

Free to Serve the Lord in Gladness

Joshua 24:14-24, Trinity Sunday IV

July 5, 2009

Beloved of the Lord.....It has been rightly said that freedom doesn't come free. The various liberties and freedoms we enjoy today came at a great cost to our forefathers. There was the American Revolution which brought our independence from Britain. There was the Civil War which set the slaves free. And there was World War I and II and the Cold War which enabled our country to be somewhat free from the bondage of fascism, socialism, and communism. The freedoms we as Americans enjoy today, especially our religious freedom, came at the heavy cost of the blood of our forefathers. Freedom doesn't come free.

In God's Kingdom of Grace however, believers enjoy a freedom which exceeds all others. Christ has set us free from the bondage of sin, slavery to the devil, and the eternal prison of hell. We would still be slaves to sin today, had not God's Spirit taught our hearts the freedom of the Gospel, how Christ came and rescued us not with gold or silver, "But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." That was the cost, the price necessary to be paid if we were to be freed from Satan's power, the power of sin. Freedom doesn't come free. In John 8:36 Jesus says, "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."

We are by faith in Christ free indeed, hence we should happily remain faithful to God above all things. Being justified by grace alone through faith alone, we must continue to persevere in the true faith unto life everlasting. In today's lesson, Joshua, the faithful servant of God had done just that and his end was near. At the end of this chapter he dies at the age of 110. This was his farewell address and he was deeply concerned for the souls of his people. He first reminded them of how gracious and merciful the Lord had been to their forefathers. With many miracles he had delivered from the slavery of Egypt so that they passed through the Red Sea. With countless miracles the Lord brought them to the Promised Land where God granted them victory time and again over their enemies. The Lord even said, "I have given you a land for which ye did not labor, and cities which ye built not....of the vineyards and oliveyards which ye planted not do ye eat. Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve Him in sincerity and in truth."

In a similar manner, God in His abundant goodness and mercy has given us these United States. We did not earn nor merit this land flowing with milk and honey, nor do we merit the freedoms we now enjoy. Nevertheless our heavenly Father heaps such blessings upon us through the merits of His heavenly Son. Every time we pray therefore we should thank God from the bottom of

our hearts in all truth and sincerity the blessings of our native land. We should also remember our confirmation vow wherein we renounced the devil and promised to continue steadfast in the truth faith, believing in God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. We dare not worship the gods of this world; money, power, pride, forbidden sex, or any lust of the flesh. Joshua said, "If it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites....but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

There are many Reformed Christians today who twist these words to say that man has the ability to convert himself, but the dead cannot bring themselves to life! According to Scriptures we by nature are spiritually blind, dead, and enemies with God. Jesus literally said to His own disciples in John 15:16, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit." Conversion, illumination, regeneration, is 100% the work of the Holy Ghost. Titus three says, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to HIS mercy HE saved us, BY the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior." This is why "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but that the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith."

When God converts us, He gives us a new and willing heart. The new man within happily does all God commands with a willing heart, with joy, with gladness for Christ has set him free from sin. In the believer, two walk as one, for our Spirit now walks in the same direction as God's Spirit, but He takes the lead. Philippians 2:13 which says, "It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of *his* good pleasure." He gives us the will to do, and the help to do all that is good and right in His sight. Our catechism says, "The Holy Ghost has sanctified me in the true faith, that is, He has by faith in Christ renewed my heart, so that I can now overcome sin and do good works."

When Joshua told the people to choose between the Lord and false gods, He was appealing to the faith of God's people. Those who had been converted then already loved the True God for all He had done, and naturally by faith they chose to serve God alone for His abundant mercy. The thought of serving false gods was utterly abhorred in their heart of faith. They said, "God forbid that we should forsake the Lord, to serve other gods." This in itself was a prayer, a plea that God would help them to be faithful. It is similar when we sing after every sermon, "Create in me a clean heart O God and renew a right spirit within me." When the Spirit reminds

us that the blood of Christ has cleansed us, we are at the same time sanctified and renewed to overcome sin and do good works. For example, in the course of a day we are confronted with any number of temptations, but through faith we work to suppress those evil desires within. Galatians 5:24 says, "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts." Thus when it comes to fighting sin we should not be discouraged but first remember that the blood of Christ we are set free from sin's power. Satan cannot rule us for Christ lives within each believing heart. Moreover through Christ our sins do not cling to us like tar, but they have been far removed from us as far as the east is from the west. In Holy Communion what God is doing is this: by the gift of His body and blood He is giving you the full and personal assurance that all is forgiven. Not only does this forgiveness strengthen you, but you know you are not alone in this battle against sin. The Holy Spirit will help you both to resist and overcome sin. In Communion we obtain strength for a holier life.

But this is all done by faith. If we do not believe we will not receive nor be strengthened. But we should believe, even firmly believe because through His body and blood, God is giving you His highest oath that all is forgiven. Indeed through His body and blood God declares every believer justified and righteous. Such wondrous grace and mercy truly empower us and enable us now to turn from sin to do that which is good. That is the second part of the Spirit's work within - to do good works. "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good work, which God hat before ordained that we should walk in them." When Christ is our Light we do not walk the path of darkness, but His light so radiates through us we can't help keep His commandment out of love, with a willing heart. Therefore "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven." "Though our outward man perish, yet the inward *man* is renewed day by day."

So on the one hand by faith we cannot help but choose only those things which are good, but on the other hand we still have that pesky and wicked flesh which seeks to only do evil. Hence Joshua warned, "Ye cannot serve the Lord, for he is an holy God,a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins. If ye forsake the Lord and serve strange gods, then he will turn and do you hurt." This is a warning to believers not to forsake the Lord, which is to fall from grace by willfully choosing to do that which is evil, serving sinful pleasure, and refusing to repent. Forgiveness of sins is not license to sin and those who make God's forgiveness permission to sin, such will find God will not forgive. This is not because Christ isn't the Savior of all men - HE IS indeed the Savior of ALL! However, when sinners

willfully choose a life of wickedness and willfully continue in the sin refusing to repent, such cannot trust in Christ at the same time for forgiveness. Those then who ultimately are damned, are damned by their own choice and those who are saved are saved only by God's choice, His election of grace. If you believe in your heart that Jesus did indeed come to set you free of your sins by the cross rejoice and "Be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee!" Jesus came only to save!

While we therefore cannot preserve and keep our own faith, and it is possible to fall, we cannot fall if only our faith is in Him who keeps us from falling! Thus, because the Holy Spirit loves us, he diligently works through the Gospel to keep us from falling. I Peter 1:5 says, "Ye are kept by the power of God through faith into salvation!" God will preserve your faith to the end dear believer, so you can be "confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform *it* until the day of Jesus Christ."

Therefore continue your struggle and battle against sin daily by repentance and faith. Daily confess to Christ those sins you know and feel in your heart and those sins you don't know, AND daily believe the Gospel promise of Jesus your Savior who teaches that through His blood, God counts and declares you just and righteous in His sight! From this faith then take a step forward and be fruitful in every good works. Consider your station in life, and faithfully fulfill your duty of love! Psalm 100 says, "Make a joyful noise unto the LORD,.....Serve the LORD with gladness: come before His presence with singing." Rejoice that your God, your Savior looked upon you from the highest heaven with mercy and compassion, and came down and descended to your low estate. God became man that He might set all men free! He died paying your price but He rose again for your justification. The "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." Though we have made many sinful and poor choices in this life, it was God's choice, God's decision to give His life a ransom for many. Continue then and persevere in this one true Gospel faith and rejoice that your heavenly Father will never let you go. "Who *is* he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?" Since you are free, serve the Lord in gladness and put away the strange gods among you. Incline your heart unto the Lord God of Israel for He has set you free. Amen.

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