

Remembering Our Heritage

John 8:32

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Central Truth: As Christ followers we have a heritage of freedom which is to be shared with all.

Application: Know Christ in order to experience true freedom and champion freedom for all.

Invitation:

- (1) Trust Christ in order to experience freedom
- (2) Commit to be a disciple growing in truth
- (3) Advocate for complete religious freedom

Introduction

Bumper Video: <https://www.ignitermedia.com/products/8421-remember-and-honor-memorial-day>

That is what Memorial Day is about: recognizing the sacrifice of people who have served in the armed forces for the cause of freedom. Many of you here have had a loved one: a dad, a mom, an uncle, an aunt, a brother, a sister, a husband, a wife, or perhaps even a son or a daughter, who served this country and is no longer with us.

Recognition: Family members of fallen troops

We are thankful and mindful of their sacrifice.

In remembering their service and sacrifice, we also remember why they served and why they were willing to risk their lives. The one overarching value our country has held since it's beginning is freedom. Those that have come before us have passed on to us a heritage of freedom.

Freedom is the big American ideal. This is, *"the land of brave and the home of the free."* We proclaim that we are, *"one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for*

all." Our statue of liberty is a colossal symbol of freedom. Those of us that are part of this great nation have a heritage of freedom.

Yet the freedom ideal did not start with the founding of this country. The freedom ideal is God's ideal. Christ came for our freedom. As Americans we may have a heritage of freedom that dates back to the 1700s but as the people of God we have a heritage of freedom that dates back thousands of years. In fact, it goes back to the heart of God.

I believe that is what Jesus wanted his disciples to know.

John 8:32 (NIV)

Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

1. Freedom Has a Price (*The Gospel Truth*)

Freedom is not free. In fact, freedom is not cheap either. Freedom has a price. Jesus wanted his disciples to know the truth. The truth would set them free. The truth liberates.

So what is this truth Jesus talks about? Notice the verse right before our text,

John 8:31-32 (NIV)

³¹ *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."*

Jesus told those who believed his message that if they embraced his message and became his disciples they would know the truth and that truth would set them free.

This truth is the gospel truth. The truth that liberates us is the good news of God in Jesus Christ. The truth that sets us free is the story of God's redemptive love for a humanity that has lived in bondage.

When God first placed the man and the woman in the Garden of Eden, he made them free to choose. He did not force them to obey him. He did not create them to automatically choose Him like robots. He made them free to choose.

God warned Adam and Eve about the consequences of choosing wrong. Freedom means you can choose but freedom also means responsibility. God gave them the freedom to eat of any tree in the Garden, except for one. If they ate from the one tree they would certainly die. Death was the consequence for a wrong choice.

When the deceiver showed up, he cast doubt on God's Words. That's what Satan does. He makes us doubt what God has said. He deceived Adam and Eve into thinking that they would be better off if they ate from the forbidden fruit. So they chose to disobey and immediately the consequences came.

They felt alienated from God. They were separated from their loving Creator, which is a spiritual death. They felt shame and guilt. And because of their disobedience they were cast out of the Garden of Eden. The enemy deceived them and enslaved them. They rejected the truth and lost their freedom.

Every human being becomes a slave to sin. We choose to listen to the lies and the lies make us live in bondage. Whether we are born in a family of faith or in a family without faith, sin enslaves us. Whether we are born to a Christian family, a Jewish family, a Muslim family, a Roman Catholic family or an atheist family, our sin leaves us in bondage.

John 8:34 (NIV)

Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin"

But the good news of the gospel is that Christ came to set us free. Christ came to pay the price for our freedom. The consequence for sin is death. The price of freedom is the life of Jesus given on our behalf.

Jesus went to the cross on our behalf. He poured his life out so that we can be freed. The lies of the enemy enslaves us but the God of truth rewrote our story by coming to rescue us.

The freedoms we enjoy in this country have cost many lives of service men and women. Freedom has a price. The freedom to worship in the place has cost the lives of preachers, authors and faithful Christians who were martyred.

