

The liberating word

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 January 2000

Preacher: Rev Hugh G.Mackay

[0 : 00] The book of Exodus, the fifth chapter. Afterward, Moses and Aaron went in and told Pharaoh, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness.

Can you just imagine the shock that Pharaoh must have got to be issued with a demand like this from two men whom he thought were his slaves?

And ought to have been working at making bricks or building houses? Who were they to interfere in his affairs and to demand the liberation of a people whom he had always regarded as born to be his slaves?

We hear a lot about confrontations in these days. And here, if ever, we have a confrontation. A confrontation between our mighty earthly ruler and the almighty ruler of heaven and earth.

A confrontation upon the outcome of which the fate of our whole race depended. And it's a typical confrontation.

[1 : 27] Because Moses and Aaron represented God. It's a confrontation between light and darkness. It's a confrontation that we see on the cosmic scale, culminating in the victory of Jesus Christ at the cross of Calvary.

But in miniature, we see it wherever God is at work in a human heart. Because where God's spirit begins to work in your heart and mind, there are other forces working against him.

And so let us use this as a sort of illustration of the conflict between the spirit of God in the world and in the heart of man and the spirit of this world, Satan or the devil.

First of all then, I want to look here at God and his people in their plight.

Let my people go. God had a people. God always has and still has a people in the world.

[2 : 52] In those days, the people were largely confined to one nation, the nation of Israel. They were a chosen people. They were separated out from the world when God called Abraham from Arathachaldee.

And then you remember the people that had gone down into Egypt in the first instance for relief from famine. And while Joseph lived there, they received VIP treatment in Egypt.

Then as the years passed, things changed. Joseph died. The Pharaoh who reigned then died. And another Pharaoh, very possibly another dynasty, had a risk.

And he brought the people into, the people of God into abject slavery. And they were in that condition for generations.

And no doubt many of them had largely forgotten God and imagined that God had forgotten them. But God had not forgotten them. You remember those moving words that we read in the third chapter when God said to Moses, I have seen the affliction of my people in Egypt.

[4 : 17] I have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters and I know their sorrow and I am come to deliver them. Well, my friends, God still has a people in this world.

Not, of course, now confined to any one race. But God has his people in this and every generation. A people whom God cares for.

Whom God nurtures. Whom God disciplines. Whom God one day will bring home to be with himself. Are we amongst that people of God?

At times we may think that God has forgotten. At times we may feel despondent.

And wonder if we haven't been putting out trust in our false dreams. Ezra says Isaiah has said, The Lord has forsaken me.

[5 : 25] My God has forgotten me. If you remember God's reply, Can a woman forget her sucking child that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb?

Yes, they may forget. Yet will I not forget thee. Says the Lord, there is mercy on me.

But just as the Israelites who were living in Egypt in Moses' time had been born there, had been born in a state of bondage, so it is true of all God's people that we came into this world in a state of bondage.

Ever since the fall of Adam, when we sold ourselves into bondage by rebelling against God, the human race has been in bondage to Satan and sin.

We are given over to that bondage. We are like birds with clipped wings. Made to soar but unable to rise from the ground.

[6 : 38] Now people don't, by and large, believe that. They talk a lot about liberty. They boast of their liberty. But as an antidote to that sort of thing, let us just think of all the things of which we are ashamed.

Of all the things we would like to be rid of in our lives. And we can't do it. Or we may affect some minor reforms in our behavior.

But just try completely to conquer one besetting sin. And how much less can we reverse the whole trend of our character. Our Lord said, you remember, he that commiteth sin is a slave of sin and how true it is.

We are slaves. By nature, we are slaves to a power that is destroying us. And apart from the grace of God, would destroy us forever. We are prisoners and we cannot set ourselves free.

But thank God for his grace. You remember that wonderful transition in the second chapter of the epistle to the Ephesians.

[7 : 56] But Paul has been talking about the miserable, hopeless conditions of mankind. Jews and Gentiles all included. children of children of rock, one and all of them.

But, that God who is rich in us for his great love wherewith he loved us even when we were dead in sin hath quickened us together with Christ and hath raised us up together with him and made us sit together in the heavenly places with him.

