

Set at Liberty

(Sermon Notes) By Warren Zehrung – 1/4/2014

I would like to begin today by showing that it was a very well established fact – even in Old Testament times – that sin brings **death**.

Ezekiel 3:

19 Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, **he shall die in his iniquity**; but thou hast delivered thy soul.

Turn over a few pages to Ezekiel 18 – where we see Ezekiel reiterating – very clearly this well known fact.

Ezekiel 18:

20 The soul that **sins**, it shall **die**.

When anyone sins – death is the automatic result! There are no exceptions! Due to our sins, we have all received the penalty of sin – death... both – spiritual and physical death. We do not have eternal souls that live on and on.

In the New Testament we find the phrase, “Set at Liberty.” What does Jesus mean when He says that all men are to be “Set at Liberty?”

For the sake of today’s sermon we need to look at a **Greek word** – it will come up a number of times today – translated various ways. I believe that by looking at the various meanings of this word – we are able to come to a better understanding of God’s Word.

The Greek word is [*aphesis*] Pronounced af-es-is.

Aphesis means: **Freedom, pardon, deliverance, forgiveness, liberty, remission.**

Immediately after the temptation of Jesus Christ by Satan – Jesus withstood him and qualified to replace him by being obedient to God the Father. Interestingly, Jesus headed back home where he had grown up.

Luke 4:

14 And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about.

This is at the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry – and already He is gaining a reputation.

Luke 4:

15 And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all.

16 And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up for to read.

17 And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written,

Jesus reads these verses about Himself—Jesus made it clear that this Scripture applied directly to Himself.

The title is taken from this verse where Jesus makes a specific purpose statement:

Luke 4:

18 The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, [Jesus read] because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance [*aphesis*’ **freedom**] to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to **set at liberty** them that are bruised,

Jesus is giving His mission statement here: "This is what I am going to do."

Isaiah's name means "the Lord **saves**," and he uses the word "**salvation**" 27 times – that's twice as many times as in all the other Old Testament prophets combined. Isaiah was a prophet to the people of God at Jerusalem during the period when the nation of Israel was a divided kingdom 700 years earlier. Isaiah warns about the rebellion of God's people and their coming captivity to the Assyrians.

But Isaiah also looks way ahead to a time when the captivity of all Israel would come to an end, a time when Israel will be comforted by God and restored. More importantly, Isaiah prophesies about the coming of the Savior—the Deliverer, the One who will set His people **at liberty**:

Isaiah is not speaking of himself here – this is a prophetic utterance:

Isaiah 61:

- 1 The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to **proclaim liberty [freedom, pure and clear,]** to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound;

In verse :2 Isaiah proclaims the coming of **perfect liberty** to those who are bound, and the year of acceptance.

Jesus came to **liberate man** from the ravages of sin: To bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness the prisoners... to comfort all who mourn ... to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes ... a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair" (Isaiah 61:1-3).

Isaiah 42:

- 7 To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house.

Jesus came to restore our sight; no matter what has blinded us. Christ came to set us all free; no matter what yoke has a hold on us. He came to heal our broken hearts; no matter what has pierced it.

When man evaluates himself and concludes that he is doing OK, he is not taking into consideration **God's perspective**.

Actually, since the day of Adam's sin, man is not doing OK. Do we recognize that all people are broken and that the entire world is in **bondage** to sin and the effects of sin?

We desperately need **Liberty** and **Freedom** from sin and the effects of sin.

The dictionary defines freedom as: "The condition of being free; the power to act or speak or think **without** externally imposed restraints." The antonym for freedom is bondage, the state of being under the control of another person or thing.

Jesus came to this earth for the purpose of healing, binding up each individual up where they are broken and then gather them together into a flock for God's glory. Jesus came to set men free from sin; free from the bondage to sin and the effects of sin.

God provided a financial system in ancient Israel whereby those who were overtaken by unmanageable debt could look forward to the year of release. It is God's intention that the family land remain in possession of the family in perpetuity (Deuteronomy 15, Leviticus 25, Isaiah 61). God designed His plan so that no matter how catastrophic a man's debt had become, he would have his debt forgiven and have the possession of his land restored unto his family.

This physical forgiveness and freeing of financial obligations ordained by God is a **picture** or **type** of the spiritual forgiveness and pardon of our unpayable debt of sin.

