

Break Free! - 1 John 5:18-21 – (1 Feb 15)

Today we are continuing and really finishing up on the book of 1 John and we come to the very last sermon in this series. It's been many months through this book and we thank God for His Word. And it's time in a sense, for us to say goodbye to Apostle John. But before he goes and before he leaves, he's going to give us important words in verses 18 to 21.

We owe a lot to John for the understanding of salvation; for the understanding of eternal life. He has taught us a lot that Christians do not just possess physical life or psychological life, but we also have spiritual life. The Greek word that is used is the word 'Zoe'. This is the life with God; this is the life from God. And really 1 John tells us about this real life from God, this 'Zoe' - how this life when it enters us, it really changes us from the inside out, that there will be a genuine love for God. We previously hated God. We previously would run away from God but because of Jesus, because of the 'Zoe' found in him, now we love God; now we love brethren; now we hate sin; now we have true victory over the world; now we have answered prayers. All that because of the real life found in Jesus Christ.

But today as we come to the end we are reminded that John gives us these closing words. Today's sermon is very short; it's not difficult because these words here are plain and straightforward. But let me read these words to you. John says, "We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him. We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols." (1 John 5:18-21 ESV)

So I think these are very simple, straightforward words, really. But one phrase that captures my attention in these 4 verses is right in the middle where he says, "We know that we are from God and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one." I'm reminded today, that those who belong to Jesus, those who have 'Zoe' are those who have escaped the clutches of the evil one. See, the Bible has a very prominent theme running from Genesis all the way to Revelation. The theme is this: God created this world; this world is supposed to be His kingdom. But after Adam and Eve were attempted by Satan, they sinned against God. The Bible says sin penetrated the world; it totally corrupted this whole world. And now, this world that supposedly was God is now the devil's. The devil now rules this world. That's why Jesus says pray. Pray what? Thy kingdom come, because it's really not God's kingdom at this stage; it's Satan's kingdom.

But Jesus is here to usher in again God's kingdom. First of all in the hearts of those who believe in him. So here we are told, we know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. We are a people rescued from the clutches of Satan. Now the Bible tells us Satan is an extremely powerful foe. In John, he's called the ruler of this world; he rules this world. In the book of Ephesians, he's called the Prince of the Power of the Air; he rules the heavenly places here. And then in 2 Corinthians, he's called the god of this world. These are strong words because he really is the one in charge right now. Now, we are not in a sense, minimising the sovereignty of God in any way. God is allowing it for this point of time, but he really rules the world and those who believe in Jesus are those who have clean escape from Satan.

So today, I'd like us to consider what it means to really break free. See, those who have 'Zoe', those who have eternal life are people who have in a sense, broken free from Satan's schemes, ploys and clutches. And that's what we are going to consider today.

Many of you would be familiar with this movie or this story...this series called 'Chronicles of Narnia'. In the first instalment, CS Lewis wrote about 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe'. It's a very strange title but that's the story. And in 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe', Narnia is in perpetual winter. It's always Christmas; it's always winter. It's cold; it's dreary; it's lifeless in a sense. Things are not what it is supposed to be because Narnia was not created to be perpetual winter. But right now it is, because someone is in charge when she shouldn't really be. She has usurped the throne of the true King and she is the queen of Narnia. She is the witch - the white witch. And she has deceived the inhabitants of Narnia. She has beguiled them, seduced them and if you watch the movie or you read the books, the palace - her palace would be decorated with the stone statues of those who have believed in her. She has cast a spell upon this entire land and that's why it's always winter. Narnia is not what it should be. It has been seduced; it has been beguiled; it has been led to a cold winter.

And the Bible here tells us, this world lies in the power of the evil one. This world we live in; the world that you see and the world we can't see. This whole world is in a sense, not what it should be, because this world was not created to be in sin and darkness. But it is right now; it is in the power of the evil one - Satan himself. I believe CS Lewis who wrote 'The Chronicles of Narnia', at least in the first instalment is picturing this world as that described in the Bible. It's not what it should be; it's in the power of Satan.

And this phrase, or in this sentence, the word 'lies' is very interesting. The world 'lies' means to really be cradled. Now, if you have a baby, you want the baby to fall asleep, what you do is you rock the baby; you cradled the baby. And look at this! The Bible is saying, this whole world is 'cradled' in the power of the evil one. This world is deceiving you; it's lulling you to sleep with its lullaby. Satan is saying, "It's fine. It's nice. This world is perfect for you. Just

sleep on, sleep on..." Till you eventually fall away from God and is damned into everlasting fire. "Just sleep on," the devil says to you.

So the idea, the Bible gives to us is...is that the world is not really struggling against the devil. The world is not really saying, "Oh, let me get out of this world! I need to believe in God!" No! The world is very happily living in the lies the devil spins. There's no struggle. People don't say to you, "I really need to know God." People in general don't say, "I really need to get out of sin!" No! They are happy in their sin; they are happy running away from God; they are happy saying that the Bible is not true; they are happy to say who is to say that Christianity is the only religion, is the only way to God? We don't have time to investigate all this, so it's okay, just live your life for the here and now. Nobody cares, nobody's disturbed. It's fine if this world is evil and sinful. It's okay if it's winter because the white witch has cast a spell on humanity. 0:08:41.2

I think about Samson and Delilah. You know, the Samson - the handsome hunk? The manhunt winner and how he lies on the lap of Delilah. Delilah must have been quite a beauty, but he was absolutely smitten by her. He lies on her lap and Delilah strokes his hair, "Oh, Samson, you're so handsome! Your hair is so nice. 'Head and Shoulders' (referring to brand of a shampoo)....and you have such big muscles. Oh! Samson, Samson you're the champion of Israel! Samson, Samson, can you tell me what is your secret? Why are you so...macho? Why are you so strong?" Samson absolutely was beguiled by Delilah. I mean, he was lying on the laps of his enemy and he doesn't even know it. He's just happy sleeping there, lulled to complacency. Delilah is like the black widow spiders; she's like the Venus fly trap. You just get nearer and nearer and she absolutely devours you. But Samson has no clue because that's the way, the devil works!

He doesn't come to you "Rraahh! I'm the devil, you better run to God!" No, he doesn't! He tells you, "Life is good. Enjoy yourself. Look at Singapore! Such a nice country! Look at that job! You can get a good job; you can buy that Ferrari; you can stay in this nice condo; your life is made; you have a good family. This is what you should live for." "Don't bother about what church is saying! Don't bother what the Bible has to say! How is it that you can know the Bible is God's words? Maybe it's not God's word?" he says to you. So don't bother! You want to share with them about the Gospel, about Jesus, he says, "No, no, no! I don't have time. If I really want to explore Christianity, I must also explore Islam, and Taoism, and Buddhism. I need to explore all religions before I can come to Christianity. So let me fall asleep, don't bother me." Now, these are the things the world talks about...happily. They postpone God. They don't want to talk about God. They don't want to hear you tell them anything about the Bible. Why? "Because the god of this world," the Bible says, "has blinded them."

Really, the God of this world has blinded us, in our lives before, all of us! If you believe in Jesus today, you must have been in your life been blinded before as well. And we were happily cradled and stroked and caressed by Delilah, by Satan. That's where we live. But this is such a passage of hope, of salvation, of joy, because it's not that every man is left in the world or left in the power of the evil one. There are those who are from God, those who have been saved by God. What happens is that we know that the Son of God has come. This is the glorious message of the Bible, not that man has reached God, no man can reach God! But this is the good news that the Son of God has come! This is the glory of the Christian message: that God sent His Son, to save us from the devil.

