

Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”
Isaiah 40:31*



July 4, 2010

The Burden of Freedom

The freedom to live our lives without interference from tyrannical oversight is a precious gift. But that freedom comes with a heavy responsibility.

“For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Gal. 5:13-14).

The desire to be free is a universal yearning among mankind. People will pay dearly, even fight revolutions, for the simple privilege of being able to choose how to live their lives without interference from a tyrannical authority. Even teenagers figure out at an early age that their primary goal in life is to reach a point where no one is telling them what to do. They want to be free!

But in most cases, those who have this passion for freedom have a poor understanding of what they are pursuing. Given the opportunity to be free, most people confuse liberty with license, concerning themselves only with the gratification of their appetites. To be sure, this self-centered version of independence is fun and exciting for awhile, but it misses the real meaning of freedom, and almost always ends in dis-

aster. Think of the Israelites who, when delivered from Egyptian bondage into their very own Promised Land, eventually squandered their freedom in moral degradation and civil war. Or look at the Prodigal Son, who escaped the constraints of his father’s authority, only to be enslaved by destitution through his own foolish choices.

“Freedom is not free” is not an empty slogan. It captures the painful truth that somebody must pay a price to get it and maintain it. And the price doesn’t count for much if we always expect someone else to cover the bill for us. We honor those who gave their lives for our freedom — but do we ever pause to consider what our own contribution might be to the enterprise?

For freedom to be meaningful, it must be accompanied by a commitment to a higher purpose outside ourselves. In our text, Paul reveals the missing component that makes freedom worthwhile: *service to others*. As a free individual, I have an infinite variety of ways to spend my time and resources. But it is only when I choose to use those

resources to help others that I experience the real rewards of living a free life. When I sacrifice myself in behalf of others, I gain a sense of self-worth that cannot be purchased any other way. My life has a value that will live on after I am gone. And it was *my free choice* — not a coercive mandate from a government or priesthood — that made it happen.

Americans are rightfully worried about the direction our country is going. We fear we are losing our freedoms. But we need only look at ourselves for the reason. Over the last few generations, we have increasingly used our liberty as, in Paul’s words, “an opportunity for the flesh”—chasing bigger houses, faster cars, fatter bank accounts, more and more pleasure, fun, thrills, so on and so on. And true to nature, our self-centered behavior is gradually eroding the very liberty that made it possible.

Those who wish to be free must assume the burden that comes with freedom, or else they will lose it. The price is not cheap, but those who are willing to pay it will learn the secret that makes freedom truly liberating.

– David King