

We're in our second week of a verse-by-verse study of the Book of Exodus. I don't believe it's an accident that we're all here today, and that God brought us together at this time and in this place. Regardless of where you may find yourself, I'm sure there's a lot of different perspectives. Whether it's a time of prosperity or a time of struggle, whether it's a time of comfort or whether it's a time of pain, God brought you here.

What we're going to see is that God's plan continues to move forward for the purpose of bringing glory to himself. It's a plan of redemption. It's one of the basic messages of Exodus. It's important for us to know as we begin to try to figure out how this applies to our own lives that God's plan will not be derailed by any circumstances that are going on here on earth.

In fact, he uses these circumstances, which can seem confusing at the time, to accomplish his plan. Maybe you're wondering how these ancient Hebrews in Exodus relate to your own life and circumstances in 2024. I mean, they're suffering oppression and bondage. They're slaves. How do we relate to that?

I think we'll find, as we go through this, that their sins are our sins, that their struggles are our struggles. Their hopes are our hopes. And believe it or not, their Egypt in many ways is our Egypt. Over and over in this book, we're going to find ourselves reading and maybe nodding, maybe nudging the person next to us saying, "Been there, done that."

But we're also going to see some ordinary, regular people do some remarkable things because of God's grace, because of his power working through them. So may Exodus 1 bring us hope in whatever hostile place we might find ourselves in. May we find hope in that hostile place, and may we be challenged to a deeper level of surrender and trust.

We need to remember that Exodus is a continuation of Genesis. The promises of God that were revealed in Genesis are fulfilled in Exodus and beyond. We will start with some encouragement this morning with the first point. God's people will receive the fulfillment of his promises. Our present and future is guaranteed by God's work in the past. Let's look at some examples.

A thousand years before the Exodus, a man named Abram lived in a faraway land, and he was doing just fine. He had lots of cattle, lots of camels, lots of sheep. He had a happy life. He had a happy wife, except for one thing: they did not have any children. Abram and Sarai wanted to be in God's will, and they wanted children of their own. And the Lord came to them in this little town called Ur. Genesis 12 says,

**The Lord had said to Abram, 'Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land that I will show you. 'I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples of the earth will be blessed through you.'** Genesis 12:1-3

So God made a promise to Abram. He told him to trust and follow God. It was God's plan to give Abraham the land and that the people of the earth will be blessed through him. So now we fast forward ten years after a weird detour into Egypt, some trouble in his marriage, and a fierce battle to rescue his nephew, Lot; he found himself camping in one of the most beautiful places in the Holy Land. It was a fertile land in the Middle East that we call the Jordan Valley.

Abram was confused. He was asking God how he can be a great nation as God promised if he didn't have a son. He said, "My wife and I are too old now to bear children." God came to Abram again and reaffirmed his promise by making a covenant with him (Genesis 15). Abram was thinking his servant was going to have be his heir since he didn't have a son.

**Then the word of the Lord came to him: This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir." He took him outside and said, "Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."** Genesis 15:4-5

A Middle Eastern night sky can take your breath away. You see so many stars. So there was a covenant formed here, a pact that God made with Abraham that was a promise of a special land. A promise of many descendants through his son that he would have named Isaac. And then Isaac through his son, Jacob, and then Jacob to all of his sons. And a promise that all the nations of the world would be

blessed by his family. But then God said something that had to have confused Abraham. Some of God's promises, as we know, are pleasant, and some of them are unpleasant. And I think unpleasant is probably not a strong enough word here. In God's infinitely perfect plan, it included a promise of a long season of oppression, bondage, and slavery for Abraham's descendants in a foreign land.

**Then the Lord said to him, "Know for certain that for four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and mistreated there. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward, they will come out with great possessions. Genesis 15:13-14**

So now we fast forward to the last chapter of Genesis, a famine had entered the land and one of Jacob's sons, Joseph, very wonderful story in Genesis, had risen to great power in Egypt and invited his dad, Jacob, and his brothers and their families to come to Egypt and live with him because there was a famine.

Jacob, at this point, a very small clan of 70 people, went to Egypt and survived the famine that had been in their homeland, and they lived pretty well in Egypt. Joseph had arranged for them to have this prime real estate in this fertile place called Goshen. They had good jobs. They had a good life. The Nile River fed them and watered their crops. The Egyptians were nice to them. Life was good on the land. It was easy, yet they wondered about God's promise. It wasn't their land. And his promise seemed delayed.

