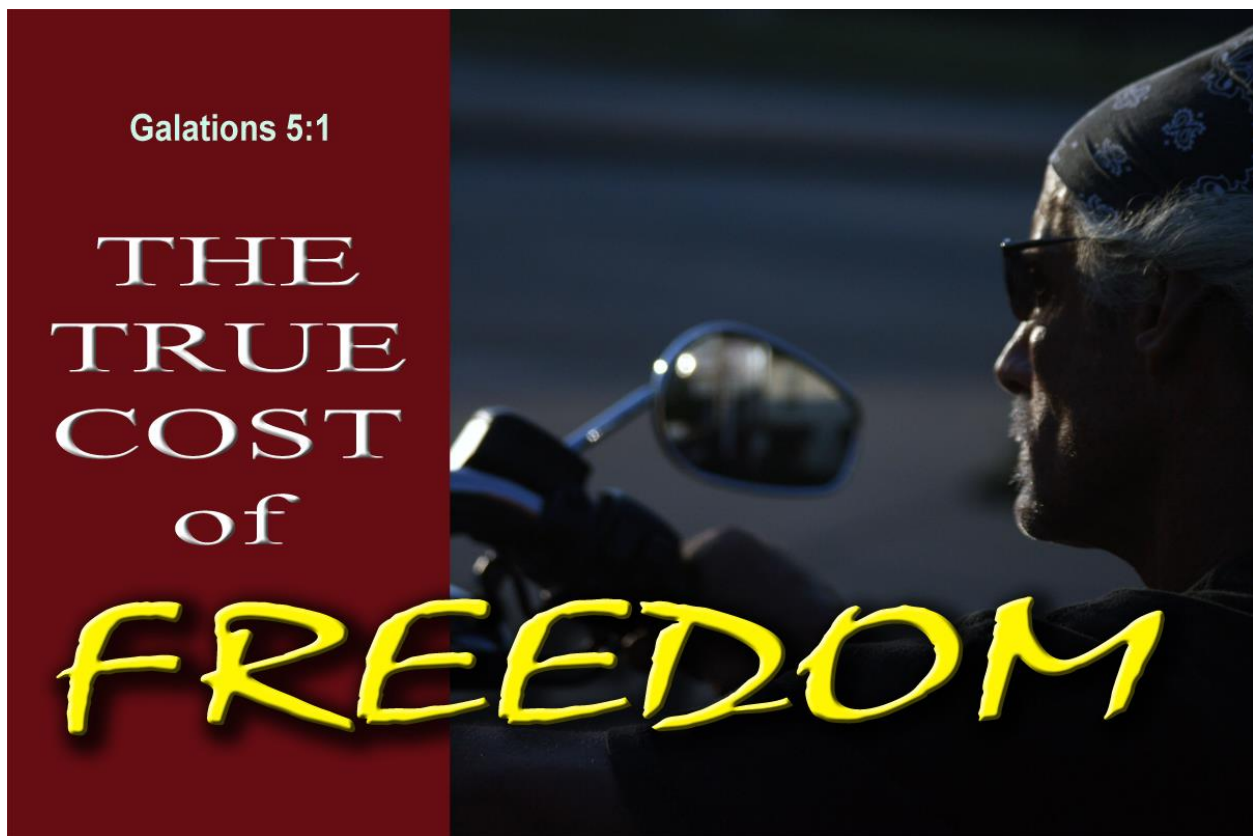


July 5, 2020

The True Cost of Freedom

#1 in the “Claiming Freedom” series



Galations 5:1

1 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.

