

Freeway Series / Sermon 7: Freedom -- Rescued to Rescue

May 22, 2016

Here's what we just sang ... to God: "I believe in God our Father, I believe in Christ the Son, I believe in the Holy Spirit" ... So let me ask you, do you really? We said: "I believe in life eternal, I believe in the resurrection, when Jesus comes again?" Do you really? Craig Groeschel, who is a great pastor, says there is an epidemic of Christian atheism. He thinks a lot of us say we believe in God, but we act like, and we live like he doesn't really exist. So, what do you think? If we really believed this stuff, down to the core of our being, wouldn't we live a little differently?

Or maybe our biggest problem isn't that we don't really believe, maybe it's that we don't really love. If we really loved God -- down to the core of our being -- wouldn't we live a little differently? If we really loved people, down to the core of our being, wouldn't we live a little differently?

Here's the deal: Do you really believe Jesus when he says, "I have come that you may have life (real life), and have it to the full." (John 10.10) Do you believe he meant it, for all of us? And do you believe he can do it, for all of us? ... Well, are you living it? Are you experiencing it? You see, we say we believe it. We say we believe that doing life with God right now, is better than doing life any other way. And we say we believe that doing life with him in heaven will be infinitely better than the alternative. But do you believe it deeply enough that you would do anything to drag people you love down his path? I think it's one of the two, guys. If we are not all in, we either don't really believe deeply enough, or we don't really love deeply enough. Because, how can we say we believe that he offers something infinitely better, and not drag the people we love towards him?

Our military calls it one of the pillars of "the warrior ethos": We leave no one behind! We leave no one behind! It's one of the core values drilled into our warriors. And it's more than just words to them. They do it: "We leave no one behind." And that stirs us, doesn't it? It stirs something in me. You watch a movie in which they send a whole chopper full of guys into harm's way just to save one, because we leave no one behind. And instead of saying, "That's crazy! Why would you do that? Why would you put others at risk for the sake of just one?" instead our chests swell, because we know it's a noble thing, we know it's right.

It kind of reminds me of a parable of Jesus. (*Matthew 18.12 on screen*) Jesus tells a story about a shepherd who leaves 99 sheep in an uncomfortable place to go personally into harm's way, into a dangerous place, to find the one that has gotten lost. Because, Jesus says, that's the way God is. He says, "In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish." (v 14) He doesn't want to leave any of us behind! In fact, I think he's actually the one who got it started.

You see guys, it's not just the attitude of a great warrior, it's not just the attitude of God ... it's the attitude of a great Jesus follower, and it's the attitude of a great church: "We will leave no one behind," if we can help it. We will leave the 99 in an uncomfortable place and go personally into danger if we have to, to rescue the 1 who is lost ... because it is God's will that none of his little ones should perish. That's the definition, I think, of what one guy calls "a dangerous church." A dangerous church is made up of dangerous Jesus followers who are willing to take dangerous risks in order to rescue others from a dangerous place. That's what I want Capital City to be: A dangerous church is made up of Jesus followers who are willing to sacrifice their own comfort and even their own safety to rescue people Jesus died for from a horrifyingly dangerous place.

Guys, I am convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt God has called us – Capital City -- to be a dangerous church made up of risk-taking Jesus followers who understand that some of our friends, our neighbors, our loved ones are in a dangerous place, and they are headed for an infinitely more dangerous place. Whether they realize it or not, they are in harm's way. And God calls us to do something about it!

And if we don't do something, then we probably have one of two problems. Either we don't believe deeply enough that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life; or we don't love God's kids the way he wants us to. Do you buy that? Whether we choose to be dangerous Christians in a dangerous church will reveal whether we actually believe this stuff, and whether we actually love people God's way. Let me spell it out more clearly. If we are not willing to "leave no one behind," if we're not willing to leave the 99 in an uncomfortable place and go after the 1, if we don't live like doing life his

way is infinitely better, if we are content to let those around us drift away from God, then either we don't really believe, or we don't really love.

Well, guys, we really do believe this stuff. And we really do want to love God's precious kids God's way. This is the last week in the series we're calling "Freeway." Jesus said he came that we might have life to the fullest, both now, and in heaven. And we believe him. But there is a path to the freedom he offers us. There are some things we have to do if we want to accept his offer of life to the fullest, both now and in heaven.

- It starts with Awareness. We have to let him reveal to us whatever junk there is inside us that is weighing us down and holding us back.
- Then we talked about Discovery. You'll discover that the key to this Freeway is trust. We trust him when we understand him, and we trust him when we don't. We trust him when we agree with him, and we trust him when we don't. Because we believe that he is smarter than we are, and he only wants our best.
- Then we talked about Ownership. The Bible says, "People who conceal their sins will not prosper, but if they confess and turn from them (if they own them), they will receive mercy." (Proverbs 28.13) So we have to stop concealing our sin. We have to quit rationalizing, and blaming others for our sin. And we have to quit pretending our sin isn't sin. We have to own it, so he can heal it.
- And then we talked about Forgiveness. We said, Holding on keeps us from moving on. You're going to be hurt, and marginalized, and disrespected, and betrayed. And every time hurt happens you are going to accumulate baggage. Well, God does not intend for us to carry a load of baggage that just keeps getting bigger and bigger as life goes on. He gave us a way to dump the baggage. It's called ... forgiveness.
- Last week Jordan talked about Acceptance. If we are going to experience the freedom Jesus came to give us, we have to stop believing the labels people put on us. In fact, we're going to have to stop believing the labels we put on ourselves. Instead we are going to have to accept who he says we are.

- And this is the last week of the series, and we've got one more big idea. Here it is: Your freedom is maximized when you share it. You will not experience life to the fullest until you do whatever you can to help others experience life to the fullest. You were rescued by God to be a rescuer. It's the coolest thing you can ever do.

Here are the verses we're going to dig into. In these verses God tells us what he has done for us, and he tells us what he wants us to do for him. The Bible says, "Anyone (anyone) who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! (He offers us life to the fullest! That's what we've been talking about: the Freeway) And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. (That's what he did for us; now here's what he tells us to do for him. He says,) And God has given us this task of reconciling people to him. (That's our mission from God – to reconnect people with God.) For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. So we are Christ's ambassadors (you are Christ's ambassadors); God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, (with people, when we implore people) "Come back to God!"

Now, I'd like us to read it together out-loud. It's a little longer than what we usually read together, but it is so powerful, and I want you to own it. I've changed the language a little bit to make it more personal. Are you ready? "In Christ I have become a new person. My old life is gone; my new life has begun! And all of this is a gift from God, who brought me back to himself through Christ. And God has given me this task of reconciling people to him. For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting our sins against us. And he gave me this wonderful message of reconciliation. So I am Christ's ambassador; God makes his appeal through me. I speak for Christ when I plead, "Come back to God!" ... Do you believe that? Do you really?

Guys, he's talking to all of us who are Jesus followers. He's talking to those of us who have been Jesus followers for 50 years. And he's talking to those of you who have been a Jesus follower for a week. We were rescued to be rescuers. Now I know it's kind of scary; it is an uncomfortable and sometimes dangerous assignment. We live in land

controlled by the enemy. Pointing people towards Jesus will offend some people and might even put some of us at risk. They may reject us, mock us, even try to turn others against us.

I know it is dangerous; but listen guys: The Bible says, “Greater is he that is in me than he that is in the world.” And I believe that. Do you? So we’ll go out and get it done. It is our job to try to leave no one behind. It’s our mission to go into harm’s way, if necessary, to rescue people from a horrifically dangerous place...

Guys ... do you really believe this stuff? Do you believe that Jesus has made you brand new, and that he has given you the job of leaving no one behind? And ... do you really love anyone who is not yet a Jesus follower? Is there anyone you really love who has not surrendered to Jesus, yet?

But some of you guys are thinking, “I don’t think I can do it. I don’t think I’m smart enough, I don’t think I’m good enough. I don’t think I’m brave enough. How can God use me? I don’t know how to be a rescuer. And I’m still struggling with so much baggage. To be honest, I’m still a mess. I’m not the one to do this job.” Well guys, it’s not about what you can do, it’s about what God can do through you. You see, God does some of His best work through really messy people.

There is a powerful story in the gospel of John, chapter 4. It’s the story of a woman with a whole lot of baggage. She is a mess. She admits to 5 failed marriages — who knows how many men beside that? She is currently living with a guy she’s not married to. Then one day she meets Jesus. And here’s what I want you to catch in her story: Immediately — immediately the rescued became a rescuer; immediately this messy woman becomes an ambassador for Jesus. She runs back into town and she tells everyone she sees, “Come and see this man I met ... he’s changed everything about me.”

Now the people in town knows her story. You know how small towns are: everybody knows everything about everybody. They know about all the junk in her life. But I’m telling you guys, God still used her, in fact he used her messiness! Her mess was the very reason people came out of the woodwork to see Jesus! Guys, that is Freedom! God using your mess for His glory!

Did you know that God can and will use your greatest failures as a launching pad to your greatest calling? What do you think your greatest calling is? Is there anything bigger you can do than drag someone you love to God? And over and over again God chooses to use our failures. He uses our messes to make us dangerous!

- Because of his grace, you can admit now you are an alcoholic, and God can use that. There are a boatload of people around you who struggle with the same thing. You can tell them what you found in Christ.
- Some of you have struggled with depression, or with an eating disorder. You may be fighting that war now. Well there are others in this room trapped in the same messes who could use a friend who understands, who can point them towards Jesus.
- Maybe your struggle is with infertility, and your inclination is to hide it. Well, what if God wants to use your struggle for his purposes, to use you to come alongside another family that is fighting the same battles? Maybe you can show them some of the strength you have found in Jesus.
- There are a surprising number of people in this room who have been sexually abused. We live in a world where it is epidemic. Well, there are others who need Jesus who are just like you. You can tell them how Christ has freed you from your past.
- We have some in here who have done time, you've been in jail. Well, you know what God has done for you. God can use your messes to help others who are still stuck.

Guys, every one of us in this room has someone in our life who did it right and we were attracted to Christ by what we saw in them. People who let God use them are dangerous! Satan shudders at the thought of the impact people like you can have. You see, a dangerous church (like this one) is made of dangerous Jesus followers (like you) who are willing to take the risk to rescue others from a horrifyingly dangerous place...

Because ... what do you think is going to happen to those who don't accept Jesus, after they die? You see, we believe following Jesus does make life better right here, right now. But it's not just about here and now. This is just the tip of the iceberg. It is not just our mission to rescue people from a lesser life here on earth, it's about rescuing them from something that is incomprehensibly bad. I don't know what Hell is like, guys. I don't know if it is literal fire, unending physical agony. The Bible doesn't give us a lot of detail. But I am convinced hell is bad enough that God describes it in the most awful terms because he doesn't want us to end up there. He died to keep us from going there.

I know Hell is another one of those politically incorrect things to talk about. To some it's quaint. To some it is unenlightened. So be it. And the truth is, I don't talk about hell a lot because I am not interested in scaring people into a decision they don't want to make. I can try to scare you out of hell, but usually when the fear subsides -- and it will -- people drift back away from God. I don't want you to come to God because you are terrified of hell, though you should be. I want you to come to God because he is truth and he is grace, and because he came that you might have life to the fullest, now and forever.

But I do believe in judgment. I do believe that someday every one of us will stand before a perfectly holy God, and the only chance you'll have is Jesus. Guys, if you really believe that, and if you really love anyone who is not doing life with Jesus, then you have a mission from God! He calls us to be a dangerous church made up of dangerous Jesus followers, who are willing to take dangerous risks to rescue people we love from a dangerous place...

There is a little museum on Nantucket Island in Massachusetts. It is devoted to a volunteer organization called the Massachusetts Humane Society, founded in 1781. In those days travel by sea was extremely dangerous. And the rough waters and rocky coastline there made it an especially treacherous place to sail. Many ships went down and many people lost their lives within sight of land. So a group of volunteers decided to go into the lifesaving business. They built huts along the shoreline. Each was stocked with a boat and rescue equipment. And they took turns watching the sea. And when a boat would go down they would send out the word and they would go out and they would save as many

lives as possible. And people who sailed that area took comfort when they saw those huts, knowing that someone was watching — someone who cared — and if they were in danger there were people who would risk their lives to save them. These volunteers didn't do it for money, or recognition — they just believed every life mattered. They had a motto. It's an amazing motto: "You have to go out, but you don't have to come back." That's powerful, isn't it? Make you want to sign up? You have to go out, but you don't have to come back. Because they believed -- we will leave no one behind, if we can help it.

