

The God who Rescues

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[0 : 00] Today, we're starting the new series in Exodus. It's a fantastic, it's probably one of my favorite books in the Bible because the story is so sensational. But it's where God uses Moses there to rescue his people from Pharaoh there.

That's not Moses and Pharaoh. That's Charlton Heston and the great Yul Brynnett. You see, thanks to Hollywood, we already have a huge head start when it comes to understanding the book of Exodus.

Because the movie, The Ten Commandments, it's very, very accurate to the Bible. That is very accurate to the author's purpose of the Bible.

Sensational. Over the next few weeks, see if you can get your hands on a copy of that movie and watch it. Actually, it'll probably take you a few weeks just to watch it because it really goes for hours and hours.

But it's fantastic. Maybe if enough of us petition Channel 9, they'll put it back on TV for us. But make sure you ask for that version of Exodus and not that version.

[1 : 05] That is really not a great version of a Bible story. But at least it's better than that version of a Bible story. That version of Noah is terrible.

It gets all weird in the middle. But anyway, the Exodus story has some fantastic bits in it. Famous Bible events, the burning bush, the plagues of Egypt, the passing of the Red Sea, manna from heaven, the golden calf and the Ten Commandments, just to name a few.

It's all here in the book of Exodus. It's easy to see why Hollywood would use this for one of their stories. But it would be wrong to reduce this to just being a great story.

In Romans, not the passage that Gwyneth read, but another one, the next passage. Hang on, there it is. Romans 15, it says this. Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us.

So that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide, we might have hope. And that means God spoke in the burning bush for us.

[2 : 16] The slavery of Egypt is for our endurance. The rescue of the Passover for our encouragement. In this Exodus series, we're going to think through what God is saying or teaching us about us and the world we live in.

But supremely, of course, Exodus will teach us about God himself. You see, we're only two books into the whole Bible. We're still learning who God is and what he wants from us.

In the first book, Genesis, we learnt that he's the creator, that he made huge promises to the family of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In verse 1 to 5 of our passage, we're reintroduced to the family of Jacob and his sons.

But by verse 6, it moves quite quickly. All that generation had died. Excuse me. But God's promises haven't died. Verse 7.

The Israelites were exceedingly fruitful. They multiplied greatly, increased in numbers and became so numerous that the land was filled with them. The language of multiplying and being numerous is the language of blessing from Genesis.

[3 : 30] When God blessed Adam and Eve, he said, Be fruitful and multiply. When he blessed Abraham and his descendants, he said, Your descendants will be more numerous than the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore.

And in verse 7, God's promises seem to be on track. That is, of course, until we meet the enemy. Verse 8. Then a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, rose to power in Egypt.

Look, he said, 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, they will join our enemies and fight against us and leave the country.

This is our introduction to Pharaoh. The fact that Joseph and his family saved Pharaoh's country from famine, we're told, meant nothing to him. You see, Pharaoh is the Bible's picture of rebellion against God.

If God's plan is to multiply his people and give them a promised land, Pharaoh's plan is to limit the Israelites and keep them locked in slavery in the country.

[4 : 38] You see, Exodus is not the story about Israel versus Pharaoh or Moses versus Pharaoh. It's a story about God versus Pharaoh.

And in verse 14, it seems that Pharaoh is winning. 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. By the end of chapter 2, the Israelites are groaning in their slavery, crying out to help.

And so, is God strong enough to help them? Is he able to do it? Does he even care? Is he willing to rescue them?

Has God got amnesia and forgotten his promises? And lots of people down through the ages have asked these very same questions in their suffering.

[5 : 33] So, when the Nazis killed the Jews in the 30s and 40s, when Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge murdered over a million Cambodian citizens in the 70s, in communist China and socialist Russia, all the millions that were killed, why does God allow people, even his own people, to be killed?

Does he even care? Has he forgotten? Is it an issue of power? And he's just not able. Thinking to our own lives, remember that Exodus is written for us.

There are lots of ways we suffer. Lots of different rescues that we need. Is God willing to help us? Is he able? Does he even care?

Has he forgotten about us? And the Hebrews in chapters 1 and 2 are asking these very same questions. And so, let's find some answers for them and for us.

So, please keep your handouts open. I'm going to have a drink of water, otherwise I won't get through. Good. So, in our story today, what happens is Pharaoh devises three strategies.

[6 : 52] Remember, God promises that Israel's numbers would go up. Pharaoh wants to limit their numbers so they would go down. And Pharaoh's first strategy is slavery.

Verse 11. So, they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor. And they built Pithom and Ramses as store cities for Pharaoh. And his plan is this.

He's going to work them to death during the day so that when they go home and go to bed, they'll be too tired for anything else but sleep. How did that strategy go? Pharaoh verse 12.

The more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread. So, the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites. That is so strange, isn't it? That slavery and oppression actually leads to more babies being born rather than less.

And I think it's deliberately strange so that we realize that something else is at work. Pharaoh, he should have been paying attention, but instead he tries a second strategy.

[7 : 56] Verse 15. The king of Egypt said to the midwives, whose names were Shifra and Puah, when you are helping the Hebrew women during childbirth on the delivery stool, if you see a baby that is a boy, kill him.

But if it's a girl, let her live. Here is the most powerful person in the world speaking to two of the weakest. First, this plan seems pretty foolproof.

Except, verse 17. The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt told them to do. So, 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? The midwives answered, Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women. They are vigorous. And they give birth before the midwives arrive. You see, we're supposed to laugh at how ridiculous this is. We're supposed to laugh at Pharaoh for falling for this trick.

[8 : 55] The midwives' excuse is right up there with, A dog ate my homework. We're supposed to laugh at how ridiculous it all is. You know that God is involved.

And so, verse 20. God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous.

Here is the most powerful leader in the world of the most powerful empire. He can't even kill some babies. And did you notice verse 15?

In verse 15, we're told the names of the midwives, Shiphrah and Puah. We haven't been told the name of Pharaoh, but three and a half thousand years later, God wants us to know the names of these two heroic women who feared God and not the king of Egypt.

It's a lovely personal touch, I think. But just to rub Pharaoh's nose in it, verse 21. Because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own.

[9 : 59] The very midwives who Pharaoh charged to stop the babies, God gave babies of their own just to rub Pharaoh's nose in it.

It's wonderful, isn't it? It's wonderful how powerful God is. It's wonderful that he laughs at his enemies, that we can laugh at our enemies too. It's wonderful to be on God's side.

But Pharaoh just isn't paying attention. And his third strategy is the worst. Verse 22. He gave this order to all his people. Every Hebrew boy that is born, you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live.

This sort of stuff is like right out of Rwanda with the Hutus and the Tutsis. It's ethnic cleansing on a national scale. It's very gruesome stuff.

It's shockingly brutal. And in chapter 2, the story zooms in on one family and their baby and how they avoid the danger.

[11 : 02] Chapter 2, verse 3. When the mother could not hide a baby any longer, she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with tar and pitch.

Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile. On the surface, it's a nifty plan to save a baby. But if you pay attention, it's packed with meaning.

Did you know that the Hebrew word for papyrus basket is only ever used once in one other place in a Bible? It's the same word for ark, as in Noah's ark.

In Genesis 6, the ark was also coated with pitch and tar, so it would float. Noah's ark and the basket were also God's method of salvation.

Noah's ark and the baby basket were also mechanisms through which God would create inside a new people for himself.

[12 : 05] You see, on the surface, it's a desperate mother rigging a bread basket for her baby. But if you pay attention, God wants us to see his hand at work.

Did you notice that God allows the baby to be nursed by his own mother? She just happened to be passing by at just the right time.

Did you notice that? Did you notice that Pharaoh's daughter is going to have to foot the bill just to rub it in? Did you notice that God has put this baby, whom Pharaoh is trying to kill, now into Pharaoh's royal family?

Just to rub it in his nose, or rub his nose in it. Did you notice that we only learn the baby's name after he's moved into the palace?

Verse 10. You see, years before Moses has done any of the famous stuff from the movie, years before that when he's still a baby, we learn that God was already at work.

[13 : 15] Behind the scenes, God was making moves, singling him out, preparing him, saving him, setting him aside, protecting him, ready for what he will do later in life. If you pay attention to Moses' early years, you can see why he's so special.

You can see why the story zooms in on him. Have a look at verse 11 over the page. I won't go through all the verses, but just cover them quite quickly. So verse 11.

Moses strikes down Egyptians who are attacking his people, just as God will strike down the Egyptians who attack his people. Verse 13.

Two Hebrews are fighting. Moses, he knows how to establish peace and justice between them. In verse 15, Moses has to flee from Egypt. He knows the way out through the desert to a well.

In verse 17, some naughty shepherds try and drive some women away from the well. But Moses delivers them. He waters their flock.

[14 : 20] He's the better shepherd. He delivers these women just as God delivers. The word is exactly the same in the Hebrew. You see, on the surface, it looks like Moses is on the run.

But if you pay attention, you'll realize he's already done a mini exodus. He gets out of Egypt. He delivers and saves and rescues in the same pattern that God does.

He is perfectly chosen to rescue God's people. You see what God has been doing? In verse 14, the two Hebrews that are fighting, they say, Who made you ruler and judge over us?

