

A New King, Who Knew Not Joseph

Exodus 1:8-14

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If you have your Bibles, I'd invite you to turn with me to Exodus, chapter 1 as we continue in this great book together. As we said the last time, Exodus is Moses' sequel to the epic story of Genesis. Exodus resumes Genesis account of God's sovereignty and His good providence in the lives of the patriarchs. Moses goes out of his way to connect these books. When you see the genealogy, which begins the book of Exodus, it connects us with the story of Jacob. When we look at verse 7 and the reflection on the fact that the sons of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly and multiplied and became exceedingly mighty, it not only connects us with Adam and the creation where that ordinance is given to Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply. It connects us with Noah wherein the reconstitution of the world after the Flood, Noah is given that challenge, that ordinance to be fruitful and multiply. But it also connects us to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, because that promise is a core component of the promise given to Abraham repeated to Isaac, repeated to Jacob throughout the book of Genesis. And so Moses has connected Exodus deliberately to the sovereign plan of God in Genesis.

As we studied Exodus 1, 1 through 7 last week, two great themes emerged. First of all we said that in this passage God is making a people for Himself though their origins are small. Only seventy or so of them came into Egypt in the beginning, though they are humble in comparison with the great nations around them. He is going to accomplish His purpose, and His purpose is to fulfill the promise that He has made to Abraham. We also said that these very verses, verses 1 through 11, show that God's plan is not many; it's not two, it's one plan. God has one plan, He's unfolding it in various ways, in various times, with various people, but it's one plan. His covenant of grace, His plan of salvation is the same in all ages, even though He, in His purposes, uses different people in different times and different means. We said that the passage reminds us, when we look at verse 7 that that passage reminds us of the requirements and blessings of the creation order. They are still a part of God's plan of redemption, but we said as well that that verse hints in the wake of what is to come that though God will grow His church, the growth of the church will not be without trial and tribulation and obstacle.

And so that brings us to God's word here in Exodus chapter 1, verse 8 and we'll

read down to verse 14. Hear God's word:

Now a new king arose over Egypt who did not know Joseph, and he said to his people, "Behold the people of the sons of Israel are more and mightier than we. Come, let us deal wisely with them, lest they multiply and in the event of war, they also join themselves to those who hate us and fight against us, and depart from the land." So they appointed taskmasters over them to afflict them with hard labor. And they built for Pharaoh storage cities, Pithom and Raamses. But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and the more they spread out, so that they were in dread of the sons of Israel. And the Egyptians compelled the sons of Israel to labor rigorously; and they made their lives bitter with hard labor in mortar and bricks and at all kinds of labor in the field, all their labors which they rigorously imposed on them.

Amen and thus ends this reading of God's holy and inspired word. May He add His blessing to it. Let's pray.

Our Father, we bow before You tonight, and we acknowledge with Paul that the story of the Exodus is a story which was written and happened for us upon whom the end of the ages have come, Your people. We are to learn both negatively and positively from the truth set forth here. We ask tonight that You would reveal yourself, that You would reveal something of Your plan. But beyond that, we pray that You would increase our trust and our resolve to be Your people, to resist worldliness, to follow after Christ *in the way of righteousness*. *We pray O God that you would exalt Yourself in our hearing and reading and study of Your word. We ask it in Jesus' name, Amen.*

You will remember that we said that the first eighteen chapters of Exodus are devoted to the story of the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt, which is the house of bondage. And the first six chapters, or the first part of that first section of the book, are devoted to showing us the trials and tribulations, the hardship that Israel was indeed facing in Egypt. And as we study the section, we learn that God is so committed to growing us in grace, that He will spare no effort, and He will spare us no hardship necessary to that task and goal. Israel could have been very comfortable. They had the best of the land. They had enjoyed a period of influence and prosperity in the times of Joseph, and they could have very easily forgotten God and rested on their laurels. And in that very setting isn't it interesting that God in His providence chooses to put them through hardships for His glory and for their good, because He is committed to their growth and grace.

There are two or three things that I'd like you to see in the passage before us tonight, as Moses continues to unfold the situation in which Israel finds itself. If you look at verses 8 through 10, you will see what happens when a new dynasty arrives in Egypt. And then in verses 11 through 14 you will see the first phase of the plan that the new Pharaoh in this new dynasty put into place to kind of keep a

check on Israel. And within these two parts of the passage that we're going to study, I want you to see three things tonight.

I. God uses second causes even when they don't know it.

The first thing is this. In verses 8 through 10 God uses second causes. I'll come back and tell you what a second cause is in a minute. God uses second causes even when they don't know it. God, of course, is the primary mover. The first cause of all things. But God employs second causes to accomplish His will. Sometimes these second causes are natural forces, such as when he causes the natural forces to accomplish His will of destruction or of blessing. He may cause it to rain, and He may use the normal meteorological laws of nature in order to accomplish that as a second cause for accomplishing His purpose. He may ordain a storm, using it as a second cause to accomplish His purpose as He did in the story of Jonah, who sought to escape Him. And He sent a storm and a whale and people who were confused about what was going on on a ship. All of whom who served as second causes to accomplish His purpose with Jonah.

But often God uses people as second causes, even when they don't know they are being used as instruments of God's will. And one of the things that strikes us immediately in this passage is that Pharaoh is an instrument of God's purposes in this passage and throughout this story, even though he doesn't know it, and he wouldn't like it if he did. In this passage in verses 8 through 10 we see a new dynasty come to power in Egypt. This dynasty has new concerns, new agendas and a very short memory. And that makes trouble for the children of Israel. In fact, the minute we read verse 8, "Now a new king arose over Egypt who did not know Joseph," we get a knot in our stomach because we know what's coming. Even if we didn't know this story, I suspect we would be suspicious when it was announced to us that the new kid on the block, or we might say the new king on the block, doesn't know who Joseph is, because we know that all the prerogatives of Israel are tied up with the knowledge of the ruling power in Egypt of Joseph and what Joseph has done on Egypt's behalf. And when we hear that the new king on the block doesn't even know him, or at least doesn't take into account the great contributions that he has made and does not have the intimate relationship with him, we are immediately nervous. This is not necessarily the next pharaoh, by the way. This may well indicate the coming of an entirely new dynasty. We don't know which pharaoh this was, we don't know when this happened, but we can speculate this. Either the pharaohs who were in control in the days of Joseph were foreign and a new dynasty came in which was indigenous to Egypt and ran them off, or the dynasty under which Joseph ruled was indigenous and a foreign dynasty came in. Either way it would explain why the new dynasty wouldn't be that interesting in continuing the favors which had been given to the children of Israel because of Joseph. They wanted to start from scratch. They had new concerns and new agendas, and because it's a new dynasty, there was no desire to perpetuate the favors which had been given to

Israel because of Joseph or Joseph's memory.

By the way, isn't that a reminder that God's people ought never to put their trust in men and circumstances because those things change. So even there we see a lesson in that story. A new king arose in Egypt who knew not Joseph. This new ruling house we're told in verse 9 was concerned about Israel's strength and numbers. Notice how he describes it to his people. He says, "The sons of Israel are more and mightier than are we." And the king responds to this perceived threat with a shrewd plan. He wants to avoid the departure of Israel. He furthermore wants to avoid them joining an enemy and fighting against Egypt. His words, and you'll see those in verse 9, "Behold, the people of the sons of Israel are more and mightier than we," is an indication of the immediacy and the urgency of the threat that he perceives from Israel.

Now I'd like you to note three very interesting things about Pharaoh's dealings. First of all, do you notice the first words that he says when he begins to implement his plan, or when he begins to set forth the plan that he wants to implement. Look at verse 10. "Come, let us." Now, recall the words. The only time that phrase is used prior in the Bible is in Genesis, chapter 11, verse 4. You remember that? It's the builders of the tower of Babel. "Come, let us build a temple that reaches to the heavens." And now the Pharaoh announces, "Come, let us deal wisely with them." In both cases, because later on we'll hear about the bricks and the mortar that Pharaoh will employ. In both cases, people are building cities out of bricks and mortar to make a name for themselves. Remember the builders of Babel had explicitly said, "Come, let us make a name for ourselves." In contrast, in Genesis, chapter 12, God had said to Abraham, "I will make a name for you. I will make your name great." Remember what *Pharaoh* means. It means great house. So the great house says, "Come, let us deal wisely with them."

Secondly, I'd like you to see this. Notice Pharaoh's determination to deal wisely. And by the way, wisely there indicates shrewdly or craftily. The implication is not that he's going to deal in the way of prudence, but he is going to deal shrewdly with them. He knows that he can't take them on directly. They are more and mightier, so he's got to deal with them through some sort of a crafty way. Does that not remind you of another event in Genesis? Chapter 3, verse 1, when we're told that the serpent was the most crafty of the animals of the field. And so Pharaoh and the crafty servant are compared.

And then thirdly, notice that Pharaoh has his own agenda. Pharaoh simply wants to keep Israel under control. He is not necessarily anti-God of Israel, he's not necessarily anti-religious. He wants to avoid Israel's departure. He wants to keep them from joining with their enemies and fighting against them. He wants to use the labor resources that they provide, but his agenda brings him into direct contest with the purposes and promises of almighty God.

Clearly, Moses is setting up for us here, even in this passage, a great contest between Pharaoh and the God of Israel, even though Pharaoh is clueless. But Pharaoh is simply trying to secure his power. Pharaoh is simply trying to make his name great. Pharaoh is simply trying to exalt his nation. Suddenly, however, Pharaoh finds himself in a fight that's a lot bigger than he ever anticipated. He has his own agendas. He doesn't know anything about the God of Israel. He doesn't know anything about Joseph. But suddenly his purposes are directly contradicting the promises and purposes of God. And God's purposes will rule and overrule whether Pharaoh likes it or not. And in this setting, Pharaoh wants to come up with a plan that will exploit the presence of the Israelites while keeping their numbers and power in check, preventing their departure and keeping them from joining with an enemy.

Now note, by the way, in passing, how Israel is depicted by Pharaoh himself. Pharaoh calls them, look again in verse 9, the sons of Israel. By the way, that could simply be translated the family of Israel as opposed to the nation of Israel. And furthermore he identifies them in the singular rather than in the plural. My guess is that most of your translations read like the one that I've just read. Look again at verse 10. "Come, let us deal wisely with them, lest they multiply." The original is in the singular. "Come, let us deal wisely with Him, lest he multiply." We see something here of the covenantal unity of the people of God, and it's even apprehended in the phrase of the enemy of God's people. Perhaps we see also here a portent of the movement from Israel as a family to a nation which the story of Exodus will tell. At any rate, what we have is Pharaoh desiring to accomplish his own purposes, coming into direct conflict with the purposes and plans of God.

When I was a teenager I remember seeing the movie, "Tora, Tora, Tora," about the Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. It meant a lot to me because I had grown up with my father telling me stories about the Sunday that they came home from church to hear about the attack on Pearl Harbor on the radio, and him immediately going out to sign up for the Marine Corps and eventually being sent to the South Pacific to fight in the Pacific war. I remember in that movie that perhaps the most moving moment for me was when the admiral who was in command of the Japanese fleet realized that all the aircraft carriers had escaped the intended destruction of the Japanese attacking fleet. He turned, and he said to one of his adjutants, "We have awakened a sleeping giant." He suddenly realized that his nation had entered into a battle which it was not prepared for, and which it was not an equal for. The intention of the Japanese was to do two things. First, to make a strike which would have immobilized the U.S. for many, many months, and maybe even years until a new aircraft carrier fleet could be renamed. With the aircraft carriers not destroyed, the U.S. would be able to wage war in the great, vast Pacific Ocean. Secondly, the Japanese had intended to demoralize the Americans in the surprise attack and thus keep them out of the Pacific theatre. Of course, neither of those objectives were met, and, in fact, the result was something much, much more dreadful for the Japanese people. Well,

Pharaoh in this passage has picked a fight with God, and He doesn't even know it. In his desiring to see his purposes brought about for the people of Israel, he has unwittingly put himself in a contest against the almighty God of Israel, and we don't need to say who's going to win this contest do we? "My purpose will stand," God would say to Isaiah in Isaiah 46:10. "My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please." God uses second causes even when they don't know it.

II. God grows His people through suffering.

The second thing we see in this passage we see in verses 11 through 14. This is the first part of Pharaoh's plan to keep the children of Israel under control. And we learn here again that God grows His people through suffering. The hardships of Israel are described in graphic terms in this passage. Notice that we are told that *taskmasters* are appointed over them. Now that's a technical term. It refers to people who were given the responsibility to manage forced laborers who have been conscripted for a particular project. In this case, the building of great cities for Pharaoh. But the name taskmaster even as it connotes something negative to us, connoted something very, very negative to Israel. Do you remember in I Kings, chapter 12, what happened to Adoram, the taskmaster who had been appointed by Rehoboam, the successor to Solomon? He was so hated that he was murdered by his own people. The name taskmaster indicates in the minds of Israel the great hardship that they underwent in Egypt.

Notice also the other phrases that are used. Burdens, hard labor, afflictions, rigorous labor, rigorously imposed on them over and over in verses 11 through 14. The rigors and the hardship and the burdens and the oppression that Israel experienced in Egypt are emphasized. Now, no doubt, were Pharaoh, or one of his representatives here before us today, he would have pled -- but wait a minute, we didn't put any harder labor on Israel than we did to other non-national people who were conscripted for labor. And we provided really good food for them, and these were worthwhile causes, they provided them. There would be all manner or excuses, and there would be all manner of contradictions of this account. Well, I mean you don't understand, the Pharaoh really had good purposes in mind. He wanted to establish peace and security in the land of Egypt. All of that doesn't matter. The Pharaoh has imposed a harsh discipline upon the people of God, and I'd like you to see two or three things from this passage about that harsh discipline.

First of all, notice what Israel learned negatively from this discipline. If we were to turn to Leviticus, chapter 25, it is very interesting that in that passage which deals with how Israelites are to treat servants and slaves, it is repeated over and over again in verses 43, 46 and 53 that Israel is not to treat its slaves rigorously. In other words, Israel is not to treat its servants like the Egyptians treated them. And so there was a negative lesson learned by Israel out of this experience. There was a moral wrong done in the way that Egypt treated Israel that Israel was not

to repeat within its own bounds.

Secondly, notice that in this passage we are told that Pharaoh makes Israel's life hard. Bear that in mind, my friends, because in just a few chapters we're going to be told that God made Pharaoh's heart hard. Pharaoh afflicted God's people and made their lives unbearable. God made Pharaoh's heart unbearably hard. God is sovereign. He does all that He plans. He grows His people through suffering.

But finally, I want you to remember that even as we know that in this exodus, in this deliverance from hardship and bondage and rigors, even though in this exodus God accomplishes it with a mighty arm, bringing the children of Israel out of Egypt like a mighty army. Even in that exodus we have hints that God's ultimate deliverance is going to be accomplished in a very different way, because it is the slaughter of the Passover lamb which keeps Israel alive, and which in a certain sense accomplishes the exodus. Now think about that for a moment. Let me transport you back twenty centuries. Let's be in the first century in Palestine somewhere on a cool autumn evening. A Jewish Christian father, a man who has been brought up as a faithful Jewish believer, who has come to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Messiah of Israel is putting his son to bed. As he puts his son to bed, he's telling him the story of the exodus. He's saying, "Son, let me tell you about the bondage that our people experienced in Egypt. We were beaten. We bore stripes. We had a heavy burden. We were rigorously afflicted." And son says, "Yes, dad, and I remember how that story ends. God sends Moses as a deliverer, and God Himself brings plagues against Egypt, and with a mighty arm he brings his people out of Egypt." "Yes, son, you're right. But, you know, Isaiah tells us that that deliverance is only a foreshadowing of a greater deliverance that God has accomplished for His people. And that deliverance He didn't do by bringing His people out like the mighty army. That deliverance He did in a surprising way, my son. As we bore stripes in Egypt, so His Son bore stripes for our deliverance. As we were afflicted in Egypt, so He afflicted His own Son. As we bore burdens in Egypt, so His Son was burdened for us. And what's more, His Son, Jesus, the Messiah, the Christ says, I bear your sins, but my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Do you see how the burdens of Egypt are a portent of the burdens of the promised Messiah who bears those burdens in our place and so grows us in our suffering. God redeems us from the cruel afflictions of sin through the burden bearing of Jesus Christ who offers to us redemption and a very light yoke.

III. God's promise is more powerful than Pharaoh's plan.

One last thing I'd like you to see, and you'll see it in verse 12. Despite Pharaoh's plan, Israel grows. The growth of Israel is described here despite the plan that Pharaoh had put in place deliberately to restrict the growth of the children of Israel, and this reminds us that God's promise is more powerful than Pharaoh's

plan. In the face of affliction, God's promises continue to be fulfilled. This is only the first part of Pharaoh's plan, by the way. But clearly, Pharaoh intended the labor, the hard labors of Israel to constrain the growth of the race, perhaps through attrition. These people would work so hard that many of them would die or die prematurely. Perhaps through constraining their ability to procreate because of the hardness of their labors. Whatever, this was part of Pharaoh's plan to keep the children of Israel from growing, but what do we read in verse 12? The more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and the more they spread out so that they were in dread (this is the Egyptians) of the sons of Israel. In the face of affliction, God's promises continued to be fulfilled. They multiplied. His purpose was to constrain their growth, yet they multiplied. And what does that harken back to? Genesis 1:28: "Be fruitful and multiply."

What's Moses saying? Here's Pharaoh's plan. Keep the people of God from growing. Here's God's promise. "Be fruitful and multiply." God's mandate, "Be fruitful and multiply." The fulfillment of that promise and mandate, they multiply. And they spread out, or they broke out. This, too, is a fulfillment of promise. You remember what God had said to Jacob at Bethel in Genesis 28, verse 14, "Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the east and to the west and to the north and to the south." They multiplied and they spread out. Pharaoh wanted to constrain them, God prospered them. God's promise is more powerful than Pharaoh's plan.

There is a wealth of truth for our daily living in this passage. God is always accomplishing His will, even using those who hate God's people to bring about His perfect and good will for His people. God grows His people in suffering. And in suffering we must never see ourselves as victims of our earthly persecutors, because God's promise is always more powerful than that oppression. May God enable us all to believe those truths and to live accordingly. Let's pray.

Our Heavenly Father, we bless You for Your word. We thank You for its richness, for the power of this story, even for the grandeur for the way that Moses wrote it. We pray that you would grip our hearts by it, and more than that that you would change us, transform us, help us to seek Christ in the exodus, help us to trust Him. We ask it in Jesus' name, Amen.

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