

FOUNDING FATHERS 6: A STUDY IN THE BOOK GENESIS
MESSAGE: MOSES
APRIL 9, 2017

In the 1760-1770's, revolution was brewing in our country. The Stamp Act was passed which was a tax specific only to the colonies. The infamous Boston Tea Party took place after excessive taxes were passed on tea imports. In the aftermath of those events, King George handed down the Coercive Acts, which were passed to break the spirit of New Englanders and return them to docile, compliant subjects. The Coercive Acts included eliminating the power of local governments, giving full immunity to British officials on American soil and the requirement of the colonists to allow British soldiers to stay in their homes if need be.

These Coercive Acts were meant to be just that. With a whiff of freedom in sight, King George fired a shot across the bow. This is not a new technique. We are going to look at the Exodus story today and the oppressive king that takes similar steps to keep his servants docile and compliant. Moses grew up as an Egyptian prince who was actually a Hebrew. He lived in the palace as a prince and watched as his people were mistreated and used as slave labor to build for this foreign empire. One day, as an adult, Moses kills an Egyptian taskmaster in a fit of rage. Moses flees to the desert and lives there for years until one day he sees a burning bush as an incarnation of God and is told to go set his people free.

After much back and forth, Moses comes to Pharaoh and requests the freedom of the Hebrews to worship in the desert. Pharaoh did what any sensible king would do when his revenue stream is threatened. He doubled down on his oppression. Pharaoh commands that the Hebrews must increase their brick making and they would not be offered any straw to make it. So when a whiff of freedom is offered, the penalty doubles. How do you think this went over with the Hebrews? Did they praise Moses and Aaron for bringing freedom to the land?

Exodus 5:19-23

Thus begins a story of the Israelites and their long fragile struggle for freedom. We will find out in this story that their grasp on freedom is tenuous at best. They see it, but won't go for it. They have it, and then they lose it. They get it, and then they don't want it. Their relationship with freedom is like ours. It's the story of humanity and our own quest for freedom. As we have talked about throughout this series, freedom is slippery and elusive. Many times the things we think will free us actually enslave us. Many times we prefer our chains. We prefer the comfort and predictability of our prisons to the challenges and unknown nature of freedom.

That's why the song from today is so perfect. It's that taunting notion that you'll be back. Your chains will call out to you. Your addiction will whisper in your ear. You'll return to patterns of anger and anxiety. You'll settle back into old patterns of hiding in your work and running on the hedonic treadmill. We often prefer our chains because freedom is unknown. We often long for our prisons because freedom can be uncomfortable.

I found an interesting article describing the recent work of a convent in Prague. The nuns' convent actually is housed in what used to be a prison. The nuns were in search of another revenue stream to keep up the convent, so they began to convert some of the prison cells into livable quarters. They wanted to keep the novelty of the prison, so they upgraded the beds, but they left the bars and doors. There are no televisions or radios. They only have communal bathrooms and showers. They wanted it to be a little more inviting, but they wanted the people to realize it was a jail cell. In all actuality, what they were striving for was a comfortable prison. What a powerful image, a comfortable prison. Completely limited and thoroughly restrained, yet it is comfortable and known.

Can anyone here relate? An addiction to food or alcohol? Staying passive in toxic relationships? Keeping up bad habits in your workplace or private life? There is something here for all of us. While we can look free to the public, in private we can find ourselves returning again and again to the things that enslave us. We can constantly hear that

whisper in our ear, “You’ll be back. Soon you’ll see. You’ll remember you belong to me. You’ll be back. Time will tell. You’ll remember that I served you well.”

The big question for this series is how do we find true freedom? Almost just as important, how do we keep it? We are wrapping up our *Founding Fathers* series today as we look at the similar stories of the Founding Fathers of our faith and the Founding Fathers of our country. When you take a closer look at these stories, we see they are heroic and messy, beautiful and broken. In one instance, Abraham moves his family in faith to follow God. In another, he is abandoning his first-born son, Ishmael, in the desert. In one instance, Jacob obediently follows God’s audacious promises, and in another he is petty and stealing his birthright and blessings through deceit. In one moment, Joseph is faithful and devout as he struggles through many injustices, and in another he is setting up a financial system that impoverishes and imprisons many for generations to come.

As we look at the messy stories of what it means to be a finite fallible human seeking after an infinite and perfect God, we have seen highs and lows. The big question we have been seeking is about freedom. Being reminded that Egypt sometimes looks like Canaan, and the things that seem like freedom are actually enslaving us. Today, as we come to the final week in our series, we are asking one more time, “How do we find and keep freedom?” I want to give you two things today.

