

The Freedom of the Gospel Week 2 Freedom from Despair

Ecclesiastes 1

1 The words of the Teacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

2 Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher,
vanity of vanities! All is vanity.

3 What do people gain from all the toil
at which they toil under the sun?

4 A generation goes, and a generation comes,
but the earth remains for ever.

5 The sun rises and the sun goes down,
and hurries to the place where it rises.

6 The wind blows to the south,
and goes round to the north;
round and round goes the wind,
and on its circuits the wind returns.

7 All streams run to the sea,
but the sea is not full;
to the place where the streams flow,
there they continue to flow.

8 All things are wearisome;
more than one can express;
the eye is not satisfied with seeing,
or the ear filled with hearing.

9 What has been is what will be,
and what has been done is what will be done;
there is nothing new under the sun.

10 Is there a thing of which it is said,
'See, this is new'?

It has already been,
in the ages before us.

11 The people of long ago are not remembered,
nor will there be any remembrance
of people yet to come
by those who come after them.

1. When in your life did you feel most free? Is it today or at another time?
2. What do you think it means to be 'free'?
3. Do you resonate with the outlook in Ecclesiastes 1? Are Christians allowed to feel that way?

Romans 8:18-30

¹⁸ I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; ²⁰ for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; ²³ and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

²⁶ Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. ²⁷ And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

²⁸ We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

4. Read our Romans 8 passage to yourself. What reasons for hope does Paul identify in this passage?

2 Corinthians 4: 7-11

⁷ But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. ⁸ We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰ always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. ¹¹ For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh.

5. Read our passage from 2 Corinthians. What do you think Paul is saying?
6. Activity: right down some of the things that you feel trapped or weighed down or imprisoned in right now. Pray over these, and then right down what Jesus wants to say to you about them. Then write down some of the ways in which he has or wants to free you from them.