

Let Freedom Ring!

On a Monday afternoon in early 2000, I spent several hours deeply gripped as I wrote a chapter titled, “‘Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death’: The Driving Force of Revolution.” It was part of a book on the revolutionary aspects of the gospel, and within the chapter, I used numerous quotes from Dr. Martin Luther King.

Only later that day did I realize that it was Martin Luther King Day. How appropriate!

We recently remembered the 50th anniversary of Dr. King’s assassination, and in that context, we do well to remember what he stood for. His was not just a message of racial equality but a message of freedom.

Today, as our freedoms are under assault on many fronts, we must recapture that cry. If we don’t take a stand today, we might suffer real loss tomorrow.

Consider the history of our nation.

More than 75 years after the Declaration of Independence was signed, slave trade was still flourishing in our land. It was not yet the land of the free and home of the brave. Hundreds of thousands were held captive. But voices rose up in protest: There must be freedom for all.

One of the most militant—and sometimes extremist—voices was that of William Lloyd Garrison a “poorly educated, failed journalist and publisher” who “found his calling in the abolitionist movement” and in 1831 “began publishing a rather radical antislavery paper” called *The Liberator* (quotes from George Grant, *The Patriot’s Handbook*.)

Although *The Liberator* “never attracted a circulation of more than 3,000, it became the driving force toward the abolition

of the institutions of chattel servitude." A short poem Garrison wrote captured the hearts of New Englanders and helped pave the way for freedom of the slaves:

*They tell me, Liberty! that in thy name
I may not plead for all the human race;
That some are born to bondage and disgrace,
Some to a heritage of woe and shame,
And some to power supreme, and glorious fame:
With my whole soul I spurn the doctrine base,
And, as an equal brotherhood, embrace
All people, and for all fair freedom claim!
Know this, O man! whate'er thy earthly fate,
God never made a tyrant nor a slave:

Woe, then, to those who dare to desecrate
His glorious image!—for to all He gave
Eternal rights, which none may violate;
And, by a mighty hand, the oppressed He yet shall save.*

How true. All human beings are made in the image of God, and therefore one man is not created a tyrant—as if he was somehow entitled to cruelly oppress other human beings—while another man is created a slave—as if he were somehow less human than the next. No! Such degraded concepts can destroy the very fabric of a nation.

Abraham Lincoln recognized this, recalling the words of Jesus that, "A house divided against itself cannot stand." In

Lincoln's own words, "I believe this government cannot endure permanently, half slave and half free."

Rather, as he stated in his annual message to Congress (Dec. 1, 1862), "In giving freedom to the slave, we assure freedom to the free – honorable alike in what we give and what we preserve."

Freedom for the oppressed meant freedom for all.

It was that message of freedom that Dr. King shouted from his Washington, D.C. pulpit in 1963, as he spoke to 200,000 who had gathered for the March on Washington.

He famously said, "When we let freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, and every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of that old Negro spiritual, 'Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!'"

Today, we are still not a totally free nation, and we still face real issues of injustice and inequality.

But there are many freedoms we do enjoy, and they have been purchased at a great price.

I urge every American reading these words: Don't take your freedoms lightly. Losing them, we lose all.

There's a reason that Patrick Henry cried out, "Give me liberty or give me death!" A life enslaved is hardly life at all.

So, let me say it again: Do not take your freedoms lightly. Use them or your risk losing them. {eoa}

(Some of this article was adapted from Michael L. Brown's book Revolution: Jesus' Call to Change the World.)