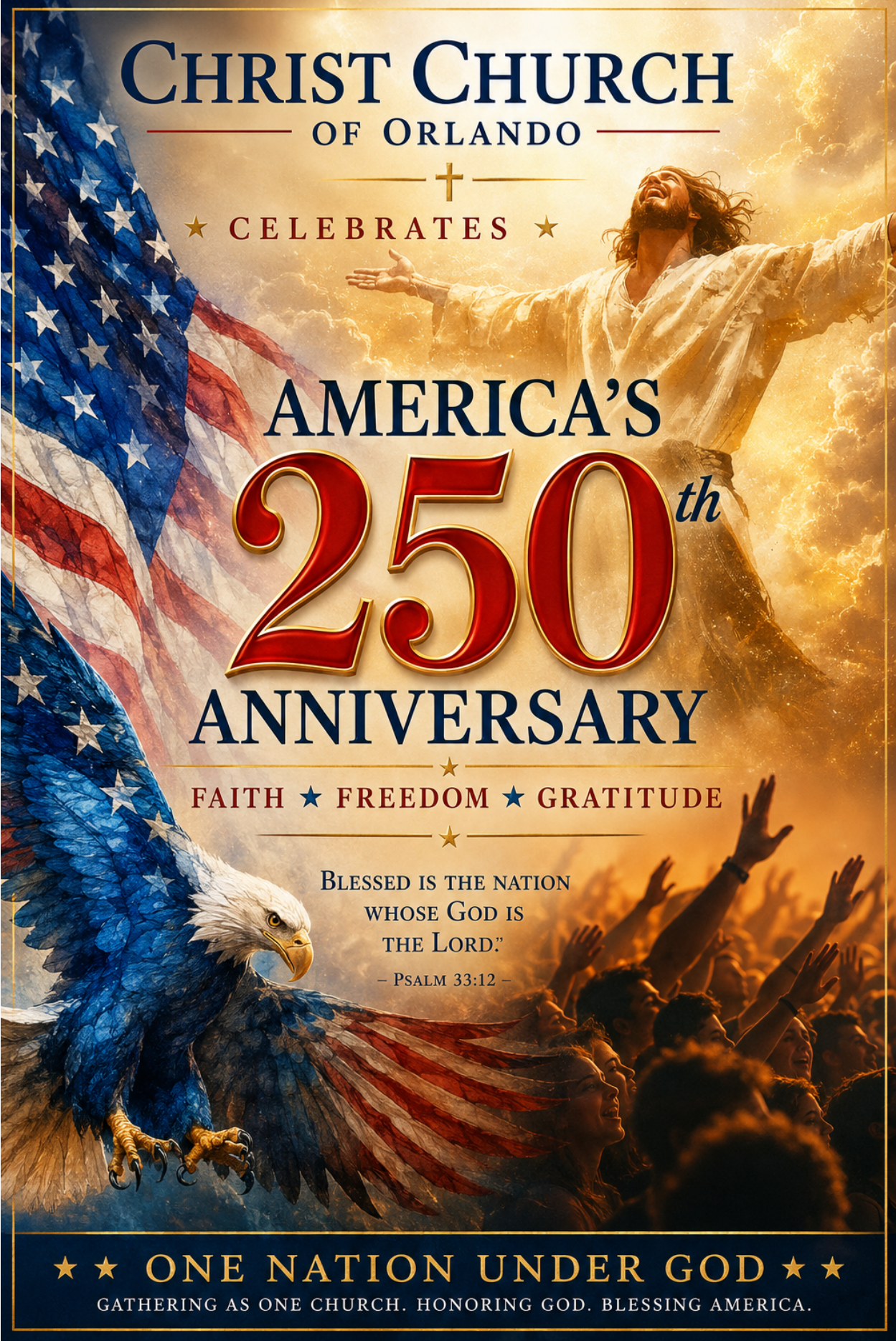




CHRIST CHURCH

OF ORLANDO

— ✕ —
★ CELEBRATES ★

AMERICA'S **250th** ANNIVERSARY

— ★ —
FAITH ★ FREEDOM ★ GRATITUDE
— ★ —

BLESSED IS THE NATION
WHOSE GOD IS
THE LORD."

— PSALM 33:12 —

★★ ONE NATION UNDER GOD ★★

GATHERING AS ONE CHURCH. HONORING GOD. BLESSING AMERICA.

PREFACE

IN A NUTSHELL, A REFLECTION BASED ON TODAY'S SERMON

THE GREATEST FREEDOM: OUR LIBERTY IN CHRIST

An Independence Day 250th Anniversary Reflection

Each year, as our nation celebrates Independence Day, we pause with grateful hearts to remember the blessings of freedom. We thank God for those who established this nation upon enduring principles of liberty, for those who have defended that liberty with courage, and for the countless men and women who continue to sacrifice so that future generations may live in peace.

Political freedom is a precious gift. The ability to worship openly, speak freely, gather without fear, and pursue lives of purpose should never be taken for granted. We rightly give thanks for these blessings and pray that God will continue to guide and protect our nation.

Yet Holy Scripture reminds us that there is a freedom even greater than political liberty.

A nation may enjoy freedom while many of its citizens remain imprisoned by fear, guilt, bitterness, addiction, pride, anxiety, loneliness, or despair. Outward liberty cannot by itself heal the human heart. Only Jesus Christ can do that.

Our Lord declared: ***"If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."*** (John 8:36)

These words reveal the deepest longing of every human soul. We were created for fellowship with God, yet sin fractured that relationship. Left to ourselves, we often become slaves—not only to sinful actions but also to the hidden burdens we carry within us. Many live beneath the weight of regret, haunted by past failures, uncertain of forgiveness, and fearful of death.

Into this broken world came Jesus Christ. The eternal Son of God took upon Himself our humanity, bore our sins upon the Cross, and rose triumphantly from the grave. Through His sacrifice we receive complete forgiveness. Through His resurrection we receive everlasting hope. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit we receive new life.

This is freedom that no government can grant and no earthly power can take away. In Christ we are freed from condemnation because our sins have been forgiven. We are freed from fear because death has been conquered. We are freed from despair because Christ has opened the gates of eternal life. We are freed from trying to earn God's love because His grace has already been poured out upon us.

Christian freedom is not permission to live however we choose. Rather, it is the joyful freedom to become the people God created us to be. The Holy Spirit reshapes our

hearts so that we desire what is good, love what is holy, seek justice, practice mercy, forgive generously, and walk humbly with our God.

This freedom transforms every part of life. The angry discover peace. The lonely discover the companionship of Christ. The guilty receive mercy. The proud learn humility. The fearful receive courage. The weary find rest. The broken discover hope. The dying receive the promise of resurrection.

This is **why Christians can rejoice even in difficult times**. Our ultimate security does not rest in economies, governments, military strength, or human achievement. While we pray faithfully for our nation and honor those who serve it, our deepest confidence rests in the Kingdom of God—a kingdom that cannot be shaken and whose King reigns forever.

As citizens of both our nation and God's Kingdom, we are called to be faithful witnesses. We honor our country by living lives marked by integrity, compassion, generosity, justice, and humble service. We pray for our leaders. We care for our neighbors. We welcome the stranger. We defend the vulnerable. We seek peace wherever God has placed us.

Most importantly, we point others to Jesus Christ, for He alone gives the freedom that satisfies every longing of the human heart.

On this Independence Day, let us give thanks for the liberties we enjoy as Americans. Let us remember with gratitude those who have preserved those freedoms through sacrifice and service. Above all, **let us rejoice that through the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus Christ we have received an inheritance infinitely greater than any earthly blessing.**

For earthly freedom, though precious, belongs to this life alone. The freedom Christ gives begins today, transforms every tomorrow, and endures forever. May we therefore stand firm in the liberty Christ has won for us. May our lives reflect His truth, our hearts overflow with gratitude, and our witness lead others into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

"For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery." (Galatians 5:1)

"Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." (2 Corinthians 3:17)

May God bless our nation. May God guide its leaders. May God strengthen His Church. May every heart come to know the perfect freedom found only in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