Those Old Testament principles are a mirror image of Jesus Christ's sacrifice and our being redeemed if we would only repent. Christ's works show unlimited mercy and love for all mankind.

In God's mercy, it is His desire that spiritually we have a clean slate so that we are reconciled back into His good graces. We are **liberated, freed, forgiven and pardoned** of our past failures when our sins are remitted by the blood of Christ.

We come here in Matthew 26 to the institution of the New Testament Passover:

Matthew 26:

- 27** And [Jesus] he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it;
- 28** For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the **remission of sins**.

We do not use this word '**remission**' very much.

'**Remission**' is translated from the Greek word ['**aphesis**'] meaning: **Freedom, pardon, deliverance, forgiveness, liberty, remission**.

Matthew 26:

- 28** [Paraphrased] For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the **liberty from sin**.

Matthew 26:

- 28** For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the **freedom of sin**.

'*Remission of sins*' here literally means that our sins have been forgiven, taken away, and pardoned – resulting in our being **liberated from the consequence of sin**. Jesus Christ was willing to **pay our debt** for us – that is extraordinary love on God's part!

What does it mean to have **liberty in Christ**?

Jesus, who is God, created all things, and is Lord and owner of all things, is worth more than all His creation - could by divine law substitute Himself to pay for **our sin**. As Christians, how does this newfound **liberty** and **freedom** manifest itself in our lives?

Is a liberated Christian free to do whatever he desires to do?

Since Christ has died for me, ungodly as I am and without strength as I am, then I cannot live in sin any longer. How can I possibly live in sin when Christ has died to save me from it?

I believe that within God's Church we have been negligent and remiss when it comes to expressing a thorough **appreciation** of how tremendous this **liberty in Christ** is.

In order to add some clarity to this subject, let me relate a true story from many years ago when I was a young man just beginning in business – the fabrication and construction business.

The first bookkeeper that I had in business was an older man who had the dubious credentials of having worked for the mafia. He was from Chicago or Detroit – I do not remember...

He had inadvertently gotten in over his head by knowing too much about the people who had employed him. It turned out that they were an organized crime syndicate that practiced racketeering, drug-trafficking, and loan-sharking.

When he realized what he had stumbled into he fled for his life by assuming another name and moving as far away as possible. As a potential threat, he was simply not allowed by the mob to resign or retire.

He spent the rest of his life in **torment** that the mafia would find him and “take him out.” He lived in **constant fear** of being discovered and “blown away” by the mob. He feared death.

Imagine how excited and **liberated** he **would have been** if somehow that fearful threat could have been absolutely eradicated from his mind. He would have been absolutely ecstatic!

Brethren, that is exactly what took place at our baptism – we were liberated from **sure death!**

Romans 6:

23 For the wages of sin is **death**;

And we were all slated to die for our own sins. All too often in God’s Church that **liberty in Christ** that saved us from **impending death** is not met with a corresponding sense of elation, jubilation or appreciation. One of the greatest sins is ingratitude.

We – in God’s Church – have been redeemed – we have been set free – we are the only ones on earth to who these scriptures of **freedom** and **liberty** apply at this **time**. Jesus Christ came to bring us **freedom and liberty!**

Only Jesus is able to pay the debt that we are unable to pay. We are wholly, totally unable to pay our own death penalty and yet live. Jesus Christ must pay our death penalty for us – if we are to have life.

After repentance and baptism, having received freedom from sin’s consequences – there is no longer the **assurance of death** lurking over our head – but a new liberty in Christ, assuring the hope of eternal life.

We do not speak much in God’s Church of this **liberty in Christ**, but it is a wonderful and glorious thing! How does this liberty come about?

We should be overjoyed about it – but there seems to be little appreciation and realization of it among the brethren. Why is that?

There is a **liberty** that comes from God. It is a liberty that leads to eternal life. Sin takes its toll on us when it is unrepented of.

Everyone is bound by the invisible chains of sin – either their own sins or those with whom they have been in contact.

Sin brings torment. Only Jesus Christ is able to break those bonds and liberate us. The entire world groans – often wearing a mask of pretended happiness – while the inner person despairs without hope. Sin results in insecurity, loneliness, lack of trust, hatred, lies, abuses and denials, wrongful desires, pride, lust, arrogance and guilt.

As a result of God’s broken Law, **everyone** is suffering from illness, disease, or weakness—emotional, mental and spiritual grief.