How does he do it? We see right here that He has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. This verse presumes that you cannot know the true God until He comes into your life. Unless God works in your heart, there is no way we can come to God. "There is no fear of God before their eyes," Romans tells us. "There is none that seeks after him," the Bible tells us. But God's son came so that we may have this understanding. So that we...the spell cast by the witch in this world is now broken in our hearts and now we awake and we realise, "Hey! The world is not what it should be! My life is not what it should be! I should know God and that is the God of the Bible!" 0:12:54.0

That's why the Bible tells us that the Christian is someone who has the mind of Christ. (1 Corinthians 2:14, 16 ESV) This is an amazing miracle. Coming to Jesus, having 'Zoe', becoming a child of God is not just an intellectual agreeing and so on, there's a real change in you so that your mind is now changed. You have the mind of Christ! Now, the rest of the world don't; they are the natural man. He has no change in his heart; no change in his mind. And when a man doesn't come to know God, he will not accept the things of the Spirit of God. You tell him the Bible, they are a folly to him. They may be very, very intelligent. Stephen Hawking probably is very, very intelligent. But to him, the Bible is folly. The wisdom of God is seen by men to be folly because he cannot understand them. Because these things of the Bible are to be spiritually discerned or understood, and only those who has the mind of Christ has the understanding.

So when people go churches, they hear sermons and they keep falling asleep, I can't understand this. Either the pastor is boring, that can be very true. Or maybe you have never really had the mind of Christ. See, the Bible says, "You have been anointed by the Holy one, and you all have knowledge." (1 John 2:20 ESV) You all have knowledge! The child of God knows something that the world doesn't know. He may have failed his PSLE or 'O' Levels, that doesn't matter. He knows God. The PhD student, the professor may have studied all the books in the world but he doesn't know God. Because it's all dependent on the Son of Man giving us understanding. And when he gives us understanding, we awake and we say, "Hey! Why am I living in the arms of the evil one? I've got to run!" And then he runs. He knows

Him who is true. He flees from the devil. And not only is he given sight, he's also given life. He's given life here when he says, "We are in Him." That's this real connection between the Christian and Christ. He is the true God! This is a beautiful profession of the deity of Jesus Christ.

There are people today, false teachings that swirl around saying, Jesus is the only man; Jesus is not God. Well the Bible here, John tells us, "He is the true God and eternal life." And when a Christian is deeply connected with Jesus, not only is he given understanding, he's given life to escape, to run. And now his life really changes. A Christian is not just someone who comes to church; a Christian is not just someone who says, "I believe" and raises his hands; a Christian is someone who has understanding and his life really starts to be different. You say how? Okay, I'll show you that in a while.

But this is what Jesus did. Jesus is able to change a life because Jesus defeats the devil. Look at John 12, he says, "Now is the judgment of this world..." What world? A world plunged in sin; a world in darkness; the world that is cradled in the power of Satan. "Now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men or people to myself." (John 12:31-32 ESV) 0:16:38.1

The death of Jesus Christ on the cross is the death blow dealt to Satan's head. The ruler of this world, Satan is cast out. We see again, in Galatians, it is "...the Lord Jesus Christ, who...would deliver us from the present evil age..." (Galatians 1:3-4 ESV) Like I've said, a very strong theme throughout the Bible from Genesis to Revelation is the reclaiming of the kingdom back to God. And this is what Jesus came to do; He gave himself to deliver us. "He delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son..." (Colossians 1:13-14 ESV) Colossians 1 and then in Colossians 2, "He disarmed the rulers and authorities..." (Colossians 2:15 ESV) Hebrews 2:14, "...that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil."

Interestingly for 'The Chronicles of Narnia', the true King is not the witch. The witch is only to be defeated by the death of the true King and we'll see that in a while. And this is what Jesus did: "...through death, He destroys the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil." (Hebrews 2:14 ESV) and "...the Son of God appeared to destroy the works of the devil." (1 John 3:8 ESV) So if you really come to know Jesus, you have understanding. I've shared that many times and you also have a real change of life. The works of the devil is to lead you to sin. And if you have connection with Jesus, if you are living in him, then it makes sense that John tells us everyone who has been born of God will not keep on sinning. Makes sense! Because Jesus came to save us from the works of darkness; He came so that we would change; He came so that we will not continuing... continue to live in the same sinful life.

