**“Free Indeed”**

Psalm 46

# Revelation 14:6-7

Romans 3:19-28

John 8:31-36

 Reformation, Oct. 30/31, 2021

Jesus said, “If you abide in My Word, you are truly My disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. And if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”

Grace to you and peace from God, our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

**Bridge**

They said: “We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it you say, ‘You will **become free**’?” …. The **better part of a nation** lied to God. **They** **didn’t really care about truth** so **thought they were (and always had been the way that they were) free**. Jesus was telling them that they were **wrong**.

Last Sunday, the adult Bible class addressed the question: “Is **America** **in** **decline**?” And so I ask all the rest of you? How would **you** answer that question? …. **We** were unanimous. And were we pessimistic about that or realistic? Were we accurate or just conspiracy theorists?

I submitted into evidence a **criterion for that evaluation**. We didn’t review it, but I did pass it out (and I hope many read it when they got home … I’ve printed copies and made it available for all of you this day in your bulletins). How would we measure decline or increase of our country? **Prosperity** abounded for the **Hebrew nation** for much of their history, yet “I will **make you** **free**” is what Jesus told them. How would that offer be received **in this country these days?** What would Facebook and the coastal medias say about that offer? Is Jesus aware of our advancements and success? Does He not know how progressive and tolerantly loving we are in America? Should He not be **proud** of us? Are **we** not the **favored nation** and “**Promised Land**” of today? Are we not getting **better** atbeing God’s people … a beacon of **light** to this world)?

Societies and cultures have risen and then fallen since the beginning of time. The rising up and then, later, destruction of empires follows similar paths each time and is well documented as to what the stages of it are. Certain characteristics and features have always made for **beginning and closing-out periods** in that. **Eight phases** have been described, each the **result** of the happenings and leanings of the previous. And I think this **relevant** because **each phase in a civilization was** **religious before it was secular**.

I also think that “**Reformation**” is a great **definitional word** to describe the **first phase** (the **re-forming** of a civilization beyond the **ruins** of a crashed-down one).

I want to read **with** you the criteria of the final stages in the fall of a civilization. See if you **recognize** the **need for** **reformation** in these final two, and then **its’ deliverance** in number 1. I read (and please follow along) stage seven of eight (“**From apathy to dependence**”):

“Increasing numbers of people lack the virtues and zeal necessary to work and contribute. The suffering and the sacrifices that built the culture are now a distant memory. As discipline and work increasingly seem ‘too hard,’ dependence grows. The collective culture now tips in the direction of **dependence**. Suffering of any sort seems intolerable. But virtue is not seen as a solution. Having lived on the sacrifices of **others** for years, the civilization now insists that ‘**others’** must solve their woes. This ushers in growing demands for governmental, collective solutions. This in turn deepens dependence as solutions move from personal virtue and local, family-based sacrifices to centralized ones.”

I propose that reformation is a **relevant current topic** because **culture (America and, maybe, the whole world) is crashing down, and pretty soon**. I submitted stage seven before eight because you might disagree with me **which of these stages we might be in**. But I can’t help but be **uncomfortably confident** that we’re in **one of the last two**. I think, actually, that we’re in the last stage (eight) so follow along as I read **that one** (“**From dependence back to bondage**”) and understand why I think **reformation is urgently needed**:

“As dependence increases, so does centralized power. Dependent people tend to become increasingly **dysfunctional and desperate**. Seeking a savior” (**but not The Savior as a side note**), “they look to strong central” (**earthly**) “leadership. But centralized power corrupts and tends to usher in increasing **intrusion by centralized power**. **Injustice and intrusion multiplies. But THOSE IN BONDAGE KNOW OF NO OTHER SOLUTIONS**. **Family and personal** virtue (essential ingredients for any **sustaining** civilization) are now effectively replaced by an increasingly **dark and despotic centralized control, hungry for more and more power**. In this way, the civilization is gradually **ended**, because people **in bondage** no longer have the virtues necessary to fight.”

