

God Remembered His Covenant

Exodus 2:23-25

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If you have your Bibles, I'd invite you to turn with me to Exodus, chapter 2, to the end of the chapter, beginning in verse 23. In Exodus, chapter 2, verses 23 through 25 we continue a story that we've been looking at for a number of weeks now. As we have looked at God's dealings in the book of Exodus we come tonight to a very important passage, a passage that reveals the wise timing of God's plan. It reveals to us the continuing burden of God's people under oppression in Egypt. It reveals to us God's heart of compassion and the reason behind His purposes of redemption.

Before we get to that story, we will do well to remember some of the ground that we have traversed. But first let's hear God's holy word here in Exodus, chapter 2, verse 23:

Now it came about in the course of those many days that the king of Egypt died; and the sons of Israel sighed because of the bondage. And they cried out and their cry for help because of their bondage rose up to God. And so God heard their groaning; and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And God saw the sons of Israel and God took notice of 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 God, we pray that as we study Your word this night, that You would teach us of Your glory and of Your purposes so that we would see Your magnificence, Your majesty, Your mercy, Your compassion and would be moved to love You and praise You and worship You, and obey You and trust in You more faithfully. We pray, O God, that Your word would strike our hearts; that You would by Your own spirit search out our hearts, and even as the word is read and explained that you would bring it to bear in our own situations and our own circumstances so that we, individually, have a glance, a glimpse at Your glory and are moved to trust You. We ask these things in Jesus' name, Amen.

In our study of Exodus 1 and 2 so far we have seen at least three grand themes

that Moses is developing. First of all, we said in Exodus, chapter 1 in that repeated phrase. That Israel was fruitful and multiplied. That Moses is deliberately connecting God's purposes and redemption all the way back to Genesis 1 and His purposes in creation. We know that in the creation ordinances given in Genesis 1, it's repeated on several occasions that the people are to be fruitful and multiply. Adam and Eve are to be fruitful and multiply. And then with the repetition of that phrase in Exodus, chapter 1 on several occasions in verses 6 and 7, verses 9 and 10 and 12 and 20 we have an emphasis on the connection between creation and redemption. God's purposes in redemption are not scaled down. They are grand; they are universal; they are cosmic. And we see here God's purposes in creation and redemption connected.

Then, we said over and over that the sovereignty of God is emphasized in Exodus, chapter 1 and 2. One way we see that is the way that God uses women to thwart the plans of the most powerful ruler on earth. In the days of Pharaoh and this dynasty of Egypt, women would not have been considered as those who were typically among the wise and powerful of the world. And yet women have tremendous influence in the working out of God's plan in this passage. First of all two midwives in Israel have a role of thwarting the designs of the king of Egypt against God's people. Then the mother of Moses and the sister of Moses are used to thwart the designs of Pharaoh against God's future deliverer Moses. And then Pharaoh's own daughter is used to overturn his plans. Clearly here, God is showing how those who are weak in the eyes of the world are used and made strong by God in His purposes so that they overthrow the one who is seen to be wise and powerful and strong.

But we also saw last week, as we looked at the first event in Moses' recorded adult life, wherein he attempts to save one of the Hebrew slaves from a taskmaster who is attempting to beat him to death. We see there the necessity of divine deliverance. Moses is perfectly sincere in what he attempts to do in attempting to deliver that Hebrew slave from a cruel taskmaster, but Moses does not have the power in and of himself to bring deliverance to Israel. In fact, the next day when he goes out and attempts to judge lightly between two contesting Israelites immediately he is accused of murder by one of those Israelites, and he fears. And then soon thereafter Pharaoh seeks his life, and he has to flee the land. He is God's chosen deliverer, but human deliverance is in vain. And God even in that incident in the life of Moses lets us know that it's not just going to be an exalted, profound, intellectual, energetic, zealous reformer that's needed in order to bring about the salvation of Israel. It's going to take God Himself. The Lord will use Moses. The Lord will graciously use him in His plan, but it's going to take God to deliver Israel out of Egypt.

With those backgrounds in mind, we're going to see a fourth theme come to light in the short passage that we're studying tonight. I'd like you to see two or three things in these verses as they are set forth before us.

I. God's providence often works out in and through ordinary human events.

The first thing that you'll find in the first part of verse 23. "Now it came about in the course of those many days, that the king of Egypt died." We see here that God's providence often works out in and through those seemingly ordinary human events. God's providence often works out in and through the seemingly ordinary course of human events.

This is a new stage in God's plan of redemption. And it begins with the death of the king. And then hold this in the back of your mind; just like in the days of our Lord Jesus Christ, this new stage in God's dealings with Israel begins with a very important event in secular terms, the death of a king. Now this is a seemingly mundane observation to say, well, then the king of Egypt died. The Pharaoh died. That would have been big news in Egypt, just like it would be big news if Queen Elizabeth were to die in England. But, it doesn't seem to have any spiritual consequences. It might have been thought to be, initially by the people of God, good news, because often times in the ancient world when monarchs die, then a new monarchs came to the throne certain liberties were given to slaves. But it's made clear in this passage and in chapter 3 and in chapter 4 that the death of this one king of Egypt and the succession of a new king of Egypt didn't mean anything good for the children of Israel. It didn't bring them any relief, it didn't bring them any freedom, it didn't bring them any relief from the bondage that they were experiencing. So it's interesting here. The death of this king, though it was a big news kind of event in Egypt, didn't seem to have any spiritual consequences to the people of God in the first place.

I've shared with you before that oftentimes military historians will point either to Guadalcanal or to Midway as the turning point in the Second World War in the Pacific. They will say that, for instance, at Midway, we really reached a turning point in which the tides and the fortunes of the United States in the Pacific were dramatically changed. But you know those of you who lived through the Second World War didn't wake up the day after you heard about Midway, and say, "Whew, glad we've hit the turning point." You don't sense that some of those great changes are occurring in history when they happen. And it's the same way with the death of Pharaoh. This is a turning point in the history of Israel, but the people of Israel don't know it yet. They are not aware of its significance at first.

But this event does let us know two things. First of all it lets us know that Moses had been away for a long time. Now Stephen tells us that in Acts, chapter 7. And later in the book of Exodus, Moses himself would reveal to us a little bit of the chronology. Moses had been away for forty years. It's been a long time. The children of Israel have been waiting a long time, even since the birth of Moses for their deliverance. He would be eighty years old before he would come back to deliver the children of Israel from Egypt.

Secondly, the death of this king lets us know that it is now possible for Moses to return. If you look at Exodus, chapter 4, verse 19, specifically God says Moses go back now. The people who wanted to kill you are dead. So this is letting you know that God is setting the stage to be able to send the deliverer of His people back into Egypt.

But the event also lets us know two other things. And I'd like you to think about these things for a moment. This event recorded for us here in verse 23, very significantly before the rest of verse 23 where the crying out of Israel is recorded, lets us know that God acts prior to the prayers of His people. We're going to read in the rest of this verse how the sighing and the crying of God's people have come up to Him. They rose up to God. But you are not to think that those cries were what caused God to act in redemption. He had been working out His plan of redemption long before those cries ever came to Him. In fact, it would be more proper to say that those cries themselves are the result of God's work of redemption as He works in the heart of His people. God is often working out His plan to glorify His Son and to save His people even when we don't realize it. God in His mercy is often doing things in our experience, and we don't even detect His hand, but His hand of mercy is at work. And that's the case here. God's already setting into place events that will lead to the deliverance of the children of Israel before they ever turn to Him and lift up their cries.

That's the first thing that I'd like you see, and the second thing is this. This event clearly parallels the prologue to Jesus Christ's ministry. And any Jewish Christian and any Gentile Christian in the days of the early church huddled with some group of believers reading a scrap of the gospel of Matthew would have recognized this. I mean, can you imagine the Jewish Christian hearing his minister or one of the elders read to him from Matthew, chapter 1 and 2, and he hears about Herod attempting to kill Jesus, and then Jesus and His family fleeing into Egypt, and then coming back out of Egypt immediately they would have thought, 'well, that's just like Moses.' And can you imagine a Gentile Christian hearing the book of Exodus read to him from a parchment for the first time, and he hears the story at the end of Exodus, chapter 2 and he would have immediately said, "Well, that's just like Jesus." And God intends this passage to strike us in just that way. If you'll look at Matthew, chapter 2, very briefly, I'll show you how. In Matthew chapter 2, verse 13, we read: "Now when they had departed, (this is speaking of the wise men) behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream saying 'Arise, and take the child and His mother and flee to Egypt and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to destroy Him.' And he arose, and he took the child and his mother by night, and departed for Egypt. And was there until the death of Herod that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying out of Egypt did I call my son." And then if you look down to verse 19, "But when Herod was dead, behold an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt saying, 'Arise and take the child and his mother and go into the land of Israel. For those who sought the child's life are dead.' And he arose and took the child and

