

Using Your Freedom to be a Light

Building Core Strength

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Bible Text: Luke 11:14-54

Preached on: Sunday, July 1, 2012

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That is a great song, isn't it? Thank you, Titus, for teaching us that today. Worship team, thank you for serving us so well all through the morning.

Well, are you glad to live in a country that believes strongly in the principle of liberty and justice for all? I think we all are. We are not a perfect country by any means, but we are thankful that men and women have fought and died for the principles of freedom and that we now enjoy the fruit of their labor, are we not? For example, we have seen the exercise of the freedom of speech and the freedom of the press in rather significant ways even this week.

When the Supreme Court issued their ruling on immigration reform, I think that was on Tuesday, specifically related to this contested law in the state of Arizona and what immediately happened? People started talking and people started writing from their various points of view and some praised the ruling. Others criticized it strongly saying the Supreme Court justices got it wrong. But wherever you are on that issue, aren't you glad you can speak your mind without any fear of repercussion whatsoever? We just take that for granted, don't we? The freedom of speech is just second nature to us.

Then I don't know if you heard, but Purdue University has hired a new president. And, because we have so many Purdue faculty and staff and students as part of our church family that decision is going to have definite and maybe even profound implications to many people in this church.

Well, what happened? As soon as the decision was announced, people started talking and people started writing that very day. Some thought the decision was the greatest thing ever. Others not so much. But don't you love a country where there is freedom to say or write what you believe about a decision like that? It is really quite phenomenal when you think about it.

Then Thursday the Supreme Court issued their decision on health care. And what happened? The same thing. Immediately people are talking. In fact, some people started talking a bit early. The first push notification I got on my iPad was from CNN saying that the Supreme Court overturned Obamacare. And then they had to actually publish a

correction a few minutes later. Oops. We spoke a little quickly on that. And regardless of what you think about that issue, we have the freedom to speak and to write whatever you want.

We even saw it happen with us yet again this week. Somehow we were connected to a story in the paper about trash crisis in West Lafayette, of all things. And so the words Faith West appeared seven times in an article about trash pick up that had absolutely nothing to do with us. And there is that question, again. Do you like to live in a land that promotes freedom, even when some use it to talk about us in ways that, well, sometimes make you scratch your head a little bit?

I am going to assume that the answer to this question I posed over and over for every one of us is yes. And when you think about the alternatives, we will take the messiness of freedom every time, won't we? Absolutely.

Now push it one step further. Are there responsibilities that come with that freedom? And I am not talking about for everybody now. I am talking about us, followers of Jesus Christ if you would put yourself in that category this morning. Is there a stewardship issue involved in this? God has entrusted us with an enormous amount of freedom in this country, but for which someday we will give an account. Is it that? Is it freedom with responsibility? Is it freedom with accountability? We would all agree with that, too, wouldn't we?

Let's study a passage of Scripture that is going to help us use that freedom well. Open your Bible, if you would, this morning, to Luke chapter 11 and that is on page 55 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you if you need that this morning. So Luke chapter 11 or page 55 on the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you.

Our church's theme this year is building core strength. That is what we are talking about over and over from the gospel of Luke and from other places as well. And our theme verse is this one in Psalm 138:3.

“On the day I called, You answered me; You made me bold with strength in my soul.”¹

Don't you love that roaring like a lion song Titus and the worship team taught us earlier this year? That is what we are talking about. Strength. Bold with strength, but in the heart, in the soul. That is what we mean. Building core strength. And I have been talking to you about that from three very specific and important emphases. I hope you are praying about these things all through the year, but one of them is building core strength in the foundational areas in our walk with Christ and our church ministries that comprise the basis of godliness and effective community service. God has given us opportunities all around us and we have to be strong not to leave those opportunities on the table, strong as individuals. That means we have to be majoring on the majors and we have to be focusing on the fundamentals of what it means to walk faithfully with Christ and grow

¹ Psalm 138:3.

in Christ's likeness. And so there is all sorts of initiatives that all under that heading. And I am really glad for a lot of what is being accomplished right there. That is key for this year.

And then, secondly, planning and praying for the construction of Faith West and the successful launch of a cluster of new ministries in West Lafayette. That, too, is going to take some strength, huh? Strength that only comes from God. But we have to be doing our part in building it.

And I am happy to tell you, by the way, a lot of really important things came together in the last 48 hours on Faith West. On Friday we met with our contractor and learned that we are within budget. Praise God for that, huh? And, yeah, you can clap for that. Thank Joe Blake. Thank Steve Marsh and Mike King. A lot of people have been working feverishly wrestling that budget like a bear and by God's grace we are able to bring that project into its budget. And then I just got a call yesterday morning from our banker from Chase who was actually calling me from Colorado at his daughter's wedding, but he wanted to—which is going to get both of us in trouble, I think—but he was giving me the good news that he had just heard from all the upper level management at Chase that our bond issue has been approved by them and they are ready to close. And what that means is I am now able to say for the first time publicly we are planning to do a ground breaking at Faith West two weeks from today, July the 15th. That is right. You can ... that is some really good news. And that will be at five o'clock in the afternoon over on the site and we will get some additional details out to you, but I want to be sure you get that on your calendar. July the 15th. And then we are not just planning on having a little ceremony and doing nothing, we are planning on like seriously breaking some ground the next morning and praise the Lord for just all the strength that he has given so many people in our church family to do what needed to be done to get us to this place.

And then, thirdly, I am preparing for the next round of ministry dreaming as we embark on a new strategic planning process beginning on January first of next year. So we need a lot of strength, don't we? It is really important that we talk about this theme from the Word of God.

Now our verses today could really be a very important part of all of this, because they give direction to what we are celebrating today. That is really important. It provides guidance for this whole matter of freedom. We are going to talk about it this way: Using your freedom to be a light.

I am going to begin reading in verse 14 and let me just warn you. This text takes some very interesting twists and turns in the logic and you have got to be on it if you are going to get it. And so I want to encourage you. Don't be thinking about what toppings you are going to put on your hotdog later on today. There will be time for all of that, ok, while you are standing in line. Right now it is all about following the logic of the Word of God. Is that right? Are we all on it? We are on it big time? Ok. Here we go. Luke 11 beginning in verse 14.

And [Jesus] was casting out a demon, and it was mute; when the demon had gone out, the mute man spoke; and the crowds were amazed. But some of them said, "He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons."²

That was their response. Jesus did that by the power of Satan. And then, verse 16:

“Others, to test Him, were demanding of Him a sign from heaven.”³

Now remember those two responses. We are going to see that broken out now.

But He knew their thoughts and said to them, ‘Any kingdom divided against itself...’⁴

He is talking about the first response now.

...and a house divided against itself falls. If Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? For you say that I cast out demons by Beelzebul. And if I by Beelzebul cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out? So they will be your judges. But if I cast out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are undisturbed. But when someone stronger than he attacks him and overpowers him, he takes away from him all his armor on which he had relied and distributes his plunder. He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me, scatters. When the unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and not finding any, it says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ And when it comes, it finds it swept and put in order. Then it goes and takes along seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first.⁵

Now, interesting vignette. Lock on to this.

While Jesus was saying these things, one of the women in the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, "Blessed is the womb that bore You and the breasts at which You nursed."

But He said, "On the contrary, blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it."⁶

² Luke 1:14-15.

³ Luke 1:16.

⁴ Luke 1:17.

⁵ Luke 1:17-26.

⁶ Luke 1:27-28.

Unlike the people who were saying, “ I just healed this man by the power of Satan,” or unlike those who are saying, “I want another sign,” it would be like this. Now, verse 29.

As the crowds were increasing, He began to say, "This generation is a wicked generation; it seeks for a sign, and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah. For just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so will the Son of Man be to this generation. The Queen of the South will rise up with the men of this generation at the judgment and condemn them, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here. The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. No one...⁷

Now watch this twist.

