

“The world is longing to be free...”

This heart for freedom is echoed on weekend’s like Independence Day.

It’s why freedom is a concept found throughout scripture.

In John 8 Jesus says – If the Son sets you free you will be free indeed.

In Galatians Paul says – It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.

Perhaps THE key story of freedom in the Bible - certainly in the Old Testament - is found in the book of Exodus, where we turn tonight in Chapter 31.

At the start of **EXODUS** we see God’s people in chains in Egypt. We know this story from multiple movies. God delivers Moses so he can go back and deliver the Israelites.

And as you read the rest of the OT, from Psalms to the Prophets and elsewhere in between, we’re called to look back in wonder and we’re called to remember what God did to deliver his people

Fruit of this reflecting over the centuries is a stream of theology that’s come to be called **liberation theology**- it’s a view that God is on the side of the oppressed and relief from oppression is the goal of Christian work. That liberation from social and political oppression is an anticipation of ultimate salvation. What it gets right is that God is against injustice and oppression, whether cultural or judicial, political or private. It’s said, repeated, and emphasized throughout scripture.

But while Liberation theology highlights the journey from oppression to freedom, it overlooks the ultimate point and purpose of the Exodus. It wasn’t *just* to get them out of Egypt.

But if God’s plan was only to get them out of Egypt, Exodus would have stopped there.

But it doesn’t. We get 25 more chapters. Why?

Because Exodus isn’t just about getting **out** of Egypt.

It was about getting **to** Mt. Sinai where they make a covenant with God.

Moses says on behalf of God - *“Let my people go, so that they may worship me in the desert”*

God had told Moses all the way back at the burning bush at Sinai in Exodus 3:12:

“When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God at this very mountain.”

“worship” = serve = the word in Hebrew is literally translated **“be slaves to”**

As one theologian once put it, Exodus is more a story of **“repatriation than emancipation,”**

It’s a story of a transfer of power from a bad master to a new and infinitely good one.

And when you begin to see this - that Exodus and the story of freedom goes far beyond just “let me people go,” you begin to understand God’s love and the freedom he gives us.

We want freedom to leave us with no commands, no restrictions.

Samuel West- a prominent pastor during the time of American Independence and a delegate at the Constitutional Convention:

“Perfect freedom consists in obeying; where licentiousness (disobedience) begins, liberty ends”

Our culture has come to define freedom in negative terms: the absence of limits or constraints. We desire autonomy and independence... and it's why we celebrate Independence Day!

And physically freedom can be beautiful and worth celebrating on weekends like this one. We experience weekly the freedom to come together and worship in settings like this... not everyone globally has this.

But freedom physically also has its limits. *Where licentiousness begins, liberty ends.* Just as physical freedom has its limits, freedom spiritually that casts off obedience is an illusion. Anyone who has struggled with addiction knows that acts done freely can enslave you.

If you aren't serving God, you will serve something else. Genuine autonomy as we seek it isn't an option. Perfect freedom isn't the absence of constraints, but finding the right ones, the ones that liberate us and give us life.

This is the gift God was giving his people, the Israelites, at Mount Sinai. And this is why it spans so many chapters of commands and instruction. He's taking a nation of people that had only known physical slavery for centuries, and he's giving them a playbook for how to genuinely, physically and spiritually live free.

And it's here at Sinai that we receive our unheralded, anonymous character.

The Bible stories we are familiar with are often like Moses in the first half of Exodus... larger than life. Confronting entire nations. Turning rivers into blood. Splitting entire seas.

It's hard to wake up Monday and drive to work feeling like you're walking in those shoes. But the problem is many in the American Church wake up Monday and won't open their Bible again until the next weekend service. 80% don't. So while there are some **3200** characters in the Bible, the average church attender knows more like **32**.

And we're doing this summer series because some of the best lessons in the Bible come from lesser known and plain unknown characters.

Just because a person didn't get a lot of ink doesn't mean they don't have a lot to teach us!

I want to highlight the first person in ALL of scripture that God says was filled with the Holy Spirit. This is significant. God in His sovereignty doesn't do something like that half-hazardly or without intentionality.

Certainly the first person in scripture filled with the Spirit can speak to God's Spirit filled Church. What did the Holy Spirit anoint this person for?

