

Journey to Freedom

PART I

Introduction

Well...the anxious wait is over ladies and gentlemen!

That uneasy feeling in your stomach that begins to rise on Wednesday and culminates as you drive up the hill to this hall wondering what on earth will be happening today...

Today, my friends, we begin an exciting journey together, the "Journey to Freedom." More specifically; we're going to begin a series through the book of Exodus which we're going to call the "Journey to Freedom".

It's a most remarkable journey where we see, for the first time in history, God revealing Himself and His plans to the world.

It is in the accounts of the people recorded in Exodus that God's desire for fellowship and relationship with us is revealed. It's where we see His plan for restoring us to Himself begin. Here, in stunning and intimate detail we are given a most remarkable glimpse into the character and nature and person of the Creator of the Universe. And, finally, we discover the pinnacle of our lives as we unveil the true nature of our life's purpose and the goal for which God has created us and the means by which we can fulfil this purpose.

"That's a fairly grand goal for a sermon series", some of you may be thinking
"This sounds like it may take a while", many of you are likely thinking!

Well, I cannot honestly say how long this journey may take. We may stop for a rest now and then, but Penny and I believe it's a particularly pertinent journey for us to begin and finish together. We're going to continue it in many of the evening meeting as well but with a different focus. Sometimes we will do specific studies to look at things in more detail, other times we will pause for worship nights and communion nights to give space to process some of the experiences we'll encounter along the way.

I would like to kick off this Journey to Freedom by introducing a bit of the background to this amazing revelation of God's Character, nature and purpose. This won't be your typical sermon, rather, a travel brochure of where we are heading.

Today, we're going to try and gain a bit of an overview of where we will journey together and over the following weeks and months and years (I'm kidding!) we will look at these many different elements in detail – taking time to enjoy the scenery along the way.

Background

Let's set the scene as we begin this journey...

Historically, we're looking at something which occurred roughly 1300 years before Jesus, so that's around 3,300 years ago.

Egypt is the region's strongest, richest and most influential nation. At this point in history the country of Israel does not exist, neither is there an actual nationality of people called either Jews or Israelites.

What we begin this journey with is, for all intents and purposes, a very, very large extended family estimated to be as large as 3 million people in total.

Most of you will have heard of Joseph and the coat of many colours; a technicolour dream-coat one might say!

Joseph's father was a man called Jacob who was renamed "Israel". His descendants came to be known as "Israelites."

We begin Exodus with this hugely expanded family living and prospering in Egypt some 200 years after Joseph had passed away.

The authorship of Exodus is widely attributed to Moses. There are several mentions of this throughout the book and other Biblical sources refer to his authorship. It is likely that he dictated the majority of it which was then completed by others.

The context we must approach Exodus in is unique.

Going back several hundred years, God had made a promise to a man called Abram, later renamed "Abraham."

Abram lived in what is modern day Iraq in a culture where there was no formal religion that worshipped God, in fact, the dominant religion worshipped the moon. Despite the fact that Abram had no Bible or Church or religion, God spoke to Him and told him to set out on a journey which God would guide him on.

Long story short; God promised Abraham a land of his own and numerous descendants which would become a nation of God's people.

Abraham had a son called Isaac. Isaac had a son called Jacob. One of Jacob's sons was Joseph. We meet the family, a few generations later as we begin the book of Exodus, still holding onto the promise God made to their ancestor Abraham.

Purpose

Exodus...

The book of Exodus that we have in our Bibles is part of what we call the Old Testament. Basically, this first half of the Bible contains everything associated with God's first promise to those who would choose to follow Him.

Of course, Exodus was around long before the Bible was compiled into the collection of books that we have today. Largely written by Moses, Exodus is part of a group of five books, the first five books of the Bible, which we call the Pentateuch. The Jews call this "Torah" – which means, "Teaching", "instruction" or most commonly "The Law."

In Jesus' day, the Old Testament that we have today was grouped into three main collections: The Law, The Prophets, and The Writings.

Of all of these, The Law – by far – had the most influence, significance and prestige.

The significance of Exodus in this collection is huge. Basically, Exodus is the story of how God took a group of people with nothing and made them into a nation of His own – designed to have no king but God and created to fulfil His purposes in the earth and to reveal God to all nations.

"Exodus" is a title from the Greek and means 'way out' or exit and the main theme of Exodus is how God opened a way out for His people from bondage in Egypt and formed them into a nation belonging to Him and connected to Him by God's promises at Mount Sinai.

The book of Exodus covers roughly 80 years.

Exodus is intrinsically wound into the national identity of Israel as God's chosen people. For us, its significance is also immense.

Exodus reveals to us four main core concepts which are really foundational things for Christians to have a grasp of.

It reveals:

- (i) God's desire for and plan for salvation and redemption
- (ii) God's nature
- (iii) God's purpose for history and individuals
- (iv) The nature and essence of worshipping God

Salvation and Redemption are, very, very basically, how God restores our relationship with Him even though we mess up. It's how imperfect humans can be close to a perfect God.

God's nature is His desires, character, values, priorities and concerns.

The book of Exodus contains more miracles than any other Old Testament book. There are 10 plagues through out this book and the primary purpose for these was as a demonstration of God's power – as much for the Israelites as for the Egyptians!

This was necessary because people were putting many things; idols, people, pride etc, before God. So God revealed His power over the Egyptians and Pharaoh. He showed that the gods of Egypt were powerless. He wanted to demonstrate that Israel belonged to God and he wanted to establish the faith of Israel in God as their mighty Saviour.

All of these things are revealed as we take this Journey to Freedom through Exodus.

Exciting huh?

So, what we have to learn?

There are so many keys for us to learn from this book, and without starting another sermon today I want to just get us thinking...

You see the Israelites, under the rule of Joseph, had been favoured but now we begin Exodus learning that a new Pharaoh arose who did not know Joseph and he was afraid of the Hebrews. He feared their strength and so he made them slaves. So the Hebrew people were put to work doing hard labour jobs on government projects.

Pharaoh also tried to keep the Israelites population down by killing all the baby boys

The Israelites lived in Egypt 430 years. For over 200 of these years the Israelites were slaves in Egypt, treated badly and cruelly and they prayed to God for their deliverance from this.

A question I ponder over is 'why so long?' Were the people not ready? Was it an attitude thing? These are all things we will learn about.

Even after this amount of time we see that God has a plan to deliver his people and His plan begins to be revealed with the birth of Moses and the calling of Moses through the burning bush.

One point I want to make is that as we go through this book we realise that God's plan is not just one to help His people out and then leave them. He has a big plan that includes not only making a way out for His people that are being oppressed and treated wrongly but also He has a plan for our future.

As we journey through this book, can I encourage you to relate it to your walk with God? Starting with the first moment you told Jesus you wanted him to be in your life as God. He made a Way Out for us and He has also made a way for our future.

It's incredibly fascinating to read through this book and think about what's going on from a number of different points of view. From God's; from His people; From Moses' and Aarons, and from Pharaoh's view point.

We've got a great many things to look forward too:

We have God talking to Moses through a Burning bush while he's out at work!

We have plagues and miracles to learn about and be reminded about.

We have the great escape with Pharaoh and his men on chariots chasing hard behind the Israelites and the fantastic parting of the Red Sea!

We see a God of provision and caring and leading and guiding.

We see a people getting what they want but then not quite sure if they really want it anymore!

We see accounts of grumbling and fighting and trying to do things in our own strength and we see faith in action and God teaching His people to worship Him and we learn about the Holiness of God and so much more.....

Summary

Over the next few weeks we are going to be looking at this book of Exodus in both our morning and evening services. We have called this a Journey to Freedom.

Together with what God is revealing to all of us through the work of the Holy Spirit we pray for greater freedom in all of our lives. We are called to be a people that experience the true meaning of freedom; a freedom that draws us into a closer relationship with Christ.

For us, it can often be easy, especially as Pentecostals, to focus on the person, presence and power of the Holy Spirit – which we must – but not at the neglect of engaging a true understanding of what it is that God is actually out-working throughout history and in our lives.

This Journey to Freedom through Exodus will give us a firm grasp on the how's and why's behind many of the things which Jesus accomplished for us.

Exodus is really the first complete revelation of the heart of God; of His desires, His character, His plans, His concerns, His commitment to us...

It gives us a correct perspective of the power and awesomeness of a God whom we can all-too-easily turn into some kind of Santa Claus figure.

We serve a holy and righteous and powerful God who keeps His promises and protects those who follow Him – but one who also fights on their behalf and whom is to be honoured and feared and revered.

Exodus helps us reconcile both the fearsome and the loving nature of the Creator of the Universe who cannot tolerate sin but who personally makes a way so that all can approach Him.

It's a most wonderful thing to discover the power and might of God and yet to take hold of His desire for a relationship with us. Exodus takes us on this journey.

Let's stand together and pray, asking God to lead and guide us on this journey and committing our way to Him...