Speical Music: A Better Place | Playing For Change | Song Around The World

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZVHOqrw3Jks&vl=en>

My dad was the proud owner of a motor scooter. For those of you that have serious riding machines, please don't laugh. I want to talk for a minute about the importance of motorized, two wheeled magic carpets. My dad loved his motor scooter. It was a 1957 Lambretta that he bought when we were in Okinawa. It was a classic machine with a floor break, a throttle in the left handle, and a clutch and shifter in the right handle. He would ride it to work and occasionally take off for a day of site seeing. He occasionally let me join him on short rides. He would lift me onto the back seat, and I would hug him tight and off we would go, much to the chagrin and worry of my mother. But, in truth, I knew that those motor scooter rides were not really about bonding with me. Let's face it, this was before the big push by Harley Davidson and Japanese manufacturers were just coming out with Honda, Yamaha and Kawasaki motorcycles which really didn't reach their height of popularity until I was in High School. You were pretty cool at my school if you had a Honda 150. I was not considered cool. The bike of choice in WWII was the classic Indian and I think if I were to buy a bike today, it would probably be an Indian. I would love to get an old Indian and restore it.

You see, after we got back from Okinawa, my dad gradually lost interest in that Lambretta. This was probably do to the fact that neighborhood streets just were not the same as the open roads of Okinawa. Eventually, he covered it up with a tarp and it sat still on the back porch at our home in Fort Worth for many years. But when I was about 15, I took an interest in it and I asked my dad if I could have it. My fascination wasn't with riding it. I knew that if I were seen riding it, I would

be the brunt of a lot of joke. No, my fascination was with its history. It mean, this motor scooter was a true piece of modern engineering in 1957. It was much larger than the motor scooters we see today and quite a bit heavier. I had a nostalgic urge to see if I could get the old girl running again. It wasn't going to be easy. Parts were pretty much non-existent for it. I never had my dad's aptitude for engines but for some reason, that pale blue scooter seemed to be calling my name like a long, lost puppy.

My dad let me have the scooter with the condition that I didn't try to ride it. Well, that seemed a little counter intuitive but truly, I just wanted to see if I could bring it back to life. I really had no interest in riding it at the time.

So, I went to work on it. I cleaned the engine and rebuilt the carburetor. It had a 2 stroke, 50cc engine in it that required that you add eight ounces of lightweight motor oil to the gas tank. I had always wondered why dad had kept an eight-ounce coke bottle in the tool compartment under the back seat of the scooter. I came to realize that every time he filled the tank with gas, he would add a coke bottle full of oil. I cleaned the brakes and repaired the electrical system. I scrubbed the engine panels until I felt the paint would come off. I fixed the cables for the transmission and braking system. I managed to find some new tires. And yes, I will never know how, but I managed to get the engine to kick over.

Blue/black smoke poured out of the tail pipe because of the oil mixed with the gasoline and the smell was almost fragrant to me.

But I kept my promise and I did not ride it. My dad did take it for a short spin and I think that in some way, he was proud of me in that I was able to get it running and in riding shape. We had some land in East Texas, just south of Sulfur Springs, TX and our family would head out on Friday nights after dad got off of work and we would spend the weekend working on the farm. I was surprised yet thrilled when he told me that we were taking the Lambretta to the farm and together we loaded it into the back of the truck.

I learned to ride that scooter on the dirt roads of east Texas. When I wasn't helping dad with the chores, I was tearing up those country roads. I learned about freedom. Yes, I was careless. That scooter would peak out at about 55 miles per hour but that is a pretty stupid thing to do on an rebuilt motor scooter on old country roads. I didn't have a license. I didn't have the scooter registered. But I lived to tell the tale. And I learned that there was nothing quite like having that country wind in my face, flying down those dirt roads with absolutely no destination in mind and free of the worries of this world. The dream of every teenage boy at that time.

You see, I may have had an old scooter, held together with chewing gum and bailing wire, but I somehow managed to find that sense of freedom that many people find today with their 1000 cc touring bikes. I truly wish I still had that scooter. It would probably be good for my spirit. But if I ever do wind up getting another magic carpet, it will probably be a trike. I'm getting a little long in the tooth to try and master a hog.

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.

