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**Sermon: Free To Die
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Man was made in God's image and likeness. He is not God. He is the image of God.

In the 1st chapter of Genesis, we are shown a God who creates out of nothing. Only God can do that. Man takes two things that God spoke into existence and combines them to make something new. Man is creative because He is God's image.

God put man in charge of His creation. God chose to give man freedom to use the creation as he sees fit. God then instructs man to inquire of Him for wisdom. This is the formula for dominion in and over all God's creation. When man seeks God, he succeeds.

Psalms 1:

1 Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers.

2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.

3 He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.

4 Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away.

5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.

6 For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

I want to address the men this morning. When I told Pastor Ron what I wanted to talk about, he thought that it was important enough that we should call a men's meeting. Then after we discussed it, we agreed that the women should be at their husband's sides while we discuss these issues.

Let me say that even though I am going to be addressing the men in particular, I in no way intend to diminish the importance of the role of women in the deliverance of our nation from the problems we face. But let it be understood that without men taking the role of leadership that God intended for them, this nation will not be delivered.

That said, let us proceed.

Martin Luther made the following statement:

"If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, then I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Him. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved; and to be steady on all the battle front besides is mere flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point"

God gave instructions how man is to conduct himself in this endeavor of dominion. For instance, He told man to work six days and then to rest one day. Isn't it interesting that God had to limit the number of days that man could work. Evidently, man would have worked seven days a week if God had not instructed him otherwise.

In modern times, man is busy trying to escape from work as if work is a curse rather than a blessing. For modern man, freedom means not having to do something that is required of him.

Roger Miller used to sing a song; "Me and Bobbie McGee". It had a line in it that said "freedom's just another word for nothing left to do". For modern man, freedom means being free of the obligation to "do" something. Leisure man is free man. In most ancient cultures work was to be done by slaves. Work was certainly not the mark of a free man. Only with the reformation did work begin to be seen as a Godly endeavor.

Many of us, having grown up in America believe that the “work ethic” is natural to all men, and has always been accepted as the norm. Not so. It wasn’t until the reformers began to seek God and read His word that they realized that work was part of man’s obligation in God’s service and part and parcel of the creation mandate to subdue the earth and take dominion over it. Roger Miller’s song is an indication that modern man is more influenced by humanism than by his Christian roots.

Another way that freedom is used is that it becomes license. Freedom becomes license to do what man wants. Man is autonomous. Man becomes God. “I am the captain of my ship, the master of my own destiny”.

But is this freedom in the Biblical sense? Freedom must be defined as God defines it. God’s definition is the only one that counts. Any other definition is a perversion of what God intended.

Galatians 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.

Before a man comes to faith in Christ, he is in bondage to sin. He might not acknowledge it, even to himself, but he nevertheless knows it in his heart of hearts.

When he is drawn to the Father by the Holy Spirit, (For no one comes to the Father unless the Spirit draws him), he is set free from the bondage of sin and death. But just like the Hebrews who came into Canaan, before whom God did not drive out all the enemies at once, the sinner comes to Christ with a lot of baggage.

Not all the enemies are conquered at once. He is required, however to begin the process of first recognizing the enemies as they are revealed to him by the Holy Spirit, and then to deal with them through prayer and obedience, with the help of the other members of the Church as needed. This requires a submissive spirit and a teachable disposition.

The freedom that God has provided for man can be elusive, hard to get hold of at times. It seems slippery and easy to lose. It *is* easy to lose. (I 'm not talking about salvation of the soul here, remember we're talking about freedom in this world, from *the sin which so easily entangles us*). If we aren't careful, this freedom can escape from us before we even know it. Suddenly, one day we realize we're all bound up, and we don't remember how or when we lost our freedom.

Diligence is required of the Christian in order to keep at bay the enemy which is ever and always on the job. The natural tendency of man is to backslide. This is why we are admonished to pray without ceasing. To "kick back" and relax is to invite attacks from the enemy of our souls.

Some old sayings are useful, such as "idle hands are the Devil's workshop".

Of course, none of us is as bad as we think we are. Are we?

