

I. My Story:

- A. When I was in my early twenties, and my wife and I had only been married a year or two, I began changing...and not in a good way. I was a young bay area youth pastor trying to prove myself...trying to prove that the small church that hired me, as their first youth pastor, hadn't made a gigantic mistake. I was stressed, over working, and dragging my wife to every church activity I could say yes to.
- Add to that, money was tight, I mean really, really tight...too tight.
 - And I was changing...I was more and more angry.
 - I was arguing with my wife, and feeling pressed on every side.
 - One day, I walked in the front door of our apartment, which was a landing with a coat closet and a flight of stairs. First floor entry, upstairs apartment. I could hear my wife greet me from upstairs, but I couldn't see what she was doing. I walked up the long flight of stairs and rounded the corner.
 - After rounding the corner, I saw on the table, a blue frosted, angel food cake. Deborah, then says to me, "I just thought you deserved a cake today."
 - As I stood there staring at that cake, something was breaking on the inside. I don't remember what I said to her, but I remember her wanting me to sit down and have a piece. She was happy and I was in shock.
 - I began taking bites of that cake, and I began to cry, and cry, and cry. She began to freaked out. Because my response was completely disproportionate to someone baking a cake.
 - This response isn't equal to that action. If you want to know how messed up you are, measure your response to the action being done.
 - If a normal person, on a normal day, on a scale of 1 to 10 responds at a 5, and you respond at a 10...there is something wrong.
- B. So I'm crying, eating angel food cake, and she's getting more worried and confused.
- And I'm not able to communicate with words what's going on...and so she, in a respectful way says, "I think you should go talk with someone. Maybe a counselor."
 - And as I'm crying, I say ok, but we don't have the money.
 - And she says, I know, but think I can work with a friend from the church cleaning houses, and I will pay for you to talk with someone if you want.
 - So my wife cleaned houses for 18 months so I could go see a counselor twice a month. We couldn't afford for me to see him more than that...but my wife cleaned other people's messes, so I could find freedom from the stuff going on inside of me.
 - What I discovered during those 18 months was surprising.
- C. The man I talked with was a Christian counselor with a Christ-centered approach. He had an understanding of the behaviors I was showing. Behaviors like:
- a. People-pleasing
 - b. Lack of boundaries...not being able to say no
 - c. Unable to deal with stress
 - d. Anger
 - e. Perfectionism
- D. These behaviors weren't just responses to my present circumstances of stresses, but they were, in many cases, deep rooted coping strategies that I had learned growing up
- And to make matters worse, they were part of my belief systems tied to vows.
 - Let me say that again my behaviors weren't just anchored in deep, core beliefs... they had strong vows tied to them as well.
 - And so, through my wife and my counselor, God, and only God brought me to the shattering truth, that I wasn't free from my past.

II. Today's message, in our Freedom series, is titled, *Freedom from your Past*.

- A. I humbly, and simply submit to you, from God's Word, and with my own personal testimony, that freedom from your past can only come from one Source (with a capital S).
- Jesus Christ.
 - Our savior, sanctifier, healer and coming King.
 - Jeremiah 2:13 communicates this idea of God being our only true Source:
*For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters,
And hewn themselves cisterns—broken cisterns that can hold no water.*
- B. Two evils:
1. First evil...turned away from the one True Source.
 2. Second evil...made their own sources which are lousy.
- The greatest deception is that someone, something, or some activity other than God can be your Source for freedom and healing.
 - The Bible calls others sources idolatry.
 - To take the contrapositive of this idea, is to say...if you are not experiencing freedom from your past the way you want...you've got the wrong source.
 - Who is going to free you? Or better put...what or who is operating as your functional savior or functional heaven?
 - Your job?
 - Your money?
 - Food?
 - Your ability to forget?
 - Your spouse...if only they...
 - Your kid's accomplishments?
 - Your religion?
 - Your drugs or substances?
 - Your hobbies?
 - Your online life?
 - Your possessions?
 - Your house?
 - Gaming?
 - Sports?
 - Your gym?
 - Your vacation?
 - Retirement?
 - Only Christ, through whom you were created, can free you. And connecting or reconnecting to Him as your primary source for all your needs is crucial.
 - He sees every moment of your life.
 - He has always been with you.
 - You haven't always trusted Him, but He has always been there.
 - He hasn't always done what you want Him to do, but He has always had your best in mind.
 - How do I know this? I look at the Cross to see what He is like. He took up every evil done to you. Every evil you have done. Every sin, every mistake... everything was nailed to the cross.
 - Forgiven.
 - Past.

