

Delivering the Deliverer

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[0 : 00] Well, one of the very helpful things that congregations can do for their preachers is to pray for them, and this is a very good time to do that. I would very much appreciate your prayers as I preach. It's something that we should actually do every Sunday.

Last night, I did a wedding around 3 o'clock, and at 4.30, somebody came through the door and said, the minister is out lying flat on the driveway.

And I said, oh, not again. But what had happened is that David had re-injured his ribs, and when he went in to open his car, he twisted a certain way, and really bad pain to the point where he had to go down on the ground.

So we called 911, the ambulances, fire trucks came, great production, and went to emergency, and a couple hours later, he's back at home, but he's certainly out of commission for several days at least.

David said two days, but that means more like a week, I would think. The thing that was great about what happened was that as David was being taken to the ambulance, we realized who's going to preach tomorrow.

[1 : 16] And so David said, I've got a sermon outline. And so he basically preached the sermon to me and the attendants for about five minutes.

And one of the ambulance guys said, I feel like I've been to church, and it's been 20 years. And I said, well, I better take notes.

But what David did is he did have an outline, and I called him, and we worked it through. And so if there's anything wrong with this sermon, it's my fault.

It's my fault. Yesterday was a great day. It was a day where Bruce Waltke was speaking on Exodus, introducing us in a wonderful way to this book that many groups in the church are going to be studying this year.

Very helpful way for us to begin to have a grasp of Exodus. If you weren't able to be there, it was recorded, and I hope that you can pick up the recordings in the weeks to come.

[2 : 20] Very, very helpful. It's one of those situations where it's like trying to drink from a fire hydrant. Lots of information to try to take in. But very, very helpful.

And the wonderful thing about Exodus is that it really is the gospel in the Old Testament really clearly outlined for us. Because it shows us the shape of salvation.

It talks about God's people being led from slavery into the place of freedom through a savior. And wonderfully, what happens in Exodus is that God not only frees his people from Egypt, but he actually frees them to a new life.

And so a large part of Exodus is about what it means to worship God, which is the point of God saving them and rescuing them. He's teaching them how to worship him.

And what it means to have God dwell with them as well. And so it's really striking how this mirrors the gospel. Because, of course, God frees us from slavery to sin by Jesus Christ, our Savior.

[3 : 28] But there's much more to the Christian life. It's not just about being saved. It's about learning to worship Jesus in our lives, obeying his word, and always learning what does it mean to have the Holy Spirit dwell within us.

The great purpose for the forgiveness of our sins is not that we would count our good fortune, that God would do this for us, but that now we can worship the living God.

And that's what Exodus is all about. As we go through in the next few months, that's what we will be seeing unfold. And I believe that our study of Exodus will help us to love God in a deeper way, and to love what he has done for us in Jesus Christ in a stronger way as well.

It will help us to understand the good news that God has given to us, and his purposes in our lives today. And in the end, it will help us to worship.

So we have a great opportunity as we're reading Exodus this year. And I'd like to draw your attention to Exodus 1 and 2. It's on page 47. And what is really a theme in these two chapters is God's sovereign providence.

[4 : 45] You're going to see that laid out for us really clearly. And what is striking is that that providence, and the definition for that is God's constant activity, ruling all things and guiding and governing all circumstances towards his purposes, those things are going to be made clear to us today.

And this is a radical thing to believe in our world today, because many people in the world cannot accept that there is a living God who is in charge. Because there is so much pain, and because there is violence and suffering, it is hard to see how God can actually be ruling everything. But that's the clear teaching of Exodus, and in fact, the whole Bible. The reason it's hard to believe is that often God's sovereign purposes are hidden, especially at the time that we are going through suffering.

And so I want to talk about that hidden work of God's providence a little bit this morning. It's very relevant for our lives. First, we learn in these two chapters that this providence means that it's futile to fight against God's purposes.

And what I mean by that is, ever since the Garden of Eden, Satan has been working against God's sovereign promises, and his work in the world.

[6 : 07] Here in Exodus 1, God is making a new creation, which he promised. A new people, people who would multiply and grow and become more numerous than the sand.

And what you see in Exodus 1-7 is something that's very reminiscent of creation. It says, What you're seeing here is a fulfilling of God's promise to Abraham.

It's a promise that people of God would multiply and grow, the language of creation. But like the serpent in the Garden of Eden, Pharaoh is threatened by the growth of Israel.

And he tries to stop it by making things very miserable for the people of God. And that's emphasized in verse 13 and 14. You see that serve, hard service, work, emphasized several times. The goal of that slavery in verse 10 is that they would be dealt shrewdly and that they would no longer multiply. And really, the interesting thing is, if you look back at verse 10, it says at the end, so that they won't fight against us and escape from the land.

[7 : 30] Well, what was God's promise to them? That they would be brought to a land that God had promised to them. Pharaoh is clearly saying, No, he doesn't want the very thing that God promises to happen for us.

Now, it's amazing that through that, despite, in fact, through the Pharaoh's very work of trying to stop the Israelites, they actually grow and multiply.

Look at verse 12. It says, The more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied, and the more they spread abroad. It's a powerful expression of how Pharaoh's greatest efforts are actually used by God to make his promises come about.

And so we see that this is something that's clear. Look down in verse 20. What Pharaoh tries next is to get midwives Shipra and Pua, who we're going to look at in a moment, to kill male babies that they deliver.

But they disobeyed, and again, in verse 20, God dealt well with the midwives, and the people multiplied and grew very strong. Every time he tries something, the Pharaoh does, God uses it to grow the people of God.

[8 : 49] And I think it's very important for us to remember this, that God is the same today. The very thing that in our life would try to oppress us, or seek to draw us away from God's will in our lives, God uses to further his purposes.

I've had several conversations with people in the congregation very recently, who have gone through, or who are going through, a time of very serious suffering in some way.

And what each of them have shared about their suffering is that God has taught them how much, in really powerful ways, how much he is for them.

He has taught them that he is trustworthy, that it is the time when they learned to rely on God in a way that they hadn't before. And that's what God does with suffering.

It's often the time when God moves us to depend on him for his help and for his salvation, which is always what ought to characterize our Christian lives. But over and over again, I'm encouraged and overawed at how clearly God's grace and his love are shown in suffering when I have conversations like that.

[10:06] And of course, that's the very opposite of what the world would say. The world would say, where is God when you are suffering? The Egyptians were probably mocking the Israelites, saying, who is your God?

As they were forcing them to be in slavery. Why couldn't that God prevent that slavery and suffering? Well, the answers were hidden at that time.

And we know in our own lives that that can happen as well, that as we go through suffering, it can be difficult to see what God in his providence is doing. But what we see here is that God actually does a powerful work.

And I just want to look at two things. The first thing is, it's very likely that if the Israelites were not oppressed, were not in slavery, they would have found it very difficult to actually leave Egypt. They would have become Egyptianized. As it was, it was difficult enough to have them leave Egypt. They wanted to go back again once they had escaped. But if they had not gone through this very difficult time, they would not have wanted to follow God out of Egypt.

[11:16] They were actually freed through their suffering to place their hope and their trust in the living God. And what we're going to see at the very end, and I'm going to mention this in a moment, is that it also causes his people to pray.

The very powerful act of prayer happens because of their suffering. And I want you to know that God has a purpose in our suffering as well.

Like the Israelites, it is for our liberation. It is for our redemption. And what I mean by that is we see that in Jesus, that he suffered and died for us so that through his suffering we can know the joy of freedom from sin and the joy of redemption, a new life.

You see, God's providence actually reverses the oppression of suffering. And he frees us in our suffering to depend on him and to let him carry each of us to the place of deep fellowship with God. And so the wonderful thing that we see is it's really futile for any illness or for any oppression or for any person in our life to fight God's perfect will, his purposes in your life.

[12:31] And that's what Exodus is teaching us. Now the second thing I want to look at a little bit more briefly is I want to look at Shipra and Pua. Those are great names.

If anybody's having a baby girl in the near future, think about these two names because they're very scarce in our culture. But they're very important.

Notice that Pharaoh is not mentioned. The name of Pharaoh, we don't even know who he is. But these two women are named for all posterity. And they teach us not only that no one thing or person can thwart God's purposes, but that providence means freedom.

Freedom for those who fear him. Freedom to stand for who God is. These two women are incredibly important to the rescue of God's people because it's through them that God's rescue actually begins.

They are clearly commanded in verse 17 by one of the most powerful persons in the world to kill Hebrew babies. But if you look at verse 17, it says, the midwives feared God.

[13:41] In other words, not Pharaoh. And did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live. You see, they respected what God is and what he has said.

In Genesis 9, it's very clear that God commanded people to be fruitful and multiply. And immediately after, he says that they shall not kill. And so because they know what God's will is, these two women were able to look at Pharaoh and not see the most powerful man in the world. Instead, they saw a man who was going to be judged by God one day. And so they were freed to do the very hard thing of saving babies instead of aborting or killing them.

That's direct civil disobedience. And wonderfully, that is where the deliverance of Israel begins. And I think that in every age, we face the same question.

What if someone calls us to do something against God's will? Whether we're being called as a church to do that or whether we're being called as individuals, what will we do when that happens?

[14:49] And it will happen more and more as our culture drifts further away from God's truth. Does our trust in God's providence and our commitment to his truth revealed free us to take the difficult stand?

That's what these two women teach us about God's providence. And then the third thing, and it's the final thing I want to talk about. In chapter 2, we are going to look at Moses.

Moses. And Moses shows us that God's providence works humility in us. Not only can God's providence never be thwarted, not only does it free us to stand for him, but it also works humility in us.

Now, we know that Moses is an extraordinary figure. Steven Spielberg did a film about him, Prince of Egypt, so he must be a big figure. You see God's providence in his life from the very beginning of his life.

That he is hidden in defiance of Pharaoh. He's put into a basket, as I told the children, that is literally called an ark. Looking forward to what will happen to him one day. There's an intentional word here that Moses is marked from the beginning as the one who will save creation, God's new creation.