Freedom from the bondage of sin cost God the life of his one and only Son.

Story: 8-year-old Salem Sabatka kidnapped & rescued in FW

Photo: Pastor King and FW Police

Salem might have spent days if not months in captivity and in suffering. But someone cared enough to go looking for her. Someone cared enough to go rescue her. Someone was willing to pay the price and the risk so that she could be free and be united with her parents.

That's what Jesus did for us. He came to look for us. He risked it all for us. He rescued us and set us free.

2. **Freedom Is a Person (*The Nature of Truth*)**

This truth of the gospel that makes us free is more than just a story. This truth that liberates us is more than just a body of knowledge or a list of propositions. This truth is a person. His name is Jesus. Knowing the truth involved related to Jesus as His disciples.

John 8:36 (NIV)

So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

Jesus is the truth that sets us free. Freedom comes when we know him personally. Freedom comes when we allow him to be our king. Freedom comes when we walk daily trusting him.

It's very important that we recognize this. True and ultimate freedom does not come from adhering to a religion. True and ultimate freedom does not come from believing the right doctrines. You can believe and recite a creed but unless you know Jesus you will not know true freedom

Elsewhere Jesus declares,

John 14:6 (NIV)

...“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Jesus is the truth. All truth comes from Him. Jesus is truer than the best of our doctrinal statements. Jesus is truer than the best Christian denomination. Jesus is truer than the best American ideals. If we love freedom, we begin with Jesus and end with Jesus.

Story: Visit from DC officials & pastors regarding immigration

Photo: Chief Provost and VIP table

You don't have to be a democrat to care for the plight of migrant families and children. You don't have to be a republican to support our men and women in uniform. You do have to be like Jesus. He tells us that when we serve the least of these we have serve him. He tells us that we should pray and obey the authorities he has set in place.

Following Jesus means that some people will think you are a liberal and other will think you're an ultra-conservative. I don't really care if people call me liberal, conservative, moderate, progressive or otherwise. I'm not working for any of those labels. The one label I am aiming for is Christ-like.

Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. Jesus is where true freedom is found. So my commitment is to Jesus first and foremost. I want every decision and every action to be guided not by a political agenda, not by a denominational loyalty, but by a total surrender to the authority of Jesus Christ.

If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

3. **Freedom Is for All People (*The Responsibility for the Truth*)**

Throughout history, the United States has been involved in various wars. Sometimes those wars were to protect the U.S.'s own freedom. Often the wars that our men and women have fought were to protect the freedom of other nations. Many of our fallen service men and women have given their lives to secure the freedom of other countries.

That's because people who know freedom understand that freedom is for all people, not just for one nation or group. When another nation or group is denied freedom, it chips away at our freedom. The more freedom you pass on to others that more of it you keep.

God created every human being with the ability to choose. God holds us responsible for our choices but he gives us the freedom to choose. He gave this freedom to Adam and Eve. Moses reminded the people of Israel of this freedom.

Deuteronomy 30:19-20a (NIV)

¹⁹ This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live ²⁰ and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him.

The Lord never forced Israel to obey him or to love him. The commandment to love God can only be obeyed out of a heart that chooses to love. You cannot force anyone to love. It's a choice!

One generation later after Moses gave the people of Israel a choice between life and death, Joshua posed the same question.

Joshua 24:15 (NIV)

But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."

When God sent his Son to earth to rescue us from sin, he gave us a choice to receive him or to reject him.

John 1:11-12 (NIV)

¹¹ He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹² Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God

Not only did God give the Jews freedom to choose or reject him but he opened up the way for everyone to make a choice. "To all who did receive him" is very inclusive. God wants every person to have an opportunity to respond to His love. God wants every person to experience the freedom that comes through Jesus. But God does not force every person.

Because God has given this freedom to everyone and because God has made every human being capable of relating to him directly, we should not impose any religion by force on anyone. Obviously as parents we instruct our kids in the faith. As Christians we proclaim the gospel. But we do not seek government or laws to impose belief on people. That's a violation of religious freedom!