- Present.
- Future.
- While we were yet sinners Christ died for us, and Christ lives, and His Spirit lives in you.
- He has the power to go back in time and heal and set free.
- Have you ever considered that Christ stands outside of time? He doesn't see your life as primarily past, present, and future. You and I see it that way. He can see it in one dimension. He just sees you. The total you.
- He joins you in the memories of your past and His Word; His promises from Scripture have authority there.
- The past isn't beyond Christ's ability to heal. For Christ the past, present, and future are all in front of Him and within His ability to heal.
- What is holding us back from trusting Him today?
- C. I see 3 barriers to experiencing God's freedom from you past, but before we look at these, I want to make three quick points of clarification.
 - a. God never exposes a past hurt without embracing it. So, as we talk today, what gets exposed gets embraced. The love of God is here today.
 - b. In addition, we are NOT talking about our pasts for the sake of digging around. We do so in order to let God do His work in bringing to light what needs His embrace, Truth, Grace, and Forgiveness.
 - c. The worst possible outcome of today's sermon is for you to get lost in your past, digging around and getting depressed. The goal of today is to allow God to bring to light what is holding you back from the freedom you desire. The hurts in this room, and for those viewing online, is heart-breaking. This message is to be seen as a starting point for many of you, not a finish line. The starting point is one of embrace from God.
- D. The process of healing for most of us, is more than one sermon. BUT without a sermon, for some of you, you wouldn't ever start.
 - A sermon can be a spark.
 - A spark to forgive.
 - A spark to confess.
 - A spark to let go.
- A sermon isn't a substitute for you digging into God's Word and hearing God communicate His heart to you.
- It isn't a substitute for Christian counseling.
- It isn't a substitute for Godly Christian counsel you may need to gain wisdom as to what God is doing in you.
- So it is in Jesus' name, that we talk about Freedom from our Past.
- We are talking about the 3 biggest Barriers that keep us from Freedom...
- 1. The Barrier of Un-forgiveness blocks us
 - a. Let me be a bit unconventional here...let's start with what forgiveness doesn't mean...this way, your blood pressure won't spike. Forgiveness doesn't mean you can't protect yourself from abusive people.
Make no friendship with an angry man, And with a furious man do not go, Lest you learn his ways And set a snare for your soul. (Proverbs 22:24-25)
 - b. Furthermore, it doesn't mean you have to have a meaningful relationship with the person.
 - c. And, based on the situation, forgiveness doesn't mean you have to have a relationship with the person. There can be forgiveness without reconciling the relationship because the person is dangerous.
 - d. Or there may be forgiveness and only partial reconciliation. If you fall into the trap that you must reconcile with an evil person once you forgive them, then you are weighed down by unhealthy guilt, shame, religion, and/or co-dependency.
 - e. Forgiveness also doesn't mean you have to ignore issues.
 - f. If you forgive someone and reconcile with them, don't think they have a hall pass.
 - g. You can forgive and still hold a standard of expectation and confront hurtful actions.
 - h. And finally, forgiveness does not mean someone doesn't have to face consequences, punishments, and yes, even criminal charges.
- Ok, now that your blood pressure is normal, 120 over 80...let's talk about what forgiveness is.
 - a. Forgiveness, as one pastor put it, is forgiving all debt and bringing the balance to zero.
 - (Matthew 18 has Jesus teaching on this very point) Perhaps you can read Matthew 18 this week as a personal Bible study time. Bringing the balance to zero is perhaps the hardest part of forgiveness. We need the power of feeling wronged to protect ourselves, and if we let our guard down and give up that power, who will protect us? Who will fight for us?
 - In Romans 12:19...the Lord promises He is the one to take vengeance. The Lord is measured, precise, and has long range wisdom.
 - Our vengeance is sloppy, short cited, and gets us into worse situations.
 - Giving up the right to get revenge, also means we don't have use of what I call the baseball bat of bitterness.
 - Ephesians 4:31-32 speaks of putting away bitterness and *"forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you."*
 - Similar to Matthew 18...forgiveness is a command, not a suggestion.
 - b. And forgiveness is for our good, not harm. We are giving the same grace that was extended to us from Jesus Christ, our Source, to others.
 - c. When, by faith, you look to Jesus for help, He gives you forgiveness for yourself, and others.
 - d. We forgive by faith...trusting God. And when we forgive we give up the bitterness bat that we use to verbally cut on, tear down and destroy another person either privately or publicly.
 - Oh, you want to hear about my dad...well he's a piece of work...bitterness bat please.
 - Oh, my boss at work, I can't stand him; hold on...bitterness bat please...he is the worse boss ever.
 - I have a suggestion. It will make you feel better. Forgive. Then get a new job if he is truly terrible.
 - Unforgiveness takes many forms beyond bitterness.
 - Gossip, name calling, hate, slander, sarcasm, labels (like idiot, jerk, moron), verbal abuse, racism, wishing bad things on people.
 - All those forms of unforgiveness can be powerful...ultimately it can be COMFORTING.
 - We feel some form of comfort when we blast someone, or gossip. And these forms of bitterness become a source, but not the Source, of comfort.
 - These forms are like a broken cistern...they torment you, because no matter how much you trash your mom, boss, or spouse...the anger, hurt, and lack of closure returns and harasses you.
 - God's way is forgiveness, and at the end of my message we will pray and start a process of becoming free.
 - Forgiveness doesn't make the person who offended you right, it makes you free.
- 2. The Barrier of Sin blocks us from Freedom
 - Sin we commit (rebellion)
 - Woman Caught in Adultery (John 8:1-11) Her Sin is Exposed And Christ Embraces her.
10 When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?"
11 She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."
 - Confess (Healing)
 - Take responsibility for you sin. Its only pride holding us back. The Holy Spirit is revealing, and convicting us of our trespasses. Pride is the root...and our bad behavior is the evidence.
 - For some of you, you need to confess your sins to someone else. James 5:16 states,
Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed.
The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