So we pick up the story in Genesis 50, in which Joseph is old and dying, and he has this last conversation with his brothers in Egypt.

**Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die. But God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." And Joseph made the Israelites swear an oath and said, "God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up from this place." So Joseph died at the age of a hundred and ten. And after they embalmed him, he was placed in a coffin in Egypt. Genesis 50:24-26**

So Joseph's passing signals the end of the good life for the Israelites in Egypt. Because without Joseph putting in a good word for his family, the attitude of the Egyptians changed toward God's people. And we all know too well in our bloody world history that mounting suspicion toward any people group is a step away from prejudice, which is a step away from persecution, which is a step away from genocide.

No matter how dark things might seem in their lives or in our lives, I want us to remember this today. God's people will receive the fulfillment of his promises. So, put yourself in the story. If you're a Christian, you are in a covenant with God. You sit here today in a covenant with God. And that covenant is called the New Covenant that has been sealed by the blood of Jesus on the cross as the New Covenant between God and his people.

Just as the Old Testament was sealed by the blood of the Passover lamb, the New Testament covenant is sealed by the blood of Jesus. His covenant promises are clear: forgiveness of sins, salvation, a relationship with God through Christ, a new life, a new community, and the Holy Spirit. And we can trust this New Covenant this morning.

He promises that what he began in you, he will continue until it comes to completion (Philippians 1:6). And his word is clear. *"I will never leave you or forsake you"* (Hebrews 13:5b). So whatever's going on in your life, whatever adversity you may be experiencing, whatever sorrow or pain you may know, don't give up. Don't lose faith.

The God we serve is a faithful God. He keeps his promises. He's the God who brought Israel out of bondage, and he will do the same for us. *"And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age"* (Matthew 28:20).

So what's ahead? Have your circumstances recently changed? Were you surprised? Were you caught off guard? Did life just take a turn abruptly out of left field? I want you to be encouraged by this second point today. God's promises don't change even when our circumstances do.

*"Then a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt. "Look," he said to his people, "the Israelites have become far too numerous for us"* (Exodus 1:8-9). So how often are we in situations where a king came that didn't know us, and things changed? Maybe a new CEO takes over your company and announces layoffs. Your industry is changing, and you feel like it's hard to keep up your skills to match, and you're anxious. A death has recently taken someone very dear from you, or a medical diagnosis has changed your circumstances. There are now needs that your aging parents have right now. You have teenagers now, maybe a fallout with a close friend, or maybe suddenly your spouse doesn't want to be married anymore.

There are real circumstances facing our family here at CPC. All changing circumstances require a whole new way of navigating life. Maybe, like the Israelites, you're just feeling low, despairing, hopelessness. Your future is uncertain. But if we look at Exodus 1, there's a hopeful alternative here. The alternative is trust. It's learning to trust God, the God of the covenant, whose plans and promises don't change

even when our circumstances do. So when circumstances seem hostile to you, remember that the essence of the Christian faith is not certainty in this life; it's trusting God in uncertain times.

So, what changed in our story? Well, verses 1 through 7 that Kevin led us through last week covered about 400 years. So, from verses 1 through 7, the number of Hebrews went from 70 to too numerous to count. From verses 1 through 7, a new Pharaoh came to power who didn't care about Joseph and what he had done to save the Egyptians from the famine in their land.

In Joseph's day, the Pharaoh was friendly to God's people. He was from the Hyksos dynasty. He wasn't Egyptian. He wasn't a native. His armies had conquered Egypt, and as historians will speculate, he appointed himself as Pharaoh. Being an outsider, he was friendly to outsiders, and that explains why Joseph's Pharaoh was so open to promoting Joseph and embracing his family, not to mention what Joseph had done for that nation.

But now, probably 350 years after Joseph, there was a new Pharaoh in town, and this Pharaoh was a native Egyptian, and he wasn't accepting of outsiders. In fact, we see in verse 9 that he was afraid of the Israelites. Everywhere he looked, he saw more Israelites. The original language describes him as looking out over his kingdom.