Story: Baptist ancestors who fled Europe

Many of our ancestors suffered religious persecution in England and in other European countries. They were Christians who followed their conscience in matters of faith.

They were persecuted, not by atheists or by Jews or by Muslims. They were persecuted by other Christians. The government sided with a particular brand of Christianity and it forbid any freedom of conscience. For that, many of our Baptist forebears were burnt at the stake, imprisoned, drowned and had their tongues cut. This was not by a secular government but a religious government.

Our Baptist ancestors believed strongly that every citizen should have the religious freedom to choose for himself or herself how to worship God or not worship God. This is based on the nature of God, the nature of the gospel and the way God created us. These heroes of the faith suffered and died for the sake of religious freedom. That's our heritage!

Roger Williams, who came from England, and founded Rhode Island, the first colony with complete religious freedom, as well as the First Baptist Church in America was an avid proponent of religious liberty for everyone. Although he had a Baptist conviction at the time, he believed Protestants, Catholics, Jews, Muslims and, even atheists should have the freedom to worship according to their conscience or not worship at all. He was a proponent of a "wall of separation" between church and state before Thomas Jefferson.

Quote: Roger Williams (mid 1600s)

There goes many a ship to sea, with many hundred souls in one ship, whose weal and woe is common, and is a true picture of a commonwealth or a human combination or society. It hath fallen out sometimes that Papists, Protestants, Jews, and Turks may be embarked in one ship; upon which supposal I affirm that all the liberty of conscience that ever I pleaded for turns upon these two hinges: that none of the Papists, Protestants, Jews, or Turks be forced to come

to the ships prayers or worship, nor be compelled [restrained] from their own particular prayers or worship, if they practice any.

And so he believed should be the case in the newly founded colonies. Our heritage is one of religious freedom. We should remember and champion this freedom for all people. We should learn from history and oppose the idea of a government that tried to favor one religion over another. We should oppose the idea of a government that persecutes any religion or the non-religious.

That's why our forefathers insured that our constitution included the establishment clause in the first amendment.

Quote: Establishment Clause

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.

Thomas Jefferson wrote a letter in 1802 to a Baptist church in Connecticut expressing his understanding of this clause. In it he wrote,

Quote: Thomas Jefferson Letter (1802) Danbury Baptists

"I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should 'make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,' thus building a wall of separation between Church & State."

That's our heritage! That's the freedom that some many have died for. That's the freedom we should champion.

Because God is a God of freedom we champion religious freedom. Because the gospel should be proclaimed so that people can voluntarily respond to it, we should not allow government to enforce it. Because Christians in other countries suffer persecution, we should advocate for religious freedom for all.

Stories: Mass Shootings in Houses of Worship

Photo: "We Must Do Better"

- San Diego-area synagogue (April) – 1 dead, 3 injured
- Sri Lanka Easter bombings – 250 people; 45 children
- Christchurch, New Zealand Mosques – 50 people

It is incredible that in the 21st century people of faith are still attacked in their own houses of worship. Religious intolerance goes against the very principle of freedom. It should make us sad, upset and angry that any of these happened.

For the people of God, there should be no room for the kind of hatred that allows this to happen. For those who know the Son who makes us free indeed we should advocate for protection and freedom of all religions and the non-religious.

As we remember the men and women who have given their lives for our freedom we are thankful. As we remember the heroes of the faith who have suffered and died for the sake of religious freedom, we are compelled to uphold it. As we remember that Christ gave his life so that we could be free, we commit to live in freedom and to proclaim his freedom to others.

We have a heritage of freedom. As Americans we have a heritage of freedom. As the people of God we have a heritage of freedom. As followers of Jesus we have a heritage of freedom. Freedom comes from God and we should proclaim it, defend it and live in it.

Response:

- I will trust Christ as Savior and Lord for freedom
- I will meditate with gratitude on my freedom
- I will commit to be a disciple growing in truth
- I will advocate for complete religious freedom
- I will follow Christ in believer's baptism