

Gospel Liberty (i) (Quality: Very good)

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[0 : 0 0] trusting in the Lord's health I shall speak from Paul's epistle to the Galatians chapter 5 and the first verse Paul's epistle to the Galatians chapter 5 and the first verse stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage the subject of this verse the subject of this epistle and indeed the subject of much of what we read earlier in the service is just this simple theme of the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free and I want with the Lord's help to speak a little this afternoon about that precious theme of gospel liberty you may have noticed as we read through chapter 61 in the prophecy of Isaiah not only that the prophet speaks of

Jesus Christ as being the source of all spiritual liberty but he also tells us of some of the wonderful consequences of the blessing that comes to those who are blessed with that power that liberating power that comes from Jesus Christ and we have in the later part of Isaiah 61 a wonderful prospect really of revival now I don't doubt that in many hearts here today this is a great concern we long to see God's work and we long to see it clearly and we long to see it in a far more widespread way than we have we long to know it more fully and deeply in our own hearts and lives and we long to see it in the hearts and lives of others we have been praying many of us and praying for a long time and praying with increasing urgency and earnestness for that time of spiritual blessing and reviving and I might just say in a general way a general comment that there is urgency about this matter particularly in regard to the churches that I'm familiar with because as I travel about the country

I'm conscious and I'm sure your pastor is aware of the same I'm conscious of a very sad and rapidly increasing decline in the churches that we're familiar with in some cases it is really alarming and most distressing and it is things like this quite apart from a deep sense of personal need it is circumstances like this which reinforce that personal sense of the need of a powerful reviving work of God and I believe that one of the evidences of the reviving work of God is in this precious blessing of gospel liberty one of the evidences of spiritual decline one of the evidences of the sad state of believers and of churches is spiritual bondage

I suppose really it would have been a rather obvious way to begin this afternoon to speak about bondage and then contrast that with the precious truth of gospel liberty but in a sense I want to start with what is so clear and so obvious in the text and in the chapters that we read I want to speak straight away about the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free now it's not easy to speak on a subject like this and for some of you it may not be easy to listen to preaching on a subject like this and it will not be easy either to preach or listen if we're not in the enjoyment of the liberty wherewith

Christ hath made us free we may be in the possession of it we may not be in the enjoyment of it and so I hope you'll pray for me as you did in the hymn I hope you'll pray as I try and preach and I hope that you it will be an answer to my prayer I hope that you also will know and enjoy something of this gospel liberty for yourselves and then you'll be able to enter into the theme of this text there's one thing about spiritual bondage and that is that it tends to produce a rather sad reaction to the truth about gospel liberty one of the features which I find intensely sad is when people try and exalt spiritual bondage as though it was the acme of spiritual experience friends spiritual bondage is misery

[6 : 22] I may say more about it later but that will suffice spiritual bondage is misery and some of us know it to our own pain and distress it's something to be dreaded something to be prayed against something to be shunned and gospel liberty is something to be prayed for and longed for and enjoyed and something to be set up according to the gospel and according to the scriptures as being the privilege of God's people and it is something that is to be preached as the gospel is preached let's look back then for a moment in Isaiah 61 we have a remarkable prophecy of the Lord Jesus Christ and I begin there because all gospel liberty centres in the person of Jesus Christ if ever you have known gospel liberty spiritual liberty then it's because you have known

Jesus Christ and the more you know of Jesus Christ in a personal spiritual way the more you will know of this precious liberty now the Lord Jesus Christ was the only person who has ever known perfect and complete and continuous liberty he was always a free man I'll try and expand that in a minute but leave it there the Lord Jesus Christ was the only person who has ever known the complete fullness and the complete blessedness of constant liberty he was perfectly free because he was perfectly bound to his father's will he found perfect freedom in the whole of his life because he was perfectly subject to the will of his father he says or the prophet

Isaiah says of him and speaks words that fell from the saviour's lips centuries later the spirit of the Lord God is upon me because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek he hath sent me to bind up the broken hearted to proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to them that are bound to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord the day of vengeance of our God to comfort all that mourn I know it's not really the text that I've read but you can't really separate the text that I've read from this passage here we have the source of gospel liberty Jesus Christ and only Jesus

Christ has the right to proclaim liberty to the captives all I can do today is preach to you I can in that sense proclaim the truth but it's Christ who comes as it were to the prison door he opens the prison door and he proclaims upon his own authority the fact that there is no longer to be any captivity for you it is he who liberates and sets free and the message of gospel liberty comes on his authority we also notice and we shall have reason to look back at this again later that the spirit of the lord god was upon the saviour and especially in regard to his preaching of liberty and you will find as we look on later into the new testament that it is the person and work of the spirit of the lord god so often associated with the blessing of gospel liberty now i believe that the lord jesus christ is the one through whom we know and receive this precious blessing of liberation and i believe that the lord jesus christ works by the power of his holy spirit so that we have a personal experience of this liberation that then is the foundation of the subject the lord jesus christ anointed by the spirit anointed with the spirit by the father anointed with the spirit without measure having the fullness of the spirit at all times he was sent to bind up the broken hearted to proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to them that are bound now friends let me ask a question about your present state are you enjoying gospel liberty or are you in spiritual bondage and there may be someone here who says well i don't know what you mean i neither understand what you mean by spiritual bondage or what you mean by spiritual liberty so i perhaps ought to begin there i feel that there are people in whose hearts and lives god is beginning to work who don't understand what's happening to them and they are being made to feel an inner spiritual pain which they don't at all understand and simply can't analyse they know that it's not with them as it used to be at one time they could dismiss religion and all that it stood for with comparative indifference they managed to live in such a way that conscience was deadened and their lives were filled with many

different distractions religions and even if they had been brought up in religious homes they were able to keep thoughts of god and of truth very much in the background of their minds they certainly wouldn't understand what was meant either by spiritual bondage or spiritual liberty though the fact of the matter is that they were in terrible bondage but there comes a time when they begin to be aware of the fact that there's something wrong they can't just push away thoughts of god and of truth and of religion as they used to perhaps events take place in their lives or families or circumstances which force upon them the realization that life isn't just like a happy dream there are very serious questions about life and death and eternity to be faced and then it may be that they're becoming aware of a sense of discomfort inwardly that they cannot feel any kind of inner peace that their hearts and minds are troubled at thoughts of god and they are becoming troubled with a feeling of guilt and shame they may have fallen into some particularly evil sin and their shame at first may be the shame of those who don't want to be found out who don't want to be scorned by their friends and acquaintances but that sense of shame has deepened into a feeling that there is something radically wrong with their lives and that deepens to a feeling that they cannot face god they cannot by now of course you see they are convinced that there is a god and they are becoming very deeply convinced that that god is a righteous god and that he does call men and women to account and they are very troubled about the thought of their lives being examined by a god who cannot be deceived who does know the secrets of all hearts and you know friends there is nothing more lowering and painful and distressing than the burden of a guilty conscience a wounded spirit who can bear and so it's as though dark clouds gather around that person and they begin to feel what they have never felt before and that is fear it's not now that they can hide behind the pretense of atheism or agnosticism there is a reality about the being of god and the glory of god and the greatness of god that they can't escape and they simply can't thrust it away from their minds they know there is a god and they know that that god is going to have personal dealings with everyone them included they know that god is just and righteous they may not

