

## **Satisfying our Thirst**

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**Exodus 17:1-7; Psalm 95**

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“Brooks was here” These were the words that Brooks Hatlen carved on the archway wall in the room of the Boarding house when he decided he couldn’t stay in this world anymore in the movie The Shawshank Redemption. You may remember this secondary character in the movie, played by James Whitmore. You see Brooks was what Red (played by Morgan Freeman) called Institutionalized. Brooks was sent to prison at a young age. Prison life was practically his whole life and the idea of living out in the real world after all these years scared him. Trying to start over in a completely different world where no one was telling you where to go, what to do or when to go to sleep was too much. Some people become so accustomed with institutional life, that the idea of being truly free seems like a nightmare more than a dream.

Later in the movie, when Red finally receives his parole hearing and is asked, “Do you feel rehabilitated?” Red answers, “Rehabilitated? Well, now let me see. You know, I don’t have any idea what that means.” Red goes onto say, “These walls are funny. First you hate 'em, then you get used to 'em. Enough time passes, you get so you depend on them. That's institutionalized.” As he begins to walk out of the prison gates. Red also struggles to know whether life on the outside is worth it after all these years. As he walks into his boarding house room he looks up and sees

“Brooks was here.” He is faced with the question, will he be like Brooks or Andy, a bird that could never really be caged. You may recall Andy Dufresne (played by Tim Robbins) you know the person who was falsely imprisoned for the death of his wife who eventually escapes and tells Red to find him in Mexico if he ever gets out.

How does one really experience freedom? What does it really mean to be truly liberated from the prisons within us and without? The Shawshank prison was meant to break one, to rob them of their passion for life and punish them. Some, like Andy, hold onto freedom and there are others, like Red who need that freedom rekindled within. So, it causes us to question What do you truly thirst for?

In today’s reading we join up with the newly released people of Israel as they take their first few steps of freedom they have ever known. Moses, their liberator, has secured their release and has promised the people a land flowing with milk and honey, but first they must make the long trek to get there. You see their bodies may be freed, but their hearts were still institutionalized. At the first sign of trouble, they looked back over their shoulders and say, “we had it better back in Egypt.” Did they? Did they really? How quickly one forgets the pain and suffering that made them cry out to God in the first place. But security and certainty even at the hands of brutal overlords can be deceptively alluring.

This was not the first time that the Israelites complained about not having things. A few chapters before they wanted food, God gave them Manna. Then they complained about only having Manna, so God sent Quail. Now they were without water and once again they complained. But this time the complaining went even further. They began to quarrel with Moses about the

motives for why they were even taken out of Egypt. They began to question the character of God. That maybe God was actually just like the overlords of Egypt, wanting to punish them and dehumanize them. God's love for them was too good to be true and they hardened their hearts to the possibility of a better life.

They hardened their hearts because they refused to acknowledge all the ways that God had already shown up for them. All of the miracles that God had performed, proving God's unfailing love for the people. How could they doubt and even accuse God of evil when all God had shown them was love and liberty.

But this is part of human nature we struggle with. Our nature is resistant to change. We often seek out security or the familiar over the new and uncharted unknown. In the story God makes the hard decision to keep the children of Israel in the desert for a generation, because the people refused to trust God. Their bodies may have experienced liberation, but their hearts were still back in Egypt. Like Brooks, they had become institutionalized. It is not enough to be liberated, unless our hearts discover the true liberty in God, and God alone. I get it, it is scary to truly be free. Free to be yourself and free to make your own decisions when for your whole life others have made it for you.

So how do we do this? How do we keep from hardening our hearts? How do we hold onto hope, when the future seems so uncertain? How do we stay on the path to true freedom, when the comforts of the familiar prison seem so enticing? The Psalmist gives us some great advice. He says harden not your hearts – That means it is a choice, a decision we are able to make for ourselves. What will you put your trust in? In what your past is

telling you or what God's love is promising you? The psalmist starts with a healthy perspective of who truly is in control of the world and who deserves our devotion.

The Psalm starts out as words of worship declaring the power of God to save. The words are full of adoration, proclaiming the works of God. It even reminds the worshiper that the God they worship is more powerful than the false gods that try to keep them imprisoned through fear and control. You see the Israelites still feared Egypt. They had become institutionalized, dependent upon the very thing that kept them imprisoned. They needed to switch their allegiance and worship God and God alone. Proclaiming the loving kindness of God and thirsting for the true freedom that God has provided. Not the false freedom of an authoritarian dictatorship that controlled their every move.

It is something we are still learning today. Jesus calls us to life and life more abundantly. And yet we have people trying to dictate a very narrow and harsh image of what it means to be a Christian, a believer in Jesus. I find it ironic that they call it freedom and yet are trying to pass all kinds of laws that are dictating what we can read, what we can learn, who we can love and even what we can enjoy and celebrate. That does not sound like freedom to me. That sounds like an institution, a prison, where the warden dictates every move we make. A false god hoping that when difficult times come, we turn back instead and long for the streets of Egypt, refusing to of remembering who really is in control and worshiping God who is our rock our deliverance!