

Jesus Is Our Jubilee

7-1-01

Call to Worship

Leader: The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion -- to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor.

People: *I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.*

Leader: For as the soil makes the sprout come up and a garden causes seeds to grow,

All: so the Sovereign LORD will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations (Is. 61:1-4,10,11).

Before we get to Jesus, let's start with some historical markers:

2001 is the 225th anniversary of our Declaration of Independence. Most of us know something about how that Declaration came to be. But let me give you a Christian perspective on FREEDOM. Our bulletin cover is a quote from Fair Sunshine – a book about Scottish martyrs who laid down their lives for the Christian faith. In it we find these words:

In the orderings of the Most High,
the United States of America is a great result of
the further development of the
Reformation.

The U.S. might have been settled by Spanish or Portuguese,
and therefore, now be as South America,
Romish, backward and dark

(think about the rich resources SA has – what accounts for the prosperity
we enjoy and the poverty and class divisions that characterize most of SA?).

But in genius and constitution,
in its strong depths and on its grand heights, the U.S. is a
Protestant land

(ed. - note the *Journal of the First Continental Congress*, 1774,
repeatedly refers to America as free Protestant colonies).

This is because of a people,
such a people,
the finest expositors of Scripture,
the English Puritans

(we do not want to believe the stereotypes of them nor do we
want to idolize them; we need to acknowledge the real difference they made).

Carrying banished men and women, with their little children,
the Mayflower was an earnest (a down payment)
of a summer of spiritual bloom to be followed by a great harvest.

The people of God suffer but to
reign (sometimes on earth; sometimes their descendents reign, always they reign in heaven).

Through going the way of the cross
there was for them a fulfillment of the promise of the love and grace of
God.

And so these blood-brothers of the Covenanters
(those who laid their lives down for the crown rights of King Jesus)
went out and founded a nation like their own –

lands of free men,

lands of the Gospel of the grace of Christ
from which to other races the message of the redeeming love of God
has been taken forth unceasingly

(they had to bring freedom with them because freedom has to accompany the gospel).

It was wicked King Charles Stuart who caused these people to go,
but God meant it unto good

- Joseph - Gen. 50: 20 *You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.*
- Prov. 21:1 *“The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases.”*
- Prov. 16:9 *“In his heart a man (adam) plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps.”*

Other ships were making ready to sail,
but Charles of Divine Right imperiously forbade their going.
Had he but known, he would have made them go,

and that quickly,

for one of the would-be Pilgrim Colonists was

Oliver Cromwell

(who unseated the king).

Oh those days of seeming calamity
to those brave and noble hearts!

Those were days of the planting of the Lord.

The British Commonwealth and the United States of America

owe much to sufferers for His name's sake,

enduring and achieving by

faith

(it is faith we want to see – but let's return to our history for a moment)

(Jock Purves, Fair Sunshine, p. 42 [revised]).

2001 is the 250th anniversary of the ordering of the Liberty Bell

This famous bell first rang out the public news of American Independence on July 8, 1776. The 2,080-pound bell cracked the first time it was rung. During the British occupation of Philadelphia it was kept safe in the basement of Zion Reformed Church of Allentown, PA. It was inscribed with the words of Lev. 25:10 - *“Proclaim liberty throughout [all] the land unto all the inhabitants thereof.”* We'll look at that passage in just a moment. First let's go back 50 years further to William Penn for his understanding of liberty.



- **2001 is also the 300th anniversary of religious liberty in America** – as declared by William Penn in his 1701 *Charter of Privileges*. Only a few selections are printed:

No people can be truly happy though under the greatest enjoyments of civil liberties if they are deprived of the freedom of their consciences as to their religious profession and worship. God only (is) Lord of conscience. Only he can enlighten the mind and persuade and convince the understandings of people.

