

Freedom

The message about Jesus is a message about freedom. It is a message about being set free from all the chains and things that hold you back or drag you down. This is a message of liberty. It is the kind of freedom that people long for, but never achieve without Jesus in their life.

Old Testament

Let's look at the Old Testament way of doing things... The Old Testament was a set of rules and ways of doing things in order to please God. Have you ever looked through books like Leviticus, Deuteronomy and even Exodus? In some places, these books are full of rules and laws that people had to obey to be made right, and to be made right with God.

Let's look at a few examples and see if you fancy following these rules!

If you touch the carcass of an animal, you are unclean until evening and have to wash your clothes: Leviticus 11.39-40, *"If an animal that you are allowed to eat dies, anyone who touches the carcass will be unclean till evening. Anyone who eats some of the carcass must wash his clothes, and he will be unclean till evening. Anyone who picks up the carcass must wash his clothes, and he will be unclean till evening."*

If your house has mildew, your house had to be torn down: Leviticus 14.43-48, *"If the mildew reappears in the house after the stones have been torn out and the house scraped and plastered, the priest is to go and examine it and, if the mildew has spread in the house, it is a destructive mildew; the house is unclean. It must be torn down—its stones, timbers and all the plaster—and taken out of the town to an unclean place."*

If you don't bring your sacrifice to the Tent of Meeting, you're cut off from your people: Leviticus 17.8-9, *"Any Israelite or any alien living among them who offers a burnt offering or sacrifice and does not bring it to the entrance to the Tent of Meeting to sacrifice it to the LORD -that man must be cut off from his people."*

If you curse your parents, you're put to death: Leviticus 20.9, *"If anyone curses his father or mother, he must be put to death. He has cursed his father or his mother, and his blood will be on his own head."*

The chains of this world

The world is like the Old Testament laws – the world wants to make peace, make things right by laws. In the UK, it is estimated that there are 3500 classes of criminal law. A 'class' means there are loads more offences within that class! And this is just criminal law.

There are many other areas of law – tort (including negligence) law, contract law, trust law etc – all with thousands of laws within them. Then the Courts can make law to build on the written (statutory) law, when they are called to interpret the law in difficult cases. There are ‘statutory instruments’ as well as law made by Parliament. Then we unfortunately have the European Union who also love to make laws for those in the EU – more thousands of rules and guidelines. Another estimate has said that there are 4.2 million CCTV cameras in the UK. The Labour government in the UK (by the year 2010) had introduced over 3000 laws during its term of office.

Wherever we look, we find people making laws, rules, regulations. The belief is that we will protect ourselves and make our nations a better place if we have more rules and tighten guidelines up to make sure people are doing what they should do. Of course, these things aren’t wrong in themselves. In fact, the Bible tells us that we have all sinned and fallen short of God’s standards. And it is because of this, that God sent Jesus. On our own, we can’t do things right. We live in a fallen world, a world where things decay and go wrong. If you buy something new, it gradually fails and goes wrong. Your body wears away over time.

Theodore Roosevelt once said, “If I must choose between righteousness and peace, I choose righteousness.” He had the right idea..

The Bible says this in Romans 14.17, “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”

Everything in the Bible is there for a reason. Notice how the Bible order of words – righteousness, peace, joy. This is for a very good reason. Without ‘righteousness’, there can never be peace or joy. The world is desperate for peace. The UN was set up to bring peace (but there have been more wars in the time of the UN than at any other time in history). Why? Because people try to bring peace through rules and doing things. But they are missing the key – righteousness (being made right with God). This only comes through Jesus.

The New King James Bible has Luke 2.14 saying, “*Glory to God in the highest. And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!*” Notice again the order of the words. First, there is glory to God in the highest, then there is peace on earth and good will between mankind. There can be no peace without God being put first, made first in our lives. Why? Because following rules failed in the Old Testament and it fails today. Only when Jesus is in our hearts and our hearts are changed to be like Jesus, can there ever be change.

What Jesus brings

This is what Jesus said in Luke 4.17-19, “The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.”

What a statement from Jesus! If you think into it, this is an incredible statement. Jesus came to speak good news to those in poverty; he was sent to proclaim freedom for prisoners; Jesus came to bring sight to the blind physically and spiritually; he came to release those who were oppressed (being weighted down); to shout about God's favour to mankind.

The lies of the evil one have twisted the truth about Jesus. In the media, he is presented as a hippy wearing a white robe, wafting his hair around like in a shampoo advert. Vicars are always seen as being wimps, unscrupulous, pathetic or gay. The church is seen as a religious place where inadequate people do strange and pointless things, or a greedy place after your money, or somewhere where children are not looked after. Some of this may happen.

But the truth is that the picture of Jesus in Revelation is of a warrior on a horse, with a sword coming out of his mouth.

Revelation 1.15-17, "His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. 16In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last."

Doesn't sound like a wimp to me... In fact, Jesus is to be feared.

The church is a place of life, of change, of motion, of transformation. The church is the main way Jesus works to show his love, power and message of hope. The church is relevant, changing lives. It is a mighty army, a place of healing and change. It is a place of training, opportunity, community. Being a Christian is increasingly not something for wimps. In fact it is being like everyone else that is the wimpy way out. Being a Christian is exciting but tough. It is the life for action men and action women.

You see, everything the world is looking for is found in Jesus. When you look around you, people are in poverty, they are prisoners to conditions and mindsets that hold them back, they are spiritually blind, in need of healing, weighed down and in need of favour, acceptance and love. This is what Jesus came to give – and best of all, it's a free gift that just needs to be received when people say yes to Jesus. The world doesn't know it, as the evil one has blinded people's eyes – but what the world needs is Jesus.

Conclusion

Jesus is the opposite of the world's ways of doing things. In order to make things right, mankind has rules, laws and ways of doing things. These do the exact opposite of bringing freedom – it brings restriction and barriers. Sometimes these are good, but they can never be permanent. The incredible message of Jesus is that he alone can bring freedom, the freedom that people crave with all their hearts.

In our world, we are becoming less free as man's sin means more laws, rules and cameras. Over time, mankind will become more and more imprisoned within narrow limits and confines as man destroys his own freedom with his own attempts to 'be free.' This is not liberation, it is oppression.

People are free to drink and then be violent – but laws come in to limit drinking and criminal offences for violence. But still people drink and are violent, with more and more people being put in prison. Why? Because we can never be free on our own efforts.

It is Jesus alone who sets people free. If you want to be truly free and liberated to be the person you really are, to do all you were made to do, to go where you were made to go and to live the life you were made to live – then ask Jesus to be in charge (fully in charge) of your whole life. Give up everything to Jesus, ask him to be the one in charge of every part of you. Say sorry for all that you have done that is wrong. Put it down, turn away from it and ask Jesus into your heart and life. Now ask him to change you to be more like him and to give you the life he made you for. It may take time, but never give up. He will never let you down. Just put one foot in front of the other, keep doing what he puts in your heart. Get into a great church, let people know you're a Christian and get a Bible and read it every day. What is God's will for your life? His Word is his will for your life so as you get to know that, you get to know him and his will for your life. God will work his ways through you and you will be changed on the inside completely over time. Jesus will set you free.