

Blessing and Bitterness

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 04 September 2022

Preacher: James Ross

[0 : 00] Please have a seat. And let's once again hear God's Word, this time in the Old Testament book of Exodus.

Up until just before Christmas, we're going to look together at the first 15 chapters of this wonderful book that tells us so much about our great God.

So let's hear God's Word in Exodus chapter 1. These are the names of the sons of Israel who went to Egypt with Jacob, each with his family.

Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah, Issachar, Zebulun and Benjamin, Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher. The descendants of Jacob numbered 70 in all.

Joseph was already in Egypt. Now Joseph and all his brothers and all that generation died, but the Israelites were exceedingly fruitful, they multiplied greatly, increased in numbers and became so numerous that the land was filled with them.

[1 : 02] 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. Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous.

And if war breaks out, we'll join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country. So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor. And they built Pithom and Ramesses 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. 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. The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shipra and Pua, 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. 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?

[2 : 23] 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. 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. Amen. So we're going to begin this series.

And I hope as we will hopefully we'll eventually get to chapter 40. We will recognize that in the book of Exodus, we discover the God who makes himself known. And we will see him making himself known in very different ways.

Now, the book of Exodus tells us about the mission of God, which by extension becomes the mission of the church. And so we discover in the Bible and in our world that God is on a mission.

[3 : 27] God has a purpose. And his purpose ultimately is to make his glory and his goodness known. And so that he would save all those he has called to himself.

And so the Bible is full of revelation. God revealing himself as creator, as ruler over all things, as redeemer, ultimately revealing himself in his son, the Lord Jesus.

And so God's mission in the book of Exodus, as we'll see, is very much to make himself known. To make himself known to his people. That they would come to recognize him as their redeemer and their savior.

And that they would come to know their covenant Lord. That they would recognize that he is the holy God that they might worship and obey him.

But also we need to understand God isn't just making himself known to his own people and for the good of his own people. He's also doing that for the nations around them. That they too might know the one true God.

[4 : 33] Perhaps especially in contrast to Pharaoh and the false gods that we see in the book of Exodus. So Exodus is a wonderful book. It's a wonderful book to help us as a church to know who God is.

And it's a helpful reminder to us of what is God's purpose in the world. Therefore what is God's purpose for our lives and for our church. That we too might be part of this mission.

And Exodus 1 is a really helpful chapter to introduce us to so many things. A couple of things at very least. It reminds us once again to ask the question that with all these terrible things that we see happening in Genesis 1.

And with all the terrible things that we see happening in our own world today. What is people's greatest need? We thought about that already this morning. But isn't it interesting if we look at Exodus chapter 1.

We can very much map so many of these negative qualities into our world today. There are still paranoid tyrants and dictators who want to rule with oppression and fear.

[5 : 39] There is still the problem of racism and the fear of the other. There is still the reality of people trafficking and human slavery. There is still oppression.

There is still the desire among some for ethnic cleansing. But here's the question for us to think about. If we had the capacity to fix all that.

If we could bring sort of peace and an end to hostility. Peace between people groups. But those people didn't have Jesus. Would that be enough?

And I think when as Christians we ask the question. That way it helps us to get to the root of all the problems. People's greatest need ultimately.

Is to know their God. To know their God as Savior in the Lord Jesus. But this chapter also addresses a question that Christians will likely face.

[6 : 41] At some point perhaps even today. If God is for me in blessing. Why is it that I suffer? And why is it that I know bitterness?

And again Exodus 1 is going to begin to point us towards hope. In our covenant keeping God. So we've got two things to think about from this chapter. Very simply we're going to think about blessing.

And we're going to think about bitterness. First of all in the first seven verses. Let's think about blessing. But before we get into our text.

Just to help our boys and girls. Do you know boys and girls who wrote the book of Exodus? I won't ask you to shout it out. But it's helpful to know that Moses wrote the book of Exodus.

And Moses also wrote the book of Genesis. So when we read Exodus. We want to read it as a continuing story. God is still at work.

[7 : 38] And there are at least two ways that we can see this. First of all. Key verse. Chapter 7. Chapter 7. Verse 7. Look at verse 7 with me in Exodus chapter 1.

The Israelites were exceedingly fruitful. They multiplied greatly. Increased in numbers. And became so numerous that the land was filled with them. Moses has already written using that language in the book of Genesis.

So we turn to Genesis chapter 1 and verse 28. God having made mankind in his own image. We're told God blessed them and said to them.

Be fruitful and increase in number. Fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish and the sea and the birds in the sky. And over every living creature that moves on the ground. People created as image bearers.