Actually we're worse; but in ways that we might not see at first.

The Christian life is a life of continuous warfare. Some battles are easier to win than others, but enemies are a reality of life. We find that as Christians, we are destined to war, and in a strange way, we can find consolation in that knowledge. Somehow if we know it's normal, we can handle it, but we must be honest enough to admit that the war is on, and that on our own, we lose.

The truth is that as long as we are in this fallen world, we are in constant warfare. We fight with the enemy of our souls in the arena of the world, the culture, with our families our church, and ourselves. The battle we fight within ourselves is inevitably the hardest. If a man can conquer himself, he is well on his way to finding success in all other areas of life.

The question is, if it is for freedom that Christ has made us free, (Gal 5:1), how can we be free if we are constantly in battle as a normal way of life? How can we be at war and live free at the same time? Doesn't this war require constant diligence and effort? If freedom, by definition is freedom from activity, then freedom in this circumstance is impossible, is it not?

God's definition of freedom must be something different, because the freedom He gives has to be compatible with this warfare which is, for us, inevitable.

How can we be free in the sense that God means it?

The Apostle Paul gives us a glimpse into the warfare we face in Romans Chapter 7. He talks of a man who is fighting for his life.

The following passage is a bit confusing to read, but even when read swiftly through, its message cannot be missed.

Listen to Paul's words:

14 We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. 15 I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. 16 And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. 17 As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. 18 I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. 19 For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. 20 Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

21 So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. 22 For in my inner being I delight in God's law; 23 but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. 24 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?

We live in a time of this kind of turmoil. This is a turmoil that takes place in our own selves, but it works itself out in our families, our churches, our communities, and our society at large. It is affecting our nation, and is actually killing us as a people. I believe this is so, because our churches haven't taught the truth; first of all about the reality of sin, then about the remedy for it.

We live in the greatest nation on God's green earth. We live as no other civilization in the past could even have dreamed of. We have freedom to the max, as defined by the world, but there has to be something missing in the definition. If we indeed are free, why do we hear so many complaints? Why are so many people expressing anger and hatred toward this country?

I knew a man who was in his twenties. He was successful by this world's standards. He had a good job, a beautiful wife, two wonderful children, a new house, a new car, and he wasn't behind on his payments. The perfect American dream was in every sense a reality. This young man had every reason to be happy. There are people all over this world who would give anything just for the chance to have been in this man's shoes.

However, there was something wrong with this picture, but it was something no one could see. There was in this young man, a problem called sin. He was not a Christian, so he didn't call it sin, but he knew it was wrong. He had lust inside him that he could not control.

The 1960's was the decade of sexual revolution. It was a time when social norms of behavior were being cast aside in the name of "freedom". It was a time when nudity began to appear on movie screens for the first time.

Our young hero was enthralled with the possibilities of seeing this, and he became obsessed with trying to see it whenever he could. He knew it was wrong, and hated the fact that his two small children would grow up in a society where this type pornography would be available to their young eyes - but he also knew something else; something that made him loath himself. He knew that if he somehow had the ability to stop it from being shown, he wouldn't do it. Why? Because he wanted to see it. This made him despise himself, but it didn't change him.

When he became a Christian, and his sins were forgiven, the old nature didn't want to surrender this "friend". This friend lived in a locked room that only he had the key to. He wouldn't let anyone else near that locked door. He always knew that he could escape to this room and visit his friend anytime and no one would know where he'd been.

It took much prayer, and some amount of time to free him from this evil demon, but thanks be to God, He is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond what we can ask or think.

I knew this young man quite well, and as you have probably surmised by now, he stands before you now.

I am well aware of the struggles a man can go through and I am also well aware of the meaning of being truly free. This kind of freedom is a precious thing. I am willing to die for it. I wasn't always willing to die for it, but when I finally came to my right mind, by God's grace I could see that the value of this freedom is like that of the pearl of great price that Jesus talked about.

When the man in Jesus' story was walking in a field and stubbed his toe on something, (something he wasn't looking for by the way), he stopped to examine it and found that it was something so special that he was willing to sell all he had in order to obtain it, and he didn't hesitate. He gave all that he had. This is another way of saying that he gave his whole life.

