**Text: 2 Corinthians 3:12-18**

**Subject: O Say Can You See? Are We Really Free?**

 52 years ago, in his famous, “I Have a Dream Speech,” Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said: five score years ago, a great American in whose symbolic shadow we stand today signed the Emancipation Proclamation.

This momentous decree is a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of their captivity.

 But, 100 years later the Negro still is not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still badly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. One hundred years later the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. One hundred years later the Negro is still languished in the corners of American society and finds himself in exile in his own land.

 And now, 152 years later after the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation, even though we are legally and technically free, all indicators seem to indicate that we are not free.

I make this claim today because, as I reflect back on Dr. King’s speech, I can’t help but to notice the fact that not that much has changed. We are still badly crippled by the manacles of individual, institutional, and systemic discrimination that manifests itself as inequality, brutality, and recently, even lynchings. I say this because just this past week, we have seen at least 6 unexplained “hangings” of African Americans around the country.

At the same time, we are still living on the lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of prosperity. For example, we are already know that right now, less than 50% of African-American adults are gainfully employed in America, and we, as a people, are no better off economically than we were when Dr. King made his speech in 1963.

Also, 152 years later, we are still languished in the corners of American society and we still feel like we are in exile in our own country because there are many who believe that we are second class citizens and there are even more who believe that we are not citizens at all.

Therefore, looking at all of the empirical evidence and all of the many stories of anguish that we see all around us, and the difficult realities that we experience each and every day, we may begin to believe that indeed, we are not really free.

However, if we look again, actually, we really are free but unfortunately we can’t always see how free we really are because of the veil of racism that has been placed on the hearts and minds of the oppressor, and the veil of distress that has been placed over the hearts and minds of the oppressed.

In essence, we are all free but like the enslaved who lived in Texas, who were set free on January 1, 1863 when President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, did not know it until June 19, 1865 which is when General Order #3 was read in Galveston, Texas.

In other words, the enslaved in Texas were legally and technically free but they couldn’t see it because nobody told them. As a result, they went about living their lives as slaves even thought they were free. And that’s why I stopped here today to ask: Are We Really Free?

Well, let’s take a look. At first glance, it is easy to conclude that we are not free because we are still oppressed by an oppressor who plays his oppression through macro and micro aggressions towards people who do not look like him.

However, before I go any further, let me define my terms. A macro-aggression is the participation in systemic injustice within big systems of oppression.

Often, these macro-aggressions are implemented within a flawed and unjust justice system; by unscrupulous consumer credit practices; by inadequate housing and unequal public education; high unemployment or under-employment; voter suppression; and in DC, taxation without representation because we have been denied DC Statehood for far too long.

At the same time, these macro-aggressions are augmented by micro-aggressions which are subtle, stunning, often automatic, and non-verbal exchanges which are “put downs” of African Americans by people who see themselves as superior and are repulsed by our very existence.

In a recent study, researchers concluded that micro-aggressions are racial assaults to black dignity and black hope are incessant and cumulative…Almost all black-white racial interactions are characterized by white put-downs, done in automatic, preconscious, or unconscious fashion.

Also, these micro-aggressions constitute a verification of white superiority and black inferiority and are dismissive attitudes and comments, behaviors, or beliefs that minimize, exclude, or render people of color to be insignificant.

For example, in my lifetime I have heard statements like, you’re so articulate; and, I’ve been followed around a retail store and made to feel unwelcomed; and I’ve been sat near the kitchen at a restaurant; and I have tried to hail a cab downtown while wearing a three piece suit and carrying a briefcase.

These are all micro-aggressions which are designed to make us think that we are second class citizens, or that we are not citizens at all, and therefore, we are not free to just be who God has created us to be. And let me just say, I think this is dangerous because, if we are not careful, we may begin to believe the hype, and when that happens, we become like our enslaved ancestors who were free, but didn’t know it because nobody told them.

O Say Can You See? Are We Really Free?

Well, let’s go a little deeper because the case can be made that we have already appropriated and incorporated the mind and heart set of the oppressor because we practice micro-aggressions against one another.

In other words, we make treat each other badly and we make each feel inferior as much, or even more than the oppressor does. As a result, the oppressor doesn’t have to do or say much of anything because we do it to ourselves.

For example, this past week here in DC, a shoot out was caught on someone’s ring camera on their front porch. And what we could see on the footage was one group of young African American men shooting at another group of men, in broad daylight, like it was the wild wild west.

In the footage, we could see brothers running to their cars, and pulling out AR-15 machine guns like soldiers who were already prepared for war. But instead of this war being fought against a foreign nation, this was being fought in the streets of DC against people who looked like them. O Say Can You See? Are We Really Free?

At the same time, in the African-American community, we specialize in put downs against one another. For example, when I taught high school for a couple of years in 2001-2002, I could hardly teach because my students were always engaged in joning on one another.

I mean, they would relentlessly “go in” on another; on the way somebody looked; on the way somebody talked or walked; on the place where somebody lived; on somebody’s mother, or whatever. And they would not stop until the student who could not respond was almost in tears, or could only respond with violence. I would hear it in the classroom; I would hear it in the hallways; and I would hear it in the lunchroom, each and every day, for the two years that I taught.

I never understood it, and I absolutely hated it because I saw the hurt that students would experience whenever joning sessions commence.