SERMON NOTES

EXPLORING OUR FREEDOM IN CHRIST

Paul Valo

07/05/26

IN SPITE OF LAST NIGHT'S LEFTOVERS of firecracker scatterings covering Orlando streets and sidewalks, which easily last night joined a slowly lifting away of sulfurous residue, we arrived at CCO's **FREEDOM SUNDAY**, front and center, to celebrate freedom's many blessings at today's joint 10am service, having little idea of how spectacular, and, folks, I really do mean *joyously patriotic-spectacular*, our 10am gathering would actually become as we worshipped, giving glory to God who gives us the *greater* freedom, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior! In any case, it all began with a question: *Good morning, Orlando! Are you glad to be in the House of the God this morning?* With this we jumped and clapped, led by our energetic worship leader, Pastor Brooks. Everything was infusing in familiar reds, whites and blues, but more importantly with Jesus Who is our true, greater and forever freedom! With this we began to sing!

Your mercies are new every morning
Your steadfast love will never end
This hope won't fade in the evening
Lord, how great is Your faithfulness
Lord, how great is Your faithfulness
Whoo

[Interlude]
Yeah
Ohh

[Verse 1]
Every hour
Every minute of my life
Has been part of Your design
Lord, the whole world's in Your hand
Every trial
Every battle that I face

God, You've met me there with grace
Every part has served Your plan

[Pre-Chorus]
Through it all
You've been so, so good
Kept Your word
Like You said You would
[Chorus: Jami Garcia]
Your mercies are new every morning
Your steadfast love will never end
This hope won't fade in the evening
Lord, how great is Your faithfulness
Lord, how great is Your faithfulness

[Interlude]

[Verse 2: Jami Garcia]

Here and now
Looking back on where I've been
Still as good as You were then
There's no limit to Your love

[Pre-Chorus: Jami Garcia]
Through it all
You've been so, so good
Kept Your word
Like You said You would
Oh

[Chorus]
Your mercies are new every morning
Your steadfast love will never end
This hope won't fade in the evening
Lord, how great is Your faithfulness
Lord, how great is Your faithfulness

[Bridge]
(Woahh, woahh)
Oh how great, oh how great
(Woahh, woahh)
Lord, how great is Your
faithfulness
(Woahh, woahh)
Oh how great, oh how great
(Woahh, woahh)
Lord, how great is Your
faithfulness
Your faithfulness

[Pre-Chorus]
Through it all

You've been so, so good,
who
Kept Your word
Like You said You would
Through it all
You've been so, so good
Kept Your word
Like You said You would

[Chorus]
Your mercies are new every
morning
Your steadfast love will never
end
This hope won't fade in the

evening
Lord, how great is Your
faithfulness
Your mercies are new every
morning
Your steadfast love will never
end
This hope won't fade in the
evening
Lord, how great is Your
faithfulness
Lord, how great is Your
faithfulness
Lord, how great is Your
faithfulness



LORD, HOW GREAT IS YOUR FAITHFULNESS!

One more question shot across the sanctuary: ***Has He been faithful to you?*** Once again, loud applause and uplifted hands accompanied our joyous acclamation. At this Pastors Marc and Brooks stepped forward. *After today's service, there's gonna be a major COOKOFF, no I mean to say, a*

major COOKOUT! Lots of laughter, encouraging laughter though, of course. Pastor Brooks added: One special element today is what we're calling CCO's PROCESSION OF PATRIOTS song coming up later. We are going to cheer our vets on in a very special way.

Announcements included: **WE CARE:** The Russell Home for Atypical Children (July 8, 9:30am-1pm); The WASH Foundation (July 11, 9:00am-noon); One Blood (July 12, 8:00am-1:30pm); House of Hope (July 15, 10:00am-2pm); United Against Poverty (July 22, 10:00am-noon); **CCO YOUTH CAMP** (July 6-10); **CREATIVE ARTS 26** (July 19); **BACK TO SCHOOL SUPPLIES** (July 26); **NEW FRIENDS** (August 2).

