

Freedom and Responsibility and God

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[0 : 00] Well, today's talk, keep your Bibles open in Exodus 21, we're going to be looking in there. It's a talk about freedom and responsibility and the kingdom of God.

Freedom and responsibility and the kingdom of God. I don't know about you, but the modern world wants to be free. I mean, look at the world around us.

So many movements are declaring people freedom. Freedom from the past, freedom from traditional norms, especially when it comes to marriage.

Freedom from gender roles, freedom from having people tell you what to do, especially, it seems like, the church. We want freedom from autocracy, from people telling us how to live our lives.

Another thing that happens in the modern world that's sort of a hallmark of the modern world is this power. All relationships are seen through this sort of, through the glasses or lens of power and power struggle and power imbalance.

[1 : 10] Power is seen as a very bad thing because it tends to hurt. Power is always bad, actually, in the modern, in many in the modern world, looking at our world around us.

And especially if it's in the hands of white people because of the problems of the past. We've experienced it here in South Africa.

Not just white people in general, but especially men seem to be a real target of the modern world's call to be free from oppression and to break down power structures.

Thing is, God loves freedom as well. But he doesn't believe in the kind of freedom that's being promulgated in the modern, in the world around us.

God also doesn't just believe in equality. So this call for freedom and the breaking down of power structure is a call for everyone and everything to be totally equal.

[2 : 14] With no one person telling other people what to do. Certainly not old white people. God doesn't believe in equality.

God actually believes in hierarchy. In power and authority. The very things that the modern world tells us we don't want. But God also believes in freedom, in dignity, in respect and fairness.

And so we're kind of caught in the middle, aren't we? This church, not just St. Mark's, I mean the church in general in the modern world. We believe in a God that believes in power and authority, but also freedom.

And then on the other hand you've got this world that's crying for freedom and doesn't want anything to do with power or authority. How are we to think through these things? How are we to think and act when it comes to freedom and power and responsibility and equality at home?

In our relationships at home or in the workplace? So that's what we're going to be looking at today. So big sort of headline questions about freedom and power and authority and equality.

[3 : 24] We've got to think through those things because the text takes us there. So here's one of the challenges, but also the good things about preaching exegetically, which is to take a book of the Bible at a time and work your way through it.

So every commentator that I looked at says, you know, we're on Exodus, we've just had the Ten Commandments. And then the next bunch of laws is, okay, now about slaves.

All right? And so every commentator is like, oh, we just wish there was an 11th commandment. Thou shalt not have any slaves. And then they wouldn't have to deal with this tricky question of slavery.

Before we dive in, I've just got to make a preliminary point about slavery and the laws of the Bible. And so the track record of not just the church, but the problem of slavery.

But just to say, we come at last to quite an interesting part of the Bible. You know, the story of Exodus so far, the highlight is Sinai. God coming down.

[4 : 32] It's exciting. He's going to be the God of the people. They've been on this journey. He's, you know, he's got rid of Pharaoh. He's walked through the water, split the sea.

Now, guys, I want you to look after your slaves. Exodus is like a very strange, almost like an anticlimax. Why is that such an important thing?

Well, the way that Exodus is structured, actually, is very interesting. It's got these narrative sections. Narrative sections are story sections. So we've seen throughout Exodus up until now the story of escape from Egypt.

We've just had a chapter 20 introduced us to the laws that are coming. Then it sort of jumps back to a little bit of storyline from the mountain. We saw that last week with Nick's sermon.

And now we come to a section of laws. It stretches on until about chapter 23, 24. It's known as the book of the covenant, actually. All these laws that we're going to come across now is called the book of the covenant.

[5 : 40] You remember God is making a covenant with these people. Well, this is how it looks. This is the fine print. This is the detail. But later on, after chapter 24, it bounces back to storyline again.

Not a good storyline. A bad storyline because we're going to come across the golden calf while Moses is getting commands from God about not worshipping golden calves. And then there's a bunch of laws stretching until the end of Exodus.

Interestingly, if you just read it as a big shot, we tend to think of the laws all jumbled up in between. And no one, I mean, guys, no one goes and reads the laws for fun. Okay? We know that.

