

And God Remembered

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[0 : 00] It was the 11th of September 2001 and the man was Pakistani in origin and Muslim in his faith.

He worked in the Twin Towers and managed to get out of them before they fell. And then in the panic he fled. And he found himself lying on his back looking up toward this massive cloud of dust and debris that was rapidly approaching.

And around the neck, his neck, he wore a pendant similar to a cross inscribed with an Arabic prayer for safety. And a man approached him. He had all the distinctive marks of a Hasidic Jew.

And he grasped the pendant and read out the Arabic and then stretched out his hand and said in a deep Brooklyn accent, Brother, if you don't mind, there is a cloud of glass coming at us.

Grab my hand and let's get the hell out of here. Now he helped the Arab man get up and together they ran without looking back. Now, friends, I don't know whether this story is apocryphal or not.

[1 : 08] It's circulated within days of that incident. But I must say, whether it's apocryphal or not, I'm not at all surprised about it. You see, although humans are capable of the most horrific and barbaric acts, just as they did on that day, they are also capable of the most extraordinary acts of human kindness, just as they did on that day.

And in today's story, we're going to see both of these things at work. We are going to see extraordinary barbarity. And we will see great kindness and human compassion.

So let's take a look at this passage together and see what God has to teach us about himself as we see people at work in action in his world.

So turn with me to Exodus 2 in your Bibles. Now, before we get underway in taking what is a closer look at this passage, it's helpful to remember where we are.

Perhaps you might remember from last week. Last week, we saw that the book of Exodus occurs in the context of God's great promises to Abraham and his descendants.

[2 : 12] You might remember Abraham had been given a great promise. God had granted the promise of children to him. Israel, now in Egypt, has become the great nation that God promised it would be.

This new king of Egypt is on the scene in Egypt. And his reign is characterized by harsh and oppressive rule. He is rigorously pursuing a policy of genocide against this captive nation.

Last week, we saw that the plan of the king was thwarted by two midwives. You might remember their names. God does. Shipra and Puah. So in Exodus 1.22, though, he embarks upon another plan because they haven't quite done what he wanted them to do.

He enlists the aid of all the people in his plan to wipe out the Israelites. And he gives an order, we're told, to all his people. Every boy that is born must be thrown into the Nile, but let every girl live.

And so the scene is set. The river Nile, which was to an Egyptian way of thinking to be the source of life, is now actually to become the place of death.

[3 : 20] And all male children are to be drowned in it. So let's see what happens with this threat over the people of God. Now, verse 1 tells us, if you have a look at it there, that God's people continue to thrive.

And in their thriving, the focus falls upon one particular couple, a Levite couple. That is a couple from the priestly tribe. They marry. And like the rest of Israel, they multiply.

And at first, a girl is born. How do I know that? Well, verse 4 is she's mentioned. So she must have been born. She's older than the child. Because she's a girl, she's exempt from Pharaoh's edicts. She survives.

Then the woman becomes pregnant again, and she gives birth. And just as in Exodus 1, the language where we heard there's a language of Genesis 1, so verse 1 here echoes, sorry, verse 2

echoes the language of Genesis 2.

So have a look at verse 2 with me. Verse 2 reads like this. Now, the word therefore, fine, is the word good.

[4 : 27] And I suspect there's an echo of the Lord saw that things were good in Genesis 1. You see, this is a good child, a child according to God's purpose.

I think it's just a small link, but perhaps in the context of all the other links, it's enough to just raise a few questions in our brains. Perhaps this might be a beginning of a new era in God's creative purposes.

Anyway, whether that's true or not, the parents decide to try and protect this little child. Verse 2 tells us that they try to hide him for three months. And then they decide to use Pharaoh's agent of death to be actually what the Nile was thought to be, an agent of life.

They decide they will use the river to save their son. And so they do a Noah. You see, in Genesis, you might remember, in Genesis 6 through to 8, the water enveloped the earth and killed every living thing.

And God saved Noah by placing him and his family in an ark. And so what this woman does is she takes a basket, she puts some pitch on it, she makes it waterproof, and she sets it on the river among the reeds.

[5 : 38] Now I want to let you into a little secret here, and that is the word for basket here is used in only one other place in the Bible. It is used to refer to the ark that Noah made.

Yet again, can you hear those echoes of Genesis coming streaming back to us? And again we wonder, maybe God might just do what he did with an ark previously. You see, God remembered Noah in that ark, didn't he?

