

Live Free

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Date: 16 October 2011

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[0 : 0 0] Now, I like this morning just for a few moments. I hope that you will forbear with me as in our worship service we like to focus around God's word and focus around His truth for a few moments and I would like to do that this morning and share some of the Gospel story today with all of us. Today is a really special day for us as a church. It is great to see so many people here today and one of the reasons it is such a great day is because children are very precious to us and we recognise children as a precious gift and I hope we all recognise that today. And in a strange way we have no right to claim children nor can we do anything in many ways to earn the right to have children. We recognise them very much as a gift and as Christians we recognise them as a gift from God. Little bundles that become bigger bundles and sometimes quite objectionable, difficult big bundles as that happens but we love them unconditionally of course all the way and we regard them as hugely precious in our lives. And yet the paradox of humanity really very much for us and it sometimes expresses itself most sometimes anyway in our attitude to children and in our attitude to little ones. It exposes a heart problem with humanity that not everything is quite right. Their children sometimes we ignore them, sometimes we use them as bargaining tools, tragically sometimes we extinguish their lives even before they see the light of day, we enslave them, we sometimes make them live out of their own failed childhoods and when we haven't time for them when we can't be bothered with them sometimes we try and buy them happiness by giving them lots of material possessions and it's strange isn't it that we would do that to people that are so precious? Ewan would you like to go to the door there's a light flashing there, we have a light flashing for people so that they can get in and the bell doesn't ring, it's very clever but of course it ruins everything because I stop and I lose my track and everything else as well but the lights in a bad place because no one can see it apart from me but it is tremendously significant that those that we would all acknowledge in regard as being precious and significant and valuable in our lives are often in society the ones that get most abused and ignored and rejected and within there's a parallel to another gift that I want to speak about today, the gift of God's grace, the gift of the gospel, the gift of his love, his redeeming love for us because and the reason I'm saying that I'm not I hope hijacking the event but we have over the last number of Sunday mornings been looking at God's grace and the core message of the Bible which is the gift of God's grace, the core of what we believe and what has transformed our lives and which has been really great to look at because it's debunked a lot of things even for ourselves as Christians because we have such a tendency to turn away from God's grace again and to somehow forget it and try and earn our favour with God or whatever it might be because as we understand it and as we've been seeing it over these last number of weeks the great good news of the gospel is that we can't earn our favour with God, we can't put right what is wrong in our relationship with a holy and

perfect and good God. It's nothing we can do to make that right, we can't earn it and we can't make ourselves right but the great news of the gospel which goes alongside that is that Jesus Christ is the one who has redeemed us in the gospel and he has done what we couldn't do and has become our saviour. Grace clearly turns and has turned her and is increasingly and continues to turn her world upside down and her family's upside down. It's a great challenge, I've no doubt about that, it's been a great challenge to me, it's a great challenge to our pride, it's a great challenge to our natural abilities, it's a great challenge to the performance culture that we live in which says we always need to earn our way, we always need to justify our existence and we always need to have something by right and yet the gospel admits to our need of forgiveness and our need of God and our need of Christ and the provision that he gives to us for our spiritual needs. Jesus came and lived the perfect life that God demands so that we can be in relationship with Him, the life that we can't live, none of us can live that life perfectly, internally and externally, none of us love God as we ought and love one another as we ought which is the kind of summary of the law. Jesus did that for us and yet he died on the cross, the death that we deserve and was raised on the third day to offer us forgiveness and eternal life. Hugely significant still, two thousand or so years later, nothing really changes as eternal God who has done that, not just a kind of fly by night Jewish teacher who happened to be misunderstood and ended up a miserable life and then people turned it all around and made his death significant but absolutely, clearly and truly the life and the grace of God has transformed us and has made us new and gives us hope and a future. And in the passage that we're reading in

Galatians Paul there is speaking to a young church and he is wanting to reiterate the freedom that the gospel brings and the danger of reverting back to something that wasn't the gospel.

See this young church has accepted that Jesus was Lord and Jesus was their Savior and his redemptive love had changed everything, transformed them and they accepted that great gift, they accepted God's verdict and they accepted his solution and they knew that his love for them had set them free. Yet just because they're like me and like us they were tending to go back to religious slavery, they were tending to go back and they were wanting to go back somehow along the line to earn their favour with God. They just felt they need, I need to do something really religious, I need to do some ritual, I need to earn my way somewhere along the line, I need to be religious, I need to be doing certain things in order to earn God's favour, I need to be trying my best but at the same time in so doing and going back to the old religion that they had known where they thought that it was by their good works and by their specialness, by their superiority to other people that God chose them, then they were denying the very gospel that had set them free. And that's the tendency within us all the time. See we're, Christian church is terrible for it, we're better than other people or we'll earn, we'll contribute to our salvation, we'll do something, it'll be a bit of a quid pro quo, we'll do a bit, he'll do a bit, we'll do a bit, God will do a bit and it'll all come together and somehow in the end of the day we hope that will be enough to get into heaven and to live with him. And yet that's a very denial of the gospel that we love and we know and has transformed us. In our pride we just want to add something to what Jesus has done, Jesus plus, Jesus what, it was okay, yeah it was fine and it was pretty well fine for people that are real rascals but you know for me

I can add to it and I can do my own bit and I can earn my favour before God and it's so difficult for us to humble ourselves and say Lord Jesus Christ what you have done is absolutely complete and full and I can't add to it and I can't possibly improve it in any way. And I know that's very difficult for us, I don't know if you've ever been in the position of being a real need one way or another, whether it's financial or in some other way and then someone really kind and generous and magnanimous and philanthropic gives you an amazing gift, just what you needed, an expensive gift, something that obviously was sacrificial on their behalf and something you know cost a great deal. Have you ever been in that situation or at least can you imagine that situation because my natural reaction to that is I don't know if I can accept that, it's just too much, it's too good, it's too generous, I'm going to be always indebted to that person for their kindness and for their huge hospitality and love and generosity and we balk against that and even if we do accept it we scramble around to look for something we can give back in return because that's in our nature. It's very difficult to be humble enough to accept a gift when we're in great need and yet that's the paradoxical reality of the gospel message that God wants us to be humble enough to recognise our need but to accept wholeheartedly His outstanding gift of grace and love in Jesus Christ that He promises to be our saviour when we put our trust in Him, having lived the life we couldn't and get died, the death that we deserve in our estrangement from God by nature. So that gospel which we've been talking about and preaching about and discussing in our city groups and discussing in our youth fellowship and peace about in churches, that gospel of grace is the gospel that sets us free as people and that's what Paul is wanting to reiterate again and again and it's hugely significant for us today and hugely significant for us to remember. It is for freedom, can you remind us, not absolute freedom but it's nonetheless freedom to live as we were created to live, to live spiritually in relationship with God and know the fullness of life that He offers.

[11 : 55] It is freedom for Christ that is set us free. Stand firm then do not let yourselves be burdened again by the yoke of slavery. Christ is set us free and can I just say to all who are Christians here and to ourselves as we've been looking through the study, the theme for today would have been the freedom of grace. I'm keeping it tighter and shorter than I would normally today but it is for freedom that Christ has set us free. That we are reminded is what we have, freedom to love God, freedom to serve Him as Lord with thankful hearts, with gratitude, not dragging our feet and not somebody saying, oh I need to do this and I need to obey Him and I suppose He might be happy that way but gratitude, not because we can earn favour with Him but simply out of gratitude for Him being good and righteous and loving and knowing what is best for us even sometimes when we don't know what is best for ourselves. Free to be honest, free to be honest before Him. We've been a lot of time speaking about that here, let's serve an honesty within our congregation and a recognition of the importance of being honest both with one another and before God. Free to follow

Him and to serve Him, supposing we are the only people in the whole world left that we would still follow Him because of the transformation He has brought into our lives and the truth that we have come to accept through Him. Freedom to let go of our pride, let go of our anger that is sometimes deep within us or let go of our fear of failure or let go of our need for revenge in life when things don't go right for us. Freedom to let go of these things and leave them in His hands. Freedom to ask for help in these matters which are overwhelmingly big and significant for each of us to a greater or lesser degree. Freedom to worship today.

Freedom from trying to earn our favour with Him. Freedom from that great weight of wondering whether I can do enough to please Him or to know Him or to love Him, knowing that He accepts us through Jesus Christ for what He has done. Freedom from living our lives trying to be comparative, comparing ourselves with others and seeing how we kind of match up in the societal standards around us. Freedom from the pressure that that involves. Freedom from having to live to impress everybody all the time and yet feel maybe miserable and struggling inside. Freedom to say no to wrong behaviour. Freedom to serve other people and to consider other people better than ourselves in our lives. Freedom to face poverty or riches, sickness or health, good things or bad things without being enslaved by these circumstances which can so often enslave us. Freedom to entrust our future and our life and our eternity to the risen Lord. That's what we are free to do and a myriad of other things as we put our trust in Jesus as we keep putting our trust in Jesus as a living resurrected

Son of God who we worship on this first day of the week, not a dead figure of the past but a risen Saviour Creator God that we will all meet and face one day. And I feel that it's tragic for us that so often the Christian church and us as Christians have portrayed the Christian life as anything but freedom. That we've portrayed it in negative and restrictive terms, legalistic terms as if by what we do and it's like, and I've used this illustration here, ad nauseam, it's like somehow we think it's like bad medicine, the worse it tastes, somehow the better it must be for us and we've sometimes portrayed a relationship with Christ like that and our Christianity as being something that must be so miserable, it must be doing as good in the life hereafter because it's so rotten and miserable here. That isn't how it is and that isn't how we should portray it and that isn't how we should live our lives.

We've been set free to live and to serve and to know Jesus Christ and to follow Him because we love Him and because He first has loved us Christ, He says, set you free and you will be free indeed. And I think for us as parents subconsciously, it's really difficult to live that with our kids as we bring them up as Christians, it's really difficult to live as parents and to live grace with them. I'm not saying we don't but I think even subconsciously as we tell our children about the Christian faith and as we tell them about the morality of Jesus Christ and the lifestyle that we live as Christian families, it's important that we get with our children beyond the code, beyond the law, beyond the culture of Christianity, beyond telling them that this is just the way we behave, this is just the way we're bringing you up. And the great challenge for us as Christian parents is to teach them about a relationship of love with Jesus Christ, a relationship of forgiveness, a relationship where we recognise all of us as equal before God and all of us needing a Savior before God, teaching them with real humility their needs for Jesus Christ.