

Freedom Fighters

Galatians 4

I've got four pictures up here. Some of them, if I couldn't get an actual picture of them, it might be an actor. Here they are. First one. Who's that? Nelson Mandela.

Second. William Wallace(as played by Mel Gibson). Martin Luther King, William Wilberforce(from the movie), and Ang Sang Suu Kyi.

Now I've got five quotes. And I want you to tell me who said what.

Here's the first quote.

In my country we go to prison first and then become President. – Nelson Mandela

They may take our lives, but they'll *never take our FREEDOM!*. William Wallace – or at least Mel Gibson playing William Wallace

I have a dream - martin Luther King

“The grand object of my parliamentary existence is the abolition of the slave trade – William Wilberforce

And the last one. Which is obviously Ang Sang Suu Kyi.

It is not power that corrupts but fear. - Ang Sang Suu Kyi

Nelson Mandella, William Wallace, Martin Luther King, William Wilberforce, Ang Sang Suu Kyi. There they are.

Every one of them suffered for it. Every one of them fought for it. Lived for it. Of course I'm talking about FREEDOM.

Every one of them In different ways....heroes for the cause of freedom.

SLIDE - world

Add to that list the apostle Paul. And the whole movement of Christianity. Because according to Paul. To have faith in the risen Lord Jesus is to have liberty. The last verse I just read. Chapter five and verse 1 of Galatians.

Galatians 5:1 It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.

Unless you're a dictator of some kind. Slavery's a bad thing. Slavery – BAD. Freedom – GOOD.

Slide - schapelle

Freedom's something worth having. And I'm guessing someone like Schapelle Corby can think of little else. Whether you're in a country that's suffering under a cruel political regime. Or even more close to home if it's just the freedom of being able to do what you'd like to do, when you'd like to do it. Read. The tyranny of being in a family.

Freedom is a GOOD THING. So then it makes sense....To FIGHT FOR FREEDOM. You can see why people do it. Fighting against apartheid makes sense. Fighting the slave trade makes sense. Even if it comes at a cost.

What doesn't make sense. Is when a freed person. Turns to slavery.

When someone who HAS FREEDOM. Gives it up. That doesn't make sense.

Well let me just take you to verse 8 of chapter 4. Because here's a church that started with the good news about Jesus that brings freedom. But for some reason they're turning back to slavery.

Galatians 4:8-9 ⁸ Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. ⁹ But now that you know God-- or rather are known by God-- how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?

Incredulous, I guess you'd call Paul's tone here.

Why would you go for slavery over freedom?

Imagine if Schapelle was let out of jail. Imagine if she went out..... found herself an ice-cream shop. Bought an icecream, and turned round and went back! That would be strange wouldn't it?

But that's what's happening in Galatia. That's why Paul's writing this letter. They're turning from the FREEDOM that came with the good news about Jesus. To slavery. And the essence of it is – they're turning back to the slavery of RELIGION. And you might be surprised to hear, there's a big difference.

See here's Paul's gospel in a nutshell. God's plan from the beginning. God's PROMISE to Abraham way back from the first book of the bible was that through him. Through Abraham. Through his offspring...the whole world would be blessed. The world under the curse of sin. Would experience blessing again. And the coming of Jesus. If the fulfillment of that promise. Jesus' coming. His perfect life. His death. His resurrection. Wasn't just stuff that happened. It was part of the plan. And Jesus is the key.

Sohere's the gospel of freedom.

Turn to Jesus...whether you're a physical descendant of Abraham or not. Turn to Jesus.....and find forgiveness. Turn to Jesus in faith...and find Peace with God. Turn to Jesus and find eternal life. Turn to Jesus and be a part of the one family of God. Turn to Jesus and find the blessing God Promised to Abraham.

That's the message that stopped the Galatians in their tracks. That's what they heard and gladly accepted. Yeehaa they said. And so far in the letter Paul's thrown in some little gospel nuggets as a reminder.

Right at the start. The Lord Jesus is the one who gave himself for our sins to rescue us.

In chapter two. I have been crucified with Christ, and the life I live in the body I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

Through Jesus who gave himself. There's a rescue. And there's new life.

And it's method of delivery. Is not by jumping through hoops, it's not by a list of rules, or through rituals, or pilgrimage. It's by faith. Full stop.

It's a bit like when you're invited to a party. Our family went to a party last night. We got an invitation in the mail. And to go to it all we had to do was to say. Yes please. We'd love to come. And we went. No hoops to jump through. We didn't even have to bring a plate. We just turned up.

And that's the simple. But, I guess hard to believe almost too good to be true..... message of the gospel.

So if that's where the Galatian Christians started out. What went wrong? What's the slavery they're turning to that Paul talks about?

Paul says, it's the law.

And if you know your Old Testament, or even if you don't, you'll have heard about the ten commandments, or at least watched the movie. And the commandments

are all a part of the law God gave to Moses and the nation of Israel, who are the Jewish descendants of Abraham.

But... there wasn't just TEN LAWS. There was about 637 if you count them all up. Along with rituals and sacrifices and ceremonial washings and food laws. And the sign of circumcision was all part of it.

And with the prompting of some people Paul says in chapter 1 who have infiltrated our ranks. People who've come into the church to spy on the freedom we have in Christ.

The Galatians are going into voluntary slavery. Because they're going back to the law. Which they were never under to start with. They didn't become God's people through it. But here they are. Submitting themselves to it.

