

## Freedom Sunday – Missy Deal

Exodus 16:2-15; Psalm 105:1-6, 37-45; Philippians 1:21-30; Matthew 20:1-16

Good morning! For those of you who don't know me, my name is Missy Deal. I have the honor today to be talking on what is known to many congregations around the world as "Freedom Sunday." Freedom Sunday is a day where we, as God's people, get to set aside some time to look at the hurt and suffering in the world created through modern day slavery, and listen to the call to how we should respond to this hurt.

I currently am on staff at Eden's Glory where **our mission is to be a home for survivors of human trafficking, to restore these women to be thriving for the praise and glory of God.** Walking alongside brave women who are facing their darkest fears gives me a whole new light on slavery. Slavery, to me, is no longer the estimated 27 to 45 million men, women, boys and girls enslaved in the world. Slavery is no longer 1 in 4 slaves being a child. Even more specifically, it is no longer the estimated between 4.2 and 11.6 million people held in forced commercial sexual exploitation. **It is easy to lose compassion with a faceless number. It is easy to lose compassion when we are at an arm's length away from these people.** But these numbers became living and active to me one night as I sat on my bed reading the beginning of a biography from one of our residents. Anger and grief began to grow inside of me as I read the stories of a loveless father treating her in ways you can imagine, given this topic. As her story unfolded to explain her past 20 years of broken trust, skewed relationships, and the normalizing of dehumanizing situations, compassion inside of me grew to an all-time high.

This story was no longer a number, no longer an authorless name. Instead, this story was a face across the dinner table, hands working the garden with me, and a smile that grooves with me when "Shake It Off" comes on. At Eden's Glory we walk through some really tough days with these women. Especially in the first year, our residents go through intense classes, recalling horrific memories as they work through tough topics like forgiveness, God's goodness, grace, and Christ's abundant love. You see, the things I just said don't exist when you are selling your body. They don't exist when you are forced to lay bricks day in and day out with little to no pay. It is so cool to see our residents learning these things, not in structured class, but in conversations with volunteers, in Bible studies at local churches, and even through arguments with one another. God always provides an avenue for learning through his own way, and his own time. In short, while I have been at Eden's Glory, I have seen God provide over and over again. Just like we heard in the Exodus text, God provided their daily bread. God always provides.

It was kind of funny reading this Exodus text, because the more and more times I read through it, the more and more I identified the Israelites with the residents at Eden's Glory. You see, the Israelites had literally JUST come from slavery. At the time they began grumbling, they had been out of slavery for about a month and some odd days. For generations, they had spent their lives building cities to the Pharaoh's delight—day in and day out making bricks from straw, being watched over by these hated Egyptian slave masters. Often times we read over the words *they put masters over them to oppress them with forced labor* (Exodus 1:11), and we think little of it. One inscription found in a

mural from that time says, “The rod is in my hand, be not idle.” So basically, if you’re an Israelite you better not stop working, or else you are going to be whipped. Words like “hard labor, lives being utterly bitter, back-breaking, severe,” and “work without relief” are all adequate words to describe the hundreds of years the Israelites were enslaved. And do we remember why they were enslaved? Because the Pharaoh thought there were too many of them! He gave orders to the midwives to kill the baby boys, and then again to throw the baby boys in the Nile! This was not just hard-working times, these were scary, painful, dark days for generations. These people, like the slaves today, were taken advantage of because they just existed. When the Bible talks of injustice, it is referencing a very specific kind of sin. Injustice is the abuse of power to take from others the good things God intends for them—their life, their dignity, and the fruits of their love and their labor. This is what Pharaoh was doing.

We pick back up in chapter 16 after Moses has, through the power of God, delivered the Israelites. Well, the newness of freedom has worn off at this point, and the hardship of the wilderness has begun to set in. You see, we find at Eden’s Glory that facing the truth of who God is calling us to be, accepting how he sees us, is often harder than to believe the lies of the past. One of our residents said, “It is easier to believe the trash is greater than me, than to believe Ginger loves me.” **The mindset of a survivor is so hard to rewire, it takes time and continual rebuilding.** In the same way, the Israelites began to admit it is easier to accept the pain of the past than it is to continue this new path. The Israelites were ready to run back home with their tail between their legs to their masters who were beating them, because that is so much easier than to have to fight for a future. The Israelites even glorified the life in slavery, “If only we had died by the Lord’s hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted!” LIARS! All of them! Slaves didn’t get to eat tons of meat, yet in the new atmosphere, they have forgotten the intensity of slavery.

Humans are so quick to forget how God has delivered us. We are so quick to forget where we would be if God had not intervened. But God, as consistent as he is, always seems to remind us of his great deliverance.

We see this, too, at Eden’s Glory. Women will recall some aspects of “the life” that weren’t all “that bad.” However, just as God replied to the Israelites by raining down manna, God responds to these women through voices of volunteers, staff, and community members by reminding them of the life God has planned for them in the future—a new life, an abundant life. We see, in this passage of reading, many thought processes survivors of slavery deal with for a long time. But healing takes time. Healing takes people helping you to relearn the future, and being taught what God has in store.

As we continue reading, we figure out why the Lord is going to answer their rude grumbling. God delivers them so that the people, and the whole world, really, will know it truly *was the LORD*, and not just Moses, who *brought them out of Egypt*. Just in case anyone thought Moses, by himself, could bring the plagues, could rally the Israelites to leave the land, and by himself could part the Red Sea—the Israelites’ surviving the

desert, receiving daily manna, surely could not be accomplished by man alone. The LORD would be remembered as the one who delivered them.

We, again, see the same thing here at Eden's Glory. By faith and obedience, we daily walk with the Lord. When Ginger and Annie opened the home, they did so trusting that God would daily provide this manna for Eden's Glory. It was not these two women who provided a physical home, the finances to start it, or the resources to continue the home; it was God showing his power, just in case there was any confusion over whose organization Eden's Glory was. One way God is practically being our daily bread right now at Eden's Glory is in our finances. As we literally live day to day, due to some increased expenses and some decreased giving, our posture continues to be the same. We continue to praise God, trusting in his daily deliverance. **I think this may be the greatest thing about God. What he could do all by himself, he offers to partner with us.** Just think of Moses. He was a murdering runaway who did not belong to any people group, an ex-con. Simply put, he was a mess. But God saw differently. God saw a man who could walk in obedience so the LORD could do amazing things.

So, with that I will close. Just as Moses answered God's call in obedience, to join the fight of slavery, how will you join this fight? In one of my classes at Greenville University it was explained that the train of salvation started thousands of years ago, and we have the invitation to jump on that train. I believe the same thing goes for justice. Every time I go into work at Eden's Glory, I know I am answering the call of the burning bush with Moses. I get to join in this great Exodus, helping reframe what the narrative looks like for these women.

It can be overwhelming thinking about injustice and slavery, but God doesn't ask you to put an end to all of it, for all time. He simply just asks us to offer ourselves to him. And if you think you are not part of this story, then you are not reading the same Bible I am. What might God do with you? He used Moses, he can use you. I would urge you to revisit what justice looks like in God's eyes. What does he really think about justice? I urge you to think about what justice looks like practically for you. At Eden's Glory you can become a monthly freedom partner with us. You can also get involved in the Simple Room; think about who you vote for and how we interact with other people. And lastly, I ask that you partner with us in prayer. Pray with us that God would open our hearts to where the oppressed are, where the Israelites of today are living—and how we, like Moses can walk alongside in obedience, so that the Lord can provide.