Okay? But it's interesting that the first set of laws that we come across, chapter 21, 22, 23, 24, are about personal relationships. The second set of laws after the next narrative section is about the tabernacle, the temple.

So it's quite interesting. Remember how the Ten Commandments are how we worship God and how we serve people? And so the first set of laws is how we deal with people. And the next set of laws, later on in Exodus, is about how we worship God.

[6 : 49] So it's interesting that they've divided it up like that in the book of Exodus. But why slaves? Why is this so important to God?

And how does this apply to us? I mean, we don't have slaves in the modern world. Well, actually, we do.

Kind of. You want to listen up to this because if you're a worker, you're a slave in the biblical sense of the word.

Sorry. I'm going to unpack that for us in a minute. If you're a boss, you have slaves. You learn to treat them well.

If you're a child, you're definitely a slave. And if you're a wife, I'm not going to say anything about that. All right. So today's talk is about freedom and service in the kingdom of God.

[7 : 47] And so, all right. I'm just, again, just to make the preliminary point. Look, I'm aware that this can be sensitive, especially coming from a white male.

And many will think I've no right to talk about these things. South Africa's colonial past. You know, I'm part of what's called the patriarchy.

Maybe you've been hurt or abused by someone in power. But just to say that abuse of power is wrong in any form.

But especially if it's based on race or gender. We all know how evil apartheid was. You know, it was a huge tragedy that our churches didn't stand up.

Many of our churches didn't stand up strongly against it. Many of the churches endorsed it and taught about it. And, of course, we all know about the horrors of the transatlantic slave trade from Africa to America in the 1700s and 1800s.

[8 : 48] So, I'm aware that this could be sensitive and a trigger. But bear with us because the text is here. And so, it's a good thing that we've got to work through this text because it's going to make us think about these things in a more biblical way.

All right. I think the first point that I want to make is that slavery in the Bible is actually more like modern labor, like modern work.

A slave, many times, depending on the context, but a slave, when you hear the word slave in the Bible, the modern equivalent is not the slave trade of the 1700s and 1800s.

It's much more of a laborer or a worker, indentured laborer or worker. I'll tell us about that in a minute. Also, depending on your translation that we read, you might not even have come across the

word slave.

But many of the translations do have the word slave. I'll point it out in a second. But how can the Bible possibly condone slavery? I mean, I thought it was against slavery.

[9 : 56] Didn't we use the Bible to get rid of slavery? Didn't God just save his people from slavery? How can there then be laws about slavery and selling girls into slavery?

What's going on? Should we live like this today? How are we supposed to understand these texts? Well, if you've got those questions that's all part of reading the Bible and letting the Bible speak to you and then trying to understand the Bible on its own terms, don't try and shape it and impose your idea of what's right and wrong.

Let the Bible speak to you. But you've got to do it a little bit carefully. So here's, this is going to help us. So, slavery as more as work.

The first thing to know is that the Hebrew word for slave, the word is ebed, is used for a number of working relationships. The word slave has many meanings in the Old Testament.

Sometimes it's translated slave. I think many of the newer translations are sensitive to the word slave and the things that happen. And so you would have seen the word servant in Exodus 21.

[11 : 10] I'm just going to point that out for us quickly. So, in verse 2, if you buy a Hebrew servant, the Hebrew word is ebed, the Greek will be doulos, slave or servant.

And the Greek and Hebrew have the same range of meaning. Verse 5, if the servant, well, let me just read verse 2 so we've got context.

If you buy a Hebrew servant or slave, he is to serve you for six years, but in the seventh year, he shall go free without paying anything. So that's an interesting thing to note.

I'm going to point out the difference between biblical slavery. And when I say slavery, I can't do air quotes all the time, but just here, laborer, worker, or servant.

Probably the best word translation actually is servant. So we understand servants in our culture. Many of us have people who come and, well, okay, we don't have servants.

[12 : 09] We've got house cleaners. People come and help us with our house cleaning. They don't work for us full time, but essentially that's what servants were in the olden days, someone who came and helped you do the housework.

Okay? So when you hear slave, just think of the word servant or laborer. Verse 5, if a servant declares or slave declares, I love my master and my wife and children and don't want to go free, then he can become a slave for life by getting their ear pierced.

