



FREEDOM CHALLENGE

The Declaration of God's Kingdom—A *Call to Freedom!*

Psalm 146:5-10

Sermon Outline

Introduction:

This week, we celebrate[d] Independence Day—a meeting in 1776 when the 13 colonies of America officially separated from Great Britain.

- The Second Continental Congress issued a Declaration of Independence.
 - “We hold these truths self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” (*Declaration of Independence*)
 - This document both declared the new nation as a reality, and described how people are to be treated in this nation.
- Scripture also is a Declaration about the reality of a Kingdom, and how the King of the Kingdom intends for his people to be treated. And, just like the Declaration of Independence impacted all people in the colonies, Scripture impacts us—both by declaring the reality of the Kingdom of which we're citizens, and by outlining our response.
- Scripture declares the intentions of a God who is re-establishing his Kingdom and who has invited us to be a part of his revolution! So as we celebrate the freedom and founding of our nation this week, let's also celebrate who we are as citizens of God's Kingdom and consider the implications of our citizenship!

I. The Kingdom—Ruled by One King, Ruled by *Shalom!*

A. *Psalm 146—A Declaration*

Psalm 146 is a Declaration of response to the kingdom and its creator

- *v.1-5* – There is a Lord who is greater than all men, and the right response to him is praise.
- *v.6* – This Lord is a creator “who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them.”
- *v.7-9* – This creator wants for people to be treated in certain ways. He is one who “executes justice for the oppressed...sets the prisoners free...opens the eyes of the blind...lifts up those who are bowed down...[and] upholds the widow and the fatherless.”¹
- *v.10* – The rule of this King is eternal

Injustice in this kingdom

- The Declaration of Independence we read earlier identifies God as the creator who gave humans innate rights—but in Scripture's declaration, God is recognized not only as the one who imparts these rights, but also defends them when threatened.
- In his Kingdom, God identifies oppression and injustice as something he hates, and something he wants to stop.
- He not only proclaims his passion, but chooses to enter into situations of violence—the Psalm says that he executes justice, he sets people free, he opens eyes, and he lifts up and upholds the oppressed.
- Why? Because this kingdom is ruled by *shalom*, and ruled by one King.

¹ All Scripture references are from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

B. The Kingdom—To Be Ruled by Shalom

God defends the oppressed because *shalom* is to be the banner flying over his kingdom.

- We often translate this term as peace, but it means far more than that—it is the “webbing together of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfillment, and delight” ... “In the Bible, *shalom* means universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight.”²
- *Shalom* describes the way this world ought to be. When sin entered our world, it could no longer remain in a state of *shalom* and the interwoven fabric of creation began to unravel.

***Shalom* is the result of viewing and treating others as images of God deserving dignity, compassion, autonomy, and worth. Psalm 146 describes God’s work to restore *shalom*—but we look at our world and witness that this work is not complete yet.**

- Here’s what God’s people saw in scripture:
Oppressors: *Psalm 58:2, Psalm 64:6*
Their victims: *Ecclesiastes 4:1*
- Here’s what we see today:
Oppressors and their victims:
 - Over 27 million people are enslaved in our world today.
 - Nearly two million children exploited in the commercial sex industry.
 - Scores of innocent men who are illegally imprisoned because of corrupt and broken justice systems.
 - Thousands of widows and orphans who are brutally kicked off their land and out of their homes because they are just a bit weaker than their oppressor.
 - *Consider including an example of violent oppression evident in your own community.*

But something new is underway—God is re-establishing *Shalom*. The work begins with Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. Christ lost his freedom, in order that we might experience true freedom. Christ became a slave, in order that we might no longer be slaves. Christ allowed himself to be oppressed, in order that we might be set free from the bondage of oppression.

- *Revelation 21:5* – he is making all things new.
- *Psalm 146* – God “executes justice for the oppressed...sets the prisoners free...lifts up those who are bowed down...[and] upholds the widow and the fatherless” because he is the creator who is redeeming the brokenness that surrounds us in this world—because he is re-establishing *shalom*. But there’s a second reason—and that is because this kingdom is to have only one king.

C. The Kingdom—Ruled by One King

God defends the oppressed because violent oppression is a way people attempt to rule over parts of God’s creation instead of him.

- But, in reality, there is only one ruler and his kingdom is eternal—*Isaiah 37:16, Psalm 146:10*
- When a brothel owner steals and enslaves a young girl, that abuser is not just stealing a child from her family; rather, he/she is stealing an image-bearer and a creation of God.