“No one, after lighting a lamp, puts it away in a cellar nor under a basket, but on the lampstand, so that those who enter may see the light.”⁸

Now a different twist. Hear this now.

“The eye is the lamp of your body; when your eye is clear...”⁹

Unlike those people saying I heal by Satan’s power or those who are wanting another sign:

“...when your eye is clear, your whole body also is full of light; but when it is bad, your body also is full of darkness. Then watch out that the light in you is not darkness. If therefore your whole body is full of light...¹⁰

In other words, you are like what Jesus said to that woman, you would be a person who hears the Word of God and observes it.

“If therefore your whole body is full of light, with no dark part in it, it will be wholly illumined, as when the lamp illumines you with its rays.”¹¹

Now last vignette.

Now when He had spoken, a Pharisee *asked Him to have lunch with him; and He went in, and reclined at the table. When the Pharisee saw it, he was surprised that He had not first ceremonially washed before the meal. But

⁷ Luke 11:29-33.

⁸ Luke 11:33.

⁹ Luke 11:34.

¹⁰ Luke 11:34-36.

¹¹ Luke 11:36.

the Lord said to him, "Now you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and of the platter; but inside of you, you are full of robbery and wickedness. You foolish ones, did not He who made the outside make the inside also? But give that which is within as charity, and then all things are clean for you. But woe to you Pharisees! For you pay tithe of mint and rue and every kind of garden herb, and yet disregard justice and the love of God; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the chief seats in the synagogues and the respectful greetings in the market places. Woe to you! For you are like concealed tombs, and the people who walk over them are unaware of it."

One of the lawyers *said to Him in reply, "Teacher, when You say this, You insult us too."

But He said, "Woe to you lawyers as well! For you weigh men down with burdens hard to bear, while you yourselves will not even touch the burdens with one of your fingers. Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and it was your fathers who killed them. So you are witnesses and approve the deeds of your fathers; because it was they who killed them, and you build their tombs. For this reason also the wisdom of God said, 'I will send to them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and some they will persecute, so that the blood of all the prophets, shed since the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the house of God; yes, I tell you, it shall be charged against this generation.' Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge; you yourselves did not enter, and you hindered those who were entering."

When He left there, the scribes and the Pharisees began to be very hostile and to question Him closely on many subjects, plotting against Him to catch Him in something He might say.¹²

And we are talking about using your freedom to be alight. With the time we have remaining let's organize all of this around three principles to help us use our freedoms well, to be unlike the men and women we just read about in this text, three principles to help us use our freedoms well.

First of all, beware of the tendency to raise weak objections to avoid the implications of God's truth. Now just to be clear, when I say that, I am not talking about somebody else this morning. I am talking about... anybody want to guess? Yeah, us. We are not here to criticize the people who are talking about... are spoken about earlier in these verses. We are here to honestly evaluate whether any of these tendencies have taken root in our

¹² Luke 11:34-54.

hearts and lives, right? Can I get an uh-huh on that? Yeah, that is why we are here. I don't want to be like that. I want to root out any of that. Well let's do it.

First of all, break the passage down. It begins by saying:

“And He was casting out a demon, and it was mute; when the demon had gone out, the mute man spoke; and the crowds were amazed.”¹³

Well, that is good. All right, that is all good. Wait till you see the way some of these people responded.

Some people said, “Well, yeah it is a miracle done by the power of Satan.”

“He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons.”¹⁴

Now notice, by the way, a very important point here, kind of off to the side, but you need to get it. There wasn't a question about whether the miracle had occurred. They didn't say that. People who like to discard anything miraculous in the Bible have a real problem on that particular point. When you are an eye witness to the facts, it is hard to deny the facts. So you have to come up with some sort of forced explanation for what you have seen, unless, of course, you want to accept the implication of the facts which they clearly didn't. I will be back to that in a minute.

