

The God Who Summons His People

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- [0 : 0 0] Now since the beginning of the year we've been listening, we've been hearing from the Old Testament book of Exodus. And what we've been learning is our family history.
- This is our family history as the people of God. We've been reading how the Lord saved our spiritual ancestors. He saved the people of Israel from slavery in the land of Egypt.
- Now this week, what that really meant, what it really means to be a slave in a foreign land, that horror seemed all too familiar to me as I was reading an account of modern-day oppression, modern-day slavery in the Middle East, conditions of foreign laborers in Dubai, and some of the claims that the article I read are in dispute, but the overall premise is that mass enslavement, that's not a relic of the distant past, that we as a human species have moved on from that.
- That takes place in the world today. This forced labor, this oppression, it's used to build cities, it's used to build empires today. It's even used to prop up our own to some degree, just as long as we sort of export it out of sight to third-world countries.
- This long, this hot, brutal work of constructing cities and supporting cities in the desert, that would have, if we put ourselves back in the shoes of our spiritual ancestors, that's something that would have broken them as individuals, as families, as a nation.
- [1 : 2 8] That just breaks you down over time. It dehumanizes you. And it was used by their Egyptian masters to subdue them, to control their growth.
- And we've seen, we saw back in Exodus chapter 2, how any simply human effort, even coming from a powerful figure like Moses himself, someone who was Egyptian royalty, even human effort failed to lead a revolt against the Egyptians.
- There is no hope, there is no escape from this sort of slavery under the thumb of an unquestioned ruler, under the authority of an unquestioned superpower. So the question is, if no human being can stand up for those people who are oppressed, if the human system, if the state, is grinding people down, throwing them into the gears to keep the machinery of state, and the machinery of progress running, who is going to stand up for them?
- And in the book of Exodus, it is the Lord. It is the Lord who stands up for his people that he has chosen. The people that he long ago made a covenant with, made a commitment to.
- We learned in the journey classes this morning, we were reminded of God's faithfulness. That the Lord is faithful. That he remains the same day in and day out, forever and ever.
- [2 : 5 7] When the Lord makes a commitment, when the Lord forms a covenant relationship, he keeps it. He keeps his end of things. He's not someone to flake out. He keeps and remembers his covenant.
- And so he blessed his people. He promised to make them a great nation. And as we read in Exodus chapter 12, at the beginning of our service, the Lord has concluded, he's bringing to a conclusion, his campaign of war against the land of Egypt.
- Against the nation of Egypt. As Moses later writes in Deuteronomy chapter 4, Has any God ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation?

By trials, by signs, by wonders, and by war. By a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. And by great deeds of terror. All of which the Lord your God did for you in Egypt, before your eyes.

To you it was shown. That you might know that the Lord is God. There is no other besides him. The Lord is God.

[4 : 06] There is no other besides him. In Exodus chapter 12, the Lord himself enters the battle on behalf of his people Israel. It raises the question of what does it look like when the Lord goes to war?

I think if we want just a poetic understanding, something that maybe hits us at a level that just simply mere prose, mere storytelling can't. In Isaiah 59 we read, the Lord saw it, and it displeased him that there was no justice.

He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no one to intercede. Then his own arm brought him salvation, and his righteousness upheld him. He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head.

He put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak. According to their deeds, so will he repay. Wrath to his adversaries, repayment to his enemies.

To the coastlands he will render repayment. So they shall fear the name of the Lord from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun. For he will come like a rushing stream, which the wind of the Lord drives.

[5 : 20] And a redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob, who turn from transgression, declares the Lord. Last week we learned, what it's like for the Lord to go to war.

And that war not only means wrath, to his adversaries, repayment to his enemies, but it also means the Lord provides a redeemer, for you and for me. The Son of God, Jesus Christ.

Jesus was crucified, his body broken, his blood shed, for you, for me, dying on our behalf. So that we who believe in Jesus Christ, we who have faith in Jesus Christ, and what he's done for us, we would die to our old way of life.

We would die to our slavery, to our own sinful thinking and living, our slavery to a world that encourages that, reinforces it, a world hell-bent on rejecting the great king above all gods.

