

Freedom - Galatians 5:1

Intro

Since WWII, freedom has been the battle cry of virtually every progressive group around the world. In the 50's and 60's it was under the banner of freedom that countries in Africa and Asia liberated themselves from colonial (often British) rule. One by one, people around the world, fought for national self-determination and liberation from foreign oppressive powers. This has continued in the present day with the devolution/independence movements in Scotland, Wales and Ireland. Freedom was also the driving passion of the Civil Rights Movement in the states in the 1960's, "We will no longer have our futures determined by the colour of our skin or where we happen to have been born." *Freedom was so much of the heart of the Civil Rights Movement that Martin Luther King Jr.'s gravestone is engraved with the famous saying, "Free at last, free at last – thank God Almighty, I am free at last!"* Freedom continues to be a driver within the Black Lives Matter movement here in the UK too.

Biblical Christians, thoughtful Christians, have found ourselves saying "Yes" to some of these movements and initiatives. because they have expressed the heart of God and God's commitment to justice and his passion for human liberation. At the same time Biblical Christians have also said no and found themselves in opposition to other expressions of liberation and freedom, because they are destructive to the human condition and actually bring about increased bondage and slavery than the liberation God longs for us.

As a culture we love freedom. Freedom to do what we want with our bodies, to express our opinions unfettered, to chose what we want, when we want it with who we want it.....you would expect us to be a very free NATION, yet we also know we want to be free from our own bad habits, bad thoughts, from shame and guilt, from fear and anxiety, but are not sure how? - we struggle to get free from people or jobs or whatever we consider to be bad influences on our lives.

Today we're talking Freedom, we're going to briefly look at one verse in Galatians 5, that we will return to in the Autumn

Let's pray.

Galatians 5:1 - *It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery...*

The meaning and goal of salvation: freedom

Freedom is one of the major themes in the Bible –in both the OT and NT, In fact, in his commentary John Stott, said that freedom could easily be used as a substitute for the word salvation. If you want to understand what is meant when you see the phrase "Jesus saves" you could easily translate the phrase into "Jesus sets us free."

In the OT, the overriding picture of God saving His people is found in the Exodus. God came and liberated his slave-people Israel from bondage in Egypt. And in the New Testament, what did Jesus say he came to do? Listen to Jesus' words in Luke 4. *Luke 4:18-19 (also Nicola few weeks ago) "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."* Jesus understood that it was only by coming to **Him** that people could experience the freedom that we all long for.

F.F. Bruce, who was a great biblical scholar, wrote a wonderful book on the Apostle Paul's life. He chose this lovely title for his book, **Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free**. This is what Bruce wrote about Paul and his letters *"Paul's pre-eminent contribution to the world was his presentation of the good news of free grace... free in the sense that it is sovereign and unfettered, free in the sense that it is held forth to men and women for their acceptance by faith alone, and free in the sense that it is the source and principle of their liberation*

from all kinds of inward and spiritual bondage, including the bondage of legalism and the bondage of moral anarchy.” In other words, Paul preached free grace. We receive salvation freely; we don't earn it. And salvation releases us from every kind of slavery. Salvation means freedom.

The Bible paints a picture of humanity that is not free. We are not Born Free; We are bound to guilt before God; to accusation from the enemy. We aim to conform to the world. We are enslaved to habitual, repeated, compulsions that destroy our lives and other people. According to the NT, human beings are enslaved – spiritually, socially, psychologically, and emotionally. And the reason Jesus came into the world was to set us free to release us.....**This is good news**

What did Jesus set us free from? Jesus came to free us from two days every week that create guilt and fear and anxiety that are destroying all our lives.. Jesus said I want to liberate you from yesterday and I want to liberate you from tomorrow. Because of Jesus' full and finished work on the cross, you and I can be set free from yesterday – from all of the mistakes we made, from all of the ways we blew it, from all of the attitudes and faults and omissions and commissions. Every one of your yesterdays can be brought to the cross. God says, “I will liberate you from your yesterdays.” We don't have to become bitter, regretful and bound by your past experiences, you can be forgiven, cleansed and set free. Jesus liberates us from yesterday!

And Jesus sets us free from tomorrow. In Matthew 6.34 Jesus said: *Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.* Jesus sets us free from tomorrow. So many of us live in dread and anxiety about what tomorrow will bring. I don't know if I will be able to handle tomorrow's problems, my health, the people. But Jesus said, “I'm setting you free to live in this moment today. I will give you tomorrow's manna tomorrow. Today live near to me.” Today you can forgive. Today you can believe in Christ. Today, you can bless your family. Today, just for today, you can choose sobriety.

Paul says in *Gal 5:1 It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.* The great alternative to turning to Christ for freedom is self help, turning to a set of rules or principles or religious practices that promise freedom. The letter to the Galatians is Paul's warning to the Galatians and to us that the great alternative to looking to Christ to set us free is looking to law, rule keeping, to set us free. There is a seductiveness, an attractiveness to legalism. Why? It seems safer and simpler. But I think that many of us are afraid of freedom. We don't know that Jesus Christ is big enough to protect us from self-destructing and wasting our lives through this gift of freedom.

I read a story a few years ago about some animal rights activists who were upset because a whale was being held in an aquarium in a huge tank. They broke into the aquarium and set the whale free to swim out into the ocean. What happened next was remarkable. The whale swam out for a little while and then decided the aquarium was a pretty good place to live. And so he returned voluntarily to the aquarium. I guess he decided that it was better to be fed fish and live in captivity than handle all the dangers of the wild. That's what I think we're like. We see it with the children of Israel in the OT. They are set free from slavery, but they don't like fending for themselves in the wilderness, having to gather food, facing the Canaanites in the Promised Land. They begin to say, “We were much better off being slaves.”

Finding Freedom

See religion is a lot easier than heart transformation. Paul says it is for freedom that Christ has set us free. So what Paul is getting at is that the goal is so much more than conformity to a set of moral principles. Paul is the apostle of the heart set free. The goal of Christ is to transform your heart. To set your heart free from bondage to your puny little self (as John Stott describes it in his Commentary); Sin is primarily self-centeredness; it is life curved in on itself. God frees us from self-absorption and self-pity and self-indulgence and self-gratification and self-glorification and self-importance and self-interest – freedom from our puny little selves. Christ liberates our hearts so that you are free to become the person that God intended you to be and fulfill the purpose for which God created you.

We live at a time where it's more noticeable that people long for righteousness, we long to be treated well, we long for a world without sexism, racism, abuse of power and our answer is more legalism - restructuring things on the outside, but it will never be enough. We need a heart transformation from the inside out and it starts with us

We need to come face to face with the cross of Jesus Christ. Why? Because on the cross we witness the breaking of the body of the Son of God for someone like you or someone like me. It took nails being driven through the Son of God and a sword going through his side to save you. The cross is an offense because it says that you and I are hopeless to ultimately find the power for true righteousness and that there is absolutely nothing we can do to help ourselves. That's the problem of changing the heart is not going to be solved by the normal "pull yourself up by your own bootstraps." – try harder.....

Christianity does not transform human beings from the outside – it transforms from the inside out. It is not a new set of rules – do this and that and you will be changed. It is to have a liberated heart and that will mean that you long to please God *and follow his ways*. We need a power to expel the darkness from our heart, to expel, pride, lust, vengeance, and greed, and self-pity, racism and sexism. Where is the power that transforms the heart?

We find it in the perfect holy Son of God hanging there bleeding and dead because of your sins, your pride will be destroyed. Stare at the wounds in the body of Christ and lay hold of those wounds by faith, and you will discover the engine, the power, to transform your heart from being proud to being humble. Stare at the wounds in the body of Christ and you will not be tempted to lift yourself up above your fellow man. You will say, "Christ, you had to die for me. Who am I to judge this other person?". In the person of Jesus and the power of the Spirit – God has come to set us free. Will you receive Him?

Let's pray.

Take a moment of quiet to think about where you're not free in your life this morning

Offer this area of life to God this morning, take it to the cross

Ask for his help and freedom.

Do you need to rededicate your life to God this morning, have you lost your way and need His saving hand to bring you back?