[17 : 54] be very well acquainted with the bible god works in the hearts of men and women even when they haven't been very well acquainted with the bible they may only have a smattering of biblical knowledge but there's this deepening sense of need this deepening sense of fear this consciousness that they have no peace of mind they have no peace with god and they feel that god in his being as great and mighty and powerful and god in his character as holy and righteous and true is threatening them they feel that god is against them and they feel there's just cause for god to be against them and so they sink lower and lower into a sense and feeling of what I said they were already in they are now being made aware that they are in bondage that they are in a prison and there's something else that happens very often that is that people in this condition struggle very hard to change their situation just like any man who finds himself in a prison and thinks he could see some way of escaping he tries every possible means to escape and a person you know with a troubled conscience a spirit that's in chains is a person who is struggling to get free and he's trying to find some way out of this feeling of fear and misery and wretchedness but all that he does seems to aggravate the situation and the more he struggles against his sins and the more he tries to find peace of heart and mind the worse the situation seems to get he finds he wants now to change his life he wants to live differently he tries as we say to turn over a new leaf but then he becomes aware of something else that is intensely sad that he can't stop sinning oh people say yes

I can I only have to make my mind up like the drunkard who says oh I'm not a drunkard I can give it up any time like the man who's addicted to tobacco he says oh no it's not an addiction I can give it up any time but he doesn't for the simple reason that he can't it has too strong a hold on him now friends if that's true of drink and tobacco it's far far more true about the whole principle of sin within us a man who says oh yes I can stop sinning is a man who is just deceiving himself and this person I hope it's not an imaginary person I'm talking about I hope this is something real at least to some here becomes aware that they are in the grip of something that is too strong for them the more

I strove against its power the hymn writer says I sinned and stumbled but the more the apostle Paul went through something of the same kind of experience he was alive without the law once that doesn't mean to say he didn't know the law it doesn't mean to say he didn't realize what the law was and what its requirements were because he did and he knew that very distinctly but having looked at the law he had really persuaded himself that the law had no reason to accuse him and condemn him he thought he was free I was alive without the law once but when the commandment came that is when God by his spirit brought the real spiritual requirements of the law home to his conscience when the commandment came and I realized what God did require and began to understand what I really was sin revived and I died when the commandment came sin revived and I died

I realized then I was in the grip of something that I couldn't free myself from you know for people who have been long in the Christian profession and who have managed to produce as it were a respectable outside you can find a great deal of pharisaism when they see a person in this situation struggling in prison in bondage in the grip of evil and sin they can't free themselves from and they start pointing a finger and saying we don't do that sort of thing how awful and they have forgotten it seems at least they have forgotten what God did for them but you know friend

I feel this that a person who is really spiritually exercised is going to be troubled right down to the end of their lives with this awareness of the fact that in themselves they are so utterly weak and that sin is so powerful and strong when I would do good evil is present with me and the good that I would I do not and the evil that I would not that I do oh wretched man that I am you know a person who is exercised like that isn't very quick to point fingers at someone else who is in the same situation the flesh lust is against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh and they're contrary the one to the other so that I cannot do the things that I would someone like that isn't quick to point a finger at a poor struggling soul who feels utterly overwhelmed with the strength of his own sinful inclination Christian church has always been plagued with spiritual

[25 : 28] Pharisees they can point fingers friends if you see someone overwhelmed held in this awful grip this bondage that's what I'm describing I'm describing bondage a person who is in bondage to some besetting sin some addiction some evil in their life why you go alongside and speak from a heart that also knows his own bitterness you'll find that God by his gracious spirit will enable you to encourage and to help that poor struggling soul but now I'm describing a situation he is a person who has become gradually perhaps gradually aware of the pain of spiritual bondage and the more they know of the

Bible and its teaching it seems the worse the situation gets the more they understand the teaching of Jesus Christ in the Sermon on the Mount for instance the more bewildered and confused they become the more they see the spirituality of God's truth and God's law the more burdened and distressed their heart you say well that doesn't sound very encouraging does it no friend and really there's nothing more to be said about it there is no encouragement to be found from that view of things the more we see of God's holy requirements and the deep spiritual requirements of the law of God the more painful and distressed we become now that person is in prison that person is a captive that person is being threatened with the sentence of death that person sees a sentence written against him the soul that sinneth it shall die so you see bondage spiritual bondage has many aspects to it and a sense a personal consciousness of bondage that has many aspects to it we might go further and say that this man or woman or boy or girl whoever it is in this condition is beginning to say to themselves now if God is the

