

TITLE: The Gospel gives us Freedom

PASSAGE: Galatians 5:1-15

LOCATION: St John's Wishart 9AM

BI: Accepting anything other than Christ for Salvation leads to being severed from Christ and the freedom he gives us

STRUCTURE:

- Freedom in Christ is Only Through Christ [V1-6]
- Watch out for False Teachers [V7-12]
- We are Free to Serve Christ [V13-15]

- Freedom. It's such a loaded word. Such a big idea. So many ideas of what freedom actually is.
- I wonder what comes to mind for you?
- Maybe it's Mel Gibsons portrayal of William Wallace's death. He's been hung and drawn - he's given the opportunity to choose mercy by submitting to the rulers he was trying to overthrow...
- The crowd are shouting at him "Say mercy"
- His mates are saying "Mercy"
- But he screws up all of his courage and screams out "Freedom!"

- Maybe it's those words that Martin Luther King Jr quoted in his famous speech in Washington.
- "Let freedom ring" "Let Freedom ring"
- It's something our modern culture preaches:
 - Freedom for all!
 - Freedom to express yourself how you want to!
- But as we'll see today - this isn't actually real freedom!
- But true freedom is found only through faith in Christ.

- **Freedom in Christ is Only Through Christ [V1-6]**
- V1 "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery."
- For the sake of freedom, for the purpose of freedom, for the destination of freedom - Christ has set us free!
- You know the old caricature of what a Christian is.
 - A Christian is someone who is always grumpy...always wanting people to follow their rules..
 - They're just all on about doing the right thing...saying the right words, praying in the correct way - and will judge you if you don't...
 - Maybe there's someone coming to mind for you who sadly matches this description!
- Well Paul is saying here, that the Christian is the complete opposite of this!
- The Christian is meant to be joyful! Free!
- Free from rule following...free from religiosity, free from judginess and rudeness...
- More specifically for the Galatians - Paul is ramming it down their throat, that the one who follows Jesus is free from the burden of trying to follow the law!
 - Elsewhere - Paul does use this similar language of being set free from sin....and that's 100% true
 - But here in Galatians - he's talking about freedom from the burden of religious, repetitive, rule following.
 - Freedom from the monotonous mundane melodrome of man-made mandates.
- This is why Christ came and died and rose for us - to set us free from all of this!
 - I know that I've said this already in this series - so apologies for my repetition...but Paul repeats himself a lot here!
 - In fact this letter is kind of like looking at grace through different lenses and through different sides of a diamond or something...catching something new here and there...a new aspect..a new perspective.
 - But one of my vices really is being a recovering perfectionist while at the same time being my harshest critic
 - This combo can lead to a really burdensome downward spiral of thoughts!
 - It can lead me to think that I'm not doing a good enough job...I'm not reading my bible in a good way or even enough...I'm not faithful enough in this area of my life...I'm not a good pastor...I'm not good enough for God.