There are really two approaches to Christianity. The cross of Jesus is the demarcation point for those approaches. They are two sides of the same coin. On one side of that coin that we call Christianity, we have the standards set by the old testament, a world of rules, laws and governing principles. Jesus often talked about the yoke of the law with reference to the burden created by trying to please God through the acceptance and obedience of rules and regulations, rather than a contrite heart and a passion for God's people. Where God is more often thought of as a warrior and the great punisher. Please don't misunderstand. There truly was joy to be found in that relationship. David found it. Solomon found it. Many of the prophets extolled and embraced it. But by the time Jesus arrives on the scene, obedience to the law had become a prison and the joy had been lost. On the other side of the coin, we have the new testament

where Jesus has fulfilled the law and shown us that we are not caged pets to a overdemanding God, but seen more as companions, free to worship and interact with our creator. Where we realize that the cage that we had created for ourselves has been removed through the blood and sacrifice of a loving, generous and gracious protector savior, a confidant and benevolent God given to our enlightenment rather than crushing our spirit.

God did not change. God was, is and always will be constant. But our perception of how to interact with God, our release to freely embrace God changed through the magnificent intercession of Jesus Christ the and His sacrifice on Calavry.

Think of it this way. You are out enjoying what you think is freedom, riding your hog in the cool breeze of the evening, just you and the road and without a care in the world. Suddenly, flashing lights and the sound of a siren as you are stopped by a state trooper who informs you that you were traveling well above the posted speed limit. This wasn't anything intentional on your part. It's easy to get lost in the reverie of being on the open road. But still, you did break the law and there is a penalty for breaking the law. In this case, several hundred dollars in fines. At this point, you are not feeling so free. As a matter of fact, you might feel somewhat cornered and restrained, maybe sensing that the cage door is about to be closed on you. Then the officer goes back to his car and looks at his computer. He returns with a smile on his face and tells you point blank, "It the

darndest thing, someone must have known that you were going to be in this situation and they have already paid for your ticket. You are free to go.” Free to go. Free to be. Free because someone else cared enough about you to pay your debt.

That’s the thing about freedom. We can’t really buy our way to freedom. Someone else has to pay the debt. Otherwise, it is a quid pro quo situation and that, in itself, is confining. A true sense of Freedom can only occur when we realize that someone else is willing to pay the price for our mistake. Understanding that is liberating. It’s not the payment of the debt. It’s the understanding that someone cares enough about us to pay that debt.

We are fortunate that we live in a country where we are “free” to make our own choices, express our opinion, develop our talents and skills, have access to education and government services. We are fortunate that we live in a country where our voice can be heard at the ballot box. Where we have a process in place that allows us to constantly undergo a peaceful revolution through the election process when our government fails to meet our common needs or tries to restrict those freedoms. We are fortunate to live in a society where we can see that laws are put in place to respect the rights of the individual against the desires of the majority. It’s not a perfect system. And when it fails it is painfully clear that we have much to improve. But it is the greatest system of government

on the face of this planet. And its failures and accomplishments rests squarely on the shoulders of the people. The burden of improving that model so that it continues to meet the needs of all people, rests with the citizens as they choose consensus over chaos.

But that kind of freedom comes at a cost. Ask anyone who has lost a mother, father, sister, brother or child to the defense of those freedoms. Over 1.1 million men and women have given their lives in military service to this country so that we can secure the blessings of liberty for ourselves and our posterity. I am in constant awe of our veterans who have put their lives on the line so that we can enjoy the freedoms that they have paid the price for. I am in awe of our current military and first responders who are placed in harm's way when the lines between rights, privileges and priorities are blurred by prejudice, selfishness and a misguided sense of entitlement. When people take advantage of enraged spirits to bring harm to others, or profit from the pain and suffering of people struggling with loss and hardship, I question our understanding of those same rights, privileges and priorities. God bless those men and women of the military, law enforcement and emergency services that leave the security of their own homes to stand in that gap for each one of us.

