

Will I Ever Be Free

by Carter Conlon

This sermon focuses on the theme of freedom in Christ, emphasizing the power of God to set the captives free from oppression, wounds, and bondage. Through the story of the leper in Matthew chapter 8 and the Old Testament practices, the message highlights how Jesus touches and cleanses us, making us whole and releasing us into a new life of freedom and purpose. The call to step out of the crowd, acknowledge our need for cleansing, and receive the touch of Jesus for transformation and liberation is central to this powerful message.

Scripture: Matthew 8:1, Romans 7:18, Leviticus 14:1, John 19:34, Luke 4:16, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Revelation 21:5

Topics: "Freedom in Christ", "Transformation through Jesus"

Description

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Transcript

I have a thought on my heart the Lord's given me this week, and it's for people who've come in this morning. You've come in physically to this sanctuary, you've come into our overflow rooms, you've come into our campus churches, and you've just come in online. And you have a question in your heart, will I ever be free? Will I ever be free? Matthew chapter 8, please, if you go there in your Bible, we're going to begin there, and then we're going to go into the Old Testament after for just a few minutes.

So Father, I thank you, God, with all of my heart, for your presence here today. You have borne witness to this word through our worship today. Lord, you have had one thing in your mind from the moment we met together this morning in this sanctuary, you are going to set the captives free.

We believe that with all of our heart. Lord, it's of no honor to you to have a captivated bride, no honor whatsoever. So for your name's sake, Lord Jesus Christ, I ask you to come and do the work that you said the Father had sent you to do.

Set the oppressed free, open prison doors, give sight to those who don't see a way forward, give strength to the weary, help those who have been wounded and bruised in heart. God, do the work that only you

can do. And even before I share this word, I give you the glory, Lord, for all the results.

This is all you. It begins with you, it's carried by you, and it's brought to completion by you. Lord, you've chosen to use me as a vessel to speak this word, but give me the grace to hide behind the cross this morning and disappear, that you may appear very clear to every heart.

Let your word have the preeminence, God. Deliver me from any of my thoughts and let it be simply yours and your word that are proclaimed today. Oh, Jesus, Son of God, Son of God, help your church.

I ask it in your precious name. Amen. Will I ever be free? Matthew chapter 8, beginning at verse 1. And when he had come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him.

And behold, a leper came and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean. Then Jesus put out his hand and touched him, saying, I am willing, be cleansed. Immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

And Jesus said to him, I can see that you tell no one, but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded as a testimony to them. You know, the scripture says in the beginning of this chapter that great multitudes followed him. And sometimes you can get to feeling lost in the crowd.

There's so many people, like even today in the sanctuary or in our overflow rooms, there's just so many people. And the question comes into your heart, I'm only one voice in a multitude. And if I call out to him, will he hear me? There's so much going on around him.

Have you ever had that thought? God, why would you even listen to my voice? We have so much to attend to. And what am I among so many? And in my life, this leper could say it started as such a small thing, and now it consumes me. It might've started as a little spot under his eye.

You know, you may have started looking at something, not realizing that it was going to make an impress in your brain. It was going to become part of your character. And you thought you could contain it, but now it's spread throughout your mind.

It's spread through your character. You're captivated by it. I think in pornography, for example, so many people in this generation are trapped in pornography, not realizing that literally, medically, it makes an impress in your brain.

And it does something to you physically, and it puts you in a prison. There's a mark inside, and it's almost impossible, apart from the power of God, to get free from that impress. It started as maybe a little mark on his hand.

You know, you think of the person that just reached for a glass and just thought, well, I can consume this little bit of alcohol, and what harm could it do to me? I can consume this narcotic or this substance. And you thought you could control it, but now it controls you. You consumed it, now it consumes you.

And your cry is, oh God, is there any hope for me? Will I ever be free? Am I doomed to be behind this prison for the rest of my life? Am I doomed to bear these marks in my character, my heart, and my mind? It started as just a little bit of depression, but now it seems to be a darkness that literally envelops me. When I was a child, there was a little bit of fear, maybe of the dark or fear of something in my heart. Now,

I'm afraid of almost everything.

I don't see any hope for the future. Leprosy carried with it a stigma. The person who had leprosy was required by Old Testament law to put a veil on their face.

In other words, it speaks of the person who has to masquerade what's really going on behind the veil. They have to pretend that they have victory when they don't. They have to try to be something they're not.

