

Hello, everyone. I sincerely hope that you are having an incredible Feast.

The title of this split-sermon is *Freedom—True Freedom*.

The purpose of this split-sermon is to take a look at the subject of "freedom," and what it means for God's people. We will look at the different degrees, or better said, phases of freedom that a person can experience during their lifetime.

There are only a handful of words known to mankind that can trigger the powerful, emotional response that the word "freedom" does. What exactly does it mean to be free? Well, now, the answer to that question is going to be different from each and every person that you were to ask. What is the one thing that people desire to be freed from most of all? Once again, the answers are going to be endless in variety.

In order for us to grow in understanding of what it means to be truly free, we need to compare freedom with that which is the exact opposite. God's people are well aware of the fact that the opposite of "freedom" is "bondage," or in other words, "slavery." God's word is full of examples of both. Over the past 6,000 years, mankind's desire to escape from bondage, oppression, and slavery has only grown stronger. Countless wars and conflicts have been fought in the name of freedom. This past spring most of Europe celebrated the 70th anniversary of being liberated from Hitler and the Nazi's.

The word "freedom" is found in many of the world's national anthems. For instance, the Canadian national anthem contains the following proclamation, "The true North, strong and free." In the anthem of the United States of America there is the following verse, "The land of the free, home of the brave." So there truly is a profound emotional attachment to the word "freedom."

At this point, we are going to take a look at one of the many examples of the struggle for freedom recorded in God's word. The first set of scriptures we will be turning to is the most obvious, which is found in the book of Exodus, where we find the most extraordinary story of deliverance that has ever taken place in the history of mankind to this point in time.

In Exodus 4 we come on the scene where God has convinced Moses to return to the land of Egypt and appear before Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. That's **Exodus 4:18**, where we read the following—**So Moses went and returned to Jethro, his father-in-law, and said to him, Please let me go and return to my brethren who are in Egypt, and see whether they are still alive. And Jethro said to Moses, Go in peace. And the Eternal said to Moses in Midian, Go, return to Egypt; for all the men are dead who sought your life. Then Moses took his wife and his sons and set them on a donkey, and he returned to the land of Egypt. And Moses took the rod of God in his hand.**

And the Eternal said to Moses, When you go back to Egypt, see that you do all those wonders before Pharaoh which I have put into your hand. In other words, God was going to pour out the plagues upon the land of Egypt through His servant Moses, by His great power. God was merely using Moses as an instrument through whom He was going to accomplish all that He did.

Continuing in verse 21 we read... But I (the Eternal) will harden his heart (that is Pharaoh's heart), so that he will not let the people go. Then you shall say to Pharaoh, (and please remember this pronouncement God makes because it will be referred to a little later on), Israel is My son, My firstborn. So I say to you, let My son go that he may serve Me. But if you refuse to let him go, indeed, I will kill your son, your firstborn.

[Exodus] 5:1—Afterward, Moses and Aaron went in and told Pharaoh the following, Thus says the Eternal God of Israel: Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness. And Pharaoh said, Who is the Eternal, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the Eternal, nor will I let Israel go. Well, as we know, from the incredible events that were about to come to pass, Pharaoh was going to find out *exactly* who the Eternal Great God of the universe really was. You could say that he was about to go through a "crash-course," "a rude awakening," "a steep learning curve."

Back to the story in chapter 5. So they said, The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Please, let us go three days' journey into the desert and sacrifice to the Eternal our God, lest He fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword, or in other words, with death. Then the king of Egypt said to Moses and Aaron, Why do you take the people from their work? Get *back* to your labors. And Pharaoh said, Look, the people of the land are many now, and you take them rest from their labor! So the same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people, and their officers, saying, You shall no longer give the people straw to make brick as before. Let them go and gather straw for themselves. Well, you can just imagine that at this point Moses must have felt quite bewildered.

Dropping down to verse 22 we see that, indeed, he was—So Moses returned to the Eternal and said, Eternal, why have You brought trouble on this people? Why is it you have sent me? For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has done evil to this people; neither have You delivered Your people at all. It would be safe to say that discouragement was an understatement at this point. Then the Eternal said to Moses, Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh. For with a strong hand he will let them go, and with a strong hand he will drive them out of his land.

