

Yahweh remembers His afflicted people

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Preacher: Dave Bott

[0 : 0 0] Today we're reading from Exodus 2, 23 to 3, 15.

In terms of context, God's people are enslaved in Egypt. All their baby boys have been thrown to the Nile, and any hope in Moses has gone as he has fled to Midian after killing an Egyptian.

During those days, the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help.

Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God, and God heard their groaning. God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel, and God knew.

Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.

[1 : 0 1] And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire, out in the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed.

And Moses said, I will turn aside to see this great sight. Why? The bush is not burned. When the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, Moses, Moses!

And he said, Here I am. Then he said, Do not come near. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.

And he said, I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Then the Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

[2 : 2 4] And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppressed them. Come, I will send you to Pharaoh, that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.

But Moses said to God, Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt? He said, But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you that I have sent you.

When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain. 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 then 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 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.

[3 : 37] This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations. Well, good morning, everyone.

Will you pray with me as we come to God's word? Father, I pray that you would capture each of our hearts, that we would be invited by your word, and believe that our deepest need is to know you, the God who is there.

So I pray that you would be speaking through your word now. I pray that whatever would distract us, I pray that you would remove that, and help us sit under your word this morning.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, do you think of God as simply the ruler of all things, or do you know him personally?

Do you know him by name? Do you see salvation as kind of like a barcode ticket in your Google wallet that you just got in your pocket, ready for when you've reached the pearly gates?

[5 : 01] Or do you see yourself as saved from the power of sin to enslave you, to obey what sin tells you?

Do you see yourself as saved from the penalty of God's judgment? Is the lamb's blood critical to your salvation?

Is the lamb's blood, that substitute's blood, define your identity? Do you struggle with why the Lord, if you're one of his people, why would the Lord lead you into what feels like a wilderness, into really difficult trials?

Why would he do that? Do you understand grace as not having to fuss about obedience and disobedience? Or do you have the opposite problem, that you don't think you're worthy of grace until you obey?

Do you see salvation only in terms of from, from slavery, from death? Or do you see the goal of salvation? Do you understand what salvation is for?

[6 : 24] It's for a heavenly calling, to be God's treasured possession, to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Do you see the for of salvation, the blazing glory of Yahweh, making a way to dwell among his people?

As we come to the book of Exodus, let's just consider a really big picture structure of the book to consider some of the massive things we're going to be dwelling in for the next two months.

The first part of the story, redemption, salvation. What is it? What does it mean? Then we've got the law as a response to salvation, and then we've got the goal of all this, is God tabernacling with his people.

I know I've covered a lot of ground there, and I apologise for just so many thoughts, but Exodus is just huge. It is huge. And I hope you're excited.

I hope we have a sense of treading on holy ground as we come to dwell in this book for two months. We're going to be flying through Exodus over these next nine weeks.

[7 : 40] Can I just suggest, can I urge, that why don't you use your personal devotions, use family devotions, let's just sit in this powerful book, because I don't have time to cover all the details.

Well, I'm hoping that wet your appetite to some extent. But as we get into the book, there's a massive unsettling question as we open Exodus.

It's a question that we can feel keenly today as we look at our own lives, as we look at the state of the church, not just our church, but also more broadly the state of the church and the world.

And it's what has become of God's promises. Where are you, God, if you promised all these things? Earlier this year, I think this is the Holy Spirit's planning, not the elders, but we finished at Genesis 15.

Maybe we should have finished Genesis, but Genesis 15, where the Lord makes an unconditional promise to Abraham. If you remember that, his promise arises from God's free decision.

[8 : 56] Abraham doesn't merit it. He's not bargaining with God to make it happen. It's God himself walking between those torn animals. Do you remember that picture?

Abraham doesn't walk through. God alone walks through. And he's saying, I'm taking responsibility of my side of the covenant and your side of the covenant, Abraham. If you don't fulfill it or I don't fulfill it, may I become like these animals.

Unconditional promise. He's promised Abraham to be a great nation. And as we open the book, chapter 1, verse 7, we hear that the people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly.

They multiplied and grew exceedingly strong. So that the land was filled. It was swarming with them. But they're hardly a nation.

They're slaves of the most powerful nation in the world of that time. The new king, who's forgotten that Joseph saved Egypt and Joseph made Egypt rich, the new king is pathologically nervous about all these Hebrew fighting men.

[10 : 12] He could have made a treaty with them, as was common in ancient times. He could have made them a vassal state that gave them protections, but also they had obligations. He could have done that, but no.

He has a government-sponsored policy of persecution. He makes their work hard, and he's hoping that weakens them. They just keep multiplying.

It doesn't work. And so he orders the midwives to kill all the boys. You can let the girls live. Kill the boys. When that doesn't work, he makes it legal and commanding Egyptian people for infanticide to throw the boys into the Nile River.

I don't know if you want to pause and imagine that. You probably don't. We don't have enough vomit bags. We're not on an airplane here. This is a disgusting scenario, isn't it?

Where's your covenant promises, God? Where's the land flowing with milk and honey? They're powerless in a foreign land.

[11 : 27] Where's the blessing? Where's the thriving? Where's the cursing of those who curse Abraham? How is all the world going to be blessed through these chosen people if they themselves seem cursed?

Where's your promises? Well, we're not told all the reasons, but in Genesis 15, when he's making that unconditional promise, he does give his people a clear word.

Genesis 15, 13, 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. Now, I don't think Scripture actually answers like 400 years.

I'm not sure. I've got thoughts. You can talk to me later. But I think the main thing here is there's a clear word. Whatever chaos is going on, 400 years of pretty bad chaos in the church, in our lives, it might seem out of control, but the Lord is Lord of history.

[13 : 01] He keeps his word. He knows the beginning from the end. There's an anchor there. And I think as we open the book of Exodus, we also see in the early chapters God's hidden activity.

With Pharaoh's schemes of burdening the Egyptians, what happens? They keep multiplying.

We see God's hidden activity. I think we see God's hidden activity with the midwives. Most likely they're Hebrew midwives, given their names.

In the face of the most powerful man on earth, this is the guy who's ordered the killing of the boys, they know that he could execute them on the spot. They're giving an account for the fact that they've disobeyed his orders.

And they've got the audacity to say, because the Hebrew women are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them. Okay? And yet God protects them.

[14 : 06] I think that's amazing that they live. He protects them. More than that, we're told, he blesses them with families.

It's likely that this Pharaoh in history is, I don't know how to pronounce this, but Pharaoh Thutmose III, but Scripture never gives this Pharaoh a name. But we have these Hebrew women, we have their names.

They're honoured for all history. We see his hidden activity in blessing these faithful women.

And I suspect Exodus is setting up a divine principle that we see throughout Scripture, that God works his power and he works his plans through what is weak in the eyes of the world.

I think we see this in the women and in Moses. Pharaoh isn't afraid of the women. Let the girls live. He's afraid of the fighting men.

[15 : 15] But in these early chapters, the Lord seems to be working through the women who had no social power at that time. It's Moses' mother who hides Moses in the first place, risking her own life, then seems to scheme to, what do we do?

Puts her in the place where Pharaoh's daughter comes along. It's Pharaoh's daughter who gives permission to be raised by a Hebrew nurse who just happens to be his mother.

It's a lovely touch there. And who knows what values and identity she instilled, his mum instilled in him. He's raising him. God is working through what Pharaoh saw as weak to bring down Pharaoh's courts.

We're later told that when the Lord gets the victory in the end, it's going to be the women who ask their neighbours for gold and silver and going to plunder the Egyptians. It's not the fighting men.

And I think we see this principle of the Lord working through what the world counts as weak in Moses as well. He's given every Egyptian privilege and education.

[16 : 38] He's in the prime of manhood in these early chapters, coming up to 40 years old. I've got to say that now because I'm approaching 40. He's in the prime of his life. But how the Lord would use him is not how Moses or we would expect him to use him.

You probably know the story well. He sees his brother being wronged and it's his strength, Moses' strength, to strike the Egyptian, avenging and delivering the oppressed.

Now the Hebrews could have kept this quiet. They should have been excited. This guy who's grown up in the courts is fighting on our behalf. What's God going to do through him? But it's his own people who reject him.

And Pharaoh hears the rumours and Moses has to run away. All his position and power and strength in the prime of life, it vanishes in a moment. He's a fugitive in a foreign land.

And I think the picture we have of him, he's a shadow of the man he was. He's a failure. He's rejected. He's afraid.

[17 : 54] He settles. He names his child after being a foreigner. He just settles in his lot. And he gets old.

He's 80. He's 80 now. He's powerless before Pharaoh. So what's become a God's covenant promise as well?

Whatever the chaos, he gives a clear word that he is Lord of history. We shouldn't doubt the fact that he's always at work. It might be very hidden.

And he loves, I take great comfort in this, he loves to use what is weak in the eyes of the world to work his power and his plan.

His foolishness is wiser than man's wisdom and his weakness is stronger than man's strength. We might not like God's pace of things, but we shouldn't doubt that he keeps his promises.

[19 : 00] Well, I wonder what in your life is, or in the church or in the world, what's making you ask that question?

What's become of your promises, God? Perhaps it's something you've used to pray for and you've just lost confidence to pray anymore.

Perhaps it's a person who you put confidence in and they ever let you down or the situation just seems a lost cause.

I want to be clear what I'm not saying.

I'm not saying we should go looking for God's hidden activity. I think we can read God's providence. If we try and do that, we can, in precise ways, we can get it terribly wrong.

[20 : 07] I'm not saying from the early chapters of Exodus that that's a blueprint for us to be looking for hints of God's hidden work. I think there's plenty that we can see and be thankful for.

An example of misreading God's providence is that there's a tragic example with a great giant of a man in church history, George Whitefield.

If you've heard his name, he was used by God in the Great Awakening. He had a boy and he named him John after John the Baptist because he had this strong impression that John would be a great preacher like him of this beautiful gospel, publicly baptising him and telling people about this word from God that he's had and his boy dies in infancy.

What's become of God's promises? What George Whitefield later convinced he needed, what you and I need and what Israel needed is to go deeper in knowing Yahweh, who he has revealed himself to be.

Don't go looking for the hidden messages. Look at who he has revealed himself to be at the burning bush because whatever doubts we have, they are decisively resolved in the book of Exodus.

[21 : 45] He's not hidden anymore. He's in your face, resolving any doubts we've got. We need to know Yahweh.

So, if you're in your Bibles, we'll be saying in chapter 3. When people talk about God, I think God is like this.

I think he's a forgiving, tolerant, compassionate God, or I think God is like that, or I think he's stern, I think he calls it whatever you think.

People talk like that, but we give the weather more respect than that. Like, I can wish that it's going to be 22 degrees and sunny, maybe a few clouds the rest of the week.

I can wish that overnight it's cold enough, the heat isn't keeping me awake at night. I can wish that all I want. Who cares? The weather's there. I've got to deal with it. God is there.

[22 : 57] Let's give him at least the respect of we give weather. The God who's really there is speaking and he uses fire to help Moses and to help us understand who he is, his name.

Now fire, we've all been close to a fire that's going out. Why is it going out? I'm stating the obvious here.

Because the fuel's burnt up that it's depending on. Or I was reading about a product you can use in housing to defend yourself against bushfires that's made out of straw.

Straw. That would just burn up, right? No, because it's compressed and there's no oxygen. So the fire just goes out once you remove the flame.

The point is obvious. Fire is dependent on fuel and oxygen and ignition. If you don't have those, there's no fire. Not this fire. The bush isn't burning.

[24 : 04] It's self-sufficient. Listen. Verse 14. God said to Moses, I am who I am.

This isn't his name yet but his name is built on these words. It's Hebrew. The verb is just to be so it's very difficult to translate. How do you translate that?

It's probably along the lines of this. It's being itself has sent you. Tell Israel that. Being. I am who I am.

Moses, you're dealing with absolute just being here. Now, here's a few things I think this means, and I doubt it fully captures it.

I am never had a beginning. He can't go out of being. He's utterly independent. All other beings, including the breath I'm using now, is totally dependent on I am.