Jesus addressed Jews who said: “**We** have never been enslaved to anyone”. The nation with a vast history of enslavement by every empire (Egypt and exiles in Assyria and Babylonia, then occupied fully by the Greeks and the Romans, about to have their Temple destroyed forty years from these words), Jesus may have laughed at them if their ignorance hadn’t, more, made Him want to cry.

In 1517, the **western world (secular and religious**) was in **submission** to the central authority of a pope and people were **subject to** signing documents called indulgences. In **America**, we’re **bound** to agree-to-disagree about sin, one side more honest than the other (as is always the case) yet both **subject** to **act like both sides are correct**, half voting for **wrongs**, tolerance **enslaving by** **mandated** from the central control of government. Jesus said, “Truly, truly I say to you, **everyone who commits sin**” (and **doesn’t repent of it**) “is a **slave** **to sin**.” I added “**repentance**” within Jesus’ sentence because the **Son’s freedom** is **only ever given to repentant sinners**. It’s **never given where it’s not asked for:** **to unrepentant sinners** (the **only distinction there is between people, sinners all but only some repentant of all sin … HONEST FROM TRUTH**).

**Text**

So, what’s **the Hope of the Jews’** and **America’s?** “**Reformation**” is about as appropriate a **defining headline** to the first stage **way up** from a **way down**. That **way up re-formational beginning** is unpacked in the phase one paragraph of the Cycles of a Civilization (“**From bondage to spiritual growth**”). **It’s** our **only hope** … and I read (follow along):

“Great civilizations are formed in a **crucible**” (which sounds the same as a **cross or crucifix**. It **means that:** **the cross** is where the word crucible comes from). “The Ancient Jews **were** in bondage for 400 years in Egypt. The Christian faith and the Church **came out of** 300 years of persecution” (and **from out of the crucible of the cross**). “Western Christendom emerged from the chaotic conflicts during the decline of the Roman Empire and the movements of often fierce ‘barbarian’ tribes. American culture was formed” (**re-formed** from out of an English dynasty) by the injustices that grew in colonial times. Sufferings and injustices cause—even force—**spiritual** growth. Suffering brings wisdom and demands a **spiritual discipline** that seeks justice and solutions.”

**Repentance and revival from the suffering of the crucible of needing to repent and be revived (re-formed) is the start of growth**. “From **spiritual growth, then, to great courage**”, “**courage to liberty**” (**that’s** **freedom**, bondage is not), and “**liberty to abundance**” (**gains** from reformation). **We** are in no different a time than the western world in 1517. “Reformation” with “**spiritual growth**” is **America’s (our) only hope … it’s always been that “only hope”**.

## Application

**Repentance because of honesty** is (as I’d said) the **pathway to begin anew**. Luther got desperate for an answer, himself; the **re-formation of his life** **was from his recognized need then struggle**. Then, what He finally **let in** came from our Epistle lesson of Romans 3:19-28, the **re-formation of God by** “**His righteousness**” (**not any of our own**) is what we can **repent into**. Luther’s “**light bulb moment**” was what’s repeated here three times: “the **righteousness of God**” / “**God’s righteousness**” expounded as the “redemption that is **in Christ Jesus**, whom God put forward as a propitiation (or payment) by His blood, to be **received by faith**”.

**Some would say** that “Reformation” is just a **lesson in history: a remembrance of the past. I would say** it’s a **renewed “wake-up call”** **for a civilization that needs it just as much now as then**. “**Truth** **comes from the Word of God**”. And it’s “**truth** **lived in**”, or “**abided in**”, so honesty from a known authority in God and, where erring (sinning), repentance that will “**set our nation, and you, free**”. Where ignorance has built (by snowball effect) into heresy and lies because our society **let it in** by “complacency” and “apathy” (where we have shown that we’ve **not cared** about “truth” or God’s Word), we have **fallen** … and that fall gets **faster and faster each day**. Beginning at any civilization’s **peak** **tipping over into the fall** is (from stage five in the Cycles to the end) “**From abundance to complacency**” (and you can read the details), “**From complacency to apathy**”, “**From apathy to dependence**”, “**From dependence back to bondage**”.

To **THAT**, the Lord Jesus said, “If **the Son sets you free**, you **will be free indeed**”.

In +Jesus’ name, Amen.