

A Redeemer Is Born

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[0 : 0 0] Tonight we are looking at the beginning of the book of Exodus. And the book of Exodus begins with the story of God's people, Israel, in slavery.

And the whole theme of Exodus is that God intervenes to redeem his people. Slavery and redemption is what the book of Exodus is about.

And so as we think about slavery tonight, maybe we have that question, well, slavery existed back in the Old Testament and slavery existed in the days of John Newton.

But is that really a relevant topic for us in the 21st century? And as I was preparing for this sermon, there were a few articles just in the couple of weeks that I was thinking about it that came up on the BBC website that made me think, well, yes, slavery in different kinds is definitely still at work in a global sense.

There was this story of some vineyard workers in South Africa who were being ruthlessly exploited in order to maximise profits.

[1 : 1 4] There was a family, a mum and dad and some kids that had lived in the same pigpen for over 10 years. These were workers who were exposed to pesticides who worked every hour of the day for a minimal wage.

That surely is slavery, is it not? Or there was an investigative journalist that went and did a story called Down and Out in Paris in London exploring some of the darker parts of those cities and discovered all kinds of people who'd been trafficked, being sold by one person to a gangmaster.

So these were people living without passports, living without any rights, being sold into prostitution, being forced to work in the most difficult conditions, having absolutely no rights at all.

And that too is slavery. In our own country, there are aspects of injustice and oppression that are going on. But still maybe we're asking the question, well, I can see slavery in that kind of global sense being out there, but in what sense is slavery relevant to me, where I am?

One of the definitions of slavery that we have in the dictionary is this. Slavery is to be excessively dependent upon or controlled by something.

[2 : 3 7] To be excessively dependent upon something or controlled by something. And that's what we're going to explore tonight. And as we go through the sermon, I would encourage you to think, what is it in my life that I am excessively dependent upon?

Who is it or what is it that I am controlled by? Because whether you're a Christian or whether you're not a Christian, each one of us have to face up to the fact that in different ways we are slaves.

You may find yourself a slave to the wage, as so many people do, that your workplace has so many demands on you, or you find that making money and achieving success is really what you are so focused on, what you live for, that you're enslaved by it.

Perhaps you find yourself a slave to other people's opinions of you, that what matters most is that you are wearing the right things, that you are listening to the right kind of music, that you're moving in the right kind of circles.

And that can be a form of slavery as well. Maybe it's a lifestyle, some kind of addiction that you just can't break free from.

[3 : 53] Maybe it's that success is the most important thing in your life. In a church context, for many of us, maybe the biggest struggle we have is slavery to religion and morality.

We still have this idea in our head that we need to achieve a certain standard of goodness before God will be pleased with us. That we think unless we can match up to a certain checklist, that we can't possibly expect God's favourance.

So we find ourselves enslaved to this constantly trying to prove ourselves. There are so many ways in which we can find ourselves enslaved, and it's important for us to be able to consider what those are in our own lives.

The story of Exodus is the story of redemption from slavery. It reminds us that God is in the business of buying people back, of setting people free.

And as we study this Old Testament book, we need to remember that it points forward to Jesus, our great Saviour, our great Redeemer. So I have a few questions for us to consider tonight.

[5 : 05] And the first question is this. Who is the Redeemer for? And we see in verses 1 to 7 of chapter 1 that it's for the Old Testament church.

In verse 1 it says, these are the names of the sons of Israel who went to Egypt with Jacob. And so because the Bible is narrative, we see that Exodus here is being connected to Genesis.

Genesis leaves us with the story of Jacob and his sons having gone down to be with Joseph in Egypt. And we see that when they get there, they're 70 in number.

But then by verse 7 we see them multiplying, we see them beginning to become a nation. That God is doing something with this family in line with his promises.

That this story in Exodus takes us all the way back to the promises made to Abraham. That Abraham was promised that his descendants would be a great nation, that they would be a numerous people.

[6 : 07] And so here we find those covenant promises are being kept and are being worked out in the Old Testament church. God is going to redeem his chosen people in line with his promises.

And what we see as we go through Exodus is that this people will become a new community. That they are called out of Egypt and brought to Mount Sinai and there God enters a covenant with them.

And he commits himself to them and they are given this great privilege of being a nation who loves, worships and serves the true and the living God.

