

Coming Free

by Richard E. Bieber

The sermon explores the dual need for God's presence and the power to free others from their personal chains through faith in Jesus.

Scripture: Psalm 51:17, Matthew 11:28, Luke 7:36, John 8:31-32, Romans 8:1, 2 Corinthians 3:17, Galatians 5:1, James 4:7

Topics: "Spiritual Freedom", "Redemption Through Christ"

Description

Richard E. Bieber preaches about the importance of experiencing true freedom in Christ by coming to Him with hope, repentance, trust, love, and surrender. Using the example of the sinful woman who found freedom in Jesus, he emphasizes the need to break free from personal prisons of fear, anger, rejection, and material obsessions to be able to set others free. The sermon highlights the power of encountering Jesus, dwelling in His presence, and receiving His forgiveness and peace to break the chains that bind us.

Transcript

Jesus then said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." They answered him, "We are descendants of Abraham, and have never been in bondage to any one. How is it that you say, 'You will be made free'?"

Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, every one who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not continue in the house for ever; the son continues for ever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed."

John 8:31-36

The stirring of the Spirit which has been going on among us and among believers in many many places in recent months, has been making us conscious of two basic needs in our lives. First is the need for us to see the face of God. To pass through the veil and get into the presence of God and dwell there. To have vision, and find that inner sabbath, that inner rest so that everything we do is quickened ... all the strength we need comes from that inner sabbath dwelling before God.

The second need is for power. To be able to do something for the people who come to us looking for divine help. Power to set the captives free, to break those chains. We see this in our own Lord, the one

who sets us free.

The example of his own life shows us that it was these two things that characterized him.

- First, he lived before his Father ... all the time.

He looked beyond and saw the Father. And whenever he finished having a time of healing or a time of feeding, he would withdraw to get alone, to get back into that inner sabbath and find that rest, that center, in his Father.

- Second, he was always filled with the power that was needed to break the chains of the captives who came to him.

And so he brought good news to the poor, release to the captives, sight to the blind, deliverance to the oppressed.

In recent weeks we've been concentrating on that first need ... the need to be with God,

- to see him,
- to live in his presence,
- to get inside the veil.

But even while we pursue that need it's necessary for us at the same time to pursue the power of the Lord to set the people free who come to us.

A man is sitting at your kitchen table who's been chained to alcohol for fifteen years. And in spite of all the deception he may use to get enough money for that next drink, you can hear coming from his inmost spirit as he talks, a cry to be free from this.

"I don't want to go on living like this anymore! - I want to come out of this! Can't you help me?"

A woman down the block from where you live has been suffering from severe depression for the last three years.

One day she comes to you and says,

"You know how many doctors I've been to see. You know all the medication I've been taking. Nothing seems to do me any good. Can't your God help me?"

And this is happening to us all the time, and we know that the Kingdom of God is not talk, words ... just being able to quote scriptures to people, but it's power ... being able to confirm that scripture by breaking the chains of the captives who come to us.

So we turn to God and we cry out,

"Lord God, why don't we have what we need to be able to truly help these people?"

And the answer comes back,

"Just as surely as the blind can't lead the blind there is no way you will be able to truly set the captives free until you come out of your own prison."

Now we may not be chained to alcohol. We may not at the moment be suffering from some severe depression, but you could say without exception, all of us here are still living in a prison. If we're honest, there are aspects of our lives, there are areas of our behavior, of our thought-life that are absolutely chained.

Some of us are living in a prison called fear of failure. We're not conscious of it all the time but much of what we do, or fail to do, is determined by our fear of failure. We're afraid to say what we know we need to say. We're afraid to do certain things because it might not work out. "I might fail." And so we back away more and more from any kind of risk and we withdraw into a world that's safe and dead and we're in prison.

And some of us are in a prison called fear of rejection. We don't open our hearts to anybody. We'll talk, we'll pass the time of day, we'll talk about the weather, but we never open our heart because, we say,

"Too many times the door has been slammed in my face. Too many people have stepped on my heart in the past. I can't take the risk of suffering one more rejection."

And so we withdraw to a world all our own ... a world that we feel is safe, but it's a world which is death ... it's a prison.

Many of us are living in a prison called anger. Eighty five percent of our time is spent being angry. We get up in the morning we're mad. We go to bed at night we're mad. We're angry at our wife or our husband or at the president or at the government or at God or at the boss at work, at our children, our parents. We're not conscious of it all the time. But every time somebody jars us, out comes anger. One day we wake up and discover that it's not that we choose to be angry. We've come to the point where anger has absolutely taken possession of us ... we can't get rid of it.

Some of us are living in a prison which is called obsession with material security. We spend too much time trying to make tomorrow safe. And while we're so busy trying to make tomorrow safe today slips through our fingers. Day after day we go on like this ... planning for tomorrow and today goes by unlived ... and that's a prison.

Now the word of the Lord to us is that if we're truly going to set the captives free we have to stand at some place of freedom, we have to have enough experience of that freedom ourselves that we can speak with authority. Speak as one who has come out of that prison, whose chains are breaking. How can we talk to people who are in chains when chains bind our own minds and hands and feet and mouths and heart?

So, what's our problem?

Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, every one who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not continue in the house for ever; the son continues for ever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed."