I do hereby grant and declare that no person or persons inhabiting in this province or territory who shall confess and acknowledge one Almighty God, the Creator, upholder and Ruler of the world, and profess him and oblige themselves to live quietly under the civil government shall be in any case be molested or prejudiced in their person or estate because their conscientious persuasion or practice nor may they be compelled to frequent or maintain any religious worship place or ministry contrary to their mind or do or suffer any other act or thing contrary to their religious persuasion. All persons who also profess to believe in Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, shall be capable to serve this government in any capacity - both legislatively and executively.

*No law or ordinance shall at any time hereafter be made to alter, change or diminish the form or effect of this charter without the consent of the governor and six sevenths of the assembly. But because the happiness of mankind depends so much upon their enjoying liberty conscience as aforesaid, I do hereby solemnly declare, promise and grant that **this first article relating to liberty of conscience remain without any alteration inviolably for ever** (revised). What love of religious liberty!*

Penn probably looked back to Westminster Confession of Faith published in the mid-1600's. Chapters 21 and 23 deal with religious liberty and are included at the end of this document if you would like to consider them further. Let's look at 23:3

- *Yet, as nursing fathers, it is the duty of civil magistrates to protect the Church of our common Lord, without giving the preference to any denomination of Christians above the rest, in such a manner that all ecclesiastical persons whatever shall enjoy the full, free, and unquestioned liberty of discharging every part of their sacred functions, without violence or danger.*

This is LOVE of religious liberty. This is a liberty which we assume. It was a liberty for which they were willing to die. It is liberty which finds its roots in Scripture.

Let's begin with the passage of Scripture quoted on the Liberty Bell. Lev. 25:10 - "*Proclaim liberty throughout [all] the land unto all the inhabitants thereof.*"

Lev. 25:1 *The LORD said to Moses on Mount Sinai,*

- From where had the Israelites come to get to Mt. Sinai? Egypt.
- What had they done in Egypt? They had been slaves. God had told Abraham (Gen. 15: 13) "*Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated **four hundred years**. 14 But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions.*
- Now God had brought these former slaves to Sinai. Hear this as if you were the descendants of generations of slaves:

2 "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: `When you enter the land I am going to give you, the land itself must observe a sabbath to the LORD. 3 For six years sow your fields, and for six years prune your vineyards and gather their crops. 4 But in the seventh year the land is to have a sabbath of rest, a sabbath to the LORD. Do not sow your fields or prune your vineyards. 5 Do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the grapes of your untended vines. The land is to have a year of rest. 6 Whatever the land yields during the sabbath year will be food for you--for yourself, your manservant and maidservant, and the hired worker and temporary resident who live among you, 7 as well as for your livestock and the wild animals in your land. Whatever the land produces may be eaten.

- Astonishing – what kind of Master is this who wants us to take every 7th year off!
- More than that, He is giving us every seventh day off and festivals, even family vacations, throughout the year.
- He must be on our side.
- And there's even more. Get this:

8 "Count off seven sabbaths of years--seven times seven years--so that the seven sabbaths of years amount to a period of forty-nine years. 9 Then have the trumpet sounded everywhere on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement sound the trumpet throughout your land. 10 Consecrate the fiftieth year and **proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants**. It shall be a jubilee for you; each one of you is to return to his family property and each to his own clan. 11 The fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you; do not sow and do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the untended vines. 12 For it is a jubilee and is to be holy for you; eat only what is taken directly from the fields. (Would God provide – certainly)¹³ "In this Year of Jubilee everyone is to return to his own property.

- This is astonishing – I've done the math. If I live to be 50, God is giving me, a former slave, descendant of generations of slaves, nearly 1/3 of my time off. What a gracious Master!
- Personal implications - If I've been a fool and mismanaged my property, God gives me a new start. If my forebearers have mismanaged our family property, it will be returned. If I've wandered away, it is possible to go back to my family and to my property. It is possible to go home again. It is possible to have a fresh start.
- Implications for the community - There will never be a perpetual slave class in Israel. Everyone will eventually have an opportunity to be self-supporting. Because God has set freedom in the heart of His people, He knows they cannot be slaves. In Israel bondservants will be given the opportunity to take dominion.