What was their other response? We need another sign. We won't believe on the basis of all the signs we have already seen and heard, but if we just had one more. Really?

“Others, to test Him, were demanding of Him a sign from heaven.”¹⁵

Why? A key to getting this text is understanding the answer to that question. Why? Do you really believe that these individuals thought that all of this was occurring by the power of Satan or that if Jesus would just give them one more sign they would repent and believe? Of course not. The rub here was that what Jesus was proclaiming was true and if they accepted it as such, they would have to repent and change. They would have to acknowledge that they were incapable of earning their own way to heaven. They would have to admit that they needed someone to do something for them that they could not do on their own. They would have to admit that Jesus was loving enough to be their Savior and powerful enough to be their Lord.

Why is that? Because God's truth properly understood and considered always has implications. That is why the... we raise the right flag. God's truth, properly understood, always has implications. And many of the people in this text, I hope we are never like them in any way. But many of the people in this text wanted nothing to do with that. And so they responded like people whose hearts were filled with unbelief.

¹³ Luke 11:14.

¹⁴ Luke 11:15.

¹⁵ Luke 11:16.

What is amazing in this text, I think, in part, is even though they responded that way, Jesus chose to take the time to be patient with them. He engaged them at the level of their unbelief. And so he kept talking to them. He said, “Your first objection is just illogical.”

“Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste; and a house divided against itself falls. If Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand?”¹⁶

Now the discussion, frankly, is a lot longer than that. But that gives us the essence and what that means is for us when a person... now we are talking about someone on the other side of the table. When a person is using their freedom of speech to raise weak objections because they don't want to accept the implication of God's truth, there are times to lovingly point out the inconsistency of what is being said. That is what Jesus did in this text. And I am not talking about engaging in endless arguments here, but you can have a reasoned discussion about having a divisive argument. That is why Paul would later say to Timothy:

“The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome.”¹⁷

But that doesn't mean he shuts up.

“The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach.”¹⁸

So talking continues.

...able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.¹⁹

So he says your argument is illogical. And then, secondly, he says your objection is disingenuous. They have already had plenty of signs. They had, for example, the sign of Jonah who was in the belly of the whale for three days and assumed to be dead. And after his miraculous deliverance a great revival took place in Nineveh of all places, that great Assyrian city. But the people, when they saw the sign of Jonah, repented. In fact, that book is a great story of revival for sure and Jesus said, “You had a sign.”

“For just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so will the Son of Man be to this generation.”²⁰

¹⁶ Luke 11:17-18.

¹⁷ 2 Timothy 2:24.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ 2 Timothy 2:24-26.

²⁰ Luke 11:30.

Talking about what? Talking about his pending death, burial and especially what? And the resurrection which, I think, is a great example of how to communicate with other people. And we are not going to get into petty arguments, but we are going to look for opportunities to point out biblical truth. And the fact that the tomb is empty is a great biblical truth to point out.

Then he reminds them of the sig of the Queen of Sheba. And I realize that I don't know who in the world that is. Well, you can read about that in the Old Testament in places like 1 Kings chapter 10 which was a woman who traveled from what we believe was the contemporary country of Yemen all the way to Jerusalem to learn about King Solomon. So unlike these people who wouldn't go across the street to learn the truth of the Word of God—No, that must be by the power of Satan, that, no, you have to give us another sign—the Queen of Sheba was so interested in following the truth of God, wherever that would lead, that she travelled all the way to actually find out if what she had heard about Solomon was true and she said in 1 Kings 10:

It was a true report which I heard in my own land about your words and your wisdom. Nevertheless I did not believe the reports, until I came and my eyes had seen it. And behold, the half was not told me. You exceed in wisdom and prosperity the report which I heard. How blessed are your men, how blessed are these your servants who stand before you continually and hear your wisdom. Blessed be the LORD your God.²¹

Jehovah. As she understood this wasn't just about Solomon. This was about Solomon's God and even the Queen of Sheba was willing to accept that truth.

