



CHRISTIAN CRUSADERS

7401 UNIVERSITY AVE., CEDAR FALLS, IOWA 50613
(319) 277-0924

INFO@CHRISTIANCRUSADERS.ORG
WWW.CHRISTIANCRUSADERS.ORG

Questions Jesus Asked: The Root of Freedom

Luke 4:14-21

And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all.

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

On October 7th, 1988, a whale hunter named Roy Amberjack first spotted three gray whales gasping for air in a small hole in the ice. This was near Point Barrow, Alaska. They were banging their heads against the ice, trying to break through so they could stay alive, get enough oxygen, more than they could get through that simple hole.

This whale hunter went and told the residents around, and they began gathering together with chainsaws and deicing pumps to cut a chain of breathing holes toward the ocean, to guide these whales to freedom. But their efforts seemed futile.

The situation quickly drew global attention, uniting unlikely allies, including Greenpeace, major oil companies, the U.S. military, federal scientists, and the Soviet Union. The breakthrough finally occurred when the Soviet Union sent two massive icebreakers to smash through a giant ice ridge blockading the whales on October 26th. Nineteen days later, a path was successfully cleared to open water. The two larger whales, named Bonnet and Crosby, successfully swam out toward freedom. But the younger, smallest whale, nicknamed Bone, perished before reaching the open waters.

The rescue mission was known as Operation Breakthrough. When you put all the factors together and you consider the influx of the international media, corporate donations, secondary rescue logistics, and all of the work put into freeing these whales, the total money spent around this event exceeded \$5 million. That's in 1988. In 2012, a movie entitled *The Big Miracle* was made, telling the story of this rescue.

The question I had when I first heard this story was, why so much attention to this? Why were we so enthralled by it? Why would we spend so much money to free a few whales?

Could it be that human beings by nature love freedom? We just intrinsically know that it's good, that we are made in the image of a God who loves freedom. And so we, in our hearts, love freedom, and we will work for it, strive for it, and sacrifice for it.

In many ways, today we're talking about the God who loves freedom. You and I are made in the image of God, who absolutely loves freedom. It's unquestionable when you read through the Scriptures. He loves it. It's part of His very nature. The Bible says our God is in heaven, and He is free to do whatever He wants. And He made us in His image, in His likeness.

There is a universal thirst or love for freedom in all of human history. Throughout history, people of nearly all cultures have some sense of valuing, desiring, and pursuing freedom in different ways. But this topic of freedom is very nuanced. There are many different aspects to it. When we say the word freedom, oftentimes we may mean different things to one another.

Prisoners often define freedom as being free from external restraints, just like we sensed with the whales. They were restrained by something physical. And prisoners often see their cell as an external restraint to freedom.

Others, like the Greeks of antiquity and many Americans, view freedom purely or mostly in a political sense. Freedom in the Old Testament is presented primarily as a freedom from slavery. It's given as a foreshadowing of humans being freed from their spiritual enslavement to sin, slavery to sin.

Considering all these kinds of freedom and different ideas around freedom, the Bible makes it clear that God is a lover of them all. He loves all kinds of freedom in all of its forms.

From the very beginning, we see this. The Spirit of the Lord was hovering over the surface of the deep, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, the Bible says there is freedom. And God the Father, and God the Son, and God the Spirit then took a man that they had breathed life into, put him in the garden to work it and to care for it. He was free to do that however he wanted. They just put him there and said, "Here's the garden. You work it, you manage it, you rule it and care for it however you want."

The Lord God commanded the man. Look at the level of freedom He gave him. "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden, but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. For when you eat of it, you will most certainly die."

All kinds of choice God gave us as human beings, free to manage as we want, free to eat as we want, only one restriction. And that restriction helped accentuate the idea of choice, that God wants us to be

free to choose to love Him or not, to do good or not. He loves freedom of choice, and He wants us to choose what's good, that brings life and hope and joy.

But there's more. The Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds of the sky, and He brought them to the man to see what he would name each of them. He was free to call them whatever he wanted. Whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name.

Freedom in naming is a powerful position to be put in. Some of us have had children, and we talked about a name that we would give that child before it arrived. And then when the child arrives and we announce a name, it's just a freedom of creative expression and opportunity to give names.

God not only wired into creation freedom of choice, but freedom of creativity. All the arts in the world, all the beauty and wonder of the world, flow from the creativity of God. And then human beings, made in His image, are free to create here on the earth.

Later, God talked about His love for political freedom. His people, the Israelites whom He'd chosen, were enslaved in Egypt. And the Lord God came to a man named Moses, and He said, "I have indeed seen the misery of My people in Egypt. I've heard them crying out because of their slave drivers."

After we disobeyed God, evil and violence entered the world. Tyranny entered the world. Mistreatment of one another entered the world, and people will now rule over others in an oppressive way.