So, how do we come free? Remember the time Jesus had dinner in the house of Simon the Pharisee? At this dinner of course were more than just Simon and Jesus, there were all kinds of Pharisee friends. And all these men who are sitting at table with Jesus and Simon are good substantial upstanding men. They

know their Bibles. They're living right, at least on the surface. And every single one of these men except Jesus is in bondage, is in some kind of prison. They're having dinner with the one person in all the world who is able to set them free but they're so blinded by the leaven of the Pharisees they can neither see Jesus for who he is nor their own condition for what it is. They go on having their meal and looking at each other with critical judging eyes and looking at Jesus this way. And while they're doing this, in comes this woman everybody knows to be a sinner, and she goes straight to Jesus and gets down to business. She stands at the foot of the platform at Jesus' feet,

washes his feet with her tears,

wipes them with her hair,

starts to kiss those feet.

Then she takes this alabaster jar of ointment and pours it on his feet.

And when she walks out of that house she alone is free.

One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house, and took his place at table. And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner." And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "What is it, Teacher?" "A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he forgave them both. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, to whom he forgave more." And he said to him, "You have judged rightly." Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house, you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little." And he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." Luke 7:36-50

So, how did she come free while everybody else remains in prison? She brings to Jesus five things that are very easy to remember.

- She comes to Jesus with hope.
- She comes to Jesus with repentance.
- She comes to Jesus with trust.
- She comes to Jesus with love.
- She comes to Jesus with surrender.

Hope ... who knows how many times this woman had made up her mind,

"My life is going to change. I'm not going to be like this anymore. I'm not going to do this anymore for a living. I'm going to change my ways" ... but it never works out.

She always slips right back into the old rut. But this time she fixes her hope on Jesus and she comes to him, looking to him to do what she could not do herself. Kneeling at his feet she begins to wet them with her tears. And her tears are not tears of self-pity but tears of repentance.

"I'm so sorry for this life I've lived. Sorry before you for what I've done to you. How I've let you down. Against you only have I sinned and done this evil in your sight, Oh God."

She weeps for what she's done and been as a disappointment to God. She begins to see this and she's turning her life around.

Now, she takes her hair and begins to wipe those feet with her hair. And as she wipes the feet of Jesus with her hair she's wrapping her heart around him in trust ... this is a sign of trust.

"These feet are going to take my sins through the dusty streets of Jerusalem to Calvary. These feet are going to receive the nails and from them will come the blood that will wash away my sin. These feet are going to go down into the grave for me." she trusts him.

And now this woman with this terrible reputation begins to kiss his feet, and he lets her do it. Everybody's watching ... people are criticizing ... she goes right on kissing and kissing and kissing those feet as an expression of love. Oh, how she loves him! She's made love many times, but this is love she has never experienced before and she just keeps on loving him and loving him.

Now she reaches back, takes this alabaster flask of ointment worth piles of money ... that's one thing she has, money ... this was her treasure. But now he's her treasure. So she takes this expensive ointment and pours it on his feet as a surrender. Everything she has ... her body, her mind, her spirit, and her material possessions all on Jesus.

At last he speaks to her,

"Your sins are forgiven. Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."

And she walks out of that house free from her chains ... a free woman ... never again to be bound like she was before.

Now what the Lord wants for us is to be able to experience that kind of freedom so that we can set free the captives that come to us. In order for us to have that kind of power to set the captives free, to come into that kind of freedom, we have to change our position. All of us "Christians" have been sitting at table with Simon the Pharisee. And we've been blinded by the leaven of the Pharisees. We look at Jesus and we still don't see. We see and see and fail to perceive. To hear and hear and fail to understand. We know all about Jesus.

We listen to him. And we feel free to even pass judgment on him and on this woman and on each other ... we're still in prison.

If we want to be free, we have to leave our place at the table ... lay aside our fancy robe of pride or whatever it is and get down there and learn how to do this. So now we bring our hope. We know how many times we've determined that we're going to make a change ... not be like that anymore. We're going to break that chain ... it never happens. But now we bring our hope to Jesus.

"Lord, you're going to have to do this. I know you will."

And we begin to weep. Male and female ... we shed tears over those feet. And now it's not tears of self-pity but tears of repentance.

"Oh Lord, I'm so sorry for what I've done to you. How I've offended against your love. How I've failed you. I'm so sorry, will you forgive me?"

Now we begin to wipe his feet with our hair. Maybe some of us don't have enough hair to do that, so we take our shirt, our handkerchief, a towel, it doesn't matter, we grab those feet and we trust them. These are the feet that take our sins to Calvary. These are the feet that take our guilt down into the grave and we put our trust there and only there.

Now comes the hard part for us Americans. We begin to kiss those feet. To show that kind of emotion ... to love Jesus to that extent, especially the males among us, how can we do that? But when we appreciate who this is and what he's done we begin to love him. And we are no longer ashamed to express that love to him, no matter who's looking, or how many Pharisees may be passing judgment.

That's their problem; we love him ... we kiss the feet of the Lamb of God.

And now we reach back and take the alabaster jar of ointment ... our possessions, our wealth ... and pour it on those feet.

"This was my treasure before, Lord. But now you're my treasure. I surrender it all to you."

And as we do this and do it with our hearts, he says to us,

"Your sins are forgiven. Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."

As the Spirit stirs among us, more and more people find their way to us with needs and cries for help and we're desperate for the power to give them the help they need. If we're ever going to have that help, we're going to have to leave the table and get down there and wash Jesus' feet. We're going to have to bring him,

- our hope,
- our repentance,
- our trust,
- our love,
- our surrender.

And the time to begin to do that is right now.

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