

Sermon for 9th September 2018 Kegworth Baptist church

FREEWILL

“The world is a dangerous place, not because of those who do evil, but because of those who look on and do nothing.”

[Albert Einstein 14 March 1879 – 18 April 1955) was a German-born theoretical physicist who developed the theory of general relativity. He is regarded as the father of modern physics.]

I felt called to talk about a potentially difficult subject in Christian circles, free will. Do we have free will or are all our decisions and life choices preordained by God? But I also want to look at how free will in making decisions also depends on where we are in our Christian walk. I want to use an example from South Africa with a true man of God, Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

(Using article to tell the story, not read it)

Tutu Defuses Tense Funeral Confrontation

August 07, 1985 | MICHAEL PARKS | Times Staff Writer

DAVEYTON, South Africa — Bishop Desmond Tutu, the Nobel Peace Prize winner, on Tuesday calmed one of the most tense confrontations yet between black mourners and police enforcing the government's ban on political funerals for the victims of South Africa's civil strife.

Hundreds of police officers and soldiers, their weapons held ready, arrived during the funeral service here for a teen-age girl, surrounded the 1,000 mourners and ordered them to disperse rather than make the customary march to the cemetery for burial.

In English and Afrikaans, the police announced that the gathering was illegal and warned that they were preparing to "take action against those who refuse" to leave.

Buses Provided

Tutu then negotiated with the authorities to allow the funeral to proceed. Under a compromise worked out by Tutu with Lt. Col. G.H. Nel, the divisional police commander, the Daveyton town council supplied seven buses to take mourners the short distance to the cemetery for the burial so that they

complied with the new funeral regulations imposed under South Africa's state of emergency.

These rules prohibit processions on foot as well as political speeches, anti-government songs and banners at burial services.

In return for the buses, the black prelate and other priests ensured that the youths left quickly and peacefully after the service.

As Tutu, a solitary figure in his purple cassock, negotiated in a dusty field for half an hour with Nel, who was flanked by soldiers and backed by armored cars, the mourners began freedom chants and jeered at the police and combat troops who surrounded them. Military helicopters circled overhead, and several times, a clash seemed almost inevitable.

"We were within minutes of what could well have been a bloodbath," said Father James Mabaso, an Anglican priest who had accompanied Tutu, the Anglican bishop of Johannesburg. "The anger of our youths is such that they would have challenged the (apartheid) system even though they have nothing that can match its guns, and dozens would have died in doing so."

"These kids scare me," Tutu remarked later. "They have a recklessness that is quite incredible. They say, 'If that's how we are going to die, then that's how we are going to die, and if that's how we are going to get freedom, that's how we are going to get freedom.' The government shows not the slightest sensitivity to what a powderkeg of anger it is setting fire to with this state of emergency and these funeral restrictions."

As the mourners were dispersing and the police and army were reducing their numbers, Tutu told the police commander, "Well, you enforced some totally unreasonable laws in quite a reasonable way today."

He had other choices he could have made. He could have used his importance as a Bishop who had won a Nobel prize and was valued politically by both sides, to be removed by to a safe zone for his own protection. Or he could have decided that as this was a potentially news worthy moment, that if it could be demonstrate police brutality in the apartheid system and broadcast it,

the outcome although tragic, would be for the greater good for the fight against apartheid. This method by the way is not something I have made up as an example, it happened often during the apartheid years, that if a few were killed or arrested, it would only work in the favour of the oppressed. It is also not the first or last time in global history that this method was used either.

But as this article shows, we not only see enormous bravery and incredible mediating skills in a potentially violent moment in history, but what comes across to me is his use of free will in which he chooses to rather show both the funeral mourners and the police the love and forgiveness of Christ in making a bridge between the 2 parties. And to me that is what free will is all about.

