

Set Free To Be Slaves For God!

In last week's message we looked at one Peter 2:12 to 15 in a sermon I entitled "We live for His Name's Sake". I really only made one major point: All that we do and say etc. V 13, is for the sake of the Name of Him in whom we live and breathe and have our being, both in this life and the life to come!

V12: "Live such godly lives among the pagans, that though they accused you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us." Yes, though we be slandered of wrongdoing, the testimony and the reality of Christ in us, (what He has done and continues to do), will be impossible to deny. Just as the Centurion who witnessed all that was done to Jesus, was forced to confess: "Surely this man was the Son of God." As also with Ruth the Moabitess in Bethlehem. Godly character always triumphs over prejudice and slander!

We saw in King David's words: Psalm 23:3 "He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake." So in all that we do and say we should be beyond reproach, for that testimony which we carry within our lives to the perishing world around us! So that everyone, v12: "Would glorify God on the day he visits us." Whether that be at Jesus' return, or when pagans see the evidence of Jesus in our lives and are forced to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord!

V13. "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority." Romans 13:1 "Everyone must submit himself to the authorities for there is no authority except that which God has established." Yes all powers from the least to the greatest have been established by God, whether or not we choose to admit this. V14: Peter says we have nothing to fear from the authorities if we do right. So we must abide by them all, unless they contradict what God says in His Word the Bible!

V15: Again, godly character will "Silence the foolish talk of ignorant men." There is no charge that can be upheld when laid at the feet of righteous people. So it is God's Will that we always do right. Abiding by all the authorities and we do it all, "for the Lord's sake." Glory be to God we cry with our lips and our lives!

Now we continue in 1 Peter 2:16-21: 'Set Free To Be Slaves For God!' V16 "Live lives as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover up for evil, live as servants of God." Jesus said in John 8:31-36: "to the Jews who believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?" Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the son sets you free, you will be free indeed."

Yes v36. "So if the son sets you free, you will be free indeed."

Brothers and Sisters, it is interesting, that when we are enslaved in the depths of sin, (with the deception of the Evil one's whispers encouraging us in our self- sufficiency), we are oblivious to our lost state and being held captive! The self- righteous Jews claimed, (falsely, mind you), that "we have never been the slaves of anyone. How can you say that we will be set free?"

This is why the scripture tells us in v9 of this chapter, that "we have been brought from darkness into his wonderful light." Because we are held captive in the darkness of sin. Yes we are prisoners, not only of sin, but also of its consequences of judgement and hell. If this were not so, why then did

Jesus come? Yes if there were some other way for us to break out of this prison of sin and judgement, why then did God send His Son? And why did Jesus have to die? Well the answer is simple. Because there is no other way! It was not without reason, (as we all know) that Jesus declared John14:16. "I Am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except by me." Yes as I said last time, not a way, but "The way." The only way!

Beloved, for us to truly grasp the significance of our freedom, we must first understand the depth and the gravity of that from which we have been delivered. The scriptures describe hell as that place where the flames never cease and the worm never dies. It is the unimaginable imagery of mountains of bodies of humanity piled high. Yes, of rotting human flesh. With the stench of death, and the eternal flames of the funeral fires of hell!

Again, for us to understand and appreciate this freedom that has been won for us, we must first grasp that from which we have been delivered. Hell is not the place where, as the Aussie's like to say, "I'll be drinking with all my mates". No, the most terrifying thing about hell is that, that is where God is, but His mercies and goodness are withheld!

And Peter explains that we shouldn't use our newfound freedom as a licence for anarchy or lawlessness in any measure. As though the laws of society don't apply to us anymore, or even indeed the 10 commandments themselves, because we have been set free by Jesus. But of course none of this is true. Because we have not been set free from the laws of society and life, we have only been set free from that law which condemns us to death. As it is written and we saw some weeks ago. "For the wages of sin is death. But the gift of God is eternal life." No we have not been set free from the rules and regulations of this life or society, we have only been set free from sin's bondage and its consequences of hell!

In Romans 6, after having been falsely accused by the Jews that he preached freedom from the law of God as though it mattered not anymore, because we are now under grace, and therefore as a consequence sin is no longer sin, Paul responds. Romans 6:1-2a: "What then shall we say? Shall we sin all the more so that grace may abound? By no means." Yes, the accusation was that Paul in effect preached that sin was no longer sin. Since Jesus had come the law of God, even the 10 commandments are superfluous because we are under the new law of Christ's grace.

As a consequence then, He is accused of teaching the doctrine which says, let's sin all the more, so that God will be given Providence to forgive us all the more. Yes we will sin more, so that God's grace and mercy will be poured out all the more! "By no means." Paul objects. Ephesians 2:1-2 "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you follow the ways of this world and the ruler of the Kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient." Before we were dead, but now we have been born again, set free. We have died to that old way and old life.

