

16th August

Memory verse

Thou shalt not oppress an hired servant that is poor and needy,
whether he be of thy brethren,
or of thy strangers that are in thy land within thy gates:
Deuteronomy 24:14

Younger children can learn the words in **bold** and understand that a “hired servant” is any employee – someone who works for another person for wages.

This is God's instruction to the Children of Israel and it shows us how he wants his children now to behave towards anyone who is employed by them. We should not oppress. Expressed in the opposite form this means we should pay fair wages and provide good conditions. God is careful to point out that this attitude applies whatever the nationality of the employees.

Something to think about

Study the quotation below. Find out the meaning of the highlighted words. Today's story is about something that happened in the Industrial Revolution and also about one of the “notable exceptions” Francis Schaeffer mentions in this quotation. If you did the lessons on the 2nd and 14th of last month you will notice how today's lesson fits in with them.

What would have happened... if the church of the time of the **Industrial Revolution** had spoken out against the **economic abuses** which arose from it? This is not to suggest that the Industrial Revolution was wrong, or that **capitalism** as such is necessarily wrong, but that the church, at a point in history when it had the **consensus**, as it does not have now, failed (with some notable exceptions) to speak against the abuse of economic **dominion**. Francis Schaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man* (London, 1970) p. 53.

Today is the anniversary of the Peterloo Massacre of 1819.¹ This event was a milestone on the road to full parliamentary democracy, freedom of speech² and freedom of association. Do you know what these terms mean? Today would be a good day to delve into this topic. Recent events have strained these liberties to breaking point. It can be argued that only within a society where there is some Christian consensus can these liberties continue to exist. This is because they are founded on moral absolutes. There are no grounds for moral absolutes except in a biblical worldview.³

A story to read from history

As a result of the Industrial Revolution, towns, Manchester in particular, had grown. People were coming in from the countryside to work, especially in the textile industry. The application of machinery to spinning and weaving had taken this work out of the cottages and into factories. Hand-loom weaving, for instance, was a dying trade and skilled hand-loom weavers suffered poverty as a result. After the Napoleonic Wars ended, people had hoped for better times but poverty increased. The price of bread was high and this made matters worse.

William Gadsby (1773-1844) pastor of Back Lane Chapel in Manchester had a congregation that was mostly very poor and not a few were hand-loom weavers. He himself had started work as a ribbon-weaver at 13 years old. Some of his chapel members were active in the so-called “Hampden Clubs” where ideas such as parliamentary reform, wider **suffrage** and the repeal of the corn laws

¹ For more about the background to this event see the lesson for July 2nd.

² A briefing on this topic that might help adults guide older children's thinking in this area as it relates to present day issues is available here <https://www.christian.org.uk/resource/free-speech-briefing/>

³ For help in understanding this issue see <https://creation.com/bible-morality>

were discussed. Parliamentary reform meant a redistribution of the seats in the House of Commons so that newly enlarged towns such as Manchester were fairly represented. At this time only those who owned a certain amount of property were entitled to a vote. This was the cause of agitation for wider suffrage. The Corn Laws restricted the import of grain for bread making to ensure that the price paid to British farmers for their grain did not fall. If the Corn Laws were abolished, bread would get cheaper, it was argued. These things were all sources of discontent among the poor and among the better off people who wanted to help them. The Hampden Clubs discussed ways of changing the situation. The government, eyeing what had happened across the channel during the French Revolution, passed laws making it very difficult for clubs such as the Hampden clubs to meet legally.

Samuel Bamford (1788-1872) organised the Hampden Club in the town of Middleton, near Manchester. He would sometimes hold the meetings at a lonely house in Alkington, about 6 miles from Manchester, belonging to a couple of hand-loom weavers who were members of Back Lane Chapel. For fear of arrest, they would post sentinels to watch the road. Samuel Bamford even invited William Gadsby⁴ to preach to the Middleton Hampden Club.

