

Wednesday, 17<sup>th</sup> June 2020



## THE CANDLESTICK

*If the Son ... shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed  
(Jn. 8:36)*

If you could live your life over again, what would you do differently? ... And what would you *not* do? How much wiser we would be if we could start all over!

However, we cannot undo what we have done. Take, for example, the English merchant, philanthropist and Member of Parliament Edward Colston who lived from 1636 to 1721. He had a large business, trading in wines, fruits and textiles. In 1680 though, he became involved with the lucrative slave trade from Africa. Out of the great fortune he amassed, he supported schools, homes for the poor, hospitals and churches in Bristol and London. At the time, he was described as “the great benefactor of the city of Bristol, who, in his lifetime, expended more than £70,000 in charitable institutions”.

‘Charitable’, and yet he made a fortune through the abominable trade in human slavery! Indeed, there were also many others, and it is a sad fact Britain was the largest slave trading nation in the world between 1640 and February 1807. It was estimated over *three million Africans* were transported as slaves to the British colonies in the Caribbean, and north and south America.

Then, in 1833, the Slavery Abolition Act was passed, and two of the leaders of the movement to abolish slavery were the Christian evangelicals, William Wilberforce and the Earl of Shaftesbury. Slavery was a blight on our history.

Does the Bible condone slavery? ... Well, in the New Testament, there were slaves who belonged to Christians, for example, Onesimus was a slave of Philemon. The New Testament does not specifically condemn or condone slavery, however, it *does* teach slaves should be treated fairly and decently, for example, Masters, give unto your servants [*doulos, slaves*] that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven (Col. 4:1).

Does that mean, then, slavery of the African negroes was permissible, and Biblically justified, as some claimed at the time? No, it does not because slavery in Biblical times was very different from the slavery slave traders like Edward Colston operated. The slavery in the Bible was not based on race, or nationality, or colour of their skin ... but in Bible times people sold themselves as slaves when they could

not pay their debts or provide for their families. In fact, sometimes people chose to become slaves so as to have all their needs provided by their masters.

But slavery from four hundred years ago was different because it was established on the premise black people were an inferior race. But that is *not* what the Bible teaches for according to Gen. 1:27, God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. John 3:16 also teaches, For God so loved *the world*, that he gave his only begotten Son ... There are no special categories. One group or race is the same in God’s eyes as any other for when the Lord Jesus died on the cross, He shed His blood for the Redeemed which consists of people out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation (Rev. 5:9). As the children’s chorus explains, “Red and yellow, black and white, *all* are precious in His sight”.

In fact, what happened in Africa when many of its inhabitants were rounded up and sold to callous cold-blooded slave traders, who then sold them on in the Americas was absolutely abhorrent to God ... Indeed, if those slave traders had lived in Old Testament times, they would have been punished under the Law of Moses with *death*, And he that stealeth a man, and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, *he shall surely be put to death* (Ex. 21:16).

John Newton was a well-known slave trader. In his early twenties he captained a slave-ship called “The Duke of Argyle”. He was ruthless and brutal, a thoroughly horrible individual until the Lord began working in his heart and brought him to saving faith. He then began to deeply regret his involvement in the slave trade, and joined with William Wilberforce, working together for the abolition of slavery. And in his most famous hymn Newton often used the symbolism of slavery ... “Amazing grace! How sweet the sound, That saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found” ... and let’s change it slightly, “Was *bound*, but now am *free*”.

That was our condition before we were saved, - every sinner was hopelessly *bound* in sin, with no means of escape until God looked upon us in grace, God Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins (Col. 1:13,14). ... “Saved by grace alone! This is all my plea, Jesus died for sinful men, and Jesus died for me”..

And consequently, Paul wrote to the church in Galatia, Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage (Gal. 5:1). ... We were slaves to a master who sought our eternal destruction in Hell, but when the Lord Jesus claimed us for His own, *He*

became our Master now, and *He Himself* declared, If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed (Jn. 8:36). ... “Free from the law, O happy condition ... *Grace* hath redeemed us once for all”

Another friend of John Newton was William Cowper, and he used this same symbolism, “He is the freeman whom the truth makes free, and all are slaves beside.” ... Aren’t you glad you’re saved and you’re no longer under any condemnation for you *in* Christ Jesus?! You are heirs of God, and joint-heirs with His Son (Rom. 8:1,17).

Once I was bound by sin’s galling fetters;  
Chained like a slave, I struggled in vain.  
    But I received a glorious freedom,  
When Jesus broke my fetters in twain.

*Glorious freedom! Wonderful freedom!  
No more in chains of sin I repine!  
Jesus the glorious Emancipator—  
Now and forever He shall be mine.*

### **Life is but a Weaving” (the Tapestry Poem)**

“My life is but a weaving  
Between my God and me.  
I cannot choose the colours  
    He weaveth steadily.

Oft’ times He weaveth sorrow;  
    And I in foolish pride  
Forget He sees the upper  
    And I the underside.

Not ’til the loom is silent  
And the shuttles cease to fly  
Will God unroll the canvas  
And reveal the reason why.

The dark threads are as needful  
    In the weaver’s skilful hand  
As the threads of gold and silver  
    In the pattern He has planned.

He knows, He loves, He cares;  
    Nothing this truth can dim.  
He gives the very best to those  
Who leave the choice to Him.”

By Hughes Fawcett