Now we must seek to live, not in the same way and same manner, as we did before we were enlightened by Christ's gospel. Because to do so is to treat with contempt the blood that He shed for us. And to pour contempt also, upon His Father who gave Him up for us! Is there a greater crime? Well, I don't know! So, V16. "Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover up for evil."

No brethren, being forgiven and set free by Jesus is not a licence for sin. On the contrary, as we saw in v12: "Live such good lives among the pagans, that though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God." The Greek word which we have here for "cover up," actually means a cloak. Even a cloak of evil, as it were. Friends, this is a really dark and evil image: Using our Christianity as a "cloak of evil." Wearing the hallmarks of Christ, while in reality, they are

“a cover up” “a cloak of evil.” That is what Judas did. That's what many millions have done throughout the millennia. Wearing “cloaks of evil” to conceal who they really are. Satan's messengers “coming as angels of light.”

In a sense we have looked at these things before. Do you remember, Hypokrites? That actor who gave birth to the word hypocrite, through his wearing of many masks so that no one knew who he really was? Well Peter takes it even further here. Wearing the cover of Christianity, but in reality it's a “cover up,” it's “a cloak of evil.”

Have you ever met people like that? I have. Supposedly in Christ's Name, while stealing from the brethren, even the Lord Himself! Turn on the TV on Sunday morning and you will find a bunch of them. Claiming to be for Jesus but they have a secret agenda. Yes, wearing “a cloak of evil.” Not all of them of course, but there are certainly those who fit into this category. Yes we must be careful that our freedom from sin which has been won for us by Jesus, doesn't become a “cover up,” “a cloak of evil,” giving us a licence to sin!

Friends, Peter starts this verse with “live as free men.” And he finishes this verse with “live as servants of God.” And Beloved, what's really interesting here is that the word which he uses for “servants,” is actually the Greek word “Doloi.” It means slaves! So we are set free from the slavery, the bondage and consequences of sin by Jesus, to become “servants”, “slaves,” for God, and the Lord and His gospel!

And yet this does seem to be a contradiction in terms doesn't it. How can we be free, while being the slaves of someone else? It seems to make no sense! But for those of us who have not been raised in a Christian home, and have not had the things of God's Kingdom instilled in our hearts from an early age as we were growing up, though it might seem contradictory, it makes complete sense, and it rings true! Beloved, I say these following things with all sensitivity. Those of you have been born into a Christian family like my children, may not have fully experienced that being enslaved to sin. Having grown up in a Christian home you may well have, (while of course having your own struggles), you may well have just accepted the faith of your parents and then at some point taken ownership of that faith for yourselves. Now please don't misunderstand me. I am not in any way saying that the experience and the reality of your faith is anything less than genuine, and actually praise God for His providence and mercy that wonderfully, you are a child of the covenant!

But for someone who had never tasted of His goodness through His Son Jesus, this being “set free” from the slavery to sin and its consequences, is in some ways at least, even more real. Yes this being set free from sin and it's bondage, is in some way even more real! That liberating knowledge, yes that sweet knowledge of knowing that this life with its trials and tribulations is not all resting upon my shoulders anymore. Knowing that there is more to this life than living for a few brief moments, and then we are gone and forgotten forever. Because even those who knew us and grieved for us, themselves will be forgotten. It's that liberating knowledge of knowing that this life and all that we do here, has a purpose. Even for eternity. Even knowing that the very Son of God gave His life that I might live? Hallelujah what a Saviour!

Though our road to Jesus, dear friends, be different in a myriad of ways, (and you may well have just begun your journey), but all of us understand these words, to some degree. My chains fell off, my heart was free. I rose went forth and followed Thee! And the other hymn that we sing. I once was lost but now I'm found. Was blind but now I see. Friends, Jesus' Blood by God's grace has washed the sin from our souls, and taken the scales from our eyes. We are now set free with the light of the

gospel in our hearts to serve the Lord. To be willing slaves, not to sin, but for Christ. So we now “live as servants,” “slaves, of God.”

If we are indeed just such servants, we need to desire to “live such good lives among the pagans” (verse 12:17). “Show proper respect to everyone. Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honour the king.” We are to be “servants of God.” Who love the brethren.

Brothers and sisters, clearly what Peter is doing here is echoing Jesus` Own words to him on the beach in John 21:15-19. Do you remember? This occurred after his three fold denial of our Lord, even calling down curses upon his own head the third time that he did so. And the absolute failure of his bold proud boast, even if everyone runs I never will Lord. I will die first with you Lord! Well as we know, on the beach Jesus asks him the question. “Peter do you truly love me more than these? Yes Lord you know that I love you” Peter replies. And as Peter's denial was threefold. So too is the Lord's question to him. With the final time, (saddened by his devotion being questioned three times) Peter replies, “Lord, you know all things, you know that I love you.” Jesus tells him the first time: “Feed my lambs.” The second time: “Take care of my sheep.” The third time: “Feed my sheep. Follow me.”