Henry “Orator” Hunt (1773-1835) believed in annual parliaments,⁵ universal suffrage, parliamentary reform, and an end to child labour. You can tell from his nickname that people enjoyed listening to him speak. It was planned that he would address a meeting called by the Patriotic Union Society to petition parliament for parliamentary reform and the repeal of the corn laws.⁶ The meeting was to be held on 16th August in an open space near Peter Street, Manchester. The government was wary of societies such as the Patriotic Union, fearing they were fomenting unrest such had happened in France.⁷ They also worried about large gatherings of people. Would there be trouble?



There was indeed trouble; such awful trouble that one of the Manchester newspapers sarcastically dubbed it “Peterloo” after the great Victory of Waterloo that had ended the Napoleonic Wars a few years earlier. The Manchester and Salford Yeomanry, inexperienced in such tasks and in poor control of their horses, were instructed by the magistrates to arrest Henry Hunt. This was despite the peaceful behaviour of the crowd. “The day ended with at least eleven dead and several hundred wounded, including women and children. A shock of horror spread throughout the country...”⁸ When William Gadsby was asked what he thought he wrote:

You wish me to state my views of the Manchester meeting of the 16th August. I can only say that I believe the people would have departed in a peaceable way if the magistrates and the cavalry would have let them, and I must confess that I consider it was an awful and unjust measure... I can assure you there is little else in the town but tyranny and oppression – thousands slaving and half starving. God only knows what will be the end; but He reigns and He is sure to take care of His dear family.⁹

⁴ You will know about this preacher if you did the lesson on 3rd January.

⁵ This means an election would be held every year. This is the only one of the ideas of the parliamentary reformers of this period that has never been put into practice.

⁶ For an explanation of the Corn Laws see the lesson for July 2nd.

⁷ For information on the French Revolution see the lesson for 14th July.

⁸ Ramsbottom, B. A. *William Gadsby* (Harpden, 2004) p.112.

⁹ Ramsbottom, B. A. *William Gadsby* (Harpden, 2004) p.113.

Samuel Bamford's account of the Peterloo Massacre can be found in the Optional Resources files for today. I have highlighted some features of his account that can clearly be seen in the picture below. You can also see the route taken by his Middleton contingent if you look up the places highlighted in green in his account in an atlas or on a road map. How far did the Middleton group have to walk? What about those from Rochdale?

The picture below certainly matches up very exactly with what Samuel Bamford wrote. You can see the writing on the banners if you look closely. Samuel Bamford noted that one of the Banners said "Liberty and Fraternity". Does this slogan remind you of anything?¹⁰ Why might it have caused the magistrates to be concerned? If you look at the banners in the picture you will see that one of them looks as if it says, "Universal Civil and Religious Liberty". At this time only members of the Church of England could be MPs. Christians who were members of Gadsby's Back Lane Chapel, for instance, would not be eligible. Roman Catholics were similarly excluded. Reform of this issue would have therefore been of interest not only to the Back Lane chapel members and others like them. The poor Irish weavers of Newtown that Samuel Bamford mentions in his account were Catholics.

Tragic as it was, Peterloo highlighted the need for reforms and hastened the much-needed changes that took place. Consider the arguments put forward in the account by Samuel Bamford's friend John Kay for not retaliating over what had happened. This dignified behaviour did much to advance the cause of freedom and full democracy.



Something to do for younger children

Today's lesson will be too hard for very young ones. They could perhaps take in that today is the anniversary of a great meeting that took place in Manchester over 200 years ago and that it was one of the steps that led to the freedoms we have now, specifically mentioning the freedom of Christians

¹⁰ The motto of the French Revolution was *Liberté, égalité, fraternité* "liberty, equality, fraternity".

to vote. It would certainly be fun to have a procession. Round the garden would do. A drum to beat time, some flags to carry and some comb and paper music would make it special. (A comb and paper kazoo can be made by simply wrapping a piece of thin paper round an ordinary comb. Then you press the kazoo flat against your lips and hum a tune.) If you did the February 22nd lesson you will already be good at marching. If not, look at it now for some tips.

Something to sing

William Gadsby was not only a popular preacher he was also a hymn-writer. His most famous hymn is the one that begins “Immortal honours rest on Jesus' head” – no. 125 in the 1977 edition of *Christian Hymns*. It is included in the optional resources files for 3rd January so that you can learn it if you do not already know it. Or you can find it in your own hymn book and sing it today.