

They Don't Die, They Multiply

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[0 : 00] Our sermon text for this evening is read into your hearing already. It's our Old Testament reading from Exodus chapter 1, verses 1 to 14.

And as you see on the screen, the title of the message for this evening is, They Don't Die, They Multiply. They don't die, they multiply. And the point I want to get across to us in the message is that the promise of God ensures that neither the schemes of people nor the powers of hell are able to destroy his plan.

God's promises are faithful and they are true and sure no matter what things look like. Would you pray with me? Father, we thank you again for your word that is not dead but that is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword that pierces to the division soul and spirit joints and marrow, judging the thoughts and the intentions of the heart.

And we confess, O God, tonight that all of us in here are naked and exposed to you, the one to whom we must all give account. And so, Lord, you know precisely then what we stand in need of. So would you be pleased to meet us where we are and give us what we need? Faith, encouragement, correction, conviction, hope, healing. Lord, use the weakness of my preparation to do what only you can do by your power.

[1 : 34] That we would be people who live not for our glory but for the glory of Jesus Christ in whose name we pray. Amen. Amen and amen.

Back in 1984, 33 years ago, a movie was released that became kind of a cultural hit and phenomenon. They didn't know that that's what was going to happen with this movie, but it was the case.

The movie was titled Gremlins. I don't know if any of you have seen that movie, but the story is a young, not a young, an older gentleman who was a struggling inventor.

Randall Peltzer was looking for a unique Christmas gift for his son, Billy. And he was in Chinatown in his community and he came across this antique gift shop and he went in and he saw this furry little creature that's named, that's called a mogwai.

And he said, this is what I've got to have. This is the perfect gift for my son. But the store owner didn't want to sell it to him because he said, this is not like any old regular pet. You've got to, owning one of these comes, well, great responsibility comes with it.

[2 : 50] And so Randall leaves the store disappointed that he couldn't buy this creature. But then the owner's grandson meets him outside and secretly sells him this mogwai because his family needed the money.

And so he says to him, listen, there are three rules that you have to follow. So, first of all, he says, you've got to keep him out of light, especially sunlight, it'll kill him.

Secondly, do not give him any water, not even to drink. And then third, the most important rule of all that you can never forget is never, ever, no matter how much he begs, never feed him after midnight.

Happy Randall agrees and he names the creature Gizmo and gives it to Billy for Christmas. And of course, how many of you know that it wouldn't be a movie if the rules were not soon broken.

Some water spills on Gizmo and these fur balls pop out and all of a sudden they're starting to multiply and you've got these other little mogwai and these mogwai are not as friendly as Gizmo.

[4 : 07] And so the ringleader, Stripe, uses some trickery to trick Billy into feeding them after midnight. And they grow these caterpillar-like cocoons and the next day comes out these rather ugly looking things called gremlins.

And what does Stripe do? Rather, he finds himself a nice swimming pool and he jumps in it and he multiplies and all of a sudden the water is bubbling up and there are gremlins, gremlins everywhere.

This handful of gremlins multiply into a swarm that practically fills the whole town and terrorize it for the remainder of the movies.

And when it came to the gremlins, the town's attitude, as much as they tried to stop the spread of these gremlins, they couldn't, they wouldn't die. They just kept multiplying.

Well, that is precisely the way the Egyptians felt about the Hebrews in Exodus chapter 1. Try and try and try as they might to stop the spread of the children of Israel.

[5 : 22] They just couldn't do it. They wouldn't die. They just kept on multiplying. The text tells us in verse 12 that the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel.

That is, they loathed the people of Israel. But this is not about the people of Israel terrorizing the land of Egypt like the gremlins did in that town. What we are seeing in Exodus chapter 1 is the ongoing story of God's promise being worked out in real time and real space.

The story that begins in Genesis 1 when God blesses Adam and Eve and says to them, Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it. But that continues in Genesis 3.15 after Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit.

And God said that the seed of the serpent, the devil's spiritual children, would bruise the heel of the woman's children. But he promised that the woman's children would crush the head of the serpent's child.

And it pressed forward in Genesis chapter 12 when God calls Abraham and he promised him that he'd make him a great nation. And he tells Abraham in Genesis 15, Look towards the heaven and number the stars if you're able to.

[6 : 39] And he says to him, So shall your offspring be. This is the continuing story of God's promise to fulfill his mission of making his name and his fame and his glory fill the earth.

And so because of his promise, his people don't die. They multiply. And so there are four things I want to share with you tonight from this text. Four Ps. The promise, the problem, the persecution, and the proliferation.

Promise, problem, persecution, and proliferation. And as I've just mentioned, this is about God's promise being realized in time and space. And it's being laid out for us right here at the beginning of the book of Exodus.