And the answer is God. You see, God raised up Moses years before any of his famous stuff happens. Years before God was already at work preparing and saving and rescuing. You see, if you only read Exodus at Face Valley, all you'll see is an enslaved group of Israelites, a maniacal king. And Moses on the run.

[15 : 30] You might wonder whether God even cares. Whether God is powerful enough to save. Whether he's willing to do it. Whether he's able. Whether he's forgotten to bless.

But if you pay attention, with the benefit of hindsight, you'll realize that God was already at work. That he's laughably more powerful than Pharaoh.

So he can be trusted to rescue, even when things look bleak. Much of the activity in Exodus is God at work behind the scenes.

Discernable only in hindsight. All the ways in the room that we're mocking Pharaoh this morning, that would not have been visible to the Hebrews in slavery at the time.

Only much, much later. And so when we read about these Hebrews suffering in slavery like that, what would you want to say to them if you could?

[16 : 33] Would you tell them that they are right to despair? That God has forgotten about them? That Pharaoh is the one to fear? Or would you tell them to trust in God?

That he's laughably more powerful. That he's already begun years before to raise up his saviour for them.

So they should endure and be encouraged and hope in the rescue. Remember, we said Exodus is written for us in the room today.

And so when you look back at times of your suffering, in hindsight, can you see now how God was at work then?

In hindsight, can you see the lessons he was trying to teach you? Lessons you would not have known, would not have learnt if you hadn't suffered? So did financial trouble in the past teach you and work to improve your prayer life and dependence on God?

[17 : 38] Did terrible years in your marriage wake you and your spouse up to how horrible husbands and wives can be to one another? Did you see the difference in your life and how we fail to be like Christ to each other?

Did your mouth get you in trouble in the past? And now you realise how important it is to be godly with our words? Did a terrible diagnosis wake you up to your own salvation?

Christians around the world, they're persecuted. At the time, they're wondering where God is. But now, at the benefit of hindsight, we can see what God has done in China.

How he has multiplied and made his people more numerous, even through suffering. Christians around the world, we all struggled last year with online services, didn't we?

We tried to put it all together and put something for you. But in hindsight, one day we will realise how many more people are added to God's family, how much more he has multiplied his people because of COVID, because some churches were able to produce an online service and send it out around the world.

[18 : 53] At the time of trouble, we're tempted to wonder where God is, whether he's forgotten, whether he's powerful enough to save, whether he's willing and able. But with the benefit of hindsight, we can see that he's already at work, keeping his promises to bless.

I've spoken about my auntie many times. I'll try not to do it too many more. So she was diagnosed with cancer in February last year, and she died in February this year.

A terrible, obviously terrible time of suffering. But looking back, she would never have given her life to Jesus, which she did in January, if it wasn't for that diagnosis, that cancer.

We're not saying cancer is good. Suffering is still suffering. God never promises that we'll be healthy, wealthy and wise. But he does promise to multiply and bless his people.

And now his people includes my auntie as well. But it took cancer for her to pay attention. In this church, we always say, trust in God, don't we?

[20 : 05] Are you suffering? Trust in God. Trust in God. Trust in God. And sometimes I have no idea what we're talking about. But Exodus 1 and 2 really helps put some flesh on the bones.

So do you trust that God is laughably more powerful than whatever it is you're going through? Do you trust that he is already at work bringing about a savior and a rescue?

Do you trust that he can flip around your suffering and make it for your good in Christ? Maybe your sufferings are still present.

Maybe there hasn't been enough time for hindsight for you because you're still right in the midst of it. How does Exodus 1 and 2 and this picture of a powerful God at work help you and speak to you in your suffering when you're right in the midst?

Verse 23. Please look at it. Verse 23. It says this. We'll finish here. Their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God in the heavenly places.

[21 : 21] Verse 24. God heard their groaning. He remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them.

We might not be able to see what God is doing. But in the heavenly places, he sees. He hears our prayers go up to him.

He remembers his covenant to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and Jesus to us. He cares, is concerned about the lives of his people. In fact, decades earlier for these Israelites, he was already raising up his saviour.

And for us, in our suffering thousands of years earlier, he raised up a saviour in Jesus who will give us new bodies, take us to a new creation when none of this suffering will ever be remembered.

And so shall we pray that we would trust in God? Let's do that. Father God, we are so grateful that you are the Lord.

[22 : 30] That there is no one like you. Everything else is a God made of stone and wood. And Father, we thank you that you are laughably more powerful than anything we face. Anyone who could come against us.

And thank you, Father, that you are always at work. You are at work already in the Lord Jesus. That his rescue is done. And that we are just waiting for him to take us home.

Please would we trust in you. That you can use our suffering for our good in Christ. Help us trust, especially when we can't see it with our physical eyes.

Please would we have a gift of hindsight. Please give us spiritual eyes to pay attention. And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.