I don't think it was just an earring thing. I think it was a manure of a, it was a big hole, another big hole so that people could identify him.

And then verse 7, which is a, we've got to get our head around this, if a man sells his daughter as a slave, servant, she's not to go free as the men's servants do, and you think, okay, but that's, that's even worse if she's a woman, if she can't even get her freedom, but actually, read carefully, we'll look at it a bit later, she, she's, she can be redeemed, she can actually get her payment price back, and if they don't look after her, she can go free without needing any payment back.

Many people in the Old Testament, Abraham, Moses, Joshua, David, the Messiah, angels are all called slaves, ebeds, servants, but the translation there is used servants, the servants of the Lord.

[13 : 45] So I'm just making you aware, that if you come across the word slave in the Bible, it, it's a good, a good translation is servant. Does that help you? The verb, to slave, is better translated to work.

Can we find it in Genesis 2 verse 5? Man was to work or cultivate the land. One of his first jobs was to, but it, so that's the, the verb is to work, or to cultivate, or to grow, not just to be a slave.

God didn't make us to be slaves, we were free, but remember, even there in the Garden of Eden, we weren't totally free. So the modern world wants to be totally free. God gives us a measure of freedom, in fact, huge amounts of freedom.

So, remember how many trees were we allowed to eat for, eat from in the garden? One? Any tree. Except? One. Now that's not a small amount of freedom, that's a huge amount of freedom, with one little tree that you can't touch.

Okay, we all know what we did there, but just to show that, and, and in that freedom, God says, okay, now I want you to work the soil, to, to build, to grow, to cultivate.

[14 : 55] In fact, that word, ebed, well, the verb of, slave, of ebed, is in the Ten Commandments, we just saw it last week.

Six days you will, ebed, six days you will work, or labor, but on the seventh day you will rest. So just, even, even the verb that comes from many translations of the word slave, isn't, you must be a slave, it's, when you work, when you labor, it's just the ordinary, everyday word for, for work. Which makes sense, because sometimes work can feel like, but like slave labor, can't it? And in Numbers 3, verse 7, the same word is used, of the temple priests, who are to serve, in the tabernacle.

So even the priests, and we don't call them as slaves, they're not slaves, they're serving God, they're serving the Lord. Okay, so, just to make the point that, although some translations will have the word slave, slave, it's a, it's a, it's a, it's a more dynamic, a better way to understand it is, as servant, someone who's, who serves.

It points much more towards being, what's called an indentured laborer, than a slave, in the way that we think of slaves. So when we, when, if I say the word slave, many of us will have, will have the picture of, sort of chain gangs, crossing the Atlantic slave trade, with, irons around their necks, or, on their hands, working in the fields, being whipped, if they run away, they get killed, or hanged. [16:34] Biblical, slavery, servanthood, is not like that at all. It's very, very different. It's really just, people who are workers, but with a certain relationship, between them, and their, boss.

Indentured labor, it's basically, selling yourself into service, to pay a debt, or to learn a skill, or to pay for passage, for economic opportunity. So, up until, very recently, in fact, it was indentured labor, happens often still today, but back in the day, when America was, was getting immigrants, from across the Atlantic, after the slave trade, had been abolished, people wanted to get to America, but they didn't have money, so they were poor.

Especially, places like Ireland, Italy, any war-torn place, in Europe, and there were a lot of wars, and they wanted to get to America, they would, sell themselves for, sell themselves, for a period, five, three, five, seven years, to a boss, on that side, and he gave them the money, to pay for their, trip to America, and then they worked for him, for a number of years.

But, when they got there, they weren't slaves, they got, an income, they got a stipend, they were taught a skill, and they were treated fairly, they had their freedom.

And so, just to make the point, that biblical slavery, or servanthood, is very different, from slavery, in the other parts of the world, at that time, and even as what we think, of slavery today.

[18:14] Slavery was not for life, in fact, the goal was freedom. So in our text, which is interesting, although it's all about, my NIV heading says, Hebrew servants, others might say, how to treat slaves, the word free, or to go free, I can't, one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, there's about seven words of, hey, when they get free, this is how they get freedom.

And so, even how to treat slaves, the goal, is freedom, not slavery, which is very different, from how the other nations, of the world, worked at the time. Their goal was, slavery.

And, you don't set the slaves free, because that's going to cost you, they kept them for life. The slaves, or the servants, in the scriptures, were included in worship festivals, and importantly, in Sabbath rests.

So when you took a Sabbath rest, in fact, we saw it in the commandments last week, even your slaves, your servants, also have to take rest. So you can't take a rest, and then they must work, themselves to death for you.

They were also to take rest. Slaves had legal protection, from abuse and beatings, and in fact, they could be set free, if they were physically abused.

[19:30] You couldn't just beat them, and treat them like you wanted, and no repercussions to you, as the master. And in fact, it's interesting that, nowhere, in the Bible, is, is the relationship between, the word slave, or servant, servant, and the relationship is, master and servant, not owner and slave.

It's not, the Hebrew word for owner, is not used of, of the boss, of the servant. The Hebrew word is, Adonai, Lord, master. We'll look at that, in a minute as well. Had legal protection, from abuse. Women were protected, from sexual abuse. So there's no such thing, as, sort of like, sex slaves, in Israel. That was abhorrent, to them. They were given their freedom, every seven years, as we've seen in verse two.

And importantly, they were given asylum, if they ran away. Kidnapping, or man stealing, is specifically prohibited. Verse 18, anyone who, kidnaps another, and either sells him, or still has him, when he is caught, must be put to death.

Now just think, if they had applied that law, a Bible law, in the slave trade, of the 1700s and 1800s, we wouldn't have had, the slave trade, in the 1700s and 1800s, because it's, was promulgated, on stealing people, from Africa, and taking them to America.

[20 : 55] Probably one of the best, scholars, on ancient, on, biblical law, his name is Chris Wright, he's an Englishman, and he's done a huge study, the tomes that we read, on ethics, and the Old Testament, and law of God, are these big books, like this.

He's done this huge search, and he says this, no other, ancient Near East law, has been found, that holds a master, to account for the treatment, of his own slaves.

Slaves in Israel, had more legal rights, and protection, than in any other, contemporary society. So it's important, for us to know, that the Bible, has a very different, way of, of, thinking about slavery, than the world around them.

And in fact, even up until modern times. And so as the modern world, gets more and more hostile, towards Christianity, we will get the blame, for much of the evil, of the world. The modern narrative, is that Christianity, supports slavery, because we believe in, power, and authority, which no one else likes.

And so it sounds like, you want to make me, into a slave, to tell me what to do, right and wrong, good or bad, don't you tell me, to do with my body, what I want to do. My body, my choice.

[22 : 10] So we say, but it's not your body. Physically, it's not your body, but also, the child inside of you, is not your body, so you don't get to, decide to take its life. Modern narrative, is that Christianity, supports slavery, especially the worst kind, of slavery, that took place, in America, in the 1800s.

But the reality, is that ironically, biblical version of slavery, is the basis, for much of modern, human rights, and protection. So that's actually, the irony. Because, of the protections, that the slaves, or servants, or the workers had.

It was Christians, after all, who abolished, slavery. The first time, any nation, had ever done, anything like that, in world history.

It's a massive, event that happened, in the early 1800s, in England, by Christians, to say, we don't want this, because God wants people, to be free, and because we're equal.

Okay, so that's just to, give a background, that when you come across, slavery laws, or things in the Bible, that you, what's this about slavery? It's a very different, kettle of fish, than other nations, and the way that, the world thinks of slavery.

[23 : 28] Are you with me on that? Are you happy about that? Okay. Having said that though, the Bible is not, into equality, in the same way, that the modern world, is into equality.

And so we've got to deal, with hierarchy, as part of the kingdom of God. We've got to deal, with hierarchy, as part of the kingdom of God. So there's still, a principle, at work, that underlies, the relationship, between, master, and servant.

Which we need to explore, because, it runs very counter, to the modern world, thinks about, how power should, or shouldn't work. And that's the principle, of hierarchy, or authority. In the Bible, the boss is in charge, he's the master, he's the Adonai.

