

## 10th January 2021 Our weekly message from the 10:45 Zoom Service -What is True Freedom? By Andrew Giles

Galatians 5 verse 1 and versus 13-14

:" Freedom is what we have – Christ has set us free!. Stand, then as free people, and do not allow yourselves to become slaves again....My brothers and sisters, you were called to be free. But do not let this freedom become an excuse for letting your physical desires control you. Instead let love make you serve one another. For the whole Law is summed up in one commandment. Love your neighbour as you love yourself"

When I imagine a caricature of being totally free, the image that springs to my mind is someone sitting on a deck chair with a cigar with the sea in the background, being waited on hand and foot by beautiful people and surrounded by bags of money.

Currently all of us are being bound fast by the rules about Covid. In many cases we can't go out, properly see family and friends and feel cooped up in the cold weather.

But actually, true freedom is much less dependant on external circumstances than we think.

The person sitting on the beach is not free – they will eventually get bored. The responsibility of what to do with all the money will weigh down on them. Like King Solomon he or she might decide to wed all these beautiful people – yet Solomon's 300 wives ended up as a source of great unhappiness to him (not to mention the 300 mothers in law!)

So whatever situation you are in there are restrictions and responsibilities, no-one on this planet is totally free in the worldly sense!

Paul, in Galatians 5, defines our freedom as Christians in two ways. The first suggests that we are **free from something**. The second suggests that we are **free to do something**.

### **So what are we free from?**

*First: Free from guilt.*

The Bible says that the moment we come to Christ he takes us and forgives us instantly, completely, and without question. The Bible says, "I've taken your sins and put them all behind My back(1) " "I've separated them as far as the east from the west(2)." "I've put them where I remember them no more(3) ."

So, when we die and go to heaven and say, "God about that sin..." He'll say, "What sin?" That is the freedom of forgiveness. As Christians, we experience joy that comes from knowing that we've been forgiven.

*Second: Free from self, wrongful passions & desires.*

In Titus 3:3 Paul describes us as "slaves to various passions and pleasures"

There are many such slaves out there today. These people in the media talk about their self-fulfilment and doing exactly what they want but I think many of them are slaves to their own appetites, ambitions and desires which they can't control and it leads them down a blind alley at the end of which is disenchantment and misery

*Third: Free from the past: the pain of resentment and as the hymn says "the sting of old regrets."*

No-one gets off scot-free in this life, my own view is that others don't have it nearly as easy as we might think from the outside and Jesus can stop us filling our thoughts with comparisons and what has gone wrong for us in the past.

*Fourth: Free from the expectations of others.*

This can include the expectations of all sorts of people – relatives, friends, colleagues, social mates and even other Christians. If we're attuned with Jesus we can just do whatever He wants us to do – which might be almost nothing- not what others want us to do. He might be calling us to work very hard at this moment but equally he might be calling on some of us to hibernate. The key thing is "at this moment" The next season he may want you to change.

**So, what are we Free to do as Christians:**

*First: Free to act differently.*

If we are truly in Christ we can:

- love instead of hate,
- be kind when others hurt you
- do good, when others do evil.

From my own experience there is nothing more poisonous for you than brooding on the unkindness of others, try and have a short and defective memory on these things, see people in the round and simultaneously give it to Jesus and let him deal with it.

*Second: Free to be joyous in the middle of sorrow and peace in the middle of conflict.*

Despite our aches and illnesses, troubles and sadness at the moment we can focus on what we have and is good in our lives rather than what is going wrong.

*Third: Free to have our purpose for him.*

We have been set "free" in order that we might "serve one another through love." A free will isn't to do whatever we like, but the power of doing whatever one sees ought to be done in response to a need, even in the face of otherwise overwhelming impulses. Freedom means I have been set free to become all that God wants me to be, to achieve all that God wants me to achieve, to enjoy all that God wants me to enjoy.

I'd like to finish with the following prayer from an amazing book *Prayers for Impossible Days* by Paul Geres a French inner-city priest which sums up what I have been trying to say:

*"I've known many temptations, but these are the worst: to wish for better health, higher intelligence, a stronger body, a better education. To know that the impossible will never happen. The dreams are over, Lord. Help me no longer to torment myself with thoughts of what "might have been", but to find happiness in doing what I can.*

*O Lord, I have this yearning for independence again, the same yearning which I felt when I was fifteen but which I thought was dead by now. A longing for adventure and unquenchable desire for open horizons. I want to be my own master, not to obey anyone. But I am not 15 years old any more, Lord, and I know that. And I need your help to realise that dreams are empty, that life is serious, that there are other human beings, and that there is work to be done: help to be given to some, peace to others.*

*I now know Lord, what it means to be free. It means to desire what you desire to love what you love. And if there has to be a choice, it simply means that I take what you choose. To be free means to try and find out your purpose for my life, your plans, and your opinions, and to make my own face more like yours. For I was made in your image."*

(1) Isaiah 38:17 (2) Psalm 103:12 (3) Hebrews 8:12