

Freedom in Jesus

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[0 : 0 0] Well, let's go back to Galatians, to chapter 5 of Paul's letter to the Galatians. We read in verse 1 of Galatians chapter 5, 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. And later in verse 13 Paul goes on to say, you my brothers were called to be free, but do not use your freedom to indulge this sinful nature rather serve one another in love. Earlier this year, masked men came and took me away. They administered powerful drugs to me in a brightly lit room.

They pulled out some sharp bladed instruments. They cut me open and they ripped out my guts. So thank you to the National Health Service. I had surgery earlier this year. And after the surgery, I found myself in a place I had never been before. And the place that I found myself was I was afraid. And I don't think I had ever really been scared of anything before in my life. You know, sometimes I'd been nervous. Sometimes I'd been apprehensive, but I don't think I'd ever really felt afraid of anything. But after my surgery, I really did feel afraid. I was afraid of the future. I was afraid for my health. I was afraid I wasn't going to be able to do what I wanted to do in life. And I felt afraid for the first time ever. I felt afraid of dying. And all of these things were new to me and kind of surprising to me. And I felt lying there in a hospital, I just felt really weighed down by all of that and kind of hopeless with it. And trapped by it. And often people do feel like that in life. It was kind of new for me, but there are plenty of people who feel imprisoned in life, imprisoned by their past, imprisoned by their failures, imprisoned by the fear of other people, imprisoned by illness. All kinds of things can make us afraid or fearful or make us feel trapped. And there's only one thing that I found that changes that.

And it's a person. And that person is Jesus. And it's only when Jesus came to me that I felt my fear lifting. Freedom is a person. Or if you saw the quote that we had up at the beginning of the service from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was a German pastor martyred for his faith by the Nazis. If you saw that quote, what Bonhoeffer says is freedom, there is, freedom is a relationship. So freedom is not a condition of the human man or person, but rather towards the end he said freedom is a relationship between two persons. And it's only when Jesus comes to us and brings us into a relationship with himself that we really begin to experience what freedom is. We bind ourselves to Jesus and that sets us free because Jesus has already bound himself to us. So what I needed and what you need is

Jesus. A relationship with him is what will set you free. Can drop the slide. I'm just going to ask or look at three things. I'm going to look at what is freedom. I'm going to ask why we're not free. And then I'm going to explain how Jesus sets us free. So what is freedom? Why are we not free? How can Jesus set us free?

I read a while back in a magazine that freedom is only found when you get rid of God. So this was in a humanist magazine and it said this. It said some ideas can enslave you, some can set you free. If you crave freedom from baseless dogma, if you want to think for yourself instead of submitting to tradition authority or blind faith, put aside religion, despair, guilt and sin and find new meaning and joy in life. In other words, to be free you have to get rid of God. And what they describe or what they mean there is not freedom.

[6 : 09] That's not freedom. What they're describing is what we know as autonomy. And autonomy simply means to be a law to yourself to do what you want. And they're saying you can only be free if you're autonomous. And yet the autonomous person, the person who just does what they want, that's not really freedom. Freedom and autonomy are not the same thing at all. Perhaps we think we're free when we just do whatever we want. Anybody remember the movie, I think it was called The Truman Show and it's a film about a man who lives on a TV set on a kind of soap opera and his entire life is a constructed reality. He lives in a place called Seahaven and Seahaven is a completely artificial town inside a giant dome. And Truman is told he's free but he isn't. He can do what he wants but he can only do it within certain limits. And in that little constructed reality Truman is missing out on so much, on real relationship, on the wider world that he's never known or experienced. And in the end what Truman has to do is to choose to walk out of the door and enter the real world.

And those who think that freedom just means doing whatever I want are living in a very little world and they're not really experiencing what freedom truly is. And like Truman we have to find a door out of that constructed reality and walk through the door and the door is Jesus. Walk through the door, mark Jesus. And when we do we're truly free. That's what Jesus said, I have come to bring freedom. It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.