Many of our forebearers were Christians who knew their Bibles. As you can see from William Penn, in coming to the US they desired freedom from religious persecution and freedom from the tyranny of the landed gentry. They established a place where religious freedom was held dear and land was available. The call to the US was a call to **proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants**. It was a grand hope to proclaim.

BUT

- There is no record of the Jubilee ever being celebrated in Scripture.
- Josephus may refer to a jubilee – but this reference may not be to one that was actually celebrated – he may have referred to it in concept.
- After the Babylonian Exile, the concept of the jubilee was officially abolished.

- It is part of the civil law of Israel and is not binding upon us.
- In other words, we could cynically say: *“This is just another good idea of God’s that simply will not work in a broken world.”*
- It is symbolic that the Liberty Bell inscribed with this hope cracked on the first time it was rung.

BUT

- There is also a spiritual side to the Jubilee. Since the laws of God not only show us what it is to love our neighbor but also show us what the character of God is, then what does this law show us? Consider two verses:
 - V. 9, *on the Day of Atonement sound the trumpet throughout your land*, reminds us that Jubilee freedom begins with the forgiveness of God – with a God-appointed sacrifice.
 - V. 10, *each one of you is to return to his family property and each to his own clan*. Although we cannot go back to Eden, we can come home to Him. We can have a place with Him – despite our failures or the repeated sins of previous generations.

That brings us to Jesus – our Jubilee.

Luke 4: 13 When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him (Jesus) until an opportune time.

- Note, this is the very beginning of Jesus’ ministry. What will He say to announce His ministry? What is the most important thing for Him to proclaim?

*14 Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. 15 He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. 16 He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. 17 The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: 18 “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to **proclaim freedom** for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, 19 **to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.**” (This is Jubilee!) 20 Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, 21 and he began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”*

- *Today* – a new era had begun, a perpetual jubilee with God. By merely speaking, Jesus changed reality. Who does He think He is – God the Creator who speaks and reality changes? Yes!

We often wish we could speak and change things. But such is often not the case with us. For example, in 1652, Rhode Island passed a law against Negro slavery. There is no evidence that it was ever enforced. Actually Newport, Rhode Island, became the center of slave trade in the next century (G. North, [Tools of Dominion](#), p. 147). Great land grants in the South opened the way for slavery that was antithetical to the freedom God puts in the heart of His people. It is fitting that the Liberty Bell cracked – this land did not proclaim liberty for all its inhabitants. Proclaim freedom – far from it!

One of my favorite movies is Braveheart. At the end, William Wallace, being torn apart, cries out, “FREEDOM.” It is inspiring – a great reminder that we, made in God’s image, are not

satisfied with being under tyrannical rule. But what did he really accomplish? Can history tell us?

That leads me to another question. Is what Jesus did in proclaiming freedom at the beginning of His ministry simply meant to inspire us? Is this just another good idea of God's that will prove to be impracticable in this world? No. What Jesus proclaimed in word He fulfilled in deed on the cross. For those who believe He did change reality in relation to God and to our neighbor.

Our Confession of Faith, Chapter 20, I, puts it this way:

The liberty which Christ has purchased for believers under the Gospel consists

1. *in their freedom from the guilt of sin,*
2. *and condemning wrath of God,*
3. *the curse of the moral law; and,*
4. *in their being delivered from this present evil world, bondage to Satan, and dominion of sin;*
5. *from the evil of afflictions, the sting of death, the victory of the grave, and everlasting damnation;*

These are freedoms *from* – now note the freedoms *to*:

6. *as also, in their free access to God, and*
7. *their yielding obedience unto Him, not out of slavish fear, but a child-like love and willing mind.*
8. *All which were common also to believers under the law. But, under the New Testament, the liberty of Christians is further enlarged, in their freedom from the yoke of the ceremonial law, to which the Jewish Church was subjected; and in greater boldness of access to the throne of grace, and in fuller communications of the free Spirit of God, than believers under the law did ordinarily partake of.*

Is this true?