Nearly three and a half thousand years ago, God sent a man called Moses from the desert into Egypt. And why? In order to deliver the Israelites from the bondage of Egypt.

But nearly two thousand years ago, God sent one infinitely greater than Moses down to this world. Why did he come?

He came to take our place before the law of God. He came to pay our debt. He came to overcome the power that held us in thrall.

[9 : 19] As the epistle to the Hebrews puts it, that through death, through his own death, he might destroy. Yes, rather the word is a stronger word than destroy.

He might annihilate him that had the power of death. That is, the devil. He might draw the fangs from the old serpent.

And although Satan still boasts of his power, and although he's able to exert a great deal of power in the hearts of men and women, the fact still remains that he is a defeated foe.

and one day, one day, his defeat will be shown to be complete. But in the meantime, millions, today and millions down the ages, have found the freedom that God alone can give through Jesus Christ.

He came to set his people free. Are we experiencing that freedom? And if not, why not? That so many are not experiencing, suggests, doesn't it, that there are hindrances in the way.

[10 : 39] Some of them external to ourselves, some of them within our own hearts. And so I want secondly to think of God's command and his steps.

what happened when God, when Moses came down into Egypt to set God's people free? Let my people go. But you remember that he met with resistance.

And resistance, you'll note both from the captor and the captives. on the one hand, from the captor, that is from Pharaoh.

I want to think for a moment of some of Pharaoh's devices, and to see how they are paralleled by the devices of Satan with us.

You can't of course wonder at Pharaoh. He didn't know this God. Who was this God who dared to interfere with him? The difference is the God of this world does know God.

[11 : 50] Satan, we're told, we're told in scripture, Satan believes that there's a God, and he trembles. But, like Pharaoh, he is in rebellion against God.

He denies the validity and the authority of God's laws. He represents God's laws as oppressors. And he tells us God is robbing us of our freedom, taking away from us all the fun of living.

And so he does his utmost to keep us in his own touches. And he often uses fellow human beings as his agent. Let's make no mistake about that.

God. And when people try to, when people try to lure you away from thinking about these things, when people tell you it's not healthy to think about these, about sin, and the need for deliverance from sin, don't forget that, quite unknown to themselves, these people are working on the devil's behalf.

So we can't wonder at Pharaoh, because after all, although the Israelites may have been a bit of a nuisance to him, they were providing him with a vast pool of free labor to further his design, and Satan too can use men and women for his purposes.

[13 : 16] And every time we disobey God, we are helping to undermine the authority of God. And that is Satan's aim number one.

He flatters us that we are displaying our freedom when we do our own thing. And doing our own thing usually means doing his thing, doing the devil's thing.

Oh, it's good for us to do what we like. It's good for us to express ourselves. It's good for us not to let ourselves be shackled by any moral norm. men and women go on in their own way, and they imagine they're enjoying freedom.

And then when they're disillusioned, and when they discover they're going up a blind alley, and don't know how to get out of it, he takes no responsibility.

Slaves, after all, are expendable. And you'll notice too that Pharaoh was nothing if not persistent. He continues to resist although he's driven more and more to the walls.

[14 : 27] He tries every contortion in order to wriggle out to obedience and to keep Israel in his power. The same is true of the God of this world.

He knows that if he can achieve compromise, just as Pharaoh knew that if he could achieve compromise, Israel would remain his.

You see, God will not have half and half Christians. We must be one thing or the other. That's all you remember Pharaoh tried telling them that now you don't all need to go, do you?

I'll let the men go. The women and children can remain behind. Oh, well, if that doesn't please you, at least leave your livestock behind. You see, if Satan can fold onto one of our toes, he will draw on that until he gets us back to himself.

If only he can divide our allegiance between God and the world. if only he can persuade us that there are some things that we ought to give up and we can't give up and we won't give up.

[15 : 49] Well, he knows that if he can hold on to one bit of it, he has it in the end. You see, surrender to God must be complete.

It must be unconditional. enough. And then another suggestion of Pharaoh is, well, why are you asking to go to the wilderness to serve God?

