

The Liberating God

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[0 : 0 0] So today we find ourselves in the fourth week of our Life Explored series, which is tracking along with the program our community groups are doing. If you're new today, or if you've been away for a while, you can ask me more about that later.

The session of the fourth week of Life Explored opens with this question. Often we feel our lives would be complete. If only we had someone or something.

What is your if only? What is your if only? Now with this question, we draw near to the desires of our hearts.

We want to be complete. We want to be fulfilled in our sense of identity, purpose, in our work, in our leisure. And we want to be fulfilling to those around us.

Seeing things wisely, acting justly, compassionately. Blessing our friends and our neighbors with our presence. There's that familiar phrase, he or she is the complete package.

[0 : 5 9] She's got it all. We want what he has. We aspire to be like them. And this desire to be complete is, I think, a natural healthy desire.

C.S. Lewis rather famously took it as internal evidence. We're meant for more than the world can offer. In the desire to be complete, I think, we can detect the work of the Holy Spirit convicting us of our sinfulness.

Since sin is, in the ultimate sense, estrangement from God. And it's this estrangement which is the source of our sense of incompleteness. God's law, as Romans 2 tells us, is written in our hearts. Because we know, deep within us, that something is wrong. We are incomplete. The danger, of course, is what we do with that desire.

To what, or whom, do we turn in order to be complete? Now, this morning, we're going to look briefly at two passages of Scripture. They were read for us this morning in the lessons Exodus 3 and Matthew 11.

[2 : 0 3] For although natural theology can take us to a certain point, it is not the fullness of the revelation of God that happens only when he speaks to us. The burning bush, which Moses witnessed in Exodus 3, is a remarkable moment.

But it is only there to point to the fuller revelation of Yahweh, the great I Am. The God who speaks to Moses. The God who promises to act. The God who delivers his people Israel from the land of Egypt.

And when Moses encounters the Lord, he hears this remarkable statement. Exodus 3, verse 7.

Then the Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt.

I have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them. To bring them up out of that land to a good land of milk and honey. The story of Exodus reveals to us that the God of the universe, who created, the God who promised to bless all peoples through Abram, is a God who sees affliction.

A God who hears the cry of the oppressed. A God who knows the suffering of the oppressed. Who comes down in order to deliver them. The God we meet in Exodus 3 is a God who liberates.

[3 : 2 1] And when we witness the actions of such a God, it stirs our hearts. It's comforting as we grapple with the injustice of the world. Comforting to see that the God of the Bible is a liberating God.

But, it is a much more difficult thing to face up to the fact that we often readily embrace oppression. The oppression of others.

The oppression of ourselves. Just as the Israelites did in the wilderness. Immediately after the Lord had rescued them from the chariots of Pharaoh. Exodus 14.

The Israelites are running out of food, and so they complained to Moses. Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt. When we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full. The problem with our appetites.

Our desire for fulfillment. That natural if only of our hearts. Is that it can lead us to make poor choices. To serve cruel and merciless masters.

[4 : 25] If we worship money. It eats us alive. Demanding more and more. Reducing those around us to what they can produce. And the God of money never lifts a finger to help us.

We are enslaved by money. We might worship security. Career success. Sex appeal. Family. Health. Comfort. Prestige. The list of gods can go on and on.

And when we do that, not only are we oppressed by that false god. But we begin to oppress others. Demanding gods create demanding people.

And that is how we can turn a blind eye to the terrible costs of our rampant consumerism. Or passively consume pornography. Or sacrifice our children.

On the altar of our own desires. And there are two dangers with oppression. The first danger is to buy into the illusion.

[5 : 32] I do not need deliverance. Either because I don't think I am enslaved. Or because I think I am capable of liberating myself.

Since the 19th century. Various progressive thinkers. And certainly this notion goes much deeper. But back in the 19th century.

There was this striking phrase. No gods. No masters. And it encapsulates rather nicely. A sentiment that many of us have. In our contemporary situation.

The problem is that it is wrong. We all worship someone or something. We are not just homo sapiens.

We are homo adorans. The man who worships. The question is what or who. What sort of master do we serve? Now the second danger of oppression.

[6 : 33] Is probably the one most of us fall into today. I suspect. Here in this room. And it is to experience the Lord's deliverance. And then to still long for the meat and bread of Egypt.

As though it. Rather than the Lord our God. Will be what truly satisfies. The psalmist exalts. Taste and see that the Lord is good.

What do we do as followers of Christ. When we realize that sometimes. We actually prefer the taste of other things. That we would rather do something other.

Than worship the Lord. Now when we think like this. Or when we feel like this. Or when we're not sure how we think or feel. But notice that in our actions.

We are not serving the Lord. It means we have lost sight of who God really is. When we resent or resist.

[7 : 38] Or deny God's lordship over our life. It is because we've been deceived. And we don't realize. What sort of master he is. In our mind's eye.

Perhaps he has become a bully with a stick. Rather than a servant. Or an overbearing parent. Rather than a loving father. And the antidote.

To such hardness of heart. Is given by Jesus in Matthew 11. To him all authority has been given. And yet.

He is the kind master. Who says to us all. Come to me all who labor. And are heavy laden. And I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you.

Learn from me. For I am gentle. And lowly of heart. You will find rest for your souls.

[8 : 40] Now that. Is a remarkable promise. In Jesus. And in Jesus alone. We find rest for our souls. And deliverance from the burdensome yokes.

Which keep us working for the wrong masters. In Exodus 3. God declares. That he has seen the oppression of his people. He knows their suffering. And he is going to come down.

To deliver them. And that is just a taste. Of what comes in Jesus Christ. We see the same character. Of the same God. Perfectly. And fully expressed.

The culmination of God's. History of salvation. That began all the way back. In Exodus. In Jesus. God came down. Experienced our suffering. And died an ignoble death.

To set us free from oppression. To lead us into the promised land. All things. Jesus tells us. Have been handed over to him.

[9 : 39] By God the Father. Which is to say. To him belongs all authority. He is the liberating master. The one worth serving. The one worth worshipping.

The one who is by the power of his Holy Spirit. Bringing us to complete fulfillment. In Jesus. The if only of our hearts. Came to earth.

And lived among us. From Christ. The rest.

Take his yoke upon you. And learn from him. in Jesus there is forgiveness for our sins rest for our souls and fulfillment for our hearts all praise and honor and glory to this liberating God Father, Son and Holy Spirit Amen