

Freedom from slavery

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[0 : 0 0] Well, this is our third Sunday looking at the book of Exodus, so really at the beginning of our series. And we mentioned on the first day that Exodus means exit or departure or way out, because the story of the Exodus really is the story of God saving his people from their slavery in Egypt and taking them out and moving them towards the promised land.

And it's interesting how this Exodus motif of freedom is one that has been used throughout history. So take the civil rights movement in the mid-20th century, for example.

Gary Selby, in his book Martin Luther King and the Rhetoric of Freedom, subtitled The Exodus Narrative in America's Struggle for Civil Rights, he says this.

He says, the development and ultimate success of the civil rights movement resulted, at least in part, from the way the movement's leaders, Martin Luther King Jr. in particular, evoked this deeply held cultural narrative to create the sense that blacks were reliving the Exodus in their own day.

And not only the civil rights movement, but many movements today still use this Exodus motif or this Exodus narrative as a way of saying people need to be set free, either from the institutions that enslave them, or from the people that enslave them, or from the structures that they are caught up in.

[1 : 3 4] They need to be set free and released. And so the Exodus has, in a sense, been used many times to point towards people who are captive, in bondage, enslaved, and who need to be set free and released.

And so our modern culture really prizes freedom very highly. Freedom to be who you want to be. But when it comes to the Exodus in the Bible, God's people are not set free to be who they want to be.

They're set free for the purpose of worshipping and serving God. Which actually is real freedom. It is what we were made for.

We were made to worship and serve God. So we're not free when we are who we want to be, but we're free when we are worshipping God. And so whoever you are in relation to God this afternoon as you have stepped into church, the text before us today in Exodus chapter 5 and chapter 6, tells us who God is and why he alone is worthy of our worship and service.

He is God and we should worship him. And this comes from the fundamental question that is asked at the beginning of chapter 5, and then the clear answer is given in chapter 6.

[2 : 5 3] And so we're going to look at this passage under three headings this afternoon. First of all, the question, who is the Lord? Chapter 5. Secondly, the answer, I am the Lord.

It's in chapter 6. And then thirdly and finally, by way of conclusion, the implication, will we worship and serve this Lord? God is revealed to us in these verses.

And so the challenge for us is, will we worship this God, this Lord? So first of all, the question, who is the Lord? Now, the question is Pharaoh's question, and it comes in response to Moses and Aaron.

So chapter 5, verse 1 says, Afterwards, Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says. Let my people go, so that they may hold a festival to me in the wilderness.

Now, this is essentially the purpose of the Exodus. And God has already indicated this. And so if you have your Bible there, just turn back to chapter 3 and verse 12, where we read, And God said, I will be with you, and this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you.

[4 : 08] When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain. So there's the bringing out of Egypt, and then there's the worship of God. Then again, look at chapter 4, verse 22 and 23.

Then say to Pharaoh, This is what the Lord says, Israel is my firstborn son, and I told you, Let my son go, so that he may worship me.

And from there on, throughout Exodus, this message is echoed. And it's almost like a formula, where Moses goes to confront Pharaoh, and he says to Pharaoh, This is what the Lord says, Let my people go, so that they may worship me.

I'm not going to read all the references, but if you're taking notes, then chapter 7, verse 16, chapter 8, verse 1, chapter 8, verse 20, chapter 9, verse 1, chapter 9, verse 13, and chapter 10, verse 3.

Essentially, all say a form of these words. This is what the Lord says, Let my people go, so that they may worship me.

[5 : 17] And so the Israelites need to be set free. Why do they need to be set free? They need to be set free because they are God's people, and they must worship the Lord their God.

And so as we reach chapter 5 and chapter 6 of Exodus, this conflict between the Lord on the one hand and Pharaoh on the other is really about who the Israelites will serve, who they will worship.

Will they serve the cruel master Pharaoh, or will they serve the loving Lord their God? And so this is what results in Pharaoh's question. In chapter 5, verse 2, Pharaoh said, Who is the Lord that I should obey him and let Israel go?