Through sin, we have **opposed ourselves**—we work against ourselves—we are our own worst enemy—our suffering has been self-inflicted.

Paul told Timothy:

2 Timothy 2:

- 25** In meekness instructing those that **oppose themselves**; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth;

We oppose ourselves – we bring the consequences of sin upon ourselves. Sin results in envy, anger, judgment, discouragement and unhappiness—these are the **bondage of corruption** and the fruit of sin.

Everyone needs the **freedom** that only Christ can bring in His healing way.

All mankind is held continuously in bondage by the scourge of sin – and cries out to be liberated. It remains for all of God's creation to be fully **restored to liberty**. Those who are redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ are free to choose life. God has bestowed this liberty on us now!

Romans 8:

- 20** The creation was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of Him who hath subjected the same in hope,
21 Because the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the **glorious liberty** of the children of God.

Romans 8:

- 1** There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.
2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me **free from the law of sin** and death.

Let's look at the ministry of John the Baptist for a second.

Luke 1:

- 76** And thou, child [John the Baptist], shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways;
77 To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the **remission** [*aphesis*] of their sins,

Luke 3:

- 2** Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness.
3 And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the **remission** [*aphesis*] of sins;

“You do not have to die for your sins,” – that was great news that John brought!

Mark 1:

- 1** The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God;
2 As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.
3 The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.
4 John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the **remission** [*aphesis*] of sins.

John the Baptist had the allure and the fascination of a **freedom fighter** to the Pharisees and Sadducees that heard about him. There was an air of excitement about John the Baptist's program that drew the crowds – good and bad alike.

The serious students of John the Baptist knew perfectly well that there was a **price to be paid** for sinfulness – and down deep they were fearful. That is why they were seeking **Freedom and Liberty** from the penalties of their sins.

Matthew 3:

7 But when [John the Baptist] saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the **wrath to come**?

8 Bring forth therefore fruits meet [suitable] for **repentance**:

John's message to the unconverted – if they did not want to die in the coming wrath – was to turn their lives around. That is what bring forth therefore fruits meet for **repentance** means.

Paul told the Thessalonians that everyone needs the **freedom and liberty** – from the **wrath to come** – that only Christ can bring.

1 Thessalonians 1:

10 And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the **wrath to come**.

Let's look at an example taken from near the completion of Jesus' public ministry.

Luke 24:

45 Then opened [Jesus] he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures,

46 And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved the Messiah to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day:

47 And that repentance and **remission** [*aphesis*] of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

The apostles heard that as, "Preach **Liberty and Freedom** from sin – to all nations."

And that is exactly what Peter did as soon as God sent His Spirit at Pentecost and the Church was established. Peter preached **Liberty and Freedom** from sin:

Acts 2:

38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission, **Liberty and Freedom** from sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 5:

30 The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree.

31 Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and **forgiveness** [Same word - *aphesis*] of sins.

I believe that it is a profitable exercise to take these words that the King James translators – translated as remission and forgiveness and substitute the original meanings of *aphesis*, – **Liberty and Freedom**.

It gives us new insight into the meaning of God's Word.

Acts 5:

31 [Paraphrased] God has exalted Jesus Christ with His right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and bring **Liberty and Freedom** from the ravages of sin.

This concept of Liberty and Freedom runs all through the Scriptures.

Acts 10:

- 39 And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hung on a tree:
- 40 Him God raised up the third day, and showed him openly;
- 41 **Not to all the people**, but unto **witnesses** chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead.
- 42 And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead.
- 43 To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive **remission** [*aphesis*] of sins.

Acts 13:

- 35 Wherefore he saith also in another psalm, Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.
- 36 For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption:
- 37 But he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption.
- 38 Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the **forgiveness** [*aphesis*] of sins:

Let's take a look at Paul's calling by God:

Acts 26:

- 17 Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee,
- 18 To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive **forgiveness** [*aphesis*] of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

Ephesians 1:

- 4 According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:
- 5 Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,
- 6 To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.
- 7 In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness [*aphesis*] of sins, according to the riches of his grace;

Colossians 1:

- 13 Who hath delivered [rescued] us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the Kingdom of his dear Son:
- 14 In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness [*aphesis*] of sins:

Hebrews 9:

- 19** For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people,
- 20** Saying, This is the blood of the testament which God hath enjoined unto you.
- 21** Moreover he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry.
- 22** And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission [of sins '*aphesis*].
- 23** It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.
- 24** For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us:

Hebrews 10:

- 15** Whereof the Holy Spirit also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before,
- 16** This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them;
- 17** And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.
- 18** Now where remission [*'aphesis*] of these is, there is no more offering for sin.
- 19** Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus,

The history of the world is about those teeming millions / billions of lost souls striving to be set free. To be set at **liberty**.