Paul says. So when we step out of a little world of an autonomy is simply selfishness. I do what I want. When we walk out of that little world of selfishness and go through the door that's marked Jesus, what do we find? Well we find that we've stepped into a whole world that we never knew existed. And the world that we've never known before is a world where we're truly free. And it's the world where God reigns. It's the world where we see God's beauty. It's the world where we see how great and glorious and good God is.

So to be free, first of all I want to say to you, is to know God. And to be free is to love God. The free world is a world where God is at the center. Where God knows us, loves us and enjoys us and where we know, enjoy and love God in return. So until you begin to know God and love God, you're not really free. You're living in a small artificial reality. So freedom is two things I'm trying to say. One is freedom is knowing God, knowing his goodness, his beauty, his love, his greatness, his joy and the power of that in your own life. Freedom is knowing this great, holy, transcendent, loving, majestic God. And freedom is also loving others. Loving others, serving others. When we are set free by Jesus, we're set free to love. To love God, to love others. Verse 13, Paul says this, you were called to be free. Don't just use that as an excuse to indulge your sinful nature. Rather, if you're free, what are you going to do with your life? You're going to serve one another in love. You're going to bind yourself to other people. And you're going to give yourself to other people. To love them and serve them. And so the free person is a person who gives their life away to others. To care for them, to serve them and to be a blessing to them.

So that's what freedom is in a very kind of simple way. Freedom is knowing and loving God. And freedom has been freed from selfishness. To love others and give our lives for them.

[11 : 27] Why are we not free? That's the second thing I said I would talk about. And the first reason I would say why we're not free is this. It's simply because we want to earn our own salvation.

Or we want to earn God's approval. And so in the book of Galatians, in this letter, Paul sets out two ways of relating to God. One, he calls the way of the promise. And the other he calls the way of the law. And the way of the promise is simply to trust God that he promises us salvation through Jesus Christ and to accept that. And the way of the law is to look at all the laws that are in the Bible and then to say to be accepted by God, I have to obey the law. I have to prove to God what a good person I am. And the thing is that strangely, it's the second way that often appeals to us. You see, God offers us something freely through Jesus Christ. And yet, too often we say no. I want to earn my way to him. I want to prove how good I am. I want to show my devotion and my consecration.

And the problem with this is it's what you might call a performance treadmill. That we try to be good, but we find that we're never good enough. And so we try harder to be more good. And then when we realize that we're still not good enough, we think, then I need to try even more and make a greater effort. And we find that life has become an intolerable burden. We find ourselves weighed down because all the time we're just consumed by this need to obey, to strive, to improve ourselves, to be better, and to try and find a way of pleasing God so that God will forgive us. And that's one of the reasons that we're not free because that slavery, that's what Paul says in this letter. He says, living under the law is to live as a slave. You're not free. The law just kind of lashes you every day and it says, go on, try harder, go on, give it more effort, go on, be a better person.

And so every day you find yourself a slave to the law. The law demands so much of you and you can never give enough. You can never match up. And so the law demands more and more of you and you find yourself trapped as a slave. Not much wonder people think religion is a horrible thing because you know what most people think? That Christianity is about trying harder and being better. And it's cruelty because of course there's no freedom in that.

There's no hope in it. You can never earn your way into God's approval. So one of the reasons we're not free is because we become slaves to the law as we try to show we're good enough for God. And then a second reason is that often we are listening to people and this is just kind of an add on to that. We're listening to people, not to God. And we're living for the approval of others. So sometimes we're living for the approval of God and trying to get God's approval by ticking all the right boxes. But sometimes we're living not for the approval of God but for the approval of other people. And other people are cruel masters. Other people can be so demanding of us and have so many expectations of us.