What's wrong with Egypt? Serve the Lord your God in the land. I'll give you all the facilities you need. And I've no doubt he would.

He would have provided animals from his own flocks and his head for their sacrifices. You see, Satan doesn't mind our religion, so long as it's practiced on his territory and under his domain.

Build all the churches you like. I won't stand in the way of you getting planning permission for them. A good many of us are old enough to remember Hitler in the days before the last war.

[16 : 55] And you remember, he didn't try to destroy religion in Germany, no. He was too wise for that. He tried to harness it to his own regime. Yes, keep your churches open, go on preaching.

Go on doing all that you think you have to do, so long as you don't interfere with what I'm doing, so long as you don't criticize my regime.

Wasn't it Karl Marx who called religion the opiate of the people. A mere religion can be just that, an opiate. And so long as it is just that, Satan doesn't object.

He uses it for his own ends. He inoculates us against real faith by allowing us faith in small doses.

And men and women can be lured as to hell by a bogus religion. And so by force or guile or flattery, Satan keeps men and women in slavery.

[18 : 06] But when God says, let my people go, not all the powers of hell can withstand his will. Israel. And yet, strange to say, resistance comes not only from Pharaoh, but from the Israelites themselves.

Satan is an ally, too good an ally in our own hearts. Moses met with resistance, even from the Israelites.

They were chasing under the bondage of Egypt. They were longing to be free. And when Moses came to set them free, at first they welcomed him. But then when they began to consider the matter and to see all that was involved, many of them changed their minds.

And they rather, for a time at least, turned against Moses. You see, they were born and bred in Egypt. They were born and bred in slavery and they had never known any other place or any other condition.

And there's something in all of us that makes us rather bear the ills we have and flee to others that we know not of. Whatever we may call ourselves in politics, we're all conservatives in the sense that we don't want change affecting our own lives.

[19 : 30] We want us to carry on the old way. There's a snare in the familiarity of the world. It's the only life we have known. Our bread and butter is in it.

And so men and women resist the gospel of God's freedom. freedom. Yes, even those who eventually become true believers, in very many cases, and in many cases even for quite a long time, resist, resist the spirit of God.

Put it to yourself. Have you resisted God, the spirit, the plenium God's spirit? by any chance? Is there anyone here resisting, even now?

Keep a feast in the wilderness. Why should they go there? The wild, crackless waste, with the scarcity of food and water. Egypt had its disadvantages, no doubt.

it was dreary and monotonous and cruelly hard, but they got used to it, and at any rate, they had plenty to eat there. Remember that to their shame, even after they left Egypt, there were some of the Israelites hankering after the cucumbers and the melons and the onions and the leeks and the garlic.

[21 : 03] It's the old question, which is the more important? Which is the more important, the spiritual or the material? It boils down to that. The world has its points, no doubt.

And you and I can lead a tolerably happy life in it. Our companions are in it. Pharaoh, after all, had suggested they could serve the Lord their God in the land.

Well, why not? Well, God has said to Pharaoh, let my people go that they may serve me. And God says to us, come ye out from among them and be ye separate.

Ah, but is it necessary? Is it really necessary? Can we not serve the Lord our God in the land? Is it necessary to make this clean break? Now, of course, we're not usually called upon to leave our homes when we become Christians.

Some people are, no doubt, but that's not the normal thing. But we are called to a new kind of life, to new ideals, to new standards. And many people find themselves misunderstood, misrepresented, yes, and discarded by their old friends.

[22 : 19] And they ask, is it really necessary? Can we not just carry on in the world, much as we used to do, and still call ourselves Christians?

Why, we might even influence the world for good. people? And a lot of people use that, please. But you know, it all too often works the other way.

The downward pull of the world prevails, and the world draws us back to itself. The best place from which to influence the world is in separation from it.

Not complete separation. We can't do that, we're not called upon to do that. we've got to earn our daily living in the world. We've got to make some various deals with the world.

And in that way we can influence the world. But we must draw the line between being in the world and being of the world. We are to be in the world but we are to be different.

