A New Life in Christ = Freedom

 Good morning! Please open your Bibles to the Gospel of Luke chapter 4. Today we are taking a few moments in our worship service to thank God for the privilege of living in a nation like the United States of American where we have the freedom to worship without fear of persecution or harassment. Not only are we grateful that we live in this country, but we are also grateful because God has given each of us a new life and freedom through the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. In today’s message we will be looking closely at a passage of Scripture that Jesus read when He was doing a reading from the Old Testament in his hometown of Nazareth. After we have considered what this passage says about Jesus we will then look at what true freedom is and how each of us can experience this freedom through our faith in Christ.

 Let us begin by reading Luke 4:17-21 together:

**“And the scroll of Isaiah the prophet was handed to Him. And He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:**

**“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me,**

**Because He anointed Me to bring good news to the poor.**

**He has sent Me to proclaim release to captives,**

**And recovery of sight to the blind,**

**To set free those who are oppressed,**

**To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.”**

**And He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down; and the eyes of all the people in the synagogue were intently directed at Him. Now He began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”**

 This passage of Scripture that Jesus read in the presence of the people from His hometown was the proclamation that He is indeed the Messiah sent by God to rescue His creation from the bondage of sin. There are a few different ways that this passage shows the way that Jesus is bringing freedom with Him. The first thing the passage says is that the Spirit of the Lord has been placed on Jesus. What this tells us is that everything Jesus said and did were guided by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. In essence, what this tells us is that Jesus did only what He was instructed to do by the Father and what was inspired in Him by the Spirit. Being filled with the Holy Spirit is crucial because in making this statement Jesus was acknowledging that He had been sent by God and had a message to share as well as a mission to complete. Unlike the prophets that had been sent before Him, Jesus had the power of the Holy Spirit in Him and it was without measure meaning that He said things and performed miracles like had never been seen before. As we continue further in the passage, we will see what His mission was.

 The next point made about Jesus is that He was anointed to complete the work that God had commissioned Him to do. This anointing was also a crucial aspect of Christ because He was sent by God and given specific tasks to complete. The first task Jesus was given was to teach the truth about God and to make Him known to all people. In the gospel of John when He was praying for the disciples at the Last Supper Jesus said **““Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, so that the Son may glorify You, 2 just as You gave Him authority over all mankind, so that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life. And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. I glorified You on the earth by accomplishing the work which You have given Me to do. And now You, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world existed” (John 17:1-5).** In His prayer Jesus stated that God had sent Him into the world and had commissioned Him to do the work of teaching the truth regarding the Father and then paying the price for the remission of sins through His death on the cross. This anointing establishes the fact that everything Jesus taught and did were under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and that He perfectly fulfilled the will of the Father.

 Next in this passage Jesus read that He was sent to proclaim release to the captives. Jesus is claiming that He has come to release the captives from their captivity to sin. This freedom from sin is at the heart of the good news of the gospel. Jesus has come so that all those who are slaves to sin, and we need to acknowledge that this means all of us, can be freed from this captivity through His name. The freedom that we celebrate on July 4th is definitely something that we need to be thankful for because the cost of freedom is great. Thousands of men and women have laid down their lives so that all of us in the United States today can enjoy a freedom unlike any other nation. Even though we have the freedom to live as we choose in this nation, we still do not have the freedom to do whatever we want to do. We do not have absolute freedom, neither should we desire this. All of us, by living in this country, give away some of our freedom by living under this representative form of government. We allow the government to make laws and execute them on our behalf. By establishing such laws, we are allowing ourselves to be governed and limiting the absolute freedom we could have under anarchy, or the absence of government. In the kingdom of God there is a similar argument to be made regarding freedom. Jesus Christ has come to liberate all those who repent and place their trust in Him from their captivity to sin. What we must also understand is that the freedom Christ provides is so much better than the freedom we have had provided to us in this nation. Jesus has paid the penalty for our sins that we rightly should suffer for. Rather than us having to face death separate from holy God we now have the privilege through Jesus to approach holy God and stand in His presence for all of eternity. We have been freed from our slavery sin, but our freedom is not absolute. James the Apostle of Christ has been teaching us in his epistle that freedom in Christ should be exhibited in the way that each of us live our lives. Rather than live like the world and think we can do whatever we like we must remember that we have been bought for a price and we belong to the Lord. The Apostle Paul writes these words in **1 Corinthians 6:12-20 “All things are permitted for me, but not all things are of benefit. All things are permitted for me, but I will not be mastered by anything. Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food, however God will do away with both of them. But the body is not for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body. Now God has not only raised the Lord, but will also raise us up through His power. Do you not know that your bodies are parts of Christ? Shall I then take away the parts of Christ and make them parts of a prostitute? Far from it! Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body with her? For He says, “The two shall become one flesh.” But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him. Flee sexual immorality. Every other sin that a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought for a price: therefore glorify God in your body.”** There are many things we have freedom to do in this world that have no merit. When we have accepted Christ as our Savior, we are called to live in a manner that honors Him. We are commanded not to take the freedom Christ has purchased for us and use that to live as the world does and thereby dishonor our bodies as well as His name. The freedom that was purchased for us came at a great price, so we must live in a way that honors the God we serve.

