

Total and Complete Freedom

♪ *If we had the chance to do it all again, tell me would we? Could we?* ♪

In the Spring of 1979, Marilyn and I lived on a two bedroom trailer and our TV set was a tiny B&W 17 inch set. I like movies, she liked Robert Redford. Our budget did not allow for many frills, so when a good movie would come on local TV, we (mostly I) would look forward to laying on the floor to watch the tiny TV. The local ABC channel showed the movie “*The Way We Were*” with Barbra Streissand (good Jewish actress) and Robert Redford and I looked so much forward to it. I remember it vividly, we were newlyweds. The movie had been billed as a “riveting love story” and so we anticipated the viewing with great excitement—we were (are still) romantic fools... The theme song of the movie was a number 1 hit around the world and the words are still fresh in my memories:

♪ *“Memories, light the corners of my mind. Misty, water-color memories of the way we were. Scattered pictures of the smiles we left behind, smiles we gave to one another for the way we were. Can it be that it was all so simple then, or has time rewritten every line? If we had the chance to do it all again, tell me would we? Could we? Memories, may be beautiful, and yet, what’s too painful to remember we simply choose to forget. So it’s the laughter we still remember, whenever we remember the way we were. The way we were...”* (sung by Barbra Streissand, music by Marvin Hamlisch, lyrics by Alan and Marilyn Bergman from the movie ‘*The Way We Were*’ Columbia Pictures, 1974)

What a huge disappointment! We were both left sad and disturbed—we could not then pinpoint exactly why we were so troubled other than it ended wrong! To this day we do not enjoy movies with unhappy endings... I remembered the song as I prepared for today’s message, and today I understand why we did not like it at all back in 1979—because it DID NOT HAVE TO END THE WAY IT DID! *The way we were is not the way we have to be!* People can change. We can change—Marilyn and I did change. So can you, with the help of *Yeshua* and His Holy Spirit. The movie ends in such a way that we (the audience) see the loss between Hubbel and Katie and Rachel, their child—but Hubbel and Katie revert to the way they were and the movie ends in tragedy.

יהוה sees us in the same manner and without intrusion—He contemplates our lives the same way Marilyn and I observed Katie and Hubbel live their life in the movie. He sees the potential we have in Him and with one another. But unfortunately, we often continue in the way we were and are satisfied in the way we are. Are we doomed into an endless spiral of despair and failure simply because we erroneously believe the lie that ‘*this is the way we are wired*’ (or for some, ‘*this is the way I am, and it must be accepted.*’) The real answer, of course, is: NO, we are not doomed. We have within us the L-rd of Glory. He brings with Him the marvelous capacity to be able change for the better. In other words, we have the potential to change, but it has to be activated by *Yeshua*. יהוה has given us the desire and the power to do His Will (His Grace) and we can change for the better with His power, His motivation and His guidance.

This week, my spirit joining the Holy Spirit inside of me has not stopped singing this song which we sang last week in our worship service:

♪ *I will lift my eyes to the Maker of the mountains I can't climb. I will lift my eyes to the Calmer of the oceans raging wild. I will lift my eyes to the Healer of the hurt I hold inside. I will lift my eyes, lift my eyes to You...♪*

Are you hurting inside? Does anyone know? Does anyone care? *Yeshua* knows—*Yeshua* cares!

We Are New Creations

Scripture paints a totally different picture to the one presented in the movie. יהוה has told us that in Him we are ‘reborned’:

“Therefore, if anyone is united with the Messiah, he is a new creation—the old has passed; look, what has come is fresh and new!” (2 Corinthians 5:17)

What a wonderful promise! Do you trust it? Do you believe it? If you do, then we do not have to accept the way things are in us—we can start living the promise of a new creation. The KJV expresses this thought in a marvelous way when it states: *“old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”* How much has become new? Answer: ALL THINGS! How about my hang-ups? ALL THINGS! How about my shortcomings? ALL THINGS! How about my habits? ALL THINGS! How about my weaknesses? ALL THINGS! How about my inconsistencies, my selfishness, my self-esteem, my personality? Same answer, ALL THINGS! ALL things are become new, but we must first become *“united with Messiah”*. *Rabbi Sha’ul* tells us that we have all been eagerly awaiting this change:

