

# Slavery to the Fear of Others

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[ 0 : 00 ] Hi, good morning. Good morning. My name's Chris. I help oversee community groups here at Watermark.

And I have a confession to make to you. I live in fear of other people. I was with colleagues a while back, and all of my colleagues, not the ones I work with at the moment, but my previous comments were bad-mouthing Christians.

Everyone was joining in about how believing in Jesus was a complete joke, and I said nothing. I was afraid of being ridiculed.

A friend of mine was entering into an unhealthy relationship. I knew that I should say something to them, but I didn't, because I was afraid of losing the relationship. I was asked to help out at a Christian event, and I was already overworked, already had too much to do, but I couldn't say no, because I was afraid that I'd be seen as maybe not a good Christian, not serving as I should do. People. We're surrounded by them. Our lives revolve around their expectations of us. And their likes on Facebook make us feel good if we get them, or bad if we don't.

[ 1 : 26 ] People carry weight in our lives. They shape how we view ourselves, whether we like it or not. In some way, all of us are controlled by other people and what they think of us.

We're afraid of them in some way. Some of you may not think you're that particularly terrified of many people, but some people may say, well, I'm a rebel. I do what I do.

I don't care what other people think. Well, the only way you can show a rebel that actually they are controlled by people is just tell a rebel, you know, you're so conservative. You know, you're so boring.

You're so conventional. And see how they respond when you tell them that, because they will not be unaffected by what people think. Now, sometimes fear of other people is a healthy fear.

The reason I came to church this morning wearing clothes was because I was afraid of what other people would think. That is a healthy fear, and I'm sure you're relieved by that.

[ 2 : 29 ] But it's true that people, wherever you look at it, people carry weight in our lives. And the question is, do we give them too much weight?

In the Old Testament, the word, the most common word for glory, is a word kavod, which literally means heaviness, weightiness.

And it's someone's glory in the Old Testament is their possessing weight and influence over you. We say a weighty person, a weighty argument.

And a weighty person inspires from other people different reactions, terror, fear, or respect, honor, worship.

That is what glory does. And the question that we want to look at today is who causes you to have those responses in your life?

[ 3 : 32 ] Who is glorious in your eyes? And we've been looking at this series just over the last couple of weeks of the things which enslave us as Christians and stop us living out the identity that Christ has bought for us on the cross and the freedom he wants us to live in.

Galatians 5 says this. It says, It was for freedom that Christ has set you free. So don't submit yourself again to a yoke of slavery.

Don't live as slaves when you're actually free, is what he's saying. And the Exodus story, which we're going through, is a story of redemption. Redemption meaning release from slavery, release from bondage, release from captivity.

And that's what God is doing in this story in Exodus. But it's the story of how the Israelites, though they were set free, still wanted to keep being back as slaves.

We looked last week, two weeks ago, at how idols, things we worship and love more than God, the idol of control, can be one of those things which enslaves us.

[ 4 : 43 ] Last week, we looked at how the idol of self-reliance, relying on our own ability or inability, can hold us and handcuff our hearts. And today, we want to look at how the fear of other people is like a ball and chain, which you carry around with you when we were made to run free.

So we're going to look. And if you've got your bulletin, you'll see on the back, there are just the key three points, God's glory, our fear, and God's deliverance.

So just kind of track with me through this. The backstory. Imagine you're an Israelite. Your whole world has been dominated by the rule of one control freak called Pharaoh, king of Egypt.

You've lived your whole life in hard labor, under the hot sun, obeying the wishes of your masters, your slave masters, who do whatever Pharaoh tells them to do.

Like working in your offices in Hong Kong under your slave driver boss. And everyone hates the boss, but no one is willing or able to stand up to him.

[ 5 : 56 ] So we serve them slavishly. And God raises up this guy called Moses to go to Pharaoh and to say to Pharaoh, let... Good.

Someone's watched Prince of Egypt. Let my people go. But in Prince of Egypt, they missed out the next part. Do you know what the next bit says? Let my people go that they may serve me.

That's what it says. And it keeps repeating because the whole Exodus story is not just about release from a cruel dictator. It's a release to serving a loving, glorious, faithful God.

