

Free.....?

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[0 : 00] You can start to finish those conversations up and that would be a good thing. So we'll start to get your focus and attention back here again. But I just thought, remember that image of the fish and the fishbowl.

We'll come back to the little guy in a minute. Because tonight we're talking about freedom. We're listening to Jesus' words in John 8. And in a word, the message tonight is freedom.

Tonight there's really only two points to this little talk. Two kind of points, two headings, two categories. Two ways to live really. And that is slave or free.

Before we get into Jesus' words in John 8 though, we should get a grip on the overall sort of picture. The overall story of the whole Bible. Because otherwise if you don't know the whole story, it's a little bit like walking into a movie halfway through.

And you don't know what's gone before. And you're like, who's a goody? Who's a baddie? What's the plot? It's confusing. So to kind of take away some of the confusion, I thought it would be good to give a bit of an overview of the whole Bible so far.

[1 : 09] So just bear with me. If you know this kind of stuff, you can shift it down a gear into neutral and you can just chill out for a little bit. Bring it up to speed when we're all together on the same page. So here's the big picture of the Bible.

Firstly, the Bible begins in Genesis 1 and it begins with God as the maker and ruler over everyone and everything. God made everything and everyone.

He made people with dignity, worth and value. And he put them in a garden on the earth to care for it, to work there and to live under God's rule and to serve him.

We are made to live under God's rule and to serve him. So off the bat, the Bible says that's our job. That's what we're designed to do. You and I, all people, to live under God's rule and to serve him.

So it's the beginning of the Bible. Let me skip a few pages and go to the last page of the Bible. The Bible ends in Revelation and again presents God as the ruler over everyone and everything.

[2 : 09] The God of Genesis 1, the maker of all things, is still the ruler over everyone and everything. The Bible begins with God creating the heavens and the earth and it ends with a new heaven and a new earth.

A recreated, perfect new heaven and new earth. People living at peace with God and peace with each other. Living under God's rule and serving him forever. So reality is we are made to serve. Everybody in the world serves someone. Or something. Everybody does. Even if it's not God. It will be someone else. Maybe it's family.

Maybe it's a spouse or a boyfriend. Or maybe it's children. Maybe it's a celebrity like Michael Jackson. Or if it's not someone, it will be something.

Maybe you live for some secret kind of indulgent pleasure of yours that nobody else knows about. Maybe it's a hobby or a pastime. Maybe it's winning Tats Lotto, the 90 million.

[3 : 11] You know, life could be a dream. Or maybe it's perhaps saving up for a nice little nest egg for when you retire. Either way, everybody lives for someone or something.

Even an atheist worships something. Maybe it's reason. Maybe it's knowledge. Maybe it's science. Everybody lives for, serves and worships something.

We are made to worship and serve God. And if it's not him, it will inevitably be someone or something else. So, the kind of two bookends of the Bible, if you like, Genesis and Revelation, the picture of it, if you like, is living under God's rule, living with God and serving him.

And guess what? It's good. It's really good. In fact, it's perfect. Both in the garden and in the new heavens and the new earth, there's no sickness.

There's no evil. There's no death. There's no crime. There's no police force. There's no hospitals. There's no evil on a grand scale like war and genocide and third world poverty.

[4 : 14] There's no evil on a personal level either. No lying, gossiping, relationship breakdowns or abuse. It's perfect.

But obviously, we live in a world where relationships aren't like this at all. Not with God and certainly not with other people. We live in a world where things go wrong.

There is evil in the world globally and also personally between each other. There is sickness and death. We live in a world that needs doctors and lawyers and police.

So, the question is, where did things go horribly wrong? Good start. Good finish. Really good finish. When did life as we know it suddenly become a train wreck? Well, if you've got a Bible in front of you, it would be helpful to turn to Genesis chapter 3.

It's really easy to find. It's page 2 if you have one of these church Bibles. So, look with me at Genesis chapter 3. Let me read verses 1 through 6.

[5 : 19] Now, the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, Did God say you shall not eat from any tree in the garden?

The woman said to the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.

But the serpent said to the woman, You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil. So, when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and it was a delight to the eyes, and the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate.

And she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. Things go wrong at Genesis 3. Remember the man and the woman, the first people God made, Genesis 1 and 2.

It was a good beginning, obeying and enjoying God in the garden. But here, Genesis 3, instead of obeying God's command, not to eat the fruit from the tree, which God said in chapter 2, verses 16 and 17, The Lord God commanded the man, You may freely eat of every tree in the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it, you shall die.

[6 : 35] That's what God said. People in the garden reject what God said, and instead listen to the serpent, and they eat from the tree that God told them not to.