They try to hide their real condition. And there's so many people in the body of Christ today that are doing that. They're trying to hide their condition.

They've not been able to get free. They've been living in a place of wounding, a place of imprisonment. There's a stigma.

And they had to walk through society declaring themselves to be unclean. Everywhere they went, unclean, unclean. And there are people even here today that walk through their whole day feeling unclean because of something you did.

Maybe something was done to you, something that got access to your life, something that changed your character. And there's this incredible inability inside to change this condition. And you walk through society feeling unclean and even coming to church saying in your heart, if people really knew what goes on in my life, they would all reject me.

That's the way the leper would have felt. Because you can just imagine, perhaps every once in a while, because he was in the crowd, maybe this was the one day he didn't yell out unclean. Because if he had, there would be a distance of probably 50 feet on either side of him.

He would have stood alone in the crowd. Maybe he decided just to be quiet. Maybe there was just a spark of hope got into his heart.

And suddenly, in the midst, if the crowd did part, suddenly he finds himself standing face to face with the son of God. And he says to Jesus Christ, Lord, if you're willing, you can make me clean. If you're willing, if you're willing to be merciful to me, if you're willing to forgive my past, if you're willing to look upon my affliction with mercy, you can make me clean.

I know you can. Then Jesus put out his hand and touched him. And he said, I am willing to be cleansed.

And the Bible says immediately his leprosy was cleansed. The apostle Paul speaks of this condition in Romans chapter 7 of the human heart. Here are his words, beginning in verse 18.

He says, for I know that in me that is in my flesh, nothing good dwells. For to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good, I do not find. In other words, I know what I should do.

I know what my life should look like, but I've lost the power to move in that direction. I don't know how to get free. The good that I will to do, I do not do.

But the evil that I do not, that I will not to do, that I practice. Anybody ever been there? How many made New Year's resolutions only to have them crumble into the sand at 10 after 12, 10 after midnight on the New Year? Oh, you were so convinced that it was going to be different. You were going to be that husband.

You're going to be that wife that you've never been. You're going to be that father, that brother, that friend. You're going to be honest.

You're going to speak the truth. You're not going to drink. And it lasted roughly 10 minutes on average.

You're right back into your old behaviors again, because you're imprisoned, because it's made a mark in your character. And no matter how you try to pretend that that's not what you are, that is what you are. It is what sin, the expression that sin has found through your life.

Paul goes on to say in verse 20 of chapter seven in Romans, now, if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. In other words, I want to do right, but something has gotten a hold of me, and it's consuming me, and it sends me on a pathway that I don't want to go practicing things that I know are wrong.

For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. In other words, I'm here today in church, and I know what is right. I know what I should be doing.

I know how I should be living, and it feels right. And I know in my heart it is right. I know that's the way my life should go forward.

But I see another law in my members that's in my body, warring against the law of my mind and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members. Oh, wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death? Who will set me free? Who can make a difference in my life? Then in verse 25, he says, I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Jesus reached out, Matthew chapter 8, and touched him.

I love that. I love that picture. He simply touched him, and it was immediately.

No terms, no conditions. No, let's go back and talk about who caused this in your life. Did your father love you? Was your mother kind? Did you have lunch at school? No, it was none of that.

He just reached out because here was a man who knew what he was. Here was a man who knew he couldn't change in himself. Here was a man who's simply sick of feeling unclean.

He's tired of moaning and groaning all day, walking through his life, walking through the crowd. I'm tired of what I've become. I'm tired of what has gotten a hold of my life.

You see, that's the beginning of a healing that only God can bring to his people, is when you get sick, you get sin sick, you get to the point where you say, I don't care who knows what I am. I don't care anymore. I want to be free.

I want to be clean. You see, stepping out of the crowd and seeing what he said, he was now identifying himself to the multitudes that were all around Jesus Christ. He stepped out and he said, I'm dirty.

And Lord, if you want to, and if you're willing, you can make me clean. And I love the fact that Jesus Christ puts his hand out immediately and touches him and says, I am willing, be cleansed. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

Now it's an interesting thing because Jesus said to him, see that you tell no one, but go your way and show yourself to the priest and offer the gift that Moses commanded as a testimony to them. Now it seems

like an, an odd thing, unless we look at this and recognize that everything in the Bible points to Jesus Christ. I don't know if you knew that or not, right from Genesis three, all the way through God had one plan, one thought in his heart and mind.