And the Egyptians were doing this because of the enslavement to sin in their hearts. They were doing this, driving the Israelites, working them to the bone. And God came to Moses and said, "I've seen the misery of My people because of their slave drivers. I'm concerned about their suffering. So I've come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians. The cry of the Israelites has reached Me. I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. So now go. I'm sending you to Pharaoh to bring My people out of Egypt."

Freedom from enslavement into a new nation, a political freedom. That's really what we're celebrating this weekend. We're celebrating something that sort of echoes that movement of God with the Israelites.

Back in 1776, the leaders of 13 states gathered together and they wrote the Declaration of Independence. They were a part of one nation, and they wanted to separate from that nation and form their own. And so, in the writing of the Declaration of Independence, they said this:

"When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires"—listen to the respect with which they did this—"requires that they should declare the causes which impel them, or drive them, to the separation."

God did this to the Egyptians. He went to them through Moses and pleaded with them to stop oppressing the Israelites, to let them go. And this is what our forefathers were doing. They were, with dignity, expressing their desire to move freely and leave the oppression that they were experiencing under King George III.

And so they started the declaration saying this: "We hold these truths to be self-evident." Self-evident. That was the compromise that they could all agree upon. Thomas Jefferson actually presented a draft that first said, "We hold these truths to be sacred and undeniable."

These truths are not self-evident. If they were, the world would live by them. These truths are revelation from God. If these truths were self-evident, we would all treat each other equally. But down through history, people devalue other people by their natural instinct.

To understand that all people are created equal is to buy into a revelation from God that there is a Creator who creates all people with a sense of dignity, made in His image. These truths are sacred, and they will never change. These are biblical truths.

And certainly our forefathers were imperfect, just as we are. But truths are not imperfect. God is the Creator of all things. He has created every human being with dignity and honor in His image. And we are to steward our lives in a way that is ruled by these truths.

Certainly there were many evils that were committed by our forefathers, as there are many evils committed by many of us today. But they were laying the foundation of a basis that would eventually bring about the freedom of slavery, the freedom of speech, the freedom of religion, and all of these things.

They are sacred. People don't understand them unless the Holy Spirit breathes them into their heart, and you start to sense that the crown of creation is a human made in the Imago Dei, the image of God. And we then want to live our lives and steward our lives in such a way that this is true.

"We hold these truths to be self-evident"—a more man-centered way of saying it, as if man figures this out on his or her own. It is a revelation, sacred and undeniable, that all men are created equal and that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights.

This is showing involvement of God with human beings. He is not some distant God, as deists may believe. They said, as the biblical worldview paints a picture of, He is involved with people, endowing individuals with certain unalienable rights.

They all agreed upon this. Among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. And they said, "To secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed."

It was a unique experiment. Whenever any form of government becomes destructive to these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it, to institute a new government, laying its foundation on these principles and organizing its powers that will most likely affect their safety and their happiness.

To this end, what we are celebrating on July 4th is the day that we set aside to celebrate the freedoms that our forefathers worked so hard, so prayerfully, so meticulously, to lay a foundation of an imperfect, yes, worldly government so that we might do just what we're doing today: seek God freely, pursue Him with our hearts.

Eleven years later, the Constitution protected many freedoms for us: speech, religion, press, assembly. But all of these things are simply fruit of another freedom, a deeper freedom.

When Jesus began His ministry, He said what we read earlier: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me because He has anointed Me to proclaim good news to the poor, recovery of sight to the blind, to set oppressed people free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Freedom of choice. Freedom of creative expression. Freedom from enslavement. Freedom from oppression. All begins with freedom from sin. The very root of freedom starts here in the human heart, where the good news of Jesus, when believed, when trusted, liberates a person from sin.

"Anyone who sins," Jesus said, "is a slave to sin." All of us have fallen short of God's glory and sinned. We are born into an enslavement to sin, and we cannot free ourselves. And the flourishing of political freedom, religious freedom, freedom of speech, freedom of creativity comes more fully when we're liberated in here first.

And this is why the most important thing going on in the planet is not the fight for America. It's the fight for the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ, which liberates people from sin. And then all of these other freedoms can flourish.

"When the Son sets you free, you are free indeed."

My brothers and sisters, Paul wrote, "You were called to be free." Free from sin by the power of Christ. Do not use your freedom to go back to sinning, selfishly indulging yourself. Rather, use your freedom to humbly serve one another in love.

Friends, what we need is a spiritual awakening where people come before God, acknowledge their sinfulness, and enter a repentance that is deep and purifying, and that ultimately motivates them to give their lives in service to the King. And then, friends, freedom will flourish.

We're celebrating the God who came to serve us and sacrifice for us. As we're celebrating our country today, there are many who have served our country and sacrificed for our nation. If you are a veteran that's here today, if you have served our nation in some way or held a political office in some way, I would invite you. Would you be willing to stand where you are and we could acknowledge you and thank you for your sacrifice in our nation?

I am so thankful to live in America. I am so thankful to know people like y'all who just stood. It is all just sort of shadows and echoes of Jesus, who came to serve and to sacrifice for you and for me.