And family, the unfortunate thing is, I still see some form of these type of micro-aggressions amongst adults in our community.

I saw in more subtle ways in the workplace; and I see it in profound ways in families; and I also see it operating in the church when people consciously, or purposely say mean spirited things about other people; or when people do under-handed things that are designed to make someone feel bad or less than because they do not fit within their particular group, family, or clique; or just because they don’t like, or are threatened by, or are jealous of, another brother or sister.

However, what we don’t know is that when we do this, we are operating in the spirit of micro-aggressions which are designed to tear people down, instead of operating in the Spirit of Christ, which is designed to build people up.

In other words, we are free but we either don’t know it, or we don’t act like it but we have experienced, and we have incorporated the macro and micro-aggressions of the oppressor whose objective is to put a veil over our hearts, souls and minds so that we cannot see or know that indeed, we are free.

So it was in our text. In 2 Corinthians 3:12-16, we see the Apostle Paul making reference to Moses who had just come down off of Mount Sinai, and out of the presence of God. Because of that, the glory of the Lord shone round about Him. As a result, he put a veil over his face because the Israelites would have been terrified by the radiance of God’s glory.

However, here, the Apostle Paul was saying that we don’t have to walk around blinded by God’s glory because of our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. However, the Israelites in the New Testament could not see that the veil has also been removed for them but they could not receive it because they could receive that the Lord Jesus Christ was their Messiah and Lord.

In verses 13-14, we see that they could not see that the old way had already come to an end and that the veil had been lifted because their minds and hearts were hardened by old teachings and ideologies. In other words, it says, that when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted.

Church, so it is with the oppressors, and the macro and micro aggressors, and so it is with some of us, we are free, but we cannot see that we are free because our hearts and minds have been blinded by the veils of the old ways of thinking and being whereas, we do not realize that we do not have to walk as the enslaved who were set free on Juneteenth even though they had been free for more than 2 ½ years.

However, in our case, we were set free when the Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross and was raised from the dead. We know this because our text in verse 14 says, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away.

Then, in verses 15-16, it says, yes, to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their hearts. But, when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. In other words, first, we have to realize that we are already free because the Lord Jesus Christ tore the veil in two when He died on the Cross.

We know this because in Matthew 27:50-51, about the ninth hour, which His final hour, as He hung there on the Cross, The Lord Jesus, cried out with a loud voice and yielded up His Spirit. And when He did that, the veil of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when that happened, that meant that for those who choose to believe in Him, we no longer have to put a veil over our faces in order to experience the glory of God.

Instead, what that means is that, by faith in Jesus, we are free. And because we are free, we no longer have to walk around as slaves even if some in this world still want to treat us like we are. However, it doesn’t matter how people treat us, because it wasn’t the decree that was signed on April 16th 1862 which us free in DC;

And it wasn’t the Emancipation Proclamation which made us free; nor was it General Order #3 that was signed on June 19th 1865 that made us free. What made us free was the Lord Jesus Christ, who died at Calvary.

O Say Can You See? We Really Are Free!

Now, we also know we are free because our text, in 2 Corinthians 3:17 says, Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

Let’s pause here for a minute because when we read the text closely, it is telling us that we are free because God has given us a reminder of a promise, that no matter what anybody says, or no matter what anybody does, we are free because we were given His Spirit, the Holy Spirit, the moment in which we first believed.

We know this is true because Ephesians 1:13-14 says, In Him [Christ], you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him, were sealed with the promised Holy
Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of His glory.

In other words, by His Spirit, and because of His Spirit, who lives deep down inside of our hearts, our minds and our souls, we are guaranteed that we are free.

And with this guarantee, we can be sure—very, very sure that He who the Son has set free is free indeed.

And also with this guarantee, we can be confident that it doesn’t matter what our situation looks like in society, or what anyone says or does, our lives will always matter, because we have the Spirit of the Living God living in our hearts.

However, we have to wait on Him, and walk with Him, and work with Him. And when we do, He will walk with us, and work with us, and it will work out in our favor.

Yes, I know, there are some who are tired of waiting because we have been waiting for freedom and man’s justice for more than 400 hundred years.

And yes, I know that there are some who are tired walking because we have been walking and marching for change in unjust and unequal policies and practices in society.

And yes, I know that there are even some who believe that this faith thing is not working out for us too well because we have put our faith in God, but nothing has really changed.

However, what I want to say to you is we have to keep waiting because Isaiah 40:31 says, but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles;

They shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint.

And then, I would say to those who are tired of walking: that we must continue to walk because Psalm 23 says, Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.

In other words, as we are walking through whatever we are going through in this world; as we are walking through these dark and dismal days filled with death; we can be sure that we are not walking alone.

We can be sure because we have the Spirit of the Living God living deep down in our souls and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is Liberty!

And with the Spirit, not only are we free, we are being transformed with each step we take.

We know this because 2 Corinthians 3:18 says, and we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image, from one degree of glory to another.

That means the more we wait on the Lord, and the more we walk with the Lord, He will reveal the radiance of His glory operating in and throughout our lives.

That means that the more we go through, the more He will bring us through (trials; tribulations; sorrows; worries; heartaches; heart breaks…)

O Say Can You See? We Really Are Free!