

Freedom in Christ

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Open your Bibles please to the book of Genesis, chapter 15. This morning, what a joy to be here it is. I have come to know and love you people. I even love the pastor and that's the grace of God, amen. But anyway, I'm thrilled to be here and I'm so glad you're here today because you'll pray for the services and come back for the afternoon service. Today, of course, is Freedom Day. You are celebrating freedom. Freedom really is found in a person and that person is Jesus Christ. The Bible says, "If the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed." Freedom from fear. Freedom from death. Freedom from eternity. It's all found not in a thing, it's found in a person and that person is Jesus Christ.

This morning, I want us to look at a man named Abraham. See how Abraham found this great freedom in Jesus Christ. Look in your Bible please, Genesis 15, verse 6, referring to Abraham it says,

6 And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness. 7 And he said unto him, I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it. 8 And he said, Lord GOD, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it? 9 And he said unto him, Take me an heifer of three years old, and a she goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon. 10 And he took unto him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against another: but the birds divided he not. 11 And when the fowls came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away. 12 And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him.

Look down, please, at verse 17.

17 And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces.

As I was a boy growing up, the great social event every week was this: every Saturday afternoon at the movies they had what they called a kid's matinee but today personally I would not go to the movies because of the character, the content and the crowd but at that

time was different. Every Saturday afternoon they had a kid's movie: Abbott and Costello; the Three Stooges. No reference to the deacons by the way but Abbott and Costello and the Three Stooges. Most of the time however, it was a Western. That's how it worked when I was young: for 5 cents you got into the movies, another nickel and you got a bushel of popcorn and a gallon of pop. Now, after you watched a few hundred Westerns, there are certain phrases that click in your mind. Sometime during the movie, the good guy tells the bad guy, "I want you out of town by sundown." I can tell you right then how movie is going end. The last scene is the main street in town, around this corner comes the good guy wearing a white hat and a gun on his hip. Around this corner comes the bad guy wearing a black hat, a gun on his hip. They face each other. Somebody makes a move and two shots ring out. Every Western I ever saw, the camera pans in on the bad guy. He's standing there smiling, holding a gun. All of a sudden, he would crash. He would fall. We would holler, "Wowee!" That's not Baptists for amen, okay? We'd holler, "Wowee!" and we'd throw our popcorn, throw our pop. How did the movie end? It ended with a showdown at sundown.

God comes and speaks to Abraham when the sun is going down. This is Abraham's showdown at sundown, the greatest trial in his life. What an interesting story this is. Number 1: first of all, I want you to see this morning very simply the despondency of Abraham. Abraham is despondent. He's discouraged. Look in your Bible at verse 1, "After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram." Abraham is fearful. Wait a minute, first of all my friend, we read Abraham is fearful and we're surprised. Of all people, why would Abraham be fearful? Number 1: first of all, he just had a fantastic military victory. A handful of lay troops, he defeated a great coalition of many nations together. He was a national hero. Number 2: Abraham was very wealthy. With all of his assets, he was probably the wealthiest man on the face of the earth; the Bill Gates, the Warren Buffett of Bible times. Number 3: Abraham was extremely popular. To this day, that part of the country, they find pieces of potsherd, broken pottery that say, "Abram, the great man of the East." Abraham was a very popular man. Before Abraham was married, probably the most beautiful woman that ever lived except for your wife, her name was Sarah. Now, when Sarah was 90 years old, men still looked at her and desired to have her. Now put that together, friend. Here was Abraham, a great military hero, all kinds of money, popular, married wife and yet the Bible says that Abraham was fearful.

My friend, we've seen here, first of all, that the surprise, why would Abraham be fearful? Number 2: may I surmise? Number 1: first of all, Abraham is fearful because of the futility of life. Abraham had everything life could give. What else could he want? What else could he acquire? He had everything yet inside he is miserable. He is miserable until one day he found Christ. The Bible, Jesus said, "Abraham saw my day and was glad." Until he looked down the tunnel of time and saw Christ, he was miserable, he was wretched. There was something missing in Abraham's life. Dear friend, I want to emphasize something: you may exist without Jesus Christ, the truth is, you cannot really live until you know Jesus Christ. May I emphasize something? Bible Christianity is just not for the cemetery and intensive care. Bible Christianity is something we live by. We walk with the King. We rejoice in our salvation. Bible salvation is for living. Jesus said,

"I have come that you might have life, not death. You might have life. You might have it more abundantly." Jesus Christ said, "I am the way, the truth and the life." Real life is found not in things, it's found in a relationship with a person and that person is Jesus Christ, God's Son.

