

Paul H. Dixon  
Jonathan Livingston Seagull and the Bible  
March 15, 1973

Unedited Transcript

Paul H. Dixon:

Hey, it's good to be here today. This is the first time, I think since 1969, when I spoke in chapel that we had the chapel all together instead of the split time. And it's really tremendous. And I don't know, I just really like it. It's great to see everyone. And I'm so glad what the Lord's doing this year at the college and the way he's working in so many lives. And that we could come and share these 30 minutes with you. I'd like for us to do something a little bit different today. As far as our consideration goes, I'd like to speak on the subject, Jonathan Livingston Seagull and the Bible. I'm sure that many of you are familiar with this book. We just have the paperback with us today. Maybe I can refresh your memory some, and perhaps some of you who are not acquainted with the book will become a little more so. And we'll look at some verses and just see what we can glean by this consideration today.

Paul H. Dixon:

Actually Time Magazine has hailed Jonathan Livingston Seagull as the publishing miracle of the decade. Now I think you'll see why as I go on to explain how the book was written and how we have it in this form today. Actually in 1972, Jonathan Livingston Seagull sold more than 1 million hardback copies. That's more than any book since Gone with the Wind. Now, remember this is 93 pages, \$4.95 cents a clip. And they sold the rights to Avon Publishers for the paperback for \$1.1 million. And of course, now you can get it in paperback for about \$1.50. Last year, some weeks they sold as many as 30,000 copies in a single week in the hardback. One day they were known to have sold as many as 60,000 copies. Now, people are talking about Jonathan Livingston Seagull all over America. And many people have told me that they've seen the man who wrote it interviewed on talk shows and so forth.

Paul H. Dixon:

Christian bookstores, many of them are selling Jonathan Livingston Seagull. And evidently with the thinking that there must be some spiritual value that can be gained from this book. Patrick Gray, when he was the head of the FBI, the Director of the FBI recommended that all of his men read the book. Many businesses are having their salesmen to read it. They believe that there's a great deal of motivation and a lot that can be gleaned if you'll read Jonathan Livingston Seagull. The book has been on the best selling list now for the last 55 weeks. Two weeks ago it was number two on the list. I don't know where it was last week or this week. A film is coming out this year about Jonathan Livingston Seagull entitled Jonathan. Now, the man who wrote it is named Richard Bach, B-A-C-H. He's now 36 years old, who was a completely unknown individual until writing this particular book.

Paul H. Dixon:

He started it about 11 or 12 years ago. And he testifies that one day. He was walking along the banks of a canal in Belmont Shores, California, when suddenly he heard a voice. And that voice said Jonathan Livingston Seagull. He said, he rushed back to his cottage, sat down at his typewriter and started to type. He said, the story was flashing through his mind, like a motion picture. And he typed as fast as he could. He said, this is not the way he writes. He claims that he did not write, that he was inspired to write this book. I don't doubt it. I don't doubt it one bit. I'll explain it to you as we go on and think about Jonathan Livingston Seagull. But the amazing thing was it stopped at the end of 10 pages. And so he tried to finish the book. And he couldn't do it.

Paul H. Dixon  
Jonathan Livingston Seagull and the Bible  
March 15, 1973

Paul H. Dixon:

He said he tried for the next five or six years to finish this book. He couldn't do it. Finally, back in 1967, in Altoona, Iowa, about 5:00 AM in the morning, he woke up and there was that motion picture going again right through his mind. He said at first he was angry to have to get up so early in the morning. But he went to his typewriter and decided it's been six or seven years since that thing was going, so he'd better finish it. So he sat down and he typed four more pages and completed Jonathan Livingston Seagull.

Paul H. Dixon:

For the next two years, he tried to get it published and no one would publish it. He thought it might come out as a children's book. But finally McMillan and Company said, we will publish it, but we do not believe it should be a children's book. We believe that it ought to be for adults. And of course, that's what makes it the publishing miracle of the decade. No publisher wanted it. No one could figure out what to do with it. And finally, when someone did take it, it became one of the biggest money making things in many, many years.

