

FINDING SPIRITUAL INDEPENDENCE

Bonus week for the series, "Finding Yourself"

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Alright; you ready? Okay; here we go!

So I was supposed to talk about Noah and the Ark tonight. And sometimes you think you're going this way [points], and Spirit says, "*No; no! We're going to go this way*" [points in the other direction]. A little switcheroo.

And I could tell as I moved through last week ... Like, because usually what happens is: I start to get, like, little ideas and nudges. And Spirit kind of starts filling things in for me. You know, 'cause I've got 20-something minutes; I'm supposed to say at least one thing intelligent in 20 minutes, right? So Spirit kind of starts nudging me in a direction.

And last week there was nada! And it's like, "*Okay, Spirit; we got 20 minutes!*" [Congregation laughs]
"*What are we doing here?*"

And Spirit said, "*You're going the wrong direction.*"

It's like, "*No; I told people we were going this way.*"

Spirit said, "*I don't care what you told them; we're going this way. You've been talking about 'Finding' for the last two months, and I've got one more. And we're going to talk about finding spiritual independence.*"

Because for us, and the time that we live in right now, finding independence is fundamentally important. God created us with a spirit of freedom. And yet, we see in the world around us a lot of situations where people are not really experiencing a high level of freedom. Where they feel trapped in circumstances and situations and addictions and problems.

And so tonight, I want to address some of that with the idea of truly asking the question: What does it take to liberate your soul? What does it take for you to know profound freedom in your life?

And in a country where we put such a high value on freedom, how do we live it -- not just as an idea -- but how do we live it as an experience in a greater way? Because I believe that there is a critical time for us to truly know profound freedom in our lives.

And if you look at the basic spiritual principle, the basis of all spiritual principle is free will. God actually gave us free will and we are called to use it; to know it; to live it. To experience a soul set free.

And so I want to begin tonight by really inviting you to really look at the areas in your life where there is an opportunity for you to know greater freedom. And it could be in any level; any situation; any condition in your life. It could be with health or finances or relationships. It could be any area in your life: addiction. It could be any area of your life. Is there an area in your life tonight where you could see that you are living a limited point of view; a limited experience? And would you be willing to know greater freedom?

So what holds us back from knowing our complete freedom as a spiritual being?

Like, that whole idea of being a spiritual being and being free: Does that interest you? Does that inspire you? Does that invite you into a, "*Like, wow! What would the possibilities be if I was completely free? What would my life look like? How would I live if I was free at every level of my being? If I was free*

financially and mentally and emotionally? If I was completely free, how would that look? And what changes would that create in my life and in the world?"

Because I believe that we have a tendency to struggle with our limitations. That we allow our limitations to define us. And what if tonight we got to be free?

So I have five points that I want to make tonight. And the first point really is ... In this celebration of our independence, what I want you to see is the first point is: **RECOGNIZING THE CHAINS THAT BIND US.**

So one of the things that amazes me is how much our spouse can see our limitations better than we can! [Congregation laughs] Does that ever amaze anybody else? That our spouse can see our limitations and -- if you're like our relationship -- and is willing to point them out! [Congregation laughs] Right? In a way that is like, *"Oh! Okay! Well, apparently everyone sees it better than I see it!"*

But you can't be free if you can't recognize your own limitations. And there's a part of us that I believe -- in our woundedness and our brokenness and our limitations -- that doesn't want to see the places where we've allowed ourselves to accept limitations. And we just don't want to see it!

But part of this journey -- this spiritual journey that we're on -- is that you actually have to be able to awaken and see where it's not working; where it's a problem; where it's not fully functioning at the level it could be. And recognizing our chains actually allows us to transcend them. That you can't heal what you can't see. You can't change what you can't be conscious of.

You know, there's this story of how they train -- and I'm not advocating this, so don't email me, right? How they train domesticated elephants. And it's really heartbreaking! Right? When an elephant is small, they put a chain around one of its legs, and drive the chain into a stake in the ground. And no matter how much the elephant pulls and pulls and pulls at that stake, it can't free itself. It doesn't have the strength. And as the elephant grows, what happens is: They get so used to that chain on one of their legs limiting their mobility that when the elephant continues to grow and is this massive beast that could rip any chain apart, it doesn't even try anymore! It's so used to the limitation that, if the chain is on its arm or its leg, it doesn't even try to free itself anymore.

And I believe that that's part of our spiritual story -- is that we get so used to the limitations that we were raised with, or the limitations of our family or of our culture or of our background, that we don't see those limitations anymore. Even when they're problematic! Even when they limit our mobility! Even when they limit our choices! Even when they limit our lives! We're so used to it, we just accept it!

And tonight, I want you to be willing to see your limitations with new eyes. Not with shame, but in a willingness to say, "I can't heal what I can't see. If I can't see my limitations, I cannot ask the Spirit of God to transform them, because I'm unconscious to them!"

The part of our spiritual -- and I think, for many of us, the most important part of our spiritual journey -- is learning to be conscious and aware and awake, and to see the areas in our lives that simply aren't working for us.

And I want to use our own Declaration of Independence as kind of a roadmap for how to do this. So from Congress July 4, 1776: the unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America:

"When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness ... That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed ... That whenever any Form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness."

Then they listed 26 grievances. They listed them all ... like clearly: one, two, three, four ... 26. Why they were doing what they were doing. They had to see it! They had to see what the problem was! And once they could see what the problem was, then they were willing to articulate the problem as justification for why they were moving in a new direction.

So the first one is that we have to truly be able to recognize the chains that bind us.