Pastor Marc said: *Church, of course, goes far beyond these walls as we literally become the hands and feet of Christ in our community and beyond.* Pastor Brooks, holding a major golden trophy, announced: *Hey, everyone, guess what? CCO's men's softball team won **FIRST PLACE!** How about that?* Major applause. Pastor Marc added: *We must remain mindful of needs around us, especially regarding what's going on in Venezuela. We thank You, Lord, for the grace you've given our nation.* With this began a fully patriotic video prepared by our tech team: **LAND OF THE FREE: WE THANK GOD!** Heartily responding to the video's message, we began to sing. Red, white and blue surrounded us in an *effervescent* sort of way. Everything though was pointing beyond our beloved USA to Christ Himself our true and everlasting freedom! Hallelujah! And there was more!

Verse 1
All my words fall short
I got nothing new
How could I express
All my gratitude

Verse 2
I could sing these songs
As I often do
But every song must end
And You never do

Chorus

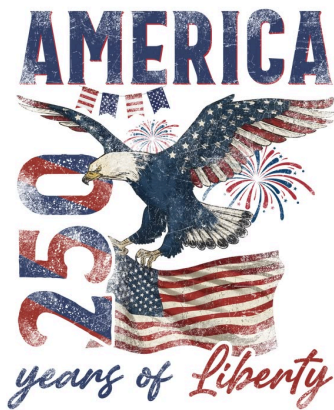
So I throw up my hands
And praise You again and again
'Cause all that I have is a
hallelujah hallelujah
And I know it's not much
But I've nothing else fit for a king
Except for a heart singing
hallelujah
Hallelujah

Verse 3

I've got one response
I've got just one move
With my arms stretched wide
I will worship You

Bridge
Come on my soul
Oh don't you get shy on me
Lift up your song
'Cause you've got a lion
inside of those lungs
Get up and praise the Lord

COME ON, MY SOUL!
DON'T YOU GET SHY ON ME!



LIBERTY IN CHRIST

With this, Pastor Brooks shouted: *LORD, YOU ARE WORTHY!* which generated a most hearty applause. We were ready for more and that was good because a spectacular video featuring our vets, accompanied by a special **FREEDOM SUNDAY** choir, was about to begin, to touch our hearts and remind us that our freedom comes to us at great cost, opening our hearts to an even greater freedom which we find in JESUS CHRIST.

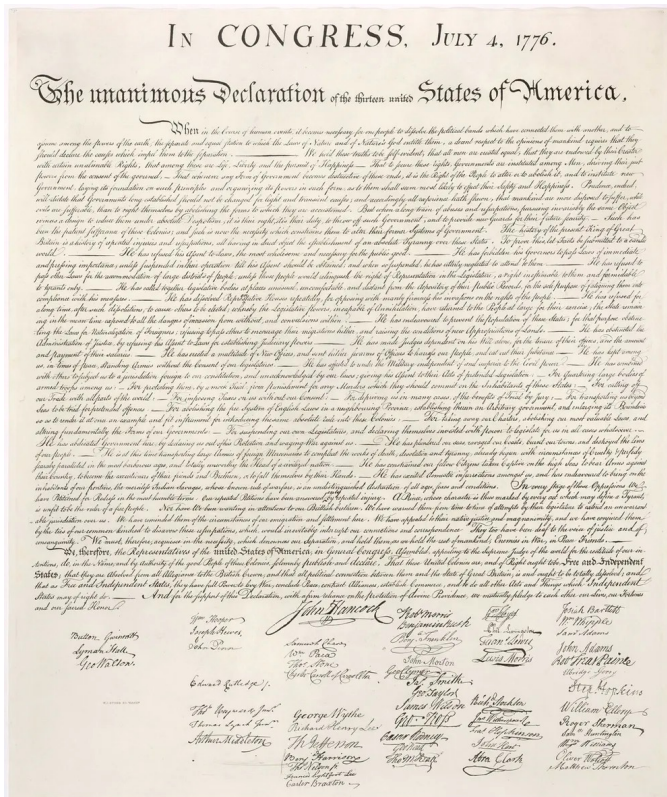




Shouting into the packed church, Pastor Brooks encouraged us: ***With every voice lifted now, let God know that He alone is mighty. He is our freedom. We lift His Name in glory! Be with us, Lord! And all God's people are called to shout...AMEN.*** We heartily replied: ***AMEN!***

Pastor Paul stepped to center stage and he had much to share, which opened our hearts in an ever-deepening way to Jesus, our true and everlasting freedom. *We are a family church, folks. Give our children's ministry a hand, as our kids make their way to children's programming. It is heart-moving especially each week, to see our kids worshipping with their mother and father and family before they leave for class. Now, remember to pick up your kids before the cookout; we don't want any strays left behind!*

Now, to begin, we should give our thanks, as we live in freedom in the greatest country of the world. Of course, we celebrate our freedom here, especially on America's 250th anniversary! Consider though our beginnings and the 56 men who signed our Declaration of Independence, featuring certain unalienable rights, provided not by government, but by God Himself!



