

**Brackenhurst 11 Jan 2008 pm**  
**A Bit of a Sore Point**

- God of this City - Chris Tomlin (B or C#)

**Welcome — Neil**

**Notices — Noleen**

**Prayer of Invocation — Noleen**

- So in love with You - Planetshakers (G)
- Break Free - United (F#m)
- Enough - Chris Tomlin (G or possibly A)
- Meet me - RTS (A)
- I will offer up my life - Matt Redman (D)

**Scripture: Noleen**

Gen 17:1-14 The covenant of circumcision

Col 2:6-20 Freedom from human regulations

Matthew 18:21-34 The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant

**INTRODUCTION**

- How you guys doing with your New Years resolutions, by the way?
  - Anybody broken any yet?
  - Anybody still trying to keep them?
- Heard a story of a young man at a New Year's party turns to his friend and asks for a cigarette.
  - "I thought you made a New Year's resolution to quit smoking," his friend says.
    - \* "I'm in the process of quitting," he replied, "Right now, I am in the middle of phase one."
  - "What's phase one?"
    - \* "I've quit buying."
- I know Justin's decided on his New Year's resolution.
  - 1024×768.
- But it's funny, isn't it, no matter how many resolutions we seem to make, they always end up the same way
  - going out the window as soon as a little temptation arrives
  - We'd love to change things in our lives, we'd love for things to be different

- But somehow that never seems to happen
  - \* Things stay the same year after year
- And I think that the reason for things staying the same is what we spoke about last week, and so I thought that this week I'd pick up that idea and look at it in more detail
  - And if you remember what I spoke about you will remember that we spoke about Jubilee
- On the one hand the Israelite economic system which allowed families to get their land back and be released from slavery every 50 years, even if they'd lost it
  - And on the other the announcement that Isaiah makes to the people from Jerusalem who are in Exile in Babylon
    - \* And the promise that is made to them to return from captivity to their homeland
  - And then of course seeing Jesus as the fulfilment of that prophecy
    - \* setting people of every generation free from the things that hold them captive
- And so it seems odd to me that Jesus came to set us free, yet so often it seems that we don't embrace our freedom
  - We pray to Jesus to change things things, but nothing seems to ever change
    - \* Why?
- I think, I think that it's because of the things that we spoke about last week:
  - When slaves get set free and get sent home to the place their family came from they don't always know how to act.
    - \* What do you know about farming the family land when you've been a slave all your life
  - And so sometimes it is easier simply to stay a slave where things are safe and comfortable
- I think this is why things don't change as much as we would like them to
  - We ourselves are too afraid to leave our slavery
- Jesus sets us free, Jesus gives us a new life
  - But we don't know how to live as free people
    - \* And so it is easier just to stay bound
- Paul, in the passage from Colossians that we read just now, paints a picture of a new way of life in which the secret is Christ in you — spoke about that last week — rather than slavish obedience to rules and laws.
  - A picture of a life in which things that control us are done away with
    - \* the law is done away with
    - \* circumcision, the sign of the old covenant with God, is done away with

- \* the oppressing powers are done away with
- What Paul is saying is that the Year of Jubilee has truly come
  - The time has come to experience God's grace
  - The time has come to go home
  - The time has come to have hope.
    - \* So what the hell are you still doing here?
    - \* And sometimes here is a hell, but it's more comfortable than a distant heaven
- Friends, that is the human condition that we all find ourselves in and that Paul addresses in this letter
  - And the people who have been able to transcend that are the people who have become the truly great leaders among us, Nelson Mandela, Obama
    - \* And likewise it is the failures who have never embraced it. Eg white & black in new sa
  - Most of us embrace it to some extent,
    - \* but for all of us there are opportunities for greater freedom that we don't embrace, and then complain about how badly things are going for us, about how God doesn't really love us, about how terrible life is
- So if we are to move from freedom, what does Paul call us to?
  - Firstly to Face the Freedom
  - Secondly to Covet Christ
  - Thirdly to Let Christ Live