II. The Implications for Us

- The Declaration of Independence we have been celebrating this week wasn’t just the way the founders reminded themselves of their own intentions — it was the way they told the world what was happening — and that it was time to get on board!
- Likewise, Scripture’s declaration of God’s Kingdom also demands our participation! What are the implications for us, as citizens of this Kingdom based on *shalom*, where there is one true ruler?

² Platinga, Cornelius. (1995). *Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, p.10

A. Implication 1: Freedom for All!

Throughout Scripture, God declares that his Kingdom is one of freedom.

- Spiritual freedom:
 - *John 10:10*: Christ declares that the thief strives to steal, kill, and destroy but he came so that we “may have life and have it abundantly.”
 - *Isaiah 52:7* we are reminded that the Gospel message is good news that “proclaims peace (*shalom*)... [and] brings good news of happiness.”
- The freedom of *shalom*—in the here and now
 - *Luke 4:18* Jesus—quoting *Isaiah 61:1* — has come “to proclaim liberty to the captives and...to set at liberty those who are oppressed.”
 - *Jeremiah 34*: God harshly rebukes his chosen nation because they refused to obey his will of “proclaiming liberty, every one to his brother and to his neighbor.”
- The Scriptures are rather explicit in teaching us that liberty and freedom are not privileges or luxuries for a few or for the powerful—or anything that we deserve or have done something right to get—but part of God’s intention for all people.
 - *Isaiah 58:6*: True spiritual devotion is “to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke.”

B. Implication 2: Called to Free

We are not given freedom—spiritual or physical—just so we can revel in it, but so we can then reflect the goodness of God to others and bring *shalom* in this world as it is in heaven.

- The people of God “are not just to be a sign and foretaste of our ultimate salvation; [we] are to be part of the means by which God makes this happen in both the present and the future” -N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope*
 - *Psalms 146* – God is the one who “executes justice for the oppressed...sets the prisoners free...lifts up those who are bowed down...[and] upholds the widow and the fatherless”—as the people of God, this is a description of how we must then live our own lives.
- We do not give a whole—a complete—picture of God to the world if we do not seek justice and bring rescue to the oppressed. Jesus chose to leave his place of comfort and enter into our darkness and deepest need. He brings rescue, justice, and *shalom*. And, as ones who are called to walk as Jesus did, we must do the same. (*Isaiah 1:17*)

Our friends at International Justice Mission give us a powerful example of what it can look like to seek justice.

- IJM is a team of Christian lawyers, investigators and social workers who seek to answer this call by bringing literal, physical freedom to victims of violent oppression around the world.
- They do this not only through physically bringing freedom to people who are enslaved and abused around the world, but they also seek justice through prayer.

Casework story:

IJM has an annual prayer gathering, bringing together prayer partners from all over the world. In 2011, this army of prayer warriors specifically asked God to end slavery in South Asia—to bring literal freedom to the over 15 million people currently enslaved through bonded labor and commercial sexual exploitation.

And, indeed, God listens to these prayers for freedom, and he responds—because it is his passion to bring *shalom*.

- Only a few weeks after this gathering, a government official was tipped off about possible slavery in a brick kiln in his district. This government called IJM to ask for their help to bring rescue. Together, IJM and the government officials prepared for a major operation—they did not know the exact number of people enslaved in the factory, but, typically, IJM rescues between 15 and 30 people at a time.
- However, on an April afternoon, a team of government officials, local police, and IJM staff entered the brick kiln. They did not just find a few dozen people or even a hundred people enslaved there...they found 514 people!

- Men, women, and children...whole families...whose freedom, whose *shalom*...had been violently ripped from them. Families who had been oppressed, abused, and degraded.
- This became the largest rescue operation in IJM's history—only a short few weeks after a thousand people prayed for God to show his power and reveal his heart of justice by ending slavery in South Asia.
- IJM has brought literal freedom to thousands of children, men and women over the past few years. The God of *shalom* is on the move—we feel it in our souls, and we also see it in his work of bringing literal freedom in the here and now!

We may not have the same professional training or direct access to victims of violence that our friends at IJM do—but God's call to us is the same.

- Prayer is the best place for us to begin seeking justice and freedom for the oppressed.
- We should not underestimate the ability prayer has to shift the tide of oppression and brokenness—in our own lives and in the lives of those who are desperately crying out for freedom.

I encourage you to go to IJM's website—IJM.org—and sign up to become an IJM Prayer Partner. We need to learn—to practice!—praying about issues of injustice and God's passion for justice and restoration. IJM will send you a weekly e-mail that details their most urgent prayer needs.

