



## Paying a King's Ransom

Text: I Peter 1:18-19  
New Testament: Acts 2:14a, 36-41  
Gospel: I Peter 1:17-25

Freedom is precious. It defines what is good.

When we're free, we hug others without fear. We kiss loved ones without fear. We travel where we want, when we want, to see who or what we want.

When we're free, we decide for ourselves where we work, when we work, how we work, for how much we work. We're free to earn a living.

Losing freedom is devastating for freedom lovers. When freedom's threatened, some people will do whatever it takes to get freedom back, even at an expense to themselves and others.

A permissive culture that worships freedom as its national entitlement finds it extremely difficult to give up liberty. A permissive culture's government that fails to protect individual liberty will see its policies protested by the governed. Losing freedom loses people's trust in government. Rebellion stirs the streets.

This week we're discovering how far we're willing to lose our freedom to protect what many believe is a greater good than freedom – our health. Good health is necessary for freedom. Losing good health loses personal freedom.

But there's an irony to being healthy. Protecting good health can lose freedom. Staying healthy these days comes at the expense of earning a living. We're physically healthy, but unable to work. We're physically healthy, but with nowhere to go and no one to see.

We live in our safe cocoons that are free from the virus. But our cocoons are isolated from our neighbors and the world.



The coronavirus is forcing us to redefine the good. One good is our freedom to work and earn a living. But we risk losing health and our freedom to work and earn a living.

The other good is freedom from the virus and preserving good health. But we lose our freedom to work and earn a living. We can be healthy by not going anywhere and not earning an income.

The world is redefining freedom.

The current social condition isn't what it was six months ago. Six months ago, we didn't consider that freedom risked losing our lives. Six months ago, it didn't matter who we saw, where we went, or what work we did. Our society didn't think the threat of disease and death was worth losing freedom.

Six months ago, the freedom to mingle in crowds exposed us to germs and viruses. But we never thought full restaurants and crowded stadiums risked our life. Even though thousands die annually to communicable diseases that we can acquire, we visited loved ones and friends who were risks to our health. We went to hospitals and homes where viruses and germs were thriving.

Six months ago, we freely lived an abundant life as God's creation.

Was it only because of vaccines that we were free?

Is freedom only possible only because of immunization?

Today, we live as exiles from the land in which we once lived. I told my neighbor I went to the store two weeks ago. We have a good relationship. But he looked at me as if I was risking his life. Tell someone you're not afraid of contracting the virus because you believe Jesus has saved you. They look at you as a lost soul who stopped using common sense.



People interviewed on television went to church Sunday while observing social distancing in their sanctuary. But radio and television commentators later excoriated those church members with anger.

Freedom to worship together according to your conscience is being restricted by public disdain for the faith that frees them from fear.

Christian faith is un-welcome in this new world of fear.

Freedom to gather with others in worship from believing Jesus' resurrection has saved us is thought as foolish in this viral world. We're a threat to spread the virus. Our lack of fear justifies media and government pressuring church leaders to close sanctuaries. Valuing the good of Christian community makes us guilty of the cultural sin of disregard for others' health.

We're pressured to give up our freedom to worship together because of our foolish faith insists that God alone governs our conscience and Jesus' resurrection inoculates us from fear of the coronavirus.

We're being socially bullied into a prison built without trust in God.

Sincere faith in the Easter gospel that God and Jesus' believers prevail over death is mocked and condemned. Pandemonium rules the earth.

This is a time of divine testing for us and the world. It's a test similar to that which Christians have faced in other times and other places.

The Apostle Peter lost his freedom because of his faith in Jesus' resurrection. He dared preach that life comes from death. The greatest intellectuals of his time refused to believe his preposterous belief that life comes out of death. Peter was defying natural law.

The greatest classical philosophers, physicians, and government leaders mocked Peter's preaching and teaching about Jesus's resurrection.



The Roman Empire rejected life came out of death. Christian teaching was a virus that was polluting the Empire. It encouraged Christians to resist the culture. It taught loyalty to Christ was paramount, not loyalty to Rome's government or the imperial Empire. It taught fearlessness before the threat of death. Rome needed the fear of death to keep the peace.

Peter was imprisoned for the freedom he taught by his faith in Jesus Christ. The Romans threatened Peter with death by crucifixion. Did he lose his freedom to preach the gospel? Did Peter lose his freedom to live the Gospel?

Peter lost his freedom to work and earn a living. Peter lost his freedom to hug his friends and to travel where he wanted, with whom he wanted, when he wanted. Peter was imprisoned by a culture that bullied Christianity into catacombs and hidden houses of worship.

But Peter was free! He was in exile from freely walking in the world. But Peter was free where it mattered - in his heart and mind. He used the platform of his imprisonment to convince disbelievers that God prevails over death! What you think about God's victory over death frees you from the prison of fear that rules the Empire. Peter's study of Jesus' resurrection freed him to boldly declare what the Apostle Paul claimed, neither powers nor principalities, nor things present nor things to come can separate us from God's love in Jesus Christ.

Peter wrote two letters from a prison in Rome to the Church in Asia Minor. But he writes to us as well in the twenty-first century. God will judge impartially according to deeds that are done during this time of our exile from the world of freedom. God's judgment is merciful to those who live in reverence to God because of Jesus Christ.



Freedom, in our time, is not ransomed by a vaccine. Our freedom is guaranteed by believing that Christ's resurrection has ransomed us from the misplaced belief that good health preserves our life.

Our savior Jesus liberates us to see our situation differently than the culture that bullies our faith. Our hope is not in the cocoon of our homes. Our hope is in the wind of Christ's spirit blowing through the Church, giving it breath and new life while the world huddles in fear of death.

Our future is secured by Christ's blood given for our freedom, not by plasma injected into us from the survivor of a virus. Christ's blood is the ransom that frees us from our exile in this world imprisoned by fear. Christ's blood guarantees life comes out of death.

Christ's blood shed upon the Cross inoculates us from believing our freedom is defined by our movement in this life. Christ's blood shed upon the Cross immunizes us from believing our freedom is defined by good health in this life. Christ's blood shed upon the Cross vaccinates us from allowing disbelievers who bully us from ruining our day with God.

This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it!

This is the day that the Lord has made. Seize the moment God is giving us to be a testimony to the resurrection that inspires us to live as free men and women with joy and gratitude!

When we live with joy and gratitude in praise to God each day, we're God's children who are fearless in our enjoyment of life! We hug and play with each other with a holy innocence that freely celebrates our life together with God. We sing and make merry with delight together in the blessing of life unafraid of the threats to life that surround us daily.



In the playground of Christ's Church, there is laughter and love that's uninhibited, freely given, freely received, freely cherished, unencumbered by the fear of death. We join hands in the circle of Jesus' fellowship and sing a song of joy that can be seen in the smiles on our faces like school children.

We sing a comforting song about God's ransom for sin that we learned in Sunday schools and Vacation Bible Schools that is engraved upon our hearts. Its words encourage us to be like children, fearless and undeterred by the world.

Our parents and Sunday school teachers taught us this song to sing together as their gift of faith so we would be free from fear. God has given us freedom to be safe with Christ regardless of where we journey in life. Its lyrics free us to see our world from God's viewpoint, like the vision the Apostle Peter gave Jesus' followers in his two letters from prison.

With the vision of God's ransom from sin, children are gathered together in Jesus' arms assured that all is well.

Jesus loves me this I know,  
For the Bible tells me so,  
Little ones to Him belong,  
They are weak but He is strong.

Jesus loves me, He who died  
Heaven's gate to open wide  
He will wash away my sin  
Let His little child come in.

Jesus loves me, loves me still  
Though I'm very weak and ill  
From His shining throne on high  
Comes to watch me where I lie.



Jesus loves me – He will stay  
Close beside me all the way.  
Then His little child will take  
Up to heaven for His name's sake.

Jesus has paid the price for sin and suffering in this world. Let us remember the faith of those who first taught us that song to sing together fearlessly. They lived and died by the Gospel it taught children and live again by that Gospel's promises, that we might be free to live in this new world with delight!

Amen.