“¹⁹The creation waits eagerly for the sons of G-d to be revealed; ²⁰for the creation was made subject to frustration—not willingly, but because of the one who subjected it. But it was given a reliable hope ²¹that it too would be set free from its bondage to decay and would enjoy the freedom accompanying the glory that G-d’s children will have.” (Romans 8:19-21)

What is holding you up? Are there areas in you that need transformation (metamorphosis) and renewing? It is time—you see this is only our ‘reasonable’ service (cf. Romans 12:3, KJV):

“In other words, do not let yourselves be conformed to the standards of the ‘olam haze’. Instead, keep letting yourselves be transformed by the renewing of your minds; so that you will know what G-d wants and will agree that what he wants is good, satisfying and able to succeed.” (Romans 12:2)

“¹⁴But as for me, Heaven forbid that I should boast about anything except the execution-stake of our L-rd Yeshua the Messiah! Through him, as far as I am concerned the world has been put to death on the stake; and through him, as far as the world is concerned, I have been put to death on the stake. ¹⁵For neither being circumcised nor being uncircumcised matters; what matters is being a new creation. ¹⁶And as many as order their lives by this rule, shalom upon them and mercy, and upon the Israel of God! (Galatians 6:14-16)

What is really important? To be Jewish? NO! *Rabbi Sha’ul* states unequivocally that the issue that really matters is being a new creation. Notice the tense of the verb: it doesn’t say *“to be a new creation”* it says *“being a new creation.”* I like this rendition—being involves doing, actively pursuing—an on-going process. It uses the progressive tense of the verb. Exactly what you and I should be doing—progressively becoming and being this new creation in Messiah *Yeshua*. Are we now some abstract being separated from all human qualities and are we now “super-spirituals?” Another resounding NO! Dr. David Stern puts it this way:

“Rav Shaul is talking about the fact that believers are now reconciled with G-d. Their old, unreconciled, sinful lives have passed into history. But they remain human beings with human characteristics and associations; they do not become abstract entities, divorced from their past.” (JNT Commentary 2 Corinthians 5:17, Dr. David Stern)

To be sure, there is work involved in *trusting (believing)* this Scriptural fact—that we are a NEW creation. In *Elohim* there is always a work involved in possessing His promises (analogous to the children of Israel possessing the promised land. There is no question they were given the land of Canaan for an inheritance, but they had to drive the Caananites out. In a sense, the Caananites were squatters, But *Elohim* transferred their right to their land unto His children, in His sovereignty). You and I have to work at “being” this new creation *Elohim* says we are in Messiah. But how rabbi?

“Get rid of the old hametz, so that you can be a new batch of dough, because in reality you are unleavened. For our Pesach lamb, the Messiah, has been sacrificed. So let us celebrate the Seder not with leftover chametz, the chametz of wickedness and evil, but with the matzah of purity and truth.” (1 Cor. 5:7-8)

Scripture establishes for us that *Yeshua* is/was the true Passover Lamb. *Yochanan* the Immerser (John the Baptist) made it clear when he said: “*The next day he saw Yeshua coming to him and said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’*” (John 1:29). Even the most casual *Berean* would agree that in order for *Yeshua* to be the Passover Lamb of the Bible, he would have to been offered for the sins of the world on the very day of Passover, that is, on the fourteenth of *Aviv/Nisan* in the Hebrew calendar—the very day of the 10th Plague in Egypt when the Angel of *Adonai* passed over the homes of the children of Israel in Goshan.

“And they (we) overcame him (Satan) by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their (our) testimony; and they (we) loved not their lives unto the death.” (Rev 12:11, KJV)

It Is What It Is

What is the front-page headline in the news in the other side of eternity? It is found in Revelation 12:10-11 and it states unequivocally “the righteous win!” Did you hear those words? The righteous side wins! In Gainesville, we are all excited about the Gator winning a national championship. It feels good to be on the winning side, doesn’t it? Americans do not like to lose. I am so glad that Messiah’s Body wins, aren’t you? How would you like to know with 100% certainty that your team will win the tournament? Yet, this is precisely what Scripture tells us about the future war against HaSatan—we win! How sweet it is!

