



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

Sermon for Lent 3

March 3, 2024

Out of Slavery

Exodus 20:1–17

¹And God spoke all these words, saying, ²“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. ³“You shall have no other gods before me.

⁴“You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. ⁵You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

⁷“You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

⁸“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, ¹⁰but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. ¹¹For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

¹²“Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. ¹³“You shall not murder. ¹⁴“You shall not commit adultery. ¹⁵“You shall not steal. ¹⁶“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. ¹⁷“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.”

Introduction

In the opening words of today’s Old Testament, the Lord identifies Himself, saying: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” Why was this such a significant moment in the lives of God’s people? We’ll explore that question for a few minutes today.

I. I Am the Lord Your God

Not long before this, the Lord had come down, enveloping the whole mountain with a thick cloud. There was thunder and lightning and the sound of a loud trumpet blast. The



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people were terrified, but it wasn't the cloud, the thunder, or the trumpet that told them that God was doing this; rather, it was His own announcement here: "I am the LORD your God."

It was the same for Moses at the burning bush. God identified Himself by saying, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." This told Moses that the one speaking to him was the same God who made Himself known to the fathers in the Faith. And now, at Sinai, God spoke similar words, "I am the Lord your God."

This is how the one true God identifies Himself, placing His Name on His people and calling them out of the world. It's the same with us. He comes to us, identifies Himself, and places His Name on us. You hear it at the beginning of every worship service in the words of the Invocation: "In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." We hear it again in the Benediction: "The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace." In other ways throughout the service, the Lord gives Himself to us as He puts His holy Name on us and marks us as His very own.

So, as the Lord once again graces the people in our text with His holy Name, they are blessed, sanctified, and prepared to receive His holy Word.

II. I Am the Lord Your God Who Brought You Out Slavery

By placing His Name on His people, the Lord identifies Himself as their Savior. He says, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." Pay attention to these words. The Lord always identifies Himself as the ONE TRUE GOD, who comes to His people as their SAVIOR. He comes to us this way because it's the only way we can receive Him. If He came to us in any other way, we'd be destroyed. It's not God's will that we should be destroyed, of course. Nor does He want us to be enslaved. He comes to us to set us free from our slavery. In fact, as Christians, who have received His Name in the waters of Holy Baptism, we've already been set free. This is why God came to the ancient people of Israel, saying, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."

Notice now that the Lord doesn't merely *promise* to set His people free, but rather that He had *already* set them free. He said, "I am the LORD your God, who *brought* you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." When the Lord comes to us in the divine service, He says the same thing to us. As we call upon Him "In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," acknowledging Him to be our Savior, who has brought us out of our slavery to sin, death, and the devil, we are assured that He hears our prayers and grants us grace and every blessing.

He identified Himself to the Israelites as the Lord who brought them out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. They needed this reminder. It had been a few months since they were rescued from 400 years of hard slavery. The Egyptians had treated them cruelly, not only subjecting them to intense labor, but attempting to deprive them of their faith. They forced them to build temples to the pharaohs, who claimed to be God. They even forced



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them to kill their baby boys because God had promised that a deliverer would be born to them. Neither were they allowed to worship God in the way they'd been taught, worshipping Him instead in secret, unable to make the prescribed sacrifices. Still, amazingly – miraculously – they had not lost their faith. They never ceased crying out to the Lord their God. And the Lord heard their pleas for mercy and deliverance.

When He appeared to Moses in the burning bush He said, "Go, assemble the elders of Israel and say to them, 'The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, appeared to me and said: I have watched over you and have seen what has been done to you in Egypt. And I have promised to bring you up out of your misery in Egypt.'" And bring them out He did, crushing the enemy by means of the Passover. From that time on, they were free. Pharaoh and his army pursued them, but never again were they slaves to Egypt. Now, at Sinai, the Lord came to them as the One who had brought them out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery, to be His chosen people.

III. I Am the Lord Your God Who Brought You Out Slavery Forever

Jesus said, "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." When the Lord came to set the Israelites free, His intention was that they would be free forever. He came to them atop Mount Sinai, identified Himself as the Lord their God, identifying *them* as His very own people. In marking them with His Name, He proceeded to mark them with something else very special and very powerful: the Torah, the Word of the Lord. This Word would be their most treasured possession, for by it they would be kept in God's grace forever; by it they would continue to be identified as those whom God had brought out of slavery.

Freedom, of course, must be used properly and responsibly. We don't necessarily understand that naturally; we have to be taught. God gave His Word to the Israelites in order to teach them how to use their newfound freedom. That's why He brought them to Mount Sinai. There He would provide them the means by which they would be kept in His grace and live as His people. His words of instruction – the Ten Commandments – would prevent them from becoming slaves again.

The only reason they were free, and the only way they could remain free, was because He was their God. So He warned them not to turn to anyone else, because He was the God who set them free. Since it was His Name by which they received their freedom, He warned them to use His Name properly. He also gave them the Means of Grace, which they would receive again and again through proper worship. In this way He established them as His people forever. As the people of God, marked with the Name of the Lord, they would live free from the slavery of sin, death, and the power of the devil. They would be preserved in God's grace until Messiah would come and their redemption would be complete.

The people of God today need instruction to enjoy the freedom God gives. As those who've been set free and marked with the Name of the Lord, it's important that we understand that the Commandments are much more than a list of shoulds and should nots.



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While they do show us what we should and shouldn't do, they were never intended to enslave us. We're not to live our lives in bondage. The Commandments were given to direct us back to the Lord our God, our Savior, to keep us mindful of the goodness of the Lord our God, who wants only good things for us, now and forever. He wants us to know Him as the only true God, because He loves us and desires our salvation. He wants us to use His Name properly, because He's placed His Name upon us for our salvation. He wants us to call upon Him in every trouble, never forgetting His gracious will for us, never forgetting that He is the only true God and our only Savior from all that would harm us. He wants us to come regularly to receive the Means of Grace by which we're renewed in our freedom to live as His people, placing His Name on us again and again in the Divine Service. And He wants us to live out those blessings in love toward our neighbors, for He loves them as He loves us.

A friend of mine once told me that, as a child, his parents taught him to pray the catechism every day. He spoke of the comfort he received from reciting the commandments every night, that they reminded him of his Savior, who had marked him with His own Name to live free from the power of the devil and all the evil influences of the world, influences that would steal from him the freedom belonging to the people of God.

The commandments themselves do not save us, of course. Indeed, they *cannot* save us. It's the Lord Himself who has saved us. And He wants us to be free from the things that enslave. Whoever understands this and lives accordingly, enjoys great peace and freedom in the Lord.

Conclusion

As believers in Christ, our freedom from sin, death, and the power of the devil is based in our identity with the Lord our God, who brought us out of the way of slavery to live in the joy of knowing Him as our Savior. After all, why did God give His people the Commandments? Because He loved them. Why does He give His commandments to you? Because He loves you! Lent is a good opportunity to renew the practice of daily reviewing the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Office of the Keys, and the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion. As God works in us by the power of His Word, we will be marked again and again with His holy Name, by which we know that we are free to be His forever and ever. In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen