

# LET ME OUT!

## Sermon, June 30, 2019

### Text: Galatians 5:1, 13-25

*(I told this opening excerpt during the Time with the Children which precedes the sermon; I include it here in the sermon manuscript– slc)*

Paul Harvey, Jr. (son of the late Paul Harvey, radio broadcaster famed for his *The Rest of the Story* vignettes) wrote about one of his dad's stories of a fascinating research project at the University of Oklahoma where they realized Dr. Doolittle's dream ... talking to the animals. And the animal, in this case, "talked" back! The subject was a 15 year old female chimpanzee named Washoe. This chimpanzee had been taught and seemed to have well learned 140 signs used in the standard American Sign Language used by the deaf, but there remained debate as to the significance of this accomplishment ... how much could be interpreted as original expression on behalf of the chimpanzee, and how much was simply "monkey see, monkey do" imitation? Dr. Roger Fouts wanted to find out, so in 1970 he brought Washoe to the University of Oklahoma's Institute of Primate Studies ... up until that point in her life, Washoe had been raised by a scientist couple who raised her almost like a human child; now she was more or less confined to the laboratory. Day in and day out, test after test, slowly but surely Dr. Fouts and his research team determined the chimp was truly capable of original communication. Instead of simply imitating some human's actions, it was determined the chimp really could express thoughts of her own in sign language humans could understand and carry on actual conversation with humans! Mr. Harvey continued, *"Now, remember, Washoe was a pampered animal in the University laboratory – well fed, physically comfortable, safe from harm. And yet, since she has learned to express herself in language humans could understand, there is one phrase – a sentence, really – that she expressed more than any other."*

The phrase? "LET ME OUT."<sup>1</sup>

We just sang, *"Make me a captive Lord, and then I shall be free; force me to render up my sword and I shall conqueror be. I sink in life's alarms when by myself I stand, imprison me within thine arms and strong shall be my hand.* It is one of the delightful paradoxes of the Christian faith .... when we are held "captive" by Jesus Christ, obedient to Him as our master and Lord, then and only then are we truly free, free to live as God designed us to live. In our reading from Galatians, Paul writes, *"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free."* As mentioned during the children's sermon, no one wants to live un-free, imprisoned, confined. It's a bit of a silly illustration, but I like the story about a husband and wife who were writing out their living will. The husband was adamant. *"Just so you know, I would never want to live in a vegetative state, dependent on some machine and fluids from a bottle. If I ever get to that state, I just want you to pull the plug and free me from my misery."* The wife thought a moment, smiled, got up from the table ... then she unplugged the television and threw out all his beer.

Again, no one wants to live un-free. Imprisoned. Confined. "Let me out!" our spirits cry. Nobody or no thing wants to live in a cage, whether it be a literal cage or a figurative cage. No one really wants to be imprisoned by any thing, place, person or habit. We want to be free. And I believe freedom is at the heart of God's will for us in Jesus Christ, Who told us, *"You shall know the truth, and the truth will set you free."*

Thursday we will again celebrate the anniversary of our nation's birth, that 4th of July in 1776 when our forbearers declared "Let us out!" They declared their independence ... their freedom *from* British rule. We were freed from subjugation, freed from taxation without representation, freed from unlawful search and seizure, freed from the constraints of tyranny. But we were not just freed FROM; we were also freed FOR. We were freed FOR life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, freed to pursue all the good and right and true things that lead to genuine happiness. We were NOT freed, however, to do whatever we please. True freedom has limits, and the Constitution places our beloved freedoms within the context of certain limits ... because unlimited freedom can become as much a tyrant as any monarch or dictator. Some things we pursue in our relentless pursuit of happiness can wind up being more enslaving than the worst tyrant.

Paul writes, *"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."* The Bible talks about being freed from sin, freed from guilt, freed from judgment, freed from fear. Jesus Christ and His sacrificial life have indeed freed us from all that and more, yes. But there were some in Galatia who thought being free in Christ meant being free to do anything they pleased. They could only equate freedom with complete independence. They thought true freedom meant having no constraints whatsoever, being absolutely autonomous and sovereign over our own lives. These people concluded that if Christ has set us free, we must be free for anything that strikes our fancy, anything our hearts desired. Besides the callous illogic such reasoning entails (*as if Jesus died for our sins so we could keep on doing whatever we want*), Paul intimates there is no quicker way to become enslaved again ... enslaved to passions, appetites, addictions and other destructive ways of "life."