And Exodus is a power contest between Pharaoh in the blue corner and God in the red corner. And in Exodus 2, God right at the outset tells Moses, I know the king of Egypt will not let you go.

His heart is so opposed to me, he is not going to let you go unless compelled by a mighty, a mightier hand. And what he's got to see and what the Israelites have got to see and what the Egyptians have got to see is that I, the God of Israel, am mightier than him.

[ 7 : 14 ] I am more glorious than the weight of Pharaoh in your lives. That is what God is always up to. He's up to in our lives. He's always about wanting to show us that he is more glorious than the things that we are serving.

And so what you have, you have 10 plagues and in these 10 plagues, God basically gets Pharaoh in a headlock and says, okay, you're going to let my people go. Pharaoh says, okay, I will.

And then he lets him go and he releases Pharaoh and then Pharaoh says, only joking. So God gets him back in a headlock again and says, who's stronger? Pharaoh says, okay, okay, you are, lets him go. He says, only joking. 10 times he does that until finally, Pharaoh for the first time in his life has to admit defeat.

God is stronger. He says, get out to the Israelites, worship your God. That's where the story picks up today. Look in your bulletin, verse 17 of chapter 13.

When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter. For God said, if they faced war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt.

[ 8 : 27 ] What does this say? There's an easy way out of Egypt. You kind of just walk out along the main highway. It's easy, okay? It's short. It's quick. But God doesn't take them that way. Does God not have a good GPS?

No. It's just because he knows that this is a people who are fickle. They haven't learned to trust him. As soon as they come into danger, they're going to be right back to Egypt, right back into slavery. God supernaturally, through a pillar of cloud and fire, leads them to this path, another path out of Egypt.

And then he just, without reason, tells them, okay, now turn back into a complete dead end. This is verses 1 to 9 in chapter 14. On the left side is the desert, okay, behind you.

Here is the sea, behind you. And then what God does, he says, okay, I'm going to make sure Pharaoh comes after you so that you have no way out, okay?

[ 9 : 28 ] Desert, sea, big Pharaoh in front of you. No way out. And God's playing this little game of chess, it seems. He's going to lure Pharaoh in. He says, I'm going to harden this stubborn man's heart.

So he's not just going to give up on the Israelites, but he's going to block you in, no escape route at all. What's God up to? It's strange.

And Pharaoh, you see in the story, realizes half of his employees have just left. And you know, how is his company ever going to make a profit? So he, as the man of the hour, gets his forces, goes down, and then the Israelites, who I can imagine they've been kind of merrily contemplating what they're going to do with their free time.

I mean, they're not slaves any longer. They're thinking, okay, where are we going to go to holiday? Okay, how are we going to spend time with the kids? Maybe they're surfing in the sea. And then suddenly, they look up and they see the Egyptians in front of them.

Their masters are coming back to haunt them and they're terrified. Ever felt like there's no way out in life? Well, God's doing the moving in this and yet, he's checkmate, checkmated his own team.

[10:48] whichever way you look, it's bad news. And the worst thing is, God, the one who's supposed to rescue you, is the one who's doing this. What?

Is it crazy? Because think about it, what kind of a God would do that? If you were a parent, what kind of parent would you be if you led your kid into a dead-end alley and then pushed the school bully up into the other end to go after them?

I mean, that doesn't seem very loving. I don't know if you're parents, but I hope you don't do that regularly. Okay? That doesn't sound like the kind of God you want to serve.

And it's even worse. If you look in verse 4, verse 17, verse 18, God says, the reason I'm doing this is to get glory for myself. Not only is I loving, he sounds like an arrogant egomaniac.

Right? C.S. Lewis, the author of Chronicles of Narnia, he said, one of his greatest struggles in coming to believe in God, the God of the Bible, was that when he read it, God seemed to constantly demand praise and glory.

[11:55] And he said, it sounded to him like a vain woman who wants compliments. It sounds like God is just a little, we're just little pawns in God's kind of chess game.

And it doesn't matter if people suffer a little bit or not. And as long as God wins the game, gets credit at the end of it. Hallelujah. Isn't he good? Seems crazy. But here's what I think is going on. Because the Bible says that's not the God of the Bible. When I was at school, we had a school bully. In fact, we had quite a lot of school bullies. I went to a pretty rough school.