Our English Bibles do not make this clear, but the first word of the book of Exodus is the word and. And it's not translated into English because you don't start a sentence with a conjunction in English and much less a book.

But verse 1 should be translated and. These are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob, each man with his household.

[7 : 48] And I'm pointing this out to you because there is an intentional connection at the beginning of the book of Exodus to what has been said before about this family in Genesis. Everything leading up to this point.

And so after Moses, the writer, makes this connection for us, he lists the names of the sons of Israel in verses 2 and 3. And this is almost a word for word repetition of what you find in Genesis chapter 20 to 35 rather verses 23 to 26.

And if you look there, what you would find is that the sons are not listed from oldest to youngest, as you might expect. As Pastor Dan said, I've got four kids and when people ask me about my children, I start naming them and I list them in order from oldest to youngest.

But that's not what's going on here. These children are, or these sons are listed in accordance with who their mama was. There was a lot of drama in Jacob's family in Genesis.

And the first six sons are the sons of Leah, his first wife. The next come his second wife, Rachel's sons.

[9 : 10] And then the sons of Bilhah, Rachel's servant. Then the sons of Zilpah, Leah's servant. And Joseph is missing from the list because he's already in Egypt, we find out in verse 5.

But listen, here's the deal. It says in verse 6, then Joseph died. And all his brothers. And that entire generation.

Everybody died. But you know what didn't die? What didn't die was God's promise. Verse 7 tells us that the people of Israel were fruitful.

And notice this with me. The words that the people of Israel in verse number 7 are the same words translated as the sons of Israel in verse number 1.

But it's rightly translated as people in verse 7. Because now we're no longer talking about this nomadic band of 70 people. We're talking about a numerous nation of people.

[10:07] Listen to that description in verse 7. They were fruitful. They increased greatly. That is, they teemed. They were like a swarm of people. They multiplied.

They grew exceedingly strong. The land was filled with them. They are starting to be as numerous as the stars of the sky and the sand by the seashore.

Just like God promised. But here is the thing. It's not because they're this model picture of perfect people who deserve this blessing. This family was formed through trickery and deception there in Egypt because some of their great, great, great grandfathers sold their other great, great grandfather into slavery.

This is a family with a checkered past. But the promise of God trumps everything. The promise of God trumps everything.

The promise of God is not hindered by you and I. You see, I don't know if you know it, but you're messed up. And so am I.

[11:16] But listen, the promise of God is not hindered by the foolishness, the stupidity, the trickery, the deceitfulness, the ignorance of people, or any other errors we might have of ourselves.

We're messed up, but we're not messed up enough to throw God off course of his kingdom promises and purposes. The mess of this world does not make God sweat.

It doesn't make him sweat. Yes, God grieves, but he doesn't worry. His promise of redemption and restoration. His promise of justice and righteousness.

It permeates the book of Exodus. It permeates, in fact, the entirety of the Bible. And no power of hell or scheme of man is able to throw him off of that course.

And the power of hell, it shows up right here in our text. From the confirmation of God's promise, we move on to find out that there's a problem in verses 8 to 10. A new king comes to power in Egypt.

[12:26] Time has elapsed. And we're centuries removed from Joseph serving as the prime minister in Egypt and saving the country from doom. And all this new pharaoh knows is that the whole land is filled with these Hebrews.

It says in verses 9 and 10, And he said to his people, Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us.

Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply. And if war breaks out, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land.

Can I put pharaoh's words and speech for you in current modern-day American vernacular?

A pharaoh is saying to his people, We have a problem with these immigrants. A pharaoh in verses 9 and 10 is delivering what I call the Egyptian State of the Union address.

[13:31] His people, the citizens of Egypt, are assembled together to hear him. And he tells them, We have a major national crisis, pharaoh says. These people are different than we are, and we've let them practically take over our country.

They are stronger than us. Listen, the political tactic of leaders creating fear among the people in order to get them to go along with the program is not new.

It is ancient, in fact. Pharaoh played on the Egyptian sense of ethnic and national superiority. He didn't have to create that sense of ethnic and national superiority.

He just had to use it for his advantage. He says in verse 10, People of Egypt, we've got to deal shrewdly with these immigrants. We've got to be wise in how we deal with the Hebrew problem in our land.

They're a threat to our national security. We've got a whole nation of non-Egyptians living in our country. They're not loyal to us. And if war comes, they'll join with our enemies, and they'll fight against us.

[14:38] They will take your jobs. They'll take your wealth. They'll take your property. They'll take your power. And yes, we should be seeing some parallels.

Yes, I know I might be stepping on toes, but some bells should be ringing in our minds. You cannot look at our text, and we can see the evil that is at work in Pharaoh's heart.

