

052519

- I. My Notes.... WWC message 5/26 (Memorial Day)
- II. Series: Let's Find Out Who We Are
  - a. Title: Free to be Me
  - b. Text: Mark 8:34; Prov. 16:9; 2 Pet. 3:9; Gal 5:13
  - c. Quote: The gospel alone liberates you to live a life of scandalous generosity, unrestrained sacrifice, uncommon valor, and unbounded courage. Tullian Tchividjian (Pastor, Author)
- III. Introduction
  - a. It's Memorial Day weekend. Memorial Day is about remembering. It's not just honoring those who have chosen to serve this country. But it is about remembering those who gave their lives in service to Our Country. I think every life has been touched by someone who has served in the military. Many have had to endure the loss of a loved one in the line of duty. Jesus said, "No one has greater love than this: to lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:13 CSB). Sacrificing for friends – for those who are important is something, doing the same for those you don't know is a great gift. The ultimate sacrifice is giving your life, your existence and impact here (with those you love), for those who you don't agree with or who have hurt you in some way. It's the example Jesus left us. He didn't just die for those who loved Him and agreed with Him – He died for those who hated Him. In his letter to the Church, the Apostle John wrote, "This is how we have come to know love: He laid down his life for us. We should also lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters." (1 John 3:16 CSB). We, believers – every Christian – have experienced true love and grace. We have experienced this perfect gift so that we can share it with those around us. This weekend, we remember the sacrifice of others – they chose to serve by giving of

themselves – and they paid for with their lives. Let's remember the love we have experienced each day, in every step of life.

- b. The gift of life, of love, is wonderful. And the freedom of choice accompanies that. It makes every day amazing. To serve is a choice that reveals love and value in a very special way. I think that today, we aren't sure about real relationships... Too often, the expectation is for life to take place on "my terms". Even in the church, we evaluate and expect things to happen certain ways. This leaves little room for the Lord. See, expectations can fill up a room real fast. They definitely hold one's focus in a specific direction and they leave little room for being amazed. On Sundays, we often sing, "Lord I'm amazed by you...." (Amazed by Jared Anderson). But the question becomes, do our actions and life reveal that we live in awe of God? Service, I'm not just talking about enlisting in the Military (though it would be good for many young people), it's about following the example of Jesus can show that we are amazed and want to share the love we have come to know.
- c. One of the ways God has shown us that His commitment is a covenant. What is a covenant? An agreement, a bond. God's covenant with us is a commitment and a guarantee of a promise to love us unconditionally and accept us for eternity. There are several covenants in Scripture. One of the great covenants is the Blood Covenant that the Lord God made with Abraham. Beginning to understand this commitment, this pledge, that God made can help us see things in Scripture in a clearer manner. Much of the purposes, plans, and truths that the Lord has for each of our lives stems from this Covenant. This term, Covenant, in its Hebrew form, ברית – *berit*, is used about 300 times in the OT. It must be an important concept for us to understand. Because of this covenant relationship believers will be able to have a better understanding of (1) God's love for them personally and (2) the potential we have as believers... (3) God's Word – Scripture is divided into the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. It's more challenging to

understand Scripture if we don't understand what the covenant means to the Lord God. I had an instructor tell me, when teaching about "covenants", that God will never break His side of the bargain. Just as a reminder, during the time that God made this pledge to Abraham sins were Atoned (expiated, covered) by the blood of animal sacrifices. When Jesus came and shed His blood (died on the Cross) my sins – your sins – were wiped away. "As it is, he has been given a ministry as far superior as is the covenant of which he is the mediator, which is founded on better promises. If that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no room for a second one to replace it." (Hebrews 8:6-7 NJB)

- d. In Genesis 15, God initiated an agreement (a pledge) with Abraham that was built on trust. It would be approved and endorsed over and over again – Circumcision, animal sacrifices, and other practices would show the strength and permanence of this agreement. God initiated this covenant with Abraham (Abram); It is the same with us – He seeks each person out so that they might come into a relationship with Him. (cf. John 6:44; Titus 2:11). In Genesis 15 God promised to be a shield to Abram (15:1) and that there would be a great reward. Abram would be involved in a "Walk of Death". We are referencing Genesis 15:7-21... Abram was told to sacrifice a 3 y/o heifer, a 3 y/o, female goat, a 3 y/o ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon. Blood sacrifices were very important. The animals were to be split in half and the parties would walk in a circular pattern between them. All the blood would be mixed and by walking between the carcasses, the parties would be covered in the same blood. Thereby creating the same type of bond between the 2 parties. It was like they were stating, "I am committed to you in life, all the way to death, and even beyond. I pray this death and dismemberment will never happen to you or I and I will never break this pledge. It is sealed in blood." This is a symbolic portrayal of the loss of individual identity... surrendering one's life for the life of the other. In many ways, this "walk of death" similar and a precursor to the "walk of death"

Jesus took on the way to Golgatha (Calvary). In Revelation we find out that because of the "Blood of the Lamb" we ultimately overcome (ref. Rev. 12:11). Here's the great thing about the Blood Covenant, God did THE ENTIRE walk Himself. "As the sun was going down, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a terrifying darkness came down over him. After the sun went down and darkness fell, Abram saw a smoking firepot and a flaming torch pass between the halves of the carcasses. So the LORD made a covenant with Abram that day and said, "I have given this land to your descendants, all the way from the border of Egypt to the great Euphrates River—" (Genesis 15:12, 17-18 NLT2)

- e. I often talk about choices. One incredible thing about God is His consistency. He is exactly who He claims to be... loving, holy, compassionate, and faithful (just to name a few things). We have a choice too. About 4000 years ago (2100 BCE) God made a promise to Abraham that we get to live in today. Part of life is a process in seeing the good things that are there – in each of our lives. Learning to get a glimpse of self and others the way that God sees them is a series of steps, both forward and (at times) backwards. But once we can trust that the Lord is committed, that He won't break His side of the bargain.

