

Free to Serve: Exodus 3.1-4.18

Team Talk 2

Discussion

It might be good to get people talking about what they want to do with their lives, splitting into groups and thinking about what one thing they would have wanted to have changed about the world by the time they die.

Read Exodus 3.1-4.18

Introduction

a) Introduce theme for this week

This term we are looking at the book of Exodus and the theme of 'Finding Freedom'. Last week we looked at how we can find freedom from the past – how we can move on from mistakes and disappointments, and not let these hold us back. This week we are going to be looking at how we can be free to serve God.

b) Freedom and Service

If you were to ask the average person what it means to be free, you might get an answer along the lines of 'being free from restraint, being able to do whatever I want, be whoever I want, and to live my life as I choose.' But the Bible has a very different concept of freedom. According to the Bible, being free means being free to serve.

Jesus was the most 'free' human being who ever lived, and he said he came to serve. And Jesus came to set each one of us free, and he did this by enabling us to serve God. There is a prayer in the Book of Common Prayer to be said each morning, which addresses God 'whose service is perfect freedom.' There is no greater freedom than to serve God. For freedom comes from finding what we were made to do, and we were created to serve God.

And I'm sure we've all had glimpses of this – when you've experience the freedom of serving God. Maybe at Safehaven, or going to talk to someone who is on their own, or comforting someone who is going through a tough time, or encouraging someone, or inviting someone to Alpha, and you've felt like this is what you were made to do.

(Personal Example of experiencing freedom serving God)

c) Calling

Freedom comes from serving God in the general sense of doing any of the things that God calls us to do: loving God and loving our neighbours, caring for the poor, praying for the sick,

visiting the lonely. But there is also a freedom which comes from finding the specific thing that God is calling each one of us to do. God has a specific role and calling for each one of us, and there is a freedom which comes from finding this. For Moses this specific calling was to liberate the Israelites from slavery, and to lead them into their own land. For William Wilberforce it was to bring about the abolition of the slave trade, for Jackie Pullinger it was to take the good news of Jesus Christ to the drug addicts and prostitutes of Hong Kong.

I don't know whether you have a sense of what God is calling you to do with your life. You might have a strong sense that you are called to work with orphans in Africa, street children in Brazil, single parents in Brighton, the homeless, the elderly, the disabled. It might be a few different things. Or you might not know yet what God is calling you to, which is fine. (Moses didn't find his calling out till he was 80.)

(Personal sense of calling) **For me I have a few things I feel called to. I feel called to be an Anglican clergyman, and perhaps something to do with caring for the poor, and with Christian unity. The first part is quite clear in my mind, the other two parts are still developing.**

But how do we discover what God is calling us to do? How do we find that service which is 'perfect freedom'?

1. Be Open in the Ordinary

First of all we need to be open in the ordinary.

a) Open

The most important thing we can do if we want to discover what God is calling us to do, is to be open. When Moses saw the burning bush, he went over to it. He said, 'I will go over and see this strange sight – why the bush does not burn up.' He wasn't so consumed by his daily job that he wasn't open to this strange sight.

It is very easy to become closed off, focussed in only on our own lives, and not aware of what God might want to say to us. But being truly free means remaining always open to what God might be saying to us, and willing to go wherever he might be calling us. It means being open when we read the Bible, when we're at church, when we're watching the news or going to the cinema – always asking God, 'what do you want me to do?'

b) Ordinary

This sense of calling comes in the midst of the ordinary. Moses was just doing his day job. He hadn't gone on retreat. He wasn't fasting and praying, asking God for his life's calling. He was in a desert, in a place where nothing much happens. And it is in this context that God calls him.

If we want to find out what God is calling us to do, we should just keep doing what we're doing, seeking to serve God in whatever place we find ourselves. It is often quite out of the blue that we get a sense of calling from God.

(Personal example) **My sense that I should get ordained started when I was having supper with some people, and someone asked me out the blue whether I had considered ordination, and something clicked into place.**

Finding our calling comes from being open in the ordinary things that we do each day, staying alert and sensitive to what God might be saying to us.

c) Available

We need to make ourselves available to God. When God called to Moses, Moses responds by saying, 'Here I am.' He made himself available to God.

'Here I am' is what Abraham said to God when he was called, what Jacob said to God, when he called him, what Samuel said, when God spoke to him. When the angel Gabriel visited Mary, she said something similar, 'I am the Lord's servant'. And according to the writer of Hebrews it is what Jesus said to his Father, 'Here I am. I have come to do your will.'

This is something we can all say this to God: 'Here I am. I am up for anything. I will go anywhere and do anything you want. I am completely available to you.' When we get a sense of God saying something to us, or giving us a new passion or idea, however daunting, we need to say to him, 'Here I am'.

2. Deal with Doubts

So, if we want to find what God is calling us to do, first we need to be open in the ordinary, secondly we need to deal with doubts.

a) Doubts

Moses had a lot of doubts. When God says in 3.10 that he is sending Moses to go and bring the Israelites out of Egypt, Moses replies, 'Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?'

- He felt daunted by the **size of the task** – Pharaoh was the most powerful man in the world; Moses was a shepherd in exile. Egypt was the most advanced and powerful civilisation in the world; the Israelites were slaves on which the Egyptians depended for their power. Moses would have known that Egypt would have both the motivation and the ability to keep the Israelites as slaves.
- He felt like he was the **wrong person** – in 4.13 he pleads with God to send someone else. He was 80 years old – not the obvious choice to lead Israel in a series of military campaign and a long trip across the desert.