He rescued him from the flood that had come upon all the earth. And so we have in the back of our brains, will he do another ark event again? Will he remember this child in this ark on the water? Will he rescue him from this river? Will he rescue him, as it were, out of water? And while we're wondering, the daughter of Pharaoh appears in verse 5.

There's a wonderful thing about Exodus. There are five women who are agents of rescue. See if you can count them up later on. Not now, later on. Five women who are agents of rescue in this first chapter and a half of Exodus.

[6 : 43] In verse 5, this woman sees, and then she sends, and then she opens, and then she sees again, and then she notes his crying, and she takes pity, and she has compassion.

You see, her father had meant this river to be an agent of death, but she acts against her father's will and makes it an agent of life. However, of course, princesses don't look after babies, do they? And so this princess looks for a nursemaid, and there's another woman being stand, or sister of this child, standing just in sort of the edges, and she volunteers the ideal candidate, the child's mother. And so it is that in these early days of Moses' life, his life is spent with his mother. Now, of course, he has two mothers. One is his natural mother, the other is Pharaoh's daughter.

And verse 10 tells us that eventually he leaves home to go and live with this new mother. He is adopted. And this princess gives him an Egyptian name that we know him by.

[7 : 48] His name will be Moses. And the name Moses has a double edge to it, actually. You see, the Egyptian name is linked to an Egyptian verb that means to be born, or to the Egyptian noun that means a child or a son.

But it also has an ancient Hebrew connotation as well. It's linked to a word that means to draw out. And so this name, therefore, not only tells us where he comes from, but it hints about God's future plan, you see, that he'll be the agent of bringing out the people of God, drawing them out.

He'll be an agent of rescue. Let's move on and have a look at the next incident. This is 11 and 12. Many years have passed. Moses has grown up. And in these years, the fierce and cruel oppression of Pharaoh has gone by and is unabated.

Moses obviously knows something of where he comes from because he ventures out to see where his people lived and worked and slaved. And he watches them in their hard labor. And something clicks within Moses.

He sees an Egyptian harshly treating his countrymen. And so he harshly treats the Egyptian by killing this Egyptian man. And having killed him, he tries to hide the fact by burying him in the sand.

[9 : 02] Third section. This is 13 to 15. The acts of Moses cannot be hidden. Verse 13 tells us that when he ventures out to see his people again, he does so the next day and he attempts to

intervene in yet another dispute.

But he is an outsider. They want nothing to do with him. I want you to have a look at verse 14. Well, verse 14 says, He answered, Who made you a ruler and a judge over us?

Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian? Then Moses was afraid and thought, Surely the thing is known. Can you see what's going on here? In verse 15 we hear, This has become known by Pharaoh.

And so the effect of this act is to cause him to become isolated from both his families. He becomes isolated from Pharaoh. He becomes isolated from his own people. He's now a man without a house, a home.

And so in verse 15, he flees to what is neutral territory, the land of Midian. That brings us to the fourth incident. Verses 16 to 22. And we find Moses now seated alone by a well.

[10:14] And the context is very different, isn't it? The last three incidents have been full of violence and brutality. Now there's something a little idyllic here. It's the previous verses, Egyptians and Hebrews driven to responding brutally to each other.

Midian though is a bit removed. It's not Egypt. It's a pastoral society. And here there's freedom from danger, threats, abuse of the Egyptian kingdom. And here Moses looks as though he might settle and find a home.

And women come to the well as they did all over the ancient world. And there's a particular group of women, the daughters of a priest of Midian. And immediately that idyllic scene is shattered.

The violence of the previous episodes creeps into these episodes. It erupts here. Some shepherds arrive. The women are defenseless. They're driven away by the shepherds. Moses intervenes. He rescues the women.

And they water the flocks of their father. And then the scene changes. And we flip back. And the women return to Reuel, who's probably actually their grandfather and the head of the household. And they tell him what's happened.

[11:14] And Moses now is taken into this family, a third family. He finds a home here. Not only does he find a home, he finds a wife as well. And he settles into a stable existence as a shepherd.

But it's clear, but it's clear, isn't it, that the story hasn't ended. For Moses is not yet where his life will be and his life's effort will be. He's not yet that good child expected in verse 2.

In verse 22, Moses names their first child. And can you see what he names him? He names him Gershon. It is the name that echoes that Moses is still an alien in a foreign land.

There's still some issues to be resolved here. Nothing has been settled yet, even though he has become settled. And that's reinforced by the final verses of the chapter. For although the king of Egypt dies, the fortunes of the people of Israel do not change.

