

**Jeremiah 34: 1-22; “True & Lasting Liberty”, Sermon # 40 in the series – “Heart Lessons Learned for a Prophet and the People of God”, Delivered  
By Pastor Paul Rendall on March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2019,  
in the Morning Worship Service.**

Last Sunday I preached to you about God’s covenant faithfulness. We looked at 3 attributes of God which He displayed then, and which He still displays now, in keeping His covenants unbroken. Now, this morning, we have arrived in chapter 34 and we find a sharp contrast from what we looked at last week. We find a situation of unfaithfulness in the king and the people of Judah and Jerusalem, which God would address through his faithful prophet Jeremiah. Each of us should understand that one of the most precious and significant privileges that a person can have is to have true liberty. To be set free from a condition of bondage and servitude, and to be able to do what you really want to do with your life; this is the great happiness in this life. In looking at this passage, I want to draw a parallel between physical liberty and spiritual liberty. I want you to be able to see that while an evil king and princes proclaimed a liberty which was deceptive and false, that Christ would have His Church to proclaim a liberty which is true and lasting.

The question which I would have you think about at this hour is this: How can I find a true and lasting liberty? How can I be set free from my bondage to sin and Satan, and not go back to it? Who is the faithful preacher that is proclaiming true spiritual freedom? What is it, to proclaim true spiritual freedom? I want to make 3 observational statements to you from the text which will give us the answers to those questions, and draw from other parts of scripture to support my assertions:

**1<sup>st</sup> of all – True and lasting liberty does not put people in bondage to other people or lead them into sin.** (verses 1-16)

Here in these verses we find king Zedekiah and the princes and people entering into a covenant, and then a short time later, we find them treacherously and wickedly breaking the covenant that they had made. The covenant that they entered into was with each other; that is, the king, with all his subjects, all of those slave-holding Jews. The covenant that they made together was that they would proclaim liberty to every Hebrew slave in Judah and Jerusalem, in light of the fact that Jerusalem was under heavy siege by the Chaldean army. If the city was taken, they all knew that they too would be taken captive and made slaves themselves. Therefore, under those circumstances it would have been natural for them to think of what they could do to strengthen their forces in the on-going battle with Nebuchadnezzar. They were not really thinking of repenting of the sins which they had committed in the past. They were not thinking of what it was that they had done to dishonor God in their worship of false gods, which was so displeasing to God.

But rather, it was more for their own safety, and for their military strengthening as a nation, that they released their slaves. Verse 10 of our text says – “Now when all the princes and all the people, who had entered into the covenant, heard that everyone should set free his male and female slaves, that no one should keep them in bondage anymore, they obeyed and let them go.” But both the king and the people had not remembered God’s law. This covenant which they were making with each other, was not something that they should take back, once they had made it. And so they needed to be reminded by Jeremiah in verse 12, of what it was that they had done; that there was a law for the release of Hebrew slaves – those of their fellow countrymen who had fallen into poverty or debt and thus became slaves – or those who were sold into slavery by a judge, because of their crimes. And this release was not revocable in the sight of God without their falling into sin.

God had commanded in His law, that the Hebrew slaves of any Israelite should be freed at the end of every seven years. (verse 14) “Therefore the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: ‘I made a covenant with your fathers in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage, saying, ‘At the end of seven years, you shall let him go free from you.’” “But your fathers did not obey Me nor incline their ear.” Exodus

21: 2 had said – “If you buy a Hebrew servant, he shall serve six years; and in the seventh he shall go out free and pay nothing.” And Deuteronomy 15: 12 – “If your brother, a Hebrew man, or a Hebrew woman, is sold to you and serves you six years, then in the seventh year you shall let him go free from you.” So, here we are told in that every man should set free his male and female slaves, after requiring them to serve him for 6 years, so that no one should keep a Hebrew brother in bondage any longer than this. And even though this law had been in place since the giving of the law by Moses, the observance of this ordinance, in Israel, had evidently not been taking place for many years.