INSIGHT: Approved by the Continental Congress on July 4, 1776, the Declaration of Independence announced the separation of 13 North American colonies from Great Britain. It established the foundational philosophy that all people are created equal and possess natural rights, including life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

The document is historically divided into three main sections:

- 1. The Preamble:** Asserts that all individuals possess natural, unalienable rights and that governments exist solely to protect these rights. If a government becomes tyrannical, the people have the moral right to alter or abolish it and form a new one.
- 2. The List of Grievances:** Outlines over two dozen specific complaints against King George III—such as taxation without consent and denying trial by jury—to prove that Great Britain had violated the colonists' rights.
- 3. The Conclusion:** Formally severs all political, legal, and allegiance ties to the British Crown, declaring the United States free and independent states with the full power to wage war, conclude peace, and establish alliances.

An important question remains: Not **WHY** we celebrate freedom but **why** do we **LONG** for freedom. We long not just for a nation's provision of freedom but something deeper, more substantial, everlasting. **Something not dependent on human achievement, but on GOD'S FOREVER provision!**

CONSIDER THIS:

- How parents hope for a better life for their children.

- How those addicted, hope for full freedom from drugs.
- How those living in fear hope for security and safety in their life.
- How those trapped in bitterness hope for redeemed relationship(s).
- How those carrying heavy burdens hope for burdens to be lifted away.
- How those guided by anger hope for peace.

No one has to teach us to long for freedom. It's in our DNA. Longing for freedom is not political! Such longing is spiritual! The heaviest chains which wrap our hearts is invisible to others. Still, such chains cause immense and sometimes a hopeless pain which can kill.

EVERY HUMAN HEART IS CREATED BY GOD WHO WANTS TO SET US FREE!

ESSENTIALS TO REMEMBER

1. FREEDOM IS GOD'S IDEA.

- e.g. Feast of the Tabernacles.
- This feast was established to remind Jews of God's faithfulness.
- This feast is not only a holiday.
- This feast is a reminder that God is a DELIVERER!

INSIGHT: The Feast of Tabernacles, also known as **Sukkot** or the **Feast of Booths**, is a major biblical festival occurring in the fall. It commemorates the 40 years Israelites spent wandering the desert in temporary shelters and celebrates God's provision during the agricultural harvest.

Core Observances and Timing

- **Timing:** Begins on the 15th day of the Hebrew month of Tishri (late September to mid-October), five days after Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement). It lasts for seven days, culminating in an eighth day of solemn assembly (Shemini Atzeret).
- **The Sukkah:** The defining commandment is to build and dwell in a *sukkah*—a temporary hut or booth with at least three walls and a roof made of natural, detached vegetation (like palm fronds). Families eat, and sometimes sleep, in these booths to remember their ancestors' reliance entirely on God for survival.

- **The Four Species:** Participants celebrate by taking a bundle of four plants (the *lulav* and *etrog*—branches of palm, myrtle, and willow alongside a citron) and waving them before the Lord while reciting prayers of thanksgiving and joy.

Spiritual and Historical Significance

- **Remembrance of the Exodus:** It serves as a generational reminder of God's deliverance from slavery in Egypt and His protection in the wilderness.
- **Thanksgiving for the Harvest:** Historically tied to the fall ingathering of crops (olives, grapes, and grains), it is a season of profound rejoicing and gratitude for God's material provision.
- **New Testament Connections:** In the Gospel of John, Jesus uses the ceremonies of this festival (such as the traditional water libation and temple illumination) to declare Himself the provider of "living water" and the "Light of the World".
- **Prophetic Meaning:** Many Christian and Jewish traditions view the feast as a symbol of the Messianic age, when God will "tabernacle" (*or dwell*) permanently among His people.

