thinking about is the freedom we have in Christ Jesus. Jesus has set us free—I mean really free! **“If the Son sets you free,”** He says to us, **“you will be free indeed.”** I just want to remind you on this **Independence Sunday** of three specific things from which Christ has set us free.

For One Thing, We Have Freedom From Guilt – Our Past Can’t Haunt Us. I believe one of the most powerful and precious verses in all of the Bible is that wonderful verse in **2nd Corinthians 5**, the **17th verse**, that says, **“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”** (New International Version).

In other words, what is past is past. The “old” is gone. The prophet Isaiah assures us that He **“remembers your sins no more”** (Isaiah 43:25 New International Version).

I’ll never forget a story I heard one time about this woman who lived in the Philippine Islands who claimed to have visions in which she spoke directly to Christ and Christ, in turn, spoke directly to her. Her priest, however, was very skeptical and so to test her, he said, **“The next time you speak with Jesus, I want you to ask him what sin your priest committed while he was still in seminary.”**

Something he had done when he was just a young man still haunted him. He had repented of it, asked God for forgiveness for it, but still he had no peace about it. It still bothered him.

A few days later the priest happened to see this woman and so he asked

her, “*Well, did Christ visit you in your dreams last night?*”

“*Yes, He did,*” she replied.

“*Did you ask Him what sin I committed in seminary?*”

“*Yes, I did,*” she answered.

“*Well, what did He say?*”

“*He said, ‘I don’t remember.’*”

When God forgives, He forgets. The key word here is **Forgiven**. You have been forgiven. “*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness*” (1st John 1:9 New International Version).

One of the things we need to celebrate this morning is the **freedom from guilt**. Our past can’t haunt us! I have been around the church long enough to know that a lot of people carry around a lot of baggage with them through life that they need not carry.

We all have mistakes and failures and sins that have the power to haunt us, if we allow them. Maybe you’ve failed at marriage. Maybe you’ve failed as a parent. Maybe you’ve failed financially because of your own irresponsibility. Maybe you’ve failed morally. Maybe you’ve failed in your attempt to live an upright Christian life.

Listen to what the Bible says in **Psalms 103**. “*He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us*” (Psalms 103:10-12 New International Version).

Believe and accept and celebrate your freedom from guilt—your past can’t haunt you.

Second, We Have Freedom From Consequence – Christ Died In Our Place. We all know that when the law is broken there are consequences. We may escape the legal consequences at times for

our misdeeds, but there are still consequences. The guilt we just

talked about is a consequence. “*What if someone finds out?*” “*What if I get caught?*” “*What will they do to me if my misdeeds are uncovered?*” Our peace, our joy, our sense of security is destroyed. That’s a consequence of breaking the law.

And so it is with God’s law. There is a price to be paid. There are consequences when you sin. The Bible says, “*The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*” (Romans 6:23 New International Version).

Here is the heart of the gospel. **Christ took the consequence of our sin upon His own shoulders and paid the price so we could be free**. Here is how the Bible states it. “*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God*” (2nd Corinthians 5:21 New International Version).

We have been set free from the consequence of our sin. The key word here is **Vicarious**. That’s just a big fancy word that means “*done by one person substituting for another.*” Christ is our sacrificial substitute.

Now please don’t misunderstand me. There are still consequences for our sin. When we choose to speed or run a red light, we still get the ticket and we still have to pay the fine.

When we cheat on our taxes there are still penalties that have to be paid. When we defile our marriage vows and commit adultery, the trust in our relationship is still broken; the marriage may still come to an end. That’s a consequence.

When we sin, there are going to be temporal consequences. That is the nature of life. You cannot set something into motion and expect that there will be no repercussions from it. But if you are in Christ, if you are walking in relationship with Him, if you have allowed Him to be your Lord and your Savior, then he sets us free—free from the ultimate consequence of sin.

We need to celebrate that this morning. Now one other thing –

Third, We Have Freedom From Fear – The Future Belongs To

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Those Who Belong To Christ. We have been set free to be all that God wants us to be. The Bible says, *“Sin shall not be your master”* (Romans 6:14 New International Version). *“If God is for us, who can be against us?”* (Romans 8:31 New International Version).

The psalmist put it like this: *“The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?”* (Psalm 27:1 New International Version).

Does that mean I will never have any fears in life? No, that’s not what it means. But it does mean that fear will not have dominion over me. The man who wrote these words, **King David** of Israel, was attacked by fear often in life. But listen to what he wrote in **Psalm 56**, *“When I am afraid, I will trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid”* (Psalm 56:3-4 New International Version).

The key word here is **Trust**. Trust is refusing to panic. It’s that little voice in your head that says, *“Believe your heart and not your eyes.”* It is the daring of your soul to go further than the eye can see.

And so I encourage you this morning to celebrate your freedom in Christ. You have been set free. **Free From Guilt** – Your past can’t haunt you; **Free From Consequence** – Christ died in your place; **Free From Fear** – The future belongs to those who belong to Christ.