

Title: The Rewards of Service

Theme: God rewards those who welcome his disciples

Object: Stickers and Stars – given as rewards

Scripture: “Whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward.” (Matthew 10:42)

-S- Stickers - I am sure you have seen a lot of these. Your teachers at school, and from your home school teachers/parents, often use stickers to reward your good behavior. Children love to get stickers for good work, showing them off to their friends and wearing them. It is the proof of a job well done! Children aren't the only ones who like to get rewards. God knows that all of us, big or small, are also motivated by rewards. The Bible contains many exciting promises of rewards for those who are faithful to God's teaching.

When Jesus was sending out his twelve disciples, He warned them that being His disciple wasn't going to be easy. They would often be mistreated, rejected, and abused. In our lesson last week, Jesus assured that God would watch over them and keep them safe. He also promised that God would reward those who received His disciples with kindness and welcomed them into their homes and was kind to them. Jesus said, **-S-** “The person who welcomes you welcomes me, and the person who welcomes me welcomes (God)the one who sent me.” (Matthew 10:40 GWT) Isn't it wonderful that we can know that when we welcome those who come to us in Jesus' name, it is the same as welcoming Jesus and when we welcome Jesus, we also welcome God the Father who sent him? Jesus went on to tell the disciples that whoever welcomes a prophet would receive the same reward as the prophet and that whoever welcomes a righteous person will receive a

righteous person's reward. Jesus also promised, **S-** “Whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward.”

I guess stickers are a pretty good reward for doing something good at school or for keeping our room clean at home, but they don't compare to knowing that God is pleased with us and that one day we will receive our reward. To hear the Father say, **S-** “Well done, good and faithful slave.” Matthew 25:21) To hear this when I enter heaven will be the best reward I can think of.

Father, help us to be faithful to your teachings each day. Help us to welcome those who come to us in Jesus' name and care for others as we offer even a cup of cold water in your name. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

-S- Free Indeed

PRAYER

What does it mean to be free? As the 4th of July approaches where as Americans we celebrate our country's independence from tyranny and oppression I thought I would take time to speak about what it means to be free. **-S-** America's freedom was hard fought for and many lives were sacrificed to secure it. It is our tradition to help secure the freedom from tyranny for people all over the world who are oppressed. President Ronald Reagan said, **-S-** "Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn't pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected, and handed on for them to do the same." This statement applies to both Reagan's concern for our government, but also for our faith in our Lord Jesus. What does it mean to be free?

Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines free as **-S-** "not costing any money or not held as a slave or prisoner." Because of the historical abuses of power the concepts "free" or "freedom" were important in the formation of our own government. The constitution that forms the foundation of our government begins, **-S-** "*We the People* of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America." I believe the reference to **-S-** "secure the Blessings of Liberty" the founding fathers were referring to what Jesus is saying in our passage

of scripture this morning. I believe we will see this as we look at the words of our Lord Jesus. First, however, I want to continue with some history that influences American thought. James Madison introduced the **-S-** “Bill of Rights” at the first congress to list freedoms not explicitly indicated in the main body of the Constitution, such as; **-S-** freedom of religion, **-S-** freedom of speech, **-S-** a free press, and **-S-** free assembly; the right to keep and bear arms; freedom from unreasonable search and seizure, security in personal effects, and freedom from warrants issued without probable cause. **-S-** The Bill of Rights reserves for the people any rights not specifically mentioned in the Constitution and reserves all powers not specifically granted to the federal government to the people or the States. This means the federal government is to be limited to providing what the states and individuals cannot do. However, the federal government has been in the process of taking more and more power upon itself, which goes against the constitution, but this is the very nature of government and what caused the American Revolution to begin with. In America to be free often means to not be bound by the law and unjust oppression. On the Statue of Liberty is the inscription, **-S-** “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses, **yearning to breathe free.**” Ronald Reagan said, **-S-** “Freedom prospers when religion is vibrant and the rule of law under God is acknowledged.” The law of God and the freedom He offers is primary for it is eternal. However, government law is temporary. History has demonstrated that governments come into being, grow and die. But, **-S-** “Jesus Christ *is the same yesterday and today and forever.*” (Hebrews 13:8) Now that we have looked briefly at what many Americans define “free” or “freedom” as, it is now time to explore what the Bible means concerning to be “free” or what is “freedom.”

Our text here in chapter eight of John states that Jesus claimed to be able to set people free. Last week we looked at Jesus' words at the beginning of this exchange in verse 31, **-S-** "If you continue in My word, *then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.*" Jesus speaks that the truth of God sets people free and Jesus ends this exchange with verse 36 saying, **-S-** "So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed." In the context of what Jesus is saying I believe we find two answers of what freedom is. **-S-** First, believers are free from ignorance. **-S-** Second, those who give their souls to Jesus are freed from sin. These two freedoms only come through Christ and the eternal truth He alone possesses.