So if you look in our, in our text, verse four, if his master, gives him a wife, and she bears him, sons or daughters, the woman and her children, shall belong to her master. Verse five, if the servant declares, I love my master, and my wife and children, and do what, don't want me to go free, then his master, must take you, before the judges.

So the word master, there's the Hebrew word, Adonai, which you know is, Lord, which refers to, to God. But master, or Lord, is a good, descriptor of, of, what, these people are.

[24 : 52] You can call them a boss. The boss is in charge. The relationship is one of, master, or boss, or Lord, and worker, or servant. It's not equal. It's not equal.

One is in authority, and one must be obedient. But is it any different, in the modern world? We, everyone who's worked, who's had a boss, well, you're not equal to them.

Yes, you're equal before the law. They can't abuse you, but they're the one telling you what to do. You're not the one telling them what to do. Yes, every now and then, you'll come up with a really good idea, and they're just, they're so happy when you do that.

But it's not you telling them what to do, or how to live. Yes, you've got rights. They can't trample over them, but there's a power imbalance. There's hierarchy, in the kingdom of God. I mean, the fact that these laws, in the Bible, both Old and New Testament, are given by God, okay, the God of

the universe, undercuts the modern idea of equality for everyone, and everything, being, and everything is totally equal.

We're all equal. No, no, we're equal before the law. There's no favoritism before the law, but we're not equal with God. God doesn't have a problem with power relationships, and neither should we.

[26 : 14] So when we think of power relationships, and we've got a problem with it, because we've been abused, we can't throw the bathwater, the baby out with the bathwater. You've got to, it's not the power is not the problem. It's abusive power that's the problem, and the scriptures are clear.

It's okay to be in power. Be careful how you use it, especially if you're the one in power. But if you're not the one in power, your job is to obey the one in power. And I know that rankles, but that's why we've got to hear these things, because we've got to learn how to do it properly.

Now the modern world hates hierarchy. Everything is designed for everyone to be equal. And I think that if everyone is equal, pay is equal, women are equal, then everything will work fine.

If everything and everyone is equal. In reality, the very opposite happens. When you try and force equality on everything and everyone, chaos ensues.

So the greatest social experiment we've had to try and implement equality, it's called communism, didn't just fail badly, but it brought death and misery to millions, and it still does.

[27 : 29] And that's because hierarchy is built into creation. It's an important thing for us Christians to get hold of, because even in Christian circles, we tend not to think of God being as the one in power.

We tend to think of him equal with us in some ways. Hierarchy is built into creation itself.

Creation is only good. Creation only works when everything works in line with God being the boss. Just go back to creation itself. God is the boss.

He's the Lord. He's the Adonai. He makes a creature out of mud, and then he says, do this and don't do that. And the creature's responsibility, man, us, is to say, yes, Lord. That's all you've got to do.

If you do that, you'll be okay. If you say, no, I'm not going to do that. I'm going to do my own thing. It's going to go badly for you, and it does every single time. And it just does, because he's the boss, and he knows how this reality works, and we don't.

[28 : 31] So much of our sin is a result of not listening to those in authority over us. Much of our sin is a result, and not just sin is a result of that, but our misery, the difficulties that we go through in life, is a result of us not listening to people in authority.

Now, of course, you've got to be careful. I'm not saying you must be silly, and just do everything you're ever told, but you've got to be wise. If it's a direct command to do something against what the scriptures say, then you've got to take issue with the person saying it.

But there's ways of doing that. But generally, I'm talking about just ordinary everyday life. The way that God intends for his kingdom to work is for, are these power structures, and we just have to work with them if we're going to thrive.

Parents. Kids, you're going to have to listen up. Are there any kids? There's a few kids. Do I have to listen to my parents, but they don't know anything.

Okay, every parent here who was a teenager said those exact words like that. Okay? There's a couple of other kids. We all said it. No, no, no, anything. Then when you're in your 20s, you pick up the phone, Mom, how do I boil an egg again?

[29 : 50] I just totally forgot. Washing. How do I do the washing? Do I get the automatic washing powder? I got the powder, and it froths the whole machine, you know. Okay, so why must we listen to our parents?

Okay, here's why. I don't know a single parent that wants to do evil to their child. Now, again, yes, there's parents that like that. They come with, they're complex, they make mistakes.

