

ROCHFORD CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

Sunday 4th July 2021

Choruses to sing or read

*Jesus, we celebrate Your victory,
Jesus, we revel in Your love,
Jesus, we rejoice You've set us free,
Jesus, Your death has brought us life.*

It was for freedom
that Christ has set us free,
no longer subject
to a yoke of slavery
so we're rejoicing in God's victory
our hearts responding to His love.
Jesus, we celebrate...

His Spirit in us releases us from fear,
the way to Him is open,
with boldness we draw near;
and in His presence
our problems disappear,
our hearts responding to His love.
Jesus, we celebrate...

(Mission Praise 387)

Set my spirit free
That I might worship You;
set my spirit free
that I might praise Your name
let all bondage go
and let deliverance flow;
set my spirit free to worship You.

(Mission Praise 595)

Prayer

Our loving Heavenly Father,

I humbly bow before you and give you praise for all your blessings I have recognised in my life and for those I am yet to see, or understand.

Thank you for giving me freedom to come before you through Jesus' saving work for me. Help me to live out my faith in You today. Guide me through your Word, by Your Spirit. Have mercy on those in need in our fellowship and across our world. May You be given the glory for all that You do and in all that we, your Church, seek to do in Your Name.
Amen.

Bible verses for today

"To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by His blood, and made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve His God and Father..."
(Revelation 1.5b-6a)

"Living in freedom"

Today, July 4th, is Independence Day in the USA. A day in which Americans celebrate their freedom to live by their own rules. During the Pandemic we have known many restrictions and the curbing of our freedom. Rules that we did not make (or choose) have encroached upon the freedoms we took for granted. There is a freedom which only Christians know, won for us at Calvary. We are free from Sin and Satan's hold. We are free from death through Jesus resurrection. We are free from Hell, by the one enthroned in Heaven. As we live for Christ we are set free from self and pride. Through knowing the truth of the gospel, the good news, we are recipients of the blessing Jesus spoke of, when he said, **"You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free."** We are guided into truth by the Holy Spirit. **"Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom."**

Arguably the two most influential men in the early church were the apostles Peter and Paul. Peter, the burly impetuous fisherman who spent three years with Jesus and Paul the precise, one-time Pharisee, and tent-maker who Jesus met on the road to Damascus. They didn't always see eye-to-eye (See Galatians 2.11f) but in their letters recorded in the New Testament we see in many things they did. Comparing two verses, one written by Peter (1 Peter 2.16) and by Paul (Galatians 5.13) we see a near identical theme:

"Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God." (1 Peter 2.16)
"You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature (or flesh); rather serve one another in love" (Galatians 5.13)

From these verses we see:

1. We are to live up to our calling

"We were called to be free..." "Live as free men..."

Do you remember how Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead? He called to his friend to come out of the tomb. After Lazarus shuffled forward he took off the graveclothes and got on with his new life!

It would have been bizarre if he had kept the graveclothes on in the days that lay ahead! They would hinder his life and movement and hide what Jesus had done for him.

Similarly, when we have new life through faith in Jesus, responding to his word, we are free – we can live and move in the power of the Holy Spirit for the world around us to see Jesus.

Sadly, the restrictions of religion can be like the graveclothes and can hide the transforming power of Jesus.

Do you know the freedom Jesus brings? Are you still trying in your own strength? When Jesus died, so did every believer. The life and power of our resurrected Lord is available for us to live free of self, sin, and Satan's hold.

2. We are not to misuse our freedom

"Do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh..." "do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil..."

As a Christian can I do whatever I like? If Jesus has done everything for my salvation can I choose to break God's Law?

The early church faced extreme errors. Some lived so sinfully abusing God's grace, while others lived so legalistically that what Jesus had done couldn't be seen – God's grace was abused in both cases from different directions! What was / is the answer?

Having a true grasp of the grace of God and the cost of it to Jesus, makes it impossible to sin carelessly. Grace is free but not without cost. Jesus died to set us free. The Law was given to direct us to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Having come to him, why would we depend upon anything or anyone else. Jesus is the pinnacle, the mountain-top – where true freedom is found before God and Man. Jesus was the most free person on earth during his three-year ministry. He submitted himself to His Father – and went about doing good. He followed His Father's will to the letter – knowing no sin. Has ever a life had more influence?

3. We are to serve others with our freedom

“Live as servants of God...” “...serve one another in love”

It sounds a contradiction, serving to be free.

Most, in the early church were slaves. They knew what slavery entailed. Through Christ they were free, but still served their masters from day to day. However, they were “servants of God”. What a master to have and serve. He sees all and knows all – but also He loves and provides for his servants. Because of who he is, we want to serve him wholeheartedly in every aspect of our lives.

How can we do this? By serving one another in love.

We can't see God but we can see one another – and the needs that need to be met. Again, think of Jesus life of freedom and life of service. We have been made free from all that hindered us, we have been made free to serve. Like a substitute sat on the bench, we are missing out if we are not in the place God has for us to serve. Are you freely serving?
