

SERMON: FREEDOM Rev 5

INTRODUCTION: FREEDOM

Where were you 20 years ago? What were you doing then? What have you done over the past 20 years?

No doubt you have done many interesting things, been to many places, met many people.

ILLN: Aung San Suu Kyi

20 years ago Aung San Suu Kyi (pronounced *an sang soo chee*) was imprisoned in Burma. But last year she was released and this week she has been invited to come to Edinburgh to collect the prestigious award of the Freedom of the City of Edinburgh.

The **Freedom of the City of Edinburgh** is a prestigious award - bestowed on people such as the Queen, the Duke of Edinburgh, and Nelson Mandela. It is a way of recognizing the respect and high esteem in which those people are held by the people of the Edinburgh.

7 years ago the award was made to Aung San Suu Kyi, but she was unable to receive it in person because she was still under house arrest. But now she is free to travel. So the Lord Provost has written to her inviting her to Edinburgh to receive the award in person.

Aung San Suu Kyi's story goes back to 1962 when Burma was ruled by a military junta that wielded absolute power and suppressed all dissent. Aung San Suu Kyi was inspired by the non-violent campaigns of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King. She organized rallies and travelled around the country, calling for peaceful democratic reform and free elections. In 1988 there was a mass uprising throughout Burma – an attempt to overthrow the military junta. This was violently suppressed and thousands of people were killed. The following year Aung San Suu Kyi was placed under house arrest, without charge or trial.

Over the following 21 years of imprisonment Aung San Suu Kyi continued to do what she could to free the people of Burma from the oppression of the military junta.

Last year there was significant progress when a civilian government replaced the military junta. Hundreds of political prisoners were released. But there is a long way to go before the people of Burma enjoy the freedom we have in this country.

Here in this country we pride ourselves on our freedom; freedom of belief; freedom of speech; freedom to roam etc.

Within human nature there is a desire to be free; to be masters of our own destiny. But how free are we really? The fact is, there are limitations to our freedom.

There are **constraints from without**

The conventions of our society – what is considered good manners or acceptable behaviour.

Eg. Putting your feet up on the dining table is bad manners.

The laws of society also limit personal freedom.

Eg. If you don't like someone you are not free to go out and murder them.

If you do you will be put in prison.

There are also **constraints from within us.**

Some psychologists claim that we are all trapped in an intricate web of fears, complexes and inhibitions, so that freedom is an illusion.

Eg. Someone may fear going to the doctor in case they are told they are seriously ill.

Others, more socially minded, see us as the slaves of our class, upbringing, physical constitution and circumstances of life.

**QUOTES: “If you want to see what your wife will be like in 20 years, look at her mother.”
“Like father like son”
People who are bullies were bullied as children**

So perhaps we can never be truly free as long as we are living on earth?
But the desire for freedom is always there.

Freedom was an important issue for the New Testament Christians also. Slavery was a reality in their society. And as you will know if you remember the film **Sparticus**, people were willing to fight and to die in an attempt to gain their freedom.

Jesus said that he came to set people free. But slavery continued for many years after Jesus. He didn't literally set slaves free. So he must have been talking about a different type of slavery. A **spiritual slavery.**

Let us think what this meant to the people in bible times and what it means to us today.

REDEMPTION FROM SLAVERY THROUGH DEBT

The bible used the idea of a **Redeemer** who literally set people free to help us understand what God does for us spiritually.

In the Old Testament (Leviticus 25) we see the example of someone who is very poor getting into debt. He first of all sells his possessions his house and land. But if he is still in debt he sells himself as a slave in order to pay off the debt.

But the purchaser did not have the right to hold such a slave for life. The slave could be redeemed by a relative. The new owner could refuse to sell him to someone from the general public, but he could not refuse to sell him to his next of kin. There was a right of redemption. One of the man's brothers, or his uncle, or his cousin or anyone from the family could put up the money and the slave would be set free. That person was known as the Kinsman-Redeemer.

The person in slavery could not pay the debt. He was stuck. But his kinsman paid the price to set him free. He did not then become the slave of the kinsman. Rather he then regained his previous status as a free man with the same position in the family he had before. He was not expected to pay back the debt to his kinsman. His relative had paid the price simply because he cared about him and he wanted him to be free.

That is the picture we have of what Jesus has done for us spiritually

JESUS OUR KINSMAN-REDEEMER

Rev 5:9 "by your sacrificial death you bought for God people from every tribe, language, nation, and race. You have made them a kingdom of priests to serve our God, and they will reign on earth."

Jesus is our kinsman-redeemer: He is our kinsman.

Jesus became a human being, like one of us. He is our brother.

"He was tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin".

So he is eligible to redeem us from the slavery of sin.

He is **able to pay the price**. Jesus is the only one who is able to do this.

Rev 5 pictures Jesus as the only one who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll. Jesus was never a slave to sin. He was never in debt spiritually. All the spiritual riches of heaven belong to him. He paid the price when he gave his life, to set us free from guilt and shame.

He knows we can never pay him back, and he doesn't expect us to. Our freedom is a gift from someone who loves us more than any human can.

APPN This means that we are free from the past. We are totally forgiven all that we have ever done wrong.

RESTORED STATUS

He has restored us to the status we had before we became slaves.

We are free **members of the kingdom** of God.

Not only are we **forgiven**, we have been set free to be **God's children** and live in **friendship** with him.

We are **free from our background** – the difficult & painful things that cause us to fear or behave in negative, destructive ways.

You don't need to turn out like your mother, or father, or anyone else.

We can be set free from the negative, destructive patterns of the past.

God's Spirit can live in our hearts and set us free to live a positive, constructive life.

He has **made us priests**.

That means we have free **access into God's presence** through Jesus.

It also means that he intends us to be the means of **bringing other people** into God's presence, so that people who do not know him can come to know him for themselves.

LINK: Freedom is important to us, it important to every living creature

ILLN: BLUE TIT TRAPPED IN BATHROOM

Some time ago I had a bit of a shock when I went into the bathroom. As I walked through the door there was a movement by the window. It was a blue-tit. I don't know who was more surprised; the bird or me. And I have no idea how it got there. I stood still, not wanting to alarm it. But it kept flying around and then trying to get out through the glass. Of course the poor thing just kept bumping its head. I felt really sorry for the poor little thing because it kept crying out with its alarm call.

I called to Bill and he took a picture of it, because it was such an unusual thing to happen. But we didn't want to keep it captive. We wanted it to be able to fly free.

So Bill gently put a towel over it and carried it outside and released it.

Now it can fly without hurting itself, it can come and go to the bird table, and it can sing its joyful song. This brings us joy also – the joy of seeing the bird free is much greater than if we had kept it captive in a cage.

God wants us to be free.

He does not want to keep us captive. He wants us to be close to him, but he wants us to come freely. He wants us to serve him, but he wants us to do so willingly.

He does not want us to live in fear. When we confess our sins to him he forgives us. He does not punish us, we do not need to do penance. He forgives us immediately and then forgets.

Love does not keep a record of wrongs.

He wants us to be free so that we can come into his presence and sing praises to him from our hearts. To join in the praise in heaven.

That's what we see happening in **Rev 5:13**

'Every creature in heaven and on earth, in the world below, and in the sea – all living beings in the universe – were singing:

"To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever. Amen"