

FREEDOM'S TEST

Text: Matthew 5.38 – 48 (in pew Bible p.959 / in large print Bible p. 1492)

Intro:

-today's theme = lest we forget.

- **illust.** Veterans
- **illust.** Mother's Prayer

-freedom's staggering cost *for winning wars*.

- W.W. I = war to end all wars.
- Gulf War = eliminate weapons of mass destruction.

-freedom is still eluding *the governments of the west*.

- cultural cold war against the boogey man *of terrorism*.
- best laid measures of national security *often come up short*.

-today's text = pinnacle of Sermon On The Mount – *be perfect / complete as your heavenly Father is perfect / complete*.

- how we relate to those whom we fear tests the genuineness of our freedom and Christian principles.

-the price of peace goes beyond the battle *for freedom*.

- that price must be paid each day by upholding the dignity of those we love and of those we fear.

-**illust.** Mosques In Middle America

Take Home Point:

-serve freedom's cause *by loving those whom you fear*.

-*Christianity Today* article "Where We Stand" (October 2010, p. 53) points to three arenas *where we can serve the cause of freedom with those we fear*.

1. FREEDOM & THE GOLDEN RULE

-Christian ethics soar high above the “*eye for an eye*” law (Exodus 21.23 – 25).

- mercy & love are the response of Christianity to hatred & cruelty.
 - If your enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink (Proverbs 24.29).
 - Do not resist an evil doer, turn the other cheek, give up both your coat & cloak, go the second mile, give to those who beg from you and loan to those who want to borrow from you (Matthew 5.39 – 42).

-illust. CALGARY—Cowtown has a new mayor

-Jesus’ Golden Rule demands that we put ourselves in the place of Canadian Muslims.

- how would we want to be treated in a foreign land if we were nurturing a faith community?
- at least we would want to be known as persons.

-Christians in communities where new mosques are planned could create chances for Muslims to discuss with them how to raise their families in a secular society.

- focusing on common challenges can replace fear and division with understanding in cooperation.
- Christians should not think of their rights but always of their duty to be of help.

-serve freedom’s cause by loving those whom you fear.

- William Barclay: love / *agape* = unconquerable benevolence & invincible goodwill (in *Daily Bible Study Gospel of Matthew* vol. 1, p. 172).
 - not a feeling of the heart (e.g. *affection we have for relatives and friends*).
 - determination of mind to never allow bitterness against those we fear to invade our hearts.
 - only possible when Jesus lives and rules in our lives.

And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us (Romans 5.5).

-pass freedom’s test by loving those whom you fear.

2. FREEDOM & THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

-use care when you are referencing those you fear for the sake of Christians who live in lands controlled by those you fear.

- the burden of being a Christian in Middle Eastern countries varies in severity but nearly all Christians in Muslim-majority countries live under significant disadvantages.

-news and rhetoric of anti-Muslim sentiment in the West only complicates the situation of Christians who live in Muslim lands.

- strain of religious diversity tests Christianity's own principles.

-to say, as American politician Newt Gingrich has, that we should allow no more mosques in the U.S. until Saudi Arabia allows Christian churches, is to be untrue to Christian principle.

-do not be unmindful that persecution is promised to all Christians who live godly lives. (Matthew 10.16 – 23; 24.9 – 13; 2 Timothy 3.12).

- **illust.** Invictus
 - Nelson Mandela springboks & daughter.

3. FREEDOM & THE GREAT COMMISSION

-people often use this passage from Matthew to support their view of international relationships in order to argue for pacifism.

- the text does have a bearing on international war and peace but its primary level of meaning deals with personal relationships in everyday life.
- it is easier to escape the thrust of the passage by saying there should be no such thing as war than it is to never allow any bitterness to invade our everyday relationships.

-use every encounter with those you fear as an opportunity to show the grace of Christ.

- treating all Muslims as potential terrorists does not open opportunities for sharing the Good News.

-suspicion is no foundation for evangelism.

- befriending North American Muslims and defending their freedoms can tear down obstacles.

-in the O.T. it never says "and hate your enemy" (v. 43).

- this was an external addition to the Old Testament by rabbinic sources.
 - we are to love our enemies / *those we fear* (v. 44).
 - we are to pray for our enemies / *those we fear* (v. 44).
- **illust.** John Stott.

Conclusion:

1. Know what God wants.

-love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you (v. 44).

- tall marching orders – New King James Version:
 - But I say to you, LOVE your enemies, BLESS those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and PRAY for those who spitefully use you and persecute you (v. 44).
 - So that you may be children of your Father in heaven ... (v. 45).