He knew he was going to lose his friends that he had created in his image. And he knew he had to die. He knew he had to die.

His son had to come and he foreknew what was going to happen. And he, he, everything in the old Testament points to Christ. I'm going to show you exactly what this testimony is.

He told him, go to the priest, go your way, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift that Moses commanded as a testimony to them. Now go with me to Leviticus chapter 14, third book in the Bible from the beginning, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus chapter 14. Now here's what he told him to do.

So this is where it starts to get really interesting. Then the Lord spoke to Moses saying, verse one, chapter 14, Leviticus, this shall be the law of the leprosy, the leper for the day of his cleansing. He shall be brought to the priest.

Now, so this is, I want you to picture now, this is what this man did. This is what he was fulfilling. This is the chapter that spoke to his condition.

This is what Jesus told him to do. Now there has to be a reason for this, otherwise it doesn't even make sense that he would send him to do this. And the priest shall go out of the camp and the priest shall examine him.

And indeed, if the leprosy is healed in the leper, then the priest shall command to take for him who has to be cleansed to living and clean birds, as cedar wood, scarlet and hyssop. Now it is understood under old Testament law that leprosy being an incurable disease, there was no known cure for leprosy, none, period, whatsoever. There was no tablets you could take.

There was no penicillin. There was no medicine. There was nothing.

Only the hand of God could heal you. And if God in his mercy chose to heal you, chose to touch you by his hand, remember this scenario in the gospel we opened with, then there was a testimony that had to be performed in the temple before God. Now the priest, verse five, shall command that one of the birds be killed in an earthen vessel over running water.

As for the living bird, he shall take it, the cedar wood and the scarlet and the hyssop, and dip them in the living bird and the blood of the bird that was killed over the running water. And he shall sprinkle it seven times on him who is to be cleansed from the leprosy and shall pronounce him clean and shall let the living bird loose in the open field. Now this is an amazing thing.

Now in chapter 14, verse five, it says, the priest shall command that one of the birds be killed in an earthen vessel over running water. I want to bring to your attention John chapter 19, verse 34. It says, one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side and forthwith there came out blood and water.

Then we go to verse six, and as for the living bird, he shall take it, the cedar wood and the scarlet and the hyssop. John chapter 19, verse 18, in the New Living Translation, it says, there they nailed him to the cross. That would be the cedar wood.

You see there were elements. There were two birds. One was to be sacrificed.

One was to be washed in the blood. But it was to be done in conjunction with wood, which represents the cross of Jesus Christ. Scarlet.

Matthew chapter 27 and verse 28 says of Christ, they stripped him, not being the soldiers, and they put on him a scarlet robe. So now we have the cross, which is the cedar wood. We have the robe, which is the scarlet.

And the hyssop now. John 19, 29, as Jesus was dying on the cross, it says, they filled a sponge with vinegar and put it upon hyssop and put it to his mouth. Everything in the Old Testament points to Jesus Christ, because he is the hand of God.

This was the hand of God. This was the testimony. Now here's where it gets interesting.

Because remember our opening question was, will I ever be free? It says, now you'll take the one bird that's alive and you'll dip it in the blood of the bird that was killed over the running water. And you will sprinkle it seven times. That means the perfection of God or the completion of God on him who is to be cleansed from the leprosy and shall pronounce him clean and shall let the living bird loose in the open field.

In other words, the one who is cleansed in the blood is to be released, no longer in a cage, no longer confined, no longer restricted, but sent into the open field, not just to fly or wander aimlessly, but everything in nature, the birds in particular, they do everything that God tells them to do. Sent into that place where we become what God has designed and intended us to be. We weren't designed to be in a cage or to live in a cage.

We were designed to be free. You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free. Praise be to God.

Praise be to God. Praise be to God. Praise be to God.

Hallelujah. If anyone is in Christ, if Christ has touched your life, if Christ's hand has come upon you, you're a new creation. The old things in your life have passed away.

The old bondages have lost their authority over your life. The old gates of old prisons have to open and let you go. Old wounds have to release you.

They can't, they don't have the power. They don't have the power to shame you any longer. The old voices have to lose their influence over your life because you are now set free by the blood of the Lamb to go and become everything God's called you to be.

The beauty of this whole story is simply in the fact that God still desires to touch you, even though something got a hold of you, even though you feel ashamed, even though there's something in your body or in your mind that you say, I don't know how I got here. I just, it just started one day and now it's consuming me. Even though people even want to reject you, who are all around, people who claim to be following the Son of God would have just parted and parted company with this man once it was known what he was.

