**Free indeed!** dkm September 2021.
At breakfast we started talking about what it would be like to be in prison. The discussion was cut short when we realised we were virtually in prison- or under house arrest anyway- as we entered another week of covid19 lockdown. Is it now two hours a day that we are allowed into the exercise yard! We spend the day cooking and cleaning, eating and sleeping, reading books and watching TV, just like regular prisoners. There is talk of ‘freedom day’, a day England has already celebrated- but still people in the UK are getting sick and dying.

Everyone wants to be free again, free to do what they did before the pandemic- cooking and cleaning, eating and sleeping, reading books and watching TV! There is that other freedom of course, the freedom to travel, to go where we want when we want. Yes, we want the freedom to travel, to visit family and friends and to party, but even before the pandemic people got sick and died- even if we did not have a daily death report! We were as much in bondage before pandemic as we are now when it comes to bondage to sin and death- unless in the meantime you have experienced the freedom offered by Jesus.

Jesus once said something very surprising to those who were following him, people looking for another healing or feeding miracle- Jesus said many surprising things which I encourage you read during lockdown! Jesus said, ‘If the Son sets you free, you shall be free indeed’ (John 8:36). Jesus knew he was the Son of God. He said that if anyone trusted in him they would know the truth and, ‘the truth shall make you free’ (John 8:32). Jesus said he was the way, the truth and the life, and the only way to the Father, to God in heaven (John 14:6).

Such claims surprised his listeners but what upset them the most was his telling them that they were slaves to sin: ‘Whoever commits sin is a slave to sin’ (John 8:34). These people were Jews, people proud of their religion. They had the law of God to be sure, but no one is saved by having, or even keeping the law. It is the same with non-Jews, with people of all races and religions. We are all proud of our heritage, proud of our achievements, proud of our hard work and our acts of kindness, or of just being who we are! We all commit sin.

If you feel you are suffering like a prisoner while enduring covid19 lockdown, the truth is you are a prisoner, not a prisoner of the premier or the prime minister, but a prisoner of Satan and sin, according to Jesus. Jesus goes on to call these people slaves to Satan, his exact words being: ‘You are of your father the devil’ (John 8:22). That pronouncement came after Jesus encouraged them to trust in him to set them free, and they refused.

As the Taliban marched across the country they opened the gates of the prisons and prisoners ran out to freedom. It would have been strange if they had stayed in prison. What would you think of a prisoner who stayed in prison when someone came and opened the gates to set him or her free? Life in some prisons is quite comfortable, but a prisoner is never free. Maybe that person did not know what life on the outside was like. Maybe they had become so accustomed to life in prison that they did not understand this was not a normal life, not the life God intended for human beings.

When Jesus told the people they were children of the devil he meant they were born in sin and they committed sin; they were slaves of sin. If they had realised and accepted this fact instead of doubting the words of Jesus, they would have looked for freedom from sin and death, and found such freedom in Jesus. Jesus was effectively at the door of the prison telling the inmates, ‘I am opening the door, so come follow me and I will show you the life of true freedom’: ‘If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed’.

So if you are looking forward to the day when you will be free from covid19 lockdowns, remember you will still be in lockdown, still in bondage to sin and Satan- unless you have responded to the invitation of Jesus to set you free. My freedom day was many years ago, and maybe yours was also. But if you are yet to experience ‘freedom day’, freedom from bondage to sin freely offered in the gospel, then consider this invitation from Jesus; consider the door to freedom that Jesus had opened through his death on the cross and his resurrection.