

THE PRICE OF LIBERTY

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Presented to Trinity Community Church, San Rafael, California, on Sunday, July 5, 2015

Liberty is a privilege, not a right. When we take it for granted, and forget that it is a privilege, we usually also neglect its maintenance.

Too often we don't appreciate what we didn't work for or sacrifice for in one way or another. If it didn't cost us something in order to obtain it, then we'll probably hold it rather loosely and with some degree of disregard.

The vast majority of us were simply handed liberty. And yet we assume we have a RIGHT to it. We resolutely claim liberty as our God-given right, and we vigorously decry any violation of it. We zealously claim it as our due, but few of us cherish it as a gift.

Too many of us view liberty as something that “just is,” and too few see it as something that “is” only because someone, somewhere, at some point in history realized that to keep liberty required paying a stiff price.

Liberty isn't something that “just is.” Liberty is something that men and women were willing to trade their lives for, to ransom their dreams to achieve, and to selflessly risk all that life meant to them in order to protect it for everyone else.

In a dozen major wars and in thousands of places around the world, over 1.25 million American servicemen and women have died in the defense of our country and its freedoms. And another 1.5 million American servicemen and women have been wounded for the protection of these United States. And nearly 40 thousand American servicemen and women have gone missing in action to secure American liberty.

Yet, none of those sacrifices *won* freedom for us at all. They were all given to preserve a freedom we already had—a freedom already known and enjoyed by some, though not by all. For freedom is repeatedly threatened by greed. The lust for power and control.

Greed still threatens our personal and political freedoms today. Nations vie for resources and the wealth and power that they represent. Politicians posture themselves for increased popularity and special interests. Ethnic groups battle for religious and cultural power over their neighbors. Corporations compete for market share in the growing global economy.

Some competition is good, even healthy—in that it demands the best we can give and sometimes

inspires more than we knew we had in us. But when competition turns cutthroat, and human beings lose their humanity—becoming mere objects to use or destroy—then we all lose, no matter how much money changes hands.

Liberty is a priceless principle that has captivated the hearts and minds of generations since time began, because liberty is part of God's unalterable design. It is His uncompromising and unwavering intent for all people.

We carelessly threw it away in the Garden of Eden at the beginning of time, and then Jesus Christ lovingly handed it back to us at the cross on which He died.

The Son of God gave His life to secure our freedom. And millions of men and women since have given themselves to preserve or regain that liberty.

Liberty is unimaginably costly. May we never forget that we still enjoy many liberties today *only* because others held the line at great cost to themselves. Above them all, God's Son, Jesus, died to liberate us, and then He liberated Himself by rising from the very death that purchased our freedom.

True, lasting, and unassailable liberty is found only in God through the gift of His Son on our behalf.

Today, in the United States of America, we celebrate much more than political independence; we celebrate a national liberty that was established “under God,” with “certain unalienable rights.”

The Gospel of Jesus Christ has had a home in these fifty states, and an amazing influence in our culture that has reached around the globe.

We have never really been a Christian nation, but we have been a Christ-aware culture from our inception, and the Church has enjoyed great liberty and esteem and global influence, as a result.

While the tide has, in many respects, turned, do I need to remind you of the way it is with tides? It will rise again! God has established that order.

We are not here to Christianize America, but to “make disciples from among all nations”—disciples, not for America, but for Jesus Christ.

Technology has changed, and will continue to change, our customs, our contacts, and our connections with one another. But if we will not be distracted or dismayed by the pace of change, God will superintend these changes for His glory, taking the Gospel into every people group on the planet, demonstrating His way, His truth, and His life through Jesus Christ.

If we are to fight for this freedom today, and in the century that lies before us, we must learn to fight “the good fight,” with integrity and respect.

A fight may be “good” because it is rooted in godly *principles*.

A fight may be “good” because it is motivated by godly *aims*.

A fight may be “good” because it is fought with godly *methods*.

But even if it lacks all of these things, a fight will be “good” if it is a fight you *win*.

And if a fight is rooted in godly principles, motivated by godly aims, fought with godly methods, AND you win it—that is really a GOOD FIGHT!

God has called you to such a good fight—a “good fight of faith.” What do you think that means? Let’s get a clue from Apostle Paul’s instructions to his protégé Timothy:

¹ Timothy 1:18 Timothy, my son, here are my instructions for you, based on the prophetic words spoken about you earlier. May they help you fight [the good fight].

¹⁹ Cling to your faith in Christ, and keep your conscience clear. For some people have deliberately violated their consciences; as a result, their faith has been shipwrecked.

¹ Timothy 6:11 But you, Timothy, are a man of God; so run from all these evil things. Pursue righteousness and a godly life, along with faith, love, perseverance, and gentleness.

¹² Fight the good fight for the true faith. Hold tightly to the eternal life to which God has called you, which you have confessed so well before many witnesses.

This, then, is how to fight the good fight that will win the war:

- *Cling to your faith in Christ* (no matter what challenges or disappointments may come)
- *Keep your conscience clear* (learn to repent quickly and forgive freely)
- *Pursue righteousness and a godly life* (be serious about your faith—not just on special days—discover how everything in your life may nurture your relationship with Jesus)
- *Hold tightly to the eternal life to which God has called you* (have goals that are bigger than this life, crafting an influence for coming generations)

Liberty is a God-given privilege, not a right. Show that you value it by pursuing it heartily, guarding it carefully, and sharing it generously.