He said that they were like swarms. They were all over the place. There was a conflict brewing, but there was also a sovereign God. We have to remember this sovereign God behind the scenes, pulling all the right levers at all the right times to fulfill his promises, even when circumstances have changed.

I love the Apostle Paul's take on Pharaoh. *"For scripture says to Pharaoh: 'I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth'"* (Romans 9:17). In 1 Timothy, Paul says to pray for all kings and authorities that we may live quiet lives (1 Timothy 2:1-2).

I think he's also saying, to put it in my vernacular, don't sweat it. Take comfort that God is in control. He wins in the end. He owns the chessboard. He's in charge of the moves, and Jesus says, *"I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it"* (Matthew 16:18b).

Let's look at what Pharaoh says in verse 10. No matter how shrewd this Pharaoh may be, he can't stop God's plan.

**Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, and fight against us and leave the country. Exodus 1:10**

Pharaoh was afraid and tried to come up with a plan. He thought if they were allowed to increase in number, they might discover that they were strong and mighty and join with their enemies, overthrow them. They might just leave, and they needed their labor.

So his go-to here was to deal with them shrewdly. It wasn't to deal with them justly or deal with them kindly. He didn't have a better life for them at his core or in his heart. The sanctity of human life wasn't important to him. It was only about hanging on to power. So what was Pharaoh's shrewd plan? It was a two-stage plan.

### **God Is With Us In Our Suffering**

His first plan was to afflict the adults, to weaken them through slave labor. The Israelites were about to learn a powerful lesson about their future, and really our future too, that God is with them in their suffering. We need that encouragement today that God is with us in our suffering.

**So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread; so the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites and worked them ruthlessly. vv. 11-13**

God's people, in history, often grow and multiply the most in the midst of persecution. We see that no amount of persecution can stop God's plan. Maybe in your life right now, you need to be reminded that God can work in ways that you can't even imagine right now and maybe in ways you would never choose. It's okay to admit that you just don't agree with God's decisions in a particular area of your life. It's okay to say that out loud and remember that no matter the circumstances and the hardships they cause, his purposes and promises still stand.

*"They made their lives bitter with harsh labor in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields; in all their harsh labor the Egyptians worked them ruthlessly"* (v. 14). So the Israelites were forced to make bricks with mud and straw. There was just this insatiable amount of brick that they would need for their civilization. For instance, their buildings were brick, their homes were brick, their storehouses were brick, their pyramids were brick, and they needed slave labor. It says their lives were bitter.

If you've ever done any kind of walkthrough of the Passover, the Seder, there's one step in the Seder where there's a bitter root that's served on the table. Then there's some salt water that's served on the table. And the Jews would take a bite of that bitter root to remind them of their oppression, of their slavery. Then, they would dip it in the salt

water to remind them of the tears that they shed in their hardship.

In chapter 2, we will read that the Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out to God for help. It says that God heard their cries, heard their groanings, and remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

### **God is Aware Of Our Suffering**

Maybe one of the greatest ideas that we can understand is that God was aware of their sufferings and is also aware of our sufferings. I think of what happened to Jews later in history in the dark days of World War II, things changed drastically under Adolf Hitler. The Jews were his scapegoat. They were his outlet for hatred and racism, and he forced them into cruel corporate slavery and work camps until he instigated his final solution. He called it the final solution to the Jewish problem, which was to murder them in death camps.

So verse 12 says that the more the Egyptians persecuted the Hebrews, the more the Hebrews multiplied. They went from a clan, to a nation. God was preparing them for what was ahead. They needed to be a nation to survive in the desert and to enter and lay hold of the promised land of Canaan someday. As they were getting bigger and stronger, they were developing this resilience that they would need for survival in the desert.

### **Pain: A Catalyst For Change**

Commentators tell us that by the time Moses led them out of Egypt, the 70 had multiplied to 600,000 men, which probably meant 1 to 2 million people that Moses led out through the Red Sea on dry land. So, isn't it true that pain can be a catalyst for change? After years of a good life in Egypt, having it changed dramatically to slavery and bondage had stirred in them a desire for something else, for something more. God was growing in them conviction, growing in them a confidence to risk a bold exodus out of Egypt and into freedom.

Life's sorrows and pain can give us a clarity that maybe nothing else can. The fight and struggle bring resolve. If you talk with people who have lived maybe a little more life than you, hard times can bring wisdom can bring maturity. As long as they were comfortable in Egypt, as long as we're comfortable in Egypt, we will not make the gritty journey into the desert to the promised land. If we're distracted in Egypt, we will not see our need for a deliverer. Michael Walzer said this about what Exodus taught him,

**First; that wherever you live, it is probably Egypt; second; that there is a better place, a world more attractive, a promised land; and**

### **third, that the way to the promised land is through the wilderness. Walzer**

I've learned in my life there are some events that happened in my life where I really learned a lot from them. Would I ever have wanted it? Would I have chosen it? No, absolutely not. There was a season of my life, years ago, when I was in this ministry situation that was very difficult. I didn't investigate it well enough, but there were things that were going on behind the scenes in this ministry that I was not aware of and were not positive. I struggled in that situation, and I had never ever before that time said, "I think I'm depressed," but that was coming on me.

It was a heaviness, a weight, a hopelessness in that situation. Then I think back to my ministry, and I don't think I was able to minister well at all or encourage anybody who was experiencing depression because I was not really sure if I believed in it until I experienced it. And then, through that, God redeemed it. Through that experience came more empathy later in my life for those who struggle. I understand it now.

There was also another stage of my life where I experienced my mom dying, in my opinion, way too early of cancer. I was very close with my mom, but I had never experienced anyone close to me who had died before. I'd never experienced that loss. I'd never had feelings in these hidden areas of my heart before. It was a hard thing. I had never grieved like that. How in the world could I have come alongside and helped somebody else who was grieving if I hadn't experienced it myself? God redeemed it.

Recently, I was riding my electric bike too fast, and I hit some branches that I didn't see on the bike path. I flipped over the handlebars and broke my ribs. I had never suffered from any sort of painful injury, and all of a sudden, I was disabled for a season. Then, all these CPCers reached out with love and food, with their presence and a recliner. I'm a pastor here. I'm supposed to help, not be helped. It was a weird situation to be in. But I gained an appreciation for what our meals ministry does or what our community groups do when they rally about somebody who has a painful situation come up in their lives; God redeemed that.

When Pharaoh's work them-to-death tactic didn't work, he unleashed an even darker plan. That brings up our next point. God's blessing is on those who show courageous obedience. So the stage one plan that Pharaoh had was to afflict the adults, kind of slow the Hebrews down, and then he launched into stage two. He turns to premeditated killing of innocent baby boys, full-term birth, infanticide, and murdering babies.

**The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shiphrah and Puah, when you are helping the Hebrew women during childbirth on the delivery stool, if you see that the baby is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live. Exodus 1:15-16**

So, Pharaoh's plan would destroy the nation of Israel in one generation. Think about that. I think of Herod the Great and his edict to kill all the baby boys in and around Bethlehem when word got back to him that the people believed their Messiah had been born in Bethlehem. How ironic that Joseph, Mary, and baby Jesus fled Bethlehem and went to Egypt for safety.

So God chooses for himself a clan, and God promises that one of his descendants of that clan will be the Savior of the world. The clan grows and grows and gets stronger under persecution, but something evil is at work, an evil greater than the evil of Pharaoh. It's Satan himself working in Pharaoh's twisted mind, thinking, "If I destroy these people, I will destroy the chance for the Savior to be born. If I can possess my servant, Pharaoh, and lead him to kill the Hebrew baby boys, no Jesus." But no amount of persecution can thwart God's purposes.

I love Isaiah 54:17. "*no weapon formed against you will prevail*" (v. 17). Be encouraged by this. Those who are saved are in Christ are in that covenant. The enemy cannot possess a child of God. The enemy cannot steal our salvation. He can trip us up, he can harass us, he can tempt us, he can steer us into bondage. But just as God delivered the Israelites from their bondage, he can deliver us as well. He can deliver us from addictions, sinful desires, fears, bitterness, lack of forgiveness, or whatever is holding us back from the peace and joy that he offers us. The goodness of Jesus is always greater than the evil of Satan.