This is the price we must pay if we are to obtain the freedom that God provides.

It requires death.

But this kind of death is different. Normally, we think of a hero throwing himself on a live grenade to save his friends, or staying behind to hold the enemy at bay while his friends-in-arms escape, knowing all the while that he will, himself, be killed. That takes an act of aggression. That kind of hero takes the bull by the horns and actually does something.

The kind of death I'm talking about is not like that. You don't grab something, or throw something, or wrestle somebody to the ground with a rush of adrenaline; no, this requires something else entirely.

This is almost passive. Yet it takes more courage than we can possibly muster on our own, no matter how macho we are. It takes an act of God; it takes an infusion of His Grace. It takes seeing ourselves as we really are. It takes the realization that without His grace, we're worse than any child molester. We're worse than a rapist. We're so evil that we have no business living in a Holy God's universe.

Once we see this, we see that our only chance is to throw ourselves at His feet and cry out for mercy. If we can do this, He'll give us His life. Resurrection life.

I don't know what it takes to bring others to this point, other than the leading of The Holy Spirit, which is obvious, but I'm convinced that our churches are full of men who sing, pray, do all the right things, and look good on the outside, but have a problem.

They are like a story I heard about a new battleship that had been commissioned. It was the newest, most sophisticated battleship man had ever devised. Everything on it was state of the art. It had every conceivable defense mechanism that could be installed on a ship. It was armed with the latest in guided missile technology and was definitely the pride of the Navy. This ship, it was said, could not be defeated in battle.

There was something, though, that no one was aware of. The enemy had placed a device way down in the bowels of the ship that nobody knew about. This device could render the ship completely defenseless when activated. The enemy would wait until the perfect time, the time when it would do the most damage, then simply by sending a signal by remote control, bring this great ship to a complete stop, shut down all systems, and make it totally defenseless and vulnerable to attack.

I believe there is just such a device planted in most men who call themselves Christians. I can't think of any other reason why we, as a nation can't get the victory over all our problems. It has been said that only 3% of the people in a society can change the direction of that society. If 3% of the people know what they want and why, and are committed to that idea to the point where they are persistent over time, and won't give up, no matter what, they can sway a nation in the direction they want.

If that is true, then surely we have more than 3% of the population that sit in church pews every Sunday, name the name of Jesus and have the intelligence and where-with-all to do just about anything they want.

So, what's the solution?

I believe that when all these men who call on the name of Jesus will be honest with themselves, with God, with the Church and with the world – when these men will stand and confess:

"My sin is there because I want it, but God knows I don't want to be what it makes me. I don't want to lust any more than an alcoholic wants to be a drunkard, and I'm ready to die in order to be free."

I believe that confession can start to bring about the true freedom in hearts that will enable the men in the American church to begin the rescue of our nation from the evil one and we can begin to see victory in politics, in economics, in education, and every aspect of life.

I must say here, for clarity's sake, that this death is not a one-time cure-all. It requires dying everyday. Jesus said, "Take up your cross daily, and follow me". I can say that the first time is the most critical. Little David knew that he could slay the giant because he had killed a lion and a bear. One victory prepares a man for the next, and the next, and on, and on. You gain strength and confidence with every victory, no matter how small.

My wife and I took a trip to Hawaii for our 25th anniversary. We spent 10 days in Honolulu. We were right within walking distance of Waikiki Beach.

I knew before we went that there would be scantily clad women there, and there would be many temptations to catch a man's eye. Before we left for Hawaii, I made a covenant with my eyes that I would not look at anything that would not honor my wife. This was, after all, the celebration of our marriage and I would treat it as the honorable estate which it was and is.

At the end of our trip, I was pleased that I had succeeded in keeping my vow, and, by the way, I didn't feel in the slightest way deprived of anything! (Isn't that part of what makes us want to look, men – be honest, isn't it true that we're afraid we'll miss something?)

Mary, of course knew nothing of my secret vow, and you can imagine my surprise when, on the plane on the way home, she touched my arm and said "I want to thank you for not looking at all those girls. I feel honored and I'm very proud of you".