One of the very first things we as God's people should realize, when it comes to freedom, it doesn't come easy. There is, indeed, a major cost involved in one way or another. A tremendous amount of struggle and effort is required before it becomes a reality. The struggle is with us, not with God, as He is all-mighty and there is nothing that is impossible for Him to accomplish.

Back to the book of Exodus. Chapters 7 through 10 give the description of the first nine plagues poured out upon the Egyptians. Then in chapter 11, starting in verse 1, we read the following... that's [Exodus] 11:1—And the Eternal said to Moses, I will bring yet one more plague on Pharaoh and on Egypt. Afterward's, he will let you go from here. When he lets *you* go, he will surely drive you out of here

altogether. It is imperative that we remember that God is in complete and absolute control of His plan, brethren.

Please turn to **Exodus 12:29**—And it came to pass, at midnight, that the Eternal struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who *was* in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of livestock. So Pharaoh rose in the night, he and all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt, for *there was not a house where there was not one dead.* We cannot begin to imagine just how overwhelming this single event must have been. After going through all the first nine plagues, and then this final tenth plague... truly beyond comprehension. The outcry from the Egyptians would have left a deep and powerful memory in the minds of the children of Israel. They would have heard many of the Egyptians crying out in anguish that lived along the boundary of the land of Goshen.

Verse 31—Then he (Pharaoh) called for Moses and Aaron by night and said, Rise and go out from among my people, both you and the children of Israel. Go serve the Eternal as you have said.

Dropping down to **verse 33**—The Egyptians urged the people that they might send them out of the land in haste. For they said, We *shall* all *be* dead.

Now in **verse 36** we read—And the Eternal had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians.... then the children of Israel journeyed from Ramses to Succoth, about 600,000 men on foot, besides children.

Drop down to **verse 40**—Now, the sojourn of the children of Israel who lived in Egypt *was* four hundred and thirty years. And it came to pass at the end of four hundred and thirty years—on that very same day—it came to pass that all the armies of the Eternal went out from the land of Egypt. *It is* a night of solemn observance to the Eternal for bringing them out of the land of Egypt. *This is* that night of the Eternal, a solemn observance for all the children of Israel throughout their generations. Now that we have had a quick review of the most well known example of the contrast between bondage and freedom, we are going to look at something very revealing. It is really quite extraordinary!

In **Exodus 14:10**—And when Pharaoh drew near, the children of Israel lifted their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians marched after them. So they were very afraid, and the children of Israel cried out to the Eternal. Now, listen very carefully to what comes out of their mouths next. It is truly stunning, indeed, a real jaw-dropper.

Verse 11—Then they said to Moses, Because *there were* no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you so dealt with us, to bring us up out of Egypt? After all they had witnessed in the land of Egypt, of all the plagues being poured out upon Pharaoh and the Egyptians, of all the death and destruction that was brought upon the people of Egypt, of being brought out of the land of Egypt with their "heads held high," as God Almighty delivered them "out of the house of bondage," *this* is their way of showing their appreciation at the very first sign of trouble? If there is

anyone that doesn't believe that we serve a *very*, very merciful God, this is one of the countless sets of scriptures that confirm the *fact* that, indeed, we truly do.

Verse 12 (Exodus 14:12)—Is this not the word that we told you in Egypt, saying, Let us alone that we may serve the Egyptians? For *it would have been* better for us to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness. After over 400 years of bondage, of being enslaved in the land of Egypt, it is clear from their response at the Red Sea crossing that slavery was all that they understood. You could say that it had become a part of their DNA. Time and time again God had it recorded how they responded during their forty-years of sojourning in the desert, in the wilderness, and it was always the same. We know that these examples are recorded for our benefit, so that we can learn from them and grow on a spiritual plane. So one of the lessons that we are to take from this example is that although they had been delivered from the land of Egypt on a physical plane, in their minds, they were still very much held in captive. They were experiencing the first level or phase of freedom. Being freed from that environment was an absolute necessity, otherwise, they would never be able to continue on to the next level.

The surroundings we find ourselves in have a profound influence upon us, one that we never fully realize while we are in the midst of them. Let's think of the example of Abraham, not that he was held in captivity like the children of Israel were in Egypt, but God told him to depart from the land where he was born and raised, the land of his upbringing, so he would no longer be under the influence of the customs and traditions of his relatives.

