

**Greater Freedom**  
**Pastor Joe Oakley - GFC - 4/7/24**

We are winding down our sermon series called Greater. Today I'm preaching a message entitled – Greater Freedom.

Last week we celebrated the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. Revelation 1:5 says:

***All glory to Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by shedding His blood for us.***

Jesus shed His blood to save us and give us eternal life. Jesus shed His blood to cleanse us and forgive us. But He also shed His blood so that we can live in spiritual freedom! John 8:36 says:

***If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.***

The word “indeed” means you are really, truly free. We can be free of addictions! Free of bondage to sins like anger and lust! Free of the things that hold us down or hold us back! Free of bad attitudes! Free to love unconditionally! Free to worship unashamedly! Free to give unselfishly! Free to live supernaturally!

But for many of us – freedom seems like an unattainable dream. We don't think we can be that free. We see it in the Bible – we hear it in sermons – but then we look at our own lives and they look more like this:

- Instead of victory, we experience defeat
- Instead of freedom, we are bound up by addictions
- Instead of walking in holiness, we are falling into sin
- Instead of having self control, we are out of control

Oh, we try. In fact we try really hard. We may even experience a little victory here and there for a while, but we can't seem to hold on to it! Galatians 5:1 says:

***It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be entangled again by a yoke of slavery.***

I want you to notice a couple of truths here: **Christ died to set us free – but it's our responsibility to stay free!** The New Living Translation says it this way-

***Christ has truly set us free. Now make sure that you stay free...***

Jesus died to set us free – but we have an enemy who wants to keep us in slavery no matter what. He doesn't care what binds us, as long as we're bound. You see - getting free is one thing – staying free is something else!

## **Getting free is great – but staying free is greater!**

There are many things I could teach about today regarding spiritual warfare and freedom. I've taught many times on our authority in the name of Jesus, putting on spiritual armor, dealing with strongholds and addictions and generational curses. Today I felt led to approach it a little differently.

### **1. To have greater freedom we must lay the ax to the root!**

In Matthew 3 – John the Baptist preached a sermon to some people bound up in legalism. He gives us a big key to change and freedom in verse 10:

***The ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.***

So here's the principle – when you're not bearing good fruit, lay the ax to the root! When you're bearing bad fruit – lay the ax to the root.

We usually try to deal with the symptoms rather than fix the problem. That's like taking a pain pill for a broken bone. You might feel better for a little while, but the problem is still there and will only get worse! True change requires laying the ax to the root of the problem.

We all have areas in our lives where we just try to control our outward behavior by telling ourselves, "No, stop it!" But if we don't lay the ax to the root, it will just grow back.

Years ago Deb and I planted a cottonwood tree in our front yard. We liked it at first because it was fast-growing and in just a few short years had a huge shade tree. But the problem with cottonwoods is that they have shallow roots. Since the roots were so shallow – many were actually visible on top of the grass and other little trees would start growing out of those roots. I took care of them by just mowing over them. But when I mowed over one – another one would pop up in another place. We eventually sold that house and the new owner took care of the problem by chopping the tree down. He laid the ax to the root. If you are not bearing good fruit, lay the ax to the root!

### **2. Fruit always comes from a root.**

If you have good fruit in your life – it comes from good roots. If you have bad fruit – it comes from bad roots. And you will never get free of the bad fruit until you deal with the root!

What are the roots that need to be axed so we can live in freedom? We find those roots by understanding what Jesus came to earth to accomplish on our behalf.

We find that in Luke 4:18-19 when Jesus said-

***The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim year of the Lord's favor.***

Jesus was anointed to do six things:

Save the lost	Heal the sick-	Comfort the brokenhearted
Set captives free	Release the oppressed	Proclaim God's favor

I believe those 6 ministries of Christ show us the 6 roots we need to lay the ax to if we are going to live in freedom – rather than slavery.

Freedom comes into our lives when we believe the gospel truth. Greater freedom comes when Jesus heals the sick and broken places in our lives. Greater freedom comes when we receive spiritual truth from God's word and His truth sets us free. Dealing with the devil is not always a power encounter, many times it's a truth encounter. And even greater freedom comes when we are set free from areas of captivity, slavery and oppression in our lives.

### **3. We have an enemy who wants to keep us enslaved.**

Satan wants to keep people in bondage – not freedom. In poverty – not in abundance. Under the curse – not blessed.

The first thing he does is try to deceive us so we don't even know we can be free. If you are not a Christian, the devil wants to keep you from hearing the good news of freedom in Christ. If you are a Christian, the enemy wants to keep you bound by deceiving you about the freedom we have in Christ. He wants to keep us from knowing truth because Jesus said in John 8:32

***And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.***

Some people never get free because they don't know truth. Others are not free because they are comfortable being stuck where they are. It's familiar. It's all they know. You will never change until you become uncomfortable where you are!

As long as you are comfortable with the temperature in your house, you will leave the thermostat where it is. But as soon as you are too hot or too cold, you will change things! It's the same way in life. Some of us are too comfortable in our lack, too comfortable in our sin, and we will never change as long as we are comfortable where we are!

But what about us who are set free – we know the truth and we don't want to be stuck – yet we are still struggling?

That's because **lasting change will not happen until we lay the ax to the root of our problems.**

Sins of the fathers keep getting passed down from generation to generation and we must be the generation that lays the ax to the root! We have an enemy who wants to keep us bound and he will use any means necessary to do so. If we experience a little freedom – he works hard to enslave us again.

That's why losing weight is one thing – keeping it off is another thing.  
Getting out of debt is one thing – staying out is another thing.  
Getting see free from an addiction is one thing – staying free is another thing.

Many people go back to their addiction or they just switch addictions. I heard about a prisoner in Australia who tried to escape by hiding in a van delivering bread to the prison. When the van made its next stop, the prisoner sneaked out of the van. He thought he was free but he found himself in the yard of another prison just 4 miles from the first. Like that prisoner our own attempts at lasting freedom often leave us in another prison 4 miles down the road of life.

When we attempt to set ourselves free – depending upon ourselves and not God – we usually end up dejected, dirty, and in another prison. That will keep on happening until we lay the ax to the root.

The first thing Jesus came to do was preach good news to save the lost. That shows us the first root that needs to be axed.

#### **4. We lay the ax to the root of sin through repentance**

Sin is rooted in self-centeredness and rebellion against God. Isaiah 53:6 says:

***We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.***

The essence of sin is living like I want rather than how God wants. Living for myself rather than for God.

The only way to deal with sinful rebellion is through repentance. **Repentance means true change - a change of heart that leads to a change of mind that leads to a change of action.** That change means we now live for God rather than ourselves! 2 Corinthians 5:15 says:

***He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.***

It's human nature to live for yourself, but Christ died to free you from the bondage of living for yourself so you can live for God. **We must die to self in order to live for God. That requires a lifestyle of repentance where we continually turn from sin and self to God.**

When a Christian sins, the Holy Spirit will convict him of his sin.

At that point, we face a choice – my way or God’s way? Dying to self means saying “No” to self and “Yes” to God.

I know it’s painful, that’s why it’s called dying. But it will produce fruit!  
 If we go God’s way – it results in life and freedom.  
 If we go our way – it results in death and captivity.  
 We need to be quick to repent or our hearts will harden and the roots of sin will grow ever deeper.

So how do we lay the ax to the root of sin? Through repentance! We must confess our sin and receive forgiveness. 1 John 1:9 says:

***If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.***

Some people stop there. Continually confessing but never changing. Proverbs 26:11 says:

***As a dog returns to its own vomit, so a fool repeats his foolishness.***

Many people never change and just stay stuck in their sin.

It’s like a poem by Portia Nelson called Autobiography in 5 Short Chapters.

1- I walk down the street. There is a deep hole in the sidewalk. I fall in. I am lost... I am helpless. But it isn't my fault. It takes forever to find a way out.

