

Real Freedom

Freedom is one of humanity's most cherished values, yet few people know what real freedom is.

Many Christians, especially those who are “*born again*” claim freedom, freedom from sin and the keeping of God's Laws.

What is real freedom and how is it obtained?

The story of Barabbas sheds much light on ultimate freedom.

Matthew 27:15-26 [NIV] *“Now it was the governor's custom at the Feast to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd. At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Barabbas. So when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them, “Which one do you want me to release to you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?” For he knew it was out of envy that they had handed Jesus over to him. While Pilate was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife sent him this message: “Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him.” But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed. “Which of the two do you want me to release to you?” asked the governor. “Barabbas,” they answered. “What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?” Pilate asked. They all answered, “Crucify him!” “Why? What crime has he committed?” asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, “Crucify him!” When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. “I am innocent of this man's blood,” he said. “It is your responsibility!” All the people answered, “Let his blood be on us and on our children!” Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.”*

Barabbas, whose name means “sins of the father” was a notorious criminal, had been convicted of both murder and insurrection. [Mark 15:7] This made Barabbas liable to execution under both Jewish and Roman law. Although Barabbas was an enemy to Rome, he may have been a hero to the Jews.

Ironically Barabbas was guilty of the very crime for which Jesus was accused, and his name also depicted the relationship that Jesus had with God the Father.

Pilate who was supposed to administer justice was, by his actions, prone to be more concerned about political expediency than justice, or what was right.

Far too often this is the attitude of those who are leaders or are in authority.

Why did Pilate **not** release Jesus, who had broken no law?

Why should the people, in this case a howling mob, be accounted worthy of judging who should be released?

Yet there was a great purpose to this terrible travesty of justice.

Remember we are talking about Jesus Christ our only Saviour.

Understand, if it had **not** happened this way, you and I, nor any other human being who has ever lived, could ever be truly free.

Why?

There is much symbolism in what happened to Barabbas.

No-one likes to admit to being guilty of anything. But Barabbas surely should have had little difficulty admitting that his reprieve was unwarranted.

How perfect a picture of true freedom is freedom from the death penalty that hangs over every human being for breaking the Creator God's law of love.

James 1:25 [NIV] *“But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it, he will be blessed in what he does.”*

It seems paradoxical that a law could give us freedom, when **no-one** is justified, [*just as if we never sinned*] freed from the penalty of the law by keeping the law. [**Galatians 3:11; Galatians 2:16**]

How is this?

Romans 7:7 [NIV] *“What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, “Do not covet.”*

We only know what is sinful, by what God's law tells us.

Romans 3:20 [NIV] *“Therefore no-one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.”*

The law gives us freedom as it points out what is sin and thus gives us the opportunity to ask for God's forgiveness.

This forgiveness and freedom comes from accepting in faith the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as a substitute death for our deserved death. [**Romans 3:23-24; Romans 6:23**]

Ephesians 2:8-9 [NIV] *“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no-one can boast.”*

No good works can free us from the death penalty **only** God's Grace.

Barabbas was a thief who committed murder during a rebellion against the law, he had rebelled against God and hated his fellow human beings.

How?

Because God's Law is spiritual, an attitude of mind that leads us to a way of living. The way of sacrificial love towards God and other human beings.

Romans 13:8-10 [NIV] *“Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellow-man has fulfilled the law. The commandments, “Do not commit adultery,” “Do not murder,” “Do not steal,” “Do not covet,” and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: “Love your neighbour as yourself.” Love does no harm to its neighbour. Therefore love is the fulfilment of the law.”*

Love, the Greek word “*agapé*” is living the way of giving instead of getting.

Agapé love is spontaneous love, that is irrespective of the rights or response of the person receiving this love. A sacrificial love where the selfish desires are sacrificed in order to show this love to others.

Romans 7:5-7 [NIV] *“For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death. But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code. What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I*

would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, “Do not covet.”

Paul is showing us the real reason that God gave the Ten Commandments, is to show us what is sin.

1 Timothy 1:7-11 [NIV] *“They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm. We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. We also know that law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers, and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.”*

Paul reminds Timothy of the reason for the Ten Commandments, how they should be used in conjunction with the New Covenant, and for whom they were given.

Those who by faith had accepted Christ’s perfect sacrifice as a substitute for their own death are **not** listed here.

This is how the Law, the Ten Commandments, should be used, to bring sinners to a state of repentance and the acceptance of Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Master.

This is where true freedom is found.

Matthew 27:19-25 [NIV] *“While Pilate was sitting on the judge’s seat, his wife sent him this message: “Don’t have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him.” But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed. “Which of the two do you want me to release to you?” asked the governor. “Barabbas,” they answered. “What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?” Pilate asked. They all answered, “Crucify him!” “Why? What crime has he committed?” asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, “Crucify him!” When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. “I am innocent of this man’s blood,” he said. “It is your responsibility!” All the people answered, “Let his blood be on us and on our children!”*

Pilate tried to free Jesus the Christ [Messiah or Saviour] but the religious leaders of that day persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and have Jesus crucified.

v25 was a prophecy from the mouths of rebels.

The blood of Jesus the Christ [Saviour] is on us for it is because of sin that He had to die, so that we could be free from the death penalty.

Matthew 26:26-28 [NIV] *“While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take and eat; this is my body.” Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”*

Jesus, just before His death, introduced the New Covenant to His disciples, He then, hours later, ratified it by shedding His life blood on the cross.

This is the only way we can be truly free from eternal death.

Romans 5:6-10 [NIV] *“You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him! For if, when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him*

through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!”

We are freed from death by the blood of Jesus Christ but we are saved by allowing Him to live His life, in us on earth, again. We do this by allowing the Holy Spirit in us to re-make our lives, that is the real being “born again.” [John 3:1-18; Romans 6:1-14]

Romans 12:1-2 [NIV] *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be **transformed by the renewing of your mind**. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is, his good, pleasing and perfect will.”*

This re-making of our new life and our surrender of our lives to Jesus Christ is done out of gratitude for the freedom from eternal death we have received because of the sacrifice of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Barabbas benefitted from grace, or unmerited pardon, without any prior knowledge or action. This is a physical freedom that can be paralleled, with the spiritual freedom we as Christians receive from the loving sacrifice of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Romans 8:9-17 [NIV] *“You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you. Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation, but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs, heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”*

Two things we receive as Christians:

- a) Freedom from the fear of death;
- b) An inheritance with our Saviour as created children in the Kingdom [family] of God.

Both of these are totally dependent on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and our being subject to the re-moulding of our lives by the work of the Holy Spirit in us.

This is the true freedom that all humans can experience and the incredible human potential that can be ours.