

Deliverance Delayed

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[0 : 00] A master storyteller.

Am I on? Can you hear me? Yes? No? A master storyteller always delights us and surprises us. It is no surprise if you've been coming here for a while that I'm a J.R.R. Tolkien fan. And one of the things that I love about the Lord of the Rings is the richness of the story that he tells.

And how a path of victory and deliverance takes unexpected twists and turns that are unforeseen by those taking the journey in the story.

And so the fellowship breaks and is scattered and you wonder what will happen. Or Faramir shows up in the middle of the wasteland looking at first like an enemy but instead becoming an essential help and aid along the way of Frodo's journey.

[1 : 20] And so on and so forth. Unexpected twists and turns fill the best of stories. But when it comes to our lives we aren't so thrilled about the twists and turns that come to us do we?

We don't necessarily like them. They're hard. They're inconvenient. They challenge us. And they leave us confused and uncertain.

Particularly if we come to it from a perspective as we gather here this morning that we live under a God who is the master storyteller of our lives.

He is in fact not just the storyteller but the story maker of our lives who leads us in a story of his own making.

And he is overseeing those twists and turns. And so when we struggle with the challenges of our lives we struggle in fact with God himself. We struggle with who he is.

[2 : 24] You see maybe you're like me. You think if God is good and God is sovereign God's plan should be pretty straightforward. How can my life go from good to better to best.

The straightest line possible without any trials. Doesn't that sound like a great thing? We want our lives easy.

We want the challenges to be predictable and the outcomes certain. But it doesn't look like that often does it? Not in our lives and certainly not in the Bible storyline.

We're continuing our series in the book of Exodus. If you want to turn with me there we'll be looking at Exodus 2. It's page 45 in the Pew Bible. And as you turn there let me remind you of where we've been.

Exodus is the second book of the Bible and it picks up the narrative of the descendants of Abraham 400 years after Abraham had moved down to Egypt. Which at that point was an amazing act of provision by God to save and deliver his people.

[3 : 31] But 400 years later that provision has become a yoke of slavery. After 400 years that great provision now looks like a prison.

And a terrible place to be. Some of the promises of God have been fulfilled. Surely this one man and him as good as dead now has children and grandchildren.

In fact he has descendants that now number hundreds of thousands. In 400 years he's multiplied into a nation such that it creates a threat to the nation of Egypt.

The leaders are afraid of the political instability that they would bring. And so they are enslaved and oppressed. They are the victims of a genocidal plot.

If you didn't listen to Pastor Greg's sermon last week go back and listen to it. Think about what it has to say to us today. But then as we saw in the story of oppression and as the people cried out to God.

[4 : 39] Beginning of chapter 2 there's this story of a baby. A baby who is delivered from that genocidal act. A baby who is delivered miraculously and unexpectedly.

And so we have a little hope. A hope that even though we haven't seen God act obviously. God has only been barely mentioned in the story so far.

We have a hope as a reader reading this story that suddenly. Okay now there's this baby. Now this is going to go somewhere. It sets us up for a great deliverance that's at hand.

Before we go on let me just ask. When you are facing times when you are longing for deliverance. What goes through your mind?

When you have been enduring some trial that's been going on longer than you think it should. How easy it is for us to imagine how God could snap his fingers and make it all go away.

[5 : 43] How easily he could say I can fix this. Because we know that he can. And we have a hope and an expectation and a longing that God will show up in the middle of this trial.

But God is the master storyteller and story maker. Often takes us on paths that we don't always expect.

And that leads us to our passage today. Exodus chapter 2. We're starting in verse 11. Let's read it together and then we'll pray. Exodus chapter 2 verse 11.

One day when Moses had grown up he went out to his people and looked on their burdens. And he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his people. He looked this way and that and seeing no one he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.

And when he went out the next day behold two Hebrews were struggling together. And he said to the man in the wrong, why do you strike your companion? And he answered, who made you a prince and judge over us?

[6 : 56] Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian? And Moses was afraid and thought surely the thing is known. And when Moses heard of it he sought to kill Moses.

But Moses fled to Pharaoh. Fled from Pharaoh and stayed in the land of Midian. And he sat down by a well. Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters.

And they came and drew water and filled the troughs to water their father's flock. The shepherds came and drove them away. But Moses stood up and saved them and watered their flock.

When they came home to their father Ruel, he said, How is it that you have come home so soon today? And they said, an Egyptian delivered us out of the hand of the shepherds.

And even drew water for us and watered the flock. And he said to his daughters, then where is he? Why have you left the man? Call him that he may eat bread.

[7 : 58] And Moses was content to dwell with the man. And he gave Moses his daughter Zipporah. She gave birth to a son. And he called his name Gershom.

For he said, I have been a sojourner in a foreign land. During these many days the king of Egypt died. And the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery. And cried out for help.

Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. And God heard their groaning. And God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.

God saw the people of Israel. And God knew. Let's pray. Father, we acknowledge this morning that your ways are not our ways.

And your thoughts are not our thoughts. Lord, that you are high and exalted. And Lord, we are creatures. And though, Lord, you have made us to know you.

[9 : 06] Lord, you are much greater than us. Lord, I pray this morning. That Lord, as we explore this passage. What we will see is you more clearly.

We will understand you more deeply. Lord, we will trust you. Lord, I pray for your help this morning as I speak.

Lord, that my words, Lord, would be useful in your hands. Lord, that you would prepare all of our hearts to receive your word this morning. We pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. So as we look at this passage this morning, we're simply going to look at two things. First, we see that on the path to deliverance, there is an... On the way to deliverance, there is an unexpected path taken. And secondly, there is an unexpected God revealed.

[10 : 07] So first, let's look at the unexpected path of deliverance. The unexpected path of deliverance is one in which we see deliverance delayed. Now, one of the things you want to think about as you're reading the book of Exodus is that the people who are receiving the book of Exodus know the story.

It was written after the fact, right? And therefore, everyone who is reading the book of Exodus probably has heard of Moses. And they know that he is the deliverer.

They know that God is going to use him in all the ways that any of us who know any... If you're familiar at all with the story of Exodus, you'll know this is the man that God is going to use to lead his people out of Egypt.

But his story does not go as expected. As we said, the birth narrative sets us up to think, okay, now something big is going to happen. And in fact, what we see in verse 11 is Moses goes out and he's grown up and then he goes out.

The words specifically say he looked on their people. He went out to his people and he looked on their burden. And you have to read this carefully because it wasn't just that Moses was in the palace and he thought today, oh, maybe I'll stroll among the slaves today and see what it looks like.

[11 : 25] The verb actually to go out to them is the word that's used later for the Exodus as they leave people. Moses was actually going out of the palace in a much more profound way. And looking upon his people was not simply detached observation, but it was an engaged examination.

He was saying, what is the status of my people? I have had this privilege of being raised up in the Egyptian household as a prince of Egypt. But now I am going to go out and see how it is that my people live.

And there's a strong sense of identification. There's a strong sense of Moses saying, I am now moving away from my Egyptian position to identify with my people.

And in fact, we see this and know this more clearly because in the New Testament, the book of Hebrews reminds us of this. Hebrews 11, chapter 24, the writer says this, By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.

He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. As Moses went out and looked on his people, he was making a strong move, a strong move to identify with the Hebrews who were despised slaves.

[12 : 56] He was leaving behind a position of privilege and of treasures, as the writer of Hebrews reminds us of. And as he did that, he saw and he intervened.

What we see from this story is that as we hoped this baby might be an instrument in God's hands, we now see Moses living it out. He is a deliverer.

He intercedes and steps in to rescue a Hebrew who is being beaten and most likely going to be killed by the Egyptian.

He steps in and he saves him. His instinct to be a deliverer is on display. And he knew it would be costly.

Look with me in verse 12. Isn't it interesting? Moses knew that when he was doing this, he was drawing a line in the sand. He was doing something that would put in jeopardy his position in Egypt.

[13 : 57] Because he looked this way and that way. Not to see, oh, is someone else going to help? I think it was to say, if no one sees me, I can get away with this and still be able to keep my position.

And he buried him in the sand because that's the quickest way to get rid of a body in Egypt.

Because there's lots of sand. It's not very hard to dig in. So Moses knew what he was doing as he was taking the step of being a deliverer.

He made a costly choice to identify with God's people. And as we look through the story, I'm just going to throw out a couple of questions for us to ask.

How many of us make costly choices to identify with God's people? How often are we willing to forsake the riches of position in this world in order to say, yes, I'm one of God's people?

The story continues. Moses then, the next day, having done this great act and seemingly having gotten away with it, is thinking, Okay, I'm stepping into this role as a deliverer.

[15 : 13] I'm going to do this. So he walks among his people again. He sees two Hebrews now who are having a conflict. And there's clearly a right and a wrong. Because the passage tells us he speaks to the one who was in the wrong.

And he says, why are you doing this? He comes to deliver his people from internal conflict and strife and to rescue them. And we think, oh man, this is it.

If you're reading the story and you don't know what's going to happen, you read the story and you think, okay, this is it. This is where they're going to say, oh, Moses, you're here. Our deliverer, our savior.

We praise God that you have sent us. And we are so glad that you are here to help us solve this little dispute and to rescue us from slavery and overthrow Egypt in the process. But that's not what

he gets at all, is it?

His instincts to be a deliverer, his instinct to intercede for the good of his people backfires terribly. The Hebrew in the wrong looks at him and says, well, who made you?

[16:16] You know, who died and made you king, right? That's what we would say today. Who died and made you king of my life? And then he goes on and he says, are you going to kill me?

Are you going to murder me the way you killed that Egyptian? It's a strong accusation. And Moses realizes, I haven't gotten away with it. People know what happened.

Maybe the Hebrew that he saved went back and rejoiced and told all his friends. Maybe they went back and said, the weirdest thing happened today. That Moses guy, you know, he lives in the palace. He came and delivered, like he killed the Egyptian.

And I think it's going to go bad for us. Because that was not a good thing. I don't know what he was thinking. And interestingly, I'll just