Created then to fill the earth. To rule for God. To spread his glory and his knowledge. And so the point then of Exodus chapter 1 verse 7.

[8 : 42] Is that despite their slavery. God is still working out that mission. Since creation. His desire and his plan has not changed. He still wants to fill the earth with the knowledge of his glory.

And he's going to do that through the captive people of Israel. Who will in the fullness of God's time be set free. God is still working to bless. Even when they're in captivity.

That it starts with a genealogy is significant too. So it begins with that list of the family of Jacob. That we discover this family of 70.

And that's significant. Because again when we go back to the book of Genesis. We remember that it's to this family. That God has made covenant promises to. So we might be familiar with Genesis chapter 12.

The promise that God made to Abraham. So let me read verse 2. And see that we can see the connection. God promises. I will make you into a great nation.

[9 : 44] 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 on earth.

Will be blessed through you. So when we get to this genealogy. We discover well here's a family of 70. We understand that God is continuing to work out that promise.

That they are becoming that family. Who know God's blessing. That great nation. Who ultimately are going to bless others. By showing and telling them of the Lord.

Again I think it's helpful for us. To think about who were the first hearers. Of the book of Exodus. It's not us.

Sitting here in the 21st century. Rather it was Israel in the wilderness. And one of the things that we discover about Israel. Is that they most likely had lost a sense of their history.

[10 : 46] So here is this nation now of one million people. They're discovering. Wow we came from this one family. And we came from God's faithfulness.

So God is blessing. Them in Egypt. Now before we make an application for ourselves. There's one more thing on the question of blessing.

That I think is important for us to recognize. Again boys and girls. Let me give you a challenge here. Can you find. The name of God in here.

Can you find the name of the Lord in here. And while you're scanning. And it's going to be a fruitless exercise. That'll give you a wee clue. In the book of Genesis.

Moses has used God's personal covenant name. The Lord. 175 times. But here. It's absent. When Moses is telling us about the midwives.

[11 : 46] We're told about God being kind to them. And God acting. But it seems as though. In the passage of time. Between Genesis and Exodus.

While these slaves are being kept. And are being cared for by God. As God is keeping his promises. They seem to know very little of him. And what becomes really clear.

Clear. Is that their great need. Is for God to reveal his name. For God to remind them of who he is. Who he is for them.

What he is like. The promises that he has made. All that he will do for them. And that comes. In chapter three. So come back. In a couple of weeks. And we'll get there. But just for us to know.

As we think about this blessing. That we see in these first seven verses. And to just pull back a little. Just to remind ourselves. Of what we said at the beginning. That God is concerned.

[12 : 42] For his own glory. That is his great mission. That's his desire. For our lives personally. That's his desire. For our church. That's his desire.

Within the world. Ross Blackburn. An Old Testament scholar. Puts it this way. The mission of God. Is God's commitment. To be known for who he is. Among his people. And through them.

Among all peoples. So perhaps one of the things. That we can usefully do. Is think. What does that mean for you. For me. For our church.

That God is committed. To tell people. Who he truly is. And one way he's going to do that. Is through his people. The church. One of the things I did. Over my sabbatical.

Was to take a look at our. Mission statement. And to rework it. And to simplify it. So now if you go onto our website. You look at our mission statement. It simply says. We exist to love God. To love people.

[13 : 39] And to make disciples. And to bring together. The great commandment. And the great commission. Because any church. In any generation. In any setting.

We all have the same mission. We are called. To worship. The one true and living God. As he's found in his word. We are called. To know God. As he reveals himself.

In his word. We are called. To bear witness. To him. In our lives. And we're called. To be engaged. In global. Mission.

Because. God deserves glory. Because knowing him. Is our greatest good. Is everybody's greatest good. So God is concerned.

For his own glory. And we're going to see that. Come time and time again. In the book of Exodus. Well that's. The blessing. That we see. Well we'll see some. From the midwives.

[14 : 36] But let's think about. Bitterness. From verse 8. To verse 22. And it dominates. Much of this first chapter.

But before again. We get into the text. So I'm from Sky. For those of you. Who haven't met me. And because I'm from Sky. I get lots of tourist. Information questions.

I love those questions. Because I love. To share. Sky with other people. My favorite. Question over the summer holidays. I still haven't got to the. The bottom of. Where the person was coming from.

And asking it. So it started. Fairly naturally. We want to hire a van. To travel there. With a family. And to tour around. And then the question came. Are the roads. Normally surfaced.

I've never had that question. And it made me wonder. In people's. Imagination. From other parts of the world. What the roads. And Sky. Must be like. Is it like the moon.