 Jesus continues in His reading to say that He has come to recover sight to the blind. In what way are people blind today? We are not just talking about physical blindness, but we are also discussing here spiritual blindness. Jesus made some comments to the teachers of the law regarding their blindness that illustrates the spiritual blindness we are speaking of here. He accused the teachers of the law as being blind guides, which means they are blind leaders leading a blind people. The nation of Israel did know the Law of Moses and they were trying to follow the letter of the law. However, even though they knew the letter of the law they did not know the heart of the law. They thought that by following the laws’ regulations they could earn God’s favor and therefore earn for themselves eternal life. Jesus made it clear that the heart of the law is love and mercy. In what way does this apply to us today? Reading the Bible, meditating on it day and night and trying to do everything it commands is a noble effort, but as we have seen in our reading through the Old Testament it is impossible to follow the law perfectly. Man is not able to do that in his fallen condition. However, Jesus Christ fulfilled the law perfectly and through His perfect life gave us an example to follow. Let’s think about the freedom that Christ had when He was here on earth. One example was what He said when He was being arresting in the Garden of Gethsemane. He told the disciples that if He wanted, He could call upon a host of angels to come and protect Him, but if He did so God’s will would not be done. Jesus had the power to resist to go to the cross, but instead of doing His own will He gave in to the will of His Father. This is the same attitude that we as followers of Christ need to have in our lives. Rather than spend our lives seeking after our own desires, we are called to seek the Father’s will and follow it to the best of our ability. This is what true freedom is according to Scripture. We are free from sin through Christ and now we have the ability to experience what freedom in Christ is like. When we live according to His commands, we will experience a life much better than we would ever experience when we do things according to our own desires.

 Next, the passage says that the Messiah has come to free those who are oppressed. What kind of oppression is the writer of this passage speaking about? This speaks of those who are lost in their sins and are rightly going to face divine judgment for those. For us today, what we need to think about here is what our lives would be like today if God had not reached out to us and made Himself known? All of us would be lost in our sins and the only consequence we could expect would be to spend eternity separated from God. Jesus came to free those who are oppressed, which means that He frees those who have been captive to sin and allows them the right to be called children of God who can spend eternity in God’s presence rather than separated from Him. When we think of oppression, we usually think about injustices we see taking place in society as well as racism or hatred towards others. All of these are not what God created this world to be, but Jesus has rescued His people from the results of sin. As the Apostle Paul reminds His readers, the wages of sin is death. (Romans 6:23). Jesus has paid all of the wages for our sins and now the death we should rightly face has already been paid for by His blood. Thanks be to God for His marvelous grace.

 Finally, the passage concludes by saying that the Messiah will proclaim the favorable year of the Lord. What does the prophet Isaiah mean with the phrase “the favorable year of the Lord?” This is what Jesus was referring to when He began His ministry. He said many times for the people to repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. This meant that with His arrival the kingdom of heaven had come to earth. Now that God has sent His Son into the world and has made Him known, all men are commanded to repent and to place their trust in Him (Acts 17:30-31). Jesus came and proclaimed that His arrival was the fulfillment of all of the prophecies from the Old Testament. We know this was His point because the next thing He says after closing the scroll is that the Scripture had been fulfilled in the presence of those that heard Him read it. He proclaims that He has come to do all of the things written about Him in the Scriptures. What we see is that He does exactly what He said He would do in His ministry. He carries out all of the prophesies we see laid out in this passage.

 So, what do we take from this today as we think about the freedoms we have in this country as well as the freedom we have been given through Jesus Christ? Here are a few ways that July 4th can help remind us of the independence we now have over sin and death through Jesus Christ:

1. We must remember that freedom is never free and it has been paid for with blood. Our service men and women who have died for our freedoms deserve our respect and honor. Moreover, Jesus Christ has died to purchase our freedom from sin and the curse of eternal separation from God. Let us live both as members of the kingdom of God as well as American citizens who honor that sacrifice by being respectful, following the commands left for us and treating each other in ways that will honor the sacrifice that was laid down for us.

2. On July 4th when the Declaration of Independence document was signed, this showed that the people of this continent were united in their desire for independence. Working together was important because through those efforts the colonists were eventually able to secure freedom from the English Empire. Just like that, the kingdom of God can fulfill the Great Commission by the members of the kingdom uniting and working together to share the gospel with the world. May we be united as a global church and be willing to work with other Christians to reach the lost. God works through His people and He can do amazing things through those who are willing to be used for His purposes.

3. And thirdly, Independence Day is a celebration of freedom that had been gained for this nation after it had been lost. This restoration is reminiscent of the freedom we all have through Christ and how He restores us to a position of favor in God’s eyes. This has been done because before we could ever love Him, God reached out and offered us the free gift of grace through His Son. Just like we celebrate the birth of this new nation, we also need to continually celebrate new births whenever someone comes to faith in Jesus Christ. This new birth is the power of God to change lives. He works through those who surrender and allow Him to be the Lord of their lives. As we continue this year let us always be grateful for the new life and restoration God has given us through His Son.