Two: We have to **CULTIVATE SELF-AWARENESS AND INNER FREEDOM**. And I love this one! Right? Because, not only do we have to be able to see it, but we have to then cultivate an inner awareness and an inner freedom that all freedom comes from within. All freedom at its source is from God!

And so if we begin to notice an area in our lives that isn't working, we actually have to have a deeper spiritual relationship with God as the source of setting us free. That it really is an inner job! And no matter what the outer limitation may be; no matter what the outer problem or challenge or need may be, it's always an invitation to go deeper and to have a greater spiritual experience.

And that greater spiritual experience is the source of the transformation. Galatians 5:1 we read:

"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand fast, therefore, and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery."

That every time you notice a limitation, it has to be an invitation for us to go deeper into God.

Reading from our own Declaration of Independence:

"Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shown that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed."

What does that mean? It means that we have a tendency to be able to suffer! That we are willing to tolerate all kinds of nonsense because we're afraid to make a change! But that all change comes as we connect with the power of God within us.

Three: **BREAKING FREE FROM EXTERNAL VALIDATION**. And this is where it gets tough! Right? Because how many of us have ever tried to be what somebody else wanted us to be? Have we all had that experience? We couldn't really be what our parents wanted us to be exactly; or we couldn't be what our spouse wanted us to be. And how many of us can't always be what our children wanted us to be? Right?

Sometimes we want other people to validate us so much that we give up on who we're called to be. But over and over again what I want you to see is that breaking free of those external validations is a fundamental part of us honoring the Spirit of God within us. That we are called to let go of the need for other people's approval at the expense of not being who God created us to be. That we are called to be set free!

And every great movement in humankind; every great freedom that was established at some level required the individual or the group to let go of the external expectations and to be more true to themselves; more true to the activity of God within them. To be the best version of themselves.

Again, from the Declaration:

"In every stage of these Oppressions, We have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble terms: Our repeated Petitions have been answered only by repeated injury. A Prince whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free people."

Right? At some point they just have to say, *"Look! This isn't working! I can't continue to live by your expectations if your expectations don't allow the fullness of who I am to be expressed!"*

Over and over again, to be free is this challenge -- this cosmic responsibility -- to honor ourselves so clearly. As Shakespeare said, *"To thy own self be true."*

And what I want us to see tonight is that this journey of breaking free of external validation is no easy thing. How many of you have ever heard that children shouldn't really allow peer pressure to affect their choices? Right? We've all heard that, right? But have you noticed that a group of adults at a party tend to have a mindset that says, *"Well, if he's doing it, then I guess I have to do it."* Or, *"If she's going like that, I guess I have to do that."*

And what I want you to see is: Adults are not immune to peer pressure. That we cave -- and I mean that with all the love in my heart, right? Can you think of a time when you've caved into somebody else's opinion? And over and over again, we have to break free of this external validation.

Four: We have to **EMBRACE SPIRITUAL PRACTICES AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH** in such a way that we actually become new creation. That every time we notice that we are limited, we can't just become a better version of ourselves; that truly to be free, you have to become a new version of yourselves. We didn't become a better United States of America; we actually became the United States of America. We actually had to become that we'd never been before!

Every time we notice a limitation, it's not about being a better version; it's actually about transforming to a higher version. To that which we've never been before.

Reading from our own Declaration:

"We, therefore, the Representatives of the united States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States; that they are Absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as Free and Independent States, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do."

It's that line! That actually separated them so that they could be what they'd never been before! That, as we move into freedom, we're not just adjusting who we've been; we're actually coming into the fullness of who we are. We actually have to stand in the glory of who we are to be that great version of who we are -- created in the image and likeness of God!

And the final point. The final point is **EMBODYING OUR AUTHENTICITY AND ALIGNMENT**. That it is written in your soul who you were called to be. I believe the moment God gave you life -- the moment you were given spiritual life -- at that moment, the design of your soul was fully intact. And our job is to

embody it! To be authentically who we are! To align with our greatness; to align with what it means to be created in the image and likeness of God.

The final act of the Declaration of Independence was this:

"For the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor."

The most powerful part of this is: They did not know how this was going to work! That they actually declared their freedom without the full awareness of how they were going to act it out! They declared their freedom from Great Britain, even though Great Britain was the greatest power in the world at that time ... and they declared their freedom anyway!

So the final act of declaring your freedom is to **DECLARE YOUR FREEDOM!** The final act is to be the radiant expression of God that you were meant to be and declare it! And as you declare it, it is established unto you ... not because you know how to do it, but in declaring it, it actually transforms you into the next greatest version of you!

Over and over again, what I want us to see tonight is that I believe that every limitation that we are suffering with in our lives and in our world is a spiritual invitation to express more God. That every issue; every need; every problem; whatever issue you're facing in your life, the way through this is to declare your freedom. Because the activity of God in you is greater than whatever you're facing. And as you declare it, it is established unto you. But if you don't declare it, and just live with it, you spend day after day, week after week, year after year adjusting to the limitation and suffering with it, instead of declaring your freedom to overcome it.

So what in your life have you outgrown? That no longer makes sense to limit your expression? To no longer make sense for you to suffer with?

Tonight, would you be willing to declare your spiritual independence and to be free?

Will you pray with me?

I invite you to open your mind, your heart, your soul to the activity of God. There is but one presence and one power: one God, one good expressing through us all. And tonight, we give thanks for our path to freedom. For our spiritual independence. That whatever is presented to us in this life, God in us is greater than that. That we were born to overcome every obstacle; every challenge; every problem. And God in us is moving us to greater and greater and greater levels of good. So in all things we look to God, and in all things we give thanks. And so it is. Amen.

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