

Freedom in Christ – An Introduction

Watch this DVD and see if you can figure what it's about!!

A little bit of history by way of introduction today!! If you know your history – and you don't need to know very much this morning – you will know that for centuries people believed that the earth was flat. In the 2nd Century an Egyptian astronomer called Ptolemy worked out how the universe fit together. He worked out that the earth was at the centre of the universe and was the fixed point around which everything else moved. For centuries people believed this. For centuries people lived according to this belief, that the earth was the fixed centre. For centuries people were influenced in all their thinking about the universe – and the earth itself – by Ptolemy's conclusion. For centuries sailors believed that because the earth was flat, you could, if you sailed far enough, literally fall off the earth. For centuries people found ways to explain exactly what awaited you if you did foolishly sail to the edge of the world. For centuries exploration of the world by sea necessitated that you sailed in sight of the coast – lest you fall off the earth. For centuries people believed that the sun moved around the earth, and for centuries people grappled to understand the universe in the light of the fact that the sun went around the earth (excuse the pun!).

Everything we once understood about how the universe worked came from Ptolemy's conclusion that the earth was at the centre. It also influenced how people thought about the place of earth and "man" in the universe. People found many ways of proving Ptolemy's conclusion to be correct. Even the church supported the view that the earth was at the centre of the universe. How people lived, how they understood life, how they understood the universe and their place in it were all influenced by Ptolemy's assertion that the earth was the central and fixed point to the cosmos.

In the 16th Century Copernicus, a Polish astronomer, challenged everything people had believed by saying that the earth revolved around the sun! This did not go down well! For centuries people had believed the earth was a sphere and not flat, but to say that the sun and not the earth was the centre and fixed point of the universe, was a step too far. Following Copernicus, the astronomer Galileo was put under house arrest by the church because he agreed with Copernicus. The church had decided the Bible taught that the earth was the centre of creation and to challenge that view was heresy. But Copernicus was right wasn't he!! We now know that the truth is that the sun is the centre of our solar system. We now know that the earth revolves around the sun. We now know that people can and do live on the other side of the earth. What is true today was in fact always true. People have found ways of proving it, and it has changed the way we think about everything. Copernicus discovery and conclusion about the sun was a complete reversal of the way we had previously imagined the earth and the universe.

This kind of change in thinking and understanding is called a paradigm shift.

“With the paradigm shift everything changed. Neither the navigators who set sail and verified that the flat earth was, in fact, a globe nor the space explorers who walked on the moon could have embarked on their ‘ventures’ without this paradigm shift. Our sense of who we are and the way the cosmos functions, our sense of time and the place we hold in its immensities, our appreciation of the intricate ecology of our existence – all this, and more, is radically affected by this paradigm shift”¹

On the other hand it changes nothing! We still say “the sun rose” and the “sun went down”; the sun still makes things grow and we still can’t exist without it. Freedom in Christ is the truth – always has been always will be. It affects everything about us – how we understand God, ourselves, the world and our place within it. I hope that as we make the journey, we will see the truth as it really is, and be able to live in it. With the truth of Freedom in Christ, everything changes and nothing changes. Everything changes because God is the centre and the truth of God permeates everything about our lives. Nothing changes because you still have to live in the here and now – get up and go to work but Freedom in Christ means we live in the truth of the way the world really is – forever!

1. Peterson E *“Under the unpredictable plant”*, Eerdmans 1992 page 174/5

FREEDOM IN CHRIST – WHERE DID I COME FROM?

Jesus said: “You will know the truth and the truth will set you free” John 8 v32. To know the truth about God and the truth about ourselves and to live in that truth – that is freedom. How many of us are free.... really, really free? Truth is – many of us, most of us, perhaps all of us, live life in the wrong paradigm. Freedom in Christ will help us to move from what we think is the truth, to what is really the truth.

In the beginning God created ... God didn’t need to create anything – he didn’t lack anything in himself. He created because he wanted to share what he already enjoyed in himself – loving relationship, loving relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This was, and is, God’s greatest dream. He wants others – those he created – to participate in community with Father, Son and Holy Spirit. “God’s aim in history is the creation of an inclusive community of loving persons, with himself included as it’s primary sustainer and most glorious inhabitant” (Dallas Willard).

The climax of God’s wonderful creation is people – male and female – God created them. In the image of God he created them (Gen 1 v 27). So Adam and Eve enjoyed community with God as he walked with them in the garden in the cool of the day. They enjoyed community with one another; they were physically and spiritually alive enjoying significance, security, acceptance. Until community is broken And it still is. It is broken here today in all our lives in one way or another, in many ways. What happened in the garden still happens today in your life and mine. We want to be god, to be our own gods and we want to live without reference to God. The consequence is death, physical and spiritual.

