

# Sermon for Online Service: Pott Shrigley 12<sup>th</sup> July 2020.

Rev David Swales

Romans 8:12-25. *The glorious liberty of the children of God*

Last week I spoke about 'Freedom in Christ'. If you recall, I referred especially to being set free from the burdens of expectation, requirements, and pressures which others may try to load onto us. And I ended my sermon with a phrase which appears in our reading today; *The glorious liberty of the children of God.*

These words were written by St Paul to Christians living in Rome. So imagine, if you will, a well-to-do Roman household back in those days. There's the master and mistress of the house: and there's the rest of the family; aged parents, maybe, but also children; daughters – and the sons who will one day inherit their father's wealth and status.

But there is also another group: slaves. In law this group is not a group of people, but rather of objects, the possessions of their owners. They may be fortunate and be treated well, or they may be treated appallingly badly, but either way they have no ability to make their own choices, no recourse to justice, no pay, no time to call their own, no rights, no freedom – and no hope that things will ever change. Slavery, whether in the ancient world, in more recent history, or in the present day, is a terrible, terrible condition.

So, when Paul says *The Spirit you received does not make you slaves... rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship*, his words would paint the picture of a household slave being somehow promoted – indeed, adopted – to be a child of the family; to be nothing less than a full heir of the father: .... *if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ.*

This scenario would be far-fetched, even shocking, to Paul's Roman readers. And yet, says Paul, this is exactly what happens to us when we put our faith in Christ. We are adopted into the Father's family. No longer slaves, we are set free as sons and daughters of God. Our old masters, who kept us enslaved, have no power over us: worry about tomorrow, bad habits and attitudes of mind, addictions, guilt and shame for the things we have done wrong, even death itself; in Christ we are set free from all of these things. That is God's promise, his guarantee in Christ – even if it sounds as implausible as that idea of a slave being adopted would have sounded to Paul's Roman readers.

One reason it might sound implausible to you is because our day to day experience is that we are *not* yet free of those things: the bad habit or attitude we can never quite shake off, the worry which still plagues us, the temptations to which we still give in. But that's where that 'guarantee' of God's Holy Spirit comes in. Paul says, *And by the Spirit we cry, 'Abba, Father.'* *The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.* As far as God is concerned, our freedom is a reality *now*: and, although we won't experience it in all its fullness in this life, day by day we will discover it, grow into it, and, by faith, know it to be true. That's why Paul, who has just described our adoption as an established fact, can in the next breath speak of it as something which still lies ahead for us:

*We, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.*

*Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.*

So, freedom from slavery, and adoption into God's family. A breathtaking promise. But there is something else in this passage which is equally breathtaking, equally startling. Paul tells us that this promise of freedom is extended to the **whole created order**:

*We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. And he speaks of the hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious liberty of the children of God.*

Now, if your mind wasn't boggled before, it surely is now! I can hardly begin to get my own mind around what this means! And yet, I can see that it makes perfect sense: I can see that, in breaking our relationship with our creator, we have caused a dislocation in the whole created order; I can see that, when we see a world which is so perfectly created, so astounding, beautiful and intricate, and yet so damaged and frightening, these words of Paul ring true. I and can see how wonderful it is that the hope of freedom is extended not just to you and me, but to God's creation.

I can also see that it means, of course, that I should care about and care for God's creation too.

This promise of freedom – for me, for you, for our created world – is the reality within which the Christian lives, guided, directed, driven, no longer by those old slave-masters, but by God's Spirit:

*Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation – but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it.*

*For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.*

*For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.*