Most of my classmates are now in prison and all kinds of stuff. But it's true. My best friend at school, he was a drug dealer. And this guy, he thought he was tough.

He would threaten and menace the people around him to get what he wanted. Everyone lived in fear of this one guy. His name was Grant. And I don't know why.

[12:58] There are certain names which are connected with bullies. In my mind, Grant is a bully. But never mind. If there's anyone called Grant, forgive me. But if you saw this bully, even if I was outside of school, I would be in fear.

Fear would kind of well up inside of me. But imagine one day my father hears about this situation, what's been going on. And just as the bully starts coming towards me in the playground, my dad shows up.

The bully backs off. Dad takes me out of the situation. But I'm still fearful. I still live in fear of this bully. The next day, my dad arranges without me knowing for this bully to meet me.

But this time, I'm with my dad. And I'm there in the corner of the playground. The bully shows up. He's towering. He's menacing. He's threatening me for candy, sweets, you know, money, anything. There's nowhere to run. And I panic. And I begin to reach into my pocket to give him the little money that I have. And just then, my dad steps out from beside me and says, don't give him anything.

[14:08] I'll take care of this. This guy has been ruling this joint for far too long. He gets down in front of him and just hammers him with a right hook, knocks him out cold on the floor.

Imagine the reaction of all the students in the playground. Imagine the reaction of me. Everyone is in awe awe of my father.

Because who is more glorious now? Who is worthy of honor and respect in that playground? My dad is not some tyrant who is trying to control and keep people living in fear.

He's truly the one who rules. So the next time I'm out and the bully comes to me or another bully comes threatening me in that playground, if I know that my father is with me, even if intimidation comes, I know my dad rules.

And fear is not going to enslave me before. I can say, I trust you to take care of this one because I know you've already dealt with it. God wants us to give him the glory so that we will be truly free from every lesser power that may enslave us.

[ 15 : 38 ] Now, I'm not saying that God is some violent thug, okay, and we should all go around punching people. That's, the Bible says vengeance belongs to God, not us, because he is the judge.

He is the judge. And Pharaoh in this story had stood opposed to God for so long that God said, now is the time I'm going to bring freedom from his rule.

In the Bible, God's judgment is actually celebrated as a good thing. We think, ooh, it's terrible hurting people like that. But actually, the Bible says God's judgment is the way freedom is brought to the oppressed.

Freedom is brought to the victims of injustice. Freedom is brought to those who have been terrorized. And in the New Testament, that same language of freedom, the language of redemption, is used not as a release from Pharaoh, but as a release from our sin, which is that bully, which, our self-centered pride, captures us and holds us and keeps us enslaved.

Colossians 1 says this, for he has rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved son in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

[ 17 : 06 ] Jesus did the ultimate prison break from the master of sin, the domain of darkness. He smashed its power through the cross. He knocked sin out on the ground so that for whoever trusts in him, when sin comes and starts getting up again and tries to intimidate you, tries to make you a slave to itself, to the fear of other people, the Bible says God has already dealt with it.

You're free. You're secure. He is the one who has victorious. He rules. He reigns. You can trust him. And anybody else around as they see the tyranny that we live in under fear only needs to see that God is stronger and greater and we can trust him.

If God, who created the whole universe, your breath right now is given by him. He can pull the plug at any time.

He's the judge of all and yet he loves us enough to die on a cross for us. Isn't he worthy of the greatest weight and glory in our lives?

Because his rule is good. It's not tyrannical. Even if you're not a Christian, author William Foster Wallace, who's not a Christian, says this, we all worship someone or something.

[ 18 : 42 ] And remember, worship is giving glory, giving great weight to something, the ultimate weight. He says, in the day-to-day trenches of adult life, there is actually no such thing as atheism.

There is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship. And the compelling reason for maybe choosing some sort of God or spiritual type of thing to worship is that pretty much anything else we worship will eat you alive.

If you worship money and things, if that is where you tap real meaning in life, then you'll never have enough. Worship your body and beauty and sexual allure and you'll always feel ugly. And when time and age start showing, you'll die a million deaths before they finally grieve you.

