

# True Freedom

‘I wish that every human life might be pure transparent freedom,’ declared the twentieth-century French writer Simone de Beauvoir. Yet what kind of freedom do we need? Is it the same as the kind of freedom that we want? Who is truly free? In a quest to find out where people’s dreams of freedom lay, I undertook a survey of a cross-section of society which posed a single question:

Which of these things would you most like to have freedom from? 1. Money worries, 2. Health worries, 3. Fear, 4. Uncertainty, 5. Death, 6. A mundane life.

The answers were very revealing. Just about everyone opted for material freedom, listing numbers 1, 2 or 6. No-one, it seemed, fancied freedom from fear, uncertainty or death! Or rather, in passing these options by, they avoided the admittance that these things are those that we most need freedom from.

We can strive to attain many kinds of freedom by ourselves and, if we are fortunate, we may be successful in some measure. We may do well in business and conserve our money wisely. We may have access to cures for illnesses which befall us. We may be spared traumatic grief and loss during our lives. We may even construct our own freedom simply from our state of mind and attitude to circumstances, believing as the philosopher Voltaire did that, ‘Man is free at the moment he wishes to be’. Yet one thing is for sure, no-one can forge themselves freedom from that one inevitable event to which we are all slaves, death. Wendy Cope’s poem Leaving sums up the universal human experience:

## Leaving

Next summer? The summer after?  
With luck we’ve a few more years  
Of sunshine and drinking and laughter  
And airports and goodbyes and tears.

Wendy Cope, *Serious Concerns*

Death is waiting in the wings and it may delay its entrance, but only by ‘a few more years’.

We can respond to this in one of two ways. The foolish man, presuming that there is nothing after death, proclaims that all we can do is make our lives have as much meaning as we can until then. The wise man, however, will not accept the inevitability of death lightly, but will consider *why* we are slaves to death. ‘How pointless!’ the foolish man will cry. ‘We’re mortal creatures with a natural end to our lives, no different from a butterfly or an oak tree.’ Yet the wise man will discover that this is not so. There was a time when there was no death. Our first parents, Adam and Eve, were created by God to be immortal, to know nothing of pain, suffering, death or indeed any of the material things we crave freedom from such as toil and need. They were formed ‘in the image of God’ (Gen. 1:27), knew God’s constant presence in the garden and enjoyed perfect communion with him. They did not have to labour for their food and had freedom to partake of anything they wanted, on one condition:

“Of every tree in the garden you may freely eat; 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 surely die.” (Gen. 2:17)

When Adam and Eve disobeyed God, they forfeited this privileged state for themselves and the race which stemmed from them. They knew instant separation from God, hiding ‘themselves from His presence’ (Gen. 3:8), to be told:

Cursed is the ground for your sake;  
In toil you shall eat of it  
All the days of your life....  
Till you return to the ground,  
For out of it you were taken;  
For dust you are,  
And to dust you shall return.  
(Gen. 3: 17-19)

The Bible makes it very clear: ‘The wages of sin is death’ (Romans 6:23). We are not free from death because we are not free from sin, and all our other enslavements (money worries, health worries, the whole list) stem from this!

The foolish man has an objection to this. ‘I am not a slave to sin; I’ve never done anything really bad at all.’ The wise man answers with these questions: ‘Do you enjoy perfect communion with God? Are you blameless in his sight? Do you even acknowledge him as God?’ Unless you can answer yes to these questions (and no-one can), then you are a slave to sin. It is the same for everyone; as it says in the book of Romans: ‘for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God’ (Romans 3:23).

Furthermore, we are powerless to do anything about our sinful state; Adam and Eve lost the free will that had been granted to them by God to choose good or evil and it is the same for us. Most people would agree with Charlotte Brontë’s words in *Jane Eyre*: ‘I am a free human being with an independent will’. However, whilst we are free to make choices and to determine our own actions, in our natural state these choices and actions will always exclude God.

So we are slaves to sin, for we fall short of God’s holy standard and are separated from him, and we have no spiritual free will, for by nature we cannot choose God over what is godless.

But is it possible to be free from sin, and thus obtain every other kind of freedom?

Yes, it is! There is a way, promised from the garden and fulfilled with the birth, life and death of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the midst of the darkness of Adam and Eve’s transgression, the Lord announces his plan of salvation, telling the serpent: ‘I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel’ (Gen. 3:15). This was the first of many prophecies describing the victory of a promised Saviour, born into the human race, over sin and death.

Isaiah, writing approximately 700 years before even the birth of Christ, prophesies the Saviour’s death on the cross and explains its meaning for us:

But he was wounded for our transgressions,  
He was bruised for our iniquities;  
The chastisement for our peace was upon him,  
And by His stripes we are healed.  
All we like sheep have gone astray;  
We have turned, every one, to his own way;  
And the Lord has laid on Him  
The iniquity of us all.

(Isaiah 53:5-6)

The Lord Jesus Christ, fully God and fully man, came to live the life we could not and to die the death we deserve. He tasted not just physical but also spiritual death for his people, descending into the torments of hell before finally rising again. He took the punishment for the sins of all those who believe in him, satisfying the perfect justice of God. His people are thus set free from sin and clothed in the perfect righteousness of Christ.

This freedom is a gift. A person can no more set themselves free from sin than the handcuffed prisoner can loosen his own bonds. The prisoner can, however, look to the mercy of the one who holds the keys. In the same way, we can look to the mercy of God in repentance and belief.

As William Cowper, the eighteenth-century Christian poet and hymn writer said: 'He is the freeman whom the truth makes free, and all else are slaves besides'. Freedom from sin brings with it every other kind of freedom. The believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, born again by the spirit of God, is granted a new outlook on life and death. They are free from fear, for the unknown has been made known. They will suffer worldly concerns but have been freed from their effects, looking to a better, heavenly country. The Lord will be by their side whether they are well or sick, rich or poor. Even if all in this life were to be taken away, as it was for Job, the Christian could echo Job's words: 'For I know that my redeemer lives, and he shall stand at last on the earth,, and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God..' (Job 19:25-26).

Returning to my survey, one reply stood out as being very different from all the rest. It went like this: 'I have freedom from all these things! Thank you for reminding me.' Only a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ could make such a claim and know that it is true. Can you claim this for yourself?

There is a poet with a greater lyrical voice than any earthly writer, who describes the true and eternal freedom granted to who come to the Lord in repentance and faith. It is the voice of God himself:

'Then you shall delight yourself in the Lord; and I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father' (Isaiah 58:14).

'Rise up, my love, 'says the Lord in the Song of Solomon, 'and come away.' See your sin and Christ's sacrifice for sin. Look to Christ in your need and he will set you free. And as one hymn writer said, 'If Jesus makes you free, you shall be free indeed'. Come, ride on the high hills of the earth, for this is true freedom!

*Samantha Jellett, 2005*