I do not know the Lord, and I will not let Israel go. So as far as Pharaoh is concerned, the Lord is no threat to him. Why would he listen to two octogenarians who tell him to obey God?

And so when he asks, Who is the Lord? He asks out of arrogance, and he asks out of ignorance, because he refuses to recognize God's authority, and so he defies him.

[6 : 25] In a sense, Pharaoh lays down the gauntlet for a fight. And yet, he would regret his words because the Lord would reveal himself to Pharaoh in such a devastating way because God wanted to set his people free.

And that's why Pharaoh's question is essentially the one on which the Exodus story turns. Who is the Lord? The story of the Exodus tells us who the Lord is.

Exodus answers the question, Who is the Lord? in the most remarkable of ways. Because through the Exodus, the Lord is revealing himself to Pharaoh, to Moses, to the Israelites, and to you and me.

He displays his awesome love for his people and the lengths he'll go to to set them free. And also how he will judge those who stand in his way.

And so Exodus reveals God to us. The answer to who is the Lord is essentially the book of Exodus. And yet, though Exodus answers this question for us, how it turns out is through the suffering of God's people.

[7 : 39] Because Pharaoh's cruelty moves up a few gears in this chapter. And it's summed up in chapter 5, verse 10 and 11. When the slave drivers and the overseers went out and said to the people, This is what Pharaoh says.

I will not give you any more straw. Go and get your own straw wherever you can find it. But your work will not be reduced at all. So, the slavery of God's people is made even more unbearable by Pharaoh.

And this, in turn, results in the Israelites grumbling against Moses and Aaron, blaming them, in a sense, because their treatment got worse. And so Pharaoh doesn't budge at all.

And so then the Israelite leaders go and complain to Moses. We see this in verse 19. The Israelite overseers realized how they were in trouble when they were told, you are not to reduce the number of bricks required of you for each day.

And then when they left Pharaoh, they found Moses and Aaron wanting to meet them. And they said, May the Lord look on you and judge you. You have made us obnoxious to Pharaoh and his officials and have put a sword in their hand to kill us.

[8 : 50] So the people aren't happy. Which, in turn, means that Moses isn't really happy with God and he complains to him. So chapter 5, verse 22, Moses returned to the Lord and said, Why, Lord, have you brought trouble on this people?

Is this why you sent me? Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has brought trouble on this people and you have not rescued your people at all. Now perhaps Moses was expecting some kind of instant rescue by God.

And Moses could not conceive how God's method of rescue would magnificently reveal who God is and what God is like.

And through the rescue, Moses, the Israelites, Pharaoh, and us would get to see a greater revelation of God in the way that he would save and rescue his people.

Because it was through the cruel and oppressive slavery of the Israelites that God would reveal himself as being the God who saves and how he saves.

[9 : 59] And so Pharaoh had to learn this the hard way. And so Pharaoh speaks first in chapter 5. He's like one of those boxers at the press conference who arrogantly and proudly says that he is going to beat his opponent and yet how pathetic his words become after he's knocked out in the first round.

Because this here is a battle between two masters. Between Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, and between the Lord, the king of the universe.

Pharaoh and God. And the Israelites need to be set free from serving Pharaoh to then serve and worship the Lord, their God.

The cruel master they need to be rescued from in order to worship their loving, true master. And that's the whole point of the Exodus as we'll see.

God was going to save his people not to set them free to be who they want to be and to do what they want to do but to set them free to serve the Lord their God as his people, as his redeemed children.

[11 : 09] Because worshipping and serving the Lord their God is how they would flourish as people. And it's the same for us. true freedom, true flourishing as human beings only comes when we relate to the God who made us as we should by worshipping him and serving him.

Because the Israelites and us, we only discover that God has our best interests at heart when we worship and serve him.

And so that's the issue for the Israelites in Egypt but it's also the issue for humanity. Because our loving God wants to save us from our slavery to serve him.

And so the Lord is not some kind of killjoy who wants to keep us captive or even to cut us loose because he's not interested in us. No, he is a committed father who welcomes us into his family.

He calls us his children. And he wants us to serve him because freedom and enjoyment comes when we do it.

