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Issues: *Free to Choose Part 2*

Jerry Arnold

“Father in Heaven, Your word is holy and so are You. We are not holy, but we want to hear from You. And we pray that You by Your grace and through Your mercy that You would pour Your Spirit out upon us, and we would hear from You through Your word. We pray that You will make sense of its teachings for us. And we pray that all of us would come away with a clear understanding of You and Your love for us. And I pray Heavenly Father that each one will hear what they are supposed to hear and each one will experience what they are supposed to experience. And we all pray this collectively in Jesus’ name, Amen.”

As you know, we are dealing with issues. Not my issues, your issues. People have written in questions, they have written in about concepts and ideas that they would like to see addressed from the pulpit. And so we are doing that. This is our second week of doing that, and yet, this issue somewhat dovetails into last week’s issue. And I want to read to you what was sent to me. “In the past few years I have been exposed to a philosophy or theology that troubles me. It appears to be growing in popularity and I wanted you to address it. What I have heard is that we are all saved and the only way to lose salvation is to reject it. I thought we were all lost, and the only way to be saved is to accept salvation by faith in Christ. Are we all saved and have to reject it to be lost, or are we all lost and have to accept salvation to be saved?”

Got a coin? Actually I do think the Bible has an answer. It’s a complicated issue though. And as I started studying it, I felt like the person that was pulling on a thread thinking it would be six or seven inches long, and it just keeps coming, and coming, and coming because there are a lot of issues associated with this, that you might not anticipate when you begin looking into it. On one end of the spectrum is a concept called, “Universalism.” Some of you may be familiar with it. Some would call it a “Theology” but I think it’s more of a philosophy because “Theo” is talking about God. And this idea cannot be derived from Scriptures, so we’ll say it’s a philosophy. And the philosophy of universalism is that all people go to heaven regardless of the lives they live or the choices they make. Well that’s not supported in any Scriptures that I’ve ever read.

But, as a part of universalism there are theological concepts, one of them being predestination. And that is the belief that it has been determined who will be saved and who will be lost. Now the Bible uses the term ‘predestination,’ and it’s a very complicated study. The idea is that man has no choice in the matter. Now a daughter of predestination is “Once saved, always saved.” And there are variations on that. Some call it the doctrine of eternal security, others call it other things. All of these are rather complicated issues and some of you would thoroughly enjoy studying them, and so go for it. Most of us would not find it very interesting, and that’s a balance. You know, for a sermon to be good, it has to be interesting as well as informative, and it has to be inspired. So if you would really like to study into those things, I will help give you some direction as to where you can study.

But this thing about ‘everybody is already saved, you have to choose to be lost,’ or ‘everybody is lost you have to choose to be saved,’ it’s an important issue. Now last week we discussed about the importance

of being free to choose. We learned that God will honor our choice for life or for death. And we spoke of the difference of 'having to' verses 'wanting to.' What we were unable to cover is why we have to choose, and how Jesus is the One who gives us a choice. Because in the theology we are studying today, whether we are all saved and have to choose to be lost, or whether we are all lost and have to choose to be saved, one thing is clear. We all have to choose. We all have to make a decision. So we are going to talk about deciding again. We are going to talk about this freedom to choose.

Let's go to John chapter 8. This is a verse we looked at last week. We are going to look at it again this week with in mind trying to understand the question about choosing. Why it is we have to chose, and how Jesus is the One who gives the opportunity to chose? Perhaps you have met a person; maybe you are that person who has this philosophy: "I have nothing against God; I just don't want to serve Him. Can't I just be neutral? Can I live my life without serving God or the devil? Can't I just live, die, and then not go to Heaven or hell? Can't I just be left alone?" Well, we'll see. In John 8 verse 32, Jesus says: "...and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Again, He is not talking about a philosophy, He is not talking about a series of facts, He is talking about Himself. He is the truth. And He wants to set us free.

When He said this to the Jews who were there, they answered Him in verse 33: "We are Abraham's descendants, and we have never been in bondage to anyone. How can You say, You will make us free?" Jesus answered in verse 34: "Most assuredly I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin." Everyone who sins is a slave to sin. A slave is a person who has lost control of himself; it is a person who is dominated by something or someone. They are held as property by another. It is servitude and subjugation to a controlling person or force. And we would say, "I don't want to be that." But yet, the Bible says, anyone who has sinned has become that to sin. In Romans 3 verse 23, a very familiar passage with most Christians, it says: "...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

Now if you are that one person who hasn't sinned, you don't exist because the Bible says that "...all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." So using Jesus' information and the logic that comes from it, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. We all have sinned; consequently, we all are slaves to sin. And that is something we need supernatural, Devine intervention to get out of. That is a condition we cannot just get out of on our own. We must have Christ. And He is the One who will give us choices along the way. We shall see that as we go on. Please turn to Luke chapter 4. In Luke chapter 4, Jesus goes to church. He goes to His hometown church in Nazareth. We start reading in verse 16. "So He..." that's Jesus, "...came to Nazareth where He had been brought up; and as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and stood up to read. And He was handed the book of the Prophet Isaiah. And we He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written."

