

“God’s people became slaves” (Exodus 1:9-11)

From today, we will start a new series, “Freedom from slavery”. We will study from the book of Exodus for four weeks. Today is the introduction of the series. And the title is “God’s people became slaves.”

1. The message of Exodus

In Exodus, we can see that people of Israel were slaves in Egypt. But, they were not slaves from the beginning. Originally, they were the family of a ruler of Egypt.

Joseph was sold as a slave and brought to Egypt. He served his master faithfully, but he was put into prison. In prison, he interpreted the cupbearer’s dream. When the Pharaoh had a dream, the cupbearer remembered Joseph. He was called and interpreted the Pharaoh’s dream. And Pharaoh made him a ruler of Egypt. And Joseph’s father, Jacob brought all his family members to Joseph in Egypt. They lived in Egypt and multiplied greatly. That was the people of Israel.

Now Joseph and all that generation died. And a king, who did not know about Joseph, came to power in Egypt. Then, what happened?

Exodus 1:9-11

"Look," he [the new king] said to his people, "the Israelites have become much too numerous for us. ¹⁰ Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country." ¹¹ So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh.

The people of Israel were originally the family of a ruler of Egypt, now they became slaves. This is the beginning of Exodus. Then, what happens in the end?

40:34-38

Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. ³⁵ Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud had settled upon it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. ³⁶ In all the travels of the Israelites, whenever the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle, they would set out; ³⁷ but if the cloud did not lift, they did not set out, until the day it lifted. ³⁸ So the cloud of the Lord was over the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel during all their travels.

This is the end of Exodus. People of Israel saw that God's glory was with them. They always went with God. They lived in God's protection and His blessings.

This is the message of Exodus. People of Israel were originally the family of a ruler of Egypt, but they became slaves. God brought them out from there, freed them and made them the people who shine with God's glory.

They had been slaves for 400 years. They had adopted the slave mentality. They needed to be set free not only from the state of slavery, but also from the slave mentality. It doesn't happen automatically when they get out of Egypt. It usually takes time to change our mentality, it's like learning a new skill. God led the people of Israel through the journey to "Freedom from slavery."

Because of Joseph, family of Jacob were allowed to live in Egypt and lived as the family of the ruler of Egypt. In the same way, because of Jesus, we started living as God's people while living in this world.

One day I realized I was a sinner, and I heard the gospel of Jesus' cross. I was saved by the grace of God through faith in Jesus, and I was born again spiritually and became a child of God. That is not because I am worthy to become a member of God's family. All of us were sinners, who oppose God, and who were objects of God's wrath. Only by grace, because of Jesus, we could start to live as a child of God with Jesus, who is our God.

It doesn't mean that we automatically become perfectly mature people spiritually and emotionally like Jesus. It takes time to grow. It takes time to adopt a new state of mind. It takes time to learn new life style as God's people. And we need to be set free from old life style and old mentality.

Just think about it, are we living the abundant life as God's people? Or are we driven by the thought that we should be always doing something? Are we experiencing victory as God's people? Or, are we feeling a sense of defeat, failure and guilt? Are we full of joy as God's people? Or are we comparing ourselves with others, and feeling proud or discouraged?

The people of Israel were originally the family of a ruler of Egypt, but they became slaves as time passed. They needed to be set free from the rule of Egypt as well as from the slave mentality. What about Christians who are members of God's family? Can we also become slaves as time passes? Or are we still keep the slave mentality? What kind of slavery are Christians prone to fall into?

2. The slave mentality

You and I know that we were saved by grace through faith. It is the way how we started our Christian life. But many of us think a victorious Christian life depends on our works. I start to do something by myself other than living by faith. Because that's what I'd learned, how I lived in the world before I was saved.

"I read the Bible every day, and I pray every day and try my best to live following the teaching of the Bible. But, the more I do, the more I feel I am insufficient, not good enough, still cannot do this or that. The more I read the Bible, or listen to the Bible message, the more I feel burdened with so many things I have to do."

Have you ever felt that way? Why did we become like that? What leads us to live like that?

(1) A right motive, but a wrong way

2:11-12

One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labour. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people. ¹² Glancing this way and that and seeing no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.

The first characteristic of the slave mentality is that his mind is occupied with what he should do.

Moses had a right motive. He felt pain when he saw Israelites, his own people, suffering from hard labor. He couldn't overlook an Egyptian's beating an Israelite. He wanted to release Israelites from slavery of Egypt. He saw the need. That was the motive given by God, but he did it in his way. He worked depending on his thought and did it by his own strength.

For us, it is right to desire to help others, do God's Will, and show God's glory. Then, my mind is often occupied with what I should do. I start to think of doing these in my way, by my strength because I came from a slave of activism. It's still natural for me to think like this. How can I know if I still have the slave mentality? This is how I know it. I did it, because I thought I should do it, and after doing it, I feel I should have done more and have a sense of failure and defeat and guilt.

(2) Rely on your own ability

Because of the incident of his killing the Egyptian, Moses fled from Egypt and went to Midian and lived there. And there he became a shepherd. One day, Moses heard the voice of God.

3:9-10

And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. ¹⁰ So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt."

4:10

Moses said to the Lord, "O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue."

The second characteristic of the slave mentality is that he relies on his own ability, what he can do.