“Blessed be [Jehovah] your God who delighted in you to set you on the throne of Israel; because the [Jehovah] loved Israel forever, therefore He made you king, to do justice and righteousness.”²²

And Jesus' point is: Here is somebody who sincerely tried to discover the truth wherever that pursuit might lead. And the implication on that day was

“The Queen of the South will rise up with the men of this generation at the judgment and condemn them, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.”²³

Now what is the overall principle? I realize we have been all over the place. We have been to Yemen. We have been to an exorcism. They say, “What does this have to do with me on this particular holiday weekend?”

Listen. There is a tendency in all of us to raise weak objections to avoid the implications of God's truth, especially when that truth might cause us to have to change in some way.

²¹ 1 Kings 10:5-9.

²² 1 Kings 10:9.

²³ Luke 11:31.

Is that a fact? That is way true and that is what we are talking about this morning, this tendency inside of all of us to avoid the implications of God's truth when it is especially the when, when that truth might cause us to have to change in some way.

Now there is no problem with the Scripture that we already believe. That is not submission. That is agreement. But on certain topics, topics on the way you ought to function in your workplace, topics like the way you ought to function in your family, topics like the way you ought to function in your personal life, et cetera, et cetera, often we would rather ignore the Scripture or twist the Scripture than let it change us.

Are we willing to acknowledge that this morning? There is a little bit of the people in this passage inside all of us, right? Yeah, yeah, yeah. No question about that. In fact, let's call it back into some of those illustrations I mentioned at the beginning of the message and just talk about how this tendency applies to the way that we exercise our freedoms.

Let's take this example of Purdue's new president. I would be surprised if practically every person in this room did not have an opinion about that subject. And I imagine that if I scratched hard enough, we would probably find some fairly significant disagreement among us on that subject.

Let me ask you this, though, especially if you disagree with the choice, or if you disagree with the process that was followed. Should the way you have been expressing those disagreements in the past 10 days or so been guided by the Word of God and therefore been distinctively Christian? In other words, you exercised your freedom of speech in a way that was consistent with the guidelines of the Word of God. And so if you listen to the way a non-Christian who didn't like the decision discussed the issue and you compared it to the way that a Christian who didn't like the decision discussed the issue, would there be a rather significant difference in many cases? And the answer to that question is: Absolutely.

Why? Well, because at some point the topic of submission to authority plays into the mix, submission to the authority of the board of trustees at Purdue, submission to the authority that has now been placed over the campus at Purdue. At some point that comes into this discussion. Is that a fact?

You say, "I don't like submission."

Didn't ask you that. I asked you is that part of the biblical guidelines for the way you would discuss this and honoring those who are over us that God has placed over us and praying for those who have been called to lead us? God's Word has all sorts of guidelines that governs the way you exercise your freedom if you are going to say you are a follower of Jesus Christ.

And you might say, "Well, you are just saying this this morning because you like Mitch Daniels." Well, frankly what I think of him is not relevant to this discussion. I don't remember ever saying that one way or another. And you may remember, if you paid

attention to all of this on a national level, any time I have mentioned our current president, President Obama, it has always been with honor. It has always been with submission, regardless of what I might think about this, this or this. That was even true when Bill Clinton was our president. Whenever I spoke about him from this place, I spoke about him with submission, with honor and we often prayed for those men.

I am saying sure, we have freedom of speech, but there are principles from the Word of God that govern the way we exercise that freedom and submitting to God's Word on such matters is an important aspect of our core strength even when submitting to God's Word on those topics cramps our style or causes us to shut it or at least to adjust it big time.