God I believe he is and if God is so great and good and holy and true then I want to love God but I can't love God and then he reads in the word that this is the first commandment that Jesus emphasized that a man loves God and he says but I don't love God I'm frightened of God I believe in God but I don't love God and so he sinks into a greater state of confusion and bondage I can't even do the things I know to be preeminently good I can't do the things positively that I want to do let alone leave the sins that I want to leave I can't love God I want to live a life that is godly but I can't live a life that is godly and that man or that woman may then begin really to bring as it were pressure to bear on themselves they try with a tremendous effort to force themselves into something that all the while they're aware of being unable to do try and be religious try and pray they try and keep up a form of

Christian behavior they may even go to the lengths of trying to join a church trying to keep Christian precepts and be baptized but all the while they're forcing themselves they're still in prison they're still in prison and they're conscious whilst they're forcing themselves that there's a stronger power at work in them that is against all these things they're forcing themselves into things which really inwardly they hate there's such a strange paradox forcing themselves into religious observances which are galling really to their nature they feel all shut up bound up restricted and miserable this is bondage now friends

Jesus comes to proclaim liberty to the captives there's something else this person becomes deeply aware of the fact although they may have tried many many times they realize now they can't atone for their sins they realize that if they could live the rest of their lives in a holy way it wouldn't make any difference to what has already gone in the past they become convinced of this that they need to have past sins forgiven they can't forgive themselves I was talking to a man not so long ago he was a drug addict and he seemed to be really troubled about his condition quite unable to break free and I began to try and tell him about the way of forgiveness and he just turned on me and he said oh you've forgiven yourself he said

[32 : 19] I can't forgive myself I said no I haven't I haven't forgiven myself I believe that God has forgiven me but I haven't forgiven myself we don't forgive ourselves in that sense we can't forgive ourselves but we can believe that God has forgiven us and try as I would I couldn't convey this to him no he felt that what he had done was so evil that he had so sinned against himself and his own body that neither he nor God could forgive him you know friends what an awful state to be in and you can't forgive yourself and you can't believe that God can either and you know friends people like that are people who so deeply need the power of such a savior and I pray that if anyone here this afternoon feels like that they'll know a wonderful power in this precious truth now that

Jesus proclaimed liberty to the captives you're in prison the door is locked and bolted there's no possibility of escape you can't atone for your sins you can't pay for what you've done wrong you can't change your state of mind and heart you can't make yourself holy you've come to the conclusion really that you're an utter failure in every respect and so you are and so am I and Jesus comes and he stands at the door of the prison and he says look I've opened the door he says the door is wide open I am setting you free in fact the gospel says that Jesus is proclaiming liberty already he says you are free the door is open you are free now walk out of the door you're as free as that he proclaims liberty to the captives but you say how can he do that what right is he to do that

I can't do it and I can't think of anyone else who can do it how is it he can do it friends what right has Jesus to proclaim liberty to the captives this is the secret really because you see you can't really and I can't really enjoy liberty unless we are really convinced convinced that it is true liberty unless we are really convinced that this is a liberty which God gives and approves of and we can't enjoy it we must know that this is a liberty which God himself provides and friends it is exactly that the spirit of the Lord God says Jesus is upon me the father is the one who gives the spirit he still is in answer to the prayer of his own dear son

I will pray the father and he shall give you another comforter Jesus said to his disciples it's still the same now here is one Jesus Christ upon whom the father sent the spirit and anointed him to preach good tidings to the meek or the gospel to the poor as we have it in Luke and he has sent me to bind up the broken hearted this prisoner is now a broken hearted prisoner he's come to the end of all his self righteousness he's so utterly miserable that all he can do is lay and weep on the prison floor he's broken hearted he sees no way of escape Jesus says there is and I have provided that way of escape

I am the way the truth and the life and Jesus tells us that this is a liberty which God his father approves of it is real freedom because it is based upon the righteousness of Jesus it's because of what he has done it's Jesus who has suffered in the place of the sinner it's Jesus who has made atonement for sin it's Jesus who has power over sin it's Jesus whose life was perfect and holy it's Jesus who proclaims liberty to the captives friends he has that divine right to proclaim liberty to the captives because his father in heaven approves of everything he has done and vindicates everything that he says no question no question at all about this liberty when

[38 : 21] Jesus stands at your prison door and shows you the door is open when Jesus breaks off the chains from your arms and feet then there's no question is there there's the opening of the prison to them that are bound the proclamation of the acceptable year of the Lord proclamation that all that Jesus has done is acceptable to the father and a proclamation that you a miserable prisoner are now made acceptable to the father this is liberty friends it's the Lord Jesus Christ showing you what he has done telling you that your sins are forgiven telling you that the law can no longer condemn you

Paul knew it after the misery he expressed in chapter seven he tells us that that wasn't all he thanked God that through Jesus Christ his Lord he knew something else and he says there is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus he knew liberty he knew there was no condemnation he knew his sins were all forgiven for Jesus sake friends that that is the preciousness of the liberty of the gospel because it's the work of Jesus Christ and the proclamation of your freedom and liberty comes from the lips of Jesus Christ but now I come to a difficulty because I rather think that some people are like a prisoner who have been so long in the prison so long in the darkness and misery of the prison that even when the door is open and liberty is proclaimed they simply can't believe that it's happened when Paul and Peter and others like that were put in prison and were miraculously liberated almost straight away well there was no question about them going out especially when the angel led them out when you have been in prison for a long time and your eyes as it were have seen nothing but darkness and your hearts know nothing but misery and you've felt nothing but the pain of the chains for so long and you've grown so utterly weak and wretched you may hear that the door is open you may be told that the chains are removed but you lay there so weak you can scarce believe that it is true and I think many when they are brought by God's spirit face to face with the gospel are at first like that they're so utterly broken hearted and so weak and wretched they can't rise as it were to the wonder of this proclamation and they hear the gospel and say well that can't be me that can't be me you may have heard this before but I think it's Matthew

Henry who comments in his commentary about people who want to hear the Lord calling them by their own name and then they believe him why he said if I had someone calling me by my own name I should think it was someone else who had the same name as me you see that they find it so hard to believe that it means me well now what's the secret to that what's the answer to that trouble perhaps there's someone here today who's heard the gospel whose hearts responded to the gospel who believes all that Jesus has done according to the gospel believes that Jesus is the saviour of sinners believes everything in this verse but still lays on the prison floor helpless immovable and the chains have been round their arms so long that even when the chains are taken away it's as though the weight still feels to be there well friend the Lord's not going to leave you there that's one thing I'm sure of the Lord's not going to leave you laying there like that so there are two things that you find associated with the liberty of the gospel and particularly you'll find this in the eighth chapter of the gospel record by

John in verse thirty-two of chapter eight the Lord says ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free the truth shall make you free and this gospel message this proclamation of truth about Jesus Christ and his saving love is going to be so impressed in your heart that you are more and more persuaded of its truth you say well I am persuaded of its truth I'm already persuaded of its truth but what about me the truth shall make you free the truth because it is

God's truth has a peculiar power the gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth the truth is going to make you free now that's the first thing the second thing is that the spirit is always associated with this work the work of the truth the truth concerning Jesus Christ in setting sinners free verse 36 if the son therefore shall make you free ye shall be free indeed and the next thing is this that the word of truth concerning the son concerning the gospel and the holy spirit work together so that there's a response of faith in your heart so you see there's a proclamation there is the power of

