

SERMON: "BIBLE BASICS - EXODUS"

TEXTS: OLD TESTAMENT EXODUS 3:1-12
OLD TESTAMENT EXODUS 16:1-8 & 17:1-7

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INTRODUCTION

Let's say there is a couple, say somewhere in Iowa. Hypothetically
And let's say they've been married for a while, long enough to have a grandchild.
Let's also say that one of them has worn glasses pretty much their whole life
Maybe had a patch when they were a kid, trying to treat 'lazy eye'

And let's say the other started wearing glasses later in life. Hypothetically
Doesn't wear them or need them all the time. They have reader glasses
like the inexpensive kind you pick up at the drug store. Say more than one pair
And let's further speculate that one person often cannot find their glasses
Maybe the one with more than a pair or two of readers?

Again, all this is purely hypothetical. So, a hypothetical question.
Shouldn't the one who always knows where their glasses are (on their head)
be understanding of the one with a few pairs of readers who may misplace
their glasses every so often. I'm just asking ... for a friend

For the purpose of the sermon, I'd like all of us to find our glasses
Reading the Old Testament requires some reading glasses to understand
what it is that we are reading – to keep us from getting lost in the weeds
to keep us focused on the major messages and movements

Two lens help us see the whole of the Hebrew bible
Johnny focused on the first one last week – the covenant with Abraham and Sarah
God choosing a people, Israel, who are blessed so to be a blessing to the world.
We speak of the second lens this Sunday – the story of the Exodus.
God delivering the people from slavery in Egypt to a new life in a new land.

These two lens are reinforced almost every time God identifies Godself
Through story after story, God will speak saying one of these two things
"I am the God of your ancestors, of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob"
That is a reference to the covenant with Israel

The other thing God will say is, by way of identifying Godself
"I am the God who brought you up out of the land of Egypt out of bondage"
A reference to God's actions of liberating a people, delivering them

A GOD WHO ...

Later. Much later. God will add a third way of identifying Godself

That will be after the exile when God brings the rebellious and hopefully repentant people back to Israel out of Babylon. God will say. "I am the God who brought you back from Babylon." It is basically another exodus another liberation, another delivery.

This story – the story of the Exodus is the defining story of the Old Testament

It is the backbone of the first part of the bible. It is so because it tells us who God is by telling us what God has done and is still doing. It is a story of liberation, of freedom

Let me explain by starting at the beginning of the Exodus story, Exodus chapter 3

This is the story of the burning bush, where Moses meets the living God and where God tells Moses (and us) who God is by telling us what God will do
I invite you to listen again to these words asking the question

This is a God who _____? Fill in the blank with the verbs in the passage

Then the Lord said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey.

This is a God who does these things – not just here but throughout the Old Testament, And throughout the New Testament in the person of Jesus eating with sinners, touching the untouchables and confronting the powers that be – religious and Roman And still today through the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit.

Notice the verbs and how they tell us who God is

God *sees* the affliction, God *hears* the cries, God *knows* the sufferings, God *comes down to deliver* the captives out of slavery and into hope.

That is who God is ... God sees, God hears, God knows, God delivers!

Please note my use of the present tense.

This story is very much about who God is and what God does

Yes, this is history, the history of Israel. But this story is so much more.

The exodus story speaks a word of hope in every time, every land and language

Throughout history, God has been very much about liberation

leading people out from under the heavy boots of oppression

leading people out of bondage (all sorts of bondage) and into freedom

FREEDOMS GIVEN & TAKEN AWAY

Our God is not a distant and detached observer,
untouched and unmoved by the pain and brokenness of the world.
Our God is a God who is active on behalf of people who need an advocate
Our God is an advocate, an activist, an abolitionist ... a God who frees slaves

In a very real sense, God takes sides ... the side of freedom
God stands up for those who have been beaten down.
God stands with those who have been trodden under foot.
God lifts up those who have fallen between the cracks.

I pray you notice that God is freeing not just a person ... but a people
And as we read in Exodus 16 and 17, providing for a people – food and water
not just freeing them but caring for them, helping them start a new life

In historical context, this kind of liberation is both an emancipation proclamation
and reconstruction, freedom plus the forty acres and a mule that Grant promised
and planned for ... and Andrew Johnson took out from underneath a freed people

I could go on about historical cycles. There is a pattern in the history of this nation
of freedoms given then scaled back – the collapse of reconstruction, the rise
of the Klan, Jim Crow laws, voting rights rolled back. Courts granting rights
and later courts restricting those same rights. Freedoms won and freedoms lost.

I would be happy to talk with any of you about those historical trends another time.
What I want you to see and hear and claim is that the work of freedom is ongoing
And that the biblical record is clear. Our God is a God who self identifies
over and over again as “I am the Lord your God who led you out of bondage”
Our God is a God of liberation, of freedom given ... not freedom taken away.

What I hope you might see anew is how radical liberation is – God frees enslaved
and oppressed people. God sees their misery. God hears their cries.
God know their suffering. And God does something about it ... and that freedom,
the freedom of oppressed and otherized peoples often upsets our apple carts
like Jesus turning over tables in the courtyard of the temple.

So here are a couple of questions for you about freedom
One, do you see how the Bible tells the story over and over of our God being
a God of liberation? Is the God you believe in a God of freedom?

Ok, building on that foundation ... Is that freedom just a personal thing?
God freed me from my sin, my brokenness in whatever forms it has taken over time.
Or is that freedom a plural thing? God did free a people, plural.

SUMMARY

Ok. One more question ... about how freedom singular and plural mix.
How does one person's, one peoples freedom fit together,
or to keep it real, rub up against another person or peoples' freedom?

I have several flags. Those include decorative flags (Beth bought those)
Georgia Bulldog and Liverpool flags (I bought those) and a variety of
American flags including a Gadsden flag – the yellow one with the coiled snake
and the motto "Don't Tread on Me." It was a power symbol during
the American Revolution. You could say it was the flag of the 13 colonies.

I mention the Gadsden flag and the motto to drill down on that last question,
the one about how freedoms fit together. Does your freedom tread on anyone?
Does your religious liberty tread on anyone else's religion or liberty?

One of the places in our society these questions about freedom are being raised
are in public places, especially our schools and the question of displaying
the Ten Commandments. We will talk about law as a bible basic next week

Looking ahead to next week and trying to connect it to this week
Connect the God of law and the God of liberation and maybe touch on the question
of how the Ten Commandments might fit be they on display and in our discourse,
And connect to these questions I keep asking you ...

How about a pop quiz today and next week too?
The correct answer will help you connect all these things
Here is the question ... How do the Ten Commandments begin?

The ten commandments do not begin with commandment number one
They do not begin with a 'thou shalt' or 'thou shalt not'
They do not begin with what we should or should not do
They begin with what God has done, God's mighty and merciful acts

**Then God spoke all these words: I am the LORD your God, who
brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery ...**

First things first. Liberation ... then law