You see, there are the objects of God's promise. They're under harsh oppression still. And they groan in their slavery and they cry out to God. So there's the story, friends, of this chapter.

[12:21] Let's see if we can pull it together and make some sense of it. Now, when we ask why this passage is here, it is obvious, isn't it, that it functions somewhat as an introduction to the main players of the drama that will follow.

We're introduced to Moses. We find that we're given his history, his credentials. We're told about his heart for his people and his heart for people under oppression.

He's clearly a man who cares about people being oppressed. We're told of how he comes to be alienated from his natural and adopted peoples. We're told of his family, his new home.

We're further introduced to Pharaoh and his successor. We're told that the policies of Egypt will continue. However, one of the striking things about this chapter is that we're not formally introduced to one player.

Did you notice that? Until the last two verses of this chapter. We're not introduced to God. We know he's there, don't we? We read the story.

[13:22] We know he's sort of sitting there behind the scenes. We know he's acting. We know the story of Exodus is fundamentally a story about him. We know that Pharaoh has opposed him. We know that God has opposed Pharaoh.

We know that from chapter one, but he's not mentioned by name in the story. Nevertheless, he is strikingly present. And we will see that as we go on. Let me explain. You see, I think the main purpose of this passage here is to introduce the main ideas that will be taken up time and time again throughout the book of Exodus.

Think about it for a moment. First of all, did you notice something? Did you notice that all the stories we have looked at here in this chapter about disadvantaged people?

Did you notice that? First, they are about people who are in situations of distress being rescued. First, there's the child in the basket of reeds.

Then, the oppressed Hebrew slave. Then, Hebrews are fighting amongst themselves. Then, there are the daughters of the priest of Midian. And finally, there's Moses on his own in need of a place where he can call home.

[14 : 32] The next thing I want you to notice is that in each of these situations, there is a rescue or an attempt at rescue. Moses is rescued by Pharaoh's daughter. Hebrew slave is rescued by Moses.

Moses attempts to rescue two Hebrews fighting, but it's rejected. The daughters of the priest of Midian are rescued by Moses. Moses. And the priest of Midian rescues Moses and gives him a home.

Can you see what's going on here? It's quite striking. Each of these stories are about the very same thing that the whole book is about. If you were to say, what is the book of Exodus about? It's about people in trouble being rescued by God.

Each of these stories is about people in need of being rescued, being rescued. Or it's about people attempting to rescue them. Each of these stories, therefore, is a precursor of the story of Exodus. And that's not just in broad outline. It's in the details as well. And did you notice them as we go through, as we went through? For example, did you notice that Moses came to the attention of the Egyptian princess because he was crying out?

[15 : 41] We're told at the end of chapter 2 that the Israelites were crying out. And that came to the attention of God. Well, did you notice that Moses also is saved through water? Did you notice the reference to reeds?

Well, later we'll hear that God rescues his people through water at the Sea of Reeds. Did you notice that the Egyptian princess pays the mother of Moses to look after her own son? Later we'll hear how the Egyptians give great gifts to the Israelites when they are fleeing out of the land of Egypt. Did you notice in the second incident that it's Moses who rescues the Hebrew slaves, but that the rescue involves the death of the Egyptian? Later we'll hear how Egyptians die in the rescue of God's people.

Did you notice in the incident involving the two Hebrews fighting against, each other, that the rescuer is not always welcomed with open arms? Later we'll hear how Moses is actually shunned by the people of God.

We'll hear how God's people shun him and want to return to Egypt. Did you notice that Moses finds a home in the wilderness of Midian where he can find welcome and security? The Israelites will also themselves find welcome and security in the wilderness at the hand of God.

[16 : 53] However, the Israelites, like Moses, have a long-term destiny, and that destiny is caught up with no longer being aliens. It's caught up with being people settled in the land God promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

So I wonder, can you see what is happening in this story? Lastly, did you notice the piling up of words recorded about Pharaoh's daughter? Have a look at it. Turn in Exodus 2 to verse 2.

And just let me point out some things as we go through. The woman conceived, bore a son. When she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him for three months. When she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket for him and plastered it with bitumen and pitch.

She put the child in it, placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river, and his sister stood at a distance to see what would happen to him. And the daughter of Pharaoh, now listen to the verbs and the words used here, came down to bathe at the river.

While the attendants walked beside the river, and she saw the basket among the reeds. She saw the basket, sent to her maid to bring it.

[18 : 01] And when she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying, and she took pity on him. Did you notice all those words?