But this covenant between Zedekiah and the people, God saw as a good thing. It was a solemn promise given with an oath that they would release their slaves. But it did not last long. It says in verse 15 that what they had done, was right in God’s sight; every man proclaiming liberty to his neighbor. And so they had made a covenant before God in the temple; the temple which was called by His name. In other words it was a holy covenant, it was a righteous covenant that they had made. And then they had treacherously turned around and profaned God’s name, He said, when every one of them brought back his male and female slaves. And thus they had not really obeyed Him at all, in proclaiming liberty to their captives and really setting them free. I have already related to you, how it was the crisis of the siege of Jerusalem that caused the king, and the princes, and the people to enter into this covenant to proclaim liberty to their slaves.

But they should have known, just as we should know, that God tests the motives of why we do things. He tests the hearts, He searches the minds; He brings the circumstances to bear upon His people which will reveal to Him, and to them, the truth of what their motivation really is. This is what God did with them. Zedekiah had called for the Egyptians to come and help them. And so, when the Egyptian army drew near to help them, the king of Babylon pulled his armies back, it says in verse 21. He pulled back from the siege of Jerusalem, so that he could fight the Egyptians. But when Zedekiah and all Judah saw that they had gained some relief, by having the Egyptians fight with them and for them; when they knew that God’s judgment had been averted, they thought to themselves – These slaves that we used to have were very profitable to us, and we were very foolish to give them up and let them go free. So now, let’s bring them back and make them serve us once again, since this is so.

I believe that we can apply this to ourselves in this way: You and I, before we come to know the Lord, are under God’s righteous wrath and judgment. God has laid siege to our lives and told us that we will perish and be taken captive to hell forever, if we do not repent; unless we will trust in His Son. And so, perhaps we are awakened to reform our lives; to try to change ourselves to make ourselves better in His sight. We will take everything related to our life of sin; all that worked so well for us in our sinful past, and we will let these things go; we will relinquish our grasp over them. And we may think that we have put our slavery to sin behind us. Those things and those people we made work for us as our slaves, to get what we wanted out of life, in business and pleasure, we might actually let them go. We think that God is pleased with us somehow, because we have done this great thing for Him. We somehow have convinced ourselves by doing some good works, that we have really changed and become a true Christian, and so we then proclaim this liberty to others; saying to them, that they too, by personal reformation and by attempting to do what God has commanded, can become free, spiritually speaking.

How many people, when they are afraid of death or hell, will try hard to be better; they will break off with their sins outwardly. They will give up the drugs, the sex outside of marriage, the gambling, and they will even go to church. They will profess faith in Christ before the church, they will be baptized, and they will even proclaim liberty to others; that this personal reformation is the way of salvation. And they seem to be genuine and sincere Christians for a while. They will say that they are Christians. And they seem to be quite different people from what they once were; at least for a while. And then something happens. Something comes up which is very difficult for them to deal with. And so they try to find relief from the people of the world and their counsels. They listen to this worldly counsel, and they find temporary relief from their sense of danger and guilt. And suddenly, they become proud of their own judgment; they are proud and selfishly ambitious to achieve their own

goals and they are very proud of themselves for what they have begun to achieve in life and to get out of life. And all of the slavery to sin from the past, begins slowly to come back into their life, and they are unaware of it.

They now feel that they must be served by other people. They will no longer go about to serve God, or to serve other people in righteousness. They feel that they must use other people to get what they want out of life. They must compromise their faith in God and Christ. And they do this by abandoning their faith in God's word by degrees. They take up the world's methods of attaining to certain position of knowledge. And they take up the world's way of going about to obtain things, and they think that the results are more satisfying to them than following God's word, keeping His commandments, and having faith in God to teach them the better way; His way of doing things. They turn back from humbly following Christ, and they turn away from the very Christians who first proclaimed liberty in Christ to them when they were captives before, and so they once again are enslaved by those very sins which they had thought that they had once abandoned. Sin and Satan have gotten back in the saddle once again, and God's name is profaned by those who had once declared allegiance to Jesus Christ; those who had publicly declared their faith in Him, in the waters of baptism, that they had repented. And so now we find those who once thought that they had mastered sin, have once again become its slaves. He who commits sin is the slave of sin, Jesus says, and the slave does not abide in the house forever.