Let me qualify that this does not mean that a Christian is now perfect. Remember right from the beginning, 1 John, we say that the man who has real life is not aiming for sinless perfection or rather he should aim for that but he'd never attain to sinless perfection but he should have sincere progression. He will not keep on sinning. He will not be sinless but he will sin less. Why? Because Jesus is in his life. 0:19:04.0

So God's salvation, our hero - Jesus, He came to give us sight; He came to give us life and now He tells us, "...he who was born of God protects him." This is a very unique phrase, (mentioned) only one time in the Bible and I believe it refers to Jesus Himself. Jesus is born of God, not born of man. He's born of God and Jesus protects us. He is the one who keeps us from the clutches of the evil one.

When I go out with my sons, we walk by the roadside; we go by rivers, seas and there are times where it's a little bit unstable. There are times when it's a bit more dangerous, I would have to hold his hands. But sometimes my son doesn't like me to hold his hands; he likes to hold my hand instead. You know how...I don't know whether you hold your kid's hands but he doesn't like me to hold him. He wants to hold me instead. Now which one do you think is a better choice? Of course, the father holding the son's hand because when he holds me, it may not be strong enough. And if we...if he does go into a slope and falls down, he might loosen his grip. But I know that when I hold him, I will not loosen my grip.

It's so encouraging here that my faith, my walk with God...now, there are other passages in the Bible that talks about how we need to persevere and keep ourselves in the faith but this is such an assuring passage that reveals to us the other aspect. That Jesus is the one who keeps us, who protects us and guards us. And because He guards us, the evil one does not touch Him. I think about a Cantonese phrase, "Mo Yuk Hui ah!" (Cantonese dialect meaning don't touch him) (laughter in the congregation). Don't touch me ah! "Mo Yuk ah!" The 'touch' here is not just...just touch as in we imagine that Satan would never tempt us or never harass us or never scare us. No! Satan will still continue to harass us. Satan may successfully tempt us to sin. It is possible but this 'touch' here is a deeper, stronger touch, not just touching as in contact but laying hold, having a grip of. So Satan can tempt us, he can sift us like wheat, like what he did to Peter. But he will not ultimately have victory over us. He cannot bring us back to where we were before. He cannot extinguish the 'Zoe' that is burning in our hearts. He can't. Why? Because it is God who protects us. 0:21:48.1

So, in 'The Chronicles of Narnia', the real King of Narnia will return. His name is Aslan. The Lion King, and Aslan will lay down his life and die, and through his death he would deliver Narnia from the curse and the spell of the white witch. And things returned to what it was before. There's something in all of us that enjoys a good hero story, right? A good salvation story...wah we love this...wah...want to die...want to die and then wow, suddenly got saved!

We love stories like that, whether it's movies or novels, you love that! Because deep in our hearts, humanity longs for salvation. You may not admit it but deep in your heart, you long for someone to save you. You may not be very clear what to be saved from, but the Bible says God is our Saviour; Jesus is our hero, to save us from our sins. This is the grand story of the Bible. This is my story, this is my song, blessed assurance, Jesus is mine. Jesus is our 'Aslan' who laid down His life to save us.

Now, our 'Aslan' saves us from blindness, from bondage, He secures us forever. But something about what God does for us is, after he saved us, he does not bring us straight to heaven. We wish it would be that case, isn't it? I mean I just wish, sometime if I'm saved, I know God, eh, why can't I go straight to heaven? I mean I am sinning and stumbling on this earth here. Well, I think God leaves us in this world for a very clear purpose. To shine the Gospel, to be witnesses to bring the message of life to others who may not know Jesus as yet. But the problem is this, when He leaves us in this world, we are still in Satan's kingdom. Now we are God's people living in Satan's kingdom and you can be sure, the devil is not going to make it easy for you. He's going to hunt after you; he's going to...he's going to try to grab you and to bring you back to his kingdom. And that's why when we look at the concept of breaking free, yes, there is a seduction; yes, there is a salvation but there is also an area that you have to be careful of. An area of sanctification in your life.

