

Emancipated

Early in the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation. The Emancipation Proclamation declared that slaves would be free as of January 1, 1863. Freedom didn't happen quickly. They had to wait until the end of the Civil War (April 9, 1865) for it to take effect, and then again to wait until word reached all of the country. On June 19, 1865 the last slave was considered free. Just this past week, we celebrated Juneteenth, which honored that day in Galveston. Attending a Juneteenth celebration gave me the inspiration for this devotion.

The question was asked: "I wonder what it felt like to finally be free?" Black Americans had experienced two hundred years of bondage and didn't even have the right to vote until the passage of the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments. Their emancipation lifted a huge burden from their shoulders. They now could know what it is like to be free.

As Christians, our freedom was won by Jesus Christ. The Bible tells us in John 8:36, *So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.* You are free from the bondage of sin. The Holy Spirit gives believers the power to overcome the influence and personal shame of their sins.

In God's eyes, repentant believers are free from the eternal penalty of their sins. *Romans 6:23 says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."* Jesus removes the death sentence we deserve because of our sins. We can rejoice because you have eternal life if you have Christ in your life.



If we repent of our sins, we can be right with God. This allows us to continue to develop our lives without letting the shame of our sinful self rob us of peace and joy. When you repent, God forgives you.

As a result, believers are free to live and be what God intended them to be. Ephesians 2:10 says *For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.* In the dictionary, freedom is defined as "the power or right to act, speak, or think without hindrance or restraint." This is what Christ has done for us. Nothing is holding us back. We are free to do God's will. A burden has been lifted from our shoulders. *It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery (Galatians 5:1).*

Our country still is not where it needs to be regarding treating everyone with love, respect, and equality. A decree by Abraham Lincoln set us on the right path. Decrees don't automatically make it happen, they just tell us what is possible. It took a four-year nationwide battle and the loss of 620,000 people, and then a century and a half of painful growth. Reaping the benefits of Jesus' decree depends on our belief in Him and was possible because of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. Let us live together in peace, harmony, joy, and freedom. We have been emancipated. The burden of our sins have been lifted. We are free to live.

Question: How do you feel after confessing your sins and receiving God's forgiveness? Can you feel the weight of your actions lifted off your shoulders?

Prayer: Dear Lord. You offer us freedom. Jesus won that for us on the cross. If we repent of our sins, we will receive forgiveness. We can be free to live a lives of fulfillment to what you created us to be. Amen.