It is a declaration of independence. Genesis 3 is, if you like, Independence Day. It's freedom. It's rebellion. Vive la revolucion.

That's what's happening here. Rebellion against God's rule, to become our own little rulers. Each individual deciding right and wrong for themselves, setting their own standards, living their own way.

It's just like the Rolling Stones saying just a minute ago, I'm free to do what I want any old time.

That's Genesis 3. There was a sign on the back of a bus. I was driving down Doncaster Road a week or two ago, and stuck in traffic, in front of me, the sign in big capital letters said, Be Your Own Boss.

Big bold letters. Be Your Own Boss. It was an ad for a small business management course at some university. I can't remember which university. It wasn't Deakin, so you're right. It doesn't really matter. But that title grabbed me, Be Your Own Boss.

[7 : 48] Because who doesn't want to get rid of their boss? Works hard, especially if you have a bad boss. That's your dream, isn't it? To win Tats Lotto so you never have to work again. Nobody wants to answer to a boss.

Here's that promise. Be Your Own Boss. That's Genesis 3. Independence Day. Rejecting God's rule, saying, I'm going to be my own boss.

Sounds like real freedom, doesn't it? But the promise of freedom is not all it's cracked up to be. Remember the fish in the fish bowl?

For the fish, life in the bowl is good. The fish bowl is its source of life. It depends on the water for life and sustenance. It can live forever in the confines of the bowl.

But what happens? Well, according to the picture, the fish jumps out. It rebels. It rejects its source of life and it leaps out. Quest for freedom. Rebellion. Be your own boss.

[8 : 47] But the bad news for the fish out of water is the grass is not greener on the other side. Life outside the bowl is not true freedom. It actually means death.

And in a similar way, rebellion against our maker means death. God does not let us rebel against him forever. So, you read the end of Genesis 3.

God says, From dust you are and to dust you will return. God acts and he judges and he holds us accountable for our declaration of independence against him.

Funerals are not nice events. We've been to a couple this year. But they are reminders that we live in a world post-garden, post-independence day and God won't let us rebel forever.

The penalty for our rebellion, our independence, or as the Bible calls it, sin, is death. Such as physical death, but suffering under God's judgment forever.

[9 : 55] Independence for the fish is not true freedom after all. In the relationship between God and people, sin is not freedom either.

So, it brings us to tonight's summary. Slave or free? Let's look at Jesus' words again in John chapter 8. Got a Bible? Helpful to turn back over to John chapter 8.

Jesus answered them, verse 34. Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin.

He says, everyone who commits sin, literally sins, plural, is a slave to sin.

The word slave in verse 34, it's a Greek word, it literally means one who is owned as the property of another. A servant whose rights and services have been obtained by a master.

So, in the Greco-Roman world, a slave is looked upon as a purchased commodity who could buy someone to be a slave. See, there was no centrelink or dole in the ancient world.

[11 : 04] So, if you didn't work and you had no family to support you or take care of you, you would be someone's slave. It was the alternative to being homeless and hungry. So, people worked as slaves.

Or, if an invasion took place and your nation lost, you could become a slave for your captors, for your enemies and thereby preserve your life. Alternatively, if you won the war, you'd make your enemies your slaves because instant workforce.

Some slaves had high positions and served ministerial roles, served in the, you know, served the emperor's court. The problem, sorry, the point is that the idea behind the word of being a slave is that you are subject to another person.

You're subject to a master. You are owned by someone else. And that's the word Jesus uses to describe people's relationship to sin, slave to sin.

That is, sin owns us. It controls us. We answer to it every whim. Jesus says, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.

[12 : 10] It's not just the, he's not just addressing the bad behaviour that people would say is sinful. We would say people who commit crimes and who commit murder and so on, they're the bad people.

He's not, he's not saying that, he's saying something deeper than that. He's talking about the nature and the status and the identity of being owned by sin and it's all of us.

The point is, sin is never just a once off, one time affair. It's not a small little, you know, chip in the, it's not a little character flaw that you can kind of overlook. It's not, it's not like waking up on the wrong side of the bed in the morning, you'd have a cup of coffee, you'd get over it.

It's not, it's not like having a bad day. It's not like you can just turn over a new leaf and be different. That is not the case. He says, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. It's an addiction, it's a, it's an all consuming and all, all encompassing power over us.

According to Jesus, everyone is a slave to sin. But maybe you don't think he's right. You see, I don't know, that applies to other people, not me.

