

The God who Rescues

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: 11 April 2021

Preacher: Vijay Henderson

[0 : 00] Today we're starting a new series in Exodus, as Steph said. It's a fantastic book of the Bible, one of my favourites. It's where God uses Moses there to rescue his people from Pharaoh there.

Obviously that is not Moses, that's Charlton Heston and the great Yul Brynner. You see, thanks to Hollywood, we already have a huge leg up in understanding the book of Exodus because of the movie, The Ten Commandments there.

It's very, very accurate to the Bible's story. Over the next few weeks, see if you can get your hands on a copy of the movie. It's on Apple TV and you can get it on Amazon as well.

Actually, it'll probably take a few weeks just to watch it because it goes for about four hours. But maybe if enough of us petition Channel 9, they'll put it on TV. But when you're talking to Channel 9, make sure you ask for that version of the movie and not that version of the movie.

That's Batman, who's also Moses. That's a terrible version of the movie, but it's still not as bad as this version of a movie. Have you ever seen that one?

[1 : 07] That's awful, both to the Bible and just as a film. But anyway, Exodus. Exodus has some fantastic and famous Bible events.

A burning bush, the plagues of Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea, manna from heaven, the golden calf, the Ten Commandments. It's all here in Exodus. It's easy to see why Hollywood would use those events and turn a movie out of that story.

But it would be wrong to reduce this passage or this book to just a story. You see, in Romans here, Romans 15, it says 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.

The slavery of Egypt is for us. The Passover rescue for our endurance and encouragement. In this Exodus series, we're going to think about what God says about us and the world we live in.

[2 : 14] But supremely, what God teaches about himself. I'll just take that off. Next slide, please. There you go.

You see, we're only two books into the whole Bible. And we're still learning who God is and what he wants. In the first book, Genesis, we learnt that God created the world.

That he made huge promises to the family of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And in verse 1 to 5 of our passage, he reintroduces us to that family. But only quickly, because by verse 6, it says all that generation had died.

But God's promises still stand. Verse 7. The Israelites were exceedingly fruitful. They multiplied greatly, increased in numbers, and became so numerous that the land was filled with them.

And that language of multiplying and being numerous is the language of blessing in Genesis.

Remember Adam and Eve? God blessed them. Be fruitful and multiply.

[3 : 17] He blessed Abraham. Your descendants will be as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore. And in verse 7, those promises seem to be on track.

Until we meet the enemy. Verse 8. Then a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came 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. You see, this is our introduction to Pharaoh.

The fact that Joseph's 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, to give them a promised land, Pharaoh's plan is to deal shrewdly with them, to limit them, to keep them so they can't leave the country.

[4 : 21] See, Exodus is not a story about Israel versus Pharaoh or Moses versus Pharaoh. It's about God versus Pharaoh. And in verse 14, Pharaoh seems to be winning.

By the end of our passage, it says, the Israelites are groaning in slavery, crying out to God for help. And so, is God strong enough to help them? Is he able to do it? Does he even care? Is he willing? Has God got amnesia?

And he's forgotten the promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And down through the ages, lots of people have asked those questions of God. Think about Europe in the 30s and 40s when the Nazis were wreaking havoc.

Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge when he killed more than a million Cambodians in the 70s.

Communist China, socialist Russia. Why does God allow people, even his own people, to suffer?

[5 : 33] Does he even care? Has he forgotten about them? Is he not powerful enough? Is he not willing and able? When we think about our own lives, Exodus was written for us, remember?

There are lots of ways we suffer. Lots of little exoduses, little rescues that we need. Does God care? Does he even know what's going on?

Is he not powerful enough? Is he not good enough? And the Hebrews in chapters 1 and 2, when they groan and cry out in their slavery, they are asking these sorts of questions.

And so let's find some answers for them and for us. And so if you've got that, that's the passage.

And on the back is a handout, an outline of where we're going.

I'm just going to get a drink. Otherwise, I'll be in trouble. So in our story today, what happens is Pharaoh devises three strategies. Three strategies. Remember, God wants his people to go up in number.

[6 : 38] However, Pharaoh wants them to go down. God wants them to go up. Pharaoh wants them to go down. And Pharaoh's first strategy is slavery. Look at 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. Pharaoh's idea is that he'll work them to death during the daytime.

So when they get home and go to bed, they'll be too tired for anything else. Except sleep. How did that go? Verse 12. The more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread.

So the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites. And I reckon that's pretty strange, isn't it? That slavery and oppression actually leads to more babies, not 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 : 42] Verse 15. The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shifra and Puah, when you are helping the Hebrew women during childbirth on the delivery stall, if you see that the baby is a boy, kill him.

If it's a girl, let her live. Here is the most powerful man in the world. He's speaking to two of the weakest. This plan seems pretty foolproof. Instead, verse 17.

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? The midwives answered Pharaoh, Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women. They are vigorous and 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 an excuse like this. The midwives excuse is right up there with the dog ate my homework in terms of excuses.

[8 : 49] It's so ridiculous and laughable. You know that God is involved. This is an. And 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. But compared to God, he can't even kill some babies. Did you notice verse 15?

It says. It tells us the names of the midwives, Shifra and Pua. We haven't been told Pharaoh's name yet. But three and a half thousand years later, God wants us to know the names of these heroic women.

Who feared God and not the king of Egypt. It's a lovely personal touch. But just to really rub Pharaoh's nose in it. Verse 21. Because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own.

The very midwives who Pharaoh was using to stop the population actually get babies of their own. It's wonderful, isn't it? It's wonderful how powerful God is.

[9 : 56] It's wonderful how he laughs at his enemies. How he can use his enemies' plans for his purposes. 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 orders to all his people. Every boy that is born, you must throw into the Nile. But let every girl live.

Here is a national edict of ethnic cleansing. Much like Rwanda in 94 with the Hutus against the Tutsis.

It's shockingly brutal. He turns all his citizens into murderers. But in chapter 2, the story zooms in on one family and their baby and how they managed to survive.

Look at chapter 2, verse 3. When a mother could no longer hide her baby, she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with tar and pitch. And she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile.

[11 : 00] And on the surface, it's a nifty plan to save a baby. But if you pay attention, you'll realize it's packed with meaning. Did you know that the Hebrew word for papyrus basket is only ever used in one other place in the Bible?

It's the same word for ark, as in Noah's ark. In Genesis 6, Noah's ark was also coated with pitch and tar. The ark and the basket are God's means of salvation from drowning.

In the ark and in the basket, God has a man whom he'll use to create a whole new nation. You see, on the surface, it's a desperate mother rigging the bread basket for her son's survival.

But if you pay attention, you'll see that God's hand was already at work. Did you notice that God allows the baby to be nursed by his own mother?

His own mother just happened to be walking by just as Pharaoh's daughter was there. Did you know that the mother was given her baby back to nurse and paid by Pharaoh for her trouble?

[12 : 10] Just as it so happens. Did you notice that the baby that Pharaoh was trying to kill, God raises up into his own royal family in his palace?

Just to laugh at him. Just to rub Pharaoh's nose in it. Did you notice that we only learn the baby's name after he grew up and after he moved into the palace?

Verse 10. She named him Moses, saying, I drew him out of water. You see, here's the idea. Years before Moses does any of the famous stuff, years before the Ten Commandments movie, God was already at work.

Behind the scenes, God was making moves and singling out his man, preparing him and grooming him, getting him ready for his grand plan one day.

But if you pay attention to Moses' early years as well, you'll realize why he's so special. So turn the page. We'll just do this quickly. Verse 11.

[13 : 18] Moses strikes down an Egyptian just as God will strike down the Egyptians too. Verse 13. Two Hebrews are fighting. Moses knows how to make peace between them.

Verse 15. Moses has to flee Egypt, but he knows the way out through the desert to water. Verse 17. Some naughty shepherds drive these women away from the well.

Moses delivers the women. He waters their flock. He's the better shepherd. He delivers the women the way God will deliver Israel. 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 some people.

He strikes down some Egyptians. He saves in the same pattern that God will later in the book. He is perfectly chosen. The perfect man to rescue and save Israel.

[14 : 21] In verse 14, the two Hebrews, they're fighting and they ask, who made you ruler and judge over us? And the answer is God. God raised up Moses to rule.

Even years before his famous stuff, God was already at work preparing his man. You see, if you only read Exodus at face value, all you'll see is a nation enslaved, a maniacal king and a Moses on the run.

But if you pay attention, with the benefit of hindsight, you'll realize that God was already at work. On the surface, you'll be asking, where is God?

Why isn't he helping? Is he not powerful enough? Does he even care? But if you pay attention, you'll realize he's laughably more powerful. That he can be trusted to rescue, even when things look bleak.

See, much of God's activity in these chapters is behind the scenes. Discernable only with hindsight. All the ways that we laugh and point fingers at Pharaoh, that would not have been possible for the people in slavery at the time.

[15 : 34] Only visible much, much later when they look back. When we read about the suffering of Israel in these chapters, how would you counsel one of the Israelites if you got a chance to speak to them?

Would you tell them that they're right to despair? That God has forgotten about them? That Pharaoh really is the one to fear? Or would you tell them that God is laughably more powerful? That if they endure a bit longer, God has already raised up his man ready. They just need to trust him. The rescue's on its way. Remember, Exodus is written for us.

When you look back at times of your suffering, can you see how God was at work with the benefit of hindsight? Can you learn the lessons or can you see the lessons he was trying to teach you?

Lessons you would not have learnt without the suffering. So, did financial trouble in the past actually work to improve your prayer life and dependence on God?

[16 : 46] Did terrible years in your marriage wake you and your spouse up to how much husbands and wives failed to be like Jesus to one another? Did your mouth get you in trouble in the past like mine does?

But now, looking back, you've learnt the lesson that the godliness of our words really matters. Did a terrible diagnosis wake you up to your own salvation?

Christians around the world suffering in China and Russia, places like that. At the time, where is God? What is he doing? But looking back now, we can see that the church has exploded in China and in Russia.

That he was keeping his promises, adding, multiplying his people. Last year, a lot of Christians around the world, we struggled with online services and the effects of COVID on our church services.

But one day, with hindsight, hopefully not too far from now, we'll look back at the online church services and realise how many more people God added to his number, multiplied, because we were able to put on online church services.

[18 : 07] See, at the time of trouble, we're tempted to wonder where God is, what he's doing, whether he really cares. But with the benefit of hindsight, can you see how God is already at work?

How he's preparing and raising his man for rescue? How he's teaching you lessons in your suffering? I spoke about my auntie many times.

She was diagnosed with cancer in February last year. She passed away in February this year. Obviously, a terrible time of suffering. But looking back, she never would have given her life to Jesus if not for that sickness.

We're not saying cancer is good. Suffering is still suffering. God never promises health, wealth and prosperity. But he does promise to multiply his people.

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

[19 : 10] Are you suffering? Trust God. Trust God. What's happening? Trust God. And sometimes I kind of don't know what we're talking about when we say that. We just blurt it out as a line to say.

But Exodus 1 and 2 helps us to be really specific, doesn't it? So, do you trust that God is laughably more powerful than what you're going through?

Do you trust that he's already at work to help you, to teach you lessons, even though you might not be able to see it? Do you trust that he can flip this situation, not for your health or wealth or prosperity, but for your good in Christ?

Maybe your sufferings are still present. And so, you're not able to allow hindsight to kick in just yet. Maybe you're right in the midst of it.

How does the picture of God in Exodus 1 and 2 speak to you in your times of suffering? Verse 23, please look at it.

[20 : 17] We'll finish here. But verse 23 says, the Israelites cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. God heard their groaning.

He remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. And so, God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them. You see, we might not be able to see God at work because he's in the heavenly places.

But our prayers go up to him. He hears. He sees. He remembers his promises. He looks. He is concerned.

He cares about the life of his people. In fact, for Israel then, decades before they cried out for help, he had already raised up his man.

Already started defeating Pharaoh. And for us in our suffering, 2,000 years ago, in fact, God was already at work with the death and resurrection of Jesus, who gives us new bodies and a new creation, a place where none of these troubles, none of our sufferings will be.

[21 : 29] Shall we pray that we trust God? Let's do that. Father God, we praise you that you are laughably more powerful than the pharaohs of the world, than anything we might suffer.

And so, would we trust you to help us? Please, Father, even though we can't see what you're doing at times, would we trust that you're already at work?

That you've already sent your son Jesus to rescue us? Please, would our sufferings wake us up to what it is you're trying to teach us?

Please, would they point our eyes forward to the victory you've won in Jesus? And Father, help us to be like those midwives. Give us just one ounce of their faith who feared God more than a terrifying pharaoh.

Please, Father, would we trust in you? We need your help. In Jesus' name, amen.