



FREEDOM

What Kind of Freedom?

Conrad Gempf

People today often call it *Jesus' Manifesto*. One Sabbath morning he read to the fine folks of his home town from the scroll of Isaiah: '...He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are downtrodden, to proclaim the favourable year of the Lord.' (Luke 4:18-19 = Isa 61:1-2). Then he closed the scroll, handed it off and sat down.

The eyes of the whole congregation were on him. With that maddening mixture of self-confidence and humility, clarity and mystery, he said to them, 'Today this Scripture has been fulfilled.'

If only he'd stopped there. If only *that* was his manifesto: Release, recovery, freedom! Those are words his homies could dance to; all were speaking well of him and nobody wanted to kill him (Luke 4:22).

In the twenty-first century, the word freedom tends to mean things that we can dance to, as well: Empowerment, time off, the chance to be myself. Modern or Postmodern, we've all still inherited the values of the humanist renaissance: 'The greatest thing in the world is to know how to belong to ourselves,' said the philosopher Michel de Montaigne. The New Testament knows all about the following your own path, indulging every whim and desire. The New Testament doesn't call that freedom, but enslavement (Titus 3:3).

True freedom is something different. And it's not the goal. Freedom is merely the beginning, a step along the way. We were under sin, and he saved us — freed us — not in order that we might belong to ourselves, but so that we might belong to God again, as we should. The Bible never pictures us as "in ourselves" — we are either "in sin" or "in Christ." Thus you'll find a lot more in the New Testament about servanthood than about freedom.

Back in first century Nazareth, Jesus didn't bask in everyone speaking well of him. Release, recovery, freedom was not Jesus' manifesto nor his message to the congregation in Nazareth. That was the straight line; he went on to the punch line. Instead of preaching the gospel of freedom from their Gentile rulers, which they would have loved, Jesus went on to talk about how the prophets Elijah and Elisha *ministered* to Gentiles (Luke 4:25-27). That was his real manifesto and programme. And the people got the message. And they went from speaking well of him in verse 22 to being full of rage in verse 28.

We Christians are his hometown congregation now. Let's take care not to get offended when he gets to the punch line. Let us embrace freedom and bring it to others by living as servants (1 Peter 2:16; 2 Cor 6:4ff).

'...He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners...' Luke 4:18

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