Well, over time things changed. The Coast Guard started to get involved. For a while the two worked together, but over time the Coast Guard took on more of the responsibility and the Society did less. After all, the Coast Guard were professionals: they got paid to put their lives in harm's way; and they had better training. So finally there came a time when the volunteers stopped manning the huts and stopped searching the coastline and stopped going into harm's way to rescue people who were dying. The funny thing is, they couldn't bring themselves to disband. So the Massachusetts Humane Society still has regular meetings today. They meet and they have a dinner. They honor the lifesavers, they support the lifesavers, they just aren't personally in the lifesaving business anymore.

Well ... the same thing happens to churches all the time. It doesn't happen in a day, or a week, or a month ... it happens over years, usually. We forget that we are in the lifesaving business. We were rescued to be rescuers. And, when we forget, we don't usually disband, we just aren't saving anybody. We aren't scouring the neighborhoods, we aren't scouring our offices and our schools and our families and our networks of relationships to see if there is anyone we can rescue. We still hold "worship" services, we still continue our programs that make us feel good, we still build nice buildings, we still have budgets and staffs — but we just aren't really in the lifesaving business; it becomes more about us — what I want, what I like, what feeds me.

Well ... not here! Not on our watch! Guys, we are surrounded by people who are drowning in their sins and some of them don't even know it. We want to be a dangerous church, made up of dangerous Jesus followers willing to take dangerous risks to rescue people we love from a dangerous place. We want to grow Jesus followers who are willing to sacrifice our

own comfort and our own safety to rescue people Jesus died for from a horrifyingly dangerous place. So are you in? Will you help? ...

One more piece. Some of you guys here are not Jesus followers yet. You have not yet made Jesus the Lord of your life. Maybe you've been thinking about it, but you haven't really done it yet. You've never been baptized. Guys, there is an urgency here! Those verses we read together earlier ... The word Paul uses is so passionate, so strong. He says, "We implore you on Christ's behalf: (We implore you!) Be reconciled to God." (2 Corinthians 5.20) The New Living translation says, "We plead with you, 'Come back to God!'" Jesus had the same urgency. The Bible says Jesus wept over people who wouldn't turn to God. Because he understood the stakes. He understood what they were throwing away, and he understood where they were heading without him.

Well, we've never done this since I've been here, but today we are encouraging you to get it done, right now. Right here, right now. If you are not a Jesus follower yet, you have felt God's Spirit nudging you, and you know it's the right thing to do – right now. And most of you are tempted to do what you've always done: you are about to walk out those doors without getting it done. Well, today, we implore you, we plead with you: get it done right here, right now. And it's not just us imploring you, guys. God's nudging you; you know it's the right thing to do. So just do it, right now. You can be baptized in this service before any of us leave.

Now you are thinking, "I didn't come prepared to get baptized." I know. But we have things ready for you. We bought shorts, and shirts, we even bought some underwear for you ladies so you don't have to get yours wet. We have towels ready. It's all ready to go, right back there. We have everything you need to get it done. So don't let any of that hold you back. But you have to make a call. Will you just get it done?

Maybe you are pushing back: Why should I get baptized? Well, I could give you a ton of reasons, I could teach on it all day. (Matthew 28.19 on screen) But I'll give you just one: Jesus said you should. If he is God, if he is going to be your Lord, that should be enough. And maybe you are still pushing back: What is the big deal about baptism? The water doesn't save you, does it? No, it doesn't. If you're not giving your heart to Jesus, all baptism does is get you wet. So we are imploring you to give you're

your heart, and to seal that with baptism. Because he wants us to act out on the outside what he is doing on the inside. You see, baptism pictures our surrender. Have you noticed when a person is baptized we always lean them backward? It symbolizes you relinquishing control of your life, it symbolizes your surrender to Christ.

It also symbolizes two other things. It's a burial. You are dying to an old life, and you are raising up to a brand new life. Remember what we read together: "Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!" That's what happens when you make him Lord of your life. And baptism symbolizes a washing, a cleansing ... the forgiveness of your sins – all of them. Guys, baptism is our line in the sand. It's when we say, "Now, right now, I am going all in for Jesus."

I'm really pleading with those of you who are teenagers and up. If you are a little guy, we are going to want to talk to you for a while first, to make sure you're ready. But if you are a teenager or an adult, let's get it done right here, right now.