

Extraordinary Promise

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[0 : 00] Well, royal scandals are everywhere on the pages of history. For millennia, people have plotted, seduced, bribed, battled, beheaded, and committed countless atrocities to either seize a throne or to increase their access or their influence over a throne.

The greatest royal scandal these days is a young couple trying to get as far away as the throne as they possibly can. But in world history, it doesn't sort of rate as a royal scandal.

I've never heard anywhere in the editorials about bringing back the chopping block or anything like that to do with a young Harry or Meghan. There have been many great royal scandals that have displayed the stupidity, the ineptitude, the selfishness, and the cruelty of leaders.

Even in England, a number of them. We don't have to go very much far back than Henry VIII, woman in one hand and a leg of lamb in the other. But even you go into the history of Egypt, and again you come up with scandal after scandal of ineptitude, stupidity amongst the pharaohs.

Pharaoh Pepe II, who oversaw the downfall of the sixth Egyptian dynasty, he was pretty much a weird one. He had many, many wives, all of whom were his sisters.

[1 : 32] That was creepy even in their day and their culture. And apart from loving his sisters, he is known for having some sort of weird fascination with pygmies and would search the world for pygmies and bring them back into the Egyptian empire, to his cities and his palaces.

And he also loved his food like Henry VIII. He would work apparently only very briefly in any given day, but spend most of his days hosting feasts, one after another after another.

The only thing he particularly hated about his feasts was the constant need for him to shoo the flies away. And so one thing that he decided to do, one of his solution, was to bring into his dining area a bunch of slaves, have them doused in honey, and get them to serve the food and to stand to one side in order to draw all the insects.

Sort of like a living, breathing fly trap, if you like. Now, like many before him and after him, Pepe II oppressed others for his own glory and freedom.

And we see it again as we open up the first two chapters of Exodus. Again, jumping into the Egyptian empire, but a terrifying situation of royalty behaving badly again, but in this case, terrifyingly so.

[3 : 10] This is a story, Exodus is a story of salvation, salvation from slavery. So if you've got the St. Paul's app, it'd be great if you could open that up.

And I've got three points there. I want to run through today as we launch into this series. Three things I want to say in the first two chapters. The promise of salvation.

First of all, three principles of salvation. And lastly, the person of salvation. So firstly, the promise of salvation. Now, the book of Exodus begins with the word and.

It's missing in virtually every English translation. But the word and immediately alerts us to the fact that this book is part of a much bigger story.

Exodus flows straight on where Genesis left off. In fact, the last three verses of Genesis give us a really strong hint that there is a sequel coming to this movie.

[4 : 15] It says, Weird, because they weren't needing it in that moment.

We'll come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And Joseph made the Israelites swear an oath and said, God will surely come to your aid.

And then you must carry my bones up from this place. So Joseph died at the age of 110. And after they embalmed him, he was placed in a coffin in Egypt.

So the unfolding story of Genesis is the background to Exodus. And more specifically, as highlighted there, is that the promises of God to Abraham are the background to these opening

chapters.

In Genesis 12, 15 and 17, God made a promise to Abraham, just an ordinary bloke. A man that he called out of idolatry to know him, to obey him and to follow him.

[5 : 25] It's a promise God sealed with a covenant with Abraham. A covenant is a binding agreement between two parties. And there are two elements to this binding agreement to God's promise.

The first was the promise of a people. Abraham, we are told from God, Abraham is told that he would become a great nation. Leave your family, go and you will become a great nation. And the second was the promise of a land. Abraham's family would inherit the land of Canaan as their home. And above all, God promised to Abraham that a descendant from Abraham would in fact be the savior.

The one who would defeat evil and rescue his people. And 400 years before Exodus chapter 1, that promise was under threat.

A famine looked like it would in fact wipe out Abraham's family. God, however, rescued his people through a descendant of Abraham.

[6 : 39] A man named Joseph who rose up from slavery and imprisonment to become sort of like the prime minister of Egypt. Through Joseph's leadership, all the nations were blessed and saved from starvation.

In those desperate times, Joseph's whole family settled in Egypt. And so the promise of God was secure for a time.

Four centuries later, at the beginning of Exodus, God promised his promise of establishing a nation for himself is gradually being fulfilled.

The first five verses list the sons of Israel who came to Egypt. The total number of Joseph's family who settled in Egypt was about 70. Now, 400 years later, they have become a great nation.

As verse 6 and 7 indicate, they have multiplied greatly and have filled the lands. In fact, they've become so great, they are now resented and feared.

[7 : 54] So once again, the promise of God, his covenant to Abraham is under threat. As Pharaoh enslaves the Israelites and works them ruthlessly.

So the book of Exodus is a story of God fulfilling his promise of liberation and salvation.