Paul H. Dixon:

Now, I want to give you the essence of Jonathan Livingston Seagull. But before I do, I think I ought to make a couple of words of explanation. You might say Paul, why devote a sermon, a Bible message to a book like this, two reasons. Number one, any book or movie or song that has such a following and creates such a furor and so much interest in this nation ought to interest us as Christians, because this tells us how people are thinking. Now, I don't think this should come as any shock to us, but it lets us know what wavelength people are on.

Paul H. Dixon:

Now, many people do not know, for instance, that right now rock music is not the in thing on the college scene. The secular campus has right now taken a decided turn towards conservative things. They've brought back jazz, blues. Right now, there's a great demand for the old Boris Karloff movies. They're bringing back the Sherlock Holmes movies. They are asking now, instead of for the radical speakers, they're asking for the conservative speakers. Now, of course we realize this isn't in every case, but we're just talking about a different trend that has come up on the American scene just in the last few months, really. This ought to tell us something. I also think that when we think about Jonathan Livingston Seagull, we have to realize that, in essence, it has a lot to say about religion, and it also has a message about Christianity.

Paul H. Dixon:

Clara Pierce, writing in world said this, "Both I'm okay, you're okay. And Jonathan Livingston Seagull are at heart religious books speaking to a spiritual need in America." The cover story of Time Magazine in November the 13th of last year had a picture of a seagull. And under that picture, it had the figure of Richard Buck. And it was entitled, "Getting away from it all with Jonathan Livingston Seagull." In that article, they point out that this book has within it, Hinduism, Buddhism and Christian science philosophy. Hinduism says the goal of life is absolute perfection. One Buddhist said, the story of Jonathan who strives for perfection, captures the spirit of Buddha. I trust you'll keep these things in mind. And then as we begin to go through the book, and as we look at verses in the Bible, it'll all begin to fit together.

Paul H. Dixon  
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March 15, 1973

Christian Science of course says, in essence, evil, death, birth, sickness are merely an illusion. Man is a timeless being.

Paul H. Dixon:

And I believe Richard Buck did a great deal of study in Christian Science. He does not claim to be associated with them now, but he did a lot of reading. I know that he claims he didn't write the book. I don't believe anybody writes in these days. But what their basic philosophy somehow does not come to the front. And I believe that this man definitely leans toward Christian Science teaching. For instance, in one place, he derides faith. He says, forget about faith. You don't need faith to fly. You need to understand flying. And we'll look at some more things that show this basic philosophy as it comes out. But I believe the main philosophy that we ought to see in this book, and even as we look at some things in quote from it, probably could be summed up with this quote. Jonathan is teaching one of his disciples by the name of Fletcher. And Jonathan says to Fletcher, "The only true law is that which leads to freedom. There is no other."

Paul H. Dixon:

And the essence of the book says, do away with law, do not allow yourself to be too structured. I think probably you could sum it up by saying, do your own thing. And of course this fits right in with the philosophy of our day.

Paul H. Dixon:

I'd like for you to look at some verses with me in the Bible about liberty. And then we'll look at the book some more, okay. Let's just go through and mark some verses in the Bible that have something to say about liberty. You know, even a lot of Christians have the idea that boy, we just need to do away with a lot of the establishment and a lot of the structure and a lot of rules we have and they down the established church. And the whole idea is if we could just get more independent. And let's look at some verses. Turn with me to Romans Chapter 8, Verse 21 and mark that. And then after you mark Romans 8:21 kind start a chain, we'll look at five or six verses on liberty. And the best way to put a chain in your Bible is when you look at Romans 8:21, and we read it next to that verse, jot down the next reference that I give you. And then that will show you another verse that speaks to us about liberty.

Paul H. Dixon:

Romans 8:21. Maybe you ought to begin with Verse 18 just to get a little of the context. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the, mark this, glorious liberty of the children of God.