[13 : 16] Really? Try living one sinless hour. Just, just try it one day for a whole hour. Only please God and only obey God and put other people ahead of yourself and don't give in to cravings and temptations and pleasures around you.

Try that for an hour. Just try it one day just for an hour. See how you go. Maybe do okay with an hour. How would you go with a day? Just try it for a whole day.

Loving and serving God, putting others first, obeying God gladly and completely and perfectly. Try it for a day because you're free, aren't you? You don't think you're a slave.

You're free. If you're free, you can do it. Try it for a day. Now try it for a week. Now try it for a month. Now try it for a year.

Now try it for a whole lifetime. See how you go. It's impossible, isn't it? We can't even keep New Year's resolutions, let alone live out the law of God perfectly for a lifetime.

[14:26] It's impossible. Do you remember your New Year's resolutions? How's that going? I decided at the end of last year I would exercise more, drink less caffeine, and learn to play the guitar and keep my room clean.

It's now July and I've done none of them. I can't even keep my own standards, let alone God's standards. We can't break sin's power over us. We fail miserably time and time again.

According to Jesus, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. But again, you may protest and you may claim I'm a good person, I'm religious, I'm in church, I'm here on a Sunday, I try and do the right thing, you can't call me a sinner, what are you talking about?

You can't call me a slave, I'll do the right thing. It seems to be the same objection the Jewish people have that are listening to Jesus. Read verses from 31 onwards. Jesus said to the Jews who believed in him, if you continue in my word, you're truly my disciples and you will know the truth and the truth will make you free.

They answered him, we're descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying you will be made free? Can you hear the protest in their voice? We're descendants of Abraham, we're not slaves of anyone.

[15:39] Historically, that's not true. In fact, there's hardly a world superpower that didn't enslave the Jewish people. In their history, they've been enslaved by Egypt, Syria, Assyria, Syria, Greeks, Babylon, and the Romans at this point.

But maybe if they claim to belong to their ancestor Abraham, who's the great father of the Jewish nation, who had all these privileges and promises made to him by God, maybe somehow pointing to him saying we're descendants of Abraham, somehow what Jesus said doesn't apply to them.

You know, we do it too, not in the same way, you might not first off the bat say oh, I'm a descendant of Abraham, but maybe your objection is I'm not a sinner, I'm a Baptist. I'm not a sinner, I'm an Anglican.

I'm a Catholic. I was an altar boy, I'm a Presbyterian, I go to church, I sing in the choir. You can't call me a sinner. I went to Ridley. It's got nothing to do with being a Baptist or an Anglican or religious or non-religious at all.

Jesus says you're a slave and he goes on to say you hate my word, there's no room for my word in you. It's like in Genesis 3, the man and the woman reject God's word to go do their own thing.

[16:56] Jesus says you won't listen to me, you reject me. In fact, later on, verse 59, they pick up stones to throw at him to kill him but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

They try and kill him. Look at Jesus' reply in verse 37 and 38. I know that you are descendants of Abraham that you look for an opportunity to kill me because there is no place in you for my word. I declare what I have seen in the Father's presence. As for you, you should do what you have heard from your Father. Jesus is from God and he speaks the very words of God but people hate him and try to kill him.

And these are the religious people. So the problem is that we are all slaves to sin under bondage to sin as our master where we're guilty rebels and we deserve God's judgment.

So what's the solution? Let's read those verses 34 and 36 again. This is Jesus talking. I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin.

[18:04] The slave does not have a permanent place in the household. The son has a place there forever. So if the son makes you free, you will be free indeed. Jesus says the son will make you free.

Who's the son? Well, if you spend any small amount of time reading John's gospel, you know that the son is Jesus. Jesus is talking about himself.

He is God the son. He says in chapter 5, so if you turn back just a page or two, Jesus talks about his relationship to the father and he says this, very truly I tell you, the son can do nothing on his own but only what he sees the father doing.

For whatever the father does, the son does likewise. The father loves the son and shows him all that he does and he will show you and he will show him greater works than these so you will be astonished.

As the father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the son gives life to whomever he wishes. Jesus says, the son will set you free but who's he talking about?

[19 : 07] He's talking about God the son. That's great news. God has come to our rescue. Someone who will make us free. That's the promise.

He says, the son will make you or set you free. That's great news for prisoners like us. That's the promise. The question is, can we trust him?

As you read throughout John and throughout the New Testament, the biographies of Jesus' life and his ministry, what he said and what he did, Jesus goes about healing the sick without even touching people, just with a word, he can command people to be healed.

Jesus just recently, in John's Gospel, fed 5,000 people who are hungry with a small little bit of bread and a small little bit of fish, fed thousands. Later on in John chapter 9, he opens the eyes of a guy born blind.