Israel is rescued from slavery in Egypt. It's a rescue that points ultimately to a greater rescue. And we will see this again and again as we journey through Exodus.

The liberation of God's people from slavery to sin. We are spending this term in Exodus because this story of salvation 3,000 years ago is our story of salvation.

The Old Testament prophets promised a new Exodus. And the trajectory of Exodus right from the opening verses just points us, takes us to Jesus.

[9 : 05] This book is key to understanding the person and the work of Jesus Christ.

It points us to him and inspires us to worship him. Secondly, Exodus 1 and 2 cover many decades of time.

They give us the background, if you like, and they set up the liberation that will come in the chapters to follow. They also teach us in these first two chapters, they teach us some key principles of salvation.

The first principle is that salvation is rescue from the misery and the slavery of serving anything in your life as more important than God.

Let me say that again. Salvation is rescue from the misery and the slavery of serving anything in your life as more important than God.

[10 : 29] Have a look at me at verses 13 and 14 in Exodus 1. The Egyptians came to dread the Israelites and work them ruthlessly.

They made their lives bitter with harsh labor in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields. In all their harsh labor, the Egyptians worked them ruthlessly. Now basically, and I don't like doing this as a general rule, but I think this is helpful in this instance.

Every English translation softens the original language in those verses. You can see that when I give you a more literal reading of those verses.

Let me read it to you and I'll tell you why. It makes it obvious why they soften it. Right? So here we go. The same Hebrew verb is used over and over.

It's the word that means to serve. Serving as if you are serving a master. Israel is a forced servant of another.

[11 : 54] It's a deep and oppressive service. This is Israel's plight. Ignorant of her God, she serves another with great pain.

Now one of the themes of the Bible, and it's here in Exodus, it is in knowing and serving God that we find blessing.

We are freed from other oppressive masters. As Jesus said, you cannot serve two masters. And what he means by that is you can only serve one master.

We are truly free when we are serving the right master. When Moses went to Pharaoh, let me just expand this point a little bit.

When he went to Pharaoh a couple of chapters later than this, he did not say, let my people go.

Now I know Charlton Heston said that in the movie, and I know we all want to believe that's what he said.

[13 : 10] He did not say, let my people go. He always said, let my people go that they may serve me, that they may worship me in the wilderness.

That is, the book of Exodus doesn't end when Israel escapes through the sea and out of Egypt's clutches. There is a whole second section to this book, and most of us get bogged down in the second section of the book.

Halfway through, we get bogged down at this point. The first half of Exodus is full of special effects. It's the exciting stuff, the miracles, the action, the power.

It's the stuff we want to read through. The second half is page after page after page of instructions on how to build a tabernacle and what you're supposed to do when you build a tabernacle and what goes on the doorposts and what the priests are meant to wear.

It's the sort of stuff that, frankly, doesn't ever get into a movie about Exodus. But if you cut the second half of Exodus out, you don't include it in the movie of Exodus, you miss the entire teaching of the book.

[14 : 36] You miss the whole point. Exodus starts in slavery and it ends in worship. It starts in service, the word service, and it ends with the word service.

which in English translations are translated slavery and worship. Service and service, the same word is used at the beginning and the end.

You go from serving one to serving another. God's salvation means freedom, liberation to serve the only one whose service will never crush us.

That's what liberation is. Now, when we hear that in the modern context, we interpret freedom very differently than that. We interpret freedom as having no masters of constraints whatsoever.

No boundaries, no constraints. It's freedom to choose to live life any way I want to live. And Exodus works against that definition for us.

[15 : 46] Until we are captivated by the beauty and the presence of the God who made us and love us, we are never free.

Never free. Unless we are centered on him and we serve him and we worship him, then we are always a slave to something else.

Something else has captivated us. Anything that we center our life on more than God makes us a slave to it. How does that happen?

Well, every single human being has something that they live for. Something that makes us think that if we have it, we have security and we have significance.

It might be, let's just pick on us for a moment, it might be a religious thing. Where we feel significant, we feel secure, we feel hopeful because we are devout and we are good.

[16 : 47] Whatever it is, it might be our family, it might be success, professional status, a good name. It could be anything that makes us feel significant, happy and secure.

However, you can generally tell what it is because we generally respond with anger when someone tries to take that thing away from us.

Or we are terribly despondent and troubled when we lose it. Our sense of identity and worth is wrapped up in our career, our work that we do, we lose it, into depression real quick.

Can't focus in life. But if you must have it, this is the thing, if you must have that thing in order to feel good about yourself and your life, then what that means is, is you are actually serving it.

Constantly striving for it, to have it. You're not free, you're not living free, you're pursuing that thing. Striving to get that thing.

[17 : 58] You are not free, you are chained to it and anything that can threaten it. And so therefore you live in fear. Exodus tells us that our journey out of slavery isn't done until we come to rest in worship and service and love of God.

