



Catalog No. 768

1 Peter 2:11-17

Eighth Message

Brian Morgan

April 1, 1990

A SLAVERY THAT IS FREEDOM

SERIES: A PILGRIM'S LIFE IN AN ALIEN LAND

One of my most enjoyable experiences this year was seeing the hit musical *Les Misérables*, the saga of a student revolt in France following the French Revolution. It is a story of the hunger for peace and freedom. One of the most inspiring songs in the musical score is “Do You Hear The People Sing?”

Do you hear the people sing?
Singing the song of angry men?
It is the music of a people
Who will not be slaves again!
When the beating of your heart
Echoes the beating of the drums
There is a life about to start
When tomorrow comes!

Will you join in our crusade?
Who will be strong and stand with me?
Beyond the barricade
Is there a world you long to see?
Then join in the fight
That will give you the right to be free!

Will you give all you can give
So that our banner may advance?
Some will fall, and some will live.
Will you come up and take your chance?
The blood of the martyrs
Will water the meadows of France!

As I listened to these lyrics I realized that this song could also be the world's theme song this year in its cry for freedom. Beginning in China, this cry spread to East Berlin, Hungary, Romania, and now Lithuania. People long to be free, to be slaves to no one.

The revolution in *Les Misérables* was a failure. The student leader ultimately sings of disillusionment. Their hunger for political freedom did not realize their dream, but instead ended in death and despair for the revolutionaries. Likewise, as the euphoria of freedom and peace wears off in our own world, it strikes me that we too are beginning to see disillusionment. What is happening in Eastern Europe anyway? Are people really free? We must remember that “freedom” brings with it freedom for abortions, freedom for licentiousness, freedom to import pornography. Some fear the uniting of the two Germanys. They remember the Holocaust. Similarly, freedom in Romania has resulted in oppression of the Hungarian-speaking minority. As C. S. Lewis once said, “No arrangement of bad eggs makes a good omelet.”

In the text today, 1 Peter 2:11-17, the apostle writes about a different kind of freedom, a transcendent freedom that liberates and transforms the soul. He will tell us that true freedom is born in the most oppressive circumstances. Whether you are in a prison, a dysfunctional home, or an oppressive workplace you can find this kind of freedom. Enter into it and you will have an influence that will have a great impact for the Kingdom of God.

That is what the Christians of Peter's day were looking for. This little group, dispersed over the Roman Empire, was hardly organized, had few resources, and was treated like outcasts. Their question was, “The whole world hates us. How do we exert an influence for the cause of Christ?”

Typically, in our own environment when Christians face that kind of hostility our response is to go to extremes. We either wall ourselves inside of a Christian ghetto and hurl words of condemnation to the unbelieving world, or we go out into the world pushing Jesus on people. Peter suggests neither of those approaches, but rather a third way—true liberty of the spirit. He spells out the principle in verses 11-12, and then works it out in various forms of life, such as government, the workplace, and the home. Today, we will look at how to work it out in the realm of government.

I. Where Is Our Freedom Found? (2:11)

Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul. (NASB)

A. By knowing our true identity: Citizens of heaven

Peter says that before we can find true freedom we must know our identity. Who are you? Today, we are being told that our identity is strongly related to our parents. If you are having trouble in life, go back and relive your old history, play the old tapes, and find that parental blessing. If you do not get it, we are told, your situation is hopeless. Peter says, however, that that is a false perspective because as Christians we are not citizens of this world. No one here can give us the freedom for which we long. We are God's beloved people, and thus citizens of heaven. While on earth, we are aliens, sojourners, pilgrims merely passing through. We are journeying by stages to our heavenly Zion, picking up our tents and moving on. Our citizenship, our freedom belongs in another land—in the new heaven and the new earth—so we should not expect to find life here. Therefore, as citizens of heaven Peter issues a call to purity, to abstain from fleshly lusts that wage war against the soul.

I picture my life as a pilgrim journeying with a backpack. Accompanying me is an ugly dog on a leash, and it is bent on my destruction. Though I have a new nature and a new heart, this dog—the flesh—still walks with me all the way home to Zion. The worst thing I can do is feed him. If I do, his appetite will grow, and thus I increase his arsenal to destroy my life.