Moses grew up in the king's palace, as Pharaoh's daughter's son. He had the special privilege as a prince. And now he is a shepherd, tending a flock in the field. He only had a staff in his hand. When he was in the palace, he could depend on all the luxuries. But now all he had was a staff. "All I have is this. I can only do this. But I am slow of speech and tongue." In other words, "I can do this as I have this." Plainly speaking, he just swapped his ability as a prince for his ability as a shepherd. He was still relying on his ability, not trusting in God who called him. It's a natural way of a person who has the slave mentality. He needed to be set free from that kind of mentality.

I've heard some people say like this, "Before, on the weekends, I would often get drunk, go to karaoke, sing love songs. After I became a Christian, on the weekends, I usually go to church, sing hymns in the choir, teach Sunday school, and serve in church. But, to tell you the truth, I don't have victory and joy from Monday to Friday. And the more I do for church, the more I feel terrible. To be honest, I feel if I don't have to go to church, how much easier my life will be."

Please don't misunderstand that there is nothing wrong with going to church on weekends, singing hymns in the choir, teaching Sunday school and serving in church. But, after all, he is still depending on his own ability, what he can do, just like Moses' swapping his ability as a prince for his ability as a shepherd. That's why he felt that way. We need to learn a new mentality as God's people.

A man cannot accomplish God's Will by doing whatever good works he does. A man cannot walk in God's way of blessings and rest, by doing good works, what he can do with his own ability. The more he does, the more he gets tired.

The second characteristic of the slave mentality is that he relies on his own ability. Unless we are set free from this slave mentality, the more we do, the more we get tired. All we get is pressure and stress.

(3) Expect the reward for fulfilling your duty

Let's go back to the story of Moses. Moses went to Pharaoh, and told him to let Israel go so that they may worship the Lord. Pharaoh became angry and made the work harder for Israel.

Then, what did Moses do?

5:22-23

Moses returned to the Lord and said, "O Lord, why have you brought trouble upon this people? Is this why you sent me? ²³ Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has brought trouble upon this people, and you have not rescued your people at all."

The third characteristic of the slave mentality is that he thinks he will receive good things if he does his duty.

I have been using the word, "the slave mentality." Do you know the difference between a slave and a son?

A slave is rated by "what he does". But a son is recognized by "who he is". A slave is accepted by his work, but a son is accepted by the relationship with his parents. A slave is valued by his "productivity and performance," but a son is secure in his being as a person. A slave "proves his worth by his work", and he is always anxious because he never knows when it will change. But a son "knows that his worth will never change", so he is always feeling secure. "A failure" can endanger a slave. But when a son fail, he may feel sad because he has upset his parents, but he will never fear that he may be deserted by his parents.

Jesus gave a parable of a father and his two sons. The elder son said to his father.

Luke 15:29-31

'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!' ³¹ " 'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours.'

He is surely the father's son. But he didn't have the sense of his son-ship. So he lived with his father as if he was a slave. He thought he should receive the good thing from his father as he did what he should do. That is how a slave thinks, not a son. Because a son knows everything my father has is mine.

The third characteristic of the slave mentality is that he expects to receive good things if he fulfills his duty. It's so natural for a slave to think like that.

Unless we are set free from this slave mentality, we will always have complaint, anger and distrust against God, feeling God is unfair. Not only we have no peace, but we will also lose sight of what we have already received.

3. His people, their God

People of Israel were originally the family of a ruler of Egypt. But they had become slaves. And God was going to bring them out, release them and make them the people shining with His glory, because they are His people and He is their God. No one else, nothing else can rule over them. There is no one else they serve.

(1) God knows our situation and suffering

3:7

The Lord said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering.

Sometimes we may think God doesn't know our suffering and how difficult our situation is. Or we can be in a situation where we would only think that God doesn't know about that. Or we think God doesn't care us at all. But, the truth is that God knows our difficult situation and our suffering very well.

Isaiah 63:9

In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.

God is not watching us from far away. But He is with us in our difficult situation.

(2) Freedom by the power of God

3:20

So I will stretch out my hand and strike the Egyptians with all the wonders that I will perform among them. After that, he will let you go.

It is God who will release us from the slavery. Not man, we ourselves.

The freedom from slavery does not depend on what we can do. It is not what man can do, what we can do, or what you can do. It depends on what God can do. God himself will release us from the state of slavery by His power.

(3) He is the highest sovereign always

6:2-3

God also said to Moses, "I am the Lord. ³ I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty,

God is God Almighty. Our God is king of kings, lord of lords, who is above all authority. No one, nothing can oppose God's authority by any means. And salvation, liberation is the work of God, which can only be accomplished by the sovereign power of Lord Almighty. Nothing can prevent God from saving us. Nothing can nullify God's salvation.

When God proclaims forgiveness, it is complete forgiveness. When God declares us righteous, we are completely righteous. When God set us free, we are completely free. That is complete freedom. Nothing can bind us. Because He is the highest sovereign.

Why does God do so? Because we are His people and He is our God. No one else, nothing else can rule over us. There is no one else we serve.

The next time we will study how God set the people of Israel free and how He leads us to freedom in more details.

For Lifenet groups and personal reflection

1) The people of Israel had been slaves for 400 years. They needed to be set free not only from the state of slavery, but also from the slave mentality. What can we learn from that?

2) Three characteristics of the slave mentality are introduced. Can you recognize any of them in your life? What does it show about your relationship with God?

- A right motive, but a wrong way
- Rely on your own ability
- Expect the reward for fulfilling your duty

3) Read Exodus 3:7 and Isaiah 63:9. Who is God for you? How God relates to you? What God speak to you?