<sup>1</sup> More of Paul Harvey's *The Rest of the Story*, Paul Harvey, Jr., Bantam Books, NY, c. 1981. pp. 113-114

There were not only those in Galatia who thought this way; there are many who like to think, *"I'm only free if I can do whatever my heart desires."* At its extreme, you have Enlightenment French philosopher Denis Diderot, who is famously (or, infamously) quoted as saying, *"Man will never be truly free until the last king is strangled with the entrails of the last priest."* That's a bit, um, graphic, but to many like Denis Diderot, government and religion, the "king" and the "priest," put restraints on our freedom with their arbitrary rules, artificial mores and restrictive laws ... if we could just be free of all religious and/or state-imposed restraint, then we would be truly free.

Now, come on. *"I'm only free if I can do whatever my heart desires"* really is sophistry, pure and simple. First, let's use our common sense; we know freedom needs structure and protection and order which only comes by moral stability and the rule of law, if for no other reason than to keep others from impinging on our freedom, rights, property, etc. Second, we all know that our hearts, even the hearts of the very best among people, are just cauldrons of conflicting desires. There are all kinds of things I think I would really like to do, not all of which will enable me to freely live and/or to live fully and well, and not all of which will help others, whose lives I touch, live freely and well. For one very simple example, I'm a somewhat large man in my sixties who would like to live for a long time; I would also like to eat Allie's donuts morning, noon and night. These are incompatible desires of my heart (as well as incompatible TO my heart). C.S. Lewis succinctly pointed out that giving in to all our desires leads to everything that is the REVERSE of health and freedom. I want to live to a ripe old age and I want to eat whatever I want whenever I want; I can't have it both ways. Our hearts want contradictory things.

The men and women who launched the great experiment in liberty in 1776 had a vision of freedom based upon the fear of God and the respect for His good law. It was not a vision of unrestrained licentiousness and stupid self-indulgence. I've used this analogy before, and some of you are probably tired of hearing it, but it'll be new for others and I think bears repeating: A train operates with great power and freedom when it remains on the track designed for it. A train can be of great service to others, it makes the best use of its gifts and design, if it stays on the track. If a train ignores and/or breaks "free" of its restraint, if a train tries to forge its own way, what happens? **Train wreck!** The train causes great damage and harm to nearby property and people (as well as to itself), it gets mired in mud, and it is no longer *at liberty* to do what it was designed to do. The "restrictive" track unleashes the train's potential; it sets the train free. Now, on one hand, God's laws are restrictive, but on the other hand, like those train tracks, they set us at liberty, they unleash us to live our lives to the fullest. We "jump the tracks" of God's good law, and we get mired in "dirt," we cause damage and harm to ourselves and to those near us, we are no longer at liberty to operate as we are designed to operate, and our lives become living train wrecks.

Diderot also somewhat loftily proclaimed, *"Only great passions, can elevate the soul to great things."* But unrestrained passions, Monsieur Diderot, can also cause great destruction to the human soul and do anything BUT elevate and free us, not to mention the destruction our unrestrained passions can cause others. Real freedom is not found in the ability to do whatever we want, because we want too many contradictory (and consequently, self-destructive) things. Freedom is not so much the freedom to do what we want; true freedom is found in the ability and desire to wholly want what is good, to wholly want what we were designed to do, to wholly and freely live into the world for which we were made by God's divine design. We more often than not become less liberated because we are doing whatever we want, instead of wholly wanting and doing what we really need. For another example, when is a fish really free? Not when it has "escaped" its "restrictive" world of the water. A fish is not free flopping about on the land, flying through the sky, or sitting on a sofa watching television ... it's only really free when it is *in the water*, because it was built and designed for the water. Again, real freedom is found in the ability and desire and determination to wholly want and do what we were designed for; to live as we were meant to live, and to do so in the element which best enhances our freedom and enables us to live to our fullest.

In the little time remaining, I'd like to direct attention to verse 13 (emphasis added): *"You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" That's our "water;" that's our element! LOVE. To serve in love, to live in love. We were created and designed to be loved and to give love, to "serve one another in love," and real freedom liberates us to truly love, to wholly and constructively serve those we love. Real freedom is always compatible with love. There's so much more I could say on this, but for now I'll just reiterate what I believe Paul to be saying, "Don't ever use your freedom in such a way as to destroy love or your ability to love!" Verse 17: "For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the spirit, and the spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want." For a short "primer" in religious vocabulary, here are two simple Biblical definitions/synonyms:*

SIN IS SLAVERY. SALVATION IS FREEDOM.

Sin always enslaves us, sin always makes us less than what we were created to be, sin always hinders our ability to love well, sin always cripples us, sin always lessens and limits us. And salvation is all about freedom, about what God is doing in Jesus Christ to free us to be who we were created to be. In obedience to Jesus Christ and by the liberating power of His spirit we are freed from our self-indulgent pasts, freed for living free and fulfilling lives, and freed to serve one another in love ... for love is what we were created for; it is the environment into which we are freed to best live as our loving Creator designed us to live.