

## **The Liberty With Which Christ Has Made Us Free.**

Text: 2 Cor 3:17

Suggested Hymns:

195, 330, 615, 327, 206

1) Through Luther, The Spirit Of The Lord  
Gave Liberty To Us

2) Enlightened And Urged By That Same Spirit,  
We Must Bring Liberty To Others

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is 2 Corinthians 3:17, *17 Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Today we are gathered here in commemoration of an event which stands for the most glorious liberation of men in modern history, generated, established, and spread throughout the world by the Spirit of the Lord.

That event is the Lutheran Reformation, and we especially remember the man, Martin Luther, who was the instrument of the Spirit of God to free men's souls again after they had agonised in abject spiritual slavery for nearly a thousand years.

That liberty and freedom must be brought to men's souls today if there is to be any hope to save mankind now and for eternity. It is the liberty with which Christ has made us free. To be of any help to our fellow men today, we must cling to this liberty, and we must bring it to others. Let us consider *The Liberty with Which Christ Has Made Us Free*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

### **1. Through Luther**

#### **The Spirit Of The Lord Gave Liberty To Us**

All people by nature are slaves. There is a triple alliance of tyrants, under which the soul of man slaves and toils with fear and trembling, without peace or rest or hope. They are sin, death, and the devil.

We read in John 8:34, *Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.* There is no exception. All people by nature are the slaves of this

tyrant and are born under his rule. We read in Romans 3:23, <sup>23</sup> *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*

This slavery to sin brings with it the terrifying rule of the second tyrant, death. Scripture says in Ezekiel 18:20, <sup>20</sup> *The soul who sins shall die* and in Romans 6:23, <sup>23</sup> *For the wages of sin is death.*” This death leads to the hopeless, doomed, eternal slavery of hell and the Prince of Darkness, *“who had the power of death, that is, the devil.”*<sup>1</sup>

What a sad picture of men. Never, even under the darkest days of government rule, have men faced such terrifying, degrading slavery as the souls of men under these three tyrants, sin, death, and the devil. Sadly, the great majority of people today are controlled by these tyrants.

Yes, even though outwardly people seem to be free, yet they are in abject slavery, spiritually blinded to their own interest, and willing to serve the powers which seek their destruction. They believe the propaganda, and the lying promises of these taskmasters rather than the word of God which would liberate them.

We learn from 2 Corinthians 4:4 that *“the god of this world has blinded, [those] who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.”*

It is as the Apostle says in 2 Corinthians 3:15, <sup>15</sup> *But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart.* They all have the foolish notion that a slave can free himself by slave labour. For sinners to try to free themselves by the works of the Law is utter folly. It still remains fear-inspired slave labour and is meritless in the eyes of the Holy God; for as we read in Isaiah 64:6, *all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags.*

### **Luther's Discovery**

The Reformer himself suffered under these very conditions. He had the same veil upon his heart. He tried by most humble obedience to the ordinances of the Church, by fasting and self-castigations and monkish rules, to quiet his conscience. But the more he tried, the harder he laboured, the greater became his fear, his terror, and his hopelessness.

He could not see the truth that ***“by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.”***<sup>2</sup> Then by the grace of God, Luther was led to the Bible, to the Word of Christ, where the Spirit of the Lord speaks to man’s heart. For Jesus Himself had said of His Word in John 6:63, ***The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.***

In this Word the Spirit pointed away from men, from man’s own effort, and pointed to the Cross of Christ, where the battle of freedom for the sin-bound souls of men had been fought and won.

In this Word of the Cross, Christ is revealed as men’s Substitute, ***“who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree”*** and on the Cross created the cloak of righteousness which covers our sins in the sight of God. We read in Ephesians 1:7, ***7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.***

Thus Christ has purchased and won the liberty of the soul from sin and death and hell for every man. ***Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.***<sup>3</sup>

This message of liberty from sin and peace with God is not a lifeless, powerless message but it brings liberty with it, as our text says, ***“where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.”*** Likewise we read in Romans 1:16, ***the gospel of Christ ... is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes.***

The Spirit of God through this Gospel brings men’s hearts to Christ and makes them cling to Him in faith. They are freed from spiritual death, liberated to be free and beloved children of God. ***“For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus.”***<sup>4</sup>

The unspeakable joy that comes with this freedom filled Luther’s heart, and what he experienced he wanted to bring to others. So God moved him to translate the Bible into the language of his people and thus give it back to them.

Luther dug it out again and brought it to light after it had been buried for nearly 1,000 years by papal edicts and bulls, decrees of councils, and the many writings of the Schoolmen, so that the Spirit of the Lord could again bring the powers of the Gospel to bear upon the hearts of men, remove the veil, and let the liberty of faith in Christ brightly shine forth.

## The Church's Liberty

But with this liberty of the soul is closely linked also the liberty of the Church, since the Word of God sets men's souls free and unites them in faith to Christ and with one another. "***Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.***"

What does this Spirit say of the free children of God? We read in Romans 8:17, <sup>17</sup> ***and if children, then heirs — heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.*** That lifts the redeemed sinner, the believer, to the highest, most exalted, kinship and makes him a member of the family of God. Therefore the Word says of them in 1 Peter 2:9, <sup>9</sup> ***But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people.***

What, then, shall we say of the man who sets himself up on a temporal throne and demands obedience of God's children, of God's kings and priests, binds them to his man-made ordinances, claims that he has the right to say who will belong to the family of God and the right to set boundaries for the holy nation, bringing the family of God down to the degrading level of a mere visible temporal organisation? Surely this is the antichrist according to 2 Thess. 2:3-4

Instead, the family of God, God's Church, is a spiritual kingdom. Its members are those led by the Spirit of Christ; ***For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.***<sup>5</sup>

Oh, how Luther fought for this liberty of the Church! Let me quote just one sentence from his powerful treatise *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*: "***Neither Pope nor bishop nor any other man has the right to impose a single syllable of law upon a Christian man without his consent.***" Yes, "***where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.***" "***One is your Master, even Christ, and you all are brethren.***"

That means liberty for the Church, a Church free to govern itself by the free consent of its members, bowing only to the Word of God. That is what the Church of the Reformation stands for, the spiritual priesthood of all believers, and by the grace of God the Lutheran Church still enjoys this liberty. The individual congregation of Christian believers still stands supreme in authority. Among them Synod and District with their officers, their commissions, and their boards, have only advisory powers.

## National Liberty

Yes, that too, a free country! Freeing men's souls, granting them the liberty of the children of God, makes them at heart people who hate all tyranny. They are not willing to be enslaved, but to serve. For *where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty*. This spirit rules their hearts, the spirit of Christ, who came to lay down His life that all men might be free.

Wherever, therefore, the Gospel has held sway, it has made people free not only in spirit but in body also. It puts charity and kindness into their hearts, a love for others, a desire to help, to edify and lift up to a higher plane, to liberate people.

Hence the modern world looks to the Reformation for its ideals of human liberty and freedom. It is significant that a Lutheran, Bartholdi, was the designer of the Statue of Liberty which graces New York harbour and symbolically casts its beams on the still enslaved people of the world.

Daniel Webster said: *"The Reformation of Martin Luther introduced the principles of civil liberty."* President McKinley said: *"Luther gave us civil and religious liberty."* Henry Ward Beecher said: *"Our civil liberty is the result of the open Bible, which Luther gave to us."*

In other words, *"where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."* Yes, liberty of the soul, liberty of the Church, and liberty of the State by the Spirit of the Lord. That is our great heritage. Oh, let us cling to it; let no modern Gospel, which is no Gospel at all, lead us astray. Let us cling to the Word in and through which the Spirit of the Lord works. Let us fight for it, for with it our liberty stands or falls. And let us in this our day, where such liberty is at stake, do all in our power under God to bring it to others.