- But all of these are self-inflicted, man-made mandates that I've put myself as a slave under!
- But Christ didn't come to give us more rules - but to free us from the burden of extra terms and conditions that we put on ourselves.
- And so Paul urges the Galatians and us to "Stand Firm" in the freedom that we have.
 - *You can imagine a military leader with his group of people...in the face of the enemy...*
 - *He tells them to "Stand Firm" - don't let yourself be moved...don't step away...remain exactly where you are.*
- Well - same thing here. Stay rooted on the spot in the place of Freedom.
 - Don't move on from freedom in Christ...don't add anything on...don't look left...don't look right...stand firm.
 - Look up to Christ...look to the cross where Jesus took the curses of the law...and was the once for all sacrifice for the sin of the whole world including yours...
 - You are standing in freedom - in a state of being free so stay there.
- So 1b - "Do not submit again to a yoke of slavery"
- Don't go back to slavery. Don't allow yourself to be taken in, don't be entangled in the mess that is slavery to the law or religiosity.
 - This language of freedom and slaves is a real big throwback to the exodus. Where God's people were enslaved under the heavy hands of the Egyptians...they were worked hard and so they cried out to God. He heard their cries...he rescued them and brought them into the wilderness!
 - But as soon as things got a tincy bit hard for them...or as soon as the bread literally given to them from the sky got a bit boring...they started complaining. And they even started saying things like "we had it better in Egypt..in Egypt we had chicken and meat and houses...."
 - They wanted to once again enslave themselves under the Egyptians!
 - But the repeated message throughout the rest of the Old Testament - is Don't go back to Egypt!
- Don't go back to slavery and the burden that it is.
- The yoke was the bar placed on the necks of a pair of ox...it let them pull heavy things like plows in the fields...
- Paul says - don't put the old yoke of the law back onto yourselves. It's a burden that you were rescued from! But stay where you are in the freedom that Christ has given you!
- There's something quite appealing about following religious rules. It's quite tidy.
- You just do the stuff...pray like this, eat this stuff, go to church, bake some slice to bring for morning tea, shake hands with the minister...and off you go.
- What's even more - is that you get to pat yourself on the back because of what you have done!
- But the grace of Christ is more confronting than this.
- The cross of Christ says that you are a sinner in need of saving...it says that you can't do anything to save yourself. Grace teaches our hearts to tremble at our own weaknesses and failure and to throw ourselves on the mercy of God and embrace his freedom!
- So don't let yourself be entangled in entrenched legalism and religiosity that is slavery!
- Because Christ has freed us from it for the sake of freedom!
- For the Galatians, it meant not being entangled in judaistic practices.
- And he firstly tells them to listen up!
 - *My mum tells the story about when I was a distracted toddler.*
 - *Sometimes when she had to tell me something really important, she would have to get down to my level, physically hold my head in her direction, tell me to listen up, and then told me what she had to tell me...and then she would ask me "Now, what did I just tell you?"*
- Well Paul does this in the beginning of V2 because it's so crucially important for the Galatians:
- V2 "Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you."
- This is the central and pressing matter for the Gentile galatians - they were thinking about getting circumcised.
- This is what the letter has been all about! This is the pressing issue here!
- Circumcision was the sign of entrance into the covenant people of God! For a gentile convert to Judaism, they would have to undergo circumcision as like a final step to be fully considered a true convert.

- But for Paul here, it represents the people going back to the Law...as we'll see, Paul doesn't really care either way about the sign or symbol of circumcision.
- But what he's really concerned about is what it meant to them!
- Because what it seems that they were doing - was trying to replace Christ with the law.
- They were treating circumcision and law following as the way into the people of God rather than through faith in Christ.
- The object of their faith wasn't Jesus anymore - but the law.
- And so - that's why Paul writes so strongly here! IF they accept circumcision - Christ would mean nothing for them. He'll be of no advantage. His death will be useless to them...because they no longer trusted in him.

- V3 "I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. 4 You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace."
- If you take this step - you are putting yourself under the whole law, which as we've already seen in Chapter 3 can't save, can't be followed perfectly, wasn't designed to save - but was designed for God's people to be able to trust in him!
- If you take this step of severing your foreskin - you will be severed from Christ!
- If you want to walk away from justification by grace and instead try the route of justification by good works through the law - Good luck to you! But you won't make it.
 - And yes - the law had various sacrifices for sin...but those sacrifices of goats and cows could never truly take away the sin of the person bringing them. But they were a taster of the ultimate once-for-all sacrifice of God's one and only Son for the sins of the whole world including those who had faith in God before Jesus turned up!
 - Going back to those sacrifices would be useless! Redundant! Because they were all fulfilled in the death of Jesus who they pointed to!
- If you go back to that way of life - you are going to fall away from grace.

- No matter how much we pull up our cotton socks and grit our teeth - no amount of our actions can rescue us.
- There's a bit of a trend that I notice in some Christians - that Christianity is just something you "do". It's just a way of life among others.
- You try and get to church where possible, you try to be a good moralistic person in the workplace or at school or at uni...but in reality, there's no concept of relationship with God. There's no intimacy.
- It's just a system of rules. A "good way to live"
- Like it's some kind of performance or show...
- But that's no difference to being circumcised and putting yourself under the law.
- There's no grace there. There's no faith there.
- And so **Look, I Michael** say to you, that if you accept this type of Christianity - then Christ will be of no advantage to you! You are severed from Christ! You have fallen away from grace!

- But there's also another side that I notice and that it's Christians who constantly beat themselves up because of things like shame and guilt.
- There becomes a cycle of almost self-flagellation - because you think you're not good enough...because you think you might be unfaithful to God...you think you're just too far for grace...
- Or maybe you know the theory of grace but you ruminate on sin, ruminate on mistakes...set yourself up to a standard of holiness you could never achieve...
- So Look, I Michael say to you - that if you keep on going down this route - then you are at risk of severing yourself from Christ!
- As the great hymn "Rock of Ages" says "Not the labors of my hands can fulfill thy law's demands; could my zeal no respite know, could my tears forever flow, all for sin could not atone; you must save, and you alone."
- Of course - there could be a grain of truth to our ruminations and yes, we always could be more faithful to God, but we'll never reach perfection until that day when Christ returns!
- And that's what Paul goes on to write about those who trust in the Lord for salvation:
- V5 "For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love."

- It's through the gift of the Spirit, given to us through faith in Jesus, that we are sealed for that final day when we'll see grace in all its beauty and fullness.
- Yes, we are justified right now. Yes, we stand in freedom right now - but when Christ returns, we'll see it plainly. And rejoice and praise God for eternity.
- And at the end of the day, it really doesn't matter if you're circumcised or not. It counts for nothing.
- What does count is the object of your faith. Christ - or yourself.
- Because freedom is only found in Jesus Christ.
- So watch out for false teachers.
- **Watch out for False Teachers [V7-12]**
- Watch out for people who might trip you up!
- *Right now, one of our members Julie is running the Sydney Marathon! If you're listening to this later on...Hi Julie...*
- *But imagine this - a runner is right up the front, battling for the win...they've ran for 42km, they are 200m away from the finish line, they can see it, they're going to win...but then one of their opponents suddenly pushes them off to the side...trips them up...cuts in on them and takes the win.*
- *Well - there would be outrage wouldn't there! We'd probably see it on the 6PM news tonight!*
- This is how Paul describes the people trying to get the Galatians to add on the Law to faith in Christ. Hinderers, back shovers...people who cut in on you!
- V7 "You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? 8 This persuasion is not from him who calls you. 9 A little leaven leavens the whole lump. I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view, and the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is."
- This word "Hindered" can also mean to "Cut in".
- Paul is asking - **who cut you off?** This isn't from God. This is from someone else.
- Just a little bit of doubt or false teaching can go a long way. That's what Paul means by the leaven talk.
 - Just like a small amount of yeast can make a whole loaf of bread rise
 - A small amount of false teaching can infest and infect the body so quickly...
- There were even some false rumours about Paul claiming that Paul preached circumcision - which he flat out denies!
- He claims that if he was preaching circumcision, he wouldn't be persecuted anymore. Because the vast majority of persecution came from the jews! If he still preached on the Law as the basis of salvation - they'd love him!
- And if he preached the Law - then the scandal of the cross would be nullified. Not needed. Removed from his message.
- V11 "But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been removed. 12 I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves!"
- Paul is so worked up about those false teachers - that he wishes that they would just go the full way, and cut off everything!
 - Now Paul is probably exaggerating here...using a bit of rhetoric...but it's super strong language.
 - So passionate is he about the grace of Christ, so driven is he by the glory of God, that he resorts to this language!
- And also note the word play here!
- He hopes that those who "cut off" the galatians from the truth by getting them to "cut around" their foreskins would go ahead and "cut everything off!"
- Cut off their manhood! Be shamed! Be reduced to nothing.

- So watch out for those who would seek to cut you off.
- Watch out for those who say that you need the gift of tongues for salvation...
- Watch out for those who say that anyone really reaches eternity in the end...it doesn't matter who you are...
- Watch out for those who say that you need anything or anyone else other than Jesus for salvation.
- Watch out for any internal dialogue that says you need to be better, do more, prove yourself.
- But remember that Christ has set you free for Freedom...don't go back to slavery. Don't turn to anyone or anything else...but
- "Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to the cross I cling; naked, come to thee for dress; helpless, look to thee for grace; stained by sin to you I cry; wash me, Savior, or I die."
- "My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness; I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name. On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand: all other ground is sinking sand;"