But Jesus was not offended by him, was not offended by his condition. As a matter of fact, he reached out immediately. And every time the Son of God encounters an honest heart, he simply reaches out and

touches.

Oh, praise God. Oh, praise God. Oh, praise God.

I was thinking about my own life as I was preparing this thought this week. I was thinking about the early years where I don't know, fear just got a hold of me. Voices were spoken over me.

Things were said that shouldn't be said to a child, but they were said and it, it, it crafted an image in my heart of, of what I was and put me in a prison that I couldn't get out of. But many here, you know, my story after nine years of suffering panic attacks from the age of 15 to the age of 24, nine years of hell on earth, nine years of running out of crowded rooms, nine years of walking through the crowds, feeling unclean, nine years of this hopelessness that seemed to want to go deeper and deeper and deeper into my life and get into my character. Nine years of starting to drink heavily because it's the only way I knew how to cope with it.

Nine years of fighting to get out of the cage, nine years of struggling to be free. And then I came to Christ and after just a short season of being a believer in Christ, I was reading my Bible. There was a verse and I only remembered half of it.

God before us, who can be against us? And I remember going down into my living room one night. I felt another one of these panic attacks coming on my life. And up to this point, when they would come into my life, I would use Valium and whiskey combined.

Bad combination. Don't recommend it for anybody at any time, ever, under any circumstance. But I was a believer in Christ and I said, no more pills for me.

I don't want those things in my life. No more whiskey. That's gone forever out of my life.

And I went into my living room and I prayed a prayer and God touched me. That's all I can say is God touched me and set me free. Touched me by the blood of the Lamb.

Opened the door of my cage and I've gone all over the world. I've preached to hundreds of thousands, if not millions of people now. He touched me.

He set me free. Praise be to God. So I will declare him as long as I have breath.

I'll shout it from the mountaintops. I'm not ashamed of Jesus Christ. I know his power.

I know what he can do. I know the devil has no right to you. I know the prisons can't hold you.

I know that your past sins have no right over your life anymore. And the old words that people spoke over your life, they fall into the dust and they dissolve because there's a new word being spoken over you now. I have washed you.

I've cleansed you. And what has been cleansed by the blood of Christ, no man has the right to call unclean any longer. And I release you.

I release you to be the person that I created you to be. Hallelujah to the Lamb of God. No boundaries, no borders anymore.

No height, no depth. Nothing can stop us. Nothing can separate us from the love of God, which is ours in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

Praise be to God. I love that symbolism. Take the two birds, kill one over running water, then take the other one and dip it in the blood with wood and scarlet and hyssop.

You can't deny that's the cross of Jesus Christ. Then take the living bird that's been touched by the blood of the one who was slain and let it go. Not don't put it back in the cage.

Let it go. Let it go into the open field. Let it become everything it was designed by God to be.

In other words, there's no more boundaries over your life in Christ. No more restrictions. It doesn't matter what you think or what anybody else said.

You are a new creation in Christ Jesus. And so now you say, well, what do I do? Press through the crowd, die to the pride. You say, God, if you want to, you can touch me and cleanse me.

And he says, I want to. He always has wanted to do. He always will want to.

I will. And the scripture says immediately his leprosy was cleansed. And you can imagine because the priest, the old Testament priest would know only the hand of God could do this.

Only the hand of God. And I can just see the priest after going through all this rigmarole that he had to do under the law, just saying, so tell me again, how did it happen? Well, he said the hand of a man called Jesus touched me. He says only God could heal.

That was the testimony. He was the son of God. He was God incarnate.

Only God could heal the leper. That's why he sent him back to do that. And I can just see the priest.

How's it possible? The hand of a man could have cured the leper. It's only the hand of God. You have to wonder, was it Nicodemus? Who was it? Who was it? And why did he send them for that testimony? He's always working, always reaching out.

Sometimes we're asked to do something. We don't fully understand why, but God knows why. It wasn't necessary to go to the temple.

It was simply a testimony of the hand of God. And you see, that's what the Lord will do for you. If you have an honest heart, you say, oh God, oh God, if you'll touch me, you can cleanse me.

And I tell you today with all my heart, you have felt it in the worship today. You felt it by his presence that he's here to set people free. We're living in an hour now where his church has to be free.