So the children of Israel had their very first taste of freedom. After all that it took to achieve it, we are able to look at this phenomenal event and realize that it was only the first step in the journey, that it was a very small step that had been taken on a long, long road.

The next step that an individual can experience is to be brought out of the bondage that takes place in one's mind. It wouldn't be possible to list all of the thoughts and ideas that have the ability to hold a person in a state of mental bondage; it truly wouldn't be. God was going to give the children of Israel the most profound knowledge ever given to a nation of people in the history of mankind. When they arrived at Mount Sinai and were given God's law, the 10 Commandments, on the Day of Pentecost, the separation that God made between them and the rest of mankind on how to truly live life was beyond words to describe.

Yes, we as members of the Body of Christ understand that they didn't have the ability to keep it on a spiritual plane, but even to apply it on a physical plane would have resulted in blessings beyond their wildest dreams. We know from what God inspired to be recorded that the children of Israel fought and resisted Him each and every step of the way. Look at their response when God spoke to them at Mount Sinai.

We read of the account in **Exodus 19:16—Then it came to pass on the third day, in the morning, that there were thundering and lightning's, and a thick cloud on the mountain; and the sound of the trumpet was very loud, so that all the people who *were* in the camp trembled. And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Now,**

Mount Sinai was completely in smoke because the Eternal descended upon it in fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. We cannot even begin to imagine what this must have been like, simply because we've never experienced anything remotely close to this event, and certainly nothing on that scale on a physical plane.

Let's turn over to the next chapter in Exodus, Exodus 20, and we will pick up the account beginning in verse 18. That's **Exodus 20:18**—in the verses immediately following the proclamation of the 10 Commandments that God Almighty... **Now, all the people witnessed the thundering, the lightning flashes, and the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; when the people saw they trembled and stood afar off. Then they said to Moses, You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die. Moses said to the people, Do not fear; for God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin. So the people stood afar off, but Moses drew near the thick darkness where God was.** Well, brethren, we know from what God has inspired to be recorded that the children of Israel fought and resisted Him each and every step of the way as they sojourned in the wilderness for the next forty years. God, through Jesus Christ, through His end-time apostle, by the power of His holy spirit revealed to us in recent times that the true problem was that the children of Israel didn't really want God's version of freedom. What they really wanted was to do whatever they pleased, that is, whatever was pleasing to them without any consequence for their actions.

A set of scriptures that confirm their attitude is found in **1 Samuel 8:5**—part way into the verse we read the following, **Look, you are old, and your sons no longer walk in your ways. Now make for us a king, to judge us like all the nations. But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, Give us a king to judge us. So Samuel prayed to the Eternal. And the Eternal said to Samuel, Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them.** In the remainder of the verses in chapter 8, God had Samuel spell out the solemn warning of what it was going to cost them to have a king over them instead of God Almighty as their King.

Now, some of you may be thinking, "If only they wouldn't have made that foolish decision to reject God and have a human being to reign over them as their king we wouldn't be in the predicament we find ourselves in at this time. When we look back from our vantage point, the easiest thing in the world to do is to put the blame for all our troubles on the children of physical Israel. But by now we should realize that we would have done the very same thing they did, if put in that situation, just like with Adam and Eve, and just like with what took place during the Apostasy.

At this time, brethren, I would like to interject a few comments, a few observations of what we have been given in understanding at this point in our calling. In these last days of mankind's self-rule, God, through Jesus Christ, through His end-time apostle, has revealed to His people that Pharaoh was a physical "type" of Satan. He took great pleasure in holding the children of ancient Israel in physical bondage. Like the spirit being that he was a "type" of, he thrived on controlling others. Even after he finally released the children of Israel, he soon realized that he was losing control over a massive workforce of slaves, which meant that his power and influence would diminish greatly. Just like that

being that he was a physical "type" of, when their power and influence is reduced, there is a mental torment that is impossible to reconcile within the mind, an overwhelming sense of loss of control, loss of power, and a loss of authority.

