

the way of freedom

(if needed: PRAY) – If you have a Bible with you, crack it open to

Exodus chapter 20. In the midst of all that's going on this morning, I want to introduce and **set us up for** an extended study in the 10 Commandments that will begin **next Sunday**.

And as I say that, I wonder **what response stirs in you** – at the thought of spending the coming **season** in the 10 Commandments.

If I'm honest, I suspect some of us might have a **deflated** feeling – a study in the 10 Commandments doesn't sound that **life-giving**. Feels more like religion and morality than *the grace of the gospel* and the beauty of *life in Christ*.

And yet that's **exactly why** we need to not rush past the 10 Commandments in a single Sunday as we journey through Exodus – but rather to *SLOW DOWN* and **dig deep** into the riches of God's grace revealed in this **foundational text...** this **monumental revelation...**

Because – and this is the premise of our study – because **without this, the Israelites – though rescued from slavery in Egypt – would never be truly free.**

Let me say that again.

Without this, the Israelites – though rescued from the oppression of Egypt – would never be truly free.

They would just be oppressed somewhere else – and not just oppressed, but *an agent of oppression* themselves.

Enslaved and enslaving others – just like the Egyptians...

Which is obviously **not** why God rescued the Israelites from Egypt – He didn't rescue them to just be enslaved somewhere else.

And if you've been journeying with us through Exodus, you heard it in last Sunday's text. **Exodus 19:4-6**. The Israelites have come to Mt. Sinai, and, there, **God says to them:**

"You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully [obey my voice] and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

With these words, YAHWEH – the God of Exodus – the Rescuing God of Israel makes clear that God's **redemptive work** – God's **saving endeavour** is not **complete** with having rescued the Israelites from Egypt. No, God's **goal** is to **claim** them as His own and **transform** them into a people **alive in His Ways** – "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation". **A people alive in the ways of their Rescuing God** – revealing the goodness and beauty of God's Ways to the world...

"Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

This, according to Exodus, is the goal of God's saving grace in their life – not just to get Israel **out** of Egypt, but **into the life of God**... to

rescue them not just from Egypt, but from the destruction of idolatry and lead them **into** the freedom of God's Ways.

To be alive in the ways of their Rescuing God...

Is this not what we long for?

*This, according to the God of Exodus, is **true freedom**.*

*Which is not how we often think of **freedom, is it?***

Not in our day and not in these parts...

When we talk about freedom – when we dream about it – we're often talking and dreaming about **the ability to do whatever we want, right?**
the ability to do whatever we choose in any given moment...

Every child and teenager have given voice to this perceived ideal – this dream – to **break free** from all restrictions so that we can do **whatever we want**.

This, our culture and our own hearts often say is **true freedom**.

The ability to do whatever we choose.

But, as a wise person once said (and many can attest), "slavery comes in many guises." As the unsung theologian, Bob Dylan, once put it, "everybody serves somebody".

And God knows this! And thank God He does...

Because, as much as we may dream the dream of freedom as the "autonomous self" – where we are *free to do whatever we want* – this itself

so often becomes ***its own enslavement...*** which many of us know this by experience...

There is something ***so appealing*** about this popular vision of freedom – doing whatever we want... ***UNTIL... UNTIL*** we realize that our own desires, ***what we want***, can, at times, be ***the worst thing for us...*** That our freedom – our capacity and commitment to live according to our heart's loudest hunger – can ***become our greatest undoing.***

And not just for us, but maybe for others too...