Jesus equated the **bondage of sin** with the **Roman occupation** and subjugation of the Jews at Jerusalem and Palestine during the life of Christ.

Isn't it amazing how the apostle, John, picks up on these important concepts – not recorded in the synoptic gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark and Luke.

John 8:

- 31** Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed;
- 32** And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you **free**. [there is that concept of freedom and liberty]
- 33** They answered him, We are Abraham's children, and were never in **bondage** to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made **free**? OK, they are certainly living in denial – especially with all the Roman garrisons all around them!

Jesus explains that **sin brings bondage** – the exact opposite of Liberty and Freedom.

John 8:

- 34** Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever commits sin is the servant of sin.
- 35** And the servant abides not in the house for ever: but the Son abides ever.
- 36** If the Son therefore shall **make you free**, ye shall be **free indeed**.

Those Jews knew their history – that Israel had been in bondage in Egypt [a type of sin] – slaves to the Egyptians.

Genesis 15:

- 13** And [God] he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land [Egypt] that is not theirs, and shall serve them [there is the bondage]; and they shall afflict them four hundred years;
- 14** And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance.

Exodus 14:

- 8** And the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued after the children of Israel: and the children of Israel went out with an **high hand**.

Deuteronomy 26:

- 7** And when we cried unto the LORD God of our fathers, the LORD heard our voice, and looked on our affliction, and our labor, and our oppression:
- 8** And the LORD brought us forth out of Egypt with a **mighty hand**, and with an outstretched arm, and with great terribleness, and with signs, and with wonders:

Brethren, that was Jesus Christ – God of the Old Testament – bringing Israel out of Egypt [type of sin] into the **Liberty and Freedom** of the Promised Land!

Israel's deliverance from Egypt was a direct picture of Christ's redemption of us – bringing us into the Freedom and Liberty of the Kingdom of God.

James 1:

- 25** Whosoever looks into the **perfect law of liberty**, and continues therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

It is for the very sake of **freedom** that Christ has set us **free**; we do not submit again to the yoke of slavery to sin. We were called by God for freedom! ...To be set free!

Galatians 5:

- 1** Stand fast therefore in the **liberty** wherewith Christ hath made us **free**, and be not entangled **again** with the yoke of **bondage**.

Liberty does not give us license, permission or the right to continue in the sins that brought on our death penalty in the first place.

Our liberty gives us the choice of choosing correctly – unlike those in the world without God's Holy Spirit who choose not to follow Godliness.

Do not confuse Christ's liberty and freedom from our sins that are repented of and forgiven – with libertarian, libertine or licentious.

A Libertine is a person who behaves without moral principles or a sense of responsibility.

Someone who is licentious is promiscuous, unprincipled and without morals. That is not what is being spoken of in the Scriptures.

Some protestants believe that Jesus kept the law of God for us – in our place – so we are at liberty not to keep it. That is false!

We have to be careful because there are many who consider themselves to be religious who use the word "liberty" as found in the Scriptures for advantage.

Galatians 5:

- 13** Brethren, ye have been called **unto liberty**; only use not **liberty** for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.

It always comes back to loving one another – laying our lives down for one another.

Jesus Christ came to **set us free** from sin through His atoning sacrifice.

Hebrews 2:

- 14** Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood [that is us – we are physical flesh], He also Himself likewise took part of the same [Jesus also came in the physical flesh so]; that through death He might destroy him that had the **power of death** [over us], that is, the devil;

- 15** And deliver them [**liberate them**] who through [a very realistic] **fear of death** were all their [entire] lifetimes **subject to bondage**. [you are going to die eternally – there is no getting around it – there is nothing you can do about it – that is bondage to fear and death.] But this is the Good News – this is the **Liberty in Christ** – Jesus Christ who was born in the same flesh can do something about it.

Jesus paid the death penalty for us through His sacrifice, freeing us from the death penalty that we incurred.

We have been set free – we have been **set at Liberty!**

End: Set at Liberty