We know that just as the children of Israel sojourned through the physical wilderness, we, as the spiritual children of Israel, are travelling through the spiritual wilderness of this world. When we look back at the history of God's Church since the time that He called Mr. Armstrong during the late 1920's and early 1930's, there are some truly remarkable parallels. That's what God encountered with the attitudes of the children of Israel after He delivered them out of physical Egypt. There was a rebellious and stubborn refusal to simply place their trust in and reliance on God to bring them all the way through that journey.

How many times did it reach the point where He was ready "to wipe the slate clean" (so to speak), and raise up a nation through Moses? It finally came to a climax when, as you remember, He swore that none of those over a certain age would be allowed to enter into the physical promised land. As God began to bring Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong further and further out of the spiritual darkness of this world, and the Church was growing exponentially, so too were the challenges of dealing with some of the attitudes that were making themselves manifest—especially among some of those in the ministry. Look back at the example of Pentecost in 1974 when God revealed to Mr. Armstrong that it was to be observed on a Sunday, and no longer on a Monday. There were *many* that fought and resisted the change that was taking place. In some cases, it was outright rebellion!

Then we come to the early 1990's and the time leading up to the Apostasy. As a result of being "rich and increased with goods," of thinking that we were "in need of nothing," God had to spew us out of His mouth, away from His presence, because we had let down and refused to repent of the sin in our lives on a daily basis, refusing to take what we were being offered. We now know that there will be 7,000 (mostly from among the ministry), that will *not* be allowed to enter into the beginning of the reign of Jesus Christ and the 144,000.

One other matter that needs to be addressed is this: As God begins the process of delivering us out of spiritual Egypt, giving us a level of freedom that has been offered to a very, very small number of people over the past 6,000 years, God expects us to free those in our lives as well.

Turn with me to **Isaiah 58:6**, where we read the following—***Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loosen the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yolk? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh? Then your light shall break forth like the morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you. The glory of the Eternal shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call and the Eternal will answer, you shall cry and He will say, Here I am. If you take away the yolk from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, if you extend your soul to the hungry and satisfy the afflicted soul, then your light shall dawn in the darkness, and your darkness shall be as the noonday. The Eternal will guide you continually, and***

satisfy your soul in drought, and strengthen your bones. You shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water whose waters do not fail. Those from among you shall build the old waste places; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations, and you shall be called the Repairer of the Breach, the Restorer of Streets to Dwell In.

If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, *from* doing your own pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy *days* of the Eternal honorable, and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words, then you shall delight yourself in the Eternal; And I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the Eternal has spoken.

You see, brethren, our calling has everything to do with freedom. Not just physical freedom, but emotional, mental, and most importantly, spiritual freedom; or in other words, complete and total freedom. As we have seen from what God has recorded for our benefit, there is a limited amount of freedom that an individual can experience in life without the gift of God's holy spirit dwelling within the mind of a person.

The second level (or phase) of freedom is not possible. When God extends an invitation (a calling) to a person, for the very first time in their life, they are going to have the opportunity to experience a level of freedom that has never been experienced before—ever.

The children of Israel were held in captivity in the land of Egypt. It took the *death* of his firstborn before Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, allowed them to leave. That was merely physical freedom, which *pales in comparison* with the knowledge and understanding that it takes the *death* of Jesus Christ, the Son of the *King of Kings*, to make it possible for those being drawn out of spiritual Egypt to be able to taste the level of freedom that can only be experienced by those who have received the gift of God's holy spirit.

When we stop and consider just exactly where we are in time, it's truly difficult to contain the excitement. We know that there is soon to be a *massive* exodus that will be accomplished by God Almighty that will make the original exodus seem puny by comparison. Not only will the sheer number of people that will be given the opportunity to be a part of that exodus be massive, but it will be a far, far greater exodus for the following reasons. First, and foremost, Satan and the demons will be completely removed from the picture. Second, the false government and religious systems will have been completely and utterly destroyed. Third, God, through Jesus Christ and the 144,000 will see to it that there will never be another war waged by mankind. Fourth, and most importantly, many of those brought out of captivity will be given the opportunity to experience the second phase of freedom that can only be experienced by those with God's holy spirit, which is why this time in which we live is truly the pinnacle of all human history. There are so many *wonderful, incredible* events about to take place right before our very eyes. It just keeps getting better and better!