Then the Lord said to Moses, “Look, I have specifically chosen Bezalel son of Uri, grandson of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. I have filled him with the Spirit of God, giving him great wisdom, ability, and expertise in all kinds of crafts. He is a master craftsman, expert in working with gold, silver, and bronze. He is skilled in engraving and mounting gemstones and in carving wood. He is a master at every craft!

“And I have personally appointed Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan, to be his assistant. Moreover, I have given special skill to all the gifted craftsmen so they can make all the things I have commanded you to make:

This wasn't a warrior. This wasn't a king. This wasn't a priest.
This wasn't a person with a platform and a lot of followers.

It was this man Bezalel. Moses' foreman for his Tabernacle project.
He was a man who had a proverbial 9-5. A craftsman.

And when you strip away the many descriptives and sidenotes in the verse we just read, it boils down to this: ***God called Bezalel by name... and filled him with the spirit... to work.***

And this is key and crucial for the Church, God's spirit filled people.
So often after we celebrate our freedom on the weekends,
we go home and feel like a slave to the grind Monday through Friday.

As a result there's a significant gap between our eternal security and our daily reality.
It results in a life of compartmentalization and duality, where there's a whole slice and spectrum of our lives- one where we spend 40, 50, or more hours a week- that is sometimes untouched by our faith and our worship.

The Office. It's now the #1 streamed show on Netflix. It officially became that during COVID as everyone and their mother started watching it again.
It's almost like... they missed the office? They missed work?

This would testify to the way God created us - we were designed by God for work – creative service, from meetings in boardrooms to doing laundry and delivering it to bedrooms. From jobs that create to jobs that serve, to the work done at home as we create and serve the next generation.

Our Mon-Fri grind looks different across this room. But one thing is universal: We were created for this. Creative service. Making ourselves useful to others. WORK.
To the point the loss of work is disturbing or depressing.

We have this complicated relationship with work. It fulfills us. It frustrates us.
It is a giver of purpose. It is a pain in the butt.

So I want to look at Bezalel, Moses' foreman for the Tabernacle, his leading craftsman, this man filled with the Holy Spirit to WORK. What can Bezalel teach us about our relationship with work? I want to look at it from three angles.

WORK AND SELF -

"I have called by name..."

Psalm 139 applies to him the same way it applies to me and you.

He formed him in the womb and knew him

...God knew his DNA and his story before he ever took a breath.

...God knew his giftings. He personality. His enneagram (I'm guessing type 4 or 5).

...God knew his failings and his flaws and his sins... and yet he called him.

DO I FEEL CALLED BY GOD?

(we make this question about us *doing* for God)

But first, do you feel called by name, called by the Creator of the Universe to walk in relationship with Him? You are.

And it's from there that *this relationship informs our work.*

I think we often don't feel like it because we make "being called" or "calling" some elusive thing that involves a platform or pulpit. But Bezalel's calling? The one he is filled with the Spirit for? To work. To serve creatively. This was his call. This was his assignment.

1 Corinthians 7- Paul is counseling people that when they become Christian its unnecessary to change what they are doing in life- be it marital state, job, or social standing...

1 Corinthians 7:17 - "***Only let each person lead the life that the LORD has assigned to him, and to which God has called him.***"

These two words used by Paul - **ASSIGNMENT AND CALLING** - are key.

In the same letter, the same two words are used in Paul's famous passage about the body of Christ. They speak to one's *calling* into relationship with God and being *assigned* spiritual gifts to do ministry in the body of Christ.

In the same way one is called and assigned to build the Church, we too are *called* into the world and *assigned* gifts and talents to build community and culture.

This means our 9-5 isn't a demeaning necessity. It's part of our calling.

Out of all of creation, only humans were given a job. And mankind's call and job in **Genesis** to "work and take care of" the earth is a holy phrase. Numbers uses the same word to speak to the work of the priests in the Temple.

Work like Bezalel's isn't beneath the work of priests.

It's not some lesser calling or assignment.

The same word is used for each.

We so often elevate one call over the other like God is more in one than the other.

No matter what your Monday through Friday grind is... God is with you in it.

He's calling you into a relationship with Him that informs HOW you work.

The problem with work often isn't work.

The problem with work isn't even how we see work.

The problem with work is often rooted in how we see ourself.

A proper, personal grasp of the Gospel means that we operate from assurance, not for approval.

We are saved by grace through faith... not by works... is there work for us to do? Yes.

But before we get to work – whether in the church or in our workplace - we need to have a grasp on God's grace. And a proper grasp of Grace means that we don't work for approval, we operate from assurance.