Sometimes the problem with persons like this is legalism; that is, they think that they are being saved by their own works. Salvation was according to their decision, they thought, at the time that they chose to follow Him, but now that it has become personally distasteful and inconvenient to submit to the truth of the Bible's commands. And so they decide to give up what they had once committed to before. They thought that the good work of God had begun in them according to their own free will. And they did not realize, or want to know the truth of their constant need for grace; that God must choose them, and that He must cause them to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. They did not come to know the reality of the Father effectually calling them and drawing them to Christ if they were going to put their hand to the plow and not look back.

You see, a person really must be born again if they are going to enter the kingdom of God and stay faithful to Christ. Salvation is of the Lord. It is not of the will of the flesh or of the will of man. It is of God. Once God does the work of regeneration, He will never turn back from doing that person good, and He will be continually be leading them and teaching them and guiding them by His Holy Spirit into all the truth of the word. A true Christian comes to realize that His faith, and the outcome of his whole Christian life, are secure because they are in God's hands. They cannot walk away from Christ because they know that it was He who first sought them out. It was He who opened their eyes to truth that they were lost and undone without Christ. And it is He who continually is helping them to understand all the truth of the Bible; that it is good for them to seek God's help and grace, especially in those times when things are not going the way that they would want them to.

They know that it is good for them to pray and ask God for wisdom in relation to searching His word, to find out what they should do next. They do not take matters into their own hands to judge God or to set aside His word just because certain things related to His righteous judgments and providential ordering of things in their life has caused them pain or disappointment. In faith they keep coming back to God continually for grace and wisdom. They will not wickedly depart from God, because God is keeping their soul. They gave their heart to Him in the beginning. They want Him to forgive all of their failures to do His will, and will submit to His discipline of them, because they want to share in His holiness. God is the One who gives the grace that saves, and the grace that saves is also the grace that will keep, and our God will watch over and protect and defend the believer, even in the times of their greatest temptations. Even if they are overcome by that temptation for a time, they will repent. They will return. They will come back to the narrow path of righteousness, because God has begun the work.

Sometimes the problem is rebellion against authority and licentiousness, as we find it spoken of, in 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 2: 10 and 11. Peter says there that false prophets are – “Especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority.” “They are presumptuous, self-willed.” “They are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries, whereas angels, who are greater in power and might, do not bring a reviling accusation against them before the Lord.” Listen how Peter describes them in verse 13 and following – “But these, like natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed, speak evil of the things they do not understand, and will utterly perish in their own corruption, and will receive the wages of unrighteousness, as those who count it a pleasure to revel in the daytime.” You say to me – But these cannot be professed Christians that are being described here, can they? Well, let’s continue to listen to Peter.

Verse 13b – “They are spots and blemishes, carousing in their own deceptions while they feast with you, having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls.” “They have a heart trained in covetous practices, and are accursed children.” Verse 18 says – “For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error.” “While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage.” So, you see that true and lasting spiritual liberty may be proclaimed by evil men, but they cannot grant it to others, or find it themselves, when they are slaves of corruption. True and lasting liberty does not put people in bondage to other people or lead them into sin.

**2<sup>nd</sup> – True and lasting liberty is only found by being in covenant with God through the Lord Jesus Christ.** (verses 17-20)

Verse 17 says – “Therefore thus says the Lord: ‘You have not obeyed Me in proclaiming liberty, every one to his brother and every one to his neighbor.’ “Behold, I proclaim liberty to you, says the Lord...” Now the Lord goes on to say through Jeremiah, that the liberty that He was proclaiming to these wicked people, was to the sword, to pestilence, and to famine; to let them go on in their sin. He told them that He would deliver them to trouble among all the kingdoms of the world. But I would like you to see, my dear listeners, that thankfully, I am not called by God to proclaim this kind of liberty to you who are here today. I am called to preach to you the gospel of true liberty; of freedom from the bondage of sin, which comes through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. I proclaim to you today the principles of true and lasting liberty which come by faith in Him. It is the grace of the New Covenant which God has made in Christ which will set you free and you will be free indeed!