Step by step. The writer is preparing us for something. You see, step by step. He's driving us toward the highlight of the story at the end of the chapter. And he's making sure he's planted all the seeds within it.

All the echoes that will come there right at the end. Step by step, he's telling us stories about people being rescued. He's telling us stories about people being in similar situations to the people of Israel.

And then he hits us with it in verses 23 and 24 of Exodus 2. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out.

And we know what will happen because it's been getting there all the way through the chapter. For if humans can rescue humans from strife, then how much more so will God, the God of all compassion and mercy?

[19 : 00] If an Egyptian princess can hear the cry of a child and have pity and mercy and be merciful against the will of her father, how much more will God do it, who is the God of all compassion and mercy?

If she can hear and see and take pity and send rescuers, how much more so will God? If Moses can see people's attitude and the trouble of the people of his people and the daughters of the priest of Midian and can do something, how much more so will God, whose nature is to have mercy?

If a priest of Midian can take on board a lonely fugitive and give him a home, then how much more so will the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, who is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

If humans can do these sorts of things, then how much more so will God, whose very nature is to do those things? And so we hear the final words of the chapter. Can you see them there?

And God heard. They're groaning. And he remembered. Remember the ark?

[20 : 15] God remembered and the waters subsided. He remembered the covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and Jacob. And he looked on. That's what it literally means.

He looked on the Israelites. And the Hebrew phrase of the last word is, And God knew. And when God knows and God remembers, you know something is going to happen.

Friends, this is our God. Can you see? Nothing escapes his notice. He looks absent. But no, he's not. He's always looking. And his eyes have a focus on his people.

He is always hearing. Always concerned. Always watching for his creation in strife. And particularly looking out for his people who cry out to him.

His eyes wander throughout the world, seeking to support those whose hearts are his. Always knowing them. And this is what undergirds this whole story.

[21 : 14] And the story of the whole Bible. It's confirmed, isn't it, in the most central place of God's purpose. For in the gospel of Jesus Christ, we are told of the story of our strife.

We are told that we were caught in an oppression that is far stronger and far worse than the oppression we hear and see in these verses. The gospel tells us that we were caught in an oppression of our own making.

We were people who had rebelled against God. We had acted in willful independence. And we had become slaves of sin, slaves of death, slaves of the devil. We had become alienated from God and from all that is good.

And then the gospel told us about Jesus. And it told us that God saw our need, heard our cry and remembered his covenant with creation.

And he knew. And in an extraordinary act of surprising grace and mercy, he acted. And he sent his son into the world to save us and rescue us.

[22 : 19] Friends, this is our God. And if this is our God, if this our God did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all, is there anything he will not do for us?

Friends, I wonder if you've forgotten this God. In the midst of his perhaps absence or seeming absence. In the midst of the difficulties of life and of ministry.

In the midst of illness or depression and hardship. I wonder if you might have forgotten the surprising and overwhelming mercy and kindness of God.

Friends, our God is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In Christ, he has forged a deep covenant etched deeply with the blood of his son.

He has demonstrated that he is a God who hears. Who remembers his covenant. He looks and sees. And he knows.

[23 : 28] And if he has given us Jesus. Then how much more will he not also with him graciously give us all things. Did you hear that in Romans 8?

Well, who shall what shall separate us from the love of this God? Shall trouble? Or hardship? Or persecution? Or illness?

Or famine? Or nakedness? Or danger? Or the sword? Or any other host of things. Physical or psychological? No. No friends.

In all of these things. We are more than conquerors through him who loved us. God's love in Jesus Christ convinces me.

It convinces us. Nothing will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. For he is Yahweh. Yahweh.

[24 : 26] The gracious and compassionate God. Slow to anger. And abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. Friends, cry out to this God. Pour everything out to him.

Yell out to him if you need to. Call to him. For he is Yahweh the Lord and the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who hears.

He is Yahweh who remembers the death of his son and the covenant he has with his people. He is Yahweh who sees. Who knows. Who has shown his love in Jesus.

And if God is for us in Jesus. Who can be against us? For he who did not spare his son but gave him up for us will also along with him give us all things.

There is nothing, nothing, nothing that can separate us from the loving concern of this God. So let us pray.

[25 : 31] Father, we thank you. Amen. Father, we thank you that in Jesus you are for us. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. And that if you are for us, we know there is none who can be against us. For you who did not spare your only son but gave him up for us will also along with him give us all things.

Thank you that there is nothing that shall separate us from your loving concern. We thank you for this in the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen.