

Freedom in our country it is our most precious possession, though often we take it for granted -- believe me, it is not taken for granted everywhere else. Much of the world is oppressed and enslaved in one way or another. All you have to do is check the newspaper and TV to find out where. Oppression and slavery are nothing new to the world, for they have been going on since the beginning of time. The Bible is full of stories of oppression and slavery. The example we are likely to be most familiar with in the Bible is the slavery of the Israelites in Egypt which set the scene for Moses and the Exodus.

You may be less familiar with the slavery of the First Century. Jesus was part of an oppressed, enslaved people, too. It was a different sort of slavery than Moses knew, but it was slavery non the less. The Romans occupied Palestine -- it was the policy of the Romans to give the occupied territories as much apparent freedom as possible -- they tried to avoid disrupting everyday life wherever possible -- it kept the people happier and less likely to revolt. Commerce continued, life continued -- yet, the Romans were there. Their garrisons were in every important city, they taxed heavily, and they quickly killed anyone who was a revolutionary -- the executions were done in public so that the larger population could see what happened to those who tried to gain freedom for the Jewish people. This, of course, was what eventually happened to Jesus.

It was in this context that these comments of Jesus occur:

### **John 8:31-36 (NRSV)**

<sup>31</sup> Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples;

<sup>32</sup> and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."

<sup>33</sup> They answered him, "We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, 'You will be made free'?"

<sup>34</sup> Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin.

<sup>35</sup> The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever.

<sup>36</sup> So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.

Three types of freedom were apparent in the conversation Jesus had: the freedom of individuals from physical oppression, the freedom of spirit which allows us to soar above physical oppression, and most importantly, the freedom from sin and its consequences.

Being American gives us the first and second types of freedom. Being Christian gives us the second and third. We are easily the most blessed people in the world!

To God be the Glory!