2- I walk down the same street. There is a deep hole in the sidewalk. I pretend I don't see it. I fall in again. I can't believe I am in the same place. But, it isn't my fault. It still takes me a long time to get out.

3- I walk down the same street. There is a deep hole in the sidewalk. I see it is there. I still fall in. It's a habit. But my eyes are open. I know where I am. It IS my fault. I get out immediately.

4- I walk down the same street. There is a deep hole in the sidewalk. I walk around it.

5- I walk down another street.

Laying the ax to the root means to change direction! That means some things need to be cut out of our lives. That means not watching some things, not doing some activities, not hanging out with some people, and not going to some places.

I heard about an overweight guy who always stopped by the bakery on the way to work to buy goodies for the staff. He had to stop this when he went on a diet. He even changed his route to work so he would not have to drive by the bakery.

One day, he had to drive by the bakery on a work-related errand. As he approached the bakery, he said to himself, “Maybe God wants me to stop by the bakery and buy some goodies for the staff. I know, I’ll put out a fleece and if God makes a parking spot available right in front of the bakery, then I’ll know I’m supposed to stop.” And sure enough – there it was - a parking spot right by the front door - on his 15<sup>th</sup> trip around the block.

Too many of us have pet sins that we want to keep feeding because we are so attached to them. But it won’t die until you starve it!

You must get ruthless with sin and Satan. 1 Peter 5:8-9 says:

***Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith.***

The Bible also tells us to flee from sins like lust, sexual immorality, idolatry and the love of money. So, greater freedom involves both fight and flight! Fight Satan and flee from sin.

The devil cannot be ignored or tamed. We must resist him in the faith. You must become a lion killer, not a lion tamer.

Some people just want to try to tame their lions, their problems, or their addictions. They want to tame it and keep it around. They don’t want it to run their life or ruin their life – but they still want it in their life.

NO! Lions must be killed or they will ultimately kill you. Even tamed animals are dangerous and unpredictable.

In 2003, the famous Siegfried and Roy tiger show was taking place when a tiger unexpectedly attacked Roy Horn. This performance had gone off without a hitch hundreds of times. But on this night the tiger attacked Roy and seriously injured him. This was a supposedly tame and trained tiger. Don’t think you can tame your lions. You must kill them or they’ll kill you.

**Listen, true change requires real repentance.**

To repent means to turn from going your own way to God’s way. And all of us need to continually turn from our way to God’s way.

God will let you go your own way. He will let you try to overcome in your own strength. He lets us try and fail and our inability to overcome in our own strength drives us to the cross.

The cross is the key to getting free and staying free! The cross is where Jesus died for sin. And - the cross is where Jesus defeated Satan.

Our victory was won by Christ on the cross and we must continually turn to the cross for victory.

Are you thankful for the cross today?

The cross paid the price to save us from the penalty of our sins and the cross frees us from the power of sin!

When we turn to the cross – we enforce the victory that Jesus won with His blood.

When we turn to the cross – we lay the ax to the root by reminding ourselves and Satan that the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin!

When we turn to the cross – we turn from trying to get free and stay free in our own strength – we turn from trying and failing over and over again-and we realize that we can do all things only through Christ who strengthens us!

When we turn to the cross – we lay the ax to the root of the things that are holding us back in life!

We must lay the ax to the root of deception by renewing our minds through the word of God.

We must lay the ax to the root of occult activity by renouncing any involvement in fortune telling, tarot cards, palm reading, seances, astrology or any type of witchcraft.

We must lay the ax to the root of unforgiveness by giving and receiving forgiveness.

We must lay the ax to the root of any generational sin or curses by verbally breaking the power of them in Jesus' name!

Do you believe that you can experience greater freedom?  
The Bible says: All things are possible to those who believe.

So refuse to live one more day under the bondage of sin, Satan or self.  
Lay the ax to the root and stand fast in the liberty Christ won for you.

Lay the ax to the root and refuse to be a slave to anything or anyone other than God any longer!

the ax to the root and you will never ever be the same again!