John Dickson, Director of the Centre for Public Christianity in Australia, makes this point. He says,

"Many talk like this [defining freedom as *the power to do whatever we want*] but we know it can't be right. Freedom **cannot** be the capacity to do whatever we choose, because some choices are destructive and enslaving – for ourselves and others. Think of the alcoholic, the workaholic, the porn addict, or the friendless millionaire. Sometimes pure, unadulterated 'choice' leads to a kind of servitude to our lesser selves." (*A Doubter's Guide to the 10 Commandments*, p.44)

What a statement – that many of us could never put into words, but we know by experience to be ***so accurate.***

True freedom **cannot** just be the ability to do whatever we want – because sometimes what we want is actually **destructive** – for us and for others. Many of the greatest pain in our lives, our families and world are due to the pursuit and embrace of this kind of freedom. Or more precisely, this kind of ***unconscious enslavement*** – being mastered by desires and powers that though enticing, are ultimately destructive.

Truth is, Bob Dylan was right. **We all live in submission to someone – to a master** – whether it's the Pharaoh of Egypt or the impulse of our latest bodily craving.

Which means the question is not "*Do you live in submission to a Master*", but "*Does your Master **know** what is best for you – and for all – and **want** what is best for you – and for all?*"

Does your Master bring freedom – or oppression?

And this is where the God of Exodus – the Rescuing God (in concert with the whole of the biblical witness) – invites us – along with the people of Israel – to **reframe** our vision and understanding of **freedom**. From **the ability to whatever we want** – to the **grace of living in joyful** submission to a better master – **a Perfect Master** – in whose service is **true freedom**.

A Master – a Lord who **knows** what is best for us – **and for all** – and who **wants** what is best for us – **and for all**.

And this is where the **10 Commandments** come into the story for Israel.

Not as a means of suppressing or oppressing the recently emancipated Israelites, but as the means of God graciously revealing Himself to the Israelites and leading them into **a life lived in the liberating Reign of God** – a life that would lead **to Life** – *for them and for the all*.

Which means then that, contrary to what we often think, the 10 Commandments are really **the Way of Freedom.**

And this isn't just *sermonic spin*, this is exactly how God introduces the 10 Commandments in **Exodus 20.**

Something we often miss, though its strikingly front and center.

We hear it in the **opening words** of the 10 Commandments – which begin **NOT** with the words, "You shall not" or "You shall not have", but with the words **(Exodus 20:2) – "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery."**

THEN, and only then, does God outline the 10 Commandments.

And this, we need to take to heart and allow to frame, or **reframe**, our experience and understanding of all the Commandments.

Because how often have we thought of the 10 Commandments as just a **burden**. As something oppressive, even. Something that is intended to **limit** our freedom. Something that many would long to break free from...

But here GOD prefaces the Commandments by reminding Israel that He is the One who has freed them from slavery.

Which means that this God is not interested in oppressing them again.

JUST THE OPPOSITE: His desire **for them** is **freedom** – that they would **never again** be enslaved. **NEVER AGAIN!**

"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery."

It's as if God says:

"Remember where you've been and what I've done – for you.
I am the LORD your God.
I'm the One who came to you and saved you.
I am the One who has freed you from the land of slavery.
You are free now.
I have set you free.
And I WANT YOU to STAY FREE.
So here's HOW...
Here is how to keep your freedom!"

As with all of God's command, the 10 Commandments were never intended to **limit** Israel's life or ours... to **restrict** Israel or us from experiencing the fullness of life. **NO! Just the opposite:** they were God's way for Israel to **live free & stay free** – and **NEVER go back** to a life of slavery and oppression.

Without this, the Israelites – though rescued from slavery in Egypt – would never be truly free. They'd just be enslaved somewhere else – oppressed and oppressing others...

You see, in the Exodus - the Plagues, the Passover, and the Red Sea – God had delivered Israel from their Egyptian oppressors, but here at Mt. Sinai, God takes this saving work **another step deeper** – seeking to deliver Israel from **their inner oppressor** – the idol factory of their own hearts – which, if submitted to, would, *without fail*, ultimately enslave and oppress them (just as Egypt had).

But the God of Exodus loves us more than that...

And so, he gave Israel the 10 Commandments – to teach them (and us) **how to live** – to call them away from the things that enslave and destroy them and others, and to teach them how to live in the freedom of God's Ways... *in the freedom of a liberating God.*

"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery."