[16:08] He will bring people through the water from death in Egypt. And Pharaoh's daughter, because of God's providence, has pity on Moses. And Moses' sister very boldly suggests that she get a woman, who happens to be Moses' mother, to nurse him in Pharaoh's place.

And so you see God's providence turning things upside down. So all of a sudden, we see that this is agreed, and Moses' own mother is paid by Pharaoh for taking care of Moses, who was supposed to be thrown into the Nile.

And so, you know, God's people are looking for a savior. Who is it going to be? Where will this person come from? Well, it's going to come from right under Pharaoh's nose, right from his own household.

One of the many things that I learned yesterday is that because Moses lived as a prince in Egypt and grew up that way. He was given the best education the world could offer.

He had the privileges that no one else on earth probably had. He was formed by this incredibly privileged situation in life. Not only that, but he was very powerful.

[17:18] He was very well connected throughout this superpower. By the time he became an adult in verse 11, he would have been somebody of an enormous influence.

Now, when we look at this person, intelligent, wealthy, well-connected, our human response to that is, that's the person.

That's the person in that situation who should save the people from slavery. He's perfectly positioned to do it. But God turns in his providence, he turns that right upside down.

And what he decides to do is to change Moses' life and to teach him humility. And so if you look at verse 11 of chapter 2, we see that Moses is grown up.

He looks on his people, sees their burden, and he sees an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his people, and he identifies with them, which is a very, very good thing. The bad thing is that he took things into his own hands and he kills this Egyptian and he ends up having to flee.

[18:30] This is where God's providence comes in because it's as Moses flees to Midian, which is 500 miles away, and he's wandering, and he doesn't know where he's going, that he learns a valuable lesson of humility.

In fact, his life is formed. He is a humiliated wanderer. And that's because God knows that Moses is useless as a deliverer unless he relies on God and relies on him alone.

Moses would have wanted to rely on his gifts and his upbringing and his influence, but those things cause him to trust himself and not to trust God. And so God humbles Moses in his providence.

And I think that there is something very important for us because we live in a culture of success. And at St. John's, we look up to success.

It can become an idol. What the Bible teaches us here is that we learn much more from failure than from success. We need a theology of failure because there is this idol of success that's waiting for us all the time.

[19:37] And so we need God's definition of success. He's not interested in the high values of this world. He is only interested in our faithfulness. And so step number one for each of us and for Moses is to ask the question of humility.

How can I depend on God? How can I look to him and be faithful to him? That's the person who is a success in God's eyes. And God will often use failure to teach that.

And we can't be afraid of that. And that's why we see a remarkable change in Moses in verse 17. This is a counter to the situation of killing the Egyptian.

Because the daughters of the priest in Midian, they try to draw water for their flock, but shepherds came and drove them away. Now, Moses' inclination before would have been to force them to do the right thing.

But what does he do instead in verse 17? He stands up. He stood up at the end of verse 17 and helped them and watered their flock.

[20 : 45] Isn't that something? He actually stood up and served the daughters by watering their flocks. And notice if he jumped down to verse 19, that the daughters refer to Moses as the Egyptian who delivered us.

Moses, that's the first time that word is used of Moses. And it's used in the context of his humble serving. He is going to be the successful rescuer of Israel because of his humility.

One commentator said that in his wandering, he learned that he is nothing and God is everything. You see, his idol of success was torn down in that way and he became a true success and a real deliverer.

And so I want to close by saying that's very important for us to understand that what the world calls failure is the time of greatest learning. It is the time when God makes us successful in his eyes.

And we see this happen at the end of this passage. It closes as a time of deep failure for Israel.

Look at verse 23.

[21 : 51] They groan. There's a new king in Egypt and the people groan under their bondage. It is a time where things actually got worse. But this is also the time of great success because as they groaned, they cried out for help to the living God.

They were saying to him, we need you. We depend on you. You are the only one who can save us. That is the place of great success. And we see here at the end of the chapter that God heard their prayers.

God remembered his covenant. It doesn't mean he forgot it. It means that he's going to choose that time to act. It says he saw the people and he knew their condition.

And here is the success. 400 years have taken place of suffering. God has been silent. But God has been working during that silence. And he's brought them to this point where the Hebrews turned to God in prayer.

And that is a call for us. God's providence is not about fatalism. It's actually about incredible action.

We are called to actively participate in God's work.

[23 : 03] And the primary way that God's will takes place is through our prayers. And we're going to see next week as David, let's pray for that to happen, and he preaches on chapter 3.

We will see God clearly revealing himself for the first time in 400 years. And it is through the prayers of his people who have suffered for so long. This is our great incentive to pray for each other in suffering.

To turn to God as our true savior. Pray for St. John's, for God's perfect will to be carried out in the months to come. Because God here shows us the nature of his providence, that his good purposes can never be thwarted.

Nothing can stop it. His providence gives each of us freedom to stand for him. And it teaches us humility. Here's the God we can depend on.

May we be about his success. Amen.