

A Way Out

"WE'RE caught in a trap," sang Elvis Presley, "I can't walk out". Whilst we may not consider 1960s rock and roll to be a source of wisdom, the songwriter did capture a feeling many of us have shared.

We can feel caught in many ways; in a boring conversation, in an uncomfortable situation, or in a job we dislike.

There are many other more serious forms of captivity too. Some are stuck in poverty with no apparent way out. In some countries, people are in prison because of their beliefs. Slavery has existed for thousands of years, and today there are estimated to be up to 70 million slaves in the world. This is known as 'Modern Slavery'.



The Bible speaks a lot about captivity and freedom, and Jesus used these words, quoted from Isaiah, to describe his mission:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed (Luke 4:18–19).

Slaves to Sin

In Romans chapter 6, the writer (Paul) describes the natural state of men and women as being in slavery to sin.

Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered (Romans 6:16–17).

The Apostle Paul is referring to the direct connection between sin (disobedience to God) and death. He has explained this already in the previous chapter, showing that it is the case from Adam onwards:

Just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned (Romans 5:12).

We all disobey God to a lesser or greater extent, and so we all die. This would be terrible news if there were no means to be freed from the cycle of sin and death, but we have already seen Paul allude to a way out. Through the work of Jesus Christ, we can be freed from this slavery and work instead for God.

Having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness... Now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life (Romans 6:18, 22).

The idea is summed up splendidly in the final verse of this chapter:

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (v23).

Freedom at a Price

This offer of freedom came at a price. To break the cycle of sin and death required a perfect sacrifice – which was made when Jesus died on the cross. He is the only person who has ever managed to live without sinning, and so he did not deserve to die. Yet God, in His love, provided Jesus to save us from the slavemaster Sin. Jesus showed wonderful love for us and obedience to his Father in submitting to the ordeal.

For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly... God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath

through him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by his life (Romans 5:6–10).

Seizing the Opportunity

This is what lies behind those famous words:

God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

Here he explained that he was sent by God, in demonstration of the Father's love, to save men and women and to offer them eternal life.

But notice that the offer is qualified: He can and will save only those who believe in Him and His Son. We show this faith through obedience, starting with being baptised:

He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned (Mark 16:16).

Jesus was very clear in his teaching. To be saved, we must believe and be baptised; there is no other way.

I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me (John 14:6).

We then begin a new life, one that is God-centred and follows the example of Jesus. In this new life we serve a loving, kind and forgiving God, who wants us to be in His Kingdom.