But every parent, that I know, wants to do good for their child. Not listening to them. When they tell you, do this, don't do that, don't do this, do that. 9.9 times out of 10, it's going to result in something going wrong.

When we were kids, my brother, 8, 9, 10, my dad brought a thing back from work. He was a doctor, and it was a stethoscope housing.

So it's a long plastic tube. Ooh, it's going to make a cool sword. Yeah, yeah, be careful with it. Don't put it in your mouth. No, no, no. We had a long passageway, like this aisle, and we used to run up and down and have races.

[30 : 58] Let's run up and down and have races with this long plastic tube in our mouths and see who can make it to the door first. Someone came up with the idea. Anyway, my brother won a long plastic tube, and it hit the door and just disappeared down his throat.

I'm like, dude, are you all right? In those days, you used to get beaten when you did something silly. So she, my mom, took the thing out of his mouth and taught him and me a lesson.

Okay. But the point is, kids, like, they've got the ability to do weird things and be, and just not listen and then hurt themselves or hurt others.

Okay. It doesn't change as an adult. The problem with an adult is you, it becomes more complex when you hurt people, but it also becomes more painful and more hurtful, and you do more damage as an adult if you're not listening to someone who knows how to live life properly.

That's parents, that's kids. What about work? Well, work is set up, what about hierarchy and work? Work is set up that those with the most experience who generally know what to do are the ones in charge and they help the ones who don't know what to do to do the things better.

[32 : 20] That's generally how it works. So listen to them. They're the one in authority. Do what you can, do what you can do, do it to the best of your ability, don't fight back with them, don't undermine them, don't talk badly behind their backs, try and work well so that they honor you for the work that you do if it's right.

Yes, of course, if they tell you to do something wrong, you've got to stand up to that, but having said that, this hierarchy is not just a one-way street. The master or boss can't just do what he likes with his workers.

The reason is they're not his. So here in the Bible, what I've said, they don't own them. He's their manager, he's their lord. And any boss, anyone in authority is a go-between between the God of the universe and the people under his care.

You're a middle management. God has told you how to act towards people. You can't then decide, nah, I'm not going to listen to how God wants me to act towards people. I'm just going to do my own thing and then hurt people in the process.

No, you are to channel how God operates with people to the people underneath you who work for you.

[33 : 36] Those in authority can't be abusive towards others. Especially, we see this especially in the case dealing with female servants. So just have a look at that for a little bit. Verse 7 onwards because you think, yes, woman, what is going on here?

How can he sell his daughter into slavery? So from verse 7, if a man sells his daughter as a servant, she's not to go free as men servants. If she doesn't, you think, okay, now she can't even go free.

But no, it's actually protection for her. Many of these laws are protection. So if a woman goes free, she's on her own. Like a man can go free and be on his own and he can go and find work. It's not good for a woman to be on her own with no source of income, no marriage, no nothing.

It's very hard. So we've got single moms here. You know how hard it is without someone supporting you and doing life on your own. It's not easy.

And so this is why you don't just let them go just like that. You've got to make sure that they've got support around them. Verse 8, if she doesn't please her master who has selected her for himself, he must let her be redeemed.

[34 : 40] He has no right to sell her to foreigners because he has broken faith with her. Really, this is more like an arranged kind of marriage. And I know we don't do that anymore.

Having said that, are there parents who would prefer to have arranged marriages? Especially if you've got a daughter and you can sort of select, no, not that one.

That one. Is there a doctor in the house? Yes. Okay. He must let her be redeemed and he can't just get rid of her off to some foreign land.

Her family has first option of paying for her freedom. verse 9, if he selects her for his sons, he must grant her the rights of a daughter.

So she gets immediately elevated to the rights of a family member. If he marries another woman, he must not deprive the first of her food, clothing, and marital status.

[35 : 44] So he can't just neglect women in the household. This has all got to do with household servanthood. If he doesn't provide her with these three things, she is to go free without any payment or money.

She doesn't have to buy her freedom. He's forfeited the right to have her in his household. So those are there to protect women from being abused in this master's sort of servant relationship.

So okay, but this is Old Testament stuff. We're 2000 AD, 2000 years after Christ. This is 1,500 years before Christ.

