

## Sunday 17th February 2019 - Freedom Centred - Galatians 5.1-12

What does freedom mean to you?

- Mel Gibson in Braveheart crying 'Freedom'?
- Scottish Independence - freedom from Westminster?
- Brexit: independence from EU - freedom from Brussels?
- Freedom from slavery... of all sorts of things that enslave: literal slavery/human trafficking/addictions?
- Those who are slaves to their circumstances - trapped somehow...?
- Last night of freedom before getting married?
- Freedom when I drove a car on my own for the first time...?
- Freedom from certain ingredients that might make us ill or seriously harm our health...?

Freedom... what does it mean to you?

### <sup>1</sup>It is for freedom that Christ has set us free...

Paul emphasises the point. The gospel is about being freed for freedom.

The gospel is a story of liberation...

So many stories echo this point - fact or fiction people fighting for **freedom** is something that captivates and motivates... this picture is of the liberation of Paris in WW2.

Freedom is a significant part of the gospel...

Listen again to Jesus in Luke 4... *'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**, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'*

### Stand firm, then...

Standing firm is not standing still...

Standing firm is being on your guard... is being attentive to your changing circumstances... being ready to resist anyone who attempts to steal or undermine your freedom... its active!

### and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

It's not about losing our salvation in some way, but losing our freedom and again being trapped by fear... it's about remembering, rejoicing in and celebrating our freedom in Christ. That's why this (worship) and this table are so important...

Paul uses this illustration of a **yoke** - the yoke refers to the study and practice of the law. But Paul doesn't want them weighed down with the burden of rules and regulations... we know that from everything that's come before!

The **yoke** surely reminds of Matthew 11 where Jesus says: *'Come to me, all you who are*

*weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.'*

<sup>2</sup> **Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all.** <sup>3</sup> *Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is required to obey the whole law.*

If my mother ever said 'Mark my words' it was never good!

Paul's use of colourful, provocative language, if you will, continues here - along the lines of '*you foolish Galatians*' (chapter 3)!

He's making the point that if they go back, if they choose circumcision they are devaluing Christ and his works...

How might we devalue Christ in our words, attitudes or actions...

- There's no point praying...
- Nothing ever changes...
- It's impossible...
- That's just a coincidence...
- I could never forgive her...
- He's a lost cause...

<sup>4</sup> **You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.**

Surely grace is meant to be amazing? Showing us how prayers are answered (though not how we expect), revealing changes in us, if not always our circumstances, grace helping us believe, forgive, trust... afresh...

How damning to **fall away** from grace - because without grace we are left to our own devices, back to saving ourselves, falling back on our own resources... our effort, our achievements... with all the performance anxiety that brings, the crippling fear of failure... that we will never be good **enough**...

<sup>5</sup> **But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope.** <sup>6</sup> *For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value.*

Paul returns to faith - children of promise - believing in (putting faith in) God's promises...

And the work of the Spirit who adopts us as children of God, who enables us to cry out with Jesus, Abba Father...

**The righteousness for which we hope**... that living in right relationship with God - not about being right all the time, but living as those who have been put right by the **cross**...

**The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.**

We are not made free in order to just please ourselves - the gospel doesn't mean anarchy. And that's what Paul addresses here...

What counts, what does have value is faith expressing itself through love... having faith that we are loved, rescued, redeemed...

We not meant to be trapped by our relationship with God, but free to be who we truly are as sons and daughters... Augustine of Hippo summed it up in his famous saying: **"Love God and do what you will."**

Our drive and motivation come out of love for God... our of relating to and relationship with him.

**<sup>7</sup> You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth?**

*<sup>8</sup> That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you. <sup>9</sup> 'A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough.' <sup>10</sup> I am confident in the Lord that you will take no other view. The one who is throwing you into confusion will pay the penalty, whoever that may be.*

*<sup>11</sup> Brothers and sisters, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offence of the cross has been abolished. <sup>12</sup> As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!*

<sup>7</sup> *You were running a **good race**.* A metaphor Paul comes back to again and again...

Paul is furious with those who are trying to trip up the Galatians... as he sees it. The one throwing them into confusion!

What should be making them stumble and think again is the offence of the cross... **but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles... I Corinthians 1.23**

And Paul's language gets colourful again in our final verse... **<sup>12</sup> As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!**

Because they are limiting the Galatians from being who they are set **free to be**. Freedom is being held back, tied down by customs and traditions, a lack of grace and faith...

**But it is for** freedom that Christ has set us free... we are freedom people, freedom centred, freed by the cross, free in the Spirit...

So, what does freedom mean to you? What inhibits, or holds you back, where do you feel stuck, or lack freedom?

Let's pray and sing these words, words from the South African Church enslaved by Apartheid:

**Freedom, Oh freedom, Oh freedom  
Freedom is coming, Oh yes I know!**