[15 : 30] Is it dirt track. I have no idea. But you know. It's a great question. Because. This is somebody. Who obviously. Wanted to have. The right expectations. For the journey. That he was about to make. You've got to make sure.

That you're prepared. Right expectations. For a journey. Make all the difference. Well if Christian life. Is a journey. What kind of journey.

Is it? What's it like? Is it. The journey. Of the. The luxury. Cruise liner. Where everything. Is smooth. And plain sailing. And we're well served.

And it's all wonderful. And nice. Or is the Christian life. More like the fishing boat. Out in the stormy seas. But where Jesus is in the boat.

And so one of the things. Exodus 1 does for us. And the whole Bible does for us. Is it provides us with reality. So for Israel. And for us.

[16 : 28] We will discover time and again. That blessing and bitterness. Often come. Together. That's why we read.

That section. Of Paul. Paul talking about his own. Testimony. You know. Sorrowful. And yet. Rejoicing. We could go to.

The letter of James. Addressed to the twelve tribes. Scattered among the nations. And what's the first thing he does. Is he prepares them. To face many trials. And to face them joyfully.

With faith in the Lord Jesus. Think about. The message of Jesus himself. Who spoke. To his followers. About their need to carry. Their crosses.

Who very honestly. Said to them. If they hate me. They will absolutely. Hate you too. And so. Exodus one. Reminds us of that.

[17 : 24] Now. Before we ask. What was the particular. Bitterness. That Israel was experiencing. We need to ask ourselves. Why? And I hope we'll understand. Why it's important to see.

Why. Things got difficult. For them. So look with me. At verses. Eight. And nine. Where we are told. 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. Come.

We must deal. Shrewdly. With them. So the bitterness comes. Because a new king comes. A new pharaoh comes.

And this pharaoh. Has no knowledge. Or no concern. For Joseph. Who had rescued. Egypt. And many other nations.

[18 : 20] At the same time. And by extension. This new pharaoh. Has no knowledge. Or concern. For Joseph's God. God. And what we see.

Is that God. Has blessed. The people. By making them numerous. And pharaoh. Chooses to oppose. Israel. Because. God has made them numerous.

So he is deliberately. Reacting. Against. God's. Blessing. Of his people. And there is a lesson. For us there. That God's.

Purposes. God's blessing. God's people. Will be opposed. Will at times. Be regarded. As a threat. To those. Who are not living.

In line. With. God's. Will. Whether that's our word. Whether that's our lifestyle. That seems so different. Often that provokes. A response. Sometimes that draws people.

[19 : 15] Towards Jesus. But sometimes. It leads to hostility. The best example. Of that of course. Is Jesus himself. God's.

Greatest gift. To give. His one. And only son. Jesus. Who came. To save. To seek. And to save. The lost. But he is despised.

And he's rejected. And he's killed. And we see this. This kind of. Extreme response. To the people. Of Jesus. Still. Where there is. Persecution.

In different parts. Of the world. In Nigeria. Where there are. Gangs of terrorists. Who are attacking. Churches. And killing. Christians. In places.

Like the Yemen. Where. Christians are routinely. Thrown. Into prison. And treated. Harshly. And I think.

[20 : 07] One thing. Whenever we. We read. Of these kind of. Circumstances. In the Bible. It should remind us. Psalm 124. Should remind us. To. To pray. For our brothers.

And sisters. Around the world. To know endurance. To know their God. In the midst. Of that suffering. To be able to live. And to die. If necessary. For his glory. But that's why.

They're experiencing. Bitterness. Because Pharaoh. Simply is opposing. The will of God. For his people. Now. How do the people. Experience bitterness. What does it look like. Under this wicked Pharaoh.

Well. First of all. There's the slave labor. Now. The brick making. Verse 11. Onwards. They put slave masters. Over them. To oppress them. With forced labor. And they built.

Pithom. And Ramesses. As store cities. For Pharaoh. So. So men are being taken. From their families. Being taken. From their farms. First of all. Being taken. To build huge cities.

[21 : 02] They're given. The very lowest. Of social standing. In the hope. That that will. Prevent any social uprising. They're being worked. Ruthlessly. That's a point.

Emphasized. In verses. Thirteen. And fourteen. Maybe you heard it. As we read it together. But let me read them again. The Egyptians came to dread the Israelites.

And worked them ruthlessly. 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. Moses is at pains. To point out. That Israel is being forced. To serve a bad master.

And their great need. Is not just. And it's important for us to recognize. Their great need. Isn't just to have freedom. From this master. But they would have freedom.

[22 : 00] To serve God. The good and gracious master. Their covenant Lord. So that's part of. The bitterness that they experience.

The slave labor. But then. There is the state. Sponsored. Murder. Pharaoh issues. Two. Utterly shocking requests. Doesn't he?

In verse 16. He turns. To these Hebrew. Midwives. Who have trained. And learned. How to. Bring life. Into the world. And to protect life.

And they are asked. When you're helping the Hebrew women. During childbirth. If you see that the baby is a boy. Kill him. And then in verse 22.

That same request. Is made to Pharaoh's own citizens. Every Hebrew boy that is born. You must throw. Into.

[22 : 55] The Nile. Time and again. We're going to see that the Pharaoh. In Exodus. Represents. The anti-God figure. He stands. Against God.

He is. Opposed. To God. And this anti-God figure. Is also profoundly. Anti-life. He is against. Life. And will take. Any.

Measures. Necessary. To. Protect. Himself. But it's wonderful. That in the darkness. Of this situation.

Against the dark. Backdrop. Of this command. That the light. Of faith. That the light. Still shines. From these. Two. Ladies. Most likely.

Two senior. Midwives. It seems. Like in verse 19. There must be a team. Of. Midwives. Working. In. The area. Where.

[23 : 49] Israel. Israel. Israel. Israel. Israel. Israel. Was. Settled. And. They're a wonderful. Example. To us. Of. Courageous. Faith. And also. Of surprising. Saviors.

Just as. We'll see. In the next chapter. And Moses. Preserved. By a courageous. Mother. And they receive. Blessing. From God. Don't they? Verse 21.

We're told. Because the midwives. Feared God. He gave them. Families. Of. Their own. God shows. Grace. To them. In response.

To. Their. Faithfulness. Their loyalty. To God. At great. Risk. And it's wonderful. That their stories. Are recorded.

That their names. Are given. That they are. Honored. For their faith. But what we see. As. As. This chapter.

[24 : 44] Closes. Is that God. Has been blessing. His people. Though it seems. Like perhaps. They are not. Very much. Aware of him. But those people. Are also knowing. Bitterness. From.

Pharaoh. And so. We find ourselves. As readers. Waiting. For God. To make. Himself. Known. And he is. And he will. A couple of things.

From this. Section. First. To acknowledge. And that God's people. Experience.

Triumphant. Brokenness. There was a phrase. I picked up in. A day. Norton book recently.

Triumphant. Brokenness. There is triumph. For.

The believer. We know. That God's plans. Are unbreakable. We know. That God's promises. Are sure. We know.

[25 : 40] That our salvation. In Christ. Victory. In him. Is. Guaranteed. So. There is triumph. And there is triumph. To come. But yet.

We also know. In our experience. Brokenness. That we live. In a fallen world. And we are weak. And broken. Sinners.

And we also know. The reality. Of threats. And opposition. Like everybody else. We know. The reality. Of suffering.

Triumphant. Brokenness. Is a defining mark. Of the Christian. And so. Perhaps. We find. Ourselves. In that situation.

Where life. Often. Feels dark. And we find ourselves. Asking the question. Why? Why? We find. Laments.

[26 : 33] In. The Old Testament. Where believers. Are asking themselves. Why? Why are things like this? We have been loyal. To. Our God.

We are. In the covenant. We expect life. To look like this. But it's turned out. Quite different. Why? Perhaps. We have that. Somebody once said. If we had. God's perspective.

All of our questions. We'd stop. But we don't have that perspective. And so often. Those questions remain. But again.

As we. As we look back. And we remember. This is an ongoing story. There's certain things. That we know. To be true. So we've seen already. For Israel. They are knowing.

And experiencing. God's blessing. Even while. They are slaves. But more than that. We can go back. One more time.

[27 : 28] To the book of Genesis. And again. To words. That God delivered. To Abraham. As he entered. Into covenant. With him. Genesis 15. And verse 13.

We discover something. Really important. Then the Lord said. To Abraham. Know for certain. That for 400 years.

Your descendants. Will be strangers. In a country. Not their own. And that they will be. In a country. In a country. In a country. In a country. In a country. And ill treated. There. What is happening.

Is not outside. Of God's control. But rather stands. As part of God's. Plan. Of course. There is mystery. And we ask why. But we see. This is part of God's plan.

And we can go further. Verse 14. Of Genesis 15. To words of promise. And hope. But I will punish. The nation. They serve as slaves.

[28 : 26] And afterwards. They will come out. With great possessions. There is that promise. Given to Abraham. That this would turn out. Well.

And this is the reality. That we're going to see. As we get to. Genesis. Rather. Exodus 15. As we see. The people. Leaving Egypt.

With all the treasures. Of Egypt. God going with them. And our need. As Christians. Is to hold on. To the reality. That it's presented.

There in Genesis 15. That's worked out. In the book. Of Exodus. That God is. Always. At work. He always. Knows. What he's doing. He works.

In his time. In his way. And for his. Good. Purposes. It's like. Those wonderful. Precious words.

[29 : 22] From Romans. Eight. And verse. Twenty. Eight. And we know. That in all things. God works. For the good. Of those who love him. Who've been called.

According to his purpose. So God's people. Will experience. Triumphant. Brokenness. But the other lesson. To learn. Is that. Everybody. Needs to choose.

The right master. So one of the things. We're going to see. Again and again. In the book of Exodus. Is that there is Pharaoh. And there is God. And Pharaoh. Wants to oppose God. And Pharaoh. Would gladly rule. As God. But he's a bad master. As we saw. Jesus. Said it. To those. Listening. You cannot serve. Two masters.

There he was expressing. You cannot. Serve God. And. Money. In Exodus 1. We meet Pharaoh. That who is making. Forcing the people.

[30 : 17] To serve him. To show loyalty to him. He's incredibly demanding. And cruel. And destructive. But it's also quite instructive.

As a picture of. Idolatry. When we think about idolatry. Not as a statue. But of. Anything that we give our hearts to.

Anywhere where our hope is placed. That is not God. Those things that drive. That drive us. There is a battle. For all of us. In our hearts.

Who will be our master. Where do we find the battle lines. Drawn in our own hearts. Perhaps. As Jesus said. It will be money. Perhaps power. Or success. Perhaps education.

Or sport. Popularity. There are many things. That will demand our time. Will claim our energy. And devotion. And they will make promises. I can give you life. I can make you happy.

[31 : 16] I can complete you. But anything less than God. Is too small. To keep those promises. And will not deliver in the end. And do not offer true life.

And so we are invited. To consider. Book of Exodus. Calls us to consider. Who really is. Our master. Come to Jesus. Is the message of the Bible.

The true and good master. While Pharaoh. Worked his. The people of Israel. Ruthlessly. Jesus. Came. And he said. Come to me.

And I will give you rest. And we meet Pharaoh. This. Terrible king. Who would kill. The firstborn. Who would kill. All the boys.

And we find Jesus. Coming to be the true. Passover lamb. Dying in the place. Of his people. So that we might truly live.

[32 : 14] We find Pharaoh. The bad master. Fighting against. The blessing of God. Fighting against. The mission of God. How different that is. From Jesus. Who comes. On the mission of God.

To give us the blessing. Of knowing. And enjoying God. For now. And for all eternity. So we will choose. To live under Jesus as Lord.

Jesus the good master. To recognize that we were made. To serve him. And to know. And to enjoy him. Let's pray. Together.

Briefly. Father God. We thank you. For the book of Exodus. Thank you. For the many ways. In which we can discover.

Who you are. What you are like. And what your purposes. And plans are. In this world. Lord. We thank you. For the way.

[33 : 08] That behind the scenes. You are working. To keep your promises. To be faithful. To your people. To bless them. Lord. We thank you. That that reality. Holds true.

We confess. That sometimes. We can't. See you working. Sometimes. We don't understand. Why things happen. The way we do. You. I give us the ability.

To trust you. Give us the ability. To. Place. Our hope. In you. Keep us. From despair.

Keep us. From bitterness. We pray. Lord. We thank you. That unlike Pharaoh. Jesus. Is such. A gracious. And a good. Master. May you cause.

All of us. To be drawn. To him. To fix. Our eyes. On him. That as we go. Into this. New week. With all kinds of. Opportunities.

[34 : 03] And situations. And circumstances. Some of which. We can anticipate. Many of which. Might take us. By surprise. Lord. Help us. To go. Knowing that you.

Are with us. And that you. Are for your people. We pray. In Jesus name. Amen. Now. Let's.

Close. Singing. The simple. But wonderful. Little hymn. Jesus. Strong. And kind. So let's stand.

Together. And sing. God. entropy.czy■■ In Jesus name. I promise you. Ha affected the!!! I am right. Honest in Jesus name. My fault.
Norah. Please listen. Nice. educational cemetery. Launch. Season.illar My advice. You are out. My choice. Giving you. To be idle. For more. gracious ■■■boe. I was out of power. To be idle. He was over. Of course. Un■■■■■■. His salud needs to be idle.■rs. Don't worry. To be idle.
[34 : 55] He was out. Gil■ period. You have consent. Yes. He has returned.install your own. To be idle.imag■ hak.