

7/5/26

A Freedom No Nation Can Give

*Hebrews 9:1-28***Pastor Doug Scalise, Brewster Baptist Church**

I'm glad to see you all made it here safely. Driving this weekend is challenging, with millions of people on the road, and crazy things can happen. I read about a stressed-out woman driving down a busy street, tailgating a man in the car in front of her. Suddenly, the light turns yellow, just in front of him. He does what we all would do – he stops, even though he could have beaten the red light by accelerating through the intersection. The tailgating woman hits the roof, and the horn, screaming in frustration as she misses her chance to get through the intersection. As she is still in mid-rant, she hears a tap on her window and looks up into the face of a very serious police officer. The officer orders her to exit her car with her hands up. He takes her to the police station where she is searched, fingerprinted, photographed, and placed in a cell.

After a couple of hours, a policeman approaches the cell and opens the door. She is escorted back to the arresting officer, who is waiting with her personal effects. He says, "I'm very sorry for the mistake. You see, I pulled up behind your car while you were blowing your horn, flipping the guy off in front of you, and cussing a blue streak at him. I noticed the 'What Would Jesus Do' bumper sticker, the 'Follow Me to Sunday School' bumper sticker, and the chrome plated Christian fish emblem on the trunk. **Naturally I assumed you had stolen the car.**"

"Laughter can relieve tension, soothe the pain of disappointment, and **strengthen the spirit for the formidable tasks that always lie ahead.**" Whether we look at the news, or read our Bible, one thing we know is that there are **"formidable tasks that always lie ahead."**

I hope you've been able to share this historic weekend with family and friends. Yesterday, Jill and I were in Ocean Park, Maine, with some of our family. I spent all my summers growing up in Ocean Park. One of the highlights of summer was the annual Independence Day parade, which included people of all ages marching, children riding decorated bicycles, adults driving decorated vehicles, music, fire trucks, all the things you'd imagine in a small-town celebration. After the parade, people gathered around the Bell Tower while The Ocean Park Band played patriotic tunes – including one of my favorites, George M. Cohan's "You're a Grand Old Flag." I can remember the celebration

for our nation's Bicentennial in 1976, when I was eleven years old, and what a big deal it was – and now here we are, fifty years later.

Independence Day, especially this year on the 250th anniversary of the ratification of The Declaration of Independence, invites us to reflect on freedom. There's a difference between political freedom and the freedom that Christ obtained and offers to all of us. **My theme today is Christ gives us a freedom no nation can give.** I'd like to talk about freedom in three ways: by talking about **the tension between ideals and practice** in US history, regarding freedom; **the freedom Christ purchased** for all who trust him, which is greater than any nation can give; and by challenging us to think about **the importance of character and virtue in how we use our freedom.**

The tension between ideals and practice in US history, regarding freedom

As America celebrates 250 years of independence, some people are in a celebratory mood, and others feel more like lamenting. Some of us may feel a bit of both. As Americans, we can celebrate the birth of our nation and give thanks for the liberties we enjoy, while also acknowledging the fact that over hundreds of years, freedom, liberty, and opportunity have not been extended equally to all people throughout our nation's history, right up to this present moment. Throughout our history, there has been tension between the ideals we claim and defend, and how well we've lived up to them, or how narrowly or broadly they have been applied.

This weekend, we rightly remember the vision, courage, and sacrifice that gave birth to a nation. We can give thanks for the freedoms we enjoy, and for those who have defended them, through the generations. We can also lament our sins as a people, and confess our need to do and be better, and to pray and strive, as we sang in "America the Beautiful", that God would "mend our every flaw."

The freedom Christ purchased for all who trust him

For those who are guests today, we're in a series, **Anchored in the Unchanging Christ**, based on the Letter to the Hebrews. **Hebrews 9** invites us to consider a deeper freedom that no declaration or constitution can guarantee, no army can win, and no government can bestow – the freedom Christ purchased through his own blood. A nation may protect freedom of speech, but it can't free a guilty conscience. A constitution may guarantee certain rights, but it can't forgive sins. A government may

liberate people from political oppression, but it can't redeem them from death. Listen to **Hebrews 9:11-22**.

