WHAT THE BIBLE IS ALL ABOUT - WHERE AM I IN GOD'S BIG STORY?

Let My People Go!

Exodus 2:23--3:12

Dr. Doyle Sager, First Baptist Church, Jefferson City, Missouri

August 31, 2014

AUDIO: fbcjc.buzzsprout.com/7678/200556

Are you enslaved? Before you answer that too quickly, remember there are many kinds of slavery and prisons--seen and unseen. Also--are you by lifestyle and choices contributing to the enslavement of others? Again, don't answer too quickly. I thought and thought all week about some dominant image of bondage to which we could all relate and I settled on good old Jacob Marley's ghost from "A Christmas Carol" by Charles Dickens. The sound of those chains rattling around as he tried to walk. And remember, he tried to tell his former partner, Scrooge, "These are the chains I forged in my lifetime." Hold this image in your mind as we go along this morning.

It's important that we have another brief history lesson, to keep all this straight. Last week we talked about Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who lived sometime between 2000 B.C. and 1750 B.C. Now, approximately 400 years have passed--Exodus 1--2 cover a lot of ground. The Hebrew people had come down to Egypt when Joseph was helping run the food aid program in Egypt. But eventually, the Israelites became enslaved by the Egyptians. The writer wants us to get the utter hopelessness of the situation.

How did God feel about this mistreatment of the people? Well, simple logic will answer that for you. How do you feel when one of your children is bullied on the playground? Mistreated at school or work? And God loves us infinitely more than we love our own kids! Listen to the verbs listed in 2:24: God heard, God remembered, God saw, God knew. *Heard* (took heed and responded); *remembered* (was actively attentive); *saw* (to begin to move toward with kindness); *knew* (to share an experience with, suffer with, to call that experience your own).

In the midst of this pain and outcry, Moses was called by God (3:1-12). Moses went many times to Pharaoh with the cry, "Let my people go!" But Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, would not. Finally, after the last plague, he did release them. That last plague was the death of the firstborn in each home. Unless...unless..the blood of the lamb was smeared on the doorpost of the home. If the blood was there, the death angel would pass over it. Thus, the Jewish Passover festival of remembrance. The blood was there as a reminder that freedom is always costly.

And so, thousands of slaves were set free that day. I want you to think about how freedom from bondage is a theme that is central to our faith. The biblical word "redemption" almost always has a religious or moral connotation today, but it was originally a word that the Bible borrowed from the slave business. A slave could be purchased and then set free. When Jesus began his ministry, he quoted from the prophet Isaiah, "God's Spirit is on me: he's chosen me

to...announce pardon to prisoners and...to set the burdened and battered free, to announce, 'This is God's year to act!'" (Luke 4:18, *The Message*).

Yes, freedom is dear to God. And slavery--of any kind--is always God's business. During the famous Lincoln-Douglas debates of 1858, historians say the entire campaign turned when Lincoln began to talk--not about the economic or political dimensions of human slavery, but the moral dimension. Right vs. wrong [*Giant In The Shadows*, by Jason Emerson, p. 345]. In our text this morning, Moses is challenging the status quo. He isn't telling the Israelites how to have peace with God; he is leading real change in the social, political and religious structures of their lives. God cares about all kinds of freedom. Freedom from fears, from addictions, from guilt, sin, death, payday loans with 400% interest, cycles of poverty, racism, class hatred and freedom from structural evil as well as from personal evil.

But there's one more piece to this. When we've told about God leading the people out of slavery, we've only told about half the story. Because they were no sooner out when they were up against the Red Sea (14:1-14). Nowhere to escape! Pharaoh's army coming after them and the water before them. But here's their first chance to learn an important lesson. The God who leads you out is the God who can get you through! The promise came to Moses, "Don't be afraid...see the deliverance that the LORD will accomplish for you today..." (14:13). By the way, the word "deliverance" is "yeshua" or Joshua, which in the New Testament becomes "Jesus."

And God opened the water and people passed over! The people of God would have to learn this lesson over and over again. And so do we. The yardstick used to measure God's power in the Old Testament is the Exodus. If God could get us out of that, God can help now. The yardstick used to measure God's power in the New Testament? The resurrection. If God can raise Jesus, God can work in this situation. So let's review. What's the yardstick of God's power in your current hopeless situation? The resurrection! What's the yardstick of God's power to work in your despair? The resurrection. What's the yardstick of God's power in your current impossible situation? The resurrection. God wants to free us all. And God wants us to stay free. And God wants us working for the freedom of others! LET MY PEOPLE GO!