Do you find that true? No matter how old you are this dog travels with you—and he has quite an appetite. If you give in to lustful appetites by feeding them, they grow greater. They ultimately consume you, and you become a slave to them. They shut the windows to heaven and wage war against your soul so that you have difficulty appropriating heavenly life. Thus, Peter says, “Say no to these fleshly urges. Do not feed the dog. Starve him, and feed the spirit with eternal life.” As one writer says,

God insists on having the heart, which He cannot have if pleasure has it...if nature is pampered, grace must be starved...The earthly senses must be made spiritual; the sensual heart purified; the wandering mind fixed; the foolish imagination made sober.¹

B. Not from this world: Aliens and sojourners on earth

The way we act when we visit a foreign country as a pilgrim is how we are to live in this world. When I went to Romania last year, I carried my passport with me everywhere. Inside was a picture and information about me: "Name: Brian Gilchrist Morgan. Birthplace: California, U.S.A." I knew I was in Romania only temporarily. I was not there on a vacation or for pleasure. I was not there to find my life. I was there because I had a mission.

We discovered on our arrival that some of our bags had missed the connection, so we had to stay in Bucharest several extra days. One evening, I suggested that we go to dinner. I found a beautiful restaurant, and we were given the upper floor where a lovely table was spread with food. I started eating and enjoying myself, until I saw my friend Bill looking sullen and quiet. I asked him what was wrong. He said, "I can't eat." When I asked why, he said, "Because my friends can't eat. We are here to give them spiritual food and they don't have anything to eat. So I can't eat."

That is the essence of how we are to live as pilgrims. We are not here in Silicon Valley on a vacation, to pamper our lusts. We are here on a mission. Therefore, we have a call to purity as citizens of heaven.

Once we learn our true identity as free citizens of heaven, Peter tells us how to express our freedom.

II. The Expressions of Our Freedom (2:13-14, 16-17)

Submit yourselves to every human institution on account of the Lord, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right...Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God. Honor all men; love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.

A. Obedience, not licentiousness

As free citizens of heaven, how should you express your freedom? Peter says, "Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves to God."

Remember the text in scripture about the IRS agent who asked Jesus to pay a tax? Jesus said to Peter, "What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of earth collect taxes? Do they collect it from sons or strangers?" Peter correctly answered, "From strangers." Jesus replied, "You're right. Consequently, the sons are exempt, or free. But lest we give him offense, go to the sea, throw in a hook, and take the first fish that comes up. When you open its mouth you will find a shekel. Take that and give it to him for both you and me."

So the sons are free. April 15th will come, and you are free. However, lest you give offense to the IRS, pay them what you owe. Jesus says that the expression of freedom is obedience, not licentiousness; submission, not lawlessness. We feel just the opposite in the process of growing up. When we are young, we yearn to be free. We do not want anyone telling us what to do. We cannot wait for the day when you are in charge.

When I was in third grade I had a French teacher, Madame Spencer, who taught the whole elementary school French. Since I hated French, I decided to exercise my freedom and chose not to study. Yet I found by exercising that freedom I did not liberate my soul but bound it up in a knot because the test was coming. To handle the situation

I decided to exercise my freedom some more. The morning of the test I told my mother I was sick, and she allowed me to stay home. I continued to exercise my freedom by doing what I wanted the whole day. The next day, however, I had to go to school and face Madame Spencer.

I realized that expressing my freedom did not liberate me, but wrapped my inner man in garments of pain, and gave me more bondage than if I had submitted to any human law. So in the fourth grade I decided to turn over a new leaf. I studied until I learned everything perfectly. I will never forget the liberty I had going to school to face Madame Spencer. She called me up to the desk, expecting me to fail. When I got 100% on my vocabulary, she was amazed and delighted. That was true liberty!

In college, I discovered that if I continued to be obedient and mastered two quarters of Italian, I had the freedom to study in Italy for six months. Students who were obedient were the most liberated in the Italian culture, but those who were not were enslaved because they were not at liberty to penetrate the culture and enter into conversations. That is the liberty of which Peter is writing. Act as free men but do not use it as a covering for evil. Use it as bondslaves to God. You become free to be who you are only when you are a slave to Jesus Christ.