Jesus rose again. He didn't just die. He wasn't just buried, but he rose again, so that everyone who believes in him will also rise to eternal life, will be free from sin and decay and death, free to become who we were made to be, free to serve the one true God.

[6 : 34] And when this God goes to war against Egypt, here's what happens in Exodus chapter 12, verse 29. At midnight, The Lord struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of the livestock.

And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he and all his servants and all the Egyptians, and there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where someone was not dead.

The Lord's campaign against Egypt is thorough. His day of judgment, the day of the Lord, it is inescapable.

It has always been this way throughout history, and always will be this way whenever the Lord goes to war. In 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, the apostle Paul warns what will happen one day in our future.

When the Lord returns on a greater day of judgment, he writes, you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, there is peace and security, then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

[8 : 00] Notice, by the way, people are saying, there is peace and security, which means that the way that we feel about the world, the way that you feel, whether you feel that the world is teetering out of control, whether you think that things are going along smoothly, the way you feel about the world has no bearing on the way the world really is.

And that's a big theme that we see in Exodus. Those who are in positions of power, but are standing against the Lord and living against his ways, they might feel peaceful and secure, but there is a day coming.

And those who feel beat down, who feel oppressed, who are hurt and wounded, and longing for salvation of the Lord and feel abandoned, there is a day coming when they will be delivered.

And all of this has already taken place on a smaller scale in the land of Egypt. Because there is not a family, there is not a household in Egypt that escapes this destruction. And this destruction, it is not done by the people of Israel.

It is not done through some sort of bloody revolt, through a revolutionary war by the Israelite slaves. This is not a Hollywood movie. This is the real world. It is the day of the Lord, done at the Lord's initiative.

[9 : 16] And this is how the Lord begins the exodus of his people from the land of Egypt. The Lord summons his people at his own initiative. The Lord summons his people at his own initiative.

He goes to war for them. He goes to war for them. And the Lord summons his people at his own initiative, not only going to war for them, but calling them to arms for him.

Calling them to arms for him. Now, that is not what this looks like at first. Because if you look at verses 31 and 32, Exodus chapter 12, verses 31 and 32, this call to arms looks a lot more like an eviction.

It looks like the, it looks at first like the Lord, if all you're reading is these verses, you might think, well, what does the Lord have to do with this? This is the people of Israel, of their own free will, evicting the people of Egypt, evicting the people of Israel.

Because we see the Pharaoh summons Moses and Aaron, and here's what he tells them. Up, go out, go, be gone. In case they didn't get the message. And in verse 33, the Egyptians are urgent with the people of Israel.

[10 : 28] They send them out of the land in haste. In fact, they send them out so quickly, the Israelites, they don't even have time to prepare provisions. All they have time to do is just grab whatever bowls they've got lying around of unleavened dough, and then just hit the road.

And it looks like Pharaoh, it looks like the Egyptians, they are doing all the summoning, they are doing all the ordering, they are doing all the sending. But it is very clear that Pharaoh knows, Pharaoh himself knows who is doing the real summoning.

Because he tells Moses and Aaron in verse 31, go serve the Lord. And then verse 32 he adds, and bless me also. This is the Pharaoh who several chapters earlier said, who is the Lord?

And I shall let these people go. And now he is begging for his blessing. The tables have turned. And Pharaoh knows that the Lord is the one who is really in charge here.

Took ten plagues, but finally Pharaoh gets the message. And the Exodus may look like Egypt is evicting the Lord's people, but the reality is the Lord is mustering his people.

[11 : 38] On the one hand, the Egyptians, their human choice, their initiative in making this decision, it is genuine. They really are making that choice. But on the other hand, all of this is decreed, ordained by the Lord on his part.

He is behind it all. And the Lord summons his people at his own initiative, going to war for them and calling them to arms for him. We read earlier, Isaiah 59, that God puts on righteousness as a breastplate and a helmet of salvation on his head.

And so God also summons his people to do battle just like he does. In 1 Thessalonians 5, we are told, since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love and for a helmet, the hope of salvation.

Just like the Lord himself has done. And just as our Lord prepared himself for battle for our sake, so we too prepare for battle. And this is important because much like those who are in slavery, there are going to be times when we feel defeated.

There are going to be times when we don't feel equipped and prepared for battle. There are going to be times when it looks like things are not working out for us. And we live most of our lives in the middle of the story.

[13 : 04] We live most of our lives without this conclusion. The future seems uncertain. We don't know how things are going to work out.

It might look like there is little hope that we will ever find the good life that God promises to those who love him. And if our weapons, if our armor, are the kind that the world advocates, if our weapons and our armor are made from steel and gunpowder, if we were to rely on political strategizing, political scheming, then we would feel right.

Then we would be absolutely right to feel despair. Our feelings would properly reflect the way the world is. But that's not the way the world really is. As the army of the Lord, we arm ourselves with what are the real weapons.

The real weapons, the real armor that the Lord has given us. We arm ourselves with faith in Jesus Christ, the breastplate of faith. faith in him and what he has done for us.

Love for him and for his people. And with hope as a helmet, he is going to return again. He is going to complete his work of salvation.

[14 : 16] He is going to renew and restore all things to the way that they are meant to be. We can stand strong because it is not we ourselves who do the fighting.

We are going to see this more than once in Exodus. It is not we ourselves who do the fighting. We are organized for war and yet we don't lift a finger to do the real fighting. It is the Lord who does the fighting for us.

The Lord summons his people at his own initiative, going to war for them, calling them to arms for him. But God doesn't merely summon his people. He does more.

He provisions them and he equips them to do the work that he has called them to do. The Lord summons his people at his own initiative, setting them up for his mission.

The Lord summons his people at his own initiative, setting them up for his mission. And you can see this in Exodus chapter 12, verses 35 and 36. The people of Israel had also done as Moses told them, for they had asked the Egyptians for silver and gold jewelry and for clothing.

[15 : 23] And the Lord had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians so that they let them have what they asked. Thus they plundered the Egyptians. They plundered the Egyptians, military term.

Right? That is how the Lord supplies the people that he has summoned. I mean, this is not news to us. This is what? Maybe like the third time that we've been told this in the book of Exodus that the Lord is saying, hey, Egypt's going to pay for your exodus.

They are going to financially support it with their gold and silver. And sure enough, the Lord supplies the people that he has summoned and this is how he does it. They don't have to enter the Egyptians' homes.

They don't have to take in swords and axes and threaten them. They don't have to bargain. They don't have to form political alliances. They don't have to threaten and steal.

This might be the most Canadian verse in all scripture because they plunder their enemies by asking politely. Right? The Lord tells them, you know, just ask. Just go in and ask boldly for what they need.

[16 : 25] I mean, actually, this reminds me a little bit of sort of a, maybe it's not so much polite, it's almost impertinent. This reminds me of a friend of mine who was, he grew up in Tanzania and his parents were missionaries there and he said, yeah, it's interesting when you walk down the street and if some of the locals, if they see you're a westerner, they'll just walk right up to you and say, hey, can I have your pants?

And of course you say, no, I'm wearing them. And they say, okay. And they walk off. It can't hurt to ask, right? That boldness is the way that the Israelites approach the people of Egypt.

Hey, I mean, that's literally what they asked for, clothing. Can I have your pants? Sure, take them. Take all my pants. Right? And here's my gold and silver jewelry. Take it, take it, take it, go. The Lord tells them, ask boldly for what you need.

And it looks like, once again, it looks like this is all the Egyptians. They're doing the work, supplying them with the wealth and clothing they need. But we see, it's the Lord behind it all. It's the Lord doing that. God is setting them up for his mission by supplying their needs.

By supplying their needs. And not only does he give them the wealth, the clothing that they're going to need during their travels through the wilderness, but verses 38 and 39, we see that God gives them the food they need.

[17 : 46] And he gives them allies for their mission. And the people of Israel journeyed from Ramses to Sukkot, about 600,000 men on foot besides women and children.

A mixed multitude also went up with them. And very much livestock, both flocks and herds. And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough that they had brought out of Egypt.

For it was not leavened because they were thrust out of Egypt and could not wait, nor had they prepared any provisions for themselves. First of all, we've seen military terminology already.

We're going to keep seeing it in this passage. We're going to keep seeing it throughout the rest of the book of Exodus. These people are described as an army. Translated here, 600,000 men on foot.

Another possible translation is 600 companies of infantry men. And this army that the Lord has summoned, it includes not only these companies of Israelites, but includes a mixed, what is called a mixed multitude, which means it's not just descendants of Abraham, descendants of Isaac and Jacob coming up from here.

[18 : 54] A lot of other people are throwing in their lot with them. Maybe there are other people, there are certainly other groups who are in slavery in the land of Egypt. Maybe there's some Egyptians as well who have seen what the Lord has done. There's people from other ethnic groups in Egypt who they've seen the greatness of the Lord over the gods of Egypt and they've decided, you know what?

That's who I want to serve. That's who I want to follow. That's a better master than Pharaoh. This is the one true God. All those gods of Egypt are fake. The whole company is supplied with unleavened bread from the dough that the Lord had told them to make on the Passover.

The Lord had prepared them for this. That's all the provisions they've got. Exactly what the Lord supplied for them. And they don't need anything else. Why?

Because the Lord is supplying their needs. And they can leave confidently knowing that the Lord is setting them up for his mission by standing watch over them.

By standing watch over them. Verses 40 through 42. The time that the people of Israel lived in Egypt was 430 years.

[20 : 06] At the end of 430 years, on that very day, all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt. It was a night of watching by the Lord to bring them out of the land of Egypt.

So this same night is a night of watching kept to the Lord by all the people of Israel throughout their generations. So the Lord stands, he stood watch for them over the Passover, during this Passover, to protect them from the death of the firstborn.

We learned about that last week. And the Lord stands watch for them during the following morning when he brings them safely out of Egypt. And so this event, this Passover, that we learned about it, is to be celebrated as a night of watching kept to the Lord.

To be celebrated year after year by the people of Israel. And then one day this Passover is going to be fulfilled by Jesus Christ. The true Passover land who has rescued us from slavery to sin and death and the devil when he was put to death according to God's will.

Because you and I expect this salvation to be completed one day when Jesus Christ returns, we too are standing watch. We're standing watch too. Once again, 1 Thessalonians chapter 5.

[21 : 28] The Apostle Paul writes, You are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief the day of the Lord. For you are all children of light, children of the day.

We are not of the night or of the darkness. So then, because this is who you are, let us not sleep as others do.

In other words, let's not be sleepwalking through this world. Let's not be unaware of what's going on, what's really going on. Let us keep awake and be sober.

Let us keep awake and be sober. Stand watch. Stay alert. We stay alert against temptations to sin. Just as Jesus, our Lord, reminded his disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane, watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation.

So we stay alert against temptations to sin. We stay alert against the temptations that we face to abandon the Lord who saved us, to walk away from his church, to walk away from him, to walk away from his commandments.

[22 : 40] Why do we do that? Because we know that he has stood watch for us. He has stood watch for us. There are going to be times when we're tempted to walk away.

There are going to be times when following the Lord seems to stop making sense. And it might seem at first glance like God has abandoned us. That's how the people of Israel felt under their harsh burden of slavery and they felt that way for a very long time.

Don't let appearances deceive you. Don't let circumstances overwhelm you. We cannot abandon our faithful commitment to the God who has stood watch for us.

We cannot abandon our mission to show the world that our God is great, that our God is good, that our God is with us. The Lord summons his people at his own initiative, setting them up for his mission by supplying their needs, by standing watch over them.

Last week we learned one practical way that we stand watch. There's just one very, very practical way. One thing that we do as a church, we remember what the Lord has done for us.

[23 : 55] We look forward to his return and we do that by celebrating communion, by celebrating the Lord's Supper. It was just awesome to be able to do that after preaching on it this last week.

It just reminds you again and again of what we're doing. Participating in his work of salvation, eating the bread, drinking from the cup, reminding one another that the body of Jesus Christ was broken for you.

The blood of Jesus Christ shed for you. And the people of Israel, they likewise celebrated the Passover and they did that to participate and reaffirm his work of salvation.