[16:13] You have to be like this. You have to conform to what we think. You have to behave this way. You have to dress this way. You have to look this way. And they have a whole list of other rules that we have to try and match up to. And we feel trapped always trying to please other people. Now what's the Gospel saying to us here? Well what the Gospel is saying to us of course is you don't need the approval of other people. It doesn't matter what anybody in the world thinks of you. There's only one person who's approval you need. And that's God's approval. And there's only one way of finding yourself right in the sight of God. And that's through Jesus Christ. Through what He's done on the cross for your sin.

If you trust in what you've done you'll never be accepted by God. That's slavery. But if you trust in what Jesus has done for us on the cross then that's liberating. That's freeing. Because what Jesus has done is offer a perfect sacrifice for our sin. This is what the Bible calls grace. Look at verse 4. It says you who are trying to be justified by a law have been alienated from Christ. So do you see that? There's two ways of salvation here. You can try and be right. Justified means to be right in the sight of God. So you can try and be right in the sight of God by obeying the law. But if that's the path you choose then you've been alienated from Christ. So you can't have both. You can't have Christ as your savior and yet rely on your obedience to justify you in the sight of God. You either give yourself completely to Christ and to the salvation that's found in Him. Or you live under the law and it's slavery. Paul calls this grace. You don't have to earn your salvation. It's a gift freely given. You don't deserve it. That's why it's grace. So we're not free because we want to earn our own salvation. Because sometimes other people have such great expectations of us that we're performing for their satisfaction and forgetting about Christ. And the interesting thing about the Galatians is this, that they started off trusting in Jesus and relying on Him and only Him for their acceptance with

God. But then they kind of, once they became Christians they thought, oh, wait a minute, and they kind of changed tack. And instead of relying on Jesus for acceptance with God, they began to rely on their own obedience to be justified by the law. And so in verse seven Paul says, you were running a good race. Who cut in on you? So imagine you're in a race and it's maybe a kind of fairly lengthy cross country race, maybe up and over the hills and you're running along. And I used to be in a running team and there was a guy who was really great at this. He would just start cutting in on the guys in front of him and he would start elbowing them out of the way and pushing them off track. And sometimes when you're running down a steep hillside that can be pretty dangerous. And that's what Paul's describing here. You know, you're running a good race, you're trusting Jesus, you're resting in Jesus and then all of a sudden people start to nudge you off in a different direction to force you off. And they're trying to say to you, listen, unless you obey all the law, you're not good enough. Unless you take all these boxes and perform in a certain way, God isn't interested in you. And you know what Paul says? That's anathema.

Paul condemns them. And he says, that's another gospel. It's only as you trust in Jesus that you're accepted in the sight of God. The minute you start to think that what you do is the basis for your acceptance, you've lost the gospel. And lots of Christians start off with the gospel, but then they get to a place where they think, I'm a rubbish Christian. I'm a terrible Christian. God can't really be interested in me. God doesn't really want to hear from me today. And when you start thinking like that, you're basing your Christian life on your goodness and not in Christ's perfect sacrifice. And the minute you give in to that religion of works, you are throwing out the gospel of grace. The only thing that makes you acceptable in the sight of God is the blood of Jesus Christ. And how good or bad we are as Christians, and we're all terrible Christians like Stacey, we all sin daily and thought-worthy. So the only way that we can be accepted is in Jesus. And how good or bad we are doesn't affect how much God loves us. Nothing you can do can make God love you less, and nothing that you do can make God love you more. God's love for you is not changed by what you do. And so that's the warning. If you go back to the law to be accepted by

God, you're going back to slavery. What's freedom? Freedom is knowing God, knowing God's love, living in the beauty and the presence of God, and in God finding the power to love others. But why are we not free? Because we enslave ourselves, because we try to earn God's approval. And sometimes simply because we don't want to be free. Do you remember Brooks Hatlin? The Shawshank Redemption? So here's the old con who's been in the prison for 60 years or however long it is. And at the very end of his life in the movie, he's liberated. And he can't cope. And he just wants to go back to prison. And I've known quite a number of guys that I've liked. They've become institutionalized with prison. And they find life in the outside harder than life in the inside. And sometimes we don't want to be free. That's why Paul says, don't use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature.

