

In Memorandum (Gal 4:3-7) Memorial Day 2014 ZCC

Freedom is important and we have many freedoms in the United States of America. Can we name a few? (religion, speech, assembly, movement, own property, from cruel punishment...) These are all wonderful freedoms. On Memorial Day, we often find ourselves being reminded that these freedoms were not literally free. They came with a great price—even from the very beginning of our nation.

On Memorial Day, we are reminded that from the very beginning of our nation, there was a cost. I like the quote about veterans that says, “All gave some, some gave all...” People have given their very lives—so that the freedoms we just named might be available to you and me. Men and women—great Americans whose names you and I will never know—have stood and declared that freedom itself is more valuable than their own lives and they have died for the sake of our freedom to choose our occupation and our home and our car and our spouse and our residence and our faith.

Their sacrifices have made it possible for us to speak our minds without being sent to jail. Their sacrifices have helped make it possible for us to meet today and worship in the way we have chosen and when we choose.

Of all the freedoms that have been bought with lives—the freedom to worship may ultimately be the most important one of all.

Through the years, there have been many groups and nations who wanted to take those freedoms from us. Our path of national freedoms has been fraught with danger and dotted with wars and death for military men and women who were fighting against tyranny. In fact, the battles for our national and personal freedoms are going on even today. Those battles are being fought in many different ways.

I want us to properly honor those who have helped to keep us a free nation. Now, I know that y'all are kind of shy and retiring—but maybe you might want to stand and say the name of someone you know who died in the service of our country. It may be a relative or a friend. There may not be very many of us who have been touched that way, but here is your opportunity. I'll begin by saying once again that I never knew anyone who fit that description. From the Civil War on, my relatives have survived war pretty well. Few of my friends have been to war.

I do want to say that a few years ago, I lost a church member and a friend to Agent Orange cancer. It took almost 40 years, but Vietnam killed him and because of the death of Lonnie Guthrie, I have the dubious honor of standing now and calling his name. It was an honor to know Lonnie Guthrie and I honor him now.

I also remember someone from our county who was killed during the Vietnam war but don't remember his name. Who else?

I am glad that these and many others in our nation's history were willing serve and to fight and to die so that we might live in freedom. Freedom of speech and freedom of movement and freedom of religion—are great freedoms and I am glad we have them.

It seems that for every freedom, there is someone or something trying to take it away. This is not a new thing. I won't go too deeply into any of it, but I'll say that the assaults on our freedom began a long, long, long, long time ago—not too long after creation. The new creation was one of absolute freedom and yet that ended all too soon. It happened with the assault on paradise by the serpent—through the casting of doubts on God's good intentions. It came through the sinfulness of Adam and Eve.

From their eating of the forbidden fruit came our separation from God and loss of freedoms on every front. From their choice came the fall that creates trouble for you and me—our tendency to choose self over God and the tendency of human beings to try and rule one another. In exercising their freedom, Adam and Eve lost the freedom to walk and talk and be with God. They lost the relationship—and though I don't understand totally, they lost it for us all.

Now, instead of being the friends of God, walking with him in the cool of the evening, we find ourselves sinners who cannot enter into his presence.

In the book of Romans we are told that “The wages of sin is death..” So, in effect, the Bible says that the paycheck for sinners is eternal death. Who does this apply to, who gets paid? Sinners.

Who are sinners?

Murderers? Yes.

Thieves? Yes.

Idolaters? Yes.

Blasphemers? Yes.

According to Scripture, sinners are paid with death—their rightful and just wages. Not only do they die physically, scripture tells us that they die eternally.

But remember that the Bible tells us that all have sinned and gone astray. Who does that include? That's right—you and me.

According to Scripture, WE are sinners.

According to Romans 3:23, WE have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Oh man! If WE have sinned and if WE have fallen short of the perfection and the glory of God, we are in trouble—we don't have a chance.

Did you ever see a movie where someone ate an expensive meal in a restaurant and when they went to pay their money was gone—they were “short?” What happened? Sometimes you get sent to jail but sometimes you wash dishes for the rest of the night.

