

Freedom is Worship (Exodus 34:5-8)

Video 1

Exodus's early chapters are dramatic. God frees his people from Pharaoh's grasp! But in the later chapters, things slow down. We're given lengthy details about how God's newly-freed people are to *worship him*.

Because worshipping God is the thing that opens us up to a richer experience of freedom.

But what does worship mean?

Well, the word tells us.

Our word – 'worship' – comes from an old English word: 'worth-ship.' 'Worth-ship' meant to publicly value something or someone. So, in its basic sense, worship is showing how much something or someone means to you.

Our emotions give us a guide as to what we worship. We punch the air as the ball hits the back of the net. We smile when we get a good grade. Our hearts flutter when that special person notices us.

And our negative feelings too. The anxiety of exam season. The anger that rises as we're criticised.

Our emotions indicate what we value. In Bible language, they show us what we worship.

In this light, hear God's warning to Moses:

Do not worship any other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.

Jealousy is different from envy. You envy someone when they have something you want. But you're jealous when someone has something that's rightly yours.

So God is saying: worship me. Why? Because only I am worthy of being worshipped. It's only in worshipping me can you be free.

The point isn't that we can't value other things. Friends, sport and achievement all matter. But to worship God is to say that *knowing him* is what matters most. And is what leads us into freedom.

Because worshipping anything else will enslave us.

Back in 2005, the author David Foster Wallace gave a speech to students that went viral. He wasn't a Christian – yet he spoke about worship in a very similar way to Exodus.

“In the day-to-day trenches of adult life,” he said, “there is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships.”

But listen to what he next warned the listening students:

Pretty much anything you worship will eat you alive. If you worship money and things then you will never have enough. Worship your own body and beauty and sexual allure and you will always feel ugly, and when time and age start showing, you will die a million deaths. Worship power and you will feel weak and afraid, and you will need ever more power over others to keep the fear at bay.

Here's Wallace's point: the things we build our lives upon all too often consume us.

So, with all that in mind, let's hear the questions Exodus asks us:

What if we're only really free when we worship the one who's truly worthy of worship?

And so what if the call to worship God is a kindness, that releases us from the slavery of worshipping other things?