

SLAVERY AND FREEDOM

“You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.” (Rom 6:18)

It ought to be obvious: **“Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey — whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?” (Rom 6:16).** Of course you know the story of Adam and Eve. They illustrate for everyone the truth of the choices mentioned in this Scripture. Unfortunately, they chose to obey “sin” and the rest is history.

Jacob also helps clarify the case. In his early life he had both his brother's “birthright” and “blessing”. Even so, he found no freedom from the sin that enslaved him. Then, at Peniel, he dared to change masters. No! It was not an easy decision. Jacob struggled all night long before choosing to be God's slave, but happily limped through the rest of his life as a free man (See Gen. 32:22 - 32).

The oft repeated proverb is true. *The devil promises freedom and gives slavery, and the Lord promises slavery and gives freedom.*

There is no doubt about it, Jesus does call us to a life of slavery. Anyone who wants to follow Christ must deny himself and take up his cross (Matt. 16:24). Paradoxically, it is in slavery to Christ that we find true freedom. Paul offered the same challenge to the Romans. At the time he wrote this letter 35 - 40 % of everyone in Italy were slaves. These millions of miserable souls must have hated their slavery as much as the Hebrews hated theirs in the land of Egypt. Yet Paul dared to proudly introduce himself to the Romans as a “slave” of Christ Jesus (Rom. 1:1). Moreover, he encouraged them to follow his example and also find true freedom as a slave to righteousness.

There were many in Rome who knew the Law of Moses (Rom. 7:1). Consequently, they knew that the Law permitted slavery under some circumstances (Ex. 21:1 - 27). By law, however, these slaves had to be released every seven years. There was, however, a provision made for a far more binding kind of slavery. This was slavery based not upon law, but love. If a slave “loved” his master, he could have his ear pierced in a public ceremony and become a slave “forever” (Ex. 21:6). In some mysterious way, it is in these chains of love that we find true freedom.

Paul knew from experience that the way of transgressors is hard. (Prov. 13:15). As a slave to sin he must have spent many sleepless nights kicking against the goads (Acts 26:14). At that time his life was in turmoil like the troubled sea (Is. 57:20). Then he discovered that **“... he who was a slave when he was called by the Lord is the Lord's freedman; similarly, he who was a free man when he was called is Christ's slave.” (1 Cor 7:22).**

There are no exceptions. Everyone on earth is a slave to something. As Peter said: **“A man is a slave to whatever masters him” (2 Pet. 2:19).** Jesus reduced our choices to only two. The correct choice, of course is God (Matt. 6:24). Even Jesus considered Himself a slave to God (Phil. 2:7). When His disciples were struggling for positions of power He reminded them of His example and explained that whoever wants to be first must also choose to be a slave (Matt. 20:27).

The message of our text will not be easy to receive. Jonah did not receive it until he had been three days in the belly of a great fish. Gideon did not receive it until he saw the supernatural hand of God at work in his fleece of wool. Paul himself did not “see” it until God struck him “blind” on the road to Damascus. What will it take for you and me to see it?

Most do not die easily! We were born struggling and will die the same way. That's the way that Jesus died! Because Jesus was a slave to God, however, He came out of the grave triumphant and free. Like a grain of wheat planted in the ground He was resurrected to a new dimension of life. Now Jesus has new power and freedom beyond the ability of human tongues to describe. When we dare to be crucified with Christ, we too can be raised to new dimensions of power and freedom.