[23 : 25] And we are to be seen to be different. God says come out. Many people say no. I don't mind serving God but I'll do it in my own way and in my own place.

But you know if we persist in that attitude the chances are heavily weighted in favor of our slipping back into the world and its ways. Yes and eventually sharing with the world and the horrors of our lost eternity.

God is all powerful. And although Pharaoh and although some of the Israelites resisted God's commandment we see in the end God's compulsion and it results.

God prevailed in the end. Pharaoh has to yield although he resisted to the last. The devil will go on trying to hold us back from Christ, trying to hinder our progress even after we have come to Christ.

And Pharaoh tried to remember all sorts of half measures but not one of them, not one of them are really meaningful concessions.

[24 : 56] All added up together Pharaoh's sovereignty would still be maintained. You see God is not blinded by such deceit. And so you remember increasing pressure was brought to bear upon Pharaoh until at last no doubt without any bad grace but at last he had to yield, he had to let God's people go.

Yes, God does work out his purposes. God has a people in the world who will be saved by the power of Christ. It's called his church, his church in the true sense of the word.

Those who are called out from the world to be, to take their stand on the side of Christ. God's people on the earth and God's people will one day be delivered soul and body from bondage and brought into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Christ has won the victory and no power on earth or hell can finally rob God of the fruit of that victory. Oh, my friend, thank God for his compelling grace.

You remember poor Lot coming out of Sodom. Oh, how he clung to Sodom. And at last the angels of God had to take hold on them, more or less, drag them out, drag them out to things.

[26 : 24] Let us thank God that he doesn't leave us to ourselves. Where are we, any of us, holding back clinging to this world?

Or just postponing consideration of these matters till some more convenient day and day after day goes past and the convenient day never comes? The question is, the question is, do we belong to the church of God in the real sense of that term?

Because so long as we are resisting God, so long as we are resisting the Holy Spirit of God, then we can't just assume that we are his. It's only our yielding to God and in our yielding to God and in acceptance of his will that we have the final proof that we are his.

You and I cannot tell infallibly who are God's two children and who are not. We may have some idea about ourselves but we can't tell and we may guess about other people but we certainly can't tell.

But we do know that there are those who are familiar with the gospel and many who are outwardly in fellowship with the church of Jesus Christ who know nothing of the liberty wherewith God set his people free.

[28 : 02] hoping it may be that everything is going to turn out all right in the end but with no real ground for their hope. Well my friends if there are any such years.

One can only reiterate and we must reiterate God commands all men everywhere to repent and believe the gospel.

That's an unqualified command. God commands all men everywhere to repent and believe the gospel. The onus is put upon ourselves.

The way from condemnation to freedom is open, blocked only by our unbelief. will you pray and pray earnestly and pray continually to God to take away that unbelief to take away that unbelief to make you willing in a day of his power make you willing to receive God's salvation on God's terms.

My friends even although we have accepted that salvation and although we are in true possession of eternal life we must always remember that Satan will try to hinder our progress to diminish our usefulness by inciting us to laxity and to disobedience in this matter or that.

[29 : 38] and so our prayer must constantly be Lord increase our faith. We need to exercise faith. We need increasing faith right on to the end.

This is the victory that overcomes the world even our faith. Lord increase our faith. Well Israel was saved from Egypt.

Israel was led out to the wilderness but not ultimately to the wilderness but to that land which God himself had promised to them. And my friends if you and I belong to Jesus Christ if we have yielded our lives to him our ultimate destination is not the wilderness if not even unearthly Canaan with all its struggles and recurring defeats and backsliding it is that rest which remains to the people of God that place into which sin and temptation can never enter where we shall enter into the full enjoyment of God to all eternity where we shall be completely saved and we shall be presented falsely before the throne of his glory and we shall be with the Lord of each one of us let us pray O Lord we bless thee thou art a

God who does great marvel thou art a God who has won the victory through thy son Jesus Christ and we pray thee for faith that each one of us may rest in him and in him alone for our salvation that we may know that salvation in our own lives and that we may have an increasing experience of it day by day until at last we have presented falsehood before thy throne we ask it in Jesus name Amen Amen