

SERMON

Galatians 5:1, 13-25

Living in the Freedom of the Holy Spirit

Nunawading and Waverley, 26-6-22

Dear friends in Christ,

I have preached a lot about mission and evangelism. In love, we reach out to others, are hospitable and make the stranger welcome. Now, we have to say something about the Spirit's mission to the interior, to the centre of our lives. Living in the freedom of the Holy Spirit entails a journey into the inner world, to confront **the desire of the flesh**, as Paul puts it. One of the great testimonies to the Holy Spirit at work within us is the way we change. People can change and that is a powerful matter to talk about. Our witness should be: "Jesus has made all the difference to my life. He has changed me."

Lutheran Media interviewed a lady, called Rachel, who was in prison where she was knocked unconscious. When she woke, she saw lying on the floor under a bench, a Bible. She began reading it and as she did so over the weeks, the Lord Jesus would speak to her. The top dog in the prison demanded that Rachel come to her and she thought another beating would occur but the woman asked that she read the Bible to her, for she couldn't read. Her life was changed, too. That was the beginning of an idea to start a group of women praying for others and befriending women in prison, which she continued to do on her release from prison. She didn't know about repentance and forgiveness but as she read the Holy Scriptures, she came to realise that she was responsible for hurting many people. She went about a process of being reconciled to them and to her family. Her old ways were now behind her and gambling no longer was controlling her life. She was living in the freedom of the Holy Spirit. Christ forgives and frees us from guilt but he also takes us and changes us to be free.

How free are we? **For freedom, Christ set us free. Therefore, do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery**, the Spirit tells us. Let's think for a moment of things that could be dominating our lives and binding us. Perhaps it is worry, a selfish life-style, over spending, unkindness to others, a loss of meaning, greed, perfectionism, anger or jealousy. Quite a number of things are listed here in Scripture: **immorality, unnatural vices, debauchery, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, discord, jealousy, rages, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness,**

carousing. The list is not exhaustive but includes anything that comes from the unconverted mind that wants to do as it pleases, such as theft or drug taking etc.

When we became Christians, the Spirit set us free from many of these things that held us in chains. As we mature in Christ, the Holy Spirit goes to war on our fleshy natures so that we can live in spiritual freedom. **For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh for these are in opposition with each other so that you may not act as you please.** Through the victory of Christ, the Spirit invites us to come out into the glorious freedom of the children of the light.

Occasionally the old prison cell keeps drawing us back and so we have to fight against returning there.

How do we fight? One of my practices is to recite the fruits of the Spirit: **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.** I do not always display these things to the degree I would like to and saying them reminds me what has to change inside. We live at a time when exercising restraint, denying oneself for the sake of others, being self-disciplined, and making sacrifices for others are not praised. We need to return to some techniques of Christians before us. Dr Luther who wrote: 'baptism means that we drown our old sinful nature through daily repentance and that day after day a new self should arise to live with God in righteousness and purity.' When was the last time you repented? In repentance, we open ourselves to the power of the Spirit enters and changes our lives. What about the words, 'day after day' and 'daily'? You can see that Christians once thought that the greatest project in life was not getting into the housing but aiming for holiness, purity and righteousness. What is more important, our life-style or **love, joy and peace, patience, kindness and goodness** etc?

Finally, the reformation of the inner self, which is the true pathway to freedom, begins with Christ and ends in our relationships with others. Only the ascended Lord and conqueror can break Satan's grip on human lives. Thus, the word says, **Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.** From this point, we can live in the freedom of the Holy Spirit, which is described here as the love for others. **Let us not become conceited, challenging one another and envying one another.** Why did the apostle put these words here? I think because he knew that when people are imprisoned by desire they cannot properly live together with others. Competing with others, being in conflict and wanting your own way are signs of slavery to

self. When Christ sets us free, we see the importance of others to us and love them for their own sake.

Here before us is the mission to the inner self that brings us the freedom of the Holy Spirit.