So even as the Lord had commanded Peter to love and follow Him, expressed in love toward Jesus` Own people, His church. Peter also instructs his hearers to do the same. Yes as he followed Jesus` example, they must follow his! “Love the brotherhood of believers.”

Brothers and sisters, notice that this whole section is, in some way, about being in submission to some level of authority. And it will continue to be so in chapter 3. Beginning with wives being instructed to submit to their husbands. Well here in v17 we read “show proper respect for everyone. Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honour the king.”

Really when you think about it, it is being accepting and appreciative of our place in this life and this world, no matter what that place may be. There will always be something or someone, no matter who we are and what position we hold in this life, that we will have to be subject to. And ultimately, all of those things will have to submit to God!

In the previous verses, Peter doesn't say submit to such things and such authorities if they are righteous. Or if they are good. Or if they are godly. No. When Peter wrote this letter saying. “Honour the king,” the king at that time was that depraved and murderous Caesar, Nero. Who butchered Christians. Covered them in pitch and set them on fire to light the way into the Colosseum. He fed them to wild beasts to be torn apart in the arena for sport, to the cheers of the Roman citizens! So the character, or the goodness, or the humanly perceived legitimacy of those authorities, was never the point.

No, as we saw last time from Romans 13 “all authorities have been established by God.” For His purposes and His plan. Either for riches or wrath. For blessing or rebuke. And we are to abide by those authorities. Unless as I said last time, they countermand what God teaches of Himself in His Word, the Bible! But even as Peter speaks of honouring this evil madman. Firstly he says, “fear God.” So don't fear those ones in power and authority. Because they themselves are all under God`s authority. They may not acknowledge it; they may reject it. They may deny it. They may never admit this but it matters not. Because they will all, one day, be forced to confess it! Yes come the day of Jesus` return, and the books are opened before the throne of God “and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.” As he separates the sheep from the goats.

As we read in that wonderful passage of scripture Matthew 25:31-34 “when the son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the king will say to those on his right, come, you who are blessed by my father, take your inheritance, the Kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.”

Yes out of that sea of humanity we will go forth to be with the Lord forever. We will hear that wondrous word, the most wonderful word of all words from the mouth of the King: “Come.” So we must not fear authorities who are mere men. We must simply do what's right, and they will hold no fear for us. Rather, “Fear God”, who holds the authorities of the universe, (not only the world,) in the palm of His hand!

In v18-21 Peter speaks of “slaves submitting themselves to their masters.” Friends, this verse and others throughout the scriptures, have been used by vile and disgusting political and racial groups throughout the millennia. They have used and abused such things to promote their evil social agendas. They have used their professed Christianity, “as a covering for evil.” Here is our licence for slavery, they say. Here is our licence to treat people as animals. Because they are even as animals. Yes that vile and abominable position that the colour of a person's skin, or the position in society that they hold, does give evil men licence to treat them as though they were animals. Actually far worse than animals. But of course, none of the above is true! The scriptures merely deal with what was a societal norm. There were people who were slaves. Some were slaves of war, others due to financial difficulties, and indeed, some were actually slaves by choice.

All that Peter is doing here is addressing a cohort (or a section) of society, who could be living under the most harsh of all circumstances! And his message is the same with regard to authority. “Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect.” And of course, he's addressing slaves who have been born again. In v13a, Peter called us to do this (submit to the authorities) “for the Lord's sake.” Next week we will see that he instructs us also to obey this teaching because that is what the Creator Himself, Jesus, did for our sake. He submitted to the authorities. The vile and evil authorities of the day, even unto the cross, for our sake!

Beloved, this submission, that we in our proud and vain hearts find so hard to accept, must be addressed in the shadow of the cross. Because do you see, when we stand in the shadow of the cross, self-sufficiency, and all thoughts of the perceived fairness or unfairness of God, due to our “poverty of spirit,” (our impossibility of presenting ourselves worthy to God), yes such thoughts of God's unfairness must flee away, when Christ's shadow from the cross falls upon us. “Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Paul speaks in another place, that if slaves are able to purchase their freedom and that is their desire, they should do so.

The Bible does not promote the bondage of humanity no. What it does do, is deal with every echelon of society. Here it is slaves, and as it is for all of us, they are called to honour God in their conduct whether or not their master is a good man or an evil man. A kind man or a harsh man. And similarly, when we work for others we give them our very best because in doing so, we give glory to God. We walk in Christ's steps, who set us free by His Blood. We ought to “submit ourselves to the authorities” no matter what place in society we hold. Because we have been set free to be “servants,” “Slaves for God.” As we testify to Him seeking to live as Jesus lived within our lives! Slave or free Jew or Gentile, we all give glory to God. Because we have all been set free to be Slaves for God! Let's pray!