

Freedom is about Many Things (Exodus 5:1-6:8)

Video 1

Freddie Mercury wanted to break free. Nina Simone wished she knew how it would feel to be free. Frozen's Elsa sings, 'No rights, no wrongs, no rules for me, I'm free.'

All of us long for freedom.

But here's the question: what does it mean to be truly *free*?

This isn't a very easy question to answer. Not when we start getting specific.

The Bible book of Exodus insists that freedom is bigger than we think. Why? Because, as we're about to see, there's more than one way to be enslaved.

As Exodus 5 opens, the people of Israel are wrongly enslaved in four ways.

They're enslaved *politically*. When the people of Israel arrived in Egypt as refugees, they were welcomed. Now, they're exploited and discriminated against.

And that's not all.

They're enslaved *economically*. They're working on other people's land doing other people's jobs. They have no say in the matter. They are forced to make clay bricks.

Then, thirdly, the Israelites are enslaved *socially*. After Moses' request, it gets worse. They're denied the straw they need to reinforce the bricks that they are being forced to make. It's an impossible workload. They are denied human rights.

The Israelites appeal to Pharaoh:

"Why have you treated your servants this way? Your servants are given no straw, yet we are told, 'Make bricks!' Your servants are being beaten, but the fault is with your own people."

And listen to Pharaoh's response:

Pharaoh said, "Lazy, that's what you are—lazy! That is why you keep saying, 'Let us go and sacrifice to the LORD.'"

The Israelites are enslaved politically, economically and socially.

But there is another dimension to their slavery. They are also enslaved *spiritually*.

Let me explain.

Moses requests that the Israelites should be freed to attend a festival to the LORD. So when Pharaoh says no, he is explicitly preventing them from worshipping God:

“Who is the LORD, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD and I will not let Israel go.”

As long as Pharaoh is master, the Israelites cannot worship God.

This is very important. Exodus doesn't show Israel's slavery in only political, economic and social terms. The Israelites needed to be freed spiritually too.

Spiritual slavery sounds strange to us - yet it's an idea taken up throughout the Bible. Slavery is one of the main metaphors the Bible uses to describe being out of relationship with God.

And that makes Exodus 5 more than just a history lesson. It makes it a picture of life without Jesus.

Spiritual slavery is something close to all of us.

Yet intriguingly, this raises a new possibility. Perhaps Jesus has more to do with freedom *in all its forms* than we'd imagined too.