his mother and came into the land of Israel." We have here God foreshadowing his ultimate redemptive plans and purposes through Jesus Christ through Moses in the Exodus. God is giving us a taste beforehand of what He is going to be doing in His real, grand redemptive design. God's providence often works out in and through seemingly ordinary human events, events that don't seem to have any spiritual reason or rhyme to them. And yet they are what He is using to bring about the accomplishment of His purposes for His people.

II. God's people cry out for relief.

Secondly, if you look at the second half of verse 23. I'd like you to see this. God's people here finally cry out to God because of their slavery and misery. Israel turns to God almost as their last recourse, and they sigh and cry aloud for relief. There is another function for this opening sentence here in this short section, which is really a section unto itself in verse 23 and following. It serves to point out the way of deliverance and the fact of the people of God crying out to God. When you read the first sentence of verse 23, "It came about in the course of those many days that the king of Egypt died." You were expecting to hear, because of what I just said about kings coming to the throne and releasing slaves, you're expecting to hear "Now a new king came to the throne and things got better for the children of Israel." You know, the old guy who was being mean to them was out of the way, and the new guy's in and things start getting better. That's not what happens. But what does happen is we're told that the people of God cried out to Him, and in addition to that we are told the way of deliverance, and it's not going to be through the new king. It's going to be through God Himself. In fact, Moses isn't even mentioned in the passage. Only God is mentioned, only God's covenant is mentioned. And so this sentence serves to point us to the way of deliverance and the fact of the people crying out. Deliverance, relief from bondage, must come from God, and Moses is emphasizing that in this passage. Furthermore, the only development reported here upon the death of the king is Israel's crying out. Now, finally, they begin to think of God.

Now that might seem to be a little bit of a cruel thing to say about Israel, but let me just remind you of something that Ezekiel tells us. Would you turn with me to Ezekiel, chapter 20. In Ezekiel, chapter 20, beginning in verse 6, we read: "On that day I swore to them to bring them out of the land of Egypt into a land that I had selected for them flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all lands. And I said to them 'Cast away each of you the detestable things of his eyes and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt. I am the Lord, Your God.'" But they rebelled against me and were not willing to listen to me, and they did not cast away their detestable things of their eyes, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt." Now, this passage indicates to us that Israel had in fact begun to drift away from God while they were in Egypt. And now we are seeing a little bit of a hint as to God's patience in His timing for redeeming Israel from Egypt so that they would learn to cry out to Him. Their hearts had begun to stray from Him.

They had been going after the idols of Egypt, and He waits for their cries to rise up in order to draw them back to Him. In their suffering, God was preparing to draw them back to Himself.

Now let me ask you a question. Are you using God as your last resort? Do you only cry out to Him in the time of trouble? Do you wait until the very last moment to lift up the cry? If so, God in His wisdom may wait for your sighs and for your groaning in order that you would love Him rather than using Him. The children of Israel sought God only apparently here as their last resort. This is the first time that Israel has been the subject of a verb since Exodus, chapter 1, verse 7. "And when they are" notice it's this corporate lifting up of their groans and sighs; their sighs rise up to God. They finally cry out to God because of their slavery and misery, but let me also say that their crying out to God is a sign of God at work in them. Matthew Henry has this beautiful phrase, "Before God unbound them, He put it into their hearts to cry to Him." Before God freed them, God put it into their hearts to cry out to Him. Again, God is already at work. Before those cries ever come up to the throne. God is already, it's almost as if God is sitting there and waiting. I've been working on this. God is not slow on His people's behalf. God is more concerned for His people than they are for themselves. He's already been at work. He's already laying out His plan. But part of His plan was that the people's hearts would be prepared to be redeemed. So he waits until the time comes when they cry out to God. No wonder, no wonder. Some wise old Christians used to say that when God prepares to bless His people He sets them a praying. This is a sign that God is working in the hearts of His people.

III. God saves not because of His people's merit, but because of His covenant.

One last thing I'd like you to see. In verses 24 and 25, and this is that great fourth theme that I wanted to mention. In verses 24 and 25 we see that God saves, not because of His people's merit, not because of His people's troubles, not because of His people's worthiness, not because of His people's cries. God saves because of His covenant. God swings into action. God begins to move in His redemptive plan because of His own covenant. The redemption of Israel from Egypt is rooted in God's prior commitments to Abraham. The deliverance of the exodus stems from a promise that God had made to the patriarchs. Deliverance from that strange land was an essential part of the promises that God had made to Abraham. Do you remember all the way back in Genesis, chapter 15? Look with me there. In Genesis 15 when God had reiterated His promise to Abraham, He said to him, in verses 13 and following. Genesis 15:13 and following: "God said to Abram 'Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. But I will judge the nation whom they will serve and afterwards they will come out with many possessions.'" God emphasizes to Abraham that the exodus experience and the bondage before it are part and parcel of His plan. God's

saving action, therefore, hear. As the cries of Israel come up to the ears of God, God's saving action is based on His covenant, His promise, His commitment. The cries of God's people don't make Him to be a loving God. The predicament of God's people does not make Him to be a loving God. The grief of God's people does not make Him to be a loving God. He already was. He was just waiting around for His people to recognize that they needed it. He was already at work for them. And His work was based not on them, not on their worthiness, not on their cries, not on their grief, but on His promise and commitment.

And notice these four glorious verbs that are used to speak about God's response. God heard. God heard about what was going on. It's not even that God heard their prayer in some sort of audible way. It is that He took heed of and He responded to their need. God heard them. Secondly, notice this glorious word. God remembered. Now again, this is a glorious word. What do you think? God forgot? This word is much richer than that. God didn't forget the promise He had made. When it says that God remembered, it means that He acted upon the promise that He had made. Just as he said to Noah, "When I look at the bow in the cloud, I will remember the promise that I have made." God set up the memorial. Now He is acting upon the promise that he had made and memorialized. Thirdly, God saw. Not just saw with detachment. Oh, I see that something is happening to My people down there. No, *God sees* means that God looks upon His people with kindness and compassion. When He sees His people in grief, if we can speak in these human terms, He is moved with compassion for His people. And fourthly, God knows. And again, it's not just that God knows about what is going on down there. But it means that God understands the condition of His people. He is near to His people and compassionate for His people because He understands what they are going through. And so we're being reminded in those words. God heard, God remembers, God saw, God knows that God is near to His people in their suffering. He literally knew their suffering. He literally understood their suffering. How? In Jesus Christ.

Think of it my friends. God's response to the crying, to the sighing of the children of Israel is based upon His covenant. Now let me ask you a question. Whose blood secured that covenant? Not the blood of heifers, not the blood of bulls and goats. The blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. My friends, when God says here that *He knew*, that He took notice of them, He means it. He literally understands their suffering because their Savior whose blood sealed this covenant promise understands more about suffering than you and I, praise God, will ever know. And so when God says I understand that, it's not like a friend who's trying to be sympathetic to you, and you tell him some horrible thing that you're going through, and your friend says, "Well, I know, I know." And you're sitting there thinking no, you don't. When God says, "I know," the irony of it is, He knows, and you don't. God is coming, and His redemption for Israel because of the promise that He had made hundreds of years before, and because of a love that He had had from eternity past.

And so to the Israel of old, the whole course of the history of salvation can be summed up in promise and fulfillment. The promise of God, the fulfillment of that promise. My friends, you see then why pleading the promises is the basic pattern of biblical prayer. O Lord, do what You've already promised. We're not going to move God to do something that He is unwilling to do. We do that which He is more willing to do than we are to receive it. We lift up that prayer before Him, and we say, "Lord, do what You have promised to do." Do you see here that even our salvation is based upon this prior promise and commitment and covenant that God has made to Abraham. Luke will go out of His way in Luke, chapter 1:72 and following, to make it clear that the coming of Christ is a fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham. Why is it that God has come to rescue us? Not because of our worthiness, not because of our merit, not because of our cries or our sighs, but because of His promise. That theme will continue on in the story of the Exodus. May God bless it to your souls. Let's pray.

Our Lord and our God, we bow before You this night, and we ask that by Your own spirit that you would apply the truth of Your word to our hearts, for Your glory and our good. In Jesus' name we ask it, Amen.

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