Hear the testimony of Paul and Peter –

- 2 Cor. 3: 17 *Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is **freedom**.*
- Gal. 5:1 *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 (of self righteousness or selfishness). 13 You, my brothers, were called to be **free**. But do not use your **freedom** to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.*
- 1 Pet. 2: 16 *Live as **free** men, but do not use your **freedom** as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God.*

Hear my testimony of some recent information I've received by testing it according to Chapter 20, I:

The liberty which Christ has purchased for believers under the Gospel consists

1. *in their freedom from the guilt of sin,*
2. *and condemning wrath of God,*
3. *the curse of the moral law; and,*
- We have been praying for our neighbors. One of our neighbor began visiting here and has joined. She told me that faith in Christ had released her from the fear of death –

particularly the fear of flying. When she flies now, she asks the Holy Spirit to help her and she is free to receive the peace He has for her.

4. *in their being delivered from this present evil world, bondage to Satan, and dominion of sin;*

- This week I received an e-mail from a Christian man, young in his faith. Since I was 13, I have been addicted to the evils and wickedness of pornography. Over and over and over I have succumbed to its unsatisfying and fleeting pleasures. Again and again, I tried unsuccessfully during these years to control these addictions on my own. About 10 months ago I began a daily program (60 days in length) from <http://www.settingcaptivesfree.com> I thought the website was aptly named, given that I've been a slave to the devil most of my life. In any case, I lasted up until the sixth day of the program. This day it asked me to find accountability in my pastor and in my wife. Internally, I refused to do both and instead reveled in my pride that I wouldn't expose myself for what I am: A habitual sinner with no control over my life. But, now I've confided in my wife. Through the program on that website, I've also been given a mentor/accountability partner who's been through this program and is spiritually right with the Lord. He's given me much scripture, hope, and guidance over the past couple of weeks and I truly have felt the Holy Spirit well up inside me. I feel closer to God. This freedom has lifted my spirit up and has shown me how fruitful a personal relationship with God can be. SO WONDERFUL AND SO SATISFYING. This bible study program has set the wheels turning to bring my wicked sins out of the darkness and into the light. I know my own self pride, to keep this in the dark and private is EXACTLY what the devil would like me to do. Continuing on that path is sure destruction and slavery to him. I refuse to keep this in the darkness. Instead of running to the darkness I'm running to the light. I'm abandoning my pride and I need to seek your counsel

5. *from the evil of afflictions, the sting of death, the victory of the grave, and everlasting damnation;*

- Thursday night Ginny and I were at Angier Baptist Church. Craig McCleod's Dad, a believer in Jesus, had died after battling cancer for 3 months. The church had been full of those who came to extend sympathy to the family. There was sadness – but there was joy. Craig told me, "God's grace has been so real to us." He had been with his Dad when his Dad died. Craig felt like his Dad was ushered into the presence of Jesus. Friday, Crag was free to preach his dad's funeral. We are freed from the sting of death and the victory of the grave.

6. *as also, in their free access to God, and*

7. *their yielding obedience unto Him, not out of slavish fear, but a child-like love and willing mind.*

- At General Assembly last week I saw someone I met at a Sonship conference six years ago. He told me he had been an elder in a strict Presbyterian denomination. He said he had been living as a Pharisee before coming to understand the freedom he has in Christ. He wondered if the distance his daughter has had toward Christ was the result of those days. But, because of the freedom of the gospel, more and more he is free to love her and love God - that love is at work. His daughter who left Christ has now had a baby and desires to have that baby baptized in the church. Her Dad is amazed. She sees the love of God transforming her parents. They see the love of God drawing her.

Why so much freedom *from* and so much freedom *to*? Jesus is our Jubilee. That is our only reason. Is He your Jubilee? Ask Him, through His work on the cross, to set you free from sin and wrath and free to love God and your neighbor today.

Communion

Westminster Confession of Faith Chapter XX

Of Christian Liberty, and Liberty of Conscience

I. The liberty which Christ has purchased for believers under the Gospel consists in their freedom from the guilt of sin, and condemning wrath of God, the curse of the moral law; and, in their being delivered from this present evil world, bondage to Satan, and dominion of sin; from the evil of afflictions, the sting of death, the victory of the grave, and everlasting damnation; as also, in their free access to God, and their yielding obedience unto Him, not out of slavish fear, but a child-like love and willing mind. All which were common also to believers under the law. But, under the New Testament, the liberty of Christians is further enlarged, in their freedom from the yoke of the ceremonial law, to which the Jewish Church was subjected; and in greater boldness of access to the throne of grace, and in fuller communications of the free Spirit of God, than believers under the law did ordinarily partake of.

II. God alone is Lord of the conscience, and has left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are, in any thing, contrary to His Word; or beside it, if matters of faith, or worship. So that, to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commands, out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience: and the requiring of an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also.

III. They who, upon pretence of Christian liberty, do practice any sin, or cherish any lust, do thereby destroy the end of Christian liberty, which is, that being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, we might serve the Lord without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him, all the days of our life.

IV. And because the powers which God has ordained, and the liberty which Christ has purchased are not intended by God to destroy, but mutually to uphold and preserve one another, they who, upon pretence of Christian liberty, shall oppose any lawful power, or the lawful exercise of it, whether it be civil or ecclesiastical, resist the ordinance of God. And, for their publishing of such opinions, or maintaining of such practices, as are contrary to the light of nature, or to the known principles of Christianity (whether concerning faith, worship, or conversation), or to the power of godliness; or, such erroneous opinions or practices, as either in their own nature, or in the manner of publishing or maintaining them, are destructive to the external peace and order which Christ has established in the Church, they may lawfully be called to account, and proceeded against, by the censures of the Church.

Westminster Confession of Faith Chapter XXIII

Of the Civil Magistrate

I. God, the supreme Lord and King of all the world, has ordained civil magistrates, to be, under Him, over the people, for His own glory, and the public good: and, to this end, has

armed them with the power of the sword, for the defense and encouragement of them that are good, and for the punishment of evil doers.

II. It is lawful for Christians to accept and execute the office of a magistrate, when called thereunto: in the managing whereof, as they ought especially to maintain piety, justice, and peace, according to the wholesome laws of each commonwealth; so, for that end, they may lawfully, now under the New Testament, wage war, upon just and necessary occasion.

III. Civil magistrates may not assume to themselves the administration of the Word and sacraments; or the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven; or, in the least, interfere in matters of faith. Yet, as nursing fathers, it is the duty of civil magistrates to protect the Church of our common Lord, without giving the preference to any denomination of Christians above the rest, in such a manner that all ecclesiastical persons whatever shall enjoy the full, free, and unquestioned liberty of discharging every part of their sacred functions, without violence or danger. And, as Jesus Christ has appointed a regular government and discipline in his Church, no law of any commonwealth should interfere with, let, or hinder, the due exercise thereof, among the voluntary members of any denomination of Christians, according to their own profession and belief. It is the duty of civil magistrates to protect the person and good name of all their people, in such an effectual manner as that no person be suffered, either upon pretense of religion or of infidelity, to offer any indignity, violence, abuse, or injury to any other person whatsoever: and to take order, that all religious and ecclesiastical assemblies be held without molestation or disturbance.

IV. It is the duty of people to pray for magistrates, to honor their persons, to pay them tribute or other dues, to obey their lawful commands, and to be subject to their authority, for conscience' sake. Infidelity, or difference in religion, does not make void the magistrates' just and legal authority, nor free the people from their due obedience to them: from which ecclesiastical persons are not exempted, much less has the Pope any power and jurisdiction over them in their dominions, or over any of their people; and, least of all, to deprive them of their dominions, or lives, if he shall judge them to be heretics, or upon any other pretence whatsoever.