He's the only one who deserves the highest allegiance of our life. The second principle of salvation we see here is that we are usually prepared for salvation through difficult and hard times in life. One of the striking things about the first two chapters of Exodus is that God is hardly mentioned at all. Things are going from bad to worse and God hardly even seems to be around.

First, Pharaoh enslaves the people and when that doesn't work, he tries to kill all the male infants, which is an act of cultural genocide. And when he can't get the midwives to do it subtly and quietly, then he orders everyone, and I'm assuming here, this is an order for not just the Egyptian population, but for the Hebrew population as well.

You see a baby boy, Hebrew boy playing in a playground, you grab him and you throw him in the Nile. It's an order for all of the population.

[19 : 27] It gets worse and worse and the one person in chapters one and two, the one person who looks like he might be able to do something turns out to be no good at all when in anger he murders an Egyptian man.

In that act, he alienates both God's people and gets Pharaoh as an enemy. He ends up running off into the desert, gets cut off from the power and the position that he could have used in order to help his people out of the plight that they're in.

Everything gets worse to worse to worse and you've got to ask, where is God? Two long chapters covering decades and I mean decades of Israel's history and God is mentioned in verse 17 and verse 20 and that's all.

That's all. But is that not the natural sense that we have when things are going bad in life? God, where are you?

You just don't seem to be there. God seems absent. He seems powerless. He even seems careless. And yet these chapters turn that whole idea on their head when you dig in a bit closer to them.

[20 : 53] Every bad thing here turns out for good. It's remarkable. everything that Pharaoh tries to do here doesn't just backfire on him but it accomplishes the exact opposite of what he was hoping to achieve.

He enslaves the Israelites who didn't know their God and he tries to get the midwives to murder the male babies. Verse 20 however tells us the midwives feared God they were brave and they had children themselves and the Israelites increased in number.

One of the great ironies of these chapters is that it is only because it is only because Pharaoh tried to kill off all the male infants that Moses was brought into the Egyptian palace and received the training needed to become a liberator.

It's only because of that. Only because of the decree to kill all the male infants is Moses nursed by his own mother for the early years of his life probably three to four years he received his own Israelite identity before going into the palace and receiving the best academic and military training in the land in the world at the time.

It's only because of that decree the ideal liberator was created by the decree designed to destroy the people from whom he came.

[22 : 33] Even the stupidity of Moses gets turned around he ends up out in the desert and he learns the humility over the course of many years the very thing that he would not learn in the palace of Egypt.

Numbers 12 verse 3 tells us Moses was a very humble man more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth. He learned not just the ability of leadership in Egypt he learned the character of leadership in the wilderness.

That was the missing ingredient when he decided to take on and kill the Egyptian. Now we can see this because of the standpoint of history but they couldn't see that.

They couldn't see that. In the same way we cannot see when God what he's doing and so question whether he is in fact a promise keeping God a powerful God a caring God.

We learn here that when God seems the most hidden and the most absent he's not. He is working for our good he is producing miracle after miracle after miracle he's working for justice and salvation.

[23 : 53] The Bible tells us he doesn't want anyone to suffer he takes no delight in the suffering of any human being and yet behind all the suffering he's working to bring about good and justice.

Everything that God was doing here in these chapters with Moses was to prepare Moses for an unforgettable encounter in chapter 3.

Moses at this point did not know his God but he does in chapter 3. The third principle is salvation comes to the weak and the powerless not the strong and the powerful.

God works for and with the poor the marginalized the excluded the oppressed he works through weakness not power for the outsider he works through the outsider God works with the second son not the first son in cultures where the first son had all the rights and the privileges you see that read through Genesis it's Abel not Cain it's Isaac not Ishmael it's Jacob not Esau he also works through the older women the barren women the unloved women it's Sarah not Hagar it's Leah not Rachel in Exodus 1 and 2 all the heroes of salvation are females all of them are females there are only two males in chapters 1 and 2 one's wicked and one's stupid in Exodus 1 the two heroes are the two midwives verse 15 we are told their names

Shipra and Pua what we know about midwives at the time is that midwives were mostly women who did not have children of their own in fact in verse 20 God rewards their faith by giving them children which means they didn't have them and in their culture these women without children were considered useless or even cursed by the gods family was everything heritage was everything and so they were given a low social status God saves his people through those with low ranking women who courageously obey God and not the most powerful man in the world and then you move to Exodus chapter 2 and we have Moses mother she like the rest was commanded to throw her baby son into the river and so she does just not quite the way that