We are given a picture of what a blessed thing it is when you have really found grace and have been set free from worldly thinking about God, and have entered in to the obedience of faith which each Christian walks in. We see a picture of this over in Exodus chapter 21, verses 1-6, if you will turn over there with me. Yes, these are Old Testament verses, but they well portray the thinking of the New Testament Christian. It says here: “Now these are the judgments which you shall set before them: If you buy a Hebrew servant, he shall serve six years; and in the seventh he shall go out free and pay nothing.” “If he comes in by himself, he shall go out by himself; if he comes in married, then his wife shall go out with him.” “If his master has given him a wife, and she has borne him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her master’s, and he shall go out by himself.” Here is what I want you to see – “But if the servant plainly says, ‘I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,’ then his master shall bring him to the judges.” “He shall also bring him to the door, or to the doorpost, and his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him forever.”

So here we see, once again, a Hebrew slave who has come into this state of bondage and servitude because he has fallen into extreme poverty or he has been guilty of robbery. Because he is one of God’s chosen people, it says here that he will go free after a period of time – 6 years. On the 7<sup>th</sup> year he goes out free. We should understand it in this way. Only God’s chosen people are eventually to be set free from their bondage to sin. They came into this state of bondage because of their extreme poverty of righteousness in God’s sight. They have robbed God of His glory, and yet God, who is a good Master, would redeem you from your bondage and this state of condemnation, to make you to be

His precious possession. When a person is set free from their bondage in sins, it is because God paid the price of their redemption in Jesus Christ at the cross. This is the basis of all of His work of salvation; all the favor and all the blessings of imputed and imparted grace, are most definitely and surely given to the one who is chosen of God.

But a response to God's good working in salvation is appropriate, and it is found in verses 5 and 6. That is the response of love, and willingly putting ourselves in His continual service. The picture here is very significant to us who are here today, even though we are not under this law physically. "But if the servant plainly says, 'I love my master, my wife, and my children, I will not go out free.'" And then his master takes him to the doorpost and he pierces his ear with an awl and he shall serve him forever. What does this mean to us? It is a picture of true and lasting liberty. When you believe in Jesus Christ, you do not want to have the liberty to go out free, to go back to sin ever again. You do not want to go back to sin or to the world, or to be led around by the Devil. You want to serve Christ in righteousness. You call Jesus your Master. You see how good and gracious He is. You want to learn from Him and follow after Him.

All of these blessings, the Bible tells us, do not come savingly and effectually to a person because of your choice of Him, but rather of His choice of you. Christ sought you and found you with His redeeming blood. And so, once you are called and chosen, having been set free in your heart and mind from the bondage of sin, you most freely and willingly choose God as your Master, to serve Him forever. You know that it has been God's grace, and His favor, and His Spirit's work in you which has saved you from yourself and from your sins. Therefore you will not leave Him for the world in any permanent fashion. Oh, you may feel the pull many times; you may even fall seven times, but you will get up again and go on, walking on the path of righteousness and singing as you go. You will always return from your straying because you have come to realize that He is watching over your soul; guarding you and protecting you from the evil one and not allowing sin to have dominion over you ever again, after your conversion to Christ.

Now look with me at Isaiah 61, verses 1-3. "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because the Lord anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God' to comfort all who mourn, to console those who mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified." I want you to see what the Lord Jesus came to do for all who understand that they are captives to sin. He proclaims the good tidings of His gospel to those who understand themselves to be poor in spirit.