“But when Christ came as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation), **he entered once for all into the Holy Place, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption.** For if the blood of goats and bulls, with the sprinkling of the ashes of a heifer, sanctifies those who have been defiled so that their flesh is purified, **how much more** will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, **purify our conscience** from dead works to worship the living God!

For this reason he is **the mediator of a new covenant**, so that those who are called may receive **the promised eternal inheritance**, because **a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant. Where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established.** For a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive. Hence not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood. For when every commandment had been told to all the people by Moses in accordance with the law, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the scroll itself and all the people, saying, ‘This is the blood of the covenant that God has ordained for you.’ And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship. Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.”

Hebrews 9:23-28, Christ's Sacrifice Takes Away Sin

“Thus it was necessary for the sketches of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves need better sacrifices than these. For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made by human hands, a mere copy of the true one, but he entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. Nor was it to offer himself again and again, as the high priest enters the Holy Place year after year with blood that is not his own; for then he would have had to suffer again and again since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of

the age to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself. And just as it is appointed for mortals to die once, and after that the judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.”

Because of the historic nature of this weekend, I’m not going to walk us through *Hebrews 9* at the depth that we’ve looked at other chapters. I do want to note three things related to **the freedom Christ purchased for all who trust him.**

1. Freedom Purchased (vv. 11–12)

How was our freedom from sin and guilt purchased? *Hebrews 9:12*, “**He entered once for all into the Holy Place, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption.**” The sacrifices of the old covenant had to be repeated endlessly, but they could never permanently solve the problem of human sin and guilt. Political freedom must be won and preserved, repeatedly, throughout history; it’s not guaranteed forever, and can be lost. However, the good news is that the eternal redemption and freedom purchased by Christ was accomplished **once for all, and it never needs to be repeated.** The freedom Christ purchased is for people of all nations who will respond in trust and faith, and it is eternal.

2. Freedom Experienced (vv. 13–14)

Can you remember the first time you heard or learned the word “**conscience**”? I can, and I’m guessing some of you can, too. I heard it in Walt Disney’s animated film, “Pinocchio”, when Jiminy Cricket sings to Pinocchio, “**And always let your conscience be your guide.**” What is our conscience? **Conscience is an inner moral sense that helps a person distinguish right from wrong.** It acts as an internal guide, in at least four ways, impacting human behavior and choices. As a **Moral Compass**: it judges the morality of our actions. As an **Internal Voice**: it creates feelings of guilt when you violate your values. It is an **Emotional Response**: it provides a sense of peace when you do the right thing. It embodies our **Personal Standards**: it’s shaped by your upbringing, culture, religion, and reason.

At the heart of *Hebrews 9* is the truth that, in Christ, we have not merely forgiveness, but **the cleansing of our conscience** and freedom from guilt when

we've confessed our sins. ***“How much more will the blood of Christ... purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God.”*** Many people live in a free country, while remaining prisoners of guilt, shame, fear, regret, or self-justification. Christ purifies our conscience, so we can experience freedom.

3. Freedom Inherited (vv. 15–22)

In verses 15-22, the language shifts to **covenant** and **inheritance**. Because Christ died, those who are called receive the promised eternal inheritance. A last will and testament don't go into effect until there's been a death. In Christ (*Hebrews 9:15*), ***“a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant.”*** The greatest inheritance is not money, land, or prosperity, but the freedom that comes from redemption and eternal life with God that Jesus has made possible.

The importance of character and virtue in how we use our freedom.

As we give thanks for the freedom we have experienced and inherited in Christ, and celebrate 250 years of Independence, and look at our nation, at present and moving forward, it's worth remembering that many of America's founders understood **the importance of character and virtue in how we use our freedom**. Our founding documents, the Declaration of Independence and the US Constitution, reflect the tension between principles being espoused, and limiting who got to enjoy the freedom and rights being sought and described. Some people who signed or ratified those documents also enslaved other human beings, yet they brought ideals forward that have shaped our nation and the world.

