

Sermon for Pentecost 4 (Series C) / Independence Day
Text: Luke 7:36-50 Preached on 07-01-2007

Introduction:

On July 4th, 1776 the Declaration of Independence was signed, marking the birthday of the United States of America and the freedom that has set this great nation apart from the rest of the world. We know from the history of our nation, however, that our freedom has not come without great cost. It has cost the lives of countless men and women in uniform. We are painfully reminded of that truth each time the death of another American soldier is reported from Iraq. Yes, freedom is not without cost!

That is especially true regarding the FREEdom that we have in Christ. We hear all the time that our salvation is FREE! And it is! That does not mean, however, that it was not without cost. It cost God everything. It cost Him His own dearly beloved Son. No matter how hard we fight or how much blood we shed, it would never be sufficient to settle the debt we owe; it would never be enough to pay the price for our sins. So on this Fourth of July, let us put the fireworks down long enough to pick up our Bibles and read about the FREEdom that God has given us in Christ...

Theme: The FREEdom of Cancelled Sin!

Part I: Denied by the self-righteous

Part II: Displayed by the forgiven

Part I: Denied by the self-righteous

A particular Pharisee, named Simon, had sent a dinner invitation to Jesus. Not wanting to turn down an opportunity for ministry, Jesus accepted his invitation and went. While Jesus was reclining at his table, a woman of very questionable character came in and sat at His feet. She wet Jesus' feet with her tears and then wiped them with her hair; she kissed them and poured perfume on them. Here Jesus is the guest of honor; He's in the middle of a fancy meal; He's surrounded by religious dignitaries, and who strolls in? The town prostitute (or someone of equal, immoral character)! Yikes! Can you imagine what all the other guests must have been thinking?

Actually, we don't have to imagine. Luke tells us exactly what the host of the dinner party was thinking. Simon thought to himself, **"If this man were a prophet, He would know who is touching Him and what kind of woman she is"** (v. 39). Two judgments were made here. First, Simon

judged Jesus. In essence he thought, “If Jesus were a real man of God; if He really was who He claims to be, then He would know what a terrible reputation this woman has. He certainly would not allow her to touch Him. Apparently this Jesus isn’t such a holy man after all!” Even while making his judgment of Jesus, Simon was making a judgment of the woman at the same time. He thought, “Just look at her. What a disgusting sinner she is!” What’s the implication here? That she’s a sinner, but he is not. Or at the very least that she is a much greater sinner than he is. What is that other than blatant, in-your-face, self-righteousness?

Application:

Could it be that you and I are guilty of the same kind of self-righteousness? When we think things like, “Didn’t she have a child out of wedlock? Wasn’t his name in the paper for a DUI? What are they doing here? They don’t belong here,” then we become the holier-than-thou Pharisee in our text, snuffing our nose at worse *sinners than ourselves*. But therein lays the truth: We ourselves are sinners! Scripture makes that abundantly clear when it says, **“Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it” (James 2:10)**. It’s not hard to find someone who has committed more grievous sins than we have. Even a murderer on death row can think to himself, “At least I haven’t committed multiple murders like the guy in the cell next to me.” But God doesn’t grade on a curve, taking the upper 50% to Himself in Heaven and leaving the rest behind. No! He says that even the slightest sin is damnable! All it takes, then, to be judged for an eternity in Hell is one slip-up, no matter how small it may be.

Simon was one of many enemies seeking to pin such a slip-up on Jesus. Jesus even asked His enemies, **“Can any of you prove Me guilty of sin” (John 8:46)?** No one could. Later, when Jesus’ enemies were trying to find enough evidence to put Him to death, they hired false witnesses to tell lies about Him. But even then their testimonies did not agree. Despite being coached on what to say, they still couldn’t keep their story straight. It is as though God were telling the world, “There’s no one who can find one fault in My Son. He lived an absolutely holy, sin-free life.” Jesus, then, unlike us, has fulfilled every requirement demanded by God. And He did it for us.

Transition:

That message gives us FREEdom! Although this FREEdom is denied by the self-righteous, it is still...