He tells them that by His powerful grace and the mighty working of His Spirit that He will open the prison to those who are bound, and set them free from their bondage to sin. He will proclaim liberty to the captives and the acceptable year of the Lord. What is being referred to here is the year of Jubilee. Let me read to you from Leviticus chapter 25, verses 38-43. "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan and to be your God." "And if one of your brethren who dwells by you becomes poor, and sells himself to you, you shall not compel him to serve as a slave." "As a hired servant and a sojourner he shall be with you, and shall serve you until the Year of Jubilee." And then he shall depart from you – he and his children with him – and shall return to his own family." "He shall return to the possession of his fathers." "For they are My servants, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as slaves." "You shall not rule over him with rigor, but you shall fear your God."

Let me apply to you these verses in a New Covenant way: If you are poor in spirit you ought to sell yourself to Jesus Christ, and to God the Father through Him. He has bought you with a price – the price of His precious blood, and His loving obedience. He does not require you to serve Him as a slave; He shall not rule over you with rigor. He will give you rest – It is for you, the year of Jubilee.

You are going out free this year, even this day, if you trust in Jesus. He will bring you peace and stability. He shall return you as a freed man, spiritually, to your family in order that the grace which He has shown to you, you may also show to them. In John 15: 15, Jesus says, ‘No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what His Master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things I heard from my Father, I have made known to you.’ Let me ask you now; are you in covenant with God through Jesus Christ the loving Master? Have you plainly said – “I love my Master – I will not go free? Has He taken the awl and pierced your ear to listen as a disciple, so that you might serve Him forever? Ah, this is the best of situations in this life, and it will bring to you great assurance.

**3<sup>rd</sup> – True and lasting Liberty is maintained by vigilance against sin and against false brethren.**

In verse 20 God states – “And I will give Zedekiah king of Judah and his princes into the hand of their enemies, into the hand of those who seek their life and into the hand of the king of Babylon’s army which has gone back from you.” “Behold, I will command,’ says the Lord, ‘and cause them to return to this city.” “They will fight against it and take it and burn it with fire; and I will make the cities of Judah a desolation without inhabitant.” There is a lesson for us here in these verses which applies to all of us who are Christians. We must be vigilant to guard against false brethren like king Zedekiah. We will not be able to consistently obey God and when those who lead us, or those whom we spend most of our time with, are worldlings, or double-minded people. People like that have not obeyed God in proclaiming the true and lasting liberty which is found only in Jesus Christ. Their liberty is to do their own will, to have what they prefer, and not keep God commands to obey Him and to worship and serve Him alone. We must not follow them. Bad company will corrupt good morals.

Let’s look at a few verses in closing. Philippians 3: 17-20. “Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.” “For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame – who set their mind on earthly things.” “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.” You see, there are many persons who profess to know Christ, that sadly, are enemies to His cross. It is by your faith in His work upon the cross that true freedom is brought to you, the freedom to obey Him. The obedience which is being spoken of in the New Testament is not a perfect sinless obedience or we would not need Christ, and knowing God would be by works and not by grace. But what is spoken of in many places in the New Testament is the obedience of faith in Christ which leads to a sincere obedience to all of God’s commandments, and the ability to do good works. We do strive for perfection but we know that our obedience is only complete in Christ. Our obedience is a sincere and consistent obedience which looks to Christ and His blood and righteousness to cover us while we go about to do and keep all of God’s commandments.

Think of James 1: 21-25 – “Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.” “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” “For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.” “But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.” The law of liberty is what we must look into. It is the mirror of the Word of God. Dear Christian, are you doing this? For it shows you whether you have the face of a slave or the face of the Lord’s freed man. The Lord’s freed man is a doer of the Word. He looks into the mirror to see whether he is counterfeit or true; obedient or disobedient, believing or unbelieving. What do you see now as you look at your own face in the mirror of God’s word? What do you see as you look at your own heart? Do you bring what you see to Jesus? Some of you may go away from this place and forget what you have heard and deceive yourselves. But I pray that you will look into the perfect law of liberty which I have held up to you in this message, and see yourself clearly, and look to Christ for

grace. When you do so, you will also see Christ as your Master, and yourself as His servant. But He will call you His friend.