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Follow the Lord Who Sets Us Free *by Revd David Gaffney*

The Israelites were in slavery in Egypt. They had been there for a long, long time under the whip of the Egyptian slave drivers. Their slavery was evil in motive and cruel in nature. This Pharaoh which Moses faced did not know the Lord God Jehovah and as a result he was cruel to the Israelites. The Pharaoh's destructive fear led him to degrade their working environment and then to use infanticide to curb the growth of their population. What made the situation in Egypt unbearable was not only the slavery but also its extreme harshness. The Egyptian slave masters worked the Israelites "ruthlessly". The Bible describes their slavery using words like ruthless, bitter, hard and cruel. Israel languished in misery and suffering and a broken spirit. Work or usefulness, one of the chief sources of joy and fulfilment in human life became misery through the harshness of oppression of the slave drivers.

Then the Lord God Jehovah sent Moses to set them free. The Lord performed all kinds of miracles before

their very eyes in order to set them free from slavery, including the parting of the Red Sea and the drowning of the Egyptian army.

The Lord loved the Israelites and did everything He could to save them, but He needed their trust, their total allegiance and co-operation. When they arrived at the threshold of the Promised Land, a land flowing with milk and honey, He told Moses to send up twelve spies to check out the land: who was there, and the food it could provide. They found that the food was there in abundance, but there were battles to fight and giants and walled cities to overcome. Most of the spies were against any attempt to gain the land and stirred up the Israelites to rebellion against Moses and the Lord. They tried to find a new leader for themselves to lead them back to the slavery and the 'flesh pots' of Egypt; rather than trust, and have faith in the Lord who had brought them this far; because there would be battles ahead. This story is a parable of the types of challenges we all face when we leave our own Egypt - our slavery to the spirits of our own lower natures - and accept the Lord's leading in our lives.

When we give our lives over to the Lord, the greatest teacher of all, we begin to come out of slavery to our desires for all forms of control over other people and possession of their goods. But as we begin to settle into our new lives, an array of destructive spirits, the warring tribes of our lower natures begin to present themselves within us. Until they are displaced, our lower natures cannot be transformed into our Promised Land. Only with the Lord's help can they be defeated. We need, at this point, to believe that the Good Lord can remove them from our presence, but He needs our co-operation.

In our efforts to resist them and do good works it will seem that we are doing it all by ourselves, but we must believe that the power to do it comes from the Lord working in us and through us. **Our greatest acts of Love or charity to mankind, are to resist evils because they are offences(sins) against God** (Swed., Charity,1). These evils are represented by the degenerate and warring tribes which occupied the Promised Land. Also, the giants there, represent our own enormous egos, and the walled cities represent dubious desires nestling inside fortresses, protected behind strong walls of false beliefs. To refuse to go forward with the Lord to face these challenges is - so to speak - to end up dying in the desert.

Jesus said, "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me you might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." (Jn 16:33).

The Lord incarnated in this world in order to put on a human body and glorify it; enabling the Holy Spirit to be sent to us. He resisted every evil which came His way, even the passion on the cross. As a result, He put His enemies under his footstool and now has

complete control over all the evil spirits in the hells. So now, if we do our bit, he will do the greater part and remove them from us, leaving us in the midst of His peace.

We each have our own personal spiritual journeys, and each one is unique between us and the Lord. Some can be very, very hard, and some are much easier. The Lord can and wants to save all people because He has redeemed everyone, that is: He has established us in freedom to choose. But, even in these days, like the Israelites in ancient times, some of us want to stay in slavery, some don't believe in the Lord or trust Him and won't go forwards, some want to return to slavery, and some stay in the desert.

The Israelites doubted the Lord. The disciples and Doubting Thomas doubted the Lord, and we doubt Him as well. Again, I think it's worthy of note to say that the disciples and Thomas saw the risen Lord in complete Human form, not with their physical eyes, but with the eyes of their spirits. Eventually Thomas admitted, "My Lord and my God!"

May we also recognise and acknowledge the absolute reality of our risen Lord Jesus Christ, our redeemer and saviour. May we trust Him, and give Him our allegiance; and with His help fight our inner demons. May we cast off false beliefs as directed by His Holy Spirit whilst meditating upon His Word; and with His strong arm to help us, live accordingly so that our lives may become the Promised Land.

The Lord loves us with a burning love and he endeavours to make all things new for us; but He leaves us in freedom and in rationality to have faith in him, to meditate on His Word, take risks, and live the good life; always renewing, always developing to eternity.