We can clearly see the power of hell behind the problem that is presented in our text, but we should be able to make the connection to our current day.

Listen, the reality is, in almost every national presidential election in our country, over even a generation, every candidate has had to talk about how they're going to deal with the immigration

problem.

That is not a new thing. It's as if we are not talking about real people made in the image of God and deserving of dignity. What are we going to do about those people?

[15 : 43] In our country's current debate over immigration, where we see those people attitude, they're different than us and are going to destroy our country attitude, what we're seeing is a heart that is closer to Pharaoh than Jesus Christ.

And listen, I'm not taking some political possession on the right or the left. I'm saying, how would God have his people view fellow image bearers?

What attitude and heart and mindset would God have his people have when we're considering people who are deserving of dignity?

What we see Pharaoh saying here to his people in Exodus chapter 1 verses 9 to 10 reminds us of the fact that the image of God being imprinted on every soul has implications for how we think about people and how we treat them.

In Egypt, Pharaoh himself was the image of God. So if you were not his people, you could be dismissed as unworthy of dignity and value and worth.

[16 : 52] And here is what I'm getting at. We have a natural tendency to categorize people into groups of others. And whoever those others are, they become thought of as those people.

And it makes it easy to dehumanize people and think of them only as a commodity. We want to know, do these people add to or do they subtract from our society?

We will determine their value and worth by that. But God would not have us look at his image bearers in that way. That mindset and that heart is incompatible with God's mission.

Indeed, it's no small point that even our Savior lived as an immigrant, as a refugee fleeing for his life in a foreign land to escape persecution. And the problem of dehumanization and commodification of people in our text, it leads to a horrific persecution.

We're told in verse 11 that because of Pharaoh's powerful State of the Union address, the people are on board with the slavery and oppression program. They set taskmasters over the children of Israel to afflict them with heavy burdens.

[18 : 05] They built for Pharaoh's store cities, Pithom and Ramesses. They laid on them heavy burdens. It says in verse 14 that they made their lives bitter with hard service in mortar and brick and in all kinds of work in the field.

Two times in verse 13 and then again in verse 14, it says they treated the Hebrews ruthlessly. And that word always includes violence.

We're getting a picture of how bad it was for them. And here's what I want to point out in this persecution. There's a connection here with what happened in the book of Genesis chapter 11. At the end of Genesis chapter 11, God calls Abraham to himself, and then he makes the promise to him that he's going to bless Abraham and make him a great nation.

And that account in Genesis, it comes on the heels of the Tower of Babel incident where humanity said we don't want to spread out over the earth. We want to build ourselves a city with a tower stretching into the heavens.

[19 : 18] And here is the connection. The people who stood against God's command and built Babel use the same kind of language as Pharaoh does. Come, let us make bricks, they said.

Come, let us build ourselves a city with a tower stretching to the heavens. And here is Pharaoh in Exodus chapter 1. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them. Just as the people of Babel were building a city and a tower against God with brick and mortar, the Egyptians are forcing the people of God to build cities out of brick and mortar to stand against God.

So those who stand against God are committed to building monuments to their own glory. The concern of Babel was that they didn't want to be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.

The concern of Pharaoh is that the children of Israel are dispersed over the face of the whole land. The persecution comes because we are seeing an ancient battle between the city of God and the city of man.

In God's kingdom, in his city, he's acknowledged to be the one with all power and glory. What people do when the Lord is not acknowledged as the one with all power and glory is heap up power and glory for ourselves.

[20 : 35] And that's not just something relegated to the past. A few years ago, Karen Ellis, a missiologist, a professor, gave a message for Campus Crusade for Christ, their inner city

conference.

And her message was titled, My People, My People, a letter to the church in America. And she made the point in that message that if God is on the throne, there is no power struggle.

If we're on the throne through self-exaltation, then you have oppression somewhere, somehow. Power is always going to be abused in that situation, she said.

And someone is going to be denied the right to the fullness of their God-given humanity. She said, Satan is incredibly uncreative and unimaginative in his tactics, but he is effective because he's good at marketing.

Here's a direct quote from her. She said, while the social fabric of oppression changed from age to age, the general contours of abuse and degradation remain the same.

[21 : 45] It's just different packaging. Look at the similarity from one oppressive regime to another. Destruction of name and identity. Destruction of culture. Violation of women.

Emasculation of men. False accusations. Unjust courts. The limiting of travel. Zone housing to substandard conditions. Denial of societal advancement. These are the same kinds of things that we find in the oppression of God's people.

In Exodus chapter 1 and throughout the early chapters of the book, if you look and you read the book of Acts, you will see the same kinds of things in the persecution of the early church.

You turn to the book of Revelation and guess what? You see the same kind of things in the persecution that Christians were enduring in the seven letters of Revelation chapter 2 and 3.

These are the same facets of human degradation that existed in this country in the days of slavery and Jim Crow. These are the same tactics that are being employed today by people who are hostile to Jesus Christ all over the world and in power.

[22 : 50] Different faces and places, but the same tactics. And look, that fact might leave us depressed if it were not for the other reality that comes back around in the text.

We started out the message in this first few verses seeing how God's promise trumps everything. It trumps the fact that the people of God are messed up and don't have their act together.

God's promise trumps the power of Satan in his attempts to destroy the work of God. Look at what it says in verse 12. It says, The more that they oppressed them, the more they multiplied and the more they spread out.

The more they oppressed them, the more they multiplied. The more they grew, the more they spread out. The result of the persecution was proliferation.

Pharaoh's oppressive evil tactics had the absolute opposite effect of what he desired. Why is that? Well, it's because no power of hell or scheme of man is strong enough to stop God or throw him off of his track.

[24 : 02] They expanded exponentially. This is just a seed of what Jesus was talking about. We heard in our gospel reading in Matthew 16 where he said, I will build my church.

I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. He promises that not even the gates of hell itself will be able to stand against his kingdom of God expansion program.

The church I pastored in Columbia, Maryland for 10 years is a song we used to love to sing titled, Jesus, My Great High Priest.

And in the last stanza of that song, it says, Should all the hosts of death and powers of hell unknown put their most dreadful forms of rage and mischief on, I shall be safe for Christ displays his conquering power and guardian grace, his conquering power and his guardian grace.

You see, safe in the arms of Jesus is a song of the people who belong to Jesus, especially in the most intense and harsh and difficult of circumstances.

[25 : 15] Persecution in Egypt causes the Old Testament church to expand. Persecution in Acts causes the New Testament church to expand. Persecution in hostile lands today causes the church to expand.

They do not die. They multiply. Let me quote Karen Ellis again as I wrap up. She said, She says, The church expands exponentially under persecution because Satan, the devil, unwittingly creates the very environment where the need for hope and faith in Jesus Christ are most necessary.

If you keep reading through the book of Exodus, you'll find at the end of chapter 2 that Israel is going to be groaning and crying out to God for help because of their harsh slavery and oppression. And God is going to hear and God is going to respond like he always does. The ultimate fulfillment, listen, of God's promise of proliferation to Abraham is not found in Exodus.

It is found in Jesus Christ. And Jesus Christ can declare himself to be both the divine promise maker and the divine promise keeper who doesn't promise that his people will not have to endure persecution.

[26 : 37] No, he promises that the persecution will not hinder his kingdom of God expansion program. And that is possible because in Jesus Christ, we have a God who is both savior and sufferer at the same time.

He is one who both delivers from oppression and was oppressed and afflicted himself. He took on every vulnerability, including subjecting himself to an oppressive regime.

And the Bible says that it was fitting for God to make the founder of our salvation perfect through suffering. If you are in Jesus Christ, what you have and what we have together is not an invented past of stories about people far away in distant lands that don't touch on the reality of the difficulties of life today.

What we have is the reality of a saving God from Genesis to Revelation who continues to push back against the darkness of human degradation, oppression, violence, and injustice with his power that sustains and enables his people to flourish even in the middle of it.

In Jesus Christ, we have a God who continues to push his mission forward. Listen, here it is. The two things as I close, I want to, at least two implications of this text.

[28 : 20] One, we can find ourselves in both positions described in this passage. The first is personal. And the question is, do you have a power struggle?

Who's on the throne? When you sit in your seat of authority over others, whether you are an executive or a teacher, a medical professional, a mom or dad, whatever it is, when you sit in a position of authority, who is on the throne?

Is it the Lord Jesus? Is the Lord Jesus Christ ruling over and influencing and directing the way you exercise your authority?

If it's not Jesus Christ as Lord, you will some way and somewhere and somehow abuse your power and influence for your own glory.

That's the hard work of self-heart examination. But the second implication is more corporate. It's because texts like these remind us, remind us to be in constant prayer for the persecuted church.

[29 : 33] The church won't die. Jesus promised it. The church will multiply. But the Lord delights to hear our prayers and to use them as a means to bring comfort and peace and even joy to those who are enduring persecution for the sake of his name.

And so, whether we're in power or persecuted, we look to and we rest upon the grace of God in Jesus Christ because as our resurrected king, he sits on the throne with all power in his hand.

And he got to that exalted place by embracing the vulnerability and the pain of the oppressed. And so, he's got both covered. Therefore, his church will never die.

She'll multiply. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray.