

The Story: Deliverance

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[0 : 0 0] So good morning, Braemar Baptist. For any of you who don't know me, my name is Kent Dixon, and it's my privilege to be the lead pastor here. Last weekend, a group of us, some of you know, were in Canmore for the men's retreat. It was a great weekend of food and fellowship and studying the book of Jonah together. And I think they tried to kill me. I'm not sure, and I don't actually have proof, but the ride on Saturday morning that we did would... So I took my bike off the wall, in my garage, and then went for the ride of my life on Saturday morning, and it was good.

And then I came home with strep throat. So I've had strep throat all week, so forgive me if I start to get a little hoarse, but it's good, really good to be back with you this morning. Last Sunday, Pastor Werner DeYoung from Holyrood Mennonite Church was here to bring the message in the story series about Joseph and his journey from being an Israelite slave to the second in command of the Pharaoh of Egypt. I hope you were encouraged by Werner's message that even in the darkest times of your life, just as Joseph experienced when he was sold into slavery and hated by his brothers, God will take care of you. If you missed that sermon and would like to check it out, our sermons are always available on our website. So I have had a listen to that one, and it is good. So let me tell you a story this morning. A high-powered Chicago attorney went to

Texas to hunt doves. He shot a dove, and it fell behind a fence. The attorney climbed the fence and saw the dove, saw his dove. He also saw a rough Texas farmer nearby on a tractor. Farmer asked, what are you doing here? The attorney said, well, I'm dove hunting, and I shot this dove. I've come to get it. Farmer said, you can't do that. This is private property. The attorney puffed out his chest and said, if you don't give me my dove, I'll sue you. Wise old Texan said, well, that ain't how we do it down here. How do you do it down here, the attorney said. Well, we got a Texas three-kick rule, the farmer said. Puzzled, the attorney asked, what is the three-kick rule? The farmer explained, I kick you three times. Then you kick me three times, and we keep doing it till one of us gives up. Smart attorney thought about it and said, okay, let's do the three-kick rule. The rough Texan got off his tractor wearing big, heavy cowboy boots. I'll start, he said. He kicked the attorney in the leg, and the attorney felt sharp, searing pain, but he stayed on his feet. The farmer kicked him again, and the attorney doubled over and fell into the dirt in agony. Then the farmer kicked him a third time in the head, and the attorney saw stars. The attorney staggered to his feet and squeaked. Now it's my turn.

Texas farmer said, nah, I'll give up. You can have your dove. Sometimes a good swift kick with a cowboy boot moves things along, but sometimes problems can't be solved with a good swift kick. Am I right? As we've talked about it before, the number one barrier between us and God is what? Our sin nature. Our desire to make ourselves comfortable and happy rather than seeking God. The story continues with how God removes the sin barrier. Perfect.

You guys are reading my mind back there. Our sermon this morning is titled, as you'll see, Deliverance. And this part of the story opens with God's new nation needing to be delivered from less than ideal circumstances. And if you're thinking again, yes, again. In the book of Exodus chapter one, we learn God's new nation is in danger of being obliterated by Egypt. The new nation had been in Egypt as slaves for 400 years. And a new pharaoh who did not know Joseph came to power. So remember that Joseph, an Israelite man, became a powerful leader in Egypt, as you learned last week. But Egyptians, after 400 years, not surprisingly, had forgotten all about that. And possibly the Israelites as well.

[5 : 07] So despite being enslaved in Egypt, God continued to bless this new nation. And they flourished even under oppression. This new pharaoh was intimidated by this nation, we read in the Bible. And their growing numbers worried him. He feared a possible takeover. So in those days, the future of a family line was to have male heirs, right? So Pharaoh made a wise strategic move. He ordered the death of all newborn Hebrew boys.

He saw this as being the best way to curb the growth and power of this potential enemy. It seems strange, though, doesn't it, that God liberated his nation through Joseph, only to have them fall into oppression and slavery again, under the Egyptians again, the same nation that had given Joseph his power. Didn't God see this coming? Did these three, these 400 years of oppression take God by surprise? No. God has revealed, had revealed to Abraham that this would happen. As the Bible says in Genesis, you can advance now. As the Bible says in Genesis 15, thanks guys, 12 to 14, let's read this together. As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram, and behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him. Then the Lord said to Abram, know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs, and will be servants there.

And they will be afflicted for 400 years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. I believe that as we begin to understand what's going on here, it may cause us some challenges. If God revealed to Abraham that the oppression would happen and it actually came to happen, did God cause it? Was the oppression somehow orchestrated by God to punish the Hebrews for somehow offending him? No. God didn't cause the slavery. It resulted from the fear, pride, and sin nature of the Egyptian people. We see that in human nature quite often, don't we? And I've talked about that before. Humans tend to fear what we don't understand.

We're suspicious of good things that seem to come out of nowhere. It's no wonder that we've developed expressions like, it's too good to be true. Or even more cynically, if something seems too good to be true, that's because it is. Right? At our worst, we can be cynical and suspicious, paranoid, defensive. My friends, that is sin. Rather than trusting God and having faith that he's at work in his upper story for our ultimate good in the lower story as well, we resist and choose our own path.

Not recognizing God at all, this Pharaoh, and likely the Egyptians in general, are choosing their own selfish path. We have another verse here.

[9 : 10] But as Paul writes in Romans 8.28, let's read this together. And we know that in all things, God works for the good of those... Good, sorry.

...who have been called according to his purpose. You're better readers than I am. God uses the oppressive sinfulness of the Egyptians as an opportunity to reveal himself and his power. Not just to them, but to the people of his own nation.

We'll see that God reveals himself in three ways in the deliverance of his people. God reveals his power, his name, and his plan.

And when God first calls Moses, their interaction is quite familiar to most of us. Go ahead. There we go. Thanks. Burning bush. Familiar, right?

Moses is tending a flock of sheep and he sees a bush that is on fire and yet not consumed by the flames. Could you imagine just coming across something like that?

[10 : 23] I've heard this story ever since I was a child. And this week I really thought about it and I thought, that would be shocking, wouldn't it? We just read this story and think, oh, a burning bush.

Yeah, that happens all the time. No, it doesn't. When we set fire to wood, what does it do? It burns. It burns completely. This would have defied all logic or explanation for Moses.

Moses. And Moses lived in a time when people were largely divided into those who were based in logic, reason, and concrete reality, like the Greeks and Romans.

But there were also people who were acutely aware of the spiritual realm. I find it interesting that scripture suggested that Moses was more curious about the burning bush than anything.

I don't know about you, but I would have been stunned by that bush, even terrified. It's burning. It's not going away. It's still burning. It's still there.

[11 : 32] That would have been, I would have been terrified by that even before the bush spoke to me. Right? By name.

God took something every day, an unremarkable, a bush, and turned it into a blazing, miraculous display of his power.

And that was his plan with the unremarkable Moses as well. God would show his miraculous power through the unlikely.

Again. Speaking to Moses through the bush, God reveals his plan. That he's seen the oppression of his people and he will deliver them.

And he will bless them as well. And then the unlikely happens. God calls Moses to be his representative to Pharaoh and the people of Egypt.

[12 : 33] And what does Moses do? He ultimately kicks into full-on doubt mode. Oh, whoa, whoa, whoa.

Surely you don't mean me, God. I'm not good at all the talking and representing side of things. Well, what if they don't believe me?

I mean, I'm a little unclear here. What if they don't listen to me? I mean, they're going to have all kinds of questions. What do I say? I often imagine God sighing when we resist his call.

He knows our insecurities before we even think them. Let alone say them out loud. And here Moses is standing in front of a burning bush through which God is speaking directly to him.

And Moses still has to ask, So when I go to them, who should I say sent me? God's patience and grace towards us are so stunning, aren't they?

[13 : 42] After God has revealed his plan, we read about Moses' insecurity in Exodus 3, 13 to 15. Let's read that together.

Then Moses said to God, If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, The God of your fathers has sent me to you.

And they ask me, What is his name? What shall I say to them? God said to Moses, I am who I am. And he said, Say this to the people of Israel.

I am has sent me to you. Next slide, please. Thank you. God also said to Moses, Say this to the people of Israel.

The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob has sent me to you. This is my name forever.

[14 : 43] And thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations. When God tells Moses that his name is, I am that I am, the translation here is Yahweh.

And it means the self-existent one. God uses his covenant name with his covenant people.

And despite his reluctance, despite his own perception of his inadequacy, God chooses Moses as his representative.

I've often wondered, was Moses genuinely feeling like he wasn't well-suited for the job? Or was he making excuses? Moses. Scripture isn't clear about that, but it's crystal clear about something.

Moses was being stubborn and resisting God's call on his life. As we saw with Abraham a few weeks ago, God called Abraham and he went.

[15 : 57] Moses took a little more convincing, but he ultimately steps into God's call to lead the people in his plan to deliver them. You see, Moses felt inadequate, but God equipped him.

God even gave him the message to deliver to Pharaoh. Let my people go. Throughout scripture, we see how God's way most often involves equipping those he has called rather than calling those who are already equipped and suited to a given situation.

If you're not ready, if you're not willing, it doesn't mean God's not. Through his calling on our lives, through the way he chooses to use us, God is also using our obedience and the circumstances in which we find ourselves to shape us.

It's through the furnace of adversity, of pain, through life's challenges and setbacks that God is at work in you and in me.

He is refining us into the people that he has created us to be. My friends, be careful when you say the words, I could never or I would never, especially when it comes to what God might ask of you.

[17 : 44] Because God might just call you to do the very thing you're sure would never show up on the radar of your life. Lord, I don't really feel called to be a pastor.

That's not your plan for me, is it? Looks like it is. That's my story. When God calls you, trust him and obey him.

Next slide. As we continue, this is one of my favorite scenes, one of my favorite movies of all time, The Ten Commandments. I remember watching it on TV when I was a kid and I've seen it a bajillion times and I'm going to watch it again this afternoon, I bet now.

Moses and Aaron are sent to Pharaoh to deliver God's ultimatum, but Pharaoh stands his ground. The challenge is on.

God also reveals his power through the deliverance of his people by bringing ten plagues against the gods of Egypt. The plagues are described in detail in Exodus 7-13.

[18 : 59] And as you may know, it began with a competition between Moses' brother Aaron casting his staff down for God to transform it into a serpent and Pharaoh's magicians conjuring serpents of their own.

A bit of a contest of snakes and adders. Come on. Ha ha. It's important to recognize that in Moses' time there were no atheists.

No atheists. People either believed in God or gods. The Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, and other cultures at the time were polytheists.

And to be clear, polytheists means that they believed in a pantheon of gods, many gods, each of whom had a specific role or domain.

And as we know, the Hebrews believed in one god. God. And so in some ways, the question, at least for the Egyptians, was, who is the most powerful God?

[20 : 09] So what was the point of these plagues? Well, obviously, they were intended to intimidate the Egyptians, intimidate them into letting the Israelites go.

But more than that, the plagues were signs that God alone is God. The signs were meant for the Egyptians, but they were also, I think, meant for the Israelites as well.

We'll read another verse together. In Ezekiel 20, verse 7, God recounts his promise to the Israelites. Let's read this together. And I said to them, cast away the detestable things your eyes feast on, every one of you, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt.

I am the Lord your God. So we see here that the Israelites themselves had begun to worship Egyptian gods.

It makes you wonder, doesn't it, why would they do that? That seems like a bad choice. Was it to fly under the radar somehow?

[21 : 23] Or to please their Egyptian captors or simply to blend into society and not stand out? Let that sink in for a moment.

We may not have literal gods like Zeus or Mercury or Anubis that we worship, but what other things are there in our lives that take our attention away from God, take priority over God, and keep us from pursuing a deeper relationship with him and his word.

It's worth thinking about. Back to Moses and Aaron. Meanwhile, once God begins to bring the plagues, the Egyptian magicians, say that ten times fast, seem to bring a match every time.

Turning staffs to snakes, water to blood, they even produce frogs. So it seems to me, I don't know about you, but a more logic approach for Pharaoh's magicians would have been to cancel out God's miracles or to somehow minimize their effect rather than somehow making them larger.

It just doesn't seem to work. And yet it's clear in Scripture that they didn't seem to have that power. And initially, Pharaoh scoffs at Moses, scoffs at his God and his power, but our God has just begun.

[22 : 52] Throughout the account of the plagues, we read many times about this phrase, the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, whether on his own or by God intervening to make that happen.

So what does it mean that Pharaoh's heart was hardened? Hardening your heart means that even though you see clear evidence of something, even though you see the evidence of the hand of God at work, you still refuse to accept his word and submit to his will.

Your heart is hard. It means to resist God by showing a lack of gratitude, by showing disobedience and not having the fear of the Lord, as we've talked about that reverence and respect for God and his judgments.

Hardened people say with Pharaoh as he does in Exodus 5, verse 2, who is the Lord that I should obey his voice? How arrogant.

We read throughout this account that in some cases, though, God acted to harden Pharaoh's heart. We read that in Scripture.

[24 : 13] So does that mean somehow that Pharaoh wasn't actually at fault for his actions? Was God making Pharaoh falsely persecute the Israelites when he actually may have wanted to go easier on them?

Not at all. Pharaoh's heart, you see, was already hardened against the Israelites and their God. God's action only served to expose those intentions of Pharaoh.

that he had all along. The Lord gave Pharaoh more than enough evidence and opportunity to convince him that the God of the Hebrews was the true and living God.

But Pharaoh chose to ignore that evidence and continued to turn from God. To briefly recount the plagues, and you can do this for leisurely Sunday afternoon reading, this included water turning to blood in Exodus 7, 14 to 24, frogs, Exodus 7, 25 to 8, 15, gnats or lice, depending on the description, Exodus 8, verses 16 to 19, flies, Exodus 8, verses 20 to 32, pestilence of livestock, Exodus 9, verses 1 to 7, boils, Exodus 9, 8 to 12.

Would you be letting them go by now? I would. A thunderstorm of hail and fire, Exodus 9, 13 to 35, locusts, Exodus 10, verses 1 to 20, and darkness for three days, Exodus 10, 21 to 29.

[26 : 06] Commentator Warren Wiersbe says, the people of Egypt had been irritated by the first six plagues designed to get under their skin, and their land and possessions had been devastated by the next two plagues.

The ninth plague, the three days of darkness, had set the stage for the most dreadful plague of all, when the messengers of death would visit the land.

Moses had warned Pharaoh over and over. God has shown his mighty power over and over, but Pharaoh still resisted and refused to relent.

And then the tenth plague came. Death. It's important for us to recognize that this tenth plague not only revealed God's power in perhaps the most definitive way possible, but it also pointed again to his plan.

As we read in the Bible, the Hebrews were instructed to spread blood on the door frames of their houses so that death would pass over their families.

[27 : 26] And so we see here again that the shedding of blood is not only a critical element of this account, but an ongoing central theme to the story.

When we began this morning, I shared a story about an attorney and a Texas farmer. Are you at a cowboy boot moment in your life?

Do you need a nudge? or even a swift kick to get you back on track? We, my friends, are all in slavery to sin.

And death, the destroyer, is coming. Just as it did for the Egyptians. And we need the blood of a lamb, just like the Israelites did.

Where will we get it? The Bible says in John 1 29, behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

[28 : 38] Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 5 verse 7, for Christ, our Passover lamb has been sacrificed. one of the biggest clues in the story is in the deliverance, the blood of a lamb.

Ask in faith for the blood of Jesus to be put on the doorframe of your soul. My friends, the deliverance from sin is free, but you must ask for it.

You must humble yourself. If you've never asked God to apply the blood of Jesus to your life, do that now.

And if you have asked God into your life before, whether that was a year ago or 40 years ago, pray this prayer again this morning with renewed commitment and conviction.

prayer with me silently as I lead us all in prayer, asking God for deliverance through Jesus Christ. Let's pray. Dear God, I know that I'm a sinner and there's nothing that I can do to save myself.

[30 : 00] I confess my complete helplessness to forgive my own sin or to work my way to heaven. At this moment, I trust Christ alone as the one who bore my sin when he died on the cross.

I believe that he did all that will ever be necessary for me to stand in your holy presence. I thank you that Christ was raised from the dead as a guarantee of my own resurrection.

As best I can, I now transfer my trust to him. I'm grateful that he's promised to receive me despite many of my sins and failures.

Father, I take you at your word. I thank you that I can face death now that you are my savior. Thank you for the assurance that you will walk with me through the deep valley.

And thank you for hearing this prayer. In Jesus' name, Amen.