

# First Love: The fight for our hearts against unacceptable worship

---

## SMALL GROUP NOTES

*Derek Reynolds - 4 August 2013*

### **Exodus 7: 14– 8: 32**

God is seeking to win a people for himself who will worship him with their hearts, body, strength and mind.

The story of Israel's family in Egypt was tragic; today we would describe it as a dysfunctional family, but God took that broken family to make it his family to worship and serve him alone. Peter (1 Pet. 2:9) speaks of the Church as those who have been brought out of darkness into light, but while he reflects on this journey he also sees they are to become a priestly people worshipping God by declaring "his excellencies". God wants to display his glory in us, as he did in Israel. Exodus is not about Moses or the Israelites; it is about God.

### **The Challenge: So what holds us back from right worship?**

*Conditions in Egypt.* Israel in Egypt was suffering – slavery, and then plagues! Egypt was under God's judgement and Israel even was caught up in it. Israel was ruled by an unrighteous pharaoh. We can live in oppressed circumstances – our job, our boss, or finances, our future plans, health issues, bereavement. Our response to these things can hinder worship.

*The Moral and Spiritual Environment.* God wanted a people with different values. We live in a world of d-i-y moral standards; absolutes are out, moral indignation or outrage is suspect, and what right, for heaven's sake, has anyone to say someone else is wrong? The world and its values pressurise us not to believe or obey God. Acceptable worship is "in Spirit and truth". It is not our circumstances but the reality of our hearts that make for acceptable worship.

### **God's Response**

The answer always lies in what we know of God. We can identify before God the very worst things in our circumstances or character and then affirm, "But God".

- He is Lord of all. "I am the Lord" (17). God's mission was that his name might be made known. When we miss God's big picture we become introspective and discouraged. The small vision of a God who meets my needs makes worship difficult. God had raised pharaoh up so that Yahweh's glory should be seen through the world (9:16). Magicians can make frogs; only God can get rid of them. The plagues show God's concern for his own glory and praise, and later at least motivated Israel to praise
- God protects his people. We see how vital this was to Israel in some of the Psalms, e. g. 78: 44 - 52, 53. Israel could only be grateful to God - that is why so many ascriptions of praise in the Bible go back to the Exodus. Exodus is a celebration of God's faithfulness. Remembering is important. What memories of special meetings with God, miraculous interventions etc. do you

remember? In difficult times remembering God's goodness is vital. They are things that are important to you and may be insignificant to anyone else, but they say God is for you.

- Yahweh is always present. Slavery in Egypt was demoralising and depressing just as later captivity in Babylon would leave them mourning after Jerusalem (Ps 139). But God never leaves his people. In the darkest times he is still with us. Jesus last words before he ascended according to Matthew were "I am with you always to the end of the age".

## **Our Response**

*By difference from "Egypt".* Moses demanded that Pharaoh should let Israel go to worship God. We have to reject the cultural pressures of our world- things like British reserve or coolness, cultural niceness and self-satisfaction if we are to worship God as he demands. Much of the OT is about the alternative ways of salvation, self-effort, pride and human goodness or achievement. We have to deal with idols if we are to show how excellent he is.

*By Celebrating Mercy.* The plagues brought judgement on Egypt, but deliverance to Israel. There was mercy here too for Egypt. There is no limit to what God will do to win his people for himself. How did God deliver Israel? He did it by his power and showing there was no other god, but also by a display of his grace. Micah (7: 18) asks, "Who is a God like you pardoning iniquity?" There is no God like our God in power or mercy, and they come together in God.

But the NT paints his mercy in greater ways still. Suppose we were a people daily filled with gratitude and praise for our deliverance through the cross, our gatherings together and our lives would be transformed. How many problems would be seen in a different perspective? God's goodness changes our outlook from what we can do for him to what he has done for us; it is about his purpose, not ours; it is not about what we feel but about what he has done. For Israel deliverance from Egypt remained a cause for praise; how much more the cross! Salvation is not for our sakes but for God's glory. This demands a response for us in the greater privilege of knowing God through Jesus in giving the highest praise. We know what and who he is and we praise, not just in meetings but in life.

## **Questions for discussion**

Have you things that you remember that God has done?

If so, share them in your group. They can be big or small – but they are all big because God has done them!

What is there in the nature of God which can lift us out of depression and discouragement?

What has God done in you that encourages you to praise?

What issues do you face that you need to see "But God" applied to?

Do not feel under pressure to share, but do share if you can.