I remember the grief, pain and rage that I felt when I witnessed the hatred and violence shown to our returning soldiers after the Viet Nam war. I truly believed

that we had grown to be a better people than that. Only to realize that my perception was tainted by witnessing an overzealous, misplaced rage against those men and women whose only crime had been to serve this county and its citizens by paying the price for the freedoms that we enjoy. I also remember the other side of that rage as the students at Kent State University were slaughtered for voicing their opinions and the riots in Los Angeles over the beating of Rodney King. But I see that same misplaced rage today as so many rail against law enforcement and other first responders due to the overzealous nature and prejudice of a few among many of those who serve and protect us. The death of George Floyd is an unquestionable tragedy and not to be diminished. Those responsible should and will be punished. But I fear the greater tragedy is the suffering that occurs to those who sacrifice their personal wellbeing on a daily basis for our security and safety. I want to cry before God when we do not express our appreciation for the sacrifices of these men and women in uniform and their families who suffer beside them.

But even the price paid in loss of limbs, loss of reasoning and loss of lives does not reflect the actual cost of freedom. We often celebrate our freedom without comprehending what that really means. We have our picnics, enjoy fellowship with one another and watch our fireworks. We reflect on our rich history even though, by international standards, we are still a very young nation. We take pride that we continue to remain on the forefront of change and acceptance, as difficult as it is for each of us. We applaud our progress while bearing the shame

for our failures as a nation. We acknowledge our scars and become outraged when others want to dismiss those scars and the agony that forced us to grow as a people. Not a people of color, race, age, sex, sexual orientation, political affiliation or religion. But one nation guided by our principles as established by God through our forefathers. A nation built on the dream that every life matters, every soul encouraged, every man, woman and child can make a difference for us as a united people, that our combined contributions to our nation, its citizens and to our world DO make a difference. DO reflect growth. We are our scars and should never hide them away. We are the better for growing through the pains that created them

But even that does not touch on the actual true cost of freedom. In order to experience the true, full nature of freedom, each individual has to pay the price. It is difficult for me to say this, but most of us want to experience the benefits of Freedom but don't want to pay that price. We allow others to pay the price for those benefits, and we enjoy those benefits without understanding that there is no way for us to grasp the no strings attached, door wide open, joy of freedom without giving into the philosophy and teachings that we must die to self. That our purpose on this planet is to elevate others. As long as we live our lives to improve our own condition rather than the condition of those we encounter, we can't know the peace and joy that comes through self-sacrifice.

Soldiers understand that they may be called upon to make the ultimate sacrifice for others. The same is true with police officers, fire fighters and other first responders. Somewhere along the line, that message was interpreted as “They risk their lives so that we don’t have too.” That somehow paying them a paycheck to risk their lives absolves us of our moral obligation to that same sacrifice. That is a very non-Christian way of looking at the universe. In actuality, that first responder is willing to sacrifice their life so that we in turn can offer up our lives up for service. It is almost a slap in their faces when we choose to give ourselves over to selfishness and greed rather embrace the challenge of lifting those around us. Christ sacrificed His life on the cross so that we can know life in abundance through him, life to be given freely to others. As His followers, we are to find joy in His example.

Let’s bring that thought home by listening to a few other verses:

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

"If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no

longer be slaves to sin— because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Romans 6:5-11).

"For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21).

Christ didn't die just to so that we can have our sins forgiven, but so that we can share the salvation that He offers with everyone around us. He is the light of the world and we are His vessels, not given to self, but given in sacrifice to God. We can never be free if we choose to keep the free gift of salvation to ourselves. The free give of salvation is not offered just to Christians, but to the world, and it is job, our sacrifice, our duty, our obligation to find freedom in delivering that message to a broken world so much in need of His love and healing.

1 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.

Christ died to set us free. Free to love. Free to teach. Free to encourage. Free to share His abundance with a weary world. Let us cast off our yoke of slavery and find the freedom He intended by taking our brothers and sisters by the hand and

bring them with us into a relationship with the Creator of the Universe. There is no greater calling. There is no greater purpose. There is no greater freedom. Giving ourselves as living sacrifices to the purpose of God on Earth is the True Cost of Freedom.

AMEN

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