#### IV. Note

- a. God chose...
- b. Creation was a choice
- c. Man was a choice
- d. His commitment and grace are the result of His choice
- e. His desire for a relationship with us, while keeping in His nature, means that He chose to understand man and to make a way that we could be free to make the choice of a relationship with Him

## V. Text

a. Calling out to the crowd, Jesus stated...

b. Mark 8:34 (NLT2)

Then, calling the crowd to join his disciples, he said, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me.

c. It's about choice - how we are going to live

d. Choose obedience, choose discipleship or choose to follow those things that are selfish

e. Discipleship is a path to be chosen. It is the path of following Christ. Every believer is a disciple by choice. In this passage it is presented in a simple and direct way: deny self, take up the cross, follow Christ.

f. The words "deny" and "take up" being Greek aorist tenses (the action is ongoing and definitive), imply definite choices. While "follow" is in the tense of continuous action. Discipleship to the Lord is a lifelong path.

## VI. Decisions

a. Proverbs 16:9 (CSB)

A person's heart plans his way, but the LORD determines his steps.

b. If we aren't careful, if we are living by feelings and emotions, we can encounter difficulty

c. Our heart can get us into trouble. It is why we need to understand God's bond with us and trust it.

d. Jeremiah 17:9 (NLT2)

"The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is?"

- e. We choose the path of sin, of hardship – all too often because of our heart
- f. Our intellect and emotions have been known to lead us astray
- g. Because God is the Creator – the Almighty, All Knowing... He understands
- h. Jeremiah 17:10 (MSG)

"But I, GOD, search the heart and examine the mind. I get to the heart of the human. I get to the root of things. I treat them as they really are, not as they pretend to be."

- i. The Lord knows us... He understands. And the amazing thing is that He accepts us just as we are
- j. Flaws, emotions, and all

## VII. Patient

- a. 2 Peter 3:9 (AMP)

The Lord does not delay and is not tardy or slow about what He promises, according to some people's conception of slowness, but He is long-suffering (extraordinarily patient) toward you, not desiring that any should perish, but that all should turn to repentance.

- b. God isn't in a rush. So, why are we?
- c. (My pet peeve is about to come out). Have you noticed that yellow and red lights today are no more than a "suggestion"?
- d. Poor driving is a choice
- e. Being late, more often than not, is a choice

- f. The rules of the road are a way so that everyone can be safe – that the risk for everyone choosing to drive is minimized and people can still get to where they are going
- g. Often, people are rushing to nowhere. They are getting to the next light ahead of everyone else, only to wait until everyone else catches up
- h. Rushing, poor driving, is a choice that puts others (innocents) at risk – without them having any say
- i. Reading this Scripture tells me, God's choice, with me, is patience and for that I am grateful
- j. I may be in a hurry, after all – more is better, right?
- k. And in hurrying I can miss many of the treasures that life has, those that the Lord God has left so that you and I can discover some amazing things

#### VIII. Love and Service

- a. Galatians 5:13 (AMP)

For you, brethren, were [indeed] called to freedom; only [do not let your] freedom be an incentive to your flesh and an opportunity or excuse [for selfishness], but through love you should serve one another.

- b. Called to freedom (independence, choice), called to liberty (authority) – we have the ability to choose what we want... even what's not necessarily the best thing for us
- c. We have been set free from the bondage of sin. But maybe that is something we don't understand
- d. Sin – disobedience, failure to love and honor the Lord is a choice we must learn to take responsibility for
- e. The Lord God has given us complete freedom to choose.

- f. Every choice has consequences. Some are readily visible; some may not be. But they are there
- g. To quote Bob Dylan – “But you're gonna have to serve somebody, yes. Indeed you're gonna have to serve somebody. Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord; But you're gonna have to serve somebody (Gotta Serve Somebody, 1979)
- h. We can't allow our flesh, our selfish attitudes and desires, to control us. To dictate our choices
- i. Choosing self, is choosing disobedience
- j. Choosing obedience is choosing love and service

#### IX. Final Words

- a. You've probably heard this story, but I thought it appropriate to wrap this message up with
- b. A man was walking along a beach upon which thousands of starfish had been washed up. Left on the sand by the receding tide the starfish were certain to die as the sun dried them out. The man also saw a boy picking up starfish and flinging them back into the sea. Planning to teach the boy a little lesson in common sense, the man walked up to the boy and said, “I have been watching what you are doing, son. You have a good heart, and I know you mean well, but do you realize how many beaches there are around here and how many starfish are dying on every beach every day? Surely such an industrious and kindhearted boy such as yourself could find something better to do with your time. Do you really think that what you are doing is going to make a difference?” The boy looked up at the man, and then he looked down at a starfish by his feet. He picked up the starfish, and as he gently tossed it back into the ocean, he said, “It makes a difference to that one.”



- c. Serving God is serving others, loving God is loving others – without condition or expectation
- d. Let's Pray
- e. Keep growing, keep stepping, keep learning and trusting
- f. Grace first... grace always