[12 : 19] And that's why the Exodus pattern of freedom confronts and it challenges all of our notions of freedom today. Because our culture thinks the true path to freedom comes when you break free from God.

That if only we can release ourselves from all of God's restrictions, if only we can unshackle ourselves from all of God's commands, then we will be free to be who we want to be and to do what we want to do.

And yet, this doesn't actually lead to freedom. It is a form of slavery that we can fail to recognize. Because we all serve something.

It's never a case of are you and I going to serve something the question is what or whom are we serving?

Because the Exodus story isn't just a history lesson. Of course, the Exodus happened, but the Exodus shows us the position that we're all in.

[13 : 26] Listen to how David Foster Wallace, the American novelist, put this in his 2005 commencement speech to the graduating class of Kenyon College, a famous speech on the internet.

And this is what David Foster Wallace says. He says, because here's something else that's weird but true. In the day-to-day trenches of adult life, there's actually no such thing as not worshipping.

Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship. And the compelling reason for maybe choosing some sort of God or spiritual type thing to worship is that pretty much anything else you worship will eat you alive.

If you worship money and things, if they are where you tap real meaning in life, then you will never have enough. You will never feel you have enough. It's the truth.

Worship your body and beauty and sexual allure and you will always feel ugly. And when time and age start showing, you will die a million deaths before they finally grieve you.

[14 : 30] worship power and you will end up feeling weak and afraid. And you will need ever more power over others to numb you to your own fear. Worship your intellect.

Being seen as smart, you will end up feeling stupid, a fraud, always on the verge of being found out. And he goes towards the conclusion and he says, look, the insidious thing about these forms of worship is that they are unconscious.

They are default settings. They are the kind of worship you just gradually slip into day after day. Can you see what he is saying? He is saying everybody worships.

Everybody pursues things in life. Everybody gives themselves to serve different things in one way or another. Everybody is enslaved, he is saying, whether they realize it or not.

Everybody is under the control of something or other. And now the Israelites knew they were in slavery. They knew they needed to be set free.

[15 : 36] And yet we may be unconscious, oblivious even to what we are enslaved to. Because Jesus said, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.

So every single human being is born into a spiritual slavery. slavery. And of course, nobody likes to think they're a slave. We all like to think we're free to choose what we want to do.

And yet the freedom we think we have is actually slavery. Because if we don't worship and serve the true and living God who made us, the God of the universe, who is the Lord, then it doesn't mean we're free.

It simply means we worship something else instead of him. We're still a worshiper, but something else is our God, our king, our master that we are enslaved to.

And so the good news of the Exodus is that it points us towards the God who saves. And the God who saves is no more content to leave us enslaved to our sin than he was to leave his people in captivity to Pharaoh in Egypt.

[16 : 54] And so he is a far better Lord to serve. And chapter six tells us why. So that's our first point, the question, who is the Lord? Second point is the answer, I am the Lord.

And this really is the substance of chapter six. The answer to Pharaoh's question, who is the Lord? And the answer to Moses' complaint is simply this, God says it in chapter six, I am the Lord.

And so the whole story of the Exodus turns on this fundamental truth of who God is. And so the message that rings out from chapter six loudly and clearly is a message about who God is.

And God reinforces the fact that he is the Lord so that no one, Pharaoh, Moses, the Israelites, you, me, should be in any doubt about who God is.

And so the repetition emphasizes this. If you notice in chapter six, verse two, and then verse six, verse seven, verse eight, and verse twenty-nine, we get this phrase, I am the Lord.

[18 : 09] So God is revealing who he is with his covenant name, Yahweh. So he's emphasizing to Moses his covenant faithfulness to his people.

And so this chapter, in essence, teaches us three great truths about the God we worship. And the first is that God is powerful. Chapter six, verse one, then the Lord said to Moses, now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh because of my mighty hand.

He will let them go because of my mighty hand. He will drive them out of his country. God's saying he will deliver his people from slavery in Egypt.

His strong and mighty hand would save them. And so while Moses complains as if things are out of control, because Moses can't see a way out of the trouble his people are in, the Lord here reassures Moses that everything is under his control to the extent that Pharaoh won't just let the Israelites go, no.

Pharaoh will drive them out of his land. He will be so sick of the sight of them because of the devastation that is going on, he'll be glad to see the back of them. And so this has got nothing to do with the seeming power of Pharaoh, but it's got everything to do with the actual power of God.

[19 : 38] God. And that is what we need to remember. No matter what is happening in the world around us, no matter how desperate the circumstances we find ourselves in in our own lives, no matter if things just seem completely out of control, the reality is that God is powerful and that he knows what he is doing and he is in control.

In this world, in his church, in our lives, he's powerful, so he is in control. God is never taken by surprise, God is never wrong-footed, God is never caught out.

He knows what he is doing because he has said, I am the Lord, the supreme sovereign power. Nobody can mess with him. And so this Lord will even allow troubles in order to show his mighty power.

Why? So that we can know and be sure that he is the Lord. And because he is the Lord, then he is worthy of our trust, our service, and our worship.

And so that's the first truth about God. God is powerful. The second is that God keeps his promise. Chapter 6 verse 2 to 5. And this is about God's covenant faithfulness.

[20 : 58] So verse 2, God also said to Moses, I am the Lord. I appear to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name, the Lord, I did not make myself known to them.

I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan where they resided as foreigners. Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and I have remembered my covenant.

So God keeps his promise. God established his covenant with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, Jacob, and so God reminds Moses that he will fulfill his promise to his people.

And yet verse 3 seems to suggest that God didn't reveal his name to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob the way he did to Moses. Remember the burning bush we looked at last week.

And yet the name Yahweh, the name for God, does appear in Genesis. And so it doesn't mean that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob didn't or hadn't heard God's name before.

[22 : 05] Of course they'd heard his name, but it's just that they hadn't had the fuller meaning and significance to God's name that the Exodus would provide. In other words, the events of the Exodus, God's mighty power and God's gracious salvation would reveal even more of who God is.

the Exodus would reveal more of the being and the nature of God that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob couldn't have seen.

And it's all because God had remembered his covenant. We said before, it doesn't mean that God somehow forgot his covenant, but the fact that God remembered it means that God is now ready to act upon what he had promised.

God would prove his faithfulness to his people. Just as in a marriage, a man and a woman make covenant promises on their wedding day, to have and to hold from this day forward for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish till death do us part, or words that are similar.

And yet those promises take on a fuller meaning years into the marriage as the man and the woman get to know each other better, then the full significance of those words that were promised on the wedding day mean far more.

[23 : 32] And so, as God speaks to Moses, he reminds him of his covenant, not because God has changed, but to reiterate his promises to his people.

So, God keeps his promise. First, God is powerful, second, God keeps his promise, and then third, God accomplishes his purpose, in verse six to eight.

God tells Moses what Moses has got to say to the Israelites. So, let's read verse six to eight again, and just notice seven times in these verses, God says, I will.

So, verse six, therefore, say to the Israelites, I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment.

I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians, and I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hands to give to Abraham, Isaac, and to Jacob.

[24 : 40] I will give it to you as a possession. I am the Lord. Seven times God says, I will. The Lord will do everything necessary to save his people.

And God's purpose, we read here, was to redeem his people from their slavery. And that term, redeem, refers to the restoration of rights to someone by paying a ransom.

So a person would be redeemed by a price being paid to the person who held them captive so that they could be set free. And so Israel, as God's firstborn son, would be redeemed from slavery in Egypt by God's outstretched arm.

And it would be the Egyptians who would pay the price as they faced God's mighty acts of judgment. judgment. And so this is how God would take his people and make them his own and be their God.

And after saving them and rescuing them, God would take them and he would give them the land that he had promised to their ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. So Moses is being told the Lord, God, will do everything required to save his people.

[26 : 03] And so Moses had to go and tell the Israelites, this is God's way of salvation. This is what God will do for you. And yet they didn't listen.

Verse 9, Moses reported this to the Israelites, but they did not listen to him because of their discouragement and harsh labor. So do you get that? They were so enslaved, treated so cruelly and badly, they could not possibly conceive of a way out.

Being rescued, being set free was not even on their radar. There's no way they could imagine or dream of it. Freedom just seemed impossible. And so because they wouldn't listen to Moses, it all began to seem impossible for Moses too, despite what God had just said to him.

Verse 12, Moses said to the Lord, if the Israelites will not listen to me, why would Pharaoh listen to me, since I speak with faltering lips. God's just said.

We see it. God's powerful. God will keep his covenant promises, and God will accomplish his purpose to redeem his people, because he is the God who saves.

[27 : 22] And so this term we speak of as Christians, salvation, God saving us. Well, salvation is all God's work from first to last.

There's no way his people here in Egypt could possibly save themselves. No hope, no chance. They were despondent, they were hopeless, and they were helpless.

And that's why the Exodus reveals who God is and what he is like. The Exodus story opens up the story of God's salvation, which is the story of the Bible.

Because God's way of salvation is the same whether we read of it in the Old Testament or whether we read of it in the New Testament, where the initiative is all of God and the saving work is all of God.

God saves out of his free grace and love. And that's why the redemptive work of God in Exodus points us forward to the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.

[28 : 30] In Israel, the Exodus from Egypt is where we see the shadow of what will be fully and gloriously revealed in Jesus Christ.

So just listen to how the New Testament describes the saving work of Jesus and the terms in which the New Testament authors describe the saving work of Jesus.

Revelation chapter 1 verse 5 to him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood. Jesus came to save us from our slavery.

Ephesians chapter 1 verse 7 we read it in our call to worship at the start of the service. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins.

So Jesus came to pay the price for our redemption to buy us back through his own death. And in Matthew 28 verse 20 and surely I am with you always to the very end of the age.

[29 : 36] So Jesus came to take us as his own people and to promise to be with us now and forever. forever. And then through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead we read in 1 Peter chapter 1 verse 4 that we have an inheritance that can never perish or spoil or fade that is kept in heaven for us.

So Jesus will take us to the heavenly promised land. And so like the people of Israel we are hopeless, we are helpless, we are enslaved to our sin, we are needing redemption, we can do nothing about it to save ourselves and yet we have a God who has revealed himself to us as the God who saves, the God who saves by his grace and love and mercy through the work of Jesus.

And so doesn't that tell us that our salvation is never about what we do, it is all about what God does for us through the work of his son.

God does and so the implication will we worship and serve this Lord as we close. God's purpose in the Exodus was to set his people free so that they could worship and serve him.

God's purpose in sending Jesus into this world was to set us free from our sin so we can worship and serve him. and so we have got to choose who we will worship and serve.

[31 : 16] Will we worship and serve the Lord? Bob Dylan, great poet, he once said you've got to serve somebody. You're going to have to serve somebody.

Well it may be the devil or it may be the Lord but you're going to have to serve somebody. And he was right. Bob Dylan's right about a lot of things. He's certainly right about this because that's what these early chapters of Exodus highlight for us.

They're saying who do you want to serve? Will you worship and serve the Lord, your creator who made you, who loves you and who redeems you?

Will you give your life to him? Will you live for him or will you foolishly think that you can find freedom without him? So how have you responded to the Lord's gracious offer of rescue?

Because we all need it. Have you gone to him to be rescued or have you chosen to continue in your slavery? Because just as the Israelites were enslaved to the cruel power of Pharaoh and needed to be set free, we too are enslaved to the cruel power of Satan, sin and death until Jesus sets us free.

[32 : 42] And that is what he came to do. Jesus went to the cross to fight for our freedom. He is the ultimate freedom fighter where through his death Jesus defeated Satan and sin and death to deliver us from their power so that we can experience the freedom of life in all its fullness now until we reach our everlasting home in the future.

And so far better to serve the Lord, the God of covenant faithfulness, the God who has gone to such great lengths at great cost to himself to save you and me.

This loving Lord alone is worthy of our worship and service. do you know the Lord? Don't you want to? Thank you.