I was preaching up in Wisconsin some weeks ago and on Tuesday, a young lady brought her boss. The man had three earned doctor's degrees, he worked for a large thing up there, ?? Lumber and the man came and sat in the service. I preached that night. The man listened intently. During the invitation, "If you want to get saved, come to Christ. Come and tell the preacher." We sing a hymn. Many folks came to get saved. That man did not. The young lady afterward brought him down and I talked with him for a minute. They took him back and introduced him to her pastor and I saw the pastor and that man going into his study. Pretty soon they came out and the man walked up to me and said, "Sir, in the pastor's study tonight I accepted Christ as my Savior." Now, that man came back to revival every single night. One night he brought five coworkers. Three of them came down the aisle to receive Christ. I quote a great revival there, we had about 50 people saved in that church of 200. I left town about two months later. I went with the pastor to play golf and we're talking. I said, "How is that guy doing that God saved?" He said, "You won't believe it. That guy has read the Bible through four times already." He said, "Every week he brings somebody from work. Brother Mark," he said, "something after revival. I didn't preach. We had testimonies. That man stood up and said, 'My dear friend brought me to this revival.'" he said. "I sat there and heard a man preach. God spoke to my heart." He said, "Afterward I went into the pastor's study and honestly and sincerely I received Christ as my Savior." He said, "To this week down at the shop, they don't know what to think of me. One guy came up and said, 'Boy, you sure are happy. You must have gotten a big raise.' Another guy came up and said, 'You can tell me, you're smiling all the time. Are you in love?'" He said, "I told them this, I am in love. I'm in love with Jesus Christ." The gentleman said, "I'm a scientist but I can tell you something, Jesus Christ is real. He's alive and he changed my life." Good news, he can change your life. God is no respecter of persons. What that man found wasn't in money or fame, he found it in Christ and my friend, you can find this same thing in the Son of God.

First of all, it could have been the futility of life that affected Abraham. Number 2: it could have been, my friend, the fatality of death. Abraham thought, "You know, one time I pulled it off. By a quick maneuver I just defeated great armies of thousands." He said, "Boy, if they come back, it could well be..." and thank God Abraham thought about death. The Bible says, "It is appointed to man once to die," don't put a period there, "and after that the judgment." Do you understand that? Some day, my friend, not somebody else, not someone else's obituary, some day it will be your obituary that you are dead. Now, the thing is: are you ready to die? The Bible says, "Prepare," get ready, "prepare to meet thy God." How do we prepare? By trusting Jesus Christ. And until we prepare, the Bible says we're already condemned. The night I got saved, a man preached on this verse, "He that believeth on him is not condemned, he that believeth not is condemned already." That night, lying flat on my back in bed, 16 years old, I realized I was morally good, I was a church member, I was baptized, I realized I had never accepted Christ and to go to hell there was not one thing that I had to do, I was already condemned but thank God that

night in bed, flat on my back, a teenager's favorite position, I invited Christ into my heart and I became a child of God.

Friend, have you made preparation? You say, "I made preparation for retirement and for buying a home." Have you made preparation for eternity, my friend? Because sooner or later you will be there. I was preaching in Florida. I was preaching there one night and I had a thought I never had before but I was preaching and I said, "Some of you folks say, Hey, I'm going to Florida and I'm going to retire and I'm going to go down there and live." I said, "Friend, you come to Florida to die. You're going to die here, be embalmed here, have a funeral here, be buried here, on Judgment Day you'll rise to stand before God from here." I said, "Sir, you come to Florida to die." At the close of the service, a 92 year old man walked down the aisle, walked straight as an arrow and walked right down. He told the pastor, "I've come to get saved tonight." Afterward he came up to me and said, "Sir, I accepted Christ." I said, "I'm happy. I'm thrilled." He said, "You hit it on the nose. I'm going to die here." He said, "But thank God tonight I made preparations and I'm ready to meet God." Have you made that preparation? To go to hell, nothing you have to do, you're already going there. Hey, but thank God if you'll come to Christ and he'll save you and he'll change you.

Number 1: first of all, we find the despondency of Abraham. Number 2: the dependency of Abraham. How did Abraham become a Christian? Look in your Bible at verse 6, "He believed," and what's the next word? "In the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness." You say, "Preacher, Abraham's in heaven because he was a great saint. He rarely sinned. He lived a great life, therefore, because he had a good life when he died, he went to heaven." Excuse me, you're totally wrong. Number 1: Abraham is guilty of adultery. He has an affair with a maid. He's an adulterer. Number 2: this is hard to believe, he abandons his own child, kicks out the woman that bore his child. He kicks out the child. My, how awful. How awful. Number 3: Abraham and his wife were heading off somewhere and Abraham turns to his wife and said, "Honey, now, we're going down to Egypt and these Egyptians have an eye for a good looking woman and you're beautiful. When we get down there, they might kill me to have you. Honey, when we get down there, let's just tell them that you're my sister." How low can a man go? He sacrificed the virtue, the character of his own wife to save his neck. Number 4: my friend, there is something else, God said, "Do not go here." Out of disobedience, Abraham said, "God, I don't care what you say, that's exactly where I'm going." Understand that Abraham, an adulterer, abandons a child, abandons the mother, abuses his own wife. You see, he wasn't a good man. Sorry, neither are you.