Part II: Displayed by the forgiven

Jesus wanted to show Simon the FREEdom of cancelled sin. So He told him a story. Two men owed money. One man owed ten times as much as the other. Neither man could pay what he owed. So a very merciful moneylender cancelled the debt of both men. Simon caught the point of Jesus' parable right away: The man who had the bigger debt canceled would have greater appreciation and love for the moneylender.

Jesus then applied this parable to Simon and the sinful woman that had come into his house. Simon had shown no love for Jesus. He probably had ulterior motives for inviting Him to his home to begin with. The woman, on the other hand, showed nothing but love for Jesus. She washed His feet and poured perfume on them, all the while crying tears of joy. **“Therefore,”** Jesus said, **“I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven – for she loved much” (v. 47).** At first glance it might seem as though this woman was forgiven by Jesus because of the love she had shown to Him. But the parable Jesus told proves that just the opposite was the case. First the debt was cancelled and then love was shown to the moneylender. Think of it this way: If I were to say to you, “The grass is green because it received plenty of rain”, you would know why the grass is green. It didn't make itself green. That would be impossible! It is green because of the rain sent and given by God. In the same way, this woman was so appreciative and loving towards Jesus because of the forgiveness God had sent and given in Him. In other words, this woman knew who Jesus was. She simply responded to the cancellation of her sin. Her love, her attention, her tears were all an expression of a grateful, forgiven heart.

Application:

Isn't the same true for you and me today? Let's face it. We all owe a huge debt to God! As completely holy and righteous, He demands that we show Him perfect love and devotion 100% of the time. We owe God that much! Not only do we owe God perfect love; we also owe our neighbor the same. The only problem is that this is more than we can pay. No matter how hard we try; no matter how much good we pile up for ourselves, it is never enough. Sin is always right there, messing everything up. It's kind of like being in financial debt. Maybe you know what it feels like to live paycheck to paycheck. The credit card bills keep coming, the collection agencies keep calling and breathing down your neck, and the interest payments keep increasing. It can feel

like you're never going to get out of the hole. And so you're left feeling depressed, angry, and defeated.

That's exactly what we are like by nature. Maybe not financially, but certainly spiritually! We simply cannot live up to the expectations that we owe God. No matter how high on the spiritual ladder we think we are, we just keep falling short of God's holy requirements (**Romans 3:23**). By nature, then, all people are destined to pay for their sins eternally in Hell. Unless, of course, someone should come along and pay off our debt for us! That is exactly what Jesus did! His own words from the cross confirm it. With His dying breath Jesus declared to the world, **"It is finished"** (**John 19:30**). The Greek word here could literally be translated, "PAID!" In other words, with Jesus' death the bill for our sins has been met, paid in full. That message gives us FREEdom, the kind of FREEdom that changes the way we live our lives.

Conclusion:

If we go out and do something really stupid, something we know is wrong, something that leaves others (and God) really disappointed in us, what is it that brings genuine tears to our eyes? Is it mom or dad yelling at us and taking away our privileges? Or do the real tears flow when dad wraps his arms around us, squeezes tight and says, "I forgive you. I'm not holding anything against you. Don't let this bother you any more. I still love you. You're still precious to me." Isn't that when the tears really flow? They're tears of joy; tears of relief; tears of gratitude! And isn't that the kind of unconditional love that really motivates us to do the right thing the next time around? Not because we have to or out of fear of possible punishment, but because we've learned and grown from our past mistakes; because we've experienced the FREEdom that forgiveness gives first hand!

My friends, isn't that why we're here today? We are here, on this holiday weekend, celebrating not only the freedom that we enjoy as Americans, but also the FREEdom that God has given us in Christ. We're celebrating that FREEdom, not because we've managed to cancel our sins by what we've done, but solely because Christ has already canceled them for us: By living perfectly; by dying innocently; by rising triumphantly! That message gives us true and everlasting FREEdom. Even though it is (1) denied by the self-righteous, it is (2) displayed by the forgiven. That's who we are. We ARE forgiven! Heaven IS ours! That's *The FREEdom of Cancelled Sin!* Amen!