It's 3,500 years old. I mean, what has this got to do with us? Surely it's not like that in the New Testament. It's exactly like that in the New Testament. There's a number of passages in the New Testament where Paul talks about the relationship between master and slave.

If you can, you can turn to Ephesians chapter 6. I'll just read it for us. Ephesians chapter 6. From verse 5.

[36 : 57] This is a direct command from God's apostle. Ephesians 6 verse 5. Slaves, again, servants, slaves, servant, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ.

Now, I'm going to read on, but just think of your work relationship. Just think of worker, obey your boss. That will put you into the right way of thinking about this.

So worker, laborer, what are we? What is the name? We don't call ourselves workers anymore. Employee. Yeah. Employee, obey your earthly employer.

with respect and fear and sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eyes are on you, but as slaves of Christ.

Whoa. Doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly as if you were serving the Lord, not people.

[38 : 10] because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do with their slave or free. So that's your goal. This is why you're nice to your boss. Because Jesus likes it and he's going to give you a reward if you do that.

Am I right? Is that in the text? Verse 8, you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free.

Okay, what about masters? What about your boss? What about employers? Bosses, treat your workers in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their master and yours is in heaven and there's no favoritism with him.

In other words, you can't tune, well, you know, the thing about bosses is they think they can get away with stuff because they're the one in authority and power. And then you face up to the great boss of the universe and then you put in your place because he's going to say, but I didn't tell you to do that with those people underneath you.

I didn't work like that. Who are you to think that you could shout at them, dismiss them, belittle them, run them down, make them feel bad as if they're not doing a proper job?

[39 : 32] That's horrible. You're supposed to help and support them. So the way we conduct ourselves in business and at home with workers must be different to the way the world conducts itself.

We are not to be domineering, abusive, hard or harsh, but kind and generous. We are to treat our workers with dignity and respect and honor that don't belong to us but belong to God as made in his image.

I just want to make the last point and then we'll call it there. And that's the point that we're free to serve. So yes, God does set us free in Christ.

He does call us to freedom. But we're not free to do what we like. Just like the Jews weren't. They were freed but they had to live a certain way. They had to live differently from the world.

So that passage in 1 Corinthians 7, I'll just read verse 22. The one who is a slave when called to faith in the Lord is the Lord's freed person. Similarly, the one who was free when called is Christ's slave.

[40 : 36] We have been set free by Christ but we're not to use our freedom as license to do what we like. Rather, in our freedom, we need to become the best slaves or servants possible at home.

Children to parents. To become the best bosses you can. Parents to child. Worker to boss, boss to worker. serving each other, serving each other, that means doing practical stuff that slaves normally do, is to be the hallmark of our communal life together.

And that's where our responsibility comes in. Christians are the most free but also the most responsible. We take authority roles and structures seriously but we also have to oppose and call out abuse wherever it's seen.

Have a think of your service track record. How good of a servant have you been to your boss, to your children, to your wife, to your husband?

How's your service record? It's okay, it could be better. I'm just going to read something, we'll end here.

[41 : 53] So we're reading through 1 John together, aren't we, as a church? And we're going to come across this reading in a few weeks' time. So we're going to read 1 John chapter 3.

This is how God wants us to be. 1 John chapter 3 verse 16. This is how we know what love is. Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. So our boss became our servant. And we ought to lay down our lives for others.

So then we become the servant of everyone else. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need, but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue, but with actions and in truth.

Christ became a servant for us. We've got to reflect that same attitude to everyone around us. And in that way, we'll fulfill the law of Christ as we strive to live as his people and to bring his kingdom on earth.

[43 : 07] Shall we pray? Well, Heavenly Father, thank you for your word. It takes us a bit of time to dig through what we would consider a minefield.

We're not used to the idea of slavery and service and authority and power, but it's throughout your word and it's an important topic for us to grapple with.

Father, I pray that you would remind us of the love of Christ, that the love that Christ has for us caused him to forsake his throne in heaven and to come down to earth and die the death of a slave on a cross so that we could be lifted up to heaven.

But in so doing, we're to reflect the servant-hearted nature of Christ. Help us to do that, Lord. It's very difficult and we need your help. In Jesus' name. Amen.