-S- Freedom from Ignorance

Through Christ believers are freed from ignorance and by this I mean spiritual ignorance. The world has little to no knowledge of true spirituality. The people responded to Jesus saying, **-S-** "We are Abraham's descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, 'You will become free?'" So, what will Jesus free these people from - from ignorance, as we will explore shortly. We know Jesus frees people from ignorance by what Jesus says preceding this verse, **-S-** "If you continue in My word, *then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.*" (John 8:31-32)

Ignorance cripples a person in almost every aspect of life, not just spiritual. Without training or a degree a person is limited in their ability to obtain a job or advance in their career. When Joyce and I worked in Muslim countries people were limited by the ignorance of illiteracy. Only about 10% of men could read

and write and less than 2% of women. **-S-** These Muslim countries wanted to limit education because it makes it easier to control people and enable a small percentage of the people, the elite, to have control. In America the founding fathers knew from experience how limiting the lack of education was and began our country with a high value placed on education. This led America in its first hundred years to advance beyond what any of the founding fathers would have dreamed. Illiterate people have limited opportunities. Spiritually illiterate people cannot come to Christ for salvation. If one does not know the teachings of Christ or who the person of Christ is – they cannot come to Christ. The problem is that many people who are spiritually illiterate are unaware they are ignorant and they are not free in Christ. No one expects a child to know as much as adults. However, it is expected that the child will learn and grow, but if the child is unwilling to learn then this is a sign of a deeper problem. **-S-** Many people are like a stubborn child who will not learn when it comes to the Word of God.

Look again at our passage, Jesus tells the people, **-S-** *“If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”* As soon as the people hear this they respond, **-S-** *“We are Abraham’s descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, ‘You will become free’?”* Their response is ridiculous on several levels. First, the Jews were slaves for hundreds of years in Egypt. Secondly, during the period of Judges, from about 1350 to 60 B.C., the nation of Israel fell under foreign rule at least seven times. Then there was the seventy-year Babylonian captivity. Even as Jesus is speaking to these men they carry coins that bore the image of Roman emperors and this is testimony of their submission to Rome. **-S-** We can be amazed at this this self-delusion, but this is no difference

than the spiritual ignorance of men today who will not admit they are slaves to sin and live in a corrupt society. These people do not know God, yet, they think they know all there is to know and in their arrogance that is founded in ignorance and pride they will not make the effort to learn about Jesus, to study to see if He is the Christ. Their pride certainly will not let them come to Jesus, submit to Jesus and worship Jesus. Freedom from ignorance is important because it is through knowledge and I am not speaking of intellectual knowledge only, but true knowledge which is made up of intellectual, practical, experiential and spiritual truth, that God saves men from sin, saves them from themselves and from the hold of Satan.

-S- Truth Saves

People live their normal lives of working at their jobs, growing families, hobbies, pleasure seeking and they become inoculated to their need for salvation from sin. They are comfortable, life is generally good and they even may go to church. They do not think about God and see any need for God, except in the most abstract way. Then one day as his soul is awakened by God the man begins to see he is a sinner, but he thinks to himself, "I am a good guy; I do not lie, steal or cheat on my wife." As he continues to become awakened spiritually he comes to understand that sin is being less than perfect and God who is perfect is separated from this man by his sin and the man becomes disturbed. The man begins to think, "What if this life is not all that there is? What if there is something after death?" His mortality, his sin, his emptiness grip him and he begins to seek Christ so that he can truly be saved. The truth, the saving truth of Christianity is now being laid upon his heart by the work of the Holy Spirit and God saves the man. The truth, the eternal truth of God has set him free. This is the truth that saves

and sets us free from the bondage of this world, but it does not free us from the eternal truth of God. We are free from spiritual ignorance; we are free from the penalty of sin. But the cost of this freedom is obedience to God.

-S- Freedom from Sin

Jesus spoke of freedom from sin in verse 34, where Jesus declares, **-S-** “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin.” I would like you to notice, first, what Jesus is not talking about here. Jesus is not talking about the penalty of sin. Jesus does not say believers are to be free from the penalty of their sins. As a believer if I lose my temper and strike someone in anger killing them – there is a penalty due. What Jesus is speaking about here is a believer is no longer under sin’s power. Sin no longer has a stronghold in our lives, but we are free from the bondage of sin and the power of Satan.