When we lose this posture of God's grace as our core reality, work becomes an idol.

There's a work where you think you have to supply your own existence, find your meaning, and fuel your value. But when you fully grasp God's relationship with you, and the implications of the Gospel on your life, you no longer have to work for approval. You work from assurance.

So how do you work from assurance?

Colossians 3:23 puts it so simple - "Work as if you are working for the LORD"

This saves us from underwork – because we are working for God, we wouldn't sell him short.

This frees us from overwork – we don't have to prove ourselves to God, we don't have to strive for approval... we already have assurance.

Sometimes the problem with work sometimes isn't work.

The problem is the way we work in light of how we look inward and see ourselves.

Am I going to work operating from the assurance I have in Jesus, or operating for approval?

But there's a second perspective that's key, and it's outward instead of inward:

WORK AND OTHERS

Later in 35:34, when Moses is relaying this revelation that God gave him to the Israelites, he says: *And the Lord has given both him and Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan, the ability to teach their skills to others.*

Work isn't just for us. Work is relational. Work is a reminder that we aren't alone.

Could it be that the idea of our life's calling is so elusive because we have made it about "me" when the work of our calling is almost always communal?

You see we're given a job in Genesis, and we're called to fill the earth in Genesis.

But this call doesn't stop at **procreation**, but **civilization**.

God didn't want to just create a **species**.

He wanted those humans to go on and create **society**.

Do we do a perfect job? Not even close.

In the US we're a far from perfect nation, and a far from perfect culture... which isn't as surprising when you reflect in our entire population there are zero perfect people.

People with personal issues will build systems with systemic issues.

Our culture here in America has a checkered past and July 4th impacts people differently for different people and their life experience. And yet with that in mind I'd point to a passage in Jeremiah 29:

This is what the God of Israel says to all the captives he has exiled to Babylon from Jerusalem: "Build homes, and plan to stay. Plant gardens, and eat the food they produce. Marry and have children. Then find spouses for them so that you may have many grandchildren. Multiply! Do not dwindle away! And work for the peace and prosperity of the city where I sent you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, for its welfare will determine your welfare.

Of note?

We're citizens of Heaven.

We aren't called to put roots too deep in this world. We're exiles and aliens passing through.

But just because we look beyond this world doesn't mean we don't have a purpose in it.

God calls us to work for the peace and prosperity of the nation we call home.

The theologian **Matthew Henry** once said of this passage,

"every passenger is concerned with safety the of the ship"

So when people raise concerns about the ship, we don't tell them *"if you don't like it leave"* and throw them on a lifeboat. So much of the unrest we've seen in our nation of late is simply echoing the words of **MLK**:

"All we say to America is be true to what you said on paper."

And you know why I have hope as troubling as these times have been?

Because we're here. The Church. Our culture is experiencing a shift. Who better to have a hand in it than the body of Christ?

And whether you realize it or not, you get a hand in shaping society every single week.

Maybe in all honesty your workplace or your 9-5 has you feeling derailed.

God would remind you of his sovereignty the same way he reminded Israel.

Trust that God has put you where you are.

Yes the geographic location, but also your workplace.

God wants to use you right where he has you.

WORK AND JESUS -

The physical created world was a temple. God comes to rest in creation and dwell with man. But you may know how that ends. Adam and Eve chose sin, fractured this order, and broke our relationship with God.. and to work.

Fast-forward to Exodus...

Bezalel was at work, filled with the Spirit, making the Tabernacle.

This was the vessel for God to dwell among his people, even after sin entered creation.

It's a foreshadowing of the more permanent Temple.

Which is a foreshadowing of Jesus, the new and perfect Temple.

One translation of **John 1:14** reads:

The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us.

Jesus himself built tables. Jesus, the Nazarene blue collar day laborer.

Jesus spent more time in carpentry than in vocational ministry!

The fact he spent so much time working with his hands affirms the dignity of our work, whatever shape it may come in.

The temple and tabernacle were no longer needed. God was there in the flesh.

And we no longer work to build a tabernacle, or a temple.

Paul says WE ARE a temple for the Holy Spirit.

But we also need to remember that the forerunner to the temple was the tabernacle.

The tabernacle was mobile. And if Jesus is truly in us, then we tabernacle Monday through Friday, wherever that sends us. May we step into our Monday through Friday, week to week grind... whether its at home with kids or at an office with coworkers... with this perspective.

COMMUNION