I was stunned.

You can imagine my surprise! I thought this was a secret, just between me and God! How did she know?

It suddenly dawned on me that she had noticed every time I had ever let my eyes wander. I felt very vulnerable and embarrassingly naked and ashamed at that moment. I was exposed and I knew it.

Obviously, I also felt good. Is there anything better than your wife saying to you "I'm proud of you"? I was so glad that I had listened to God speaking to me through my conscience.

Men, don't ever think that your wife doesn't know what's going on in your head. There used to be a time when all of society helped keep men from acting in crude and animalistic ways, but nowadays we must discipline ourselves. God requires it, and real men take the challenge seriously. The "freedom" we gained in the 60's means greater responsibility for men to act like men.

I am convinced that this is the thing that keeps us from achieving victory in our culture and in our lives and keeps our society from being reformed. If we are serious Christians; indeed if we are serious men, we must conquer our own passions or we'll never be free to experience victory in anything. Our great nation will go the way of The Roman Empire – given over to its lusts and evil desires, only to be conquered by barbarians.

This is why Edmund Burke said that men of intemperate minds can never be free. Their passions forge their fetters!

There are young men on the battlefield right now; fighting for the country they love. There have always been men who have found it in themselves to do the hard things that were necessary to secure our freedoms. Our history is replete with stories of acts of courage.

How can it be that we men can show that kind of courage on the field of battle, and then find it so difficult to be willing to die to a moment of sensual self-gratification in order to protect our wives, our children, our self respect, and ultimately that same nation that our soldiers are fighting for?

Paul admonishes the Corinthians:

1 Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly—mere infants in Christ. 2 I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. 3 You are still worldly..... Are you not acting like mere men?

MERE MEN.....

Surely God expects more of us!

Is there not a real man amongst us, who will lay down his life for those God has given him responsibility for, to honor and protect?

But how, you ask. How can we do it? In this climate where there are temptations in every direction and even in our own homes on television and the internet, how can we ever find victory in such an environment?

There's only one way. God has given us freedom to choose.

I'm not talking about choosing what movie to go to, or what restaurant to eat at!

I'm talking about something it takes a real man to do. I'm talking about the only real choice God allows you and me to make – I'm talking the only choice that makes any difference, and the only real choice God gives anyone.

It is the choice to die! "He who loses his life for my sake will find it".

Only by dying can you be free, because only if you die can you be resurrected. If you die to your own desire, your own passion, to your own will, God will raise you up and give you a new heart and new mind and there will be birthed in you a new desire – a desire that can legitimately be fulfilled in such a way that you will experience real freedom!

This is why Paul can say to the Romans:

But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.

If you have the desire to be free, you must understand that *it is God who is at work in you both to will and to do according to His good pleasure*, and it is He who gives you the freedom to make that choice:

The freedom to die.

How about it? Is your faith real? Is it that saving faith that not only requires you to lay down your life, but then gives you the power to do it?

12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the power to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: 13 who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

When your faith becomes "saving faith", and you can lay down your life for God's purposes, then you can say along with the Apostle:

I have been crucified with Christ but still I live, yet not I but Christ in me, and the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

That, my brothers, is freedom. How bad do you want it?

Let's bow our heads and our hearts for prayer.

Most Gracious Heavenly Father,

What a needy people we are. We skip along through life as a water bug, skimming speedily across the surface of the pond with no regard for the depth of our depravity.

Lord, as we pause, stopping long enough to take stock of our condition, we purposely and sincerely bring our thoughts into submission to Your Holy Spirit.

We ask you to search our hearts – see if there be any wicked way in us. Judge us according to your law and do to us as you see fit.

We know without a doubt that we deserve death, but we also have your word that says you are a Gracious God, showing mercy to those who call on your name.

We call on you now, O God, to raise us up in newness of life. Infuse us with your Spirit; give us your grace whereby we can do what we cannot do for ourselves.

At last, have mercy on us, and let your face shine upon us, and forgive us our sins, for Jesus sake,

For it is in His name we pray

Amen.