As believers I can think of a number of things I have been freed from; **-S-** I no longer fear judgment, nor do **-S-** I fear death, (However, I must admit that when I was working in difficult countries – that even though I did not fear death. For a bullet to the head would send me to heaven. But I did fear torture and prayed if the Lord took me He would do so quickly.) I am also free from the **-S-** quilt of sin and when I fail it no longer weights so heavily on me that I am spiritually crippled – the Lord convicts me and enables me to repent, seek forgiveness and to reconcile with those I hurt, and my sin no longer defines me. **-S-** You will notice these things are no longer masters of my life, as long as, I seek Christ and let Him have His way in my heart and soul. If you have an area of your life that plagues you and you cannot seem to shake – the answer is not trying harder, but seeking Christ with your whole heart, mind and soul. Come to Jesus, study His word and

gain power from it, call upon Jesus, claim Jesus, claim His promises as your own.

-S- *“If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.”*

A role that Christians are called to by Christ is to help others achieve this freedom from ignorance and the power of sin. We do not want to overstep our authority or role, as governments so often do. It is clear that all authority and power is God’s, but He does delegate. It is God alone that brings a dead soul to life, but once God has made a person spiritually alive, there is work He gives us as His followers to do. This brings to mind Lazarus. It was Jesus who called him forth from the grave, but after Jesus called him forth, while still wrapped in grave clothes – it was also Jesus who calls those witnessing into action of service, **-S-** *“Unbind him, and let him go.”* (John 11:44) When God called Saul, who would become the Apostle Paul, on the road to Damascus, it was God alone who gives Paul new life. Those with Paul did not even hear God. But then God uses Ananias to instruct Paul and baptize him. God uses Philip to reveal the light of the gospel the Ethiopian who had been reading the scriptures and that he was called by God to belong to God and he needed to be baptized. God uses His children, Christians, to free people from their spiritual bondage of ignorance and sin, they are to help others become free in Christ. Jesus was clear, **-S-** *“If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine.”* You may think you are inadequate, but God is not. The question is, **-S-** *“Are you being obedient?”* Out of obedience Christ will use you and do miracles, His miracles of spiritual birth, through you. Eleanor Roosevelt made a statement concerning freedom. I believe the statement is true both for Americans and even more true for Christians, **-S-** *“Freedom makes a huge requirement of every human being. With freedom comes responsibility. For the person who is unwilling to grow up, for the person who does not want to*

carry his own weight, this is a frightening prospect.” As a Christian you have responsibility to others and to fulfill that responsibility you must grow into a spiritually mature believer in Jesus with a heart to serve others.

-S- Prodigal Son

In closing I would like to remind you of the story of the prodigal son. When the son finally came home, it was the father who met him. The father did not say to the servants, “Go and bring my son to me.” The father went himself and threw his arms around his son and kissed him. This is how God approaches us. The father forgave his son and restored him to his house. Once this had been done the father turned to the servants and said to them, **-S-** “Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found. And they began to celebrate.” (Luke 15:22-24) The master of the house is the one who restored, but it was the servants who had work to do in four areas. This is what Jesus was speaking about in John chapter 8, saying, **-S-** “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.” With these verses in your mind let me build upon them with imagery.

-S- First, they were to bring the “best robe” and put it on the restored young son. Robes in Scripture often speak of Christ’s righteousness. We as the servants of Christ have a role in helping put Christ’s righteousness upon restored sinners. We must not be content to merely preach Christ. We want people to put Christ on, to

put on Christ's robe of royalty and Jesus calls us to help with this. God wants His children engaged in teaching, evangelism and discipleship.

-S- **Second**, the servants were told to place the father's "ring" upon the son's finger. This is symbolic of fellowship. Many who do not feel they are equipped to teach. But they can give of their time to be friends of believers who need support as they leave the world behind. Helping new brothers and sisters feel welcome and become part of the community of Christ.

-S- **Third**, the servants were to put "sandals" or shoes on the son's feet. With restoration there are now roads to walk in service of Christ. Discipleship prepares us to walk life's journey and it prepares others to walk through the world carrying the gospel message to the lost.

-S- **Fourth**, there was the preparation of the "fatted calf" and a life lived for Christ is a banquet and it is a life to be lived rejoicing. There are babes in Christ to be fed the rich meat of the Scriptures. As lives are changed there is rejoicing and cheering. I love when we baptize new believers into the Church of our Lord Christ.

You see there is plenty to do in reaching the unsaved and helping those who have come to Christ. There is the celebrating, the joy and the worshiping of Christ as our Lord and Savior. The question is, "Who do you belong to?" Jesus makes this choice clear, **-S-** "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed." Each Christian has a responsibility to help others in God's service. **-S-** How are you serving others with glad tidings and the joy of Christ?