We have to have a testimony of him, an encounter with him, a living testimony. You can't argue. You can argue theology, right? But you can't argue with a leper who's now healed.

You can't. You can't argue with a blind man who can see. You can't argue with a lame man who can walk.

Who could argue with Lazarus? I was dead and now I live. Hallelujah. Hallelujah.

Hallelujah. So it's time for the church to rise. It's time for you and I to say, Lord, touch my life.

My God, send me into the open field. Wherever that field leads, whatever it requires, wherever it takes me, I'm asking you Lord to set me free and send me into the field. Hallelujah.

That people might look at my life and say, that's the bird, that's the bird that used to live in a cage. There it goes, there it goes, there it goes, there it goes. I tell you, that's the bird.

He's still got the blood on his wings. That's the bird. You let the Lord touch you and you're going to fly through the city of New York.

You're going to fly through the subway. Everywhere you go, there's something different about you. You're not bound by the cords of this society any longer.

Praise be to God. Praise be to God. And so now comes the time to part the crowd.

I don't care who knows what I am. They're just as leprous as me. Anyway, they just won't admit it.

But I'm going to fly. I crawled in here, but I'm going to fly out of here. Hallelujah, hallelujah.

The Lord has determined to touch you today. And he gave me the thought, because you came in with the thought, will I ever be free? Yes, you will. Yes, you will.

I was shackled, by heavy burden. I was beneath the load of guilt and shame. Then the hand of Jesus touched me.

And now I am no longer the same. He touched me. Oh, he touched me.

And oh, the joy that floods my soul. Oh, something happened. And now I know.

He touched me and made me whole. Oh, and since I met this blessed Savior. Since he cleansed and made me whole.

Oh, I will never cease to praise him. I'm shouted while eternity rolls. Oh, he touched me.

Oh, he touched me. And oh, the joy that floods my soul. Oh, something happened.

And now I know. He touched me and made me whole. Here's my altar call today.

You've heard the message. Now it's time to press through the crowd and say, Lord, if you will, if you want to, you can touch me. You can heal me.

And he says to you again today, I'm willing. And he reaches out and simply touches you. It's as simple as that.

Don't make it complicated. Let the hand of God touch you and the presence of God touch your life. But it requires a stepping out of the crowd, requires a moving forward to God, no matter what it is.

If you're addicted, afflicted, imprisoned, whatever your situation is, I want you to step out now up in the balcony. Let's all stand. Just slip out.

Let's everybody stand. You go to any exit and make your way down here with these guys that are already here. And we're going to see Christ do what only he can do for his people today.

He's going to set you free. And so he came to Nazareth where he had been brought up. And as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and stood up to read.

And he was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. When he had opened the book, he found the place where it is written. The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor.

He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free or set at liberty those who are oppressed and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. Then he closed the book and gave it back to the attendant and sat down and the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing today, today, not tomorrow, today, today, today, you're free today.

Today, the chains of hell are broken today. Your past is eradicated and you have a new future. And so we're going to pray in your heart.

It's just God, if you are willing, you can make me clean. And the Lord says to you today, I am willing. That's why Christ came.

He came to set you free. He came to make you clean. So I want you to agree with me in your heart as I pray this day.

Father, in Jesus name. No, I said, agree. I didn't say repeat agree with me.

Lord, these are your people. These are your people. This is your bride.

This is your body. This is your church. This is the work that you died on a cross for.

These are the people that you put a new song of praise in their heart and you promised a new mind, a new heart and a new spirit. So I'll take authority over every work of the devil, everything of darkness, every lie of hell, every power of evil that tries to destroy the bride of Jesus Christ. And I've declared today, Satan, you have no part in the church of the living Christ.

You have no part. There's a victory here that's been won for these people. And by the grace of almighty God, by God's almighty grace, I proclaim your freedom today, your freedom from oppression, from addiction, from fear, from depression, from the pain of the past.

I proclaim in Christ's name, your freedom this day, your freedom from these things. I declare, I declare according to the word of God that you are new creations in Christ Jesus. I declare that the old things have passed away.

They've lost their power. They've lost their hold. They've lost their ability to dictate your future.

I declare the old things have passed away and I declare all things have become new. You are a new creation in Christ. You have a new future.

You have new strength. You have new power. You have new song.

You have a new destiny. You, God says, behold, I make all things new. I make all things new.

Not some things, all things new. Hallelujah to the lamb of God. Thank you, Lord.

Give him a shout. Give him a shout of praise.

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