[45 : 51] Jesus Christ the authority of Jesus Christ the full proclamation of what Jesus has done there is all the truth which is a powerful word of God the gospel of our salvation and there is the holy spirit at work through the truth and in your heart that's already been so because you believe it's true but now the holy spirit is working with the truth and in your spirit to bring you to that point of believing now you say I believe God's word I believe the truth I believe this message from the lips of Christ I believe that what he says is true and faith moves the heart in a remarkable way faith is like strength flowing into that poor weak broken man on the prison floor and he says yes

I do believe yes I do believe the truth I do believe Christ I do believe what he has done and what he has said I believe I am free and faith rises up and finds that the chains have fallen off it was Wesley who put it like that my chains fell off my soul was free yes friend that's exactly what does happen and there's the man previously certainly helpless and weak now rising up in faith and saying yes I prove the chains are broken I'll walk out through the door because the door is open and that man is graciously drawn out into the outside the liberty out of the prison friends friends this this is the gospel and you find it was exactly the case with the

Galatians the apostle says right at the beginning grace be to you and peace from God the father and from our lord Jesus Christ who gave himself for our sins that he might deliver us from this present evil will according to the will of God and our father and later on in chapter 3 he says this only would I learn of you received ye the spirit by the works of the law or by the hearing of faith by the hearing of faith are you so foolish having begun in the spirit are you now made perfect by the flesh have you suffered so many things in vain if it be yet in vain he therefore that ministereth to you the spirit and worketh miracles among you doeth he it by the works of the law or by the hearing of faith even as

Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness now friends faith is the spiritual response to the proclamation of the gospel faith is the inward response of our hearts to the word of Jesus Christ faith says Lord I believe even thou it has to go on and say help thou mine unbelief faith says Lord I believe and I can't I can't go on really to explain much more about this because you see it's far better experience than described scripture himself he wrong it's something about you must so many ideas about■■■■se happening Your guilty conscience has been taken away because Jesus has borne the burden of your sin.

This is a wonderful epistle, this epistle to the Galatians. It's one in which Paul speaks of the wonderful relief that he knew. I am crucified with Christ.

[50 : 35] Nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me. And the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me. And gave himself for me.

It's believing in our hearts with such inner persuasion that Jesus has borne the penalty. That he has suffered in my place.

That he did all this for the most unworthy. That it is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation. That Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am chief.

I live by the faith of the Son of God. Saying I now believe in my heart that there can be no condemnation.

And friends, there is a sense in which that faith is a venturing faith. It's a faith that ventures upon the reliability of Jesus Christ.

[51 : 42] The reliability of his own word. Your eyes may have become so darkened by the prison for so long. That you're almost afraid of the daylight.

You walk towards the door and you wonder whatever it will be like when you get outside. Friends, I can tell you. It's wonderful when you get outside.

Don't be afraid of the light. The light that you thought would burn as it were into your very spirit and soul. And consume you.

Because our God is a consuming fire. Why friends, that's the very light that warms your heart and spirit. It's the very light that attracts you to God and to Christ.

It's the very light of the gospel that unites your heart to the truth. As it is in Jesus Christ. It's a blessed thing to go outside.

[52 : 46] To get out of that prison house. Out of that bondage. Away from all the fear and misery and doubt. Friends, this.

This is when a soul enters into the liberty of the gospel. When a believer now rejoices in the Lord. He loved me.

And gave himself for me. I still have to leave it. For now. Stand fast.

Oh friends, it's something to stand fast in, isn't it? Stand fast therefore. In the liberty. Wherewith Christ has made us free. And be not entangled again.

With the yoke of bondage. Don't go back into the prison. You've suffered so much misery in that prison. Just see again.

[53 : 45] The preciousness of liberty. And don't go back into the prison. Don't be entangled again. With the yoke of bondage. Don't be saying to yourself.

Well I'm such a sinner. I deserve to be back in the prison. Don't be entangled again. With the yoke of bondage. Stand fast. In the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free.

Amen.