- For some of you, you need to ask for forgiveness. Humble yourself and do it. However, don't go to a person who has no idea what you are talking about and offend them.
- Hey man, I'm sorry that in my heart I been thinking you are a real jerk. If the apology is going to be taken as hurtful or wounding, deal with God on it, or maybe, just maybe if it's eating you up inside talk to a trusted Christian friend.
- 3. Finally, forgive yourself.
 - We just don't forgive ourselves, do we?
 - Which is a pride issue at the core. Either Christ's beating was sufficient, or it wasn't. And it was, so stopping rejecting the grace and love of God and receive forgiveness for yourself today.
 - We believe that God can bring beauty from ashes, so even if your offense is irreparable, we believe God can still do something with it.
 - He only gets broken stuff to use on earth, He's really good at repaying the years that the locust have destroyed.
 - The Barrier of Sin committed against us keeps us from Freedom.
 - The lasting effects...from your family, teachers, pastors, mentors, and close friend's sin aimed at you, is a barrier to Freedom.
 1. Bring to light the effects (Be brave)
 - For example, acknowledge...
 - My View on marriage is warped...Because my parents didn't show affection towards each other. They didn't kiss. They didn't sleep in the same rooms.
 - Relationships are out whack
 - You may have had terrible dating relationships with evil people
 - Sex
 - Pornography was introduced to you, abuse occurred, lack of transparency, never talked about
 - Finances
 - Parenting
 - Faith
 - High Religious
 - Opposite sex
 - Belittled, made fun of
 - Politics
 - Super political, dogmatic, mean
 - Substances
 - Emotional Health or Abuse
 - Never saw healthy Anger, Joy, Sadness, Fear
 2. And then there is the lasting effect of Shame...
 - Hidden sin against you.
 - I've been a pastor almost 20 years. I've spent a considerable amount of time counseling people, and the things people have revealed in counseling sessions are unspeakable.
 - Things that have locked them in guilt and shame for years and years and years.
 - Things that were not their fault.
 - You might have one Godly relationship Christian who you can confide in, who you can confess to...
 - Oh the freedom to be free from the burden of shame!
 3. I spoke at a High School summer camp one time. Don't have me as your camp speaker...invite Bill, invite Travis. Don't invite me.
 - The Lord seems to lead me into areas that 95% of the students listening have no idea what I'm talking about...One night at this camp, I spoke on guilt and shame.
 - I think they wanted a camp speaker with funny stories, a lot energy from stage, and to wow them. Instead I stood up, changed my message, and talked about being locked up in guilt and shame and the freedom that comes from Christ... And for some reason the close of my message got super heavy, and somewhat depressing, as I centered in on students there who were weighed down by secrets and that camp could be a safe place to open up to a counselor.
 - After I walked off the stage, and sat down next to one of the leaders, he said, in a sheepish tone, "Ah, wow Todd, that was super heavy. I'm not sure how everyone is going to take that."
 - The service closed and people were milling around...no one came up to me to talk.
 - I had the plague.
 - I felt horrible.
 - And then everyone left and went to their cabins and I went to mine.
 - Later that night, a knock came at my door. It was a leader, who was clearly shaken.
 - He explained how a boy had the courage to open up about unspeakable things occurring in his home.
 - He went on to explain other issues coming to light and thanked me for sharing the message I did.
 - I'm here today, in the name of Jesus.
 - If things are happening to you or have happened to you...and you aren't free from them, find a trust-worthy, Christian person to confide in.
- 4. The Barrier of Inner Vows blocks us from Freedom
 - Inner Vows are crazy little guys.
 - Want to pinpoint an inner vow?
 - Where are you resistant to change?
 - And a little crazy?
 - Where are you unteachable?
 - a. Here is an example: Your dad or mom quit or lost a job while you were growing up, and it led to financial hardship. You vowed to never put your family in the same financial hardship.
 - You follow through with your vow, and you have a job you should quit, but you are afraid of financial hardship if you quit your job, or your boss finds out you are looking for a job, so you don't do anything.
 - Even if your family is telling you to quit.
 - Your friends are telling you this.
 - And you know you aren't happy and should do something about it...but this hidden, deep vow is kicking your butt...it won't let you change.
 - And people think you are crazy.
 - b. The biggest craziness is that these internal vows are hidden.
 - These vows keep us stuck in our past...entrenched really.
 - We as humans have lots of Vows of self-protection "I will never let anyone in." or I will never open my heart again."
 - You've felt abandonment rejection and no else is going to be let in. And so you don't feel emotionally close to people. They feel closer to you, than you do to them. And you don't build the bonds you desire.
 - c. Furthermore...un-forgiveness is a lifestyle. My vow is to never let that person in again.

- Now, as we talked, the people that are abusive, evil, unsafe, this is wise. However, your vow of not letting people in, lumps everyone into that category. Everyone who slights you is only reaffirming and giving evidence that no one is allowed in your heart.
- d. You call these boundaries. Boundaries, however as God intended are to keep people inside your life, not just outside.
 - God has other Christian people that need to be on the inside of your fence, not the outside.
 - You might say you don't have time for relationships.
 - You have busied your life with activity after activity.
 - You are probably completely unaware that your business is a direct connection to your vow to keep people out.
 - I will always take care of myself.
 - People didn't take care of you.
 - Didn't fight for you.
 - You don't let people help you.
 - Your answer to everyone's offer to help..." I'm good. No worries, I've got it. Nope. We are good."
- e. I will always protect my children.
 - You are living in a false world. You can't possibly protect your child from everything...But you will try...and make sure you don't let them take risks. My sister drown in the backyard of our swimming pool when I was growing up...what type of parent vows have I made...
 - I have driven my wife crazy!!!!
 - Your inner vows can drive others absolutely bonkers.
 - In marriage, inner vows can suck the life out of the relationship.
 - These vows are made to comfort us...but the reverse happens, they torment us.
 - I don't have the time to continue listing false vows.
 - They are endless.
 - When you get "triggered" as the kids call it, your emotions flare...your inner vow is sticking its neck out.
 - You got disrespected once...and now you made a vow not to let one more person disrespect you. And you see everything as disrespect. Forgive the person that disrespected you.
- f. Its time to move on.
 - Be free.
 - The Bible says not to make these sorts of false vows. We are not to swear these things in our hearts. (Matthew 5:33).
 - Our vows are broken cisterns in God's eyes.
 - We are trusting in our determination to protect ourselves.
 - God asks us to read His Word and trust his ways by faith.
- g. Faith is Trust.
 - What is God vowing to us?
 - To never leave us or forsake us.
 - He vows that nothing can separate us from Him.
 - He will walk through the valley of the shadow of death with us.
 - We are to be in bonded relationships with others...He calls it the body of Christ.
 - He calls it marriage.
 - He calls it family.
- h. I just listed a few promises.
 - Do you know how many promises and vows God makes to His people in the Bible?
 - Over 3000.
 - If you have a false vow, God's got a powerful substitute for it.
- As we close our time, I'd like to lead us in a time of prayer.
- The prayer has 5 parts to it.
 - Confession.
 - Repentance.
 - Forgiveness.
 - Relinquish Control.
 - Humility.
- What has come to mind and heart today that needs to be confessed?
 - Is a hardness of heart?
 - Pride?
 - Not willing to forgive?
 - Is it a sin you have never done business with God over?
 - Is it a sin done to you that you need to confess to God?
 - Is it a vow you've made in your heart that has unseated God for having any chance to be God over it?
 - I'm going to lead us in prayer, join me.