2. OUR GREATEST FREEDOM IS IN CHRIST.

- Before there was earthly freedom or any nation's freedom, there was God's freedom and deliverance. Think: Jews delivered from Egypt's oppressive hand from slavery, and their journey to the Promised Land.
- Note: ultimately, *earthly* prisons cannot fully *confine* the people of God. Think about that for a moment.
- True freedom is God's provision; His journey He invites us to take.
- God's heart is that we be free. Free indeed!
- Luke 4:18-19 NIV
- ***"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, [19] to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."***
- What a beautiful story it is about how God wants us to be free!

**GOD'S HEART IS THAT WE BE FREE!
FREE INDEED!**

*Of course, I do not believe that America is our savior. Of course NOT! It is possible to live in a free nation and still not be free! Right? Here, this morning, we are looking at **things of the heart. Freeing hearts requires something much BIGGER than any nation could ever provide.***

John 8:31-32,34 NIV

To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. [32] Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” [34] Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.

In His time Jesus recognized that it was not the tyranny of Rome which kept the Jews from freedom. It was sin. Sin keeps us all from the freedom which Christ offers. Yet, we long to be free, don't we? Jews thought that Jesus had come to free them from Caesar. More importantly, they needed to see that Jesus had come to free them/us from the tyranny of sin! The Jews needed to recognize that Rome was not their greatest enemy! Sin was! Jesus clearly taught us: Sin is slavery! Today, if you don't know Jesus you are NOT free!

Everybody has some kind of master. Masters call their followers to be slaves and into a life of major bondage. Jesus, our Master, sets us free!

CONSIDER THIS:

- Bondage to sin: perfectionism.
- Bondage to sin: need for continual approval.
- Bondage to sin: a heart that cannot rest in faith.
- Bondage to sin: need to MANAGE our bondage.
- Bondage to sin: seeking ways to work around and maintain sin.
- Bondage to sin: seeking ways to simply settle for sin in our life.
- Jesus came to set us free NOW!
- Those areas in our life which seem impossible to heal, can literally be made NEW in Jesus.
- Only Jesus Christ can free us from slavery to sin!
- Only Jesus Christ can set us free!
- The freedom we long for is in Jesus Christ alone!
- The enemy is a LIAR.
- The enemy will do everything to discourage us and bring us down.
- God wants each of us to know the FREEDOM OF CHRIST.
- We are in a battle. Set your heart on Jesus!

HOW JESUS SETS YOU FREE

1. JESUS FORGIVES YOUR SIN.

- Sin is thoroughly dealt with through the blood of Jesus on the cross.
- **INSIGHT:** In Romans, the apostle Paul primarily details our freedom in Christ through Chapters 6 & 8. These passages focus on being liberated from the power of sin, released from condemnation, and walking in the newness of the Spirit.

Here are the key verses in Romans regarding this freedom:

- **Freedom from sin's control (Romans 6:6-7):** "For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been set free from sin."
- **Freedom from sin to serve God (Romans 6:22):** "But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life."
- **Freedom from condemnation (Romans 8:1-2):** "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death."
- **Freedom from fear into adoption (Romans 8:15):** "The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship."

2. JESUS BREAKS SIN'S MASTERY.

- John 8:36 NIV
- ***So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.***
- Jesus has the FINAL WORD on freedom in your life!
- Galatians 5:1 NIV
- ***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.***
- Do not let yourself be enslaved any more. **SEEK CHRIST alone!**

3. JESUS FILLS YOU WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT.

- On purpose, Jesus fills you with the Holy Spirit's empowerment!

- 2 Corinthians 3:17 NIV
- ***Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.***
- Freedom is a relationship.
- Freedom is a walk every day with Christ Who gives us His freedom!
- Jesus empowers us in His freedom through the Holy Spirit!

4. JESUS INVITES YOU TO WALK WITH HIM EVERY DAY IN HIS AMAZING FREEDOM.

- God delights in setting His people free!
- Galatians 5:1 NIV
- ***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.***
- True freedom goes far beyond the USA.
- TRUE FREEDOM is found in Christ alone!