The Bible says emphatically, "There is none righteous, no not one. There is none that understandeth, none that seeketh after God. They have all gone out of the way, altogether become unprofitable." Then God repeats it, "there is none righteous, no not one." ??? with God, truth says this, "everybody is a sinner." The Bible says, "If we say we have no sin, we lie and do not the truth." My friend, Abraham is not in heaven because he was a good, moral, upright person. Why is he in heaven? Look in your Bible again, please, verse 6, "He believed in the LORD." That word "in" implies trust. The Bible illustration, God comes to Noah and says, "Noah, I'm going to send a flood. Build an ark." Noah

builds an ark. God comes to Noah and says, "Take your family and get in the ark." Now wait, Noah looks outside and said, "Lord, I'm not getting in the ark." Do you realize how many animals are in there? He probably didn't say this but do you realize the smell in there with all the animals? Anyway, he said, "God, I'm not getting in that ark." He said, "God, let me tell you something, I built it, I know all about it. I know the square footage, the lineal foot." He said, "It's got one door, one window. I know every dimension in that ark. God, I know all about the ark. I'm not going in." It starts to rain. Noah gargles water and drowns. Knowing all about the ark, he perishes. Friend, will you please hear me? You could know every fact, every figure, every character in this book and you'll be the most knowledgeable person in hell unless you personally make that decision to accept Jesus Christ.

Turn in your Bible, please, "as many as received." A decision you make. "As many as received him, to them gave he authority to become the sons of God." It is not believing about Christ that saves. It's not believing in the Bible that saves. Paul preached to a king and told the king, "Believest thou the Scripture? Yea I know thou believest," but this Sunday morning the king is not in heaven. Bible salvation is a decision you make, only you can make, realizing you're a sinner and you receive Jesus Christ.

I was preaching in Illinois and one night a man said, "Preacher, tomorrow night I'm going to have coworker come. Pray for him. He has never received Christ." The service started and I met him at the door coming in and it was not his friend that came in but another man. I talked to him. We talked a while. He said, "Yes, I went to Moody Bible Institute and graduated. I went also to Maranatha Baptist College for two years." He said, "I know all about the Bible." I said, "Well, I'm glad you're here." He sat with his friend over here. The man the friend was waiting for came in late and the crowd was so great nobody sat over here so the friend had to sit over here. I preached that night, gave the invitation. On the first note, the friend walked down the aisle and told Pastor Randy, "Sir, I really need to accept Christ." And over here on this side, the man who had brought that man, turned to the man that was sitting beside him and said, "Hey, will you let me out? I want to go and talk to my friend." He said, "No." "Don't you understand? The guy that came to get saved is my coworker. I want to show him how to get saved. Will you let me out?" He said, "No, I want you to talk to me." He said, "Okay." He went and closed the door. They sat down. The guy said, "I'll tell you, I graduated from Moody Bible Institute, went two years to Maranatha Baptist College. I'm a baptized church member but as that man preached tonight, I realized I dealt with a Bible college, I dealt with a church but I never dealt with Christ. I have never received Christ but I'm ready right here, right now." That is salvation between you and Christ. Have you received him? ??? Have you received him?

That my friend, is Bible salvation. Number 3 and I'm through: ??? Abraham's life we find there is disruption. There is disturbance. Look in your Bible, please, at verse 11, "When the fowls came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away." Now, here it is, these animals are a prophecy of the coming Christ. The Bible calls him in the New Testament a Lamb. Christ was to die for our sin. That's the prophecy. It's pictured right here in these animals were dying, that Abraham might have a picture of what it is to go to heaven by