### **(1) Facing the Freedom**

- So the first thing that we need to do if we truly want to be set free from slavery is to face the freedom.
  - Now that is a negative word that I've used right there, and I use it intentionally
- See, normally we the use of that word is coupled with a bad situation
  - If we're in trouble we face the music
  - If we behaved in a childish way we must face up to our responsibilities
  - If we live in a dream world we are told that we need to face reality
- We have to turn from a 'happy' and an easy place to face something that is difficult or challenging
  - Just as when have a problem have to recognise it to cure it
- The same is true for freedom
  - When we are in slavery, and all of us are, I think, to some extent, in some area of our lives

- When we are in slavery we have to turn and face the freedom that God offers to us
  - Now that is a scary thing to do
- Why?
  - Because it means turning from what we know — and we're always more comfortable with what we know
    - \* It means turning from boundaries that others have set for us — that teach us what is safe
    - \* It means facing up to challenge as we learn to live in a way that is different from everything else we've known.
- There is a sense, of course that this is what growing up is about — moving on from the boundaries your parents set for you to a place where we have to set our own boundaries,
  - A place where we really are free to do what we like, but where we don't know, always what is right or what is wrong.
    - \* Trevor Hudson always tells his children that they are free to do whatever they like — but they are not free to choose the consequences
  - But I think that this is something that we struggle with
- Sometimes we are so afraid of the consequences that instead of making a decision, a choice that is offered to us in freedom, we rather stay in captivity
  - And I think, often don't grow up in many areas of our lives — those places where we are afraid to leave the boundaries behind and make decisions for ourselves
    - \* We can't keep living as though we are still bound.
- And this is the situation that Paul addresses as he speaks to the church in Colossae, and to us
  - It is a situation that is the perennial struggle of our lives, and especially our lives as Christians
    - \* The conflict between the Law, and freedom in Christ Jesus
- And it seems as though people were going around speaking to those in the early church, not just in Colossae, but also Galatia and other areas saying that you couldn't be a Christian without being a Jew first
  - And by being a Jew meaning obedience to the Jewish Law which required first and foremost of men that they be circumcised
    - \* And as you can imagine that was a bit of a sore point!
- So Paul writes to correct this idea saying that in the fullness of Christ the Law has been put aside, and your sinful nature has been put off
  - And says this:

“When you were dead in your sins, and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and the authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.” (Col 2:13-15)

- The written code — the law — with all its regulations that was against us and stood opposed to us was cancelled by Jesus Christ.
  - Do you understand, do any of us understand what that means?
    - \* It means everything in this book that tells us that we have to behave in a certain way to be acceptable to God is gone
- When you’re reading this book and you’re reading and it says you have to do this thing, or that thing you can skip it
  - You can ignore it because it has been nailed to the cross with Christ
    - \* Praise the Lord!
- And I know we struggle with this — we struggle with the idea of freedom, it’s easier to stay in slavery — just as much as the first Christians did. Paul says it: “Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules?” (Col 2:20) Do this, Don’t so that
- He says that these things appear wise, but have no value.
  - There comes a time when you have to take the training wheels off the bicycle
    - \* And what glorious freedom that brings!
  - We no longer have to live with this idea in our minds that if we do good we’ll get rewarded, if we do bad we’ll be punished
    - \* God is not Santa Claus!
- He created us to be free, and set us free in Christ Jesus to live fully and live freely
  - Let’s have the courage to face that freedom!

## **(2) Coveting Christ**

- But now the second thing that I need to speak about, and I guess my second and third points are quite closely connected, could probably have made them one if I didn’t like to have three points
  - Is well, if the law has been nailed to the cross that what is going to guide us?
    - \* How do we know we’re not going to make a mistake, or do something terribly wrong?
- The short answer is we don’t always, and i think that’s part of the excitement and joy of being alive and free

- God didn't create a race of robots who would always do exactly the right thing
  - \* He gave us freedom and said surprise me!
- But as Paul has been writing to the Colossians his language has been filled with — not the condition of freedom
  - That's a given, the Law has been abolished
- But the condition of living a life that is worthwhile, a life that is abundant, and life that one can look back upon as having been a life well lived is what Paul writes earlier
  - And what we spoke of last week, I quoted one version last week, want to quote the NIV tonight
    - “the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints” — and saints are the people who believe in Jesus —
    - “To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory”
- What a precious, wonderful treasure this is!
  - Christ in you
- Of course a slave doesn't know how to live in a free society, you'll never understand how to farm your grandfather's land when you've been a city boy all your life
  - But Christ in you does
    - \* Christ is the essence, the epitome of freedom
- And it is when we recognise the fullness of God, manifest in King Jesus, manifest in our lives
  - And we covet that, we long after that
- That we have a wonderful and new kind of freedom to turn to from our slavery
  - So the second thing that we need to do is to recognise that we're not alone
    - \* We're not alone in our struggle in try to understand free living
- but that Christ is in us and this is what we are to seek after

