

“Do You Know What Is Inscribed on the Liberty Bell?”

Leviticus 25:8-17

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Do you know what is inscribed on the Liberty Bell? Perhaps you have been to Philadelphia and have seen one of our country's most prominent symbols of freedom.

This historic bell, which was commissioned from the London firm of Lester and Pack in 1752, was one of the bells rung after the Declaration of Independence was signed and read. For over one hundred years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the Liberty Bell was transported to special events throughout the country for people to see and touch. This ceased after officials noticed the crack in the bell was widening, and people were chipping away pieces of the bell for souvenirs.

The Liberty Bell made its last journey out of Philadelphia when it was taken to the World's Fair in San Francisco in 1915. Since then, it has resided under close scrutiny in the city which was the sight of the First and Second Continental Congresses.

So, what words are inscribed on the bell? “Proclaim liberty throughout the land to all the inhabitants.” This is a quote from Leviticus 25:10.

This passage in Leviticus is a part of the instructions about the Year of Jubilee. The Year of Jubilee occurred every fifty years to usher in a time of new beginnings. During this special year, all debts were forgiven, and land was returned to its original owner.

I know we find this idea bizarre, but it had a purpose in ancient Judaism. It made it possible for someone struggling under a load of debt to be liberated, and it kept the Israelites from becoming too attached to the things of this world. The Year of Jubilee was designed to remind the Jews they were stewards, not owners of what they had, and they were their brother's keeper.

To be candid with you, there is no biblical record of this ever occurring. It seems God's people were not as generous and benevolent as God.

However, this passage describing the Year of Jubilee has these important words as a central theme, "Proclaim liberty to all the inhabitants of the land." I don't know if the makers of the Liberty Bell understood their full significance, but they certainly understood the value and importance of freedom and wanted this bell to serve as a reminder. For two hundred thirty-seven years, it has done this.

On this Sunday before the Fourth of July, we have assembled to worship God and thank Him for the gift of freedom. Of all people, we are most fortunate because as Americans and Christians, we experience freedom on two levels, the physical and spiritual. We don't need the first to experience the second, but we need the spiritual freedom found in Christ to more fully appreciate our freedom as Americans. Let me explain.

The first level of freedom we celebrate today is the freedom we enjoy as Americans. We live in a country which encourages all its citizens to dream and cast visions for a better world for all people. Furthermore, our country provides us opportunities to pursue these dreams by working alone or with others.

We know it is not this way everywhere. Many people do not enjoy the privileges and opportunities we often take for granted. Indeed, we are fortunate and need to be grateful to God and all who have passed this freedom on to us. May we be wise and faithful stewards of the opportunities given to us and the abundant resources entrusted to our care!

The second level of freedom we celebrate today is the spiritual freedom we enjoy as Christians. While our nation provides us with unparalleled **opportunities** to pursue our dreams, our faith provides us with **the ability** to achieve them. Opportunity without ability leads to great frustration. This is why our faith is so important to us.

How does our faith help us to achieve our dreams? First of all, it helps us to know what is important, and what we need to pursue. Not all dreams honor God and make the world better for everyone. Our faith reminds us we have not been placed in this land of opportunity to build our own kingdoms, but to advance God's Kingdom, by building healthy communities.

"Thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven," Jesus prayed, and so should we. All of Jesus' dreams were designed with that prayer in mind, as ours should be.

Secondly, our faith brings the best out in us so we can do our part to build strong, healthy communities, beginning with our own families. Freedom is only as secure as its citizens are good. Selfishness, greed, arrogance, deceit, and a lack of concern for our neighbors undermine freedom and weaken us as a nation.

This was why the eight century Old Testament prophet, Micah, clearly outlined what God expected of His people in the days before the Northern Kingdom fell to the Assyrians. “What does the Lord require of you? To act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” Micah 6:8.

Micah was concerned that the hearts of the leaders and citizens of Judah in the Southern Kingdom were not right, as was the case with their northern neighbors, and their character was flawed and their dreams were misguided, too. He appealed to them in the strongest terms to be fair in their dealing with others by being honest, trustworthy, reliable, dependable, compassionate, loving and humble.

In addition, he urged his fellow citizens to confront injustice and evil wherever they saw it and champion the cause of the victims. According to Micah, it was not enough for a person to have good character; he or she needed to demand it of those who wielded power and influence and hold them accountable if they did not.

Jesus reinforced the words of Micah with his own when he said to his disciples, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” Luke 6:31. We know this as the Golden Rule, the highest standard for decision-making.

Our faith will bring the best out in us, especially when we face the temptation to be less than our best. It will keep our eyes focused upon what is truly important to God and for all of God’s children.

Our faith will liberate us from those things which would hold us back: low self-esteem, fear, guilt, ignorance, negative attitudes, bad habits, selfishness, unhealthy relationships, hatred and the desire to seek revenge.

In his 1985 novel, Texas, a book about oil and water, rangers and outlaws, the frontier and settlements and money and power, James Michener has the 16th century Spanish explorer, Cabeza de Vaca say, “You know, Lad, men are often imprisoned by the chains of their own forging.”

How true and sad. Time and time again we have experienced this in our own lives or witnessed it in others who had great potential.

Our faith, however, will liberate us from the chains that bind us, allowing God to set us free. No wonder we worship God and celebrate freedom. What a gift!

Finally, our faith will provide the confidence and courage we need to take risks and pursue dreams. It is never easy to go “where no man has gone before,” at least where we have

never been. It is frightening and foreboding. It takes a lot of fortitude, will-power, determination and perseverance to be a pioneer. From where do these essential traits come?

“I can do everything through Christ who gives me strength,” Paul wrote to the Philippians. So can we!

Does your faith make you a better American and citizen of the world?

Do the dreams you pursue honor God and build healthy communities?

Are the things important to God important to you?

From what do you need to be liberated so you can pursue the dreams God has given you and live up to the potential God has placed in you?

I believe God would like to talk to you about these things. Join me in prayer as we begin this conversation.