receiving the future Messiah. Here it is, everything is ready. The sacrifice has been made. The God's word has been heard. What happens? Here comes all these animals. The Bible calls these birds, watch it, unclean birds. Why are they unclean? Because they're not fit to eat. Here they come, this great moment, here come all these animals swooping in to disturb, interfere, intervene what God is trying to do. Hear me: the same thing happens today. When the Bible is preached, the Bible say this: then cometh the devil immediately. He'll show up this morning if you're unsaved. He'll tell you, "Don't walk the aisle. What is somebody going to say?" He'll tell you, "You're not such a bad guy." He'll tell you, "Wait, yeah, you should be saved but do it later." The devil comes to every church service where the Bible is preached and, friend, I'm not proud of this, believe me, but standing here this morning in 44 years, ??? people. Come to a service like this, hear the Gospel, said, "Boy, I need to get saved," maybe even raised their hand for prayer. The sad truth is right now, they're in the one place they never wanted to be, the one place they never expected to be, they're the inhabitant of the halls of hell. Why? They put off being saved one second too late. If you ever intend to get saved, God tells you when, "Behold, now is the accepted time. Now is the day of salvation." The Bible says, "It is time to seek the Lord." Dear friend, if you're unsaved today, if you have to, drive away the fowls the hell. Drive away public opinion and say, "I'm coming this morning to receive Jesus Christ."

I never knew my father. He was a career military man. He died in the service. I never knew him. I was raised by my mother and my grandfather right next door. When I was in the fourth grade, a man moved in our house: wicked, godless, vile, filthy, a bartender. In every area, he made life miserable. He used to beat my mom. Life was just horrible. I know one time he was supposed to be tending bar one night and mother and I went to a movie and we got home and he was waiting for us. He came out and asked my mother where she'd been and said, "You've been out with another man." She said, "No, I haven't." She told the truth, she wasn't. He grabbed me and slammed me against the refrigerator, got out a knife and put it right there and said, "Tell me who she was with or I'll slit your throat." Friend, you don't have to tell me about sin, I've been there. I've been there. I know all about it. I'll tell you something, though: I didn't find something better, I found someone better when I found Jesus Christ.

But, oh, life was miserable. Pretty soon at our house, mom kicked him out. Pretty soon he came crawling back and mom took him back. Things were better but he quit tending bar and got a job as a mechanic and things were a lot better but he still wasn't saved. From Bible college, I'd write him letters about salvation and never heard. Time went on. I was going to seminary in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Thanksgiving, my wife and I came back from Chattanooga to Bloomington where her parents lived and by then, my mother had married that man. They came and we had a decent time together and pretty soon after the meal, he turned to my mother and said, "You know, the sun is starting to set." It was about sundown, "We'd better head home." She said, "Okay." He said, "I'll go out and start the car." I followed him out and he was sitting behind the wheel with the window down. I said, "I've been praying for you." He said, "I want you to pray I get a better job." I said, "Well, that's not what I'm praying for. I'm praying you'll get saved." Oh, he just broke down and started crying. He said, "I'm going to." I said, "What?" He said, "I'm going to."

I thought, wonderful. Let me show you how." He said, "No, no, not now. Not now." He said, "Son, I'm going to get saved but not now." I said, "The Bible says to get saved now." He said, "There are some things I've got to take care of." I said, "No, I've got good news. Jesus Christ took care of everything on Calvary. All you need to do is accept him." He said, "Son, I'm not lying to you. I know I've treated you horribly and your mom horrible and I feel awful about it. I'm not lying to you. I'm going to get saved but not now." The window was down and I reached in and I hugged his head to my chest and I kissed him on top of the head and I said, "I want you to please, please, get saved now," and he was weeping and crying. He said, "Son, I'm going to do it. I'm going to do it but not now." Mother came out and got into the car and they headed for Illinois.

Two weeks later, I'm working for a Sears in Chattanooga selling sporting goods. The phone rings. I pick it up and it was my aunt. We talked a while and she said, "Your step dad had a heart attack and died." She said that and it was like a motion picture camera. I could see him sitting there saying, "I'm going to get saved but not now. I'm not lying to you, son. I'm going to get saved but not now. I'm going to become a Christian but not now." For him it was a showdown at sundown. Hear me! Every person in hell right now, there was one last opportunity they had to get saved and said, "No." Old friend, please, don't you make that mistake. If you're not a Christian, you flee to Christ today and he'll save you and he'll change you.

Will you bow your head for prayer? Our heads are bowed, our eyes are closed.

I have two questions. Number 1, oh, heed it, hear it, the most important question you'll ever hear in your existence. Here it is: if you were to die today, do you know you'd go to heaven? Have you thought about that question? Sure you have. You went down to the funeral home, looked in the coffin of a friend, a coworker, a classmate, a little thought surfaced: some day my body will be there but where's my soul going to be? Driving down the road one day, you came on a horrible car wreck. As you slowed down and drove by, you had to struggle for that next breath because you saw a sheet over a body. You thought about the question, that's not the issue: have you acted on it? Not by baptism. Not by church membership. Not by turning over a new leaf. No, have you acted on it by receiving Jesus Christ as your Savior?