[26 : 49] Pharaoh had in mind put him in his own little boat instead and then there's Pharaoh's daughter she's a Gentile she's a racial and a religious outsider and surprisingly she is compassionate and she takes a huge risk to defy her father God uses a Gentile to save his people when you look at chapters 1 and 2 what is remarkable and it is no accident that Pharaoh is not named the most powerful person in the world at the time we don't know exactly who he is it's speculation to this day but we know who Shipra and Pua are 3,000 years later

God works with the nobodies of this world and he gives them a name and he can give you a name a name that will never perish spoil or fade disappear into oblivion his salvation makes you a somebody forever of course when you have experienced God's salvation and you become a somebody in him you have been set free and elevated the power of that transformation in your life means that you work for the marginalized and the disadvantaged and the powerless and the poor in this world they're not nobodies so those are the three principles of salvation that we see here serving anything but God is slavery God is always at work in the hard times preparing you for salvation and his salvation comes through the outsider for the outsider now there's one more thing that we need to see though because if I left it there and time wise

I could probably leave it there I leave you with a terrible burden if we just cut it off there you would now be left with a terrible burden terrible burden of religion and striving and stoicism and guilt principles of salvation do not save we need a person of salvation we need the person to whom Moses points and as we read through those first two chapters I wonder did those first two chapters sound familiar to you at all did it remind you of anything at all the king decreed that all the male infants should be killed and yet a child is born and escapes death at the hands of the king a child who rose up and liberated his people he is rejected by his own people and goes into the wilderness and is anointed with the spirit of

God in order to lead his people to freedom he is under the sentence of death and condemnation but because and through that sentence of death he is raised up and becomes the prince of peace and the liberator of God's people sound familiar to you at all you know like let's see if it doesn't think Christmas Matthew chapter 2 1 2 3 4 5 Jesus ascends the mountain gather his disciples around him and teaches them the word of God Exodus 20 Moses ascends the mountain receives the word of God and teaches the people there is so many direct parallels between Moses the great liberator in the Old Testament and Jesus Christ the liberator of all people in Luke 9 we are told that Jesus was transfigured on the mountain and the disciples saw him filled with the glory of God and we are

told this in Luke chapter 9 verses 30 and 31 two men

Moses and Elijah appeared in glorious splendor talking with Jesus and they spoke to Jesus about his departure which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem the word departure there in Luke 9 is weird it's a weird word it's a little difficult for English translators it literally reads that Moses and Elijah were talking with Jesus about his exodus they were talking about his exodus his crucifixion the thing that was about his exodus at Jerusalem the crucifixion as his exodus exodus was great but it was limited it was social and it was a physical liberation for one people group at one particular time in history

[32 : 10] Jesus is about to perform the ultimate liberation Jesus exodus will be a liberation from sin and death for all people for all of eternity Moses liberated the risk of his own life but Jesus liberated the cost of his own life on the cross Philippians 2 which John read out to us at the beginning of today's service tells us that Jesus left the throne room of God as God himself the eternal palace so to speak and stepped into our shoes of slavery to sin Philippians 2 specifically says God became a slave he became a servant in order to liberate those of us all of us who are slaves servants to sin it is the liberating work of

Jesus that liberates us we must trust in his ultimate service for us without Jesus as the liberator without him as the savior the rescuer then serving God burden that I must fulfill which is the perfect definition of what religion is Christianity take take Jesus take the savior out take the person of salvation out Christianity will boil down to my effort and we'll either feel guilty for not performing or feel proud because we're doing a whole lot better than everyone else and when we do that we become our own liberator we become our own rescuer our own savior because we trust in our own commitment and therefore ultimately we will be crushed by our own service it will never ever be enough without Jesus as the liberator the savior the rescuer then our suffering will either break us or it will turn us into a stoic person stoicism can I say is not maturity it is a weakness we need to see

Jesus who suffered for us suffered because of us he has been there and knows it and he feels it he is not distant he is not cruel he is not cold without Jesus as the liberator the savior the rescuer then working for social justice will wear us out or make us angry and manipulative will either be tired or will be angry Jesus shows me that God loves the powerless our salvation was accomplished because Jesus letting go of power and dying on the cross his salvation is brought into our life when we acknowledge that we are weak that we are poor that we are marginalized that we are broken and we need his grace when we realize that we are loved and we are accepted though we are unlovable and we are unworthy until we fully grasp that can we move out to help the vulnerable from a genuine place of identifying with them rather than elevating ourselves over them it means therefore that you will treat them well only when we see the person to whom

Moses salvation points are we genuinely set free and that is Jesus promise to you to me to all of humanity to you watching on the screen that is Jesus promise to you Jesus the king of kings the prince of peace calls all of us to come and to find salvation to find rest in him liberation in him freedom in him in Matthew 11 his call to you is come to me all who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls for my yoke is easy and my burden is light right your School Think do stuff about

ASMR For one take for listen to uh can tap the dreaming can Christ even