



WOW: Word Of the Week

Freedom

June 29, 2022

The week before Independence Day, July 4! If we were forced to choose only one word to represent the meaning of July 4th, many of us would choose the word **Freedom**.

“Freedom isn’t free...you’ve got to pay the price, you’ve got to sacrifice, for your liberty!” Words easily remembered, never forgotten from over 50 years ago -- a time long ago. What is freedom? Do we understand freedom? Who is really free? Are you free? Really free? Or are you perhaps imprisoned?

In the initiation of his ministry (Luke 4:18-19), Jesus visited the synagogue in his home town and read from Isaiah 61. “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me...he anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor, he sent me to announce release to the captives, recover of sight to the blind, to send release to the devastated.” The word release (Greek, *aphesis*) can mean forgiveness, remission, pardon, deliverance, freedom. Most recent translations use liberty or freedom in these verses.

Jesus’ declaration of the purpose of his coming foreshadows a large number of reversal stories that are part of throughout Luke’s Gospel. Jesus came to proclaim the possibility of freedom—to the lost, to captives, to those imprisoned by infirmities, to those whom life devastates.

On a recent Wednesday night at Park, I greeted Jim Carmichael and we talked briefly. Prison workers like Jim Pinkston and Ray Vaughn regularly see how much people desire freedom—freedom from spiritual, mental, and emotional burdens. We see the power of freedom proclaimed, announced, made possible—in 129 baptisms last weekend.

On Sunday morning at Fort Gibson, I spoke with Henry Petree about the prison work done through the Fort Gibson church. Henry is seeking more graders for the courses. The gospel sounds forth continually and people whose lives have been turned totally upside down by the world are turned right side up by Jesus. I rejoice when I think about our meager beginnings at Fort Gibson, now a third of a century ago.

Pete Shaw and I often share coffee and spiritual conversations. Recently as we studied some reversal passages from the Bible, Pete told me about the impact WBS is having, especially in prison work.

This week, I gently remind you, with love, that only Christ can give genuine freedom to a person (Gal. 5:1). Or, from the lips of Jesus in John 8:32, knowing the truth sets one free. “If the Son sets you free, you will be really free” (John 8:36). This coming weekend, a primary focus will be on political freedom. I remind us that history books are filled with stories of people were free while living in the midst of oppression, adversity, and even physical imprisonment.

I will remember and celebrate political freedom.... but I never want to forget that the most valuable freedom one can ever know is the freedom found in Christ—freeing us, releasing us from the bondage of sin and death. Helping us see, helping us understand. May we never tire of proclaiming good news, announcing forgiveness, release, freedom from spiritual bondage!