## 2. Enlightened And Urged By That Same Spirit, We Must Bring Liberty To Others

### Heirs of the Reformation

You and I, as Lutherans, are by God's unbounded grace in the fortunate position now to do that very thing for the souls of people around us who are still spiritually enslaved. We are still, thank God, the children of the Reformation and heirs of its spiritual stores.

If the Spirit of the Lord is in your heart, if you are a free child of God who enjoys the wonderful liberty with which Christ has made us free, then there will be in your heart an urge to give to others what you yourselves possess, even as it was in the heart of the great Reformer.

We are all members of a Church which for over a century has had possession of the unadulterated precious Gospel of Jesus Christ, in a land of religious freedom and liberty.

In our land God has permitted the Lutheran Church to establish Christian day schools, colleges, and seminaries. Overseas there are Publishing Houses, from which flow streams of Christian literature and books. They are the most powerful spiritual resources of the Word of God.

All are the vehicles of spiritual freedom and possess the power of the Gospel, which is the power of God.

### **Liberty to Serve**

***“Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty!”*** What is this Spirit of the Lord? He said Matthew 20:28, ***the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.*** Yes, ***“where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty,”*** liberty to serve! To serve our fellow men in bringing them the liberty with which Christ has made us free.

Can we be less charitable than the leprous beggars of Samaria, who, when the host of Syrians had fled from further besieging the starving city, upon finding all the Syrians’ stores of food in their tents, said one to another: ***“We are not doing right. This day is a day of good news, and we remain silent.”***<sup>6</sup>

Can we, then, who, too, once were all leprous beggars before God hold our peace when there are millions enslaved and starving spiritually around us? How about the millions children without the Gospel? How about that one out of every two of our fellow citizens passing us on the street who is without the Bread of Life?

### **Individual Opportunity Realised and Redeemed**

If you have tasted of the liberty with which Christ has made you free, the Spirit of the Lord will urge you to speak of it as Peter and John, who said: ***“For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.”***<sup>7</sup>

You must realise that the Spirit of the Lord has placed you wherever you may be — at work or at play, in the shop, in the office, on the street, in the home — everywhere you can reach out. Yes, you can say, as Moses said to Hobab, *“Come with us, and we will treat you well; for the LORD has promised good things to Israel.”*<sup>8</sup> Come, taste the liberty with which Christ has made us free.

Here are our children, our men and women, liberated by Christ. Let each one reach out prayerfully to liberate enslaved starving souls by bringing them to school, to church, to the confirmation class, where through the Gospel the Spirit of the Lord sets men’s hearts free.

It is that simple — if a doctor has cured you, you would tell any friend afflicted with the same disease, “Come, go to my doctor.” Why should the need of the body seem so much more important than the need of the soul? Is not the latter incalculably more precious than the former?

A poor woman needed a blood transfusion. It was advertised in the daily paper, and volunteers were found in twenty-four hours to give her one every day for a month, if she needed it. How many souls in your own neighbourhood need the spiritual transfusion of the saving blood of Christ?

Are we to be like the young Christian man who took employment with some rugged, rough, and godless men. When one expressed the fear that he must have had great trouble because he was a Christian, he said: *“No, none at all. Nobody found out that I was a Christian.”*

### **Joy in Serving**

And finally consider the great joy in winning souls. Members of the board of elders of a church were instrumental in gathering a number of unchurched children to be baptised. There were six of them, and members of the board were the sponsors.

When finally the answer came from the lips of these children *“I will be baptised into this Christian faith,”* tears of joy began to flow down the cheeks of these sober, stalwart men.

Win a soul, and your heart will leap with joy to see the saved one kneeling at the altar and vowing allegiance to the Saviour.

May the Spirit of the Lord so move us all, every one of us, to reach out, to bring Christ's liberty to souls still enslaved. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 2:14

<sup>2</sup> Galatians 2:16

<sup>3</sup> "John 8:36

<sup>4</sup> Galatians 3:26

<sup>5</sup> Romans 8:14

<sup>6</sup> 2 Kings 7:9

<sup>7</sup> Acts 4:20

<sup>8</sup> Numbers 10:29