So Jesus is handed the scroll of the Prophet Isaiah. He goes through it until He found this spot. He wanted to read this particular passage, and this is what He read and what is recorded. "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 preach deliverance to the captives and recovery of the sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." Now those of you who

have the New International Version will recognize that I read the New King James Version, it says, "...He had sent Me." Yours will go right to, "...preach deliverance to the captives." Those of us who read the New King James Version or the King James Version, we get to be healed of our broken hearts." It says "...to heal the brokenhearted." That doesn't appear in the NIV. Apparently in the translation that they used that wasn't a part of it. But, they will translate this passage better than the King James or the New King James. I'll show you what I mean.

In verse 18 it talks about "...preaching deliverance to the captives." The Amplified Version says, "...renounce release to the captives." The New International Version says, "...proclaim freedom for the prisoners." Now the word that is used here for captives in the Greek is associated with prisoners. Now if prisoner is a person deprived of his liberty and kept under involuntary restrained confinement or custody, in the Greek, the very word that is used here that is translated, 'prisoner,' actually means 'prisoner of war.' Prisoner of war! Jesus has come to set the prisoners of war free. Now you think about it. What is the prisoner of war? The prisoner of war is a person captured in war; a member of a nation who is taken by the enemy and imprisoned. So Jesus says His ministry is to come to earth and to deliver all the prisoners of war.

You see, we are in a war, and the enemy does not recognize a neutral position. He is the enemy of all human beings. And there is a war, and he has imprisoned all of us. Look at Revelation 12:7-9, because mankind chose to sin back in the Garden of Eden, mankind has now become a prisoner of war. That war began in heaven. It says in verse 7: "The war broke out in heaven, Michael and His angels fought against the dragon and the dragon and his angels fought. But they did not prevail nor was the place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old called the devil and Satan who deceives the whole world. He was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him." War began in heaven. And you wonder why your household is rough sometimes? War! God's servants concurred the great dragon who is called the devil, threw him out and threw his followers out of heaven. Where did they go? They came to earth, and the war continues here.

You and I were born. We didn't ask to be born, but we were born. Here we are. We didn't ask to be involved in a war, but we are. And we are prisoners of war according to the way things are. But Jesus came to set us free. Jesus came to unlock the concentration camp and to take us out of the pitiful enslavement of sin and to give us freedom. We only have freedom to choose because of Jesus. He is the reason we have freedom to choose. So we are in a war. It's interesting that in Revelation 19 verse 11 (and I didn't give this to the folks upstairs so it might not appear on the screen), it describes Jesus returning. It says, "Then I saw heaven opened and behold a white horse. And He who sat on him was called faithful and true, and in righteousness He judges and makes war." He makes war! So Jesus comes to set the prisoners of war free. He goes into battle with the devil, concurs him at Calvary, defeats him through the resurrection, and He is waiting now to deliver those He has delivered.

And it will be a war. And the enemies of God will be struck dead in His presence. We serve a God of war, and we can be thankful because He is more powerful than the enemy of our souls. But back to the original question, "Are all saved and need to say 'no' to be lost, or are all lost and need to say 'yes' to be

saved?" Well, let's see what Jesus says, John 10 verse 1. Jesus is talking to the folks in His day. He uses terminology and symbolism that they were quite familiar with. He says in verse one, "Most assuredly I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way the same is a thief and a robber." Now Jesus is talking about the sheepfold, and a sheepfold is a small corral made out of stones. They would have one near the shepherd's house, but they would also have one out on the fields because they would spend the entire night sometimes. They would bring the sheep into the sheepfold, they would be protected there. And Jesus says that if you were to come up over the wall or any other way, you are a thief or a robber; the only one way in that He is talking about and that is through the door.

He acknowledges that He is the door. In fact, in these sheepfolds, they were made out of stone and they would have four sides with the door in one side. And that door wouldn't be very wide because the shepherd himself would lie across the door. He could tell if any of the sheep were climbing over him to get out, or if any animal was trying to climb across him to get in. The sheepfold is a metaphor for being saved in Christ, for having eternal life, for being safe with Christ. And He is the way in. Now look at verse 9. He says, "I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture." In this story, Jesus identifies that the sheep must come in to the fold. They are not there originally and decide to leave. They are not in there originally. They come through Jesus to get to the safe place. That would argue on the side that humanity is lost and must choose to be saved!

Well let's go to another story, a very familiar story. We find it in Acts chapter 16. Paul and Silas are in prison. They've been singing hymns. They've been praising God. And during the night there is a great earthquake. The Bible says, everyone's chains were loosed. And the keeper of the prison is afraid that everyone's escaped. He is about ready to kill himself, and Paul hollers out, "No, no, no, don't do yourself any harm." So we come to verse 30: "So the jailer brought them out and said, 'sirs, what must I do to be saved?'" Their response is very telling in verse 31. They simply said, "Brother, you already are, just don't reject it." Obviously that's wrong, they didn't say that. They said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved; you and your household."