Satan will be out to bring you back. And therefore, John ends...this is the very last statement in his letter, it seems so out of context, it seems so incongruent to some people but really it's not, if you think about it. You have broken free. Yes, you belong to God but you are still in Satan's kingdom. He's still going to come and tempt and lure you. So Christians, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols." Now I'm not saying you can't watch American Idols. The idols here can be a metallic thing, object; can be BMW, Mercedes. But really, an idol is anything that takes the place of God in your heart. And John says, now that you have clean escape Satan's clutches, but though...and that you are now living in his world still, be careful, keep yourself from idols. Don't let these idols come into your lives.

See, Satan is on the prowl. He's not letting us go easily. The Bible regularly talks about how he is out to devour us (1 Peter 5:8 ESV). And by the way, this is not talking about devouring an unsaved person; it's talking about devouring a saved person. He's desperately trying to trip Christians up. That's what he's always doing. We are told that we wrestle against satanic forces (Ephesians 6:12 ESV). That's our battle. It's not a holiday here on this earth because you are living in Satan's kingdom.

And what Satan really wants to do, is that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning...Satan deceived Eve by his...his schemes and lies, he wants to do this to you. He wants your thoughts to be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. He doesn't want you to

love Jesus; he doesn't want you to live for Jesus. And one of the best things he can do to lure you away from Jesus, is to give you idols. To give you counterfeit gods, to give you things that you so loved, you so depend, you so enjoy that you say, "This is now my real God! I don't need the Jehovah God! I have this car, it makes me happy! I have this house, it makes me happy! I have my child, it makes me happy! I don't need God."

By the way, we always think of idols as bad things. Orr...like in the Bible it talks about this statue that looks like a bull or statue that looks like a cow. Eek! Those are bad things! I won't fall for such idolatry temptations. But do you realise that idols need not be bad things? In fact someone says, "We look at idols as bad things but generally what happens is you take a good thing and make it an ultimate thing." That's what idols is all about. It's a good thing. Your job is a good job but your job can become your idol; your son is...is a blessing from God but it can become your idol; your ministry is a great thing but even your ministry can become an idol.

Idolatry is making a good thing the ultimate thing that it replaces God in your heart. This is what you live for; this is what you enjoy; this is what your heart beats for. Satan is a master at throwing idols into your life. Satan is a master of presenting idols before you every single day. You know that? Every day that's what he's doing. To present to you idols so that you may receive it into your life and be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Jesus. That's why John says, "Little children keep yourselves...", protect yourself. The idea...the word 'keep' here is to guard, is to protect. It reminds me of the youth. Our youth, when they have youth camp, they play 'Candle Fight'. Have you seen them do 'Candle Fight'? It's crazy! They all walk around with this candle that is lit and their objective is to preserve their light, but try to burn the ropes of their king, or the kingdom of the other side. So they hide, they pfff...pfff (blowing sound). That's what they do, they protect their light. And there are people who will also protect their light. They guard it with their lives.

I think of a goalkeeper who is standing guard of his goal. He doesn't allow any ball to go pass him. That's the idea here of keeping, protecting, guarding. Don't let the idols come. They are all around us but don't let it come in, and the tense here is to keep...or continue to keep yourself because the idols are going to flood your life all the time. There's only one person who can keep you away from idols. It's yourself, by the help of God, you're to keep yourself from idols.

Luther, it was him who said that, "We don't break the 10 commandments until we've break the first commandment." And you say, "What's the first commandment?" Thou shalt have no other gods before me. But when we break the first commandment, when we have idols in our lives, that's why we will start to lie; we have adultery; we lust; we hate because your source of life is no more God, something else and Satan has successfully led you astray from Jesus.

My friends, I want to close by saying, “Do you have idols today in your heart?” You say, “How do I know what are my idols?” Trace your heart. Trace where your heart goes today. You may be sitting here listening to the sermon but you are thinking about your...your property buy. Wah... what if later I must go and call my dealer or I’ve been searching and you are thinking about your house. You are thinking about your Mercedes. Wah...new one...shiny, you...you...very blinding, very nice car...you’re thinking about your Mercedes. You’re thinking about your bag; you’re thinking about your child; you’re thinking about his results; you’re thinking about your promotion and all those things dominate you.

Where does your heart go to, most of the time? What will absolutely devastate you? If you lose it? That shows you, your functional source of life. My friends, if there are idols in your heart today, I’d like to give you some time later on, but you’ve got to be honest with God. You’ve got to realise that this is all a deception, all a lie. God wants the best for you but the devil regularly tempts you. Stop sleeping on Delilah’s lap. Stop allowing her to caress your head and shoulders, hair and muscles and tempt you to fall away from Him. Cry out to God, to ask for grace that you would truly repent; you would smash the idols; you would share it with your brothers and sisters in Christ that they may pray with you and let God's love once again fill your heart.

As what we have looked at before, let the expulsive power of a new affection drive the idols from your life. Let Jesus be supreme. As what Isaac Watts would have said, “All the vain things that charm me most, I sacrifice them to his blood.” What is it that allows this writer to say, “I’m going to give up the idols in my life that so appeal to me?” I remember the love of God, when Jesus shed his blood for me. As we close the book of 1 John, the Apostle of Love reminds us of the love that is found in Jesus Christ. While we were yet sinners, whilst we were in the clutches of the evil one, the Son of God came and gave us understanding in life. Would you today give up the idols, that you would live for Jesus alone? Let's bow for a word of prayer together. 0:32:50.9

My friends, this morning it’s a short message but I like to give you time for meditation and contemplation because it’s no point hearing about these words, but you're still allowing yourself to hide these idols in your heart. Like Achan, who took from what he shouldn't have taken. He hid it and the whole of Israel suffered together with him. Maybe your life today is suffering because idols are in your life. It might be something, it might be someone. If God has spoken to you today, would you cry out to him right now? And say, “Dear God, help me smashed these idols away. Fill me with your love that I will know how much you love me; that when I know how much you love me, I let go of these things happily and willingly. Give me a pure and sincere devotion to you.” Would that be your prayer right here, right now?

My brothers and sisters in Christ, I pray we will live purely for Jesus. That's His desire for you. Would you give up acceptance by this world? Give up fame and fortune? Give up your own pride? Maybe you need to say sorry to someone today; maybe you need to change your lifestyle. You just need to run away from these idols. Would you bring them to the cross and smash it right there? God will help you. Would you humble yourself? If there's something more important to you than God, then say, "God help me."

Maybe today you're here for the first time, I say to you this is the greatest news of the Bible; this is the greatest news of all the world. When we were all lulled by the lullaby of the devil, this morning, I believe God is giving you His voice and say to you, "Wake up! Hear My voice. Stop following the ways of the world! Stop living oblivious to the reality you are doomed for damnation! But hear My voice and repent! Turn from your wicked way and believe in Jesus, My Son who came and died for your sins. He is the only way; He is the only truth; He is the only life. Would you come to Jesus today, asking him to cleanse you from sin and restoring you to the relationship with your creator God?"

My friends, this is the Good News and the news is something you believe in. God is not telling you today to build a church; God is not telling you to do anything fantastic; He's telling you to turn from your sin, humble yourself and believe in His Son. Would you do that right here, right now? Gospel Light Christian church, what a tremendous message we hold in our hands! This is the only message that will save this world. That Jesus Christ has come! Would you share this message? When you go to your office tomorrow? When you return home tonight? When you're with your friends in school? Do you realise that the whole environment is in the hands of the devil? But you who have seen light can bring light. Let Jesus shine through you. May we all be Gospel lights. May we be wonderful, faithful stewards of the Gospel of Jesus. Maybe God is speaking to you in any of these areas. Would you commit to Him today and make choices by faith?

Would you praise Him for this amazing salvation? You didn't earn it, you didn't deserve it but you receive it freely. This is my story, this is my song, praising my Saviour all the day long. Father, we thank you this morning for Your Word. Thank you for calling us back to yourself, hearing your voice. We pray that you will work in all our hearts, that we will not be satisfied with just being a hearer, but we will be a doer. So bless everyone here, by Your Spirit's grace. We thank you. We asked all this now in Jesus' name. Amen