George MacDonald, the great children's writer of the last century, wrote:

True liberty lies in obedience: ...a good dog does not bite because he is not inclined to bite. He loves you, but you do not say that he is high morally because he is not inclined to do anything bad. But if we, choosing, against our likeness, to do the right, go on so until we are enabled by doing it to see into the very loveliness and essence of the right, and know it to be altogether beautiful, and then at last never think of doing evil, but delight with our whole souls in doing the will of God, why then, do you not see, we combine the two, and we are free indeed, because we are acting like God out of the essence of our (new) nature, knowing good and evil, and choosing the good with our whole hearts and delighting in it.

That is the essence of true freedom.

B. Obedience across the board

Peter says that this kind of obedience is to apply across the board to governments and every human institution. So he says, "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to the king as one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right...Honor all men; love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king."

This issue is confusing to us at times, but the apostles were clear about the difference between church and state. They understood that God's Kingdom is forged through the interaction of a pagan, secular state and a spiritual kingdom. When God first planted the nation of Israel, they were both a spiritual and a political kingdom. In the New Testament, we see that when believers failed to discern the difference, they used the sword to further the kingdom, causing great trouble in the process. Because of her corruption God took the sword of the state away from Israel, gave it to unbelieving Gentile rulers (such as the Syrians, Greeks, Persians, and the Romans), and used that sword even against his own people to purge her.

The prophets predicted a new kingdom coming that would be birthed not with the earthly sword, but by the sword of the Spirit. There would be a King who would not coerce people, but win their hearts, and the kingdom would be a kingdom of the heart. The secular, unbelieving people in the state would still have secular authority,

but God would work in his sovereignty between the two to spread his kingdom on earth.

We can see an example of that when we open to the Gospel of Luke. Luke tells us of the Roman government's census, a greedy process to count the people and then increase taxation, that was opposed by the Jews. Yet it was God behind the census, changing all the wheels of Roman government and administration to get one little pregnant couple on their donkey from Galilee to Bethlehem to fulfill a 700-year-old prophesy! I can hear Joseph telling Mary, "Dear, we have to fulfill the prophesy. Just obey the king, the Lord knows what he is doing. I know it's troublesome, no hospitals or anything, but we have to go."

Men of faith have seen that principle at work ever since. God has given the state the sword, and he is sovereign. As we have seen in the last year, nations are a drop in the bucket. What did God do with Communism? It was his tool to create a spiritual appetite among nations. After 40 years in some places, it is now fulfilled, and Communism is finished. The full revival awaits us.

God is in charge, and that is why we do not have to fight the state. Therefore, we need to submit to the police, the IRS agents, and pay the electric bill on time. This time of year we ought to start water rationing because the city asks us to do that. If the city wants a permit when we build, we must obey the codes and file for a permit. We must not be an irritant, but be gracious in every way. We are trying to be good neighbors here in our church with our parking problem. It is legal for us to park on the street, but the city says there is a problem because the neighbors are upset. Therefore, we choose to come by shuttle to be gracious. We need to go beyond the laws so we are not an irritant.

The Christian is free, but that freedom should make him a better earthly citizen. Even though this is not our home, we are to be better than the real citizens. Peter says, "When you obey, don't just do it externally, but do it from the heart." That is why he uses terms like "honor," "love," "fear." Give the people in authority respect in their offices, even though they are unbelievers.

I got a letter last week from one of our missionaries in Africa. He describes how he learned the very truth of his own freedom on an outing he took from Kenya to West Africa. In West Africa he bought some cans of tuna fish, which is not available or allowed in Kenya. As he was crossing the border he had five cans of tuna wrapped unobtrusively in a white blanket. He writes of his encounter with an agent when he was asked, "Do you have anything to declare?":

"Nothing except my computer, and I have documentation for that." Silently, I added, "and five cans of tuna that you might like to know about, but it's such a small thing."