So, according to the Bible—we find ourselves short—only this world is not a restaurant, where we can make up the difference by washing a few dishes. Here we find ourselves short of the glory of God. And there are no dishes to wash in heaven.

So, we find ourselves in no position to enter into the presence of God—we find ourselves doing a job where the wage is physical and eternal death. We find ourselves literally the enemy of God.

Fortunately, over time, God put together a plan—a plan of salvation and a plan for the church—a plan to set the world free.

He began in Genesis 12:1 by calling Abraham and his children as a special people—as a people through which he could bless and reclaim the world as they loved and followed him. God was to be the leader and the people were to be followers.

God called out many along the way, including Joseph (beginning in Genesis 33) and Moses in the book of Exodus.

By the way—how well did that work out? How well did God reach the world through the faithfulness of the Hebrews?

Not too good!

It seems that when they went to possess the promised land, they failed to take it all. They left pockets of idol-worshippers in the land, even though God told them not to and they were never at peace and they were never free of temptation.

So, instead of setting the world free—free from sin and separation from God—we find that the Hebrews were prisoners of sin and prisoners of their own rebellion and their own unfaithfulness.

As time went on, they wound up in a bigger and bigger mess so God raised up a group of men and women to set them free—free from bondage, both physical and spiritual. These were the Judges and you find their stories in the book of the same name.

They were real live heroes. They were fighting leaders and they were spiritual leaders.

If you look in the books of First and Second Kings and the Chronicles and both books of Samuel, you will find that, over time, the people called for a king and God granted them a king, but Saul was unfaithful to God and failed to heed his word.

So the LORD raised up David—who was a man after God’s own heart, we are told. BUT he was also a man with troubles and problems. He was a man who left a moral legacy that was lacking and one that his children followed.

The next thing you know, the kingdom had split and both the northern and the southern kingdoms were ruled by evil kings who worshiped idols and who sacrificed children to their gods.

So, God called out prophets to tell the kings and the people to straighten up and do as God’s people should.

When God sent real live heroes to save the people, to sent them free from the wages of sin, they didn’t like the message, so they killed the messengers.

So—how would you say that this all worked out?

Not too good!

Isaiah was sawed in half.

Jeremiah was stoned to death.

Ezekiel and Micah were both martyred.

Amos was tortured and then martyred.

Zechariah was killed by Jehoash.

Time after time after time, the people God had chosen found themselves slaves to other nations and slaves to their desires and slaves to other gods—in other words, slaves to sin.

What happened then?

God decided upon a new and radical plan—one outlined in John 3:16-17. Would someone care to quote those verses?

For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God didn’t send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through him.

How did THAT work?

This time, it worked.

It changed and still changes the lives of those who would believe and accept the free gift of eternal life. It moves them from slave to free—from slave to heir. I read these verses a few weeks ago, but I never get enough of them, so let's do it again.

Galatians 4:3-7 says: So we also, when we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental principles of the world. But when the fullness of the time came, God sent out his Son, born to a woman, born under the law, that he might redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of children. And because you are children, God sent out the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, "Abba, Father!" So you are no longer a bond-servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

Here is true freedom. Brought by a true hero (Jesus Christ) and spread to us by those who risked and even gave their lives so that you and I might get the message of God's love. Peter, James, John, Paul—and the first one martyred—Stephen—and many thousands more who stood and stayed the course.

So, as we honor those who have sustained our freedoms in this country—I want us to remember, too, those who died to bring us ultimate, eternal freedom.

As we honor those who kept the faith and preserved the teachings of Jesus, let's remember his sacrifice—his death, burial, and resurrection which offers you and me the chance at that eternal freedom.

Prayer: Father, I thank you for those who have been willing to suffer and die to bring and to preserve freedom for our nation. We ask a special blessing on their families today. We also thank you for your plan of salvation and for the ones who died to bring us the good news—Good News which comes from the sending of the Son.