Now God has made it possible for all men to be saved. And in that sense salvation has come to all. Yet, the choice is left to us. If we want salvation, we can have it through Jesus. If we don't want salvation, we can choose not to have it. Slavery! Prisoner of war! These are all images that are very negative in our mind. In the 1800's, Abraham Lincoln was debating Steven Douglas. And Lincoln said, "Everyone who upholds the institution of slavery talks about its wonderful benefits to the slave. Yet, no one wants to become one." Pretty powerful! "No one wants to become one." No one wants to be a slave. We all want to be independent, free, able to move about and have our being. And become who we were destined to be. We cannot have that without Jesus.

We are, by virtue of the way it is on planet earth, born into a prison camp. We are prisoners of war. We can find relief from it in Jesus. He gives us the freedom to be able to choose whether we want Him or not. And if we choose Him, then we are given one of the most beautiful things a human being can have. We are given our dignity and self respect back again. I seldom watch the show called, *America's got*

*talent*. For some reason it just doesn't resonate with me. But I happened to be watching last fall when Kevin Skinner showed up for the first time. Now Kevin Skinner is a man from Kentucky. And when he showed up he had on this, I don't know, it's like a parka. I know my son got one in Mexico when he went on a mission trip. He was wearing that, had on his hat backwards, deep, deep draw. "What do you do for a living?" You, know, "I'm a chicken catcher." And you know everybody there is just, "Oh, who is this guy?" You know, "He is a kook from the hills of Kentucky." And you can just see in their faces, and the judges' faces, and so on. And when he is asked "What are you going to sing," "I'm going to sing a song by Garth Brooks." The lady judge starts to laugh, like, "Yeah, I got to hear that." And the one that sat on the right of her says, "Come on, come on, get on with it, what's the act?"

He strums a guitar, and he starts to sing. "Sometimes late at night, I lay awake while you are sleeping." And it's only a matter of time and you go, "Wow, this guy can sing. That song is moving." And you look out at the audience because the cameras are going back and forth, and the people who were mocking just seconds before are sitting at the edges of their seat. The one judge rolls back and you can hear him go, "Wow!" And when they are done, there is a loud applause. This guy will go on and he wins the thing. Gets a million dollars and gets a contract to do shows in Vegas and stuff like that. How did he get that opportunity? How did that come to him? Somebody gave him the freedom to come and share who he was. And when he did, he was more than anybody thought he was, and he won America's hearts.

It happened earlier in England. Lady named Susan Boyle. She came out and they said, "What are you going to do?" She goes, "I'm going to sing." And she kind of, did something like that, and she is just this middle aged woman that hasn't done much with her life, and just didn't look like a typical entertainer. And you could see the people snickering and elbowing each other, "Oh, come on, oh, come on, let's get off the stage. What right do you have to be on there?" And they said, "Okay, sing." "I dreamed a dream of days gone by." People were mesmerized. Gears turned to tears. She captivated the heart of a nation and until the pictures and clips of that video went all around the world. How did that happen? Somebody gave this woman a chance on a stage she could never be on any other way. She was given the freedom to be herself. And we all saw that there was a lot more to her than what it appeared initially.

You see, Jesus is providing you a stage. A stage to be yourself; to let you, with dignity and self respect, and self worth walk through life knowing, "I'm not a prisoner of war, I am a slave to no vice. I am not owned by any demonic force at all. I am a redeemed child of God." He wants us to walk with the dignity of a King, but the humility of a servant. That's the stage Jesus gives. That's the deliverance Jesus offers. Now, I promise you, I will never be singing on *America's got talent*. I will never sing on *England's got talent*. In fact, I don't think there is a country small enough that I could go to and sing, and have talent. But I do know this. God created me for something. God created me for a purpose. And in Christ I can find that purpose. And when I find that purpose, and when I live free in Jesus, people will look and say: "There is a person of dignity. There is more to him than I thought there was."

And that's what God wants for you my friends. Now I believe salvation is offered to all us, it's our choice to receive it or not. And today, I want to ask you if there is anyone here who would like to be delivered

from the prison camp. I'd like to ask you if there is anyone here who would like to say, "I am no longer in bondage. I am no longer a slave. I am a free individual because of God and what Jesus has done for me." If there is anyone here who would like to say, "God, I want Christ, and I want Him as my Savior, and I long for a relationship with You." I am going to ask you to stand.

"Father in Heaven, thank you for salvation in Jesus! Thank you for freeing us from bondage. Thank you for delivering us from the prison of war camp. Now may we with great dignity and self respect walk in a way that brings honor and glory to You. We pray this in Jesus name, Amen."