Adam and Eve fell for Satan's flattery and we've been falling for it ever since. Satan appealed to their pride and he still does very effectively today. Community shattered, significance, security, acceptance now a daily, life long struggle. Do you ever struggle with significance issues? Do you ever have issues over feeling secure – ever feel lonely, abandoned, guilty, wondering if God protects you ... really? Do you ever have acceptance issues – if they know what I'm really like ... if they knew who I really was I can't go there – I'm not part of that group.... I'm different – people don't understand what makes me tick.... Welcome to the world of spiritual death!!! You know it only too well!

But now here's the truth – the paradigm shift. Does God give up on community? Does God give up on his greatest dream? Absolutely NOT! There's Noah, Abraham, Isaac & Jacob, Israel, the wilderness, the Promised Land, and when all the wooing and loving and pulling and pushing and ups and downs and battles and peace and victories and defeats and miracles and more miracles and prophets and prophecies are done – there's this bloke called Jesus!

In the world of broken community, performance and accomplishments give us significance. In the world of broken community, status and recognition gives us security. In the world of broken community, appearance and admiration give us acceptance. But we know that in truth, these things are never enough. They may feed my physical body and make me feel alive, but they do not, and cannot give us back what was lost – community with God himself.

Jesus said: "I have come that you may have life, and have it to the full" – as God always intended. Only through Jesus can we be fully alive and enjoy community with God himself. Friends, if we make ourselves the centre of the universe, like once we made the earth the centre of the universe, and if we keep falling for Satan's claim that we can be like God, then we will always struggle with, significance, security and acceptance. We will always have to perform and accomplish to be significant. We will continually be striving for status and recognition to feel secure. We will never be free of worrying about our appearance and always be seeking the admiration of others to feel accepted. But the truth through Jesus changes everything. If we put God in the centre of the universe, like we now know the sun is at the centre of our solar system, then we can be free.... really, really free.

Friends, here's the truth of restored community through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus:

I am significant

I am no longer worthless, inadequate, helpless or hopeless, In Christ I am deeply significant and special.

God says:

Mathew 15: 13,14

I am the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

John 15:1,5

I am a branch of the true vine, Jesus, a channel of His life.

John 15:16

I have been chosen and appointed by God to bear fruit.

Acts 1:8

I am a personal, Spirit-empowered witness of Christ.

1 Corinthians 3:16

I am a temple of God.

1 Corinthians 5:17-21

I am a minister of reconciliation for God.

2 Corinthians 6:1

I am God's fellow worker.

Ephesians 2:6

I am seated with Christ in the heavenly realms.

Ephesians 2:10

I am God's workmanship, created for good works.

Ephesians 3:12 I may approach God with freedom and confidence.
Philippians 4:13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me!

I am secure

I am no longer guilty, unprotected, alone or abandoned. In Christ I am totally secure.

God says:

Romans 8:1,2 I am free forever from condemnation.
Romans 8:28 I am assured that all things work together for good.
Romans 8: 31-34 I am free from any condemning charges against me.
Romans 8: 35-39 I cannot be separated from the love of God.
2 Corinthians 1:21,22 I have been established, anointed and sealed by God.
Philippians 1 :6 I am confident that the good work God has begun in me will be perfected.
Philippians 3:20 I am a citizen of heaven.
Colossians 3:3 I am hidden with Christ in God.
2 Timothy 1:7 I have not been given a spirit of fear, but of power, love and a sound mind.
Hebrews 4:16 I can find grace and mercy to help in time of need.
1 John 5:18 I am born of God and the evil one cannot touch me.

I am accepted

I am no longer rejected, unloved or dirty. In Christ I am completely accepted.

God says:

John 1:12 I am God's child.
John 15:15 I am Christ's friend.
Romans 5:1 I have been justified.
1 Corinthians 6:17 I am united with the Lord and I am one spirit with him.
1 Corinthians 6:19-20 I have been bought with a price. I belong to God.
1 Corinthians 12:27 I am a member of Christ's Body.
Ephesians 1:1 I am a saint, a holy one.
Ephesians 1:5 I have been adopted as God's child.
Ephesians 2:18 I have direct access to God through the Holy Spirit.
Colossians 1:14 I have been redeemed and forgiven for all my sins.

Preached in Crawley Baptist Church on 28th September by Rev. Ian Phillips.