As God's people know from what is recorded in the pages of the Bible, God is the one and only source of truth. It's God's word that sanctifies us, that sets us apart. Without His holy spirit there is absolutely no way in the world that *anyone* can comprehend, can hear spiritually, or can see on a spiritual plane.

In the book of **John 8:32**, the following words are recorded, **And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free**, free from all the chaos and confusion, all the deception and lies, all the fear and superstition. For those that are a part of God's Church, the Body of Christ, one of the first realities that stares them in the face is that they have entered into the greatest struggle they will ever experience in life. There is nothing in this world that even comes close to the battle that rages in one's mind after a person has been baptized by a true minister of God and has received the gift of God's holy spirit through the laying on of hands.

As we observe God's Feast of Tabernacles, which pictures the glorious reign of Jesus Christ and the 144,000 for a full 1,000 years, part of our rejoicing during the Feast should be in the realization that for the first time ever, the 144,000 will experience complete and total freedom, which has only been given to Jesus Christ up to this point in time. Yes! Some of those in our midst will be *so phenomenally blessed* to finally experience what it means to be truly free! We know two of them, and we will simply have to wait for God to reveal at the sounding of the final Trumpet the rest. There are bound to be a few surprises. The anticipation and excitement is hard to contain, but that's the way it's supposed to be. We are always to be eager and excited for what God is waiting to give His people in His perfect timing.

The title of Nelson Mandela's autobiography is "The Long Walk to Freedom." And no, this is not a suggestion that anyone should read it. And no, yours truly has not, and will not be reading it either. But it fits perfectly into this split-sermon as it sums up beautifully what we are on. It's an incredible journey, a lifelong journey which can easily overwhelm a person if they try to look too far down the path that stretches out before them. It is wise for God's people to heed the instruction, the admonishment of Jesus Christ found in **Matthew 6:28**, where we read the following—**Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.** The key to our long walk to freedom is to take one step at a time.

There was this guy that used to hang around with a motley crew of sled-dogs, that would go out on these insanely long journey's (adventures), some for well over 100-miles at a time. He had to learn the hard way (which, by the way, seems to be the only way that he's able to learn anything)... but anyway, he had to learn the hard way that in order to be able to finish such an adventure it was necessary to break it down into very small portions or distances. One of the other things that he learned along the way is that it's not how you start, but that it's that you finish.

Well, brethren, rest assured, God wants to bring us all the way to the finish, into His Kingdom as spirit-born members of His holy, royal, Family.

There is one more area that needs to be addressed before drawing to a conclusion of this split-sermon. Back in the first half of August of this year, brethren in this area were honored with a visit from Laura, Johnny, and Myrtle, and part of the excitement that we experienced during their visit was being able to hear the voice of God's end-time apostle. That was such a wonderful treat, a *true* blessing! One of the many things that everyone listening to him noticed right away was the calmness in his voice. The strength and resolve was obvious. There was a single-minded focus to press onward. You could tell he was totally at peace. And despite the unjust situation that he was placed in, there was no ill will,

absolutely no desire to lash out or seeking of any vengeance. The example being set is truly wonderful to behold. It drives home the final point that needs to be addressed.

All throughout the history of mankind, God's servants, His apostles, and prophets that have been sent by God to warn people of what the results of their decision to continue to reject God and His way of life would be, we know that they were not well received, that most of them were treated harshly, to put it mildly. But despite it all, they were able to experience a level of freedom that most simple cannot comprehend.

You see, brethren, it's not where you are, it's who you are with. Yours truly is absolutely convinced that there is no man on earth at this time that experiences the level of freedom that God's end-time apostle is currently enjoying. Remember, it's not *where* you are, it's *who* you are with. He is with God the Father and Jesus Christ in unity and harmony and oneness. Now, *that's* freedom—true freedom!

In conclusion, we've taken a closer look at the different degrees or phases of freedom that an individual is able to experience in their lifetime. We've come to the conclusion that there is very little freedom experienced by anyone other than God's people...and that is only on a physical plane for those in the world. We've been reminded that it's God's truth that sets us free, and that is only available to those that have been given the gift of God's holy spirit. Complete and total freedom is only realized when one is a spirit-born member of God's holy Family, Elohim. God *is* the one and only source of freedom—true freedom.□