The agent waved me on, and I pushed the luggage cart into "safety," away from any more uncomfortable questions. I struck up a conversation with another agent while we waited for some fellow passengers to finish with formalities. As we prepared to leave, half the baggage fell off the cart, including my innocent-looking box with blanket and tuna. This second agent came up, asked if I had cleared everything, and wondered out loud what was in that box. "A blanket from Mali," I informed him, carefully telling the truth and hiding the truth at the same time.

"Are you sure?" he asked. I made motions to open it for him, and he declined. I was enjoying the proverbial cold sweat by then.

We got everything home safely. "Now I can relax," I thought mistakenly. But in the coming days I kept replaying the scene in the airport, and hearing the question, "Are you sure?" I repeatedly reminded God that it was just a small thing, not worth bothering about. But those five cans of tuna refused to be quiet. What made

it worse was my commitment to integrity in the small secret things as the foundation for integrity in the more visible public arena of leadership.

After three days of unsuccessful mental wrangling I agreed with God that he could bother me about my tuna and I would listen. The result? A phone call to the Principal Customs Officer at the airport to explain what I had done. "You violated the law," he informed me. "But don't bring the tuna back here or it will only create confusion. I am a Christian man like yourself, and I encourage you to ask God to forgive you. In the future, we expect you, as a resident of Kenya, to follow our laws."

True freedom liberates the soul. We express it not in license, but in obedience. Christians should be the best citizens.

If we are pilgrims going to Zion, our new heavenly destination, what is the goal of our freedom in exercising this kind of freedom and obedience? Peter tells us that of all people in the world we have the highest of callings.

III. The Goal of Our Freedom: Winning Hearts (2:12, 15)

Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation...For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men.

A. The setting: unjustified slander

The apostle says that the goal of our freedom as Christians is to win the hearts of evil and angry men who oppose us. In Peter's day, just having the name "Christian" subjected one to immediate scorn, ridicule, abuse, and unjust slander. Christians were accused of cannibalism because they "ate" the body and blood of Jesus. They were accused of incest because they greeted brothers and sisters with a holy kiss. They were charged with boycotting and interfering with trade, setting slave against master, child against parent, and wives against husbands. The most serious charge of their alleged disloyalty, however, concerned Caesar and the Roman government.

B. The method of winning hearts

What were these Christians to do about these unrighteous accusations and slander? Peter says, "When you are a victim of unjust suffering, make no defense through speech. Do not open your mouth." That is not explicit here, but in the examples that follow, the apostle first cites Jesus' response to his trial on trumped-up charges: He said nothing in his defense, he was silent as a lamb before the shearers. Peter next uses the example of a wife with an unbelieving husband, telling her, "Win the husband to the word without a word." Thus, when you are the subject of unjustified slander or abuse, do not defend yourself. Rather, your defense is continued righteous behavior.

People who are silent really have nothing to defend. Peter shows that unjust suffering lifts you up to a stage where the lights are turned on to a high intensity so the pagan world can observe you. Observing your continued good deeds, their mouths, which were once open wide to slander, are now closed in silence. They have nothing to say. If you follow that with even more good deeds and say nothing, good deeds are not only a proper defense, but they become an offensive weapon as well. They move the hearts of those attacking you, and they actually have the power to convert the heart. Instead of the accuser's mouth being open wide in slander, it shuts in silence when you do good. The next time it opens, rather than uttering slander it opens to glorify

God. The text says that it is open wide in praise for the day of “visitation.” That is a word play, since “visitation” is from the same root as the word “observe.” The world observes you, and behind the world is the Lord observing them. On the day of visitation they turn from your stage and they face outward on the same stage to glorify God with you. What a day that will be!

