

Exodus Intro Sunday

Opening Prayer **God of grace, liberating God, free us we pray.. Amen**

Welcome back

If this is your first time back with us in person? then a very warm welcome, it really is wonderful for me to see you this morning. I can't tell you whether that's mutual, but look around. We're for you this morning. It's wonderful to see you face to face. It's a beautiful gift to look someone else in the eye. Don't get me wrong, I'm extremely grateful for the gifts of technology, that we can see an image of each other across a screen, (but it's a poor reflection of the reality) but at the heart of being truly human is being physically present with one another. It really is a gift.

As we've been praying for you, thank you for your prayers and encouragement. Lockdown has been so different for each individual person and family, some have loved it, for some it's been full of grief, for others it's been like a steady dripping tap of pain, others have simply retreated into themselves. But I hope you've known God's presence with you and God has been teaching you new things. It's good to learn and grow, isn't it?

For me this Summer, I was specially selected, to get some training and teaching on how the speed limits in England are there to be obeyed, they showed me my failures and taught me that speed limits are a good thing.....I listened intently as a humbled vicar and hoped I was a good pupil. If that wasn't bad enough... on Friday morning when I was delivering Joshua and Hannah to school, Joshua turned around to me unprompted, with a straight face and simply said, Dad do you really think you're safe driving around Bath? No irony!! Straight Question!!! His comments have made me laugh and cry in equal measure.....

We've rented a tent to help us gather together as a community over the next couple of months. I've been praying Psalm 133 all week, "how good it is when God's people dwell together in unity.....for there, God bestows his blessing". This six months has been incredibly costly to many people's discipleship, but we have a window to worship together in a new way and cry out to God for help and strength as we gather.....Come Lord Jesus, Come.

Exodus

This Autumn we're going to journey through the book of Exodus, it's a magnificent book, with a story that has gripped generation after generation. The Israelites who went there for safety, find themselves cruelly enslaved & oppressed, yet God leads them out, through Moses, and miraculously sets them free.against all the odds.

I've provided you 3 things this morning that I hope will help you engage in this story this Autumn. Read through Exodus and use **(1)Exodus for you as a guide**. Do a chapter a week and you'll just about make it by Christmas, meet up with someone and share what you're discovering each week, join a life group.

(2) There is a Resources list, please go away and find something that helps you go deeper with God, excites you to discover more of what God has done through history and is saying to us today **(Strickland)**

(3) Brief Powerpoint Intro. from me that gives you a taster of what's in the book of Exodus.

These extraordinary events are of over 3,500 years ago and it has an amazingly powerful narrative for us to follow, of how God delivers his people as they go on an incredible journey to the Promised Land. And like all journeys there are incredible highs and lows, things to learn on the way as gradually God reveals His nature and His character to His people. God establishes a new relationship with His people and makes His presence known.

I've been wrestling with Exodus for 4 years and there a number of things I'm really praying for – That we will hear God's call on our lives and step into Christian leadership.....So many of us appear very weighed down and reluctant to respond to God's call on our lives and hide away from Christian leadership. Moses is a great person to look at, as God gets to work freeing him and the Israelites from a 'lesser' life.

A Gospel of Freedom

You know, a central theme in Exodus and the Bible is that of slavery and freedom. And we see how God speaks to Pharaoh like in Exodus 8.1 *"Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Go to Pharaoh and say to him, "This is what the Lord says: let my people go, so that they may worship me". Let my people Go-----We see this compassionate word from God seven times (5.1, 7.16, 8.1, 20, 9.1, 13. 10,3) to the suffering, oppression, abuse and enslavement of God's people, finally God answers their prayers for freedom and deliverance.*

Everybody talks about freedom – free speech, free trade, free markets., freedom of worship, freedom from suffering, freedom from poverty, and freedom to choose.....freedom from the EU..... We are free. We live in 21st century UK, and we see ourselves as one of the freest civilizations in the history of the world. . Freedom is its own justification today and one of the highest values in the contemporary West.

But freedom is a tricky concept. *You see how do we practice freedom and not destroy community, or creation, or not constantly self-destruct like the younger brother in Luke 15? The irony is that the more we human beings pursue the goal of being totally free, the more enslaved we become . There is no such thing as complete autonomy, there's always something bigger than us. Ultimately we become *enslaved to our families, our own dreams, our kids, our marriage, our careers, bad relationships, to our bodies, our reputation, our fears, our addictions to things, anything good or bad can enslave us.**

The Freedom of the Gospel

One of the best ways to understand what the Bible means by its teaching that Jesus saves us is to see that Jesus sets us free. *Jesus summarised his ministry as one of freedom in Luke 4: The Spirit of the Lord is on me, He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and to set the oppressed free,*

At Baptism, Christians affirm our freedom from sin, the brokenness of the world and the devil, but also free to live the abundant and full life God came to bring us ... Becoming a Christian means moving from one kingdom to another. To transfer from the oppressive and enslaving kingdom of this world to the free, good and dynamic rule and reign of God. As the prophet Bob Dylan put it decades ago: You've got to serve somebody; it may be the devil, it may be the Lord, but you've got to serve somebody. Something that tears you down, or someone who builds you up? Something that creates anxiety, or someone who gives you peace?

How do we get there? The first thing is to present yourself to God. You cannot simply break free from an addiction without giving yourself to something or someone else that is greater with the power for real and powerful and lasting transformation. That's what Jesus offers

Free from guilt and shame, darkness and death, oppression and fear. Do you need to find freedom again? Are you longing for freedom? but looking in the wrong places? Offer yourself afresh to God today

Prayer

Father it was Demos Shakarian, who called his book the Happiest people on earth, we confess that the cares of this world, our selfishness and sin have left us bound and anxious. We repent and offer ourselves to you again this morning. Revive and renew us by your Spirit. In Jesus' Name. AMEN