Jesus demonstrates he is indeed from God and that he is good. Not just that, but he lived the perfect sinless life. He stands up in the temple and says, can anyone convict me of sin?

[20 : 18] I would never be so foolish as to say that. But Jesus lived the perfect life, loving God, under God's rule, loving people.

He lived the law perfectly. Jesus is truly free and he's powerful. But the question is, can he set us free? And if so, how?

Jesus says this, Mark 10, 45, Jesus says, the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Jesus talks about his death being a ransom. A ransom is the price you pay to set someone free or something free, to buy it back out of captivity.

Or if you go to a pawn shop and you try and get rid of your stereo, the money that you pay to buy it back, to redeem it, it's a ransom price. Jesus' death is a ransom.

[21 : 17] He goes to death on a cross. If you keep reading John's Gospel, the central thing John wants us to know about Jesus is that he goes to death on a cross. It doesn't sound like much of a rescue mission, does it?

If we're slaves, surely Jesus should come and overthrow the... But no, he doesn't. He ends up dead on a cross. But he says that his death is a ransom for many.

That is, when Jesus goes to the cross, he bears our sin. Individually, collectively, he bears our sin and on the cross he dies in our place bearing God's judgement for us.

He dies the death we deserve, takes the punishment we deserve. But how can we know that his death was a ransom?

How can we know that it just wasn't something he got caught up in and it's got nothing to do with us? How can we know Jesus' blood paid the ransom price to set sinners free?

[22 : 19] The answer is God raised Jesus from the dead. Three days later, Jesus rose from the dead, was seen by John and other eyewitnesses. He was raised from the dead.

So we're slaves to sin and we die. Jesus lived the sinless life, died for us and rose again. That's why Jesus' word here about the sun setting us free is trustworthy.

Absolutely. The sun can set us free. He is trustworthy. He died for us, paid the price and he rose again from the dead.

You can trust this word. In fact, Jesus says earlier, probably the most, arguably the most famous verse in the Bible. You can turn over and look at it if you want.

It's in John chapter 3. Jesus says this, for God so loved the world that he gave his only son so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

[23 : 25] That's why Jesus came and died. That's why he is the ransom. He took the punishment for us. So, the question is, those two questions at the start, slave or free?

Let me ask you, are you free? It's not freedom in a vacuum though that Jesus sets people free into. Freedom means being set free by the sun for the sun. Ironically, being set free by Jesus involves being a slave of Jesus.

It's not freedom to be an independent rebel. That's what got us in this mess in the first place. It's not freedom in a vacuum. Being set free by the sun to serve the sun, bought by his blood to belong to him and serve him forever.

So, are you free? Are you still a slave? Still a slave to your selfish habits and desires that are in you and eating away slowly and slowly and slowly and slowly until you die and it's too late.

[24 : 43] You get what your sins deserve. Sin has enslaved you and hardened you and even now, hearing this word that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.

If that means nothing to you in any sense, if it's just kind of Jesus is just kind of this nice moral teacher, whatever, I've got other things in my life to worry about.

If Jesus means nothing to you, probably a good indication you're still a slave to sin. But the good news is Jesus sets you free, those who believe.

Jesus invites everyone to turn to him, believe he died in your place for your sin, bearing your sin, that he gives you new and eternal life and he wants you to belong to him and to serve him forever. So that future in heaven, no sickness, death, dying, evil, that's a good future. and when you put your trust in the son, that future is yours forever.

[25 : 52] So let me leave you with that question. Are you a slave or are you free? If you'd like to come and ask me more a little about freedom and how to respond to Jesus, you can come and see me after the service and I'd love to talk to you about that.

I'll pray with you. Let me just finish by praying. Lord God, thank you for sending your son into the world to save sinners. Thank you that when we believe in him, we have true freedom.

Thank you that Jesus lived the perfect life we could never live. Thank you that he demonstrated his great power in many works and deeds. But thank you that he went to the cross and took our sin upon himself and the punishment and judgment we deserve.

And thank you Father God for raising your son from the dead so that we can know what Jesus says here is true and trustworthy. Lord God, for those who do not know and trust your son, we pray that you would please reveal yourself to them.

Lord God, please reveal yourself to us. Sorry for when our hearts and our ears get deaf to your word. We don't want to listen to you. We don't want to live your way. But thank you that Jesus Christ died for us and that his blood is good enough to forgive our sins.

[27 : 19] We thank you for the Lord Jesus, that he is indeed Lord and we look forward to when he comes again and that one day at the name of Jesus every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

Amen.