[25 : 14] If he's not dependent, he's utterly free. He doesn't need anything outside of him. There's no constraints on him.

I am is constant in his character. He's not becoming. He's not developing. He's not progressing. He's the same yesterday, today, and forever. His character is stable.

I think it means I am is the absolute standard of truth and goodness and beauty. If he is ultimate reality, he is the ultimate standard of what is beautiful and what is good and what is true.

All this means that he is more worthy of our interests and our attention and our admiration and our enjoyment than all other beings and realities put together.

I don't know how you feel about this kind of God. You can't control this kind of God. It's a bit humbling, isn't it?

[26 : 35] Whatever ego I've got, there it goes, in the face of this God. Everything is a gift from this kind of God.

It's also incredibly liberating because it means I'm not the one holding my life together. I'm not the one holding this church together.

I'm not the one holding the world together. I'm not keeping it spinning. It's really liberating as well. Apparently, Martin Luther wrote to his worrying, anxious friend in a letter to Philip Melanchthon, let Philip cease to rule the world because I am.

I am runs the world. What does Pharaoh look like in comparison to him? All his authority.

Well, good luck, Pharaoh. If I am comes down to intervene. I think Israel's afflictions and their utter helplessness and their dashed hopes resonates with a lot of people's testimony of meeting the true God.

[28 : 00] It's often when we're at the end of our resources, it's at the end of ourselves, it's at the end of our confidence in people or society or government. That's when we meet the real God.

And the God who is real and personal reveals himself to us. He's personal.

We hear that the people are not just groaning under their affliction.

A new Pharaoh comes into play. Maybe they hoped the regime of slavery would end with a new Pharaoh, but it keeps going. And so they're moaning and groaning under the affliction.

And that's just natural, isn't it? But at the end of chapter 2, they do something more than just groan, which all people do that. They pray. They cry out.

[29 : 06] They look upward. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God and God heard their groaning. God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob.

God saw the people of Israel and God knew. He's personal. He knew.

It's a funny way of talking, isn't it? I think that's saying much more than he knew the facts of the situation. Because in Genesis, Old Testament, often knowing is intimate involvement.

Like Adam knew his wife, Eve. So I'm not saying it's sexual here. Much more than physical intimacy. The Lord is intimately involved.

He comes down and gets involved. He sees. He hears. And him remembering his covenant is not saying anything about his forgetfulness.

[30 : 10] It's like we saw with Noah in the flood. At the height of the flood, we hear that God remembered his covenant and that's when God acts to take the flood away.

God remembering his covenant means time to act. What prompts God to act? It's the prayers.

It's the prayers of his people. I have no idea how that works. God has given a clear word. But the time of fulfillment of that promise is responding to God's people praying.

I wish I believed that more. And we see it again and again through Scripture. In the exile, Daniel prays and they return from exile.

At the time of the birth of the Christ, who's praying? Simeon and Anna at the temple. Whatever we think of God's pace in acting and fulfilling his promise, prayer is effectual.

[31 : 20] The Egyptians wouldn't have seen it straight away. But it's effectual. Yahweh knows. He sees. He hears. He remembers.

He's personal. He remembers his covenant. Verse 15.

Being itself sent you. Tell them that, Moses. Verse 15. There's more to my name. God also said to Moses, Say this to the people of Israel.

Yahweh. 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. And thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.

Just in case you haven't heard this before, capital L-O-R-D is always the personal name of God when you're reading the Old Testament.

[32 : 21] It's over 6,800 times. He wants to be known by name. When we sing hallelujah, we're not just going praise some divine title.

We're praising his name. Yahweh. Hallelujah. We're praising his name. I don't usually call Emma wife.

Unless I'm trying to be playful. I call her by a name. He wants to be known by name. And he's a covenant-keeping God.

His name represents all he is. And at the heart of who he is, inseparable to who he is, is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He always acts on his covenant promises.

I think another way of saying it is, I work with the most unpromising material to bring about my promises. Abraham, who is a coward. Now he changes, God changes him.

[33 : 35] But he's also a coward. Dysfunctional Isaac. He's a dysfunctional father. You've got Jacob, who's a schemer and a con man. Now these guys all change through God's grace.

But now, and we're going to see this more next week, we've got failure feeling, rejected, doubting Moses. I work to keep my promises through pretty ordinary material.

He keeps his covenant. We don't see this in these verses, but I want to mention it now, given it's the start of our time in Exodus.

We should understand his name as tied with the whole book of Exodus. That he is Redeemer. That he is the covenant Lord.

That he provides the blood of the lamb. When we get to the Passover lamb, his name is all through that passage. That his purpose is to dwell with his people in the tabernacle.

[34 : 51] His name is tied to the events of Exodus. And his ultimate goal is that the whole world will know that God is Yahweh.

We hear this when he's speaking about Pharaoh 9.16. For this purpose I raised you up, Pharaoh, to show you my power so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth.

In chapter 14, verse 4, I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his hosts and the Egyptians shall know I am Yahweh. That's the purpose of this book.

It's the purpose of history. It's the purpose of the universe. It's the purpose of your life. Whether you know it or not. Is that the world would know that I would know that God is Yahweh.

The God of the Exodus. The final thing I want to draw our attention to in this passage is in verses 4 to 6.

[36 : 00] His goal is personal encounter and yet he's unapproachably holy. Yahweh attracts Moses' attention with the fire and calls him, Moses.

He calls him. He wants encounter. But then Moses comes and he goes, whoa, don't come near. And Moses hides his face afraid of God.

We're going to see it again when we get to Mount Sinai. God comes down and the people hear his voice and they're terrified. They can't come near. We're going to see it when Moses asks to see God's glory in chapter 34 and God says, I can't.

I'll kill you. I can't show you all I am. He wants personal encounter and yet, like fire is life-giving, it destroys.

The big question isn't why isn't the bush consumed? The big question is why isn't Moses consumed if we understand his holiness?

[37 : 21] We see a tension here that we're created to know this God. We're made to know him. Remember the Garden of Eden. We're made to not be afraid of this God and yet, because we've turned away, his presence is traumatic.

It's fatal. As one person put it, the human condition is we can't live with God and we can't live without him.

But Yahweh will make a way. We don't make a way. He makes a way. The book is going to end in the tabernacle, his glory dwelling, coming and filling.

At the centre of his people's camp is the tabernacle and God makes a way. He wants to be known and yet he's unapproachably holy but he'll make a way.

Well, after 400 years of slavery, whatever Israel's groans and doubts, what's become of God's promises, they were thrillingly put to rest at Exodus.

[38 : 42] Yahweh decisively makes himself known. He saves them from Egypt and he brings them to himself. But we're also going to see something else in Exodus that Israel had a deeper enslavement, worse than Pharaoh.

Yahweh intimately knew his people. He remembers his promise but his people keep turning away. They don't want to intimately know him. They don't remember his promises, his clear word.

It's that enslavement of the heart that keeps turning from the God who is there and wants to be known and has done everything for us to be known.

I wonder if you can resonate with that. We need a greater Exodus. Exodus 2.0. When we're asking the question what's become of God's promises we come to a man named Jesus who says in John 8.58 truly, truly, I say to you before Abraham I am.

We should read the gospel why Jesus came as the second Exodus. A greater revelation of Yahweh absolute being who knows us, who hears our prayers, who always acts according to his covenant promises so that the whole world will know him.

[40 : 35] to know Yahweh in Jesus is thrilling or it should be thrilling.

It should fill us with hope and it should call us to a heavenly calling to make him known. So whatever, can I just end by saying whatever is causing us to doubt God's promises, promises, the main thing we need is to know Yahweh and to know our calling to make him known in the situation you're in.

Will you pray with me? Let's pray. Father, as we walk through Exodus, these next few months, I pray that you would give us deeper insight into who you are and your great acts of salvation.

I pray that it might help us grasp more deeply who Jesus is and all you've done and the great riches of the inheritance you've bought for us through Jesus and the great calling to be your people and to make you known in whatever situation we're in.

Lord, please do this for us. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.