And, by the way, if somebody would say, "Well, I am not sure I like having a pastor who would point out to me that I need to be careful about how I would speak about an issue like that," well, welcome to you you have got a pastor like that anyway. And also this. If the fact that I just raised that issue, if that honks you off a bit you actually realize that proves the point of the text? You actually proved the sermon. Thank you very much. So that big frown you have got going on your face, I can actually sit down right now because you proved it. I am not going to sit down because I want a full day's pay for today, but the bottom line is if you are getting a little bit antsy about all of this, because some people they want to have church on Sunday morning, but they don't want it to affect any other part of their life. That is not biblical Christianity and we will not have the impact that God wants us to have on this culture if we don't get the fact that thank God we have freedoms, but we have something more important than freedom, that is fidelity to the Word of God that guides and governs and sometimes restrains the way we exercise those freedoms.

Now what about the next section of verses? It is really fascinating what happens next and I think you can summarize this with this statement. Make the lamp of God's truth a clear and compelling option. And what Jesus says in verse 33 to 36 looks at this subject from a couple of different perspectives. In verse 33 it is about the responsibility for those sharing the truth. And Jesus says:

"No one, after lighting a lamp, puts it away in a cellar nor under a basket, but on the lampstand."²⁴

See, you might say, "Ok, pastor Viars, I heard what you just said. There are so many controversial topics going on in our culture, either nationally, internationally, locally, maybe the best thing for me to do is to not say anything."

I don't think that is the best option. What I would encourage you to do is to look for opportunities in contemporary culture to bring biblical truth into the discussion. In other words, to see that as an opportunity to exercise your freedom to be a bright light. And so, for example, on this Purdue president issue, since you have got me wound up about that. For you to task the Lord to help you to be a bright light even if you are in that category

²⁴ Luke 11:33.

of persons who don't fully agree with the decision or the process that was followed with words like this in your office.

You know, I have some questions or some concerns. But biblical love calls upon me to think and hope for the best, not assume the worst. So I want to be loving to the people involved in this situation. Or this. I am going to ask God to give me the strength to joyfully submit to the leadership he has placed in my life even if I have questions or disagreements with some aspects of that person or that process. I am going to focus on asking God to give me the strength to joyfully follow leadership. Or this. I am going to redouble my efforts to pray for our university president. He is going to need strength. He is going to need wisdom. He is going to need guidance and I am going to focus my attention on praying.

And listen. Face it. Words like that would stand out in many of the conversations that have been taking place in this community recently. And I realize some of you might say, "Now, you know what? If I started talking like that in the office, people wouldn't include me in the gossip anymore."

To which we would say what? Yeah, that might be good. In fact, I have this view. If you are following Christ, there ought to be times when you walk in the room and everybody else shuts up. And I am not talking about you being a prude and all that sort of thing or carrying around this huge family Bible, King James Version to work and banging everybody over the top of the head with it. But listen. There ought to be situations where people in your office would say, "You know what? We don't talk that way when he is around. We don't laugh about things like that when she is there, because we know they are not going to have anything to do with that."

And, again, I am not talking about being a prude. But I am talking about your exercising your freedom in a way that helps you to be a bright light for Christ.

Now the metaphor really changes in verse 34. It switches, because it also talks about the responsibility for those receiving the truth. And it is fascinating. Don't move away from this text or you will miss it. It says:

"The eye is the lamp of your body; when your eye is clear, your whole body also is full of light; but when it is bad, your body also is full of darkness."²⁵

You say, "What has that got to do with anything?" Lock on. This is really important. And we are talking about the grid, your frame of reference with which you evaluate ideas. And if that is skewed, everything we think, everything we believe as a result is going to be skewed as well. But as... on the other side of that, if our eye is clear, forget the, well, Jesus did that by the power of Satan. I need another sign, all those weak objections to keep us from truth. If our eye is clear, open to whatever God's Word would say to us on whatever topic, then the body—or in this case, metaphorically, the resultant

²⁵ Luke 11:34.

life style—is going to be clear as well. And that is where that fascinating series of verses fits not this, verses 27 and 28.

“While Jesus was saying these things, one of the women in the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, ‘Blessed is the womb that bore You and the breasts at which You nursed.’”²⁶

If there was ever a time for Jesus to acknowledge the place for worship of Mary, that was it. But what did he say? He said, “Forget that.”

“On the contrary, blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it.”²⁷

As he put it back into what we are talking about this morning, maybe I don’t want to hear the way God’s Word is going to direct and maybe even restrict the way I talk about this recent decision at Purdue. But I am going to hear God’s Word on that topic and I am going to observe it. I am going to see it as a great opportunity to be a light. Or maybe I have strong views about immigration reform. Or maybe I have strong views about health care. Maybe I don’t like some of what was said about Faith West, blah, blah, blah.

Sure, we all have freedom of speech. We have freedom of the press, but let’s never use those freedoms irresponsibly. Let’s use them to be a light.

Paul said it this way:

“For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh.”²⁸

Do we all see that? That is so important to what we are talking about this morning. Through love serve one another with exercising your freedoms.

That is, by the way, one of the things I really appreciated about our church family and the way you have responded to all this Faith West thing. Boy, that took on a life of its own. But as I watched people from our church participate in some of the public hearings, when I have watched people from our church write into the newspaper or maybe get involved in some of these online chats, there has not been one instance in that entire discussion where I thought somebody from our church discredited Christ. It appeared to me that people were exercising their freedoms, but they were exercising them in a way that was guided by the truth of the Word.

“For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh.”²⁹

²⁶ Luke 11:27.

²⁷ Luke 11:28.

²⁸ Galatians 5:13.

²⁹ Ibid.

Now what about this last section with the Pharisee and the lawyer? And you understand when the Bible talks about a lawyer it is not talking about someone like one of our contemporary attorneys. So don't pull out one of your favorite lawyer jokes. This is talking about an expert in religious law. That is what they were. And the principle is, for sake of time, don't add to the gospel in ways that make it harder for others to come to the light.

Jesus is invited to this Pharisee's house and the Pharisee was surprised he had not first ceremonially wash before the meal. And I should probably say before some smart aleck 10 year announces to his mom and dad I am no longer washing my hands before supper because Jesus never did, notice the key word, ceremonially. They had all these rules and rituals regarding hand washing and Jesus said, "Look, the gospel is not about that. It is about transformation of the heart. You are about the outside of the cup, but inside you are full of robbery." That is, by the way, why we try to have as few rules around here ministry wide. If people are going to reject our message, we want them to reject Christ, something that really matters, not some goofy rule.

Then one of the lawyers says:

"Well, teacher, when you say that, you insult us, too."³⁰

And Jesus essentially says, "Good, I am glad that came through. Woe to you as well."

And as an extended discussion, we don't have time to talk about it, but here is the point. Legalism takes away the key to true knowledge.

"Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge; you yourselves did not enter, and you hindered those who were entering."³¹

But, see, wouldn't it be a terrible thing if God looked at the way we chose to live before others and had a similar conclusion? You have taken away the key to knowledge. You exercise your freedom in such a way that the light of Christ and his Word have been obscured.

The passage ends in a very sober fashion, because you would have loved to have heard that those persons repented and believed, they changed the path that they were on. But they didn't.

"...the scribes and the Pharisees began to be very hostile and to question Him closely on many subjects, plotting against Him to catch Him in something He might say."³²

You know, with many pastors I would be in trouble tomorrow because I brought up a contemporary illustration that hits home with many people in this room and I talked with

³⁰ Luke 11:45.

³¹ Luke 11:52.

³² Luke 11:53-54.

you about how you need to be very, very careful that you let God's Word guide you. And for some of you, you are going to have to say, "You know what? I have got some repenting to do on that topic, because I have been exercising my freedom, but not in a biblical way."

In some churches that would be a problem. I am glad to be able to be a pastor here, because I know as long as I root whatever I say on the Word of God, I am in good stead, especially when I help our people apply it throughout the week. To the degree that that is true, that says you are the opposite of the people in this text. That is what makes us strong.

Let's stand together for prayer, shall we?