Paul H. Dixon:

Hey, that's great. The glorious liberty of the children of God. I don't believe anybody else has the kind of liberty that Paul's talking about here. Well, I think he's talking about in finality that glorious liberty that we'll enjoy in eternity where we'll be free from sickness when we'll be free from the limitations of this body. But I think there are applications to this life. We have a glorious liberty in Christ.

Paul H. Dixon  
Jonathan Livingston Seagull and the Bible  
March 15, 1973

Paul H. Dixon:

2 Corinthians 3:17, 2 Corinthians, Chapter 3, Verse 17.

Paul H. Dixon:

I can tell by the way that it took a little time to turn those pages that you're jotting these down. That's great. You'll want to put another mark next to Verse 17. 2 Corinthians 3:17. Now the Lord is that spirit. And where the spirit of the Lord is there is liberty. Isn't that good? Where the spirit of the Lord is there is liberty. Just let me quickly share this with you. In Verse 6, it says where the spirit of the Lord is there is life. In Verse 17, where the spirit of the Lord is there is liberty. And Verse 18, where the spirit of the Lord is there is likeness. But I especially want you to note Verse 17 that says where the spirit of the Lord is there is liberty.

Paul H. Dixon:

Galatians, Chapter 5, Verse 1. Great verse on this matter of bondage and liberty. Of course, in reference to the law and the problem that these Christians there in Galatians were going through with the judaizers and wanting to put them back under the law and the whole thing. But Galatians 5:1, the apostle Paul says, stand fast therefore in the liberty where with Christ hath made us free. B not [inaudible 00:14:22].

Paul H. Dixon:

Now, as I said, I believe that this is talking and we definitely know from the context about the law. And don't get placed under the bondage of the law again. But I also think that there's an application to sin here. Christ hath set us free from sin, and it's ridiculous for a Christian to be in bondage to sin. And stand fast therefore in the liberty, where with Christ hath made us free. And we can make many other applications.

Paul H. Dixon:

Look, if you will, at Verse 13, same chapter. Galatians 5:13, for brethren, ye have been called unto liberty. Only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. I am convinced that there are a lot of well-meaning people going around today and they're using liberty as an occasion for the flesh. There are a lot of people going around today and shouting from the rooftops, legalism, legalism, legalism, anytime a school wants to have some standards. Anytime a preacher wants to talk about sin. Anytime some Christians have some convictions in their home, they yell legalism. And I believe they're using liberty as an occasion for the flesh.

Paul H. Dixon:

Turn with me, if you will, to James Chapter 1, verse 25, James 1:25. The word of God itself is called the law of liberty. Who so looketh into the perfect law of liberty and continue with therein. He being not a forgetful here, but a doer of the word. This man shall be blessed in his deed. See, I've just got to share this with you before we go on.

Paul H. Dixon:

Paul H. Dixon  
Jonathan Livingston Seagull and the Bible  
March 15, 1973

In Verse 24, it says, he beholdeth, let's go back to Verse 23. If a man be a hearer of the word and not a doer, he's like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass. He beholdeth himself and goeth this way straight way forgeteth what manner of man he was. Then it says, who so looketh into the law of liberty.

Paul H. Dixon:

The Bible is the mirror of the word of God. He talks about beholding your image in the mirror. The word for behold is the word for a quick glance. The word that's used here is the word that was used when you would just kind of look around the corner and glance at yourself in the mirror, and then go on your way. The word for look here is the idea of a continual looking and a really deep evaluation of your condition.

Paul H. Dixon:

There are a lot of you this morning who got up and you spent five minutes reading your Bible, and you soothed your conscience with a "quiet time". And hey, I am for the quiet time. But all you are doing day after day is taking a glance into the mirror of God's word, and it is not changing your life one width. And what we need to do is stop taking glances into the word of God and just giving it 5 and 10 minutes a day. But we need to spend much more time before the word of God, looking into it, seeing ourselves as we really are and letting the word of God as we apply it to our lives, change our lives. But the word of God is the law of liberty. The word of God can set you free. The word of God will not bind you. It will lose you and let you go. All right.