Refute the Farmers in your life.

As the revolution was beginning to brew in the colonies, the land was divided between those who saw the oppression for what it was and those who preferred comfortable prisons. Those who advocated for comfortable prisons were called loyalists, as in loyal to the throne of England. One such loyalist was Samuel Seabury an Episcopal Bishop. Samuel Seabury wrote under the pseudonym Westchester Farmer or W. Farmer (The Farmer.) He wrote in clear dogmatic terms through many open letters to the people on the dangers of revolt. In his letters, he was a genius. He pulled two levers that stir every human heart, fear about safety and provisions. He suggested that proceeding in the insurrection would cause

riots, crime and would endanger the colonies. Pushing forward would also cost the colonies money because things would get more expensive. The Farmer contended in his letter that the colonies needed oversight and regulation from the benevolent throne in the motherland.

Samuel Seabury was no fool. He pulled the two levers that stir every human heart, safety and provisions. To his credit, there was violence and financial issues in the land. He said these were caused by insurrection. Now he failed to mention that much of the violence was caused by British soldiers. He also failed to mention that much of the concerns about provision were caused by British taxation. He framed the story, he sold a narrative and he played on fear.

There are Farmers in every age and every era. You see Farmers in dozens of stories in the Bible. You see it in our story today. When the Hebrews suffer under Pharaoh, there are some who think the answer is to trust Pharaoh more. They can't see past the pain of the extra work without straw, so they blame Moses and Aaron. Why have *you* done this to us? Not Pharaoh who has oppressed our whole lives. Not Pharaoh who is punishing us. Why did *you* do this to us?

Farmers pop their heads up in stories again and again in the Bible. People who play upon fears of safety and provision. While in the desert, people will cry out to Moses, "Why did you bring us out here? There is no water. There is no food. We will die out here." When the Israelites go in to conquer the Promised Land, the majority of the spies come back and say, it can't be done because the people of the lands are giants and they will crush us. When Nehemiah seeks to rebuild the broken down walls of Israel, the people complain and outsiders threaten their every move. David is told he will be crushed by Goliath. Daniel is threatened with death and destruction if he doesn't stop praying to Yahweh.

The world is full of Farmers, those who will play on your fears and tell you to stay in a comfortable prison. You know the great thing about Samuel Seabury? Patriots threw him in prison for six weeks in 1775 to silence his loyalist voice. Eventually the colonies won out

against the English throne. Do you know what Samuel Seabury did? Did he remain a loyalist who moved back to the motherland because he was a man of principle? Nope. He moved to Connecticut and supported the new American government. Farmers aren't usually men of courage or men of principle. They traffic in fear because they are fearful themselves. Farmers have to be refuted.

The Farmers in the New Testament are the religious professionals. At every turn, they are seeking control through fear mongering. They are loyalists to the law who traffic in fear. When true freedom gets offered, they pop their heads up and say, "You can't do that." They prefer the comfortable prison of following the law, even when it doesn't make sense. In John 9, Jesus heals a blind man, and he does it on a Sabbath by making mud and putting it on his eyes, which seems like work. You weren't supposed to work on the Sabbath. The Pharisees made a big show of questioning and belittling this man who was healed and castigating Jesus for doing such a thing.

John 10:7-10

I always thought the thief was Satan. When you read in context, Jesus has just healed this man, and he says those who came before him were thieves and robbers, different name, same people. These are Farmers, those who seek to control through fear and power. People who will frame the discussion to keep things the way they are and to keep you where you are. They prefer the predictability of chains, and they prefer the comfort of prison. Who are the Farmers in your life right now? You can see freedom from where you sit. There will be naysayers. There will be fear mongers. There will be Farmers.

Refuse the lies about going back.

The Farmers are a scary foe, but I want to introduce you to someone far more dangerous. You. Yourself. While you may be able to spot a Farmer and refute their dogma, what is more dangerous is that voice in your head. That whisper. That invitation back to slavery. Even

when we know the destruction of our addictions and the threat of our previous prisons, we can talk ourselves into everything.

The Israelites have seen the ten plagues. They have seen the most powerful man in the land let his slave labor go free. They have seen the Red Sea part. Now only a few days out of slavery this happens.

Exodus 16:1-3

Remember the good old days when we had meat in our pots and bread till we were full? This is absurd, but I get it, because I have done it. A few people have talked me into bad ideas a few times, but the majority of my mistakes and missteps have been things I talked myself into. Remember the meat pots and the bread? They strangely don't say, "Remember the brick making? Remember the taskmasters? Remember crying out to Yahweh because we were so broken down by living under Pharaoh's thumb?" They just remember the meat pots and the bread.

There is always an appeal to going back. You'll be back soon. You'll see. You'll remember you belong to me. Sometimes the biggest threat to going back is ourselves. We can explain it away. We can justify it. We can lie to ourselves. For some of you, you can remember the meat pots of addiction. Remember how nice it was to enjoy x, y, z. The way it warmed my body. The way it comforted my soul. You selectively forget that those same addictions cost you relationships, cash and emotional well being. You can remember the meat pots of a toxic relationship. Remember when that person loved you and made you feel special? You can forget about the way they manipulated you and took advantage of you.

The thing with lying to ourselves and remembering the meat pots is they are always half true. We can delude ourselves because it's not a complete lie. There was something great and enticing about that past comfortable prison. It was a prison, but it did have some comfort to it.

In Texas we had big bugs and lots of them. We also had bug zappers. These bugs were so annoying, but I occasionally felt really bad for them. Not because I am a bug lover but because those poor chumps never saw it coming. They were on a suicide mission toward these bug zappers, and they didn't even realize it. They find themselves attracted to something that will ultimately take their lives. It is counterintuitive and dangerous. I looked this phenomenon up, this zapper effect, and it is really a sad misunderstanding. Many bugs have a positive photo taxis, meaning they are attracted to and fly towards the light when they see it. Light for a bug provides direction, warmth and safety. In all truthfulness, it is the bug's life source. The zapper effect plays on this inclination and leads them to their self-destructive demise. All of this based on a misunderstanding of heading towards something that seems life-giving only to have their life taken from them. Flying towards the light or remembering the meat pot, whatever you want to call it, we can easily lie to ourselves and return to slavery. Jesus ran across a guy doing this same thing.

John 5:2-7

Jesus is talking to a man who has been disabled his whole life. This means he was poor, he was a social pariah and he was a spiritual outcast. Two amazing things happen. 1) Jesus asks a ridiculous question. 2) This man gives a ridiculous answer, or so it appears until you look closer. Jesus asks the man who has been disabled his whole life, a man who has likely missed out on a career, respect and dignity, "Do you want to get well?" This seems ridiculous until you realize Jesus knows the human condition well. He knows we often listen to Farmers. He knows we often lie to ourselves. He knows that change is hard and freedom is scary. He knows we prefer comfortable prisons, so he asks, "Do you want to be well?"

The man proves this suspicion true because he doesn't answer the question. He makes an excuse. He points to why his solutions haven't worked. He blames others. What he doesn't say, unequivocally, is, "Yes," because sometimes we prefer our chains. Sometimes change is too hard. Sometimes all we can think about are the meat pots.

Alexander Hamilton knew this full well. While he was a great man, he also had a huge temper that led him to participate in ten different duels. While he was a noble man, he also cheated on his wife and tried to cover it up. While he stood firm on principle, he also used backroom deals to get his agenda through. He pushed hard for freedom, but introduced us to national debt. He pushed hard for independence, but advocated for a lifelong president.

We often travel from Egypt to Canaan and back again. Many times, the siren song *You'll Be Back* seems like it is perpetually playing in the background of our lives. Freedom is yours if you want it. The great thing about the Prague convent is that it is also a prison motel. They give you a key when you enter. It might be the only prison in the world that offers keys to the inmates. We can stay in comfortable prisons our whole life, but the call of true freedom awaits.

I want you to consider your situation today and give you what I think is the best solution if you truly want freedom. We have discussed freedom throughout this whole series and touched on some principles here and there. Some of them were easier to grasp than others. Some of them were more concrete than others, but I am a simple man and a practical man. I want to tell you the most practical thing you can do for the sake of freedom. If you truly want to be free, you need other Christians in your life. People who will encourage you and pray for you. People who will call a meat pot a meat pot. People who will spot Farmers and name them for who they are. People who will help you not lie to yourself. God called out a people. He knew we needed one another. He called us to help free one another. If you do this life alone, you'll be back soon. You'll see. If you seek out accountability, if you seek out prayer partners, if you seek people who love you and want what's best for you, freedom is just around the corner.