I say that because after looking up research for this talk today led me to reading some articles concerning free will from different Christian blogs and pieces of scholarly papers written on the subject, both for and against. I found them, a) boring, as they used scholarly language, which they have to for these papers. B) pompous in their writings. So, I dug a bit deeper and found an illustration by A. W. Tozer who was an American Christian pastor, author, magazine editor, and spiritual mentor. He demonstrates to reconcile God's sovereignty and man's freewill:

An ocean liner leaves New York bound for Liverpool. Its destination has been determined by proper authorities. Nothing can change it. This is at least a faint picture of sovereignty. On board the liner are scores of passengers. These are not in chains, neither are their activities determined for them by decree. They are completely free to move about as they will. They eat, sleep, play, lounge about on the deck, read, talk, altogether as they please; but all the while the great liner is carrying them steadily onward toward a predetermined port. Both freedom and sovereignty are present here, and they do not contradict. So it is, I believe, with man's freedom and the sovereignty of God. The mighty liner of God's sovereign design keeps its steady course over the sea of history."

A.W. Tozer.

Jesus said in Matthew 11: 28 "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." He said all you who are weary and searching, not those who are predestined to be saved. I am sorry, you are welcome to disagree with me, but why did Jesus send his

disciples to all the world to proclaim the message and be saved? **Mark 16: 15-16 says: He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.** They can choose when they hear the message to be saved or not. Why has He asked us to go out and do the same if all people won't hear the message and be given equal opportunity no matter who they are to be saved?

John 3:16 to the end is a very famous and well quoted passage of the bible. **16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son**

Whoever believes in Him...sounds like free will not preordained outcomes. But this is a long standing dispute and a difficult subject to get into and I truly don't think we as humans will ever all agree on everything, that is impossible.

Hence, I love this illustration for RB Kuiper Professor of theology as a guest lecturer used the following illustration of God's sovereignty and human responsibility:

I liken them to two ropes going through two holes in the ceiling and over a pulley above. If I wish to support myself by them, I must cling to them both. If I cling only to one and not the other, I go down. I read the many teachings of the Bible regarding God's election, predestination, his chosen, and so on. I read also the many teachings regarding 'whosoever will may come' and urging people to exercise their responsibility as human beings. These seeming contradictions cannot be reconciled by the puny human mind. With childlike faith, I cling to both ropes, fully confident that in eternity I will see that both strands of truth are, after all, of one piece.

1 Corinthians 10:13

13 No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it. So, no one is saying we won't sin, we fall short everyday, but God provides a way out. One of my favourite shows is Touched by an Angel, does anyone remember it or still watch it? It is on Drama channel at the moment, so I have recorded loads of episodes to sit with chocolate, tea and have a good weep. Every episode, they are at pains to show you, that no matter how far you stray off the path, God is always there to guide you and to help them to make the right choices in life, but never to force you. When Monica angel gets upset that the people aren't listening and are heading for a fall, the head angel, Tess always reminds her, their job is to guide, the choice is for the humans to decide. Most importantly, they always tell the people that God loves them and always has, whether they have turned from Him or not and that He is just sitting patiently waiting for them to make the right decisions and He will be right beside them the whole way. Now, I personally can't see how I could say no to a glowing angel from God, can you? But in reality, God and His angels are there even if we can't see them, waiting for our choices everyday to keep looking to Him for guidance.

2 Peter 3:9

9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

I was brought up with the CS Lewis books, the Narnia series and so it stands to reason that I really enjoy his writings as an adult, still love and read the Narnia books too. I will end my talk with a passage from his book, The Case for Christianity.

God created things which had free will. That means creatures which can go wrong or right. Some people think they can imagine a creature which was

free but had no possibility of going wrong, but I can't. If a thing is free to be good it's also free to be bad. And free will is what has made evil possible. Why, then, did God give them free will? Because free will, though it makes evil possible, is also the only thing that makes possible any love or goodness or joy worth having. A world of automata -of creatures that worked like machines- would hardly be worth creating. The happiness which God designs for His higher creatures is the happiness of being freely, voluntarily united to Him and to each other in an ecstasy of love and delight compared with which the most rapturous love between a man and a woman on this earth is mere milk and water. And for that they've got to be free.

Of course God knew what would happen if they used their freedom the wrong way: apparently, He thought it worth the risk. (...) If God thinks this state of war in the universe a price worth paying for free will -that is, for making a real world in which creatures can do real good or harm and something of real importance can happen, instead of a toy world which only moves when He pulls the strings- then we may take it it is worth paying."

— C.S. Lewis, *The Case for Christianity*