

Promises to Keep
Last in a Faith Promise Series
My counsel is this: live freely, animated and motivated by God's Spirit.
Gal. 5:16 MSG
September 5, 2020
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Prayer - Remind us today oh God, that of all the promises to keep, it is the one with you that matters most.

Message:

What does it mean to be free? Is it a state of mind? Is it physical in nature? Is it more mental or emotional? Is there a psychological component? What does a heart set free look like? Free from bondage. Free from addiction. Financially free. Debt free. Culturally free. Free from responsibility. Free from the past. Free to be yourself. In the church when we speak of being free, we often mean free from sin and guilt and we understand that to mean, we are set free in Christ.

Let's play a little game. A game to test your observation and analytical skills. A game to challenge the way you think and how you make decisions. Welcome to the game-show, "Face of Freedom!" (SLIDE)

The objective of this game is simple - you will be shown a collection of images; faces. Your job is to determine who is free and who is not. Ready? Let's play.

Round One:

Answer: I don't know, have no idea.

Round Two:

Answer: Your guess is as good as mine.

So, how did you do?

The point is, just by looking at someone in a photo doesn't necessarily tell us if a person is free at heart or not? Nor more than seeing someone at Walmart, Kroger, Hobby Lobby, the gas station, or even in church. We don't know who is truly free because we do not know the heart of everyone.

A person can follow all the rules, do all the right things, say all the right things, and go through all the right motions, and yet NOT be free in their heart. A person can live in the right neighborhood, have a good job, drive the right kind of car, have the right friends, and yet, NOT be free in their heart.

The only way to know the heart of someone is to spend time with them, get to know them, welcome them into your life; your circle, your sphere of influence. The only way to do that is to open yourself up, take risks, be real, be vulnerable, reach out, and be willing to listen to and trust others. And the only way to do that is to have faith in the One who created you, designed you, and knit you together; the One who seeks relationship with you and promises that when you put your faith in the One, you will be changed forever. Your heart will be free. Your life, mind, body and soul will be free from that which holds you captive.

As Jesus followers we are called, named, identified as the church. As such we were given, by Jesus, a model to live by; a way to be community. We were given a promise, first by God and then, fulfilled by Jesus, that we would become the family of God. That we would find our true freedom in Christ.

Here's the thing though - from the early church, some followers came to believe it was all about rules, regulations, and certain ways or practices. They loved God and followed Jesus with as much passion and conviction

as anyone else but they clung to the rituals more than the cross. This caused problems in the church. This still causes problems in the church today.

We conclude our Faith Promise series today with a great finale, given by Paul, in the book of Galatians, chapter 5. Again, written to the body of believers, the church, in Galatia, Paul is going after the pious followers of Jesus who measure their salvation and freedom in Christ by whether or not they, or anyone else who claims to be a follower, are adhering to the strict Jewish code of circumcision. This was considered to be the mark of the true people of Israel, the true people of God.

Paul sends this letter as a reminder that Jesus fulfilled the code of law or the code of God; Jesus completed the promise of God given to their ancestors Abraham and Sarah, and passed on through people like Moses, David, Joshua, Esther, Ruth, and all the way to Mary and Joseph.

Freedom was now found in Christ and Christ alone. And here in chapter five, Paul reviews the parameters or expectations of that freedom.

Read Text - Gal. 5 selected verses

What is with humanity and the need to control? The need to control persons, places, and things with rules, regulations, codes, rituals, and pious formality?! Don't get me wrong, I taught third and first grade and did a stint in kindergarten, I know the importance of rules and boundaries - there is a fence around the playground for a reason. I am raising two teenage boys, I know the significance of clear expectations and consequences for our actions. I am NOT saying that rules don't matter, that rituals do not have their place, or that governing expectations are useless.

I am saying (Jesus said it first), that the essence of the law was made complete in Jesus and we now must live by the essence of the spirit of God. The purpose and promise of the Law given to Moses was to ensure the place of God in the hearts of the people and to build a community that would serve as an example to all who saw them.

That purpose and promise was fulfilled; made manifest in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus - He was and is the assurance of God with us and the foundation on which we need to build community.

Jesus set us free from the bondage of sin and from being held captive to destructive, hurtful behavior toward ourselves and one another. Jesus came to make us free from those things that imprison our ability and shackle our potential as people of God. Jesus came to free the marginalized and invisible in society from oppression, We are to live by God's way given to us through Jesus and by the Holy Spirit, and not by our human nature.

When we live out of a place of human nature / human desire, we seek things like power, control, authority, division, and That was not the promise given, nor the promise we are to keep. That is not who we are designed to be. That is not our original goodness created by God.

When we live out of place of the Holy Spirit, we seek things like shared authority, equality, compassion, empathy, unity, and we find ways to build true communities across social, cultural, racial, sexual, and political lines.

How do we do it? How do we live the kind of life Paul is talking about and Jesus died for? How do we keep the promise and be the people of God? Paul makes it quite clear (as did Jesus before him in response to the Pharisees' question of the greatest commandment): Love the Lord your

God with all your heart, strength, soul and mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.

It doesn't get much simpler than that church.

There are a lot of promises being spouted out right now in our country; from all sides of the political arena. There are a lot of promises being made regarding what is and what is not the truth of Covid19. There are a lot of promises being put out there for us to decide what is and what is not true; what is and what is not who we are to be, and how we are to live.

There is only one promise ever given that remains as true today as it was when it was first spoken - "I will be your God and you will be my people." It's that second part that is the promise we must learn and strive to keep.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself. Live that promise church, and you will live free, regardless of what is going on around you. Live that promise and you will live with purpose and intention regardless of what promises around you are being spoken, unspoken, broken or manipulated.

Faith-promise is about trusting God makes good on God's promise to us AND knowing that God trusts us - God has faith in us to live into the people God wants us to be together.

Gather at the table today, hear the promise of God, remember it through the life and love of Jesus, be fed in body, soul and soul, and walk with renewed strength and hope. Keep your promise to God and to one another - a promise of love.

Amen

Resources Consulted:

Homeleticsonline.com

NIB Vol. XI

NT Wright, Paul for Everyone