And the Lord, once again, he reiterates this verses 43 through 51. This time, it's interesting the different emphasis this time.

This time, the Lord is emphasizing primarily who can and who can't eat this ritual meal. Who is allowed and who isn't. He's telling his people who is an insider and who is an outsider.

[25 : 02] Who belongs to his people and who doesn't. Who he has summoned and who he has not summoned. And what it boils down to is this.

As you read the different instructions on it, it boils down to this. It does not matter what color your skin is. It does not matter what your ethnic background is.

It does not matter whether other people think you're a good person or a bad person. It does not matter what social class you belong to. It doesn't even matter if you are a slave or a servant or a free man or a man or a woman.

Only one condition on this. Every male must be circumcised to celebrate the Passover. And that's important because when we were studying Exodus chapter 4 we learned why.

We learned why this is so important. Because the Lord had made a covenant with their ancestor Abraham in Genesis chapter 17. And here's the binding covenant relationship that God made with Abraham.

[26 : 18] He said to Abraham, I will make you exceedingly fruitful and I will make you into nations and kings shall come from you. And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant to be God to you and to your offspring after you.

And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings all the land of Canaan. This is the promised land where the people of Israel are about to be heading towards. For an everlasting possession and I will be their God.

As for you here's Abraham's part of the covenant relationship. You shall keep my covenant you and your offspring after you throughout your generations. This is my covenant which you shall keep between me and you and your offspring after you.

Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. And so what God did is he took this ancient Near Eastern ritual of circumcision and he repurposed it as an oath sign of his covenant.

This is how you mark yourself out as the people of God. Here's how you show that you belong to me. The Lord summons his people at his own initiative setting them up for his mission and setting them apart for himself.

[27 : 44] The Lord summons his people at his own initiative setting them up for his mission and setting them apart for himself. In other words only those who have identified themselves as God's people.

Only those who have believed in his promises who have turned away from their sins who have died to their old way of life to be born again into God's family.

They alone have been summoned by God and they alone have been charged with carrying out his mission. And they alone are welcome to eat at this family meal that he has given to them because they alone belong to his family.

And this is why. That's why whenever we celebrate communion together we first of all we want to express gratitude to anyone who is here who doesn't believe who doesn't follow Jesus Christ. Because we're here to proclaim you know as as we say over and over again quote of the Apostle Paul we're here to proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

So we want people to see it. We want people to hear this proclamation and to see it. But this is why this ritual meal is only to be celebrated by those who believe in Jesus Christ.

[29 : 04] Because that's what's important. That's what sets the people of God apart. Because in Christ we are we're not divided by race and ethnicity by sex and class.

And it's absolute travesty. Some people have tried to use the Christian faith as an excuse to divide people up that way. he used it as ammunition for racial for ethnic bigotry.

And that's awful because we are not divided by that. Everybody. No matter your background everybody who turns and believes in Jesus Christ is united into one family into one undivided people of God.

We are set apart as his family as his people as his army. This is why we want to maintain a clear cut distinction between who is in and who is out.

That's why we maintain a distinction between who is a believer and who isn't. It's not an elitist thing. It's because that's a real distinction.

[30 : 17] And it's important to us because it's important to our Lord. He sets apart his people for himself. And so I urge you no matter your background no matter your history no matter what you have done no matter who you are turn away from your sin believe in Jesus Christ be baptized in the name of the Father Son and the Holy Spirit be welcomed into the family of God be commissioned into his hosts the army of the Lord whose mission whose mission is to make his name known throughout the world not through weapons of violence not through political scheming but through the truth by proclaiming the truth of the gospel and by showing the love of our Savior Jesus Christ.

For those of us who believe let me encourage you the Lord is with you the Lord has summoned you he has chosen you he has set you apart as his own and he is not going to leave you he is not going to abandon you no matter what hardship no matter what difficulties no matter what sorrows you and I face our God is faithful our God is the great I am our God remains unchanged and he still welcomes you and he still welcomes me to continue this mission that he has given us to make his name known throughout the world and that is why the Lord summons his people at his own initiative he sets them up for his mission he sets them apart for himself because our God is great our God is good and our God is with us let's turn in prayer to the Lord