-serve freedom's cause *by loving those whom you fear.*

-the price of peace goes beyond the battle for freedom.

- that price must be paid each day by upholding the dignity of those we love and of those we fear.

2. Know how to do what God wants.

-agape love does not allow people to do absolutely as they like & left unchecked.

- no one would say that a parent really loves his child if he always let the child do as he liked.
- all punishment, restraint, and discipline must be remedial and retributive with the goal of making the person better and to protect the person against themselves.

-but before we correct to our enemies / or those we fear, let us do all that we can to promote peace.

1. Pray for each other ... remember that we are all creatures of God.
2. Imagine a peaceful world ... change begins with a dream.
3. Listen with care ... let your listening change you.
4. Learn forgiveness ... remember the past, turn to the future.
5. Speak truth ... using passion and compassion.
6. Value diversity ... celebrate differences and things shared.
7. Build fairness ... give voice to those who have none.
8. Care for the earth ... buy wisely, use less.
9. Live gratefully ... be content with just enough.
10. Teach nonviolence ... oppose violence wherever you see it.

(Mennonite Central Committee)

-live peace as Jesus did.

- at each small turn choose peace.
- pass freedom's test by loving those whom you fear.

3. Know that you will do it.

-Closing Hymn: #52 O God, Our Help In Ages Past (v. v. 1, 2, 3, 6).

Veterans

Veterans have defended freedom of religion for us.
Veterans have upheld freedom of the press for us.
Veterans have safeguarded freedom of speech for us.
Veterans have guaranteed freedom to assemble for us.
Veterans have won the right to vote for us.

Mother's Prayer

The postman came and brought a letter, It was from her son that was called far away;
She gave him up to join the colours, Each time he writes I hear her pray.

“Dear God, watch o'er my boy in service, Help him to win the victory there.
And when this cruel war is over Send him home to my Mother's prayer.”

The day he left they walked together, down to the train that took him away;
She knew her boy would be a hero, Her smiling eyes just seemed to pray.

Oh, soldier boy, don't e'er forget your mother,
She prays to God for you each day;
That harm may never overtake you When you are serving far away.

(Words & music by Wallace Fowler)

Mosques In Middle America

Twenty years ago, Terry Muck, then executive editor for *Christianity Today*, wrote about the emerging trend of world religions in America. In *Alien Gods On American Turf* he noted that the influx of Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists in the 1980s caused little concern. Nevertheless, Muck observed that “the strain of this diversity” was moving Christians who were traditionally “bedrock supporters” of religious freedom to begin questioning the limits of First Amendment guarantees. “Ten or twenty years from now,” he warned, “the full force of non-Christian religions will be felt.”

Just 11 years later, terrorists from an Islamic fringe group attacked the Pentagon, destroyed the World Trade Center, and created an acute awareness of Islam’s adherents in the United States.

Muck did not foresee 9/11, but he was certain that the relative invisibility of non-Christian religions would evaporate. He urged American Christians to work out an understanding of their relationship to these faiths. However Americans have not done that well in probing their principles and asking what they lead us to (*Christianity Today* - “Where We Stand” October 2010, p. 53).

CALGARY—Cowtown has a new mayor

(The Canadian Press October 19, 2010)

He's young, funny, educated, a visible minority and a Muslim.

Naheed Nenshi was still basking Tuesday in his somewhat unexpected election victory the night before.

And while much was being made of Nenshi being what's believed to be the first Muslim mayor in a major Canadian city, experts, supporters and even leaders in Calgary's Muslim community were playing down the role Nenshi's faith played in his election.

"I think it's an overblown situation," said Calgary Imam Syed Soharwardy, the founder of the Islamic Supreme Council of Canada.

"He's a Muslim. Yes, well so what? Why does it have to be identified that we have a Muslim mayor? I think the most important thing is we have a new person who has been elected by Calgarians."

Still, Soharwardy couldn't deny the impact Nenshi's election will have on Calgary's cowboy conservative stereotype.

"This sends a very strong message to our country. Calgary is the first major city in North America who has a visible minority mayor, an immigrant son," he said.

"I think it shows we are not a redneck city. It shows that we are not biased, that we are not just Christian, we are multi-faith and everyone has an equal opportunity."

John Stott

Jesus seems to have prayed for his tormentors actually while the iron spikes were being driven through his hands and feet. Indeed the perfect tense of the verb in the Gospels suggests that he kept praying, kept repeating his entreaty, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23.34). If the cruel torture of crucifixion could not silence our Lord's prayer for his enemies, what pain, pride, prejudice or sloth could justify the silencing of ours? (cited in D. A. Carson *Matthew – The Expositor's Bible Commentary*. Zondervan, p. 158).