

Grace, mercy, and peace are yours in, and solely because of Christ Jesus your Lord and Saviour. Amen. The title for today’s sermon is ‘Bondage and Freedom’ and is based on the Epistle reading, Galatians chapters 3 and 4. Let us pray... .

In 1998, Hollywood released another adaptation of Victor Hugo’s 1862 novel, ‘*Les Miserables*’. It is set in early 19th century France and is the story of Jean Valjean, a burly French peasant of abnormal strength and potentially violent nature, and his quest for redemption after serving nineteen years in jail for having stolen a loaf of bread for his starving sister's child.

Towards the beginning of the story Valjean had a run in with a local bishop. Valjean come to him for help. The bishop invites Valjean in for the evening, lets him clean up, eats with him, and even gives him a place to sleep for the night. In the night Valjean wakes up and proceeds to start stealing the silverware from the bishop’s house. The bishop wakes up at a sound, comes face to face with Valjean, and Valjean strikes the bishop in the eye knocking him out. Valjean then flees the house with the stolen silverware. The next scene is the next morning with the bishop and his house keeper talking in an outside garden. At once a group of police officers bring Valjean, now physically bound and chained into the garden. Valjean is caught and is broken.

The bishop approaches and says “I am very angry with you Jean.” He then proceeds to tell the police he gave Valjean the silverware as a gift, but was disappointed that Valjean didn’t also take the silver candlesticks as he was told to do. Valjean is unshackled and the bishop invites his housekeeper to give the police officers a drink of wine for their trouble. As everyone but the bishop and Valjean leave the scene, the bishop approaches Valjean and tells him, “Now don’t forget. Don’t ever forget, you’ve promised to become a new man.” Valjean is almost speechless except for a “Promise? Wha... Why are you doing this?” The bishop tells him “Jean Valjean, my brother, you no longer belong to evil. With this silver I have bought your soul. I’ve ransomed you from fear and hatred, and now I give you back to God.”

A man in bondage was released. A man crushed by his past crimes was ransomed and given new hope, he was given a future. A man who could not save himself, one who had nothing to offer, was set free and given a new life.

Wow, it sound great. It is wonderful. It gets one cheering for the underdog. To see one in bondage set free through such a great and generous gift, well it just warms the heart.

And yet, we see and hear of underserved redemption and freedom from bondage regularly, but of a much, much greater kind. We see it, and even experience this freedom, and yet don’t always recognize the gift as much as we should. You heard this gift, you received this release only a few minutes ago in God’s own Words, where He said I forgive you all your sins

because of Christ. You and I were held in bondage and yet this gift that we have is because of Christ. We were held in bondage, we were detained and imprisoned under the Law for our sins. Unlike Valjean, we couldn't even stealware to help ourselves out because we were dead in our sins, imprisoned under the power of Satan, and fully deserving death for our actions.

Unlike Valjean and his actions, in our sin we didn't just punch and knockout a bishop, we killed our High Priest, we executed the Son of God. We weren't 'noble' in our actions trying to seal bread for a starving niece of nephew. No, in our actions we tried to depose God and tried to get rid of Him and tried to put ourselves in His place. Because of our sin, because of the sin we inherited from our forefather Adam, because of that Original sin and our continued sin, everything we do and have done, apart from what we do in Faith in Christ, is shrouded in the filth and sin, and could not save ourself, and certainly not anyone else. Our actions were like Valjean, trying to satisfy ourselves no matter the cost to anyone else.

Here is the problem, while the bishop's words to Valjean in Victor Hugo's novel sounds so wonderful and encouraging, we cannot pull ourselves up by our boot straps. We cannot just promise to be a better person. No amount of silver or gold can save us. We can get away from the judgment we deserve by hiding, because while you can hide from the police, you cannot hide from God. While you can try to get a good lawyer in this life to find a loophole, on the Last Day before the Judgment seat of God there are no lawyers, no loophole, the only thing for sin which has to be satisfied is God's divine and perfect judgement. What you deserve, what I deserve is to be punished for our words, for our deed, for our actions is for blood to be shed. As long as we live under the Law, there is no salvation, only Law and punishment. What your actions deserve, all your actions apart from what you do in faith in Christ, is God's rightful and just punishment.

Now we also see a similar condition to what we used to be in the demoniac in Geresene, how he was out in the wilderness, how he would be bound and shackled, but would break free and the demon would cause him to flee out into the wilderness. When Jesus arrived in the region He saw the naked man. The possessed man cried out to Jesus, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?” Don't torment me. He knew what he deserved and was afraid of God's rightful punishment. He knew he had no chance, he knew he had no redemption, he knew he was bound in sin and Satan had him. Yet, despite the bondage, Christ was present. Despite the lack of chance, despite the condemnation he rightly deserved, God sent forth His Son to set that man, and each and every one of you free.

Just like Valjean, you and I were bought at a price, you and I were set free from evil, sin, the Law, and the bounds of Satan. But unlike Valjean, it was not with silver or gold, but with the precious blood of our Saviour Jesus Christ. It is His blood which washed you in the font. It is His blood which covered you and made you His very own child. It was Christ's blood that took your full payment, and took you from the bondage you were in and freed you to eternal life. It is

there that Christ washed you, He cleaned you up, He delivered you, and now He also feeds you, not with bread that perishes but with His own body and blood for eternal life.

This Galatians text is beautiful and clear in the Greek because all the verbs, the action words, which deal with us and what we are doing instead reveal what God is doing to and in us. All the verbs describe what is being done to us. You were baptized, not you decided, you were washed, you were adopted by God. All these have nothing to do with our actions but with the grace of God and what He has done and continues to do. You are God’s very own child set free from the bondage of sin and given that new life in Christ because Christ really did come for you, because He really did take your full punishment, that punishment God required for your sins was paid by Christ when He was nailed to the cross and received God’s full wrath for all our sins. And when Jesus said “It is finished.” And bowed His head and died it was finished. Your sins are forgiven—they are all paid for—the one you have committed and the ones you will commit, they are all paid for and you are redeemed in Christ. You are God’s own child. He does love you. As such you have the privilege to approach God anytime and pray, or talk to Him.

Now the world does not understand it, but God and His Word are very clear about it. God says to you, ‘Come to Me and hear my Word. Come to me and receive the body and blood of my Son through it you are set free and you are my own beloved child.’ Amen.

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