The remaining question is: What CHAINS are you living with? Shame? Fear? Regrets? Bitterness? Grief? Hopelessness? Have you lost hope in your life? Many have, unfortunately. JESUS WANTS TO PUT HOPE back in your life!

The enemy is a liar and says things like: This is just the way you are! You can't help it anyway. It's in your DNA! You are pitiful. You won't make it. You are stuck in life and will stay that way forever! WHAT LIES! Don't listen to the enemy any more! Seek Christ alone Who will set you free indeed!! Only the enemy comes to condemn!

JESUS WANTS US TO BE FREE INDEED!

1 Corinthians 2:9 NIV

However, as it is written: "What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived"—the things God has prepared for those who love him.

If you have NOT surrendered yet to Jesus as your master and king, you are serving another master! WATCH OUT!

1 Peter 5:8 NIV

Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

Confession in faith can change your life! Yes, indeed, your life can be changed forever! With this Pastor Paul, on fire with the Holy Spirit, began to pray over every person: O God, Almighty and forever, You can do what no other can do. Set our souls free as we pray together. Lord, Jesus Your Son, Who led a sinless life, saves us in freedom. I lay everything down at your feet, Lord, at your cross. I am a sinner and stand in need of You. I confess my sin as I acknowledge Jesus as Your Son, and from this day forward I will follow You. May the Holy Spirit fill us all afresh and new. Break our chains of fear and anxiety...Seal this work by Your Holy Spirit. Amen.



Sisters and brothers, let those who have truly confessed and repeated today's salvation prayer in their hearts, that they will be set free indeed. Let them know that they have made the best decision of their lives. A hearty applause accompanied much hand-clapping and shouts of joy. The FREEDOM of Christ indeed had surrounded us and now thoroughly filled our hearts to overflowing! FREEDOM. TRUE AND ABIDING FREEDOM! We began to sing once again. As a people truly free, our hearts filled anew with God's abiding and forever love. Alleluia. And again. Alleluia!

There's a calm that covers
me
When I kneel down at Your
feet
It's a place of healing
It's a place where I find
freedom

There's a place my eyes
can't see
Where my spirit longs
to be
It's a place of healing
It's a place I live in
freedom

I'm gonna lift my hands
'Til I can reach heaven
I'm gonna shout Your
name
'Til the walls come
falling down
I've come to worship
I've come to worship

There's a love that lives
in me
For You Lord, my
savior king
Breaks the sin that's
binding
And leads me to a
place of freedom

I'm gonna lift my hands
'Til I can reach heaven
I'm gonna shout Your
name
'Til the walls come
falling down
I've come to worship
I've come to worship

I'm gonna sing my
song
Like I am unashamed
I'm gonna shout for joy
At the mention of your name
I've come to worship
I've come to worship

There is no one
That can bring me peace
That can wash me clean
Like you Lord

There is nothing
In this world that can free me
You saved my soul

I'm gonna lift my hands
'Til I can reach heaven
I'm gonna shout Your name
'Til the walls come falling



down
I've come to worship
I've come to worship

I'm gonna sing my song
Like I am unashamed
I'm gonna shout for joy
At the mention of your name
I've come to worship
I've come to worship

I'm gonna lift my hands
'Til I can reach heaven
I'm gonna shout Your name
'Til the walls come falling
down
I've come to worship
I've come to worship

I'm gonna sing my song
Like I am unashamed
I'm gonna shout for joy
At the mention of your
name
I've come to worship
I've come to worship

I've come to worship
We've come to worship
We've come to lift Your
name high

I'm gonna lift my hands
'Til I can reach heaven
I'm gonna shout Your
name
'Til the walls come
falling down
I've come to worship
I've come to worship

I'm gonna sing my
song
Like I am unashamed
I'm gonna shout for joy
At the mention of your
name
I've come to worship
I've come to worship

I'm gonna lift my hands
'Til I can reach heaven
I'm gonna shout Your
name
'Til the walls come

falling down
I've come to worship
I've come to worship

I'm gonna sing my song
Like I am unashamed
I'm gonna shout for joy
At the mention of your name
I've come to worship
I've come to worship