James Madison, who served as the fourth president of the United States (1809-1817), was often called the Father of the Constitution for his pivotal role in drafting the US Constitution and authoring the Bill of Rights. Madison also championed the sacred right of religious liberty. In an essay titled “Property”, which Madison published in the “National Gazette” on March 29, 1792, he wrote, **“Conscience is the most sacred of all property.”** In this essay, Madison expanded the definition of “property” far beyond land, money, or physical possessions. He argued that individuals have a property right in their opinions, their speech, and — most importantly — their religious beliefs. His

words remind us that genuine faith can't be compelled by governments or institutions. The freedom to worship God – or to not worship God – according to one's conscience, is a precious gift that should be cherished and protected.

The first president, George Washington, wrote in his Farewell Address, published on September 19, 1796, as he announced he would not seek a third term, **“Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports.”** He went on to emphasize that citizens should treat both religion and morality as the **“great pillars of human happiness”** and essential foundations for justice and civil society. Washington recognized that external freedom depends upon internal character.

The second President, John Adams, expressed a similar conviction, two years later, when he wrote in a letter to the Officers of the First Brigade of the Third Division of the Militia of Massachusetts on October 11, 1798: **“We have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion. Avarice, ambition, revenge, or gallantry would break the strongest cords of our Constitution as a whale goes through a net. Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.”** Adams understood that no system of government can compensate for, or overcome, a lack of virtue among its leaders or citizens.

Yet even these important freedoms have limits. Nations rise and fall. Empires come and go. Laws change. Constitutions can be amended. Earthly freedoms, valuable as they are, remain temporary. The freedom purchased by Christ is eternal. *Hebrews 9* teaches that Jesus has appeared **“once for all at the end of the ages to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself.”** Because of Christ's faithfulness, believers have a freedom and a hope that extends beyond the fortunes of any earthly nation.

As we gather with family and friends, this weekend, let's give thanks for the blessings of our nation, and pray for wisdom, character, and faithfulness among its people and leaders. Let's also celebrate the greater freedom found in Jesus Christ. Through His sacrifice, we've received what no nation can give, and no earthly power can take away: forgiveness, peace with God, and the promise of eternal redemption. May we

live as faithful citizens of our country — and even more importantly, as faithful citizens of God's kingdom, which circles the globe, and includes people of every nation.

Prayer: God of all nations and ages, we recall the day when our country claimed its place among the family of nations. For what has been achieved, we give you thanks; for the work that remains, we ask your help; and, as you have called us from many peoples to be one nation, grant that, under your providence, our country may share your blessings with all the peoples of the earth. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Blessing: As we celebrate the freedom of our nation, may we also celebrate the freedom God has given us, and commit ourselves to using our freedom wisely. May we never forget that the spiritual and political freedom we enjoy has been purchased at an incalculable cost. What will we do with that freedom? I pray we will use it not for self-indulgence or as an excuse to do wrong, but that we will use our freedom nobly, as servants of God, to love one another.

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. **The sermon contrasts political freedom with the freedom Christ provides.** What are some freedoms that a nation can protect, and what are some forms of bondage that only Christ can address? Why do you think people can live in a free society, yet still feel trapped by guilt, fear, shame, or regret?
2. **Hebrews 9 teaches that Christ obtained “eternal redemption” through His own sacrifice.** What stands out to you about the phrase “once for all” in relation to Jesus’ work? How does knowing that Christ’s sacrifice never needs to be repeated affect your confidence in God’s forgiveness?
3. **The sermon emphasized the cleansing of our conscience (Hebrews 9:14).** How would you describe the role of conscience in your own life? Have there been times when you struggled to accept God’s forgiveness, even after confessing a sin? What helped you move toward freedom?
4. **James Madison called conscience “the most sacred of all property.”** Why is freedom of conscience so important? How can Christians respect the conscience and dignity of people who hold different beliefs, while remaining faithful to Christ?
5. **The sermon noted that lasting freedom requires character and virtue, not just good laws.** Do you agree with George Washington and John Adams, that external freedom depends on internal character? Why or why not? What practices help Christ’s followers grow in the kind of character that honors God and benefits society?
6. **The sermon concludes by reminding us that we are citizens of both our country and, even more importantly, of God’s kingdom.** What does it look like to be a grateful citizen of your nation, while keeping your primary allegiance to Christ? How can we live, this week, in a way that reflects the “greater freedom” we have received through Jesus?
7. If Christ has truly obtained eternal redemption for us, how should that shape the way we think about our standing before God, today? What practical difference should this truth make in our confidence, worship, and daily walk with Christ?