Some of you were given a bag full of stones when you were taught in our previous congregation (or in your former walk with the L-rd) that the Believer’s life is to be devoid of struggles. Nothing could be further from the truth! In fact, if you are not struggling, then you are probably not causing any damage to Satan’s kingdom. Anyone doing something for the L-rd is going to meet strong opposition from the kingdom of darkness. Scripture affirms this warfare mindset when Rabbi *Sha’ul* states in Ephesians 6:12:

¹²*For we are not struggling against human beings, but against the rulers, authorities and cosmic powers governing this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realm. (CJB, emphasis, mine)*

I do not know about you, but I am definitely in a struggle. Sometimes we win, sometimes the enemy wins, but in the struggle against HaSatan we know the final result—we are victorious, our side wins! In order to receive the crown we have to wrestle. And in order to wrestle well we must have a warfare mentality—one moment we are up, and in other moments we are down, sometimes we are ahead, sometimes we are behind, sometimes we win a scrimmage and sometimes we lose a battle—but ultimately we win the war. Scripture comforts us while in these battles:

“We have all kinds of troubles, but we are not crushed; we are perplexed, yet not in despair; persecuted, yet not abandoned; knocked down, yet not destroyed.” (2 Corinthians 4:8-9)

“I can do all things through him (Messiah) who gives me power.” (Phil. 4:13)

“No, in all these things we are SUPERCONQUERORS, through the one who has loved us.” (Romans 8:37)

“But he told me, “My grace is enough for you, for my power is brought to perfection in weakness. Therefore, I am very happy to boast about my weaknesses, in order that Messiah’s power will rest upon me.” (2 Cor. 12:9)

We must understand and accept the fact that the Believer’s Walk is a struggle—a spiritual battle—not really against a system or against men but ultimately against the one who is behind the system, the ancient enemy of G-d, HaSatan the ruler of darkness. *Yeshua* said: *“The thief comes only in order to steal, kill and destroy; I have come so that they may have life, life in its fullest measure (life more abundant).” (John 10:10)*

But if normal state of affairs is a state of war, then we Believers are nothing less than an army—the Army of G-d. There are only three statuses for members of the armed forces of *Adonai Tzevaot* (the L-rd of Hosts/Armies): (1) a frontline soldier (a Marine or a Green Beret?), (2) a POW or (3) or a deserter. These are ultimately, the only positions one can be in the *Army of Adonai*. Rank does not matter—in fact greatness is measured by servanthood (cf. Mark 9:35 and 10:44).

Many segments of the Redeemed Community are POWs and churches are often no more than collections of glorified POW camps whose people are holding on until the Commander comes back to rescue them. They hope and wait to see what will happen, without joy, without victory. People dead on the inside and broken hearted saying: *“Messiah will come and will fix things up.”* Victimized by circumstances and lacking in trust, we see people who are enslaved and imprisoned by their own lusts, sin, and fears. They just wait and often despair—when will I get out of this situation? In fact, a theology has been developed to explain this conquered state of affairs and justify the status quo: *“Glory to G-d, we are few and fewer and we are down because the L-rd is purifying His flock.”* BUNK! LIES! General Patton told his army: *“I am sure that some stupid politician in Washington told you that the secret of winning the war is to die for our country. But I tell you that the secret to winning this war is to cause the enemy to die for his country!”*

Yes, there are times that the enemy has us pinned down and we must lose gracefully, but if we are to be an overcomer, we must win—with grace, with holiness, with transparency, with humility—but win we must. One more time, personalized:

“I Rabbi Tony (your name) have overcome HaSatan by (1) the blood of the Lamb, and (2) by the word of my testimony (about the Blood); and (3) because I have loved not my life unto the death.”

We have entered into His High Holiday of freedom. We have the opportunity to gain total and complete freedom. Freedom inside, where it matters most and freedom on the outside also. It takes a surrender of our way to His way, since He said: *“I am the way, the truth and the life.”* Are you ready to be healed inside? I am. Thus,

*♪God, my God, I cry out. Your beloved needs You now. God, be near calm my fear and take my doubt. Your kindness is what pulls me up. Your love is all that draws me in.
I will lift my eyes to the Maker of the mountains I can't climb. I will lift my eyes to the Calmer of the oceans raging wild. I will lift my eyes to the Healer of the hurt I hold inside. I will lift my eyes, lift my eyes to You.♪*