Similar to how in the Lord's prayer, the phrase **"Our father in heaven"** is really a preface to all of the individual petitions within the prayer:

- *"our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your Name...*
- *Our Father in heaven, your kingdom come...*
- *Our Father in heaven, give us this day our daily bread...*

So here, **Ex 20:2 is to preface each and every commandment.**

Which means, every time we read one of the 10 commandments, we need to hear it in the light of this preface:

*"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. [I have freed you from a life of slavery and I want you to stay free, therefore] (v.3) **you shall have no other gods before me...***

*"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. [I have freed you from your life of slavery and I want you to stay free, therefore] (v.8) **Remember the Sabbath day be keeping it holy...***

*"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. [I have freed you from your life of slavery and I want you to stay free, therefore] (v.14) **you shall not commit adultery...***

and on and on...

Seen through the lens of v.2, we can understand now why, rather than perceiving the Law as a burden, the **Israelites** came to celebrate the Law as a gift.

To this day – Pentecost, the annual feast in honor of the giving of the Law is one of the **most jubilant and celebratory feasts** in the Jewish year. It's the Feast where they clasp one another's arms and dance and shout and sing. **WHY?** Because, in the giving of the Law, God had revealed the way for them to **enjoy freedom forever** – no matter where they were.

"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

You are free.

I have set you free.

And I want you to stay free.

*So here is how. Here is how to **live free.**"*

Ok, so what does this have to do with us – most of us non-Jews, on the other side of history – and specifically, on the other side of Jesus?

Simply Put: **EVERYTHING.**

Because **this** is exactly why Jesus has come.

This is the salvation Jesus offers to all of us.

This is the heart of Jesus' life, death, resurrection and present reign.

He has come **to set captives free** – and to lead us, in grace, into the liberating Reign of God – in whose service is true freedom...

Hear the words of Jesus in **Luke 4** – quoting and fulfilling the scroll of Isaiah... **Luke 4:18-19.**

*"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
Because He has anointed me
To proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
And recovery of sight to the blind,
To set the oppressed free,
To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

And then, after sitting down, Jesus said simply, *"Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."*

And the rest of the gospel is simply the **outworking** of this revelation – **the end of oppression** – in Jesus and because of Jesus – for all who will bow to Him as Lord.

Which should be no surprise to us – *since the God who gives us the 10 Commandments is the God who gives us Jesus—that we might be free.*

Not yet from the oppressive regimes of our world, but increasingly from the **enslaving power** of our own fallen hearts.

I love how J.I. Packer years ago expressed it. **He said,**

*"Suppose someone says: 'I try to take the 10 commandments seriously, and live by them, and they swamp me! Every day I fail somewhere. What am I to do?' **The answer is: now** that you know your own weakness and sinfulness, turn to God, and to his Son Jesus Christ, for pardon and power. Christ will bring you into a new kind of life, in which your heart's deepest desire will be to go God's way, and obedience will be burdensome no longer." (Packer, 248)*

Not necessarily immediately – but as we seek and follow Jesus, we will find ourselves led into the Way of true freedom – a life alive into the liberating ways of our Rescuing God...

A life lived in submission to a Master who knows what is best for us – and for all – and who wants what is best for us – and for all...

A Master – a Lord – who has laid down His life for us!

Why would we not run to bow to Jesus as Lord today and forever?

So let me ask you: **Does your Master bring freedom?**

As you look at your own life – your own heart and where it leads you – **where do you need to experience the liberating rescue and reign of Jesus?**

Where has your **freedom** – and by that I mean, your attempt to be your own Lord – actually led you into bondage – into ways that are destructive to you, or to others – or both?

Whatever your answer, hear the call of Jesus this morning from

Matthew 11:28-30,

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 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. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Come to Me, Jesus says.

*Come bow to Me – that I might set you free, and lead you into the Life that is **true freedom** – life with God in Jesus Christ as our Liberating Lord.*

Let's pray...