[24 : 01] Because sometimes when God sets us free, we use our freedom to go back to the old way of living. We use our freedom to go back and sin. God sets us free from the power and control of sin. And we get a great description of that kind of choice in verses 19 through to 26. So you can choose, and we often do choose, the acts of the sinful nature, are obvious, sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery, idolatry, and witchcraft. Hatred, discord, jealousy, and fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, and envy. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Now why is it that so often we feel the pull back to sexual immorality, or to impurity, and debauchery, or to jealousy, or anger, or selfish ambition, or envy, or drunkenness?

We don't know how to live free. We're afraid of freedom, and we let the power and the seduction of the old way of life call us back. God set a world of freedom in front of us, and yet too often we choose to go back and imprison ourselves again in the darkness of sin. So I just want to take a couple of minutes now to say, this is why we need Jesus. We need Jesus because He sets us free. He sets us free from the slavery of self-salvation. In Galatians chapter 3 verse 13, it says this, Christ redeemed us. Christ sets us free from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. So the curse of the law is this, that we can never obey the law and we become slaves to it, and it doesn't bring freedom. But Christ comes and takes that curse on Himself and sets us free from it. So Jesus frees us from the slavery of self-salvation by dying on the cross, in our place, becoming a curse for us. Jesus, we need Him to set us free from the curse of the law. We need Jesus to restore our relationship with the Father. In chapter 4, He says that you're, well at the end of chapter 3 and verse 26, He says, you are sons of God through faith in Jesus

Christ. And later on in chapter 4 verse 6, He says, because you are sons, God sent the spirit of His Son into our hearts, the spirit who calls out, Abba, Father. So you are no longer a slave but a son. So Jesus is the one who sends His spirit into our hearts, and it's the spirit who enables us to know God as our Father and to cry out, Abba, Father.

And that's where freedom is. Freedom is found in the embrace of our Father in heaven. Where will you find rest from your fear or from your addiction or from your tormentors or from your past, you'll find rest from these things in the arms of your Father in heaven. And that's the picture Paul gives that Jesus allows us to clothe in with our Abba, Father. Jesus frees us from the slavery of self-salvation. Jesus restores our relationship with the Father.

[28 : 13] Finally Jesus frees us from being self-absorbed. He frees us from being self-absorbed, from being full of self-love, to loving others, loving God, loving others, serving others.

How does He do this? He does it through the cross. So Paul says to the Galatians that he had clearly portrayed Christ Jesus before them as crucified. And it's the crucified Jesus we've got to look to. Because when we look to the crucifixion, to the death of Jesus on the cross, that destroys our self-absorption and our self-love. Because when we see Jesus crucified, we're seeing Jesus crucified for me, for us. We're seeing God's Son made a cross, hung on a tree. We're seeing the amazing love of God that lies behind that action.

And when we begin to recognise the greatness of the love that lies behind the cross, it takes our petty self-love and self-absorption and it destroys it. And you think how pathetic it is that I'm living for my own glory when God's Son was crucified in my cross. How pathetic it is that I can't see beyond me and my needs when God calls me to worship and to lift up the crucified Jesus and to live in the power of the cross to love others.

Freedom then. Freedom is not just doing what you want. Freedom is a relationship with God.

Freedom is being freed from having to save yourself by your own efforts and knowing that what Christ has done is perfectly sufficient for you. And freedom is the freedom not to sin, not to be selfish, not to be absurd with yourself, but the freedom to forget yourself, to see others and to love and serve them. I'm going to pray and then we're going to sing our last song. Lord God, we want to ask for your help tonight that what we've heard you would bring home to our hearts, that what we've talked through would be clear to us, and that above everything else we would see that Jesus paid it all, that is only what Jesus has done for us that counts in the end, that we can't add anything to that, we can't take anything from that, is absolutely perfect. Help us to see how much you love us tonight and may that love bring us freedom we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.