

The Irrepressible God

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[0 : 00] All right. Well, we live in a very worrying world. A very worrying world. There's a very heavy sense, I've just noticed this over the last year or two, just this growing sense of anxiety in our culture, this growing, our cultural background is becoming more and more anxious, more and more agitated as we worry about our future, as we worry about where civilization in North America is going, where civilization throughout the world is going.

I think the advent of the internet has brought and placed on our doorstep things that otherwise we didn't know about. And now we are kind of maybe seeing the world as a whole in a way that we hadn't seen before, in a way that we hadn't understood before, and it's scaring us.

Now, if you're worrying about what is the future, what is the future? And in particular, what is the future of God's people? What's going to happen to God's people? What's going to happen to believers?

If you're worrying about what if someday we wake up to find ourselves in a country that is suspicious, even hostile towards us? If you're worrying about what if we find ourselves under the power of government that wants to suppress our influence, that wants to control our growth? Should this possibility, and it's a real possibility, because, you know, the fact is, the age of acceptance and tolerance that we've experienced is there's no guarantee that it's going to continue.

[1 : 28] And for many believers throughout the world, they are experiencing this repression right now. Should this possibility, that things may not always be so rosy for God's people, that the culture we're in may not always be so accepting of us, should this possibility be a reason for panic?

Should this possibility, should these potential circumstances be a cause for despair? Well, not only could you ask this of the millions of Christians who are suffering under those exact circumstances throughout the world, you could ask this of God's people well over 3,000 years ago.

Back when the Israelites, the people of Israel, were being oppressed by the government of Egypt. Now, at the beginning of the service, we heard about the suffering of the Israelites that was recorded in Exodus chapter 1, verse 1, through chapter 2, verse 2.

And in this story, maybe you noticed as you were following along, but it seemed like God was conspicuously absent. God is not portrayed as acting in this story.

He doesn't seem to be acting on behalf of his people. What we're going to find this morning, as we examine those verses more closely, is that just because God's activity is not obvious to the Israelites, and just because it's not obvious to the Egyptians, this doesn't mean that God's power has been repressed.

[3 : 07] In fact, the irrepressible God is at work, and he is working to undermine the power of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. He is working to safeguard his people and his purposes.

Now, the book of Exodus that we're going to study, it's most likely written, for the most part, by the leader of Israel, by a man named Moses.

And it was written to show the people of Israel, this newly defined, newly identified people, to show them who their God is. And in so doing, show them who they are.

To know the character of God, to know the purposes of God, if you know those, then you know who you are. Then you know your own identity. Then you know your own purpose.

And so Exodus picks up the story that began in the first book of the Bible, that began in the book of Genesis. This story of how God is going to save the world through a people that he has set apart for his very own.

[4 : 15] Now, if you'll turn with me back to those first six verses in Exodus. If I remember right, that's on page 45 in those blue Bibles we handed out. So if you turn with me to Exodus chapter 1, and if you examine those first six verses, what you'll find is that we're going to read how Jacob, the

grandson of a man named Abraham, this Jacob traveled to Egypt hundreds of years before the story begins.

He traveled with his entire family. And then in chapter 1, verse 7, we read about what happened to Jacob's descendants. In verse 7, we read, The people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly. They multiplied and grew exceedingly strong so that the land was filled with them. They were fruitful. They multiplied. The land was filled with them. Now, if you've been reading the book of Genesis recently, perhaps you've been reading it as you follow along in that bulletin insert we've had and followed that sort of yearly Bible reading plan.

If you've been in Genesis recently, especially in chapter 1, those words will have a very familiar ring to them. That's not a coincidence. In fact, the first five books of the Bible were all written together. In fact, they're all meant to be read together. And so this verse, Exodus chapter 1, verse 7, is an echo. It's an echo of a commandment that God gave to the first human beings that you'll find in Genesis chapter 1.

[5 : 40] This command is, Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. The exact same wording. Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. And this commandment in Genesis makes up part of what scholars often call the dominion mandate.

The dominion mandate that's given to human beings. So what God is commanding, as you read the full mandate, is that human beings are meant to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.

And we're not just supposed to do that just because. We're meant to do that because human beings have been created in the image of God. Human beings have been created in the image of God. That's what gives them value. That is something that no one can take away from you. Human beings have been made in the image of God. They gain their value because they image God. They show what he's like. Our purpose is to represent the character of God. And to carry out his will, his plan throughout the world. To bless the world with the good, the just, the righteous reign of the Lord God.

[6 : 51] That's what it means to be human. That is what we were meant to do. But if you keep reading the book of Genesis, what you're going to find is that by the time you get to chapter 3, the first human beings have deviated from that purpose, from that plan.

They've rebelled against God. They've sinned. They doubt his goodness. They reject his authority. They didn't want to represent him. They wanted to replace him.

And their attitudes were the seed of evil that is going to sprout and to grow up and come into full bloom in men like Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, who's going to tell Moses, when we get to Exodus chapter 5, he's going to say to him, who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice and let Israel go. I do not know the Lord. And moreover, I will not let Israel go. In the journey class this morning, we've been talking about the knowledge of God and how knowing God transforms your behavior, transforms who you are.

Pharaoh did not know the Lord, did not acknowledge the Lord as God. And he scoffed at him. He laughed at him. And that gave Pharaoh carte blanche to do to the people of Israel whatever he wanted.

[8 : 18] Pharaoh was reveling in his own power and not in knowing the Lord. And so it seemed that God's good plans and God's good purposes for the world were ruined in Genesis chapter 3 by this corrupting power of human beings, by the corrupting power of the nation states and the governments that human beings control.

But what we're going to find in Exodus chapters 1 and 2 is that God's purposes for his people will not be repressed. God's purposes for his people will not be repressed.

Back in the book of Genesis, we can read about how God chose one man, God chose this man named Abraham to be the father of a great nation, to be this ancestor whose children would fulfill his dominion mandate.

In Genesis chapter 12, God sets apart Abraham. He sets apart him and tells him, Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.

And I will make of you a great nation. And I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing.

[9 : 35] I will bless those who bless you. And him who dishonors you, I will curse. And in you, all the families of the earth shall be blessed. And so what God is saying here is that through the descendants of Abraham, through the children of his grandson Jacob, God is going to bring his

blessing to the world.

God is going to save people from their sin. God is going to bring them back to the way life was meant to be, back to the good life, the eternal life. of knowing God and imaging God throughout his created world.

So God protected Abraham's descendants. He caused Jacob's son, Joseph, to become a prominent official in the land of Egypt. So that Joseph brought Jacob and his family to the land of Egypt during a time when they were in danger of dying from a great famine.

And there, the children of Abraham, they grew in numbers and grew in influence for hundreds of years. So they were no longer just a little family, a little clan. They had become a great nation, a people group, the people of Israel.

But that favor that Joseph had with the government of Egypt, the favor that he had with Pharaoh, did not last forever. Because after a period of time, after Joseph had died, eventually a new Egyptian dynasty came to power.

[11:02] And this new Egyptian dynasty drove out the rulers who had shown favor to Joseph and to the Israelites. And so in Exodus chapter 1, verse 8, here's what Moses writes. He says, there arose a new king over Egypt who did not know Joseph.

Now this new king does not know Joseph. And that's a way of saying that this new king is not appreciative of Joseph. He's not interested in honoring the memory of Joseph or the memory of Joseph's people.

In fact, we're going to learn in verses 9 and 10 that Pharaoh, this new pharaoh, this new king, thinks of the people of Israel as a threat. They're a threat to his nation.

These outsiders, these foreigners with their strange ways, they're going to take over our land.

There's too many of them. They are too mighty, is what he says.

In fact, maybe they'll side with Egypt's enemies. Maybe they'll get rid of the Egyptian way of life.

The commentator Douglas Stewart writes, This pharaoh is afraid.

[12:29] He's afraid that the people of Israel are going to be a threat to that Egyptian way of life. They're going to be a threat to his own power. And they are going to be a threat to the homeland security of Egypt. And so over many years, Pharaoh and his officials work out a scheme.

What Pharaoh does is he gradually ratchets up the oppression of the people of Israel. He does it, and the pharaohs that come after him do it. First, he starts by commissioning them for building projects.

He does that not as a sort of like an employment program or anything like that. He does that in an attempt to humble them, an attempt to cripple them, an attempt to kill them off with hard labor.

But this oppression does not work out the way that Pharaoh expects. In verse 12, we read, the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied, and the more they spread abroad.

And the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel because they viewed this as a plague, an infection, that the more they fought it, the more it was growing and the more it was spreading.

[13:41] God's purposes for his people will not be repressed. The king of Egypt, he has picked a fight with the wrong God. The king of Egypt believes he is merely what he calls dealing shrewdly with a political threat.

This is all politics to him, Machiavellian politics. But what he is actually doing is he is acting in defiance against the people that God has chosen to act as his representatives throughout the world.

And so Pharaoh's efforts to control God's people, they backfire. God's plan will not be thwarted.

It will not be upset. God's plan is that through the nation of Israel, one day a savior will be born into the world. This man, the savior, is going to embody all that Israel was meant to be.

This man is going to be crucified on a criminal's cross by another oppressive government, the government of Rome. But he is going to rise again so that anyone who believes in his name and the name of Jesus Christ will be united to him by faith, will be delivered from the sin that holds them captive, will be given new life through the Holy Spirit, will be given the hope of resurrection and eternal life.

[15:01] And the dominion mandate is going to be extended to all of those who have been united with Jesus, all those who have been united with this man who is now the new Israel. And Jesus is one day going to tell his disciples in Matthew chapter 28, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. and behold, I am with you always to the end of the age. For thousands of years, this has been God's purpose for his people.

You and I who are Christians, you and I who believe in Jesus Christ as our Lord and our Savior, we are meant to multiply. We are meant to multiply by making disciples of all nations.

We are meant to raise our own children to know the Lord. We are meant to tell the good news to those who don't know it and don't believe it so that they may know the Lord and they may represent the Lord to a world that desperately needs to know him, a world that desperately needs justice.

[16:18] And we ourselves, we are meant to instruct, to correct, to encourage one another so that we may know him, so that we may live righteously, so that we may bear his image faithfully on the earth, so that we can fill the whole world with the good and righteous reign of the Lord our God.

That is the plan and purpose of the Lord and that is what Pharaoh is trying to stop. Pharaoh is part of a long line of human authorities who do not want the Lord to reign.

They want to preserve their own kingdom. They want to preserve their own political power. They want to preserve their own governments and their own way of life.

So it really should come as no surprise that there are going to be regimes that oppress God's people. There are going to be regimes that suppress the gospel of Jesus Christ. But God's purposes for his people will not be repressed.

Why? Because all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Jesus Christ. He is the rightful ruler of the world.

[17:33] And even when it looks like God is not acting in the world, we know from Exodus chapter 1 that Jesus' words are true. I am with you always. We see that in Exodus chapter 1.

The people of Israel, they need their God to preserve them. They need their God to be with them because their suffering is not about to be relieved. In fact, what we are going to find is their suffering is going to get much worse.

This is just the beginning. The Egyptians, what they do is they ratchet up that forced labor. They develop that forced labor of these Hebrews into full-fledged slavery.

Verse 13, we read, they ruthlessly made the people of Israel work as slaves and made their lives bitter with hard service in mortar and brick and in all kinds of work in the field.

In all their work, they ruthlessly made them work as slaves. And that is a, you know, you have to, in a sort of sick sort of way, admire the ruthless political efficiency of what Pharaoh is doing.

[18:41] On the one hand, he's got these grand plans, these building projects that he wants to continue and he solves that problem by solving another problem. We've got this people of Israel who are taking over.

So what he does is he solves two problems at once. And by doing so, he's trying to ensure that the people of Israel are no longer going to multiply. They're going to be broken down.

They're going to be broken down by the shame of the slavery, of being a lower caste. They're going to be broken down by despair, that there is no escape from the cruel hardships of their life.

They're going to be broken down by injury. They're going to be broken down by death. Day after day, beat down by their taskmasters. Day after day, treated as the scum of the earth.

Day after day, seeing their fellow Israelites injured and killed with no hope for justice. And Pharaoh ratchets it up further because his efforts to population control are not working anymore.

[19:47] They are not working the way he wants. And so Pharaoh begins an ancient version of a eugenics campaign. Verse 16, he gives the Hebrew midwives, these women who help out during the delivery labor of the babies, he gives these Hebrew midwives some secret instructions.

He says to them, when you serve as a midwife to the Hebrew women and see them on the birthstool, if it is a son, you shall kill him. But if it is a daughter, she shall live.

Oh, you know, a generous man, right? Well, the king, you know, if you look at this, your first thought might be this is straight up genocide. The king is trying to basically extinguish the people of Israel.

That's not quite what's going on. He's not trying to exterminate the Israelites. He's trying to curb their numbers. No doubt, at some point, he plans to lift this restriction.

You know, he's such a generous man. You know, he'll start letting them have children again once their numbers are brought down to a manageable level. In the meantime, this means thousands upon thousands of dead baby boys.

[20 : 55] Thousands upon thousands of dead children. If the midwives give in to fear, if they do what the great king of Egypt tells them. Because he has the power over their lives, not only their lives, but the lives of their families.

He could destroy them. But the two chief midwives, these women, and they get names, which shows you that the author really wanted to call attention to their example, the example that they set for us.

These two chief midwives, Shifra and Puah, they're not going to give in to the king's demands. They have a greater authority than the government of Egypt. A greater authority than the self-proclaimed God king, Pharaoh.

Verse 17, we read, the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live.

There are going to be times in your life, there are going to be times in my life, in which we are going to be overwhelmed by a desire to please other people, a desire to win the approval of other people, a desire to escape the condemnation of other people, a desire to escape the harm that they might bring us.

[22 : 14] We will be overwhelmed by this fear of man, this controlling power that other people have over us. unless we fight fear with fear, unless we overcome the fear of man with the fear of the Lord.

God's people fear him. God's people fear him. They are overwhelmed by wonder, by awe at his incredible power, his incredible significance, his awesome ability.

They are overwhelmed by his goodness, by his holiness. They are overwhelmed by a sense of the power of his judgment. He is the one who dominates their thinking.

He is the one who fills their vision. When God seems that big to you, other people seem really, really small. And what are they going to do to you? That is why the midwives didn't give in.

When you were put under the pressure they were put under, that is how you don't give in. That is how you persevere. That is how you stand fast. They feared the awesome authority, the awesome power of God, and their fear of God set them free.

[23 : 39] Because you and I, we will always fear someone or something. And you can fear a harsh and cruel master. You can fear other people and be controlled by their opinions and their thoughts of you.

But if you fear the Lord God, that fear will set you free. It freed them from their slavery of their fear to Pharaoh. Pharaoh will never crush them.

He will never crush their spirits. And even when Pharaoh eventually learns, you know, he's not dumb, he eventually figures out, you know, there's still baby boys here.

There's still these boys that are growing up into young men. So what he does is he summons Shiphrah and he summons Puah to appear before him. And I just love their response in verse 19. They tell him right to his face, the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them. It's especially true when you warn the mothers ahead of time not to call the midwives until the baby is born.

[24 : 38] I just love this whole story and this is not the last time that it's like Pharaoh, whenever he tries to break down God's plan and beat down God's people, he's always outsmarted.

He can't do it. This is the most powerful man in the ancient world and he can't win. He can't win. God's people fear him and because they fear God these humble midwives are outsmarting Pharaoh and his entire court.

They're crippling the Egyptian National Security Administration and somehow they not only get away with it but God gives them children of their own.

Most likely these were older women in charge of midwives women who grew up and don't have children of their own to care for. That's why they're helping other women give birth.

They've got the time for that. But God gives them children of their own. He blesses them and he blesses not only them but the rest of the nation. In verse 20 we read the people multiplied and grew very strong.

[25 : 52] So just in case you didn't get that message earlier they're still multiplying they're still growing stronger. Once again God's purposes for his people will not be repressed.

And we're about to find out that just like he did with the midwives just like he is doing with his people God saves one particular Israelite baby boy from harm.

We're going to zero in on one family now and what we're going to learn is that God's people fear him and he saves them. God's people fear him and he saves them.

That is not how things appear at first. because Pharaoh is going to institute his final solution. He's going to ratchet up his oppression campaign to the maximum level in verse 22.

Then Pharaoh commanded all his people every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the Nile but you shall let every daughter live.

[26 : 58] Still a generous man. Right? His murderous population control is no longer this private secret arrangement between Pharaoh and these Hebrew midwives.

At long last Pharaoh has made it the public policy of his realm enforced by the full might and the military power of Egypt. Throughout all of these Israelite towns families any family who is expecting a baby they're faced with the terrible possibility this horrible possibility that soldiers and officials may come to their home may search their home and if they find a baby boy they're going to take him from their arms carry him to the Nile River throw him into the river so that he's drowned.

In chapter 2 the story focuses on this one Israelite couple that come from the tribe of Levi from the descendants of Jacob's son Levi this couple is expecting a third child at the time when Pharaoh's edict comes out and when the child is born they see that he is a boy and so now they are faced with a decision are they going to give in to the fear of man are they going to allow Pharaoh to take their new son because if he does then at least the rest of their family is going to be spared or are they going to risk the security and the safety of themselves and their other two children are they going to risk everything to hide their son from the Egyptians and his parents respond not out of fear of Pharaoh but they respond out of faith in the fearsome

God in Hebrews chapter 11 it's written by faith Moses when he was born was hidden for three months by his parents because they saw that the child was beautiful and they were not afraid of the king's edict it's not as though they had no fear of Pharaoh but that fear did not control them they see that this child is good he is good he is a precious human life he is created in the image of God Pharaoh may look at their son and he might see a political nuisance a threat to his power a parasite to be disposed of they look at their son with the eyes of faith they believe that God loves him they believe that God values him even more than they do and they believe that they are responsible to God himself to preserve the life of their son and so when they can't hide him any longer he's getting older he's getting noisier believe it or not those of you toddlers can probably relate they can't hide him any longer so what do they do do they cast him into the

Nile like Pharaoh said well technically yes they do but they do it in a different way his mother puts him in a little container our translation is called a basket it's literally an ark a little ark that is going to protect them from the deadly waters just like that ark that preserved Noah and his family through the great flood of Genesis chapter 6 through 8 this salvation this preservation this is God's pattern that keeps occurring over and over and over and over throughout history from the time of Noah to the time of the Exodus to the time of Jesus Christ continuing through today God's people fear him and he saves them in verse chapter 2 verse 3 the mother she hides the ark among the reeds by the river bank so the the Nile river she hides the ark among the reeds that are going along by the river bank and it's kind of funny you know as I was reading the commentaries

[31 : 11] I learned something that was very new to me and surprised me you know I guess I always just assume that this is sort of like she puts her child in this little boat and just off you go down the river and just lets the child float down the river and I mean I guess that's a possibility one commentator I read pointed out you know what makes a lot more sense is this she's using her little ark among the reeds as sort of a short-term hiding place place that she can take her son to sort of this secluded place far outside of town and hide him in this little ark out of sight for a period of time and that would explain in verse four why the boy's sister is keeping an eye on him she's making sure that nobody discovers this ark because the family is worried that an Egyptian might stumble across their son and that is exactly what happens and worst of all it's not just any Egyptian it is the daughter of Pharaoh himself she happens to be staying nearby and she decides that she's going to go and bathe in this secluded area of the Nile

River and she and her servants they find this ark this little baby boy is going to die that's what it seems like no doubt that's what it seemed like to his sister who is watching in horror as these events unfolded but in verse six God works an amazing turn of events in verse six we read when she opened it she saw the child and behold the baby was crying she took pity on him and said this is one of the Hebrews children she knows full well that he's supposed to be put to death she knows

exactly what her father had commanded but all she does is she looks and she sees a crying infant and she takes pity on him she is obviously fawning over this little boy just enamored by him and so his sister decides to make a very bold move in verse seven then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter shall I go and call you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you and Pharaoh's daughter said to her go so the girl went and called the child's mother and Pharaoh's daughter said to her take this child away and nurse him for me and I will give you your wages so the woman took the child and nursed him so not only does God work through these circumstances to spare the child's life but he spares the child's life through the Pharaoh's own daughter who pays his own mother to nurse and care for the child not only is he safe from harm not only are his parents now able to keep him publicly they get paid to do it the people of Israel are suffering they are no doubt wondering whether their God has abandoned them whether their God even cares about them but he has not abandoned his people he is working to save them you know how he's working to do it he's using the Pharaoh's own wealth the Pharaoh's power to raise up a rescuer for his people God is going to save his people and Pharaoh is bankrolling it not only does Pharaoh's daughter pay the child's own mother to nurse him and by the way women at the time they used to nurse their children for three or four years so that whole time for three or four years she's being paid to raise her own son and I guess really the she has to breast feed a toddler for three or four years you know they were bold people back then but not only does Pharaoh's daughter do this we read in verse 10 when the child grew older she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son she named him Moses because she said I drew him out of the water so Pharaoh's daughter adopts the boy she gives him an Egyptian name Moses and so this boy he not only survives he is raised in the royal family he receives the finest education the finest training the finest nutrition that the world has to offer God is using the resources of Pharaoh to prepare a leader who is going to save the nation of Israel from Pharaoh's own power God's purposes for his people will not be repressed God's people fear him and he saves them that is our God that is the God that we worship he has not cowed he is not defeated by Pharaoh in fact he's the one in command he's the one who's dealing shrewdly with Pharaoh and manipulating Pharaoh the Lord is in charge he is in control the birth of the savior for God's people that is what we remember in

[36 : 35] Exodus chapter 2 that's two weeks ago at Christmas Jesus of Nazareth he was also an infant he was a baby boy whose parents had to protect him from the power of a murderous king Herod the human beings who felt threatened by him tried to destroy Jesus once and for all God used their own power against them they crucified the son of God but what they meant for evil God meant for good he gave his own precious son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins so that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life as we prepare to commemorate as we prepare to participate in what Christ has done by celebrating communion together we're reminded that God's purposes for his people will not be repressed God's people fear him and he saves let's pray