### **(3) Letting him Live**

- My third point flows on from that
  - It is not enough to say Christ is in us, we must also allow Christ to live in us
- And it is when Christ lives in us that the law of God — which has been nailed to the cross with Christ
  - Begins to live within us as well
    - \* And all the traditions and laws that tie us down in slavery set us free to be and to become the people that God created us to be

- To continue with my bicycle illustration
  - I grew in a quiet suburb, and as I grew older gradually began to ride more and more in the street
    - \* First just outside the driveway
    - \* The a bit further up and down the street
    - \* Then around the block
- Got hurt sometimes, fell off, had an accident
  - But growing to a point where I've come to learn that the laws of the road aren't there to stop me from doing what I want, but to keep me safe and I joyfully obey them
    - \* Cause if I don't I know I could die, and I can see more now through my parents eyes that they never wanted to stop me having fun, but only wanted to keep me safe, grow up, live a life
  - I think we will discover the freedom that we need when we look at the situations we face in freedom with the eyes of Jesus
- You will remember, maybe, if you're old enough, there was a time when everybody was going around saying rather glibly, "What would Jesus do?", bracelets etc.
  - As if through studying scripture enough we would actually be able to say exactly what Jesus would do in such and such a situation
    - \* And usually the answer had a way of being judgmental and became not so much about Jesus point of view
  - So it became about using the name of Jesus to justify my point of view
    - \* I think there's a commandment about that!
- So that's not what I'm saying
  - I saying Don't ask what Jesus would do, but ask yourself if you can try to see the situation through Jesus' eyes
    - \* And eyes that are the utmost unconditional, judgemental eyes of love you've ever known.
- Let your eyes become as Christ's, Let Christ truly live in you.
  - And so when you see a woman or a child (or a man) being abused
    - \* God's beautiful creature whom he has created and whom he loves unconditionally
- What do you think Jesus feels as he sees that?
  - When you see people, beggars, at the side of the road having to beg and plead for scraps
    - \* God's beautiful creatures whom he has created and loves unconditionally
- How do you think Jesus feels?

- When you see two sides at war with each other and women and children being killed helplessly
  - \* People on both sides — beautiful people — whom God has created and loves unconditionally
- How do you think Jesus feels about that?
  - The kid at school who sits by himself, the retarded person at church who has no friends
  - The guy everyone is taking advantage of at work
  - When Jesus sees the way you treat your boyfriend, girlfriend, parents
    - \* The list can go on
- Name a situation that you think the biblical law controls, break the law — or maybe think about breaking the law — and think about how Jesus would feel seeing what you're seeing, doing what you're doing
  - And not just how you treat others, but how to see yourself
    - \* How do you treat yourself — do you see yourself as Jesus sees you?
  - The beautiful, worthwhile, wonderful creation lovingly crafted by the Father's hands?
    - \* Whom God loves unconditionally
  - Do you see yourself, do you see situations as God sees them?
- Allow Christ to live in you by starting to see things through his eyes.
  - That's when he lives within us; that's when his loves compels us to live differently and in that the law that we are set free from starts to become meaningful.
- Not about laws, but about giving Christ the space to become alive

## CONCLUSION

- All those new year's resolutions — Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch are not going to transform our lives
  - As much as we try, and as long as we try we are going to fail
- The only difference is going to be found through Christ living in us, and us living through Christ
  - Trying to see what Christ sees and think what Christ think
- I pray that this year you would focus not on the rules and laws and regulations that we hope will transform our lives one day
  - But that we would simply allow Christ to live in us, and set us free
- May it be so for you, even as it is for me.
- Amen

## **Prayer of Response and Intercession (altar call?)**

### **Offering**

- Amazing Grace / My chains are gone - Chris Tomlin / Louis Giglio (F)

### **Offering prayer: Noleen**

- Closing: Tell the World (**F#m**)

### **Benediction**