- He felt **ill-equipped for the task** – 3.13 he says, ‘what will I say if someone asks me who sent me?’ He doesn’t think he knows enough theology, or will have the necessary knowledge for what God is calling him to do.
- He felt like he didn’t have the **necessary skills** – 4.10 he says to God, ‘I have a speech impediment and have never been one for public speaking.’ He understandably doesn’t think he’s the right candidate for a job requiring the ability to persuade.
- He’s **afraid of failure** – 4.1 he says, ‘what if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, ‘The Lord did not appear to you.’ What if it all goes wrong? And he had good reason to be afraid of failure, as we saw last time, he had got it wrong in the past and had to flee from Egypt.

I don’t know whether you feel a little like Moses – whether you feel daunted by what God might call you to do, or that you’re not really the right sort of person, or you don’t have the right skills, or are afraid of all the things that might go wrong, or what happens if it all comes to nothing, or you make things worse rather than better?

(Personal example(s) of inadequacies) **I know I have felt all these things. When I felt like I might be called to be ordained it was not the obvious choice for me. I don’t find church services very easy and I don’t like standing up in front of people. I am constantly afraid of what might go wrong, and that it would all be easier if I had different skills and was a different kind of person.**

b) Addressing doubts to God

Despite all of these doubts God is still able to use him, because Moses does one crucial thing with all his doubts: he admits them to God.

Moses is honest with God about his doubts and fears. All of these insecurities and inadequacies are addressed to God.

Our doubts and feelings of inadequacies are no obstacle to God using us, if we bring them to God. If we use them as an excuse for not listening to God, not making ourselves available to him, then we are controlled by them. But if we take them to God, God can use us despite them.

c) Focus on God not our doubts

Notice the way God deals with Moses’ doubts. He doesn’t say, ‘That’s not true – your speech is really quite eloquent’ or ‘you are an outstanding leader with a lot of excellent skills – have confidence in yourself and what you have to offer’ or ‘nothing could go wrong with you involved – you’re so talented and resourceful.’

God seems to agree with Moses about his inadequacies, but tells him instead that they are not relevant. He says, ‘I have come down to rescue the Israelites’, ‘I will be with you’ ‘I will make the Egyptians favourably disposed towards you’ ‘I will help you to speak and will teach you what to say.’ Every time Moses says, ‘I can’t do this,’ God responds, ‘I know, but I will do it.’

Being free to serve God, comes not from denying our inadequacies or pretending they don't exist. It comes from admitting them, telling God our fears and our doubts, and then focussing on his character and ability to use us despite our failings.

3. Get Going

We find our calling by staying open in the ordinary, dealing with our doubts, and thirdly by getting going.

a) Making a start

When we get a sense of what God might be saying to us, however faint or uncertain, the best thing we can do is make a start. We don't have to come up with a master plan, or tell everybody that we are about to plant a hundred churches in India. But we do need to make a start.

Despite all his fears, Moses is willing to make a start. And it is a small one. He tells his father-in-law, 'Let me go back to my own people in Egypt to see if any of them are still alive.' He doesn't say, 'I'm going to liberate a million slaves from the most powerful empire in the world with the power of my lisp and my magic stick. He says he going to see if any of them are alive. He starts small.

If you have a sense of what God might be calling you to do, make a start. If you feel like God might be calling you to be an evangelist, don't book Wembley Stadium, but try talking to a friend about your faith or inviting them on the next Alpha course. If you feel called to spend the rest of your life in India, try to see if you can at least go to India for a week on holiday or a short-term mission.

(Personal Example) **When I first thought that I might be called to ordination, the whole thing was terrifying, but the process consisted in lots of little steps. The first was to speak to my vicar, so I spoke to my father. Then I went to see someone from the diocese, then the next step then the next. At each stage I was happy to take the next step.**

The important thing is that we take a look and start moving. A boat can only be steered when it is moving, and it is the same with us. God can only steer our lives if we get going, even if it's briefly in the wrong direction.

Bear Grylls, the explorer and adventurer, says that the best way to survive in the wild is to make sure you're constantly making decisions. Doing nothing, deciding nothing is fatal. It's better to make a bad decision than no decision at all. We need to keep moving, making the next step.

It's the same if we want to find what God is calling us to do. We need to keep moving, investigating, trying things out, making a start, however small.

b) Immediately

And it is important to respond immediately. God says to Moses, 'So now, go.' He is saying, 'don't hang around, don't dawdle, get moving immediately.'

Conclusion

These are the three key things for finding freedom in serving God: be open in the ordinary, deal with doubts, and get going. There is nothing more liberating than finding knowing that you're doing what God has called you to do.

Jackie Pullinger felt called to go the Walled City in Hong Kong. The Walled City was an area of land in the heart of Hong Kong that had been excluded from the treaty between Great Britain and China and as a result no-one ruled it. It therefore became a haven for gold smuggling, drug smuggling and gambling dens. The police rarely entered and the city was effectively run by two opposing triad gangs. There were no building regulations and so the buildings were a chaotic maze with live wires from the electricity they stole from the city, no water or sanitation. Water was carried in to the city in buckets from outside and excrement just tipped into the alleys. The upper stories of the buildings often touched meaning that there was practically no natural light. There were two loos in the city for its 30,000 inhabitants squashed into 6 acres. The Chinese called it Hak Lam, which means 'darkness'.

And yet Jackie Pullinger felt like this was the place that God had called her, and she loved it. She said that she used to get the feeling like it was her birthday every time she entered it.