Readings:

Twelve Spies: Numbers 13:1-3,18-20,26-32 & 14:1-9,22-24,31

Doubting Thomas: Jn 20: 19 - 23 & 24 - 31.

The Lord sets us free to choose: He redeemed us: DL 35 and/or 36 and TCR 579.

For the convenience of those who want to read the Word upon which this article is based:

From the Book of Numbers 13:1-3,18-20,26-32 & 14:1-9,19-24,31

The Lord said to Moses, "Choose one of the leaders from each of the twelve tribes and send them as spies to explore the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites." Moses obeyed and from the wilderness of Paran he sent out leaders, saying

“Find out what kind of country it is, how many people live there, and how strong they are. Find out whether the land is good or bad and whether the people live in open towns or in fortified cities. Find out whether the soil is fertile and whether the land is wooded. And be sure to bring back some of the fruit that grows there.”

After exploring the land for forty days, the spies returned to Moses, Aaron, and the whole community of Israel at Kadesh in the wilderness of Paran. They reported what they had seen and showed them the fruit they had brought. They told Moses, “We explored the land and found it to be rich and fertile; and here is some of its fruit. But the people who live there are powerful, and their cities are very large and well fortified. Even worse, we saw the descendants of the giants there. Amalekites live in the southern part of the land; Hittites, Jebusites, and Amorites live in the hill country; and Canaanites live by the Mediterranean Sea and along the Jordan River.” But Caleb silenced the people who were complaining against[Moses, and said, “We should attack now and take the land; we are strong enough to conquer it.” But the men who had gone with Caleb said, “No, we are not strong enough to attack them; the people there are more powerful than we are.” So they spread a false report among the Israelites about the land they had explored. They said, “That land doesn't even produce enough to feed the people who live there. Everyone we saw was very tall.

All night long the people cried out in distress. They complained against Moses and Aaron, and said, “It would have been better to die in Egypt or even here in the wilderness! Why is the Lord taking us into that land? We will be killed in battle, and our wives and children will be captured. Wouldn't it be better to go back to Egypt?” So they said to one another, “Let's choose a leader and go back to Egypt!”

Then Moses and Aaron bowed to the ground in front of all the people. And Joshua and Caleb, two of the spies, tore their clothes in sorrow and said to the people, “The land we explored is an excellent land. If the Lord is pleased with us, he will take us there and give us that rich and fertile land. Do not rebel against the Lord and don't be afraid of the people who live there. We will conquer them easily. The Lord is with us and has defeated the gods who protected them; so don't be afraid.” And now, Lord, according to the greatness of your unchanging love, forgive, I pray, the sin of these people, just as you have forgiven them ever since they left Egypt.”

The Lord answered, “I will forgive them, as you have asked. But I promise that as surely as I live and as surely as my presence fills the earth none of these people will live to enter that land. They have seen the dazzling light of my presence and the miracles that I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, but they have tried my patience over and over again and have refused to obey me. They will never enter the land which I promised to their ancestors. None of those who have rejected me will ever enter it. But because my servant Caleb has a different attitude and has remained loyal to me, I will bring him into

the land which he explored, and his descendants will possess the land. You said that your children would be captured, but I will bring them into the land that you rejected, and it will be their home.

This is from the Word of the Lord.

From the Gospel of John: 20: 19 - 31

LD: When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.'

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.' Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.'

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

This is the Gospel of the Lord. Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

From the Writings of the Church (Swedenborg): Doctrine of the Lord 35 [9], and True Christian Religion, 579 [2-3]

Because the Lord's human nature was glorified - that is, made divine - on the third day after his death he rose again with his whole body, which is not true of any human being, since we rise again with our spirit only and not with our body. So that we should know this, and so that no one should doubt that the Lord rose again with his whole body, he not only said so through the angels who were at the tomb but also showed himself to

the disciples in his human form with his body, saying to them when they thought they were seeing a spirit,

“See my hands and my feet-that it is I myself. Touch me and see, because a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.” And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.

And again,

Jesus said to Thomas, “Reach your finger here, and look at my hands; and reach out your hand and put it into my side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing.” Then Thomas said, “My Lord and my God.” (John:

The purpose for which the Lord came into the world, the glorification of His Human [Nature], was because He, by this means, became the Redeemer, Regenerator and Saviour for ever. Since all have been redeemed, everyone can be regenerated, and because regeneration and salvation are one and the same, everyone can be saved, and He unfailingly saves those who believe in Him and do what He says.

This is the Word of the Lord.

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