He's saying what the Bible is saying. We are all worshippers, so God wants you to worship him because he's the only one in worshipping him that you will gain true freedom to live free in the playground of life.

God's not interested in just getting you like the Israelites out of your kind of spiritual mess and then the quickest way possible. He doesn't save us so we can have a spiritual spa where Jesus is like your kind of personal love dispensing machine so when you feel a little bit empty you just kind of put in your church going coins and out pops some of Jesus' love and blessing and it's fine we can just go on and live our own way.

[ 20 : 15 ] He says the reason God wants you to center your life around his glory is because he alone is worthy of worship. And when you make glorifying him your greatest desire you'll be free from everything else that tries to enslave you.

including the fear of the people around you. So I want to ask you as you look at your circumstances what looms who looms large in your life right now?

How much of your concern is that God would gain glory in your life? Or how much of your prayers your church going is simply about just making a better life for yourself.

God says I love you that much I want you to be free serve me and you will find liberation in your lives. That's God's glory the way to freedom.

Secondly our fear. Verse 10 when Pharaoh drew near the people of Israel lifted up their eyes and behold the Egyptians were marching after them and they greatly feared.

[ 21 : 38 ] See the Israelites look up and they see the most powerful army in the world bearing down on them and they panic. They cry out to God but he doesn't see much use so they shout at Moses is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you've taken us away to die in the wilderness.

They've forgotten there's the pyramids there which are actually the biggest graves around but they say this incredible thing they said what have you done in bringing us out of Egypt?

Is not this what we said to you in Egypt? Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians. We may serve the Egyptians. They seem to have forgotten what it was like to serve the Egyptians.

God has already shown the Israelites that he's bigger than Pharaoh but for the Israelites Pharaoh and the Egyptians are bigger in their eyes. That's why they're willing to become his slaves again because when people are big God is small.

When people are big God is small. And our fear that creates we give other people the keys to our heart and the right to tell us what to think what to feel and what to do.

[ 22 : 52 ] When people are big God becomes like you know you have the iPad Mini or we begin to have my God Mini who is just kind of pocket size he can fit in there you can carry him around with him but you have no awe of him.

And there is this theme in the Bible that there is awe when you see God and the awe the level of awe that you experience of how amazing God is will correlate to how much freedom and satisfaction you find in him.

Do you ever easily get embarrassed? Do you feel the need to impress clients all the time so that you act out of character and say things you wouldn't normally?

you know this this sermon is for me because I I have some very silly things that just show my fear of people I I think it can be going out to meet somebody and I'm I have some food before I grab a curry before I go out I'm going out I'm going off to meet somebody and then as halfway to get there I suddenly look down and I realize on my shirt half of the curry is on my shirt and at that moment depending on who it is that I want to go and see if it's just I'm going to meet a friend you know somebody who's kind of fairly relaxed chilled out you know I'll think oh and maybe I'll go and try and wash it off but it's still there stained and I'll think okay and then I'll make a joke of it okay to my friend and it'll be fine but if I go out the same thing happens and there's somebody that I want to really I want to respect me I want to gain respect from them I want to impress them and I go out and that happens to me and I'm going there

I run to the bathroom I'm panicking and I'm trying to get it out I'm trying every possible known method known to man to clean my shirt because and if I can't then what I'm going to do is I'm kind of going to go along and find them and I'm going to try and hide and cover as much as I can so they don't see that actually I'm a complete mess and I'm clumsy and all those other things and if my wife had told me earlier that not to wear that shirt because I might mess it up and I didn't listen to her do you think I would go and tell her about the incident later?

[ 25 : 15 ] I've got to hide I've got to hide why? because these people even my wife the people I want respect from the people that I have locked my identity in that if I can get respect from them then I will feel better about me and that good desire for respect can morph very quickly into needing respect from them and I become dependent on them for my sense of worth and identity and when that is threatened then I begin to panic and fear and I will cover up because I'm controlled by their expectations of me Dr. Ed Welch who's a counselor says there are three things that cause us to fear people we fear people number one because they can attack oppress or threaten us attack oppress threaten do you fear criticism or the words of other people?

number one number two we fear people because they can expose and humiliate us do you fear being exposed as a fraud and a failure? we fear people because they can reject ridicule or despise us do you fear sharing your faith because you might get rejected from the group you want to impress?

for the Israelites it seemed totally legitimate to panic except that the Egyptians don't want to kill them they just want to enslave them again but we say if I don't get that person's respect then I'm going to lose out and it seems legitimate and it may be true except if you remember that your massive glorious heavenly father who's already demonstrated on the cross that your identity is utterly secure your worth your value your approval is already found in him and it's not going anywhere this other person they are not the key to your identity because Christ is and he will provide for your needs we fear because we're needy people with desires people who are looking for love looking for comfort looking for belonging looking for acceptance stability security and we all

want to worship something bigger than ourselves and sometimes if we look to anybody other than God to ultimately fulfill those needs we become enslaved to them that's why God says make me big in your life because when you will be then you won't have to live in the fear of all these other people so who's boogieing in your life what expectations from people are you slaving under God's glory our fear third thing God's deliverance how do you get out of slavery to fear of other people chapter 14 verse 13 says this don't be afraid stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today the Egyptians you see today you will never see again the Lord will fight for you you need only to be silent the way to get out of slavery the way to fear of others is to have a bigger fear of God when God is big people are small and to get a vision of God you need to be thinking and meditating about God regularly you need to talk about God and we need to stop meditating on the bigness of the people around us and to walk in obedience to what God calls us to do if you look in this Moses says the Lord will fight for you you need only to be silent that's not saying there there there it's okay it's gonna be fine that in Hebrew is a rebuke to them he's saying literally

God's gonna fight for you so be quiet to be more rude shut up that's what he's saying shut up stop thinking thinking and meditating all the time on how big the Egyptians are because they've they've filled your eyes so all you can see is them in your screen but you've taken your eyes off you can't see that they are not gonna bring you security if you wanna rush back to slavery to them that's not gonna be security I'm the one I've showed you already will you trust me because I am the one in this situation who has already gone before you I have this sorted will you trust me I'm the judge of these people Jesus in Matthew 10 he says don't fear those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul rather fear him who can destroy both body and soul in hell quite strong words whoever is big in your eyes now one day will be seen in true perspective they will look as small as you sometimes feel when God shows up in this story in verse 24 he looks down on the Egyptians he looks down you know if Eric is standing here he looks down on everyone else when God is standing next to whoever is controlling us in our lives he looks down he doesn't have to look up and you know the very ones who have caused the Israelites to panic are themselves panicking because they're facing a glorious God and they've been opposing him all this time and the chariots that were their strength that struck fear into the Israelites are now stuck in the mud like a car trying to rev its wheels but it's stuck in a pothole it's getting nowhere everyone that we crave that is big in our eyes we crave approval from we crave respect we crave identity from will one day stand before God in judgment and it's the great equalizer of everyone who seems powerful now and I will stand there and you will stand there with Jesus who has already done the greatest exodus in our lives he's already taken the judgment for us and he's beside us so we have nothing to fear so the call to get out of freedom out of slavery to fear is actually a call to repent of making other people bigger than God in our lives it's to take the cross and replay what he has done for you so know that you are secure again and again so your boss your spouse your parents will see so much smaller in the light of who he is and what he's done

[ 32 : 31 ] I want to just play you a little video to show some of this my name is my name is May and this is my story I'm a pastor kid I feel so in a church I know one I'm a long teacher I'm on here as much as possible when I got a little older I was a little cancer I'm a little older people found me as a giver and I kind of had it all together and I started to get out and I started to get out and the girl grabbed it all together and I thought I had this family history of people who would love to be with and who were willing to sacrifice for others and I wanted to be like that and unfortunately I discovered that I also have a long family history of anxiety and depression but I never thought that that was going to affect me because I

I was a pretty kid I had all together and I was a good church girl and girl last year I moved out of my parents house I was working the whole time I was still trying to maintain this image of being really involved my body and mind started because I didn't work anymore but I ignored that and I just kept going and I was thinking that I hadn't used up all of a sudden I found myself having panic attacks on the way to work or in meetings at work on the way home or during days and I didn't know what to do with that because it didn't fit with my image and I didn't want people to think that I was crazy because I was afraid that my community was going to label me as crazy asking to not keep all the community until I got myself figured out so I would have a panic attack on the time that works and I come home and I tell my room in bed she was kind of anxious I'm not an equity counselor and she was like okay but I didn't want her to see the depth of my head it didn't work very long

I found myself out with co-workers wishing that I were out of the day and through that the voice really was able to say I have more for you for it something that this way was going to happen to me I was able to make it outside and call my boyfriend and say listen listen listen this I'm an absolute mess but this is where I'm at right now and I need I just need help I just can't do this anymore and within 10 minutes I had my family around me taking me home to my parents house and I was in the middle of the night after packing me up and taking care of all my tasks and loving me even though I was so messy that kind of was what allowed me to see that it found out that God is concerned with him glory and that Jesus is an important to make God glory if I'm so concerned to my own image in front of other people so I'm never going to experience a freaking three dimension of the perfect for me on the cross by a great end of my life

I'm not saying I have it altogether by a meaning but I'm concerned more and more than I'm ever saying if I accept that I'm not being and that I'm never going to be perfect and that when I'm able to be make that face make look so good if you're a Christian if you're not a Christian some of us have been hiding things because we fear other people I know what that's like there are things that we don't want to share because there are things we're worried what other people say there are things that are going on in our lives where we have been fearful that other people may ridicule us if only they knew what was really going on and yet

God says I want you to live for my glory because I want to set you free from those things I want to set you free because I want you to see how much I love you our CGs our groups the way we do community we can just do community on a superficial level where we put up masks and where we hide because we're actually afraid of each other and yet God wants to bring us a reality where we are messy people and we can be a community where God's grace is evident where we see him as the one who's given us our identity then it frees us to take that step to say here's what's really going on in my life living for God's glory doesn't mean that you won't feel any fear it doesn't mean trying not to fear people but it does mean that if you walk in obedience to what

[ 37 : 59 ] God is calling to you to do today and for some of you you need to go and share you've been hiding things for so long and today is a day where you actually have to go to a Christian brother or sister and say hey this is what is really going on in my life I need you to walk with me God is calling us to walk in obedience to him in spite of our fear how do I know this because if you look in the end of this story you see as God parts the waves and the walls of water on both sides and the Egyptians are behind them God says move forward I want you to take a step but it's not how strong the faith of the people were because I can see there will be some people who are walking through thinking hey this is good my God's good you know Egyptians fine nailed and there will be other people who are walking through and they're looking at the way it's gonna fall it's gonna fall the Egyptians are gonna get us they're gonna get us and yet all of them got through to the other side because it's not the strength of your faith that will save you from fear it's the gloriousness of his power and his goodness and his love and what he's done that will get you through

God is glorious so I do not have to fear others I want you to look on your bulletin maybe if the musicians would like to come up I want to do something slightly different I want to give you a few minutes to actually reflect on who is big in your life you look in your the insert on your bulletin on the back there's some questions when people are big God is small who is big in your life at the moment what does this show you about your view of God how do you need to repent God is glorious so I don't have to fear others how do you need to respond now what is God calling you to do now to have a bigger view of him just spend a couple of minutes just want you to think about those questions if you're not a

Christian I also want you to think what is it that actually I worship what do I serve in my life is that reliable way hand you comments about making pleasing and love rain awayüllt Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[ 42 : 30 ] Thank you.

Thank you.

Father, we, I admit, are people often so much bigger in my life than you are.

Yet you are not like the other things that I crave after. You are good.

And your rule is not a tyrannical rule. It's not one which is going to crush me. But it's one where you want me to find joy and freedom to be who I, we truly are.

[ 44 : 04 ] Forgive me where I live. I'm so focused on myself and on other people that my eyes are taken off of you.

I pray for us here this morning that we would see what it means to actually have awe of you. To see that we stand before you as the one we will have to give an account to you and no one else.

And yet you're a God who is for us and not against us. Help us to see that what Jesus has done on the cross means our identity is not in the hands of other people.

It's not in the hands of that client that I've got. That boss that I have. My spouse. The people around me. My peer group. The expectations that I think I've got to meet.

That's not where my value is found. Help us to know our value and worth is utterly secure in you.

[ 45 : 16 ] You are glorious. Show us that you're glorious. So we do not have to fear others. In Jesus' name. Amen.