After Peter wrote this letter, these words had an impact on Christians for about 100 years. A wonderful document by an unknown author of the second century describes the behavior of these believers. It is wonderful because it describes the very thing that Peter says. This author writes:

The Christians are not distinguished from other men by country, by language, nor by civil institutions. For they neither dwell in cities by themselves, nor use a peculiar tongue, nor lead a singular mode of life. They dwell in the Grecian or barbarian cities, as the case may be; they follow the usage of the country in dress, food, and the other affairs of life. [What he is saying is that the Christians did not wall themselves in a Christian ghetto; they walked as full citizens of the culture in every single way. You could not tell them apart by any physical attributes.] Yet they present a wonderful and confessedly paradoxical conduct. They dwell in their own native lands, but as strangers. They take part in all things, as citizens; and they suffer all things, as foreigners. Every foreign country is a fatherland to them, and every native land is foreign. They marry, like all others; they have children; but they do not cast away their offspring. They have the table in common, but not wives. They live upon the earth, but are citizens of heaven. They obey the existing laws, and excel the laws by their lives. They love all, and are persecuted by all. They are unknown, and yet they are condemned. They receive scorn, and they give honor. They do good, and are punished as evil-doers. When punished, they rejoice, as being made alive.

May that be our legacy!

To me, *Les Miserables* is a production about the gospel—a gospel of deed, not a gospel of speech. After the revolution fails, another story is written about a greater freedom, a freedom of the soul that the hero finds while he is in prison. He is liberated to a new spiritual freedom and becomes a man of integrity. Now he is willing to suffer the loss of earthly goods, and he gives the rest of his life to caring for the oppressed. In the last scene he is received into heaven by an army of believers welcoming him to the place of freedom. That is the freedom Peter is sharing with us.

For the last eight months our Wednesday morning men’s group has had the privilege of being in the presence of a man like this. His name was John Van Deist, and last week he died at the age of 38. He was with us as a pilgrim in a foreign land for only eight months. During that time he was imprisoned by a brain tumor, but his whole life was dedicated in obedience to Jesus Christ, loving his wife and children, and doing good for others. His whole desire was to take others to Zion with him.

His memorial service last Wednesday was a moving time. There were several hundred people with their mouths open wide at the day of John’s visitation, giving praise to the God of John Van Deist. The most powerful testimony was that of an orthodox Jew, Avron ——. In Poland at the age of seven, Avron was hidden underneath the floor boards of a synagogue to protect him from soldiers, otherwise he would have been killed for his faith of Judaism. The scars of persecution are so deep that Avron would never set foot in a Christian church, even

to attend his son’s wedding after his son had converted to Christianity. Last week, however, he stood in front of a pulpit of a Christian church with his mouth open wide.

His first words were, “I am Jewish, but I loved John Van Deist. John used to take me to the bus stop, and he would describe his brain tumor to me and what he was going through. I don’t know how he got through it.” Then he gave John the greatest compliment a Jew can give a Christian. He said, “John was a religious man.” As an orthodox Jew, what Avron meant was that John was devoted to God. Then he sang out a beautiful Hebrew prayer. The last words he had shared with John were, “Trust in God.” This is the true freedom, born in oppression, that liberates the soul. It carries the pilgrims with it, and converts the heart.

In honor of John, I would like to read to you the finale of *Les Miserables*, the song of freedom, true freedom:

Do you hear the people sing
Lost in the valley of the night?
It is the music of a people
Who are climbing to the light.
For the wretched of the earth
There is a flame that never dies.
Even the darkest night will end
And the sun will rise.

They will live again in freedom
In the garden of the Lord.
They will walk behind the plowshare
They will put away the sword.
The chain will be broken
And all men will have their reward.

Will you join in our crusade?
Who will be strong and stand with me?
Somewhere beyond the barricade
Is there a world you long to see?
Do you hear the people sing?
Say, do you hear the distant drums?
It is the future that they bring
When tomorrow comes!

Because we live as aliens and sojourners in a hostile world, we must not fall into the temptation of befriending the world so as to have influence. We must not allow our roots to grow too deep. This not only damages the soul, but it destroys our impact upon the world. On the other hand we must not err on the other extreme and isolate ourselves from the world, feeling that our temporary stay here on earth is insignificant. Rather we have the highest of callings, that of winning the hearts of men and women, boys and girls, even our enemies, through our good deeds. Seeing our proper identity as aliens and sojourners allows us to have a lasting impact upon the world without being stained by it.

1. John Fletcher in David Lyle Jeffrey, ed., *A Burning and Shining Light: English Spirituality in the Age of Wesley* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 354-5. This is a fascinating book, rich in doctrinal readings from ages past.

© 1990 Peninsula Bible Church