Conclusion

- We've celebrated the freedom we have in our nation this week. Let's not forget to celebrate the fact that we are citizens of God's kingdom as well—and to follow him through pursuing freedom for others!
- We heard God's declaration: That his kingdom is one of *shalom*, and one where he is the only ruler. And we've uncovered the implications—that God intends for all to be free, and for us to be part of that freedom.
- Let's get to know our God of justice and righteousness—our Savior who brings freedom and establishes *shalom* here on earth as it is in Heaven!

Action Steps

Pray for Freedom—IJM can equip your church with prayer cards so congregants can commit to 27 days of focused prayer on behalf of victims of slavery around the world—email churches@ijm.org and we will provide them!

Visit IJM.org/FreedomChallenge for more action steps your church can take together this summer!



FREEDOM CHALLENGE

Freedom, *Shalom*, and God's Declaration

Small group discussion guide

I. Opening Discussion

This week we celebrated Independence Day—and we talked a lot about freedom.

- What does “freedom” mean to you? What different kinds of freedom are there? Why do we view freedom as a positive thing?
- What do you think the implications of being free are?
- Spiritual?
- Personal?
- Other?

Why? Where do these implications come from?

- As Christians, we are also citizens in God's Kingdom
 - Read *Ephesians 2:19-21*, *Philippians 3:20-21*
 - Why do you think Scripture uses this metaphor of a Kingdom?
- In other places of Scripture, we are told that we are adopted into God's family, as children—*Romans 8:15*, *Galatians 4:5*.
- What is different about being a citizen in a kingdom than a child in a family?
- What are the implications for us?

II. *Psalms 146*

What does this verse show us about the King and the Kingdom? What do we see God doing?

As citizens in God's Kingdom, what are the implications of these verses for us?

In what ways do we see the concept of freedom in these verses?

Why does injustice exist in God's Kingdom? What is God's response to it?

III. *Shalom*

God's Kingdom is intended to be a place of *shalom*.

- We often translate this term as peace, but it means far more than that—it is the “webbing together of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfillment, and delight”...“In the Bible, *shalom* means universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight.

What would *shalom* look like in your life? What would it look like in this church? What would it look like in our families? What would it look like in our relationships with our community? With our world?

***Shalom* describes the way this world ought to be. When sin entered our world, creation could no longer remain in a state of *shalom* and the interwoven fabric of creation began to unravel.**

- Read *Psalm 58:2, Psalm 64:6, Ecclesiastes 4:1* – even as God is on the move, we see people in scripture actively working against *shalom* by oppressing others.
- How do we see this today? We see a lack of *shalom*, God’s peace, spiritually. We also see the implications in the here and now—we see that where there is no *shalom*, there is no freedom.
- Consider these global statistics:
 - Over 27 million people are enslaved in our world today.
 - Nearly two million children exploited in the commercial sex industry.
 - Scores of innocent men who are illegally imprisoned because of corrupt and broken justice systems.
 - Thousands of widows and orphans who are brutally kicked off their land and out of their homes because they are just a bit weaker than their oppressor.
 - What do we see in our own community?

IV. Re-Establishing *Shalom*

***Psalm 146* paints a picture of a God re-establishing *shalom*. In what ways can we see all of Scripture painting this story? How is God establishing *shalom*:**

- Through the cross?
- In your life today?
- In the establishment of the church?
- In the world?

As a citizen of God’s kingdom, what are the implications for us? How are we called to bring *shalom* to others? (Consider *Luke 4:18* – Jesus’ declaration of *Shalom*.)

- Spiritually?
- Physically?
- Those we know?
- Those we do not know?
- Victims of oppression?
- Perpetrators of oppression?

V. Taking Action

***Psalm 146* showed us a God who “executes justice for the oppressed...sets the prisoners free...opens the eyes of the blind...lifts up those who are bowed down...[and] upholds the widow and the fatherless.”**

- First, respond in thankfulness to God for the freedom and wholeness we are given through Christ.
- Thank him for responding to the needs of the oppressed in our world.

Because we are citizens of God’s kingdom, he calls us to follow his example—to restore *shalom* in many ways—including responding to the needs of victims of violent oppression.

- Consider joining with International Justice Mission, a group of Christian lawyers, investigators and social workers, by praying for the work of justice—they are seeking the citizens of God’s kingdom to join them in prayer. Visit IJM.org/prayerpartner to learn more.
- What are some other ways that God might be calling you, your family, or your church to restore *shalom*?

Visit IJM.org/FreedomChallenge for more action steps your church can take together this summer!