



Freedom

I trust that each of you had as good a Fourth of July as we did. For approximately two hours today, we were able to minister at the Fourth of July Celebration in the town of Valdese, North Carolina. This is the community in which we live, and which has a rich tradition. The Waldensians fled Italy because of religious persecution and settled in this area of the Carolinas. Much of the town of Valdese is Waldensian in nature. They are wonderful people with a deep appreciation for both this country and the freedoms we have here.

Colonel Ralph Benson (former Pentagon chaplain and current chaplain at Dulles and Reagan National airports) spoke briefly on what it means to be "An American Hero." He cited numerous accounts of his experiences on 9-11, even mentioning one young man from Valdese who worked in the Pentagon when 9-11 occurred. Following the Colonel's comments, the Daybreak Quartet and the Kistler family provided patriotic and sacred music. North Carolina state senator Jim Jacumin commented to me that "this is the finest music that the town of Valdese has ever heard." My heart was thrilled to know that so many of the towns residents were moved and touched by our involvement in the celebration. Already, they have asked us to return next year for the 2007 Fourth festival.

All of this illustrates exactly what we as Christians are to be in this world. We are to be gracious, winsome witnesses for our Savior. We don't have to have an adversarial attitude toward our town, city, state or government officials. Nor do we have to develop an "us versus them" mindset toward the people of our communities. You never see Daniel exhibit an "attitude" toward those for whom he worked. He served with a gracious spirit, helping his king be as successful as possible and confronting his culture when fundamental truth was at stake. Community involvement does not equal compromise! Community involvement means loving individuals enough to demonstrate to them your willingness to reach out to them in loving ministry, with the gospel.

Over and over tonight, as we dismantled and packed up, I heard people say, "Thank you for your ministry to us." It is my prayer that my community will be blessed by both my presence and involvement in it. May God give us the ability to leave a good taste in the mouths of all with whom we come into contact. May our demeanor and conversation be like salt to make them thirsty for the Savior we love. May God grant us His wisdom, power and boldness to declare His gospel to our Jerusalem that they might know the FREEDOM that comes from forgiveness of sin.

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