Paul H. Dixon:

Now, Jonathan Livingston Seagull talks a great deal about freedom. The essence of this story is this book, you can read it in 20 minutes if you haven't read it yet. And it's got a lot of pictures in it of seagulls and so forth. It's about a common ordinary seagull, just like the seagull next door. And he goes around about his mundane task of going out over the fishing boats, working for his food, eating the fish, going back, reporting to mom and dad and going to sleep. And he goes through that routine day in and day out. But there's something within this guy. And Jonathan just doesn't like it. So some days he even skips his meals. And he goes out flying and he decides that he's going to learn to fly like no other seagull.

Paul H. Dixon:

And he starts climbing higher than any seagull has ever gone. And he starts going into dives. And of course he has crashes and so forth. And he meets with a great deal of resistance from the establishment. His parents put him down. They say, Jonathan, that just isn't the way a seagull is supposed to act. And then of course the elders of the flock they've warned him that he just shouldn't be doing this. And so finally, one day he decides to go back and be an ordinary seagull. But he just couldn't take it for long. And then he goes up, and he comes upon an amazing discovery. If he would take his wings and tuck them in, instead of being way out like this, he could probably increase his speed greatly. So he does it. And I don't know how Richard Bach did this, but he must have built in a speedometer into Jonathan.

Paul H. Dixon:

And he clocked him at 214 miles per hour. That's the fastest that any seagull had ever flown before. And he is just so proud that he has broken this speed barrier. And he goes back to the flock and they're all waiting for him. And he thinks that they're ready to hail him as the hero. And as he's walking into the council meeting, they say, front and center, Jonathan. He thinks, boy, they want to make me an elder. I

Paul H. Dixon  
Jonathan Livingston Seagull and the Bible  
March 15, 1973

don't want to be an elder. I mean, I'm just satisfied being in the background and going ahead and accomplishing my feats. And he goes up there and stands before the elder. And they call him for shame. He can't believe his ears. That means he's going to be cast out of the flock. And so they throw him out of the flock because he is not an ordinary seagull.

Paul H. Dixon:

And he goes on, he doesn't care. And he lives out on the cliffs and he practices his dives and so forth. And he accomplishes many things. And one day, two radiant gulls appear. And as they meet Jonathan, they say, we want you to go with us. And they usher him higher in the heaven than he's ever gone before. And he thinks, oh, I'm going to heaven. And he gets up there and he doesn't see very many birds. And so, as he is up there, he starts asking some questions about why there aren't many birds. Listen to this answer. One of the radiant gulls is telling him this, do you have any idea how many lives we must have gone through before we even got the first idea that there's more to life than eating or fighting or power in the flock?

Paul H. Dixon:

A thousand lives, John, 10,000, kind of like reincarnation, huh? And then another hundred lives until we begin to learn that there is such a thing as perfection and another hundred again to get the idea that our purpose for living is to find that perfection and show it forth. The same rule holds for us now, of course. We choose our next world through what we learn in this one.

Paul H. Dixon:

One day he says to Chiang the big elder up there in this place, kind of like Kevin. Chiang, this world isn't heaven at all, is it? And Chiang says, no, Jonathan, there is no such place. Heaven is not a place. And it's not a time. Heaven is being perfect. And that's the philosophy of the book.

Paul H. Dixon:

And it's amazing how many people have bucked this philosophy, but there is no heaven. Richard Bach was on the Phil Donahue show and someone called in and they said, do you believe in heaven or hell? He said, absolutely not.

Paul H. Dixon:

And then finally, one day Jonathan decides that he ought to go back to the flock. So he goes back to the flock. And as he gets back to the flock, he's able to convince seven gulls to follow him. He gets seven disciples around him. And as he takes those seven disciples out and starts to train them, he starts giving them lessons like this. Each of us is in truth an idea of the great gull, an unlimited idea of freedom. On another occasion, he says this, get the Christian Science philosophy here. Your whole body from wingtip to wingtip is nothing more than your thought itself in a form you can see. Break the chains of your thought and you break the chains of your body, too.

Paul H. Dixon:

Well, as he's out lecturing these seagulls one day, one of his prized disciples crashes into a cliff doing 200 miles per hour, and he's dead. And what does Jonathan do? He walks up to him and he says, now, remember, Fletcher, everything is controlled by thought. There's no such thing as dead. And old Fletcher

Paul H. Dixon  
Jonathan Livingston Seagull and the Bible  
March 15, 1973

gets to thinking, and he says, man, I can't be dead. Jonathan's talking to me. This is really amazing. He says, it's no way I could be dead if he's talking to me. So he just gets up and he flies away. And the flock is amazed, and they look at Jonathan and they say, he must be the son of the great gull.

Paul H. Dixon:

He says, no, don't make a God out of me. And when he says, don't make a God out of me. They say, well, if he's not the son of the great gull, then he must be the devil, and they decide that they're going to kill him. Of course, he doesn't stay around for any kind of crucifixion or anything like that because he is able to think himself so many miles away and he gets away from it all.

Paul H. Dixon:

But the whole essence of this book really is a drive for perfection and a drive to do your own thing and get your independence and your liberty. Now, look you say, Paul, how can the world buy this? Surely they know that this isn't what it's all about. But wait a minute, many of you right now have bought this philosophy in your own life. Many of you are thinking right now, you can't wait until the summer gets here and then you're going to go out and you're going to do things that you're not doing and that you're hindered from doing in school right now. And some of you have all kinds of contemplations and plans and things that you're going to do for your life. And you are tired of being restricted by your parents. You're tired of a preacher standing up and telling you what to do. You're tired of a teacher standing up there and telling you how much time you have to study and assignments you have to get in. And you are going to hit the road and go your own way.

Paul H. Dixon:

Let me give you a simple definition of liberty, and I hope you'll never forget it. Liberty is disciplined living. Most of the world doesn't know what liberty is all about. Did you get that? I'll run it by again. Liberty is disciplined living. There is no liberty without law.

Paul H. Dixon:

Let me show you how it works. Let me just take something out of the world that I think we can identify with and maybe some of you are having a problem with this right now. Here's a guy. And he decides when he's in high school, the way he is going to get his liberty is he's going to start smoking. And so he stands outside of the front door of the high school every day. I know when I was in high school, the hoods always stood right there at the front door, with their black jackets and their duck tails.

Paul H. Dixon:

Some of you don't know what that's all about, but some of the teachers do. And here are the guys when they line up in front of the door. And when the kids come out, boy, they ooh and they aah because these guys stand there and they got that little look on their face and they got that weed in their finger and they're blowing smoke rings. And everybody thinks that is just great. You know, that guy really has independence. He really has liberty.

Paul H. Dixon:

Here's another guy. He has the same opportunity. And he disciplines himself. I don't know why. Maybe it's because he's frugal and he doesn't want to spend all the money it's going to take in the course of a



Paul H. Dixon  
Jonathan Livingston Seagull and the Bible  
March 15, 1973

lifetime to buy all those cigarettes. Or maybe it's because he's an athlete and he knows what it'll do to his body. Or maybe it's because he is a Christian, and he knows what the word of God has to say about the temple of the Holy Spirit, but he disciplines himself. Doesn't start.

Paul H. Dixon:

Ten years later, that guy who wanted independence and liberty and freedom is sitting on the couch, watching the TV program. He's married and he's got five kids. And he's sitting on this end. His wife is down at that end. He not only smokes Camels, he smells like a Camel. She won't even sit next to him. She won't even hold his hand. And on comes this commercial three reasons why you shouldn't smoke. He says, "Hey honey, I've been getting up every morning and I've been coughing and I've been spitting, flaming, listen, I've got to stop. I just got to stop. I might have cancer. And I'm only 27 years old." And he can't stop. He's chained to a weed. That guy who wanted independence, that guy who wanted liberty, that that supposedly gave him his liberty has now bound his life.

Paul H. Dixon:

You know that other fella he's sitting at home that same night, he's married. He's got five kids, too. His wife is all snuggled up next to him. They're just having a great time watching that program. On comes that three reasons why you shouldn't smoke any it doesn't even move him. It doesn't bother him at all. Now who's free? And who isn't?

Paul H. Dixon:

This can be applied to every area of life. This thing can be applied to sex. Here's the young couple, they live loose. They go like the world is glowing. They call themselves Christians. They may attend a school like this, but they just don't treat each other like the word of God says they ought to treat one another.

Paul H. Dixon:

Here's another young couple. And they discipline themselves. They have the same passions. They have the same temptations, but they discipline themselves. You don't have to wait 10 years. Maybe one day she calls him up and she says, John, I'm sorry to tell you this [inaudible 00:29:23] to get married. And he says to himself, I don't know if I really love her or not. And she says to herself, I wonder if he really loves me. And you got about a 50/50 chance of making it in marriage. And that's a terrible way to get started. That other young couple, they can stand before that preacher. And they're pure in one another's sight, pure in God's sight. Now who's free? And who isn't?

Paul H. Dixon:

Liberty is disciplined living. If you want to really be free, you discipline yourself. You discipline yourself in your relationship to God and standing against sin and getting into the word of God and applying it to your life and doing what it says. Satan in Isaiah Chapter 14, wanted independence and liberty. And he is headed for an eternal bondage because he chose that route. Adam and Eve listened to the temptation of Satan that said, go out and do your own thing. Don't be restricted by God. And man has been bound by sin ever since.

Paul H. Dixon:



Paul H. Dixon  
Jonathan Livingston Seagull and the Bible  
March 15, 1973

I think the greatest illustration of the Bible of someone who wanted independence and ended up in bondage was David himself. He had a lot of spare time this particular day, and he walks out on top of his roof and he sees a beautiful woman and he does not discipline himself. And he ends up in bondage. Bondage by his lying, by his adultery, by his murdering. And you read Psalm 32 and you read Psalm 51 and you see what that bondage caused in that Believer's life.

Paul H. Dixon:

And many of you right now are miserable and you're in bondage and you're not enjoying the joy and the peace and the freedom in Christ because you're all bound up in sin. I pray to God that we might study John Chapter 8 and know that Jesus Christ shall set you free. You shall be free, indeed. And I trust that the spirit of God will apply this message to every one of our hearts and lives and help us not to listen to the philosophy of the world, but to listen to the philosophy and the truth of the word of God, look into the perfect law of liberty and know the liberty that's in Jesus Christ.

Paul H. Dixon:

Would you bow with me in prayer please? Now, before I pray today, every head bowed and every eye closed. Let's do some heart searching. I don't want us to go out of this chapel period and just talk about Jonathan Livingston Seagull. Let's talk about the truth. What this says to us. And every time we see it advertised, and every time we hear it, let's be reminded of what the word of God had to say about biblical liberty. Now, you think about your life. Are you free in Christ? Are you bound up in sin? Have you been going the do your own thing route? Have you been obstinate? You've been going through this whole school year with a sorry attitude and a sorry spirit. No better time than right now, even in your seat, to get right with God. Just a couple minutes of quiet prayer.

Paul H. Dixon:

Thank you, our father for speaking to our hearts today. It's quite evident you've met with us. Thrilling to know that we don't meet alone. It's great to know as we leave this place, that we're not limited to our power of persuasion or delivery to accomplish it, but your spirit will continue this after this chapel is over for hours and days and weeks and years to come. It's thrilling Lord to have a part in your work. Continue to moving on of our lives and build into our lives and shape us for your glory. Well, thank you in Jesus' name. Amen.