And they're invited to be a community that loves God and that loves one another and that loves the outsider as well. And what we discover is that this new community, the church, is established through God's grace.

It's not the case that God looked down at the people in slavery in Egypt and was really impressed by their political organization. There was no great liberation movement going on.

[7 : 16] It was entirely God's initiative that God reached down to help helpless people. And what we can say is that God is still redeeming people according to his promise.

That God has made a promise of salvation to all who will believe in Jesus as saviour, that they will be joined to the church and united to Christ.

Because God has also made another promise. He's made a promise to his son Jesus that he is going to prepare a bride for his son. And that bride is the church.

And God is faithful to that promise and God is building a kingdom. And the Redeemer is for all those who will accept that offer of salvation.

And so just as the promise, the Redeemer was for the Old Testament church, so Jesus is our Redeemer for us in the New Testament. And we are called to be a new community that doesn't just live for ourselves, that lives to serve God, that lives to show love and concern to one another, and to show love and care and God's grace to those outside of the church as well.

[8 : 33] And just like Old Testament Israel, we are called to be the church not because we're good people, not because we have achieved a certain standard of morality that sets us above everybody else.

No, it's by grace alone, not our attempts at making the grade. That the Redeemer is for sinners who accept that offer of salvation.

So the Redeemer is for the church, those who will accept the offer and become part of the church. The second question is this, why is a Redeemer needed?

And we find that in verses 8 to 22. In verse 8 it says, then a new king who did not know about Joseph came to power in Egypt.

Luke he said to his people that Israelites have become much too numerous for us. So we find that there's a new king, Pharaoh, who feels threatened by this great people group who are slaves, and he's worried about some kind of rebellion that should an army come, he is concerned that there will be an uprising.

[9 : 49] And so he wants to take steps to keep this people down. And it results in three separate crises for the Israelites. And there is this tension in the story because from Abraham there's been promises that God will make a great nation out of these people.

And now there is the tension, will this Pharaoh thwart these promises? Will God's promises fail? We find the first crisis in verse 11 where there are slave masters put over them to oppress them with forced labor.

Without any rights these people could literally be worked to death. So would this people group Israel, would they stop growing? Because of this oppression?

Will the answer in verse 12 is no, the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread. We see that God intervenes and God protects. And so Pharaoh tries something new.

The second crisis comes in verse 15 when he says to the Hebrew midwives, if you find that a woman gives birth to a boy, you have to kill him.

[11 : 05] And so there's a challenge, will the family line of Israel be halted at this stage? Will families no longer be able to grow?

And again the answer is that no. In verse 17 the midwives feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told him to do. So that in verse 20 the people increased and became more numerous.

God again intervenes and looks after his people. But then comes the third and the most serious crisis in verse 22. Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people, every boy that is born you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live.

The first crisis was forced labour and then there were just these two midwives who were commanded to kill the baby boys, but now the entire nation of Egypt is being called into action to kill these little children.

Where will escape come from this time? That's the tension we're left with at the end of chapter one. What we see is that Israel is in a bleak and a desperate situation because of their slavery.

[12 : 24] When we stop and think about their slavery we see how complete it must have been. Economically they had no possessions, they were receiving no wages, so they had nothing, they had no chance of improvement.

Politically they had no rights, they weren't citizens. Pharaoh could do exactly what he wanted to them and they could do nothing about it. Physically they were being worked to the bone and there were no labour restrictions, no labour laws, to help them and spiritually these people that were called to worship the true God were unable to do it, they were unable to sacrifice, they were unable to worship the way God wanted them to.

There was this constant threat of extinction and death with no possible means of escape. They are in a bleak place right now.

And that's why the rest of the Book of Exodus is such good news because we discover that God listens to their cries as they are oppressed and God chooses Moses to be a redeemer that God is going to take action to redeem them from their desperate situation.

God is still concerned about slavery and injustice in all its forms as we find it today. That just as these oppressed people touched God's heart and he responded that so God is still concerned about the oppression that he sees in the world and we are, as his church, encouraged to have that same heart, to pray and to act when we see these things taking place in our city or in our nation or in our world, that God is concerned about slavery on the global but he's also concerned about slavery at the personal level.

[14 : 25] God is concerned with those things that enslave you and those things that enslave me. So Paul writes in Romans 6 and verse 16, And you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin which leads to death or of obedience which leads to righteousness.

The image is that each one of us is constantly choosing a master for ourselves, someone who we are controlled by, someone who we are obedient to.

And the Bible makes it clear that there is a wise choice and there is an unwise choice that we can follow the way of sin which leads to death or we can follow God and be obedient to him which leads to life and righteousness.

And that applies to us as Christians as much as it does to non-Christians that even as Christians we can so often find ourselves turning away from God and turning towards sin, that we miss out on fully enjoying the relationship with Jesus Christ that God has given to us because we find other things more attractive or because we become enslaved by habits or by worries about people's opinions or any of these different things.

That God is concerned about who our master is and he says that he wants us to be dependent upon him. He wants our lives to be defined by our relationship with him, not to be defined by any of the other stuff.

[16 : 11] God wants to give us true freedom in Christ and that comes as we submit all of our lives to him. We can't just pick and choose, he wants to be master of all of our lives.

And that's why we need Jesus as our Redeemer because in and of ourselves we make the wrong choice. By nature we choose to go the way of sin.

When we read in Ephesians 2 it said that by nature we are spiritually dead, that we're objects of wrath. We don't make the right choices, but God in his love intervenes by his grace, he saves us.

And it's so important for us to recognize our need of a Redeemer each and every day to turn to him for that grace that we need every day.

The third question I want to ask from chapter 2 is this, how does this Redeemer Moses point us to Jesus? Because we need to read the Old Testament from the perspective of the New Testament.

[17 : 23] Whenever we come across a great figure we're looking for links to Jesus. Whenever we see a great saving act we look to see how that links up with Jesus and his saving work on the cross.

So how do we see Jesus in the story of Moses here? Well look at verses 1 and 2. It tells us, a man of the house of Levi married a Levite woman and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son.

Moses had a significant birth because his mum and his dad were both from the clan of Levi, the priestly clan. He has significant origins. It's a significant birth.

Surely Jesus had the most significant, the most spectacular birth of all time because his was the virgin birth as God became man.

And as his birth was announced to Joseph and Mary by angels and to the shepherds on the hillside by that whole host of angels that were singing of this saviour who had come into the world, that they both share a significant birth.

[18 : 33] They both also have humble beginnings. That Moses, although he was a fine child, he was hidden away for three months. And then we find him in verse 3 getting placed in a basket and left to float in a river.

It's not a very auspicious beginning to his life as God's chosen redeemer. And when we flash forward to the New Testament, we see that Jesus was born in a manger, humble beginning.

He had a normal job with normal parents. When he began his public ministry, he didn't have fame and fortune. The Bible tells us he was homeless. He wasn't widely known or respected.

His beginnings as redeemer were also humble. Another striking connection we see is in verses 3 to 5 where we see exactly which river Moses was placed in.

Because he was drifting along in the Nile. And we know from chapter 1 that the Nile was supposed to be the place where all the Hebrew children were put in to die.

[19 : 49] So here we find Moses put in the place of death. But he doesn't die because Pharaoh's daughter finds him and her servant girl raises Moses up.

Raises him up to life as it were. And surely this reminds us about Jesus. Because Jesus by God's will was put in the place of death for you and for me.

But that he didn't stay dead. Three days later God raised him to life in victory over sin and death. And the final connection we see is that while Moses had humble beginnings, by verse 10 we find that when the child Moses grew older, his sister took him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son.

So we find him now living in the palace. He's now received glory. And again we can think about Jesus and Jesus' humble beginnings and his death on the cross.

But then we see his glory as he's raised to life and then as he is ascended to heaven. And we see him now seated as king of kings and Lord of lords. And there's this promise that one day he will return in all his glory to draw his people to be with him and to make everything new.

[21 : 18] So we see that Moses even in these details points us to Jesus our Redeemer. That Moses is the one who brought redemption for Israel.

He was the one who freed them from their slavery. He's the one who gave them freedom to enjoy relationship with God, freedom to enjoy being God's chosen people, freedom to live under God's rule as their king.

And that's what Jesus came to do for his church. That's the good news of the Gospel. So the final question is this one.

Why is redemption? Why is the theme of redemption so important? Why do we find it weaving its way all the way through the Bible?

Well surely fundamentally this theme of redemption reminds us that Jesus is the one who gives us freedom from our slavery to sin and death.

[22 : 21] The Bible speaks so clearly about that slavery that in and of ourselves we are spiritually dead and objects of wrath.

That Jesus came and took our sin on himself. That Jesus took the death for sin that you and I deserve. He died it on our behalf and he won victory over them both for us when he triumphed over the grave when he was risen from the dead.

Redemption is so important because it gives us that assurance of our salvation that it is secure because Christ has won the victory on our behalf.

But redemption and freedom is not just for our salvation. It's also so important for us in our everyday lives as Christians.

Because when we begin to reflect and to see in how many ways we can find ourselves being enslaved by different things, we realize that we need the freedom that Jesus offers.

[23 : 35] We need grace to be able to have the power to break free. When we understand what Jesus came to do, we have freedom from trying to prove ourselves that we live in a world that teaches us that we have to prove that we are worthy.

We are constantly being encouraged to hit the right grades or to meet the right kind of targets. It can be exhausting and tiring and we can bring that into the church and we think that we have to try and prove ourselves to God.

But the Gospel of grace says that our identity is in Christ. It's not reliant on our performance. It's all about Christ's finished work on the cross that we are accepted unconditionally.

And that frees us from so much baggage and so much stress of trying to prove ourselves. When the people of Israel were called out of Egypt, when Moses led them to Mount Sinai and God was going to give them the Ten Commandments, he prefaced them by saying, I am the Lord your God who brought you out of slavery in Egypt.

In other words, I am the one who has intervened, who has taken the initiative to bring you into relationship. And as you are now my redeemed people, here's how you're supposed to live and he gives them the Ten Commandments.

[25 : 01] In other words, you belong to God and then you behave in the way that God looks for. And it's so vital for us to understand that because we can often invert the order and we can think, well, I need to behave a certain way before I can belong to the church or I need to achieve a certain standard before God will accept me.

And so we see how the gospel frees us from that because we realize it's all about the work that Christ has already done for us. When he said, it is finished, he meant it. The work of salvation is complete. We don't add to it in any way.

We see too that when we understand this freedom and what Jesus Christ has given to us, it can free us from that bitterness that we can find in our lives.

When somebody sins against us, when we feel wronged, we can end up with resentment and bitterness. And we have the choice of either living with that and storing that up and living on that, or we can look to the cross and see how much we have been forgiven by Jesus Christ.

And as we look at that, as we look at His grace towards us, then that begins to melt our hearts. And we begin to be the kind of people that can practice that forgiveness.

[26 : 29] That when we look at Jesus as our Redeemer, it can free us from the selfishness that we so often find in our lives. When we reflect on the fact that Jesus gave us everything.

When Jesus welcomed us in, when Jesus served us by dying for us, surely that should give us openness to other people and a willingness to get outside of ourselves and a willingness to serve and love others.

And it frees us from our morality when we realize that He has fulfilled the law for us and His righteousness is gifted to us.

That we need this freedom in our Christian lives, otherwise we find ourselves enslaved. We need to go back time and again to the Gospel of God's grace, because it's only the Gospel that can free us from our slavery.

Slavery is not an old problem. It's still an issue for each one of us every day, and we need to be honest about that, to consider where our problems are, where we find ourselves being controlled by things or excessively dependent on things that are less than God.

[27 : 51] And that's the message of the Gospel that Jesus came to give us freedom over those things. That whether we're a Christian, whether we're not a Christian, the message of Jesus' life, death and resurrection is what you and I need to be freed from our slavery.

Let's pray. Loving God, we do thank you for the story of the Exodus, for that reminder that you are in the business of buying people back, of redeeming us and making us into a your people.

May you help us to reflect on those areas on our lives where we find ourselves slaves to sin. May we be honest. May we be repentant.

And may you help us to reflect daily on the Gospel of grace, to see how Jesus can free us from all these things, to see how much money we need to look for our identity in work, or how much money we have, or what friends we have, because we are accepted and we have our identity in Christ.

Help us to see that He gives us all that we need. Help us to rejoice in that. Help us to live in the light of that.

[29 : 23] Help us to see that as we see slavery and injustice. May we look to deal with it in our own hearts, in our own lives, and in the lives of others as we come across it.

And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.