I mentioned a while back that I used to run quite a bit. I ran in my first half marathon with my daughter, and we were training together for this run. Our training plan said a half marathon is 13 miles. I'd never run that in my life. This was the first time I was training for this, and our training plan said to train for ten miles. I wondered why I wouldn't train to 13 miles. The training said that you didn't have to do that because your adrenaline would carry you the last three miles of the race. So, I diligently followed the plan, and that was exactly what happened.

I read recently of a woman who ran in a full marathon, which I'll never do. And I don't know if she was a Christian or not, but she said, "I ran, and I had six miles to go, and I completely ran out of gas. I completely ran out of steam. I had nothing left. It's as if I ran the last six miles on borrowed power."

I love that. And I hope everyone here will stop and think for a moment and understand that we cannot stand up against the world, against our flesh, against the enemy, under our own power. We need borrowed power to finish the race. We need the power of God to do that. We will lose if we're in it on our own. We will lose against the forces that are against us. But with borrowed power, Jesus wins. That means assuming a posture of trust, a posture of surrender. It means coming to the end of our pride, coming to the end of our independence. My experience is that when we arrive at that place, God loans us his power for his glory.

### **The Midwives Refuse To Cooperate With Pharaoh.**

**The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live. Then the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and asked them, "Why have you done this? Why have you let the boys live?" Exodus 1:17-18**

Why were the midwives mentioned by name? They're mentioned because they are heroes of faith. They were not rulers. They were not pastors. They were not presidents. They were not senators. They were women who didn't have their own families. They may have been Hebrews. They were probably Hebrew women, but they may not have been. But they obeyed God's perfect law and disobeyed the king's evil law. May God bless those in the family of God who courageously obey God in their Egypt. May God bless those who fear God more than the rulers of our age. These midwives were clever too.

**The midwives answered Pharaoh, "Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive." So God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous. vv. 19-20**

Well, do you think the midwives told the truth? Seems like Pharaoh believed them. The text doesn't say that they lied. Maybe Hebrew women in that day and age were different from Egyptian women. Maybe the Hebrew women were in shape and they were buffed because of their hard lives. And the Egyptian women were just waited on by slaves, and they were soft and delicate. I'm speculating on that. And even if they did lie, I'd understand that because God's heart is for the sanctity of life. They trusted and obeyed God, and God protected them. And our understanding is these midwives didn't have families, but then look at verse 21.

**And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own. Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: "Every Hebrew boy that is born you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live." vv. 21-22**

The River Nile was considered to be a God to the Egyptians. So, by drowning these Hebrew baby boys in the Nile, they were offering child sacrifice to a god so that the god would bless and protect them with fertile lands. But one Hebrew mother, attempting to save her baby boy, placed him in a basket. A basket that was coated with tar and with pitch. And she let him go and floated him down the Nile. He was picked up by Pharaoh's daughter. And Pharaoh's daughter looked at him and named him Moses. Which literally means pulled out of the water.

Eighty years later, according to God's plan, Moses would be the one who would deliver God's people from slavery, and he would lead this nation through the wilderness to the cusp of the promised land where 1,300 years later, Mary and Joseph would give birth to Jesus, the Savior of the world.

God's people will receive the fulfillment of his promises. God's promises don't change even when our circumstances do. God's presence is assured in our sufferings, and God's blessing is on those who show courageous obedience.

So I ask all of us here, is there a Red Sea that stands between you and the promised land? How are we doing with the pressures of our modern-day Egyptian culture? Do you sense that the time is now for you to be defined by obedient courage? I want to ask you, have you ever cried out from a place of bondage to sin? Have you ever hated yourself or cursed yourself, longing to be free from some unhealthy desire that has a hold on you?

Have you ever addressed the trauma from your past that holds you back from hope and joy and all that God has given us through his gift of his life, death, and resurrection? Are you believing a lie right now that God's promise of deliverance isn't truly for you?

**God, cause us, move us to rise up, to trust and follow you through the wilderness into that promised land that you've given your children. Lord, convict us to leave our old lives behind that your Son died to give us the escape from, to deliver us from. Lord, may we, in confidence, renounce our old ways, repent, turn to life-giving ways, turn to life-giving friends, life-giving habits, and life-giving truth.**

There's an old hymn writer who wrote, "Rise up, O Men of God, Be Done with Lesser Things." May we be done with lesser things and hold tight to the greater things. God is

behind all that's going on and all the possibilities that come because we have a God who loves us.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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