

## **Exodus - Journey to Freedom** (9 week series for 22 January - 26 March 2023)

The story of the Israelites' rescue from slavery in Egypt and journey to (although not entry to) the promised land is central to understanding the Old Testament and indeed the whole story of salvation in the Bible. It is a story which begins with a family and ends with a nation. It is the defining act of God's salvation for the Jewish people and it foreshadows our redemption in Jesus.

At the heart of Exodus is the question: how does a holy God dwell with an unholy people - a people through whom he wants to bless the whole world. Moses in many ways foreshadows Christ (as priest, prophet and judge) - yet his sin means he never enters the promised land, he only glimpses it.

The New Testament writers use this Exodus story to help us understand God's saving work in Jesus. Matthew in particular wants us to see how Jesus is the fulfilment of the Hebrew Scriptures. Exodus foreshadows our own rescue from sin's slavery, to our redemption through Jesus, to our baptism, and the gift for each of us of the Holy Spirit. God's dwelling place is no longer in the Tabernacle (40:34) but in each of us through Christ (John 14:23). We as God's people are to be a blessing to the nations. We walk to freedom because of God's grace alone and our response is worship and praise of him.

### **22 January**

#### **Exodus 2: 1-10, (Matthew 2: 13-18) - A longing for freedom**

The people of Israel have grown numerous in Egypt - note the similarities with Genesis and God's promise that his people will multiply. But that has led to their oppression and slavery. Where is God in all of this? As we see with the midwives in the first chapter (1:17), and here in chapter 2, it is the women who act subversively and courageously against oppression. And that leads to the birth of Moses. Where can we stand against oppression? Looking forward, Matthew and Luke transform Exodus 1-2 in their narratives of Jesus' birth. Jesus brings a new exodus for all people in all the world.

### **29 January**

#### **Exodus 3:1-15, (John 8: 34-38, 53-58)— The call to freedom**

There are 430 years of oppression and slavery and then God intervenes to rescue his people. God makes himself known to Moses in this encounter at the burning bush and there begins the question of how can a holy God dwell with an unholy people. Moses is the pivotal character - the people's intermediary with God - he is prophet, priest and judge. He foreshadows Christ.

### **5 February**

#### **Exodus 11:1, 12:21-28, (Luke 22: 7-20)— The day of freedom**

The 10th plague was the death of the Firstborn. The Israelites' were spared from God's judgement by the blood of the lamb smeared on their door-posts. John in his gospel times portrays Jesus as the Passover lamb. In the Synoptic gospels Jesus is sacrificed the day after the Passover meal. In John's gospel Jesus is crucified on the day the lambs are sacrificed. Equally in John 2 Jesus clears the temple of animals leaving only himself.

**12 February** (*half term begins*)

**Exodus 14:10, 13-14, 19-31 (Matthew 3: 13-17) — Celebration of freedom**

This story marks a transition in the life of the Israelites - an end to their old life with the complete destruction of the Egyptian army, and their emergence on the other side of the waters. They put their trust in God and declare his praises. Miriam led the women in worship (15:20). It mirrors our baptism as we die to our old life and rise again with Christ to our new life in him.

**19 February**

**Exodus 16:1-3, 11-18 (Matthew 4: 1-11) — Freedom to trust**

There is much in this section (15:22-17:7) on God's provision for his people (manna, quails and water). God's faithfulness contrasts with the people's fear, quarrelling and grumbling and their lack of trust in him. Jesus' miracles of feeding the 5000/4000 were poignant because of the people's awareness of how God fed them in the wilderness. Equally in Matthew's gospel (4:1-11) we see how Jesus in his 40 days in the wilderness draws on these incidents (see his references to Deuteronomy 6:16, 8:3) but he is Israel in perfection.

**26 February**

**Exodus 19: 3-13 (Matthew 5: 1-10) — Living in freedom**

In this section, chapters 19-23, God gives his people laws for living - most notably the 10 commandments. We see here the tension between a holy God and his ways, and an unholy people with Moses as an intermediary between the people. Matthew places Jesus' teaching which starts with the Beatitudes (Matt 5) on the mountainside as a parallel to this giving of the law at Mount Sinai.

**5 March**

**Exodus 32:1-4, 9-14, (John 17: 20-26)— Freedom under threat**

Exodus 20:23 forbid the people from making other gods besides God and yet within a short space of time this is what they do. Moses pleads with God on behalf of the people. However his action later in the chapter appears shockingly gruesome to us. What gods do we worship? Jesus is our perfect intermediary.

**12 March**

**Exodus 34: 29-35, (2 Corinthians 3: 7-18 or Matthew 17: 1-8) - Freedom to be shared**

Moses meets with God and his face is radiant with God's glory. He is transformed in God's presence. The gospels also record Jesus' transfiguration by God's glory (e.g. Matt 17:1-13). We are each made in God's image and created to bear his glory and bring his blessing to the world. Paul draws on this passage in his letter to the Corinthians. Through the Spirit and in Christ what was only possible for Moses is possible for us all. As we gaze on Christ and his glory we are each transformed and as we do so we reflect God's glory in and for the world interceding for those in need of God's mercy.

**19 March - Mothering Sunday** (break from this series)

**26 March**

**Exodus 40: 1-5, 34-38 (John 14: 15-23) - Freedom's joy**

Exodus began with the absence of God and here, in the final chapter, God's presence fills the Tabernacle. In this small portable tent, God chooses to dwell, in the midst of his people whom he loves (cf John 1:14). The journey to the promised land is not yet over but God will go with them. Jesus promises his disciples in John 14:23 that "we will come to him and make our home with him". This is the joy of the Christian life: God's abiding presence with us who are in Christ and through the Spirit's power. It is in service of him that we find true freedom and joy.

**Some resources:**

*The Abiding Presence: a theological commentary on Exodus* by Mark Scarlata (SCM Press, 2018)