III. Prayer

- God, you have seen every day of our lives before one even began. You have seen the joy and pain, the times we have trusted you whole heartedly, and the times we have done what is right in our own eyes. We declare you are a good, loving, forgiving, just God. We declare that you see right to the depths of our being and you see the burdens we carry. We know in your Word that we are, by prayer, to bring our requests to you. Today God we ask for you to draw out the things in our hearts that need your healing embrace.
- Now in the quietness of your own heart. Confess to God your sin or the sin done to you. Repent from it. Either the sin itself, or the vow to do it on your own. Claim a turning away from the wrong you can own, and respond to God's leading you into his ways. Turning away from sin. Forgiving someone. Now ask God for forgiveness. Receive this forgiveness. As far as the east is from the west, so has God removed our transgressions from us. Christ took a beating on the cross that we might experience forgiveness. Receive God's forgiveness today. Next pray and relinquish control. Relinquish your way of handling the pain, hurt, sin...and by faith, trust God with this past event. And finally, in humility ask God to teach you His ways in this area. Leading you into His plans and purposes.
- God we are your children, and you are our God. You are not a broken cistern that runs out of resource. You are an everlasting fountain of living water, able to continue flowing down into our heart, mind, will and emotions. Help us to walk in freedom. Help us see you as the Source, the only Source, of true freedom from our past.
- Amen.