They've got the ice cream in their hands. And they're heading to the jail cell.

They're putting themselves under the law. Letting themselves be circumcised.

Observing rituals. Obeying commandments. Which I guess is why the depictions of Paul if you ever see one, he's got no hair.

They're set free through faith alone. They receive the Holy Spirit Paul says. Which is a bit like some of these places you go into. They put a stamp on your hand – which says. You are rightfully in this premises. There's all the evidence you need. Yet they're doing all these outward things to somehow firm up their standing with God.

Now in a way you can understand the confusion. I mean here's the Jewish nation. Given the law to live by and be God's special people. Living under the law for all that time. Over and over being punished for not obeying that law. And now they're saying anybody's free to come in.

And maybe it does seem too good to be true.

And the whole point of this letter. Is to talk them down. By reminding them of the gospel again. And putting the law in perspective.

And we're in chapter 4. And the argument's a follow on from chapter 3. Paul started it last week. Talking about the law he said.

We, that is, us Jews were held prisoners by the law, locked up UNTIL faith should be revealed.

Did you pick up the key word there – UNTIL. The law had it's place. It was a good thing. But it was a bit like a babysitter. It was in place for a time.

But it's time's over now.

He says the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ.

Jews and Gentiles alike. And in the illustration here in verse 1 it's children and slaves. For us Jews it's like we're James Packers little kids. It's like we're Indigo and Jackson Packer. Children. But heirs of the estate.

What I am saying is that as long as the heir is a child, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. He is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father.

Thankfully the Packer kids aren't going to be let loose on the business world just yet. Even though dad's empire's their inheritance.

And that's what it's like for us Jews Paul says. So don't worry about those Jews who are telling you you've got to come under the law. It was just our babysitter. Until it was time to get the keys to the car. Until maturity.

Verse 3. So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world. But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.

God sent his spirit into our hearts Paul says. So the babysitter's been sent home. So we're not under the law anymore.

And as it happens. It's the same for you non-jews.

From verse 6

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; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.

So here's the two camps. Jews and Gentiles.

The Jews. Children under the guardianship of the law. Now with the coming of Jesus -Free sons.

And here's the Gentiles. Slaves. But now sons and co-heirs with full rights. Which is what he says in verse 8.

Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. But now that you know God – or rather are known by God – how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles?

See if you understand two things you'll get it. If you understand the point of the law. As a sort of a guardian. If you get that. And if you get that the coming of the Spirit through faith in Jesus makes it redundant. You'll see why it's so wrong to go back.

Sometimes our four and six year olds like to jump into the little 2 year old's high chair or pram. And they think it's so funny. Because even at their stage ... they know how ridiculous it looks. They know how bizarre it is to go back to the things you've grown out of.

Do you want to be enslaved by those things all over again Paul says? You are observing special days and months and seasons and years. I fear that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you. And another hair turns grey.

Martin Luther was a religious man. He became a monk. And he read the bible. and he knew that God was a holy God. But it wasn't good news at all. It drove him crazy. Even though he went to a monastery. Even though he punished himself, even though he fasted and prayed went without sleep, went without blankets. Even though he mortified his flesh. He couldn't make himself righteous. To the point where he said. I hated God. Let me just read you a quote from one of Luther's writings.

"I torment myself to death to procure peace with God for my troubled heart and my agitated conscience; but I was surrounded by horrible darkness, and could find peace no where."

I did not love, no, rather I hated the just God who punishes sinners.

Of himself he said *I was a good monk and kept my order so strictly that if ever a monk could get to heaven through monastic discipline, I should have entered in.*

What he discovered was that for making you right with God. Those things were just weak and miserable principles.

And he was in fact, not a happy man at all. I don't think too many monks are! They wouldn't throw much of a party I wouldn't think!

And if you had to describe a lot of religious people. Joy would not be one of the first words on your lips. I wonder, does it describe you?

There's this great quote about the puritan movement back in the 18th century. I apologise if you've heard this before. But I love it. It goes like this.

Journalist Henry Menken defined a puritan as one obsessed by the haunting fear that someone, somewhere, might be happy.

It's a sad indictment isn't it. And I think I understand where he's coming from.

And that's the road the Galatians are going down. If you jump down to verse 15 Paul's asking the question.

What has happened to all your joy?

It's one of the symptoms of losing your freedom isn't it. It's hard to find that joy when you're surrounded by four brick walls. And that's what Luther and lots of others have found when they went down the track of somehow trying to impress God through feats of your own righteousness. By going to church. By moral fortitude.

So don't do it Paul says. Fight for your freedom. And don't get sucked in.

Take the gospel at face value. And then serve Jesus with Joy. There is a kind of voluntary slavery that comes with the liberty of the gospel. Paul says you Galatians used to have it. He had some kind of sickness when he went there apparently. And verse 15 he says. I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me.

But now their eyes are going dull.

Luther turned the corner when he got the point.

He read and reread Paul's words in Romans one.

The righteous will live by faith.

Luther's words. all at once I felt that I had been born again and entered into paradise itself through open gates. Immediately I saw the whole of Scripture in a different light.

And the chains came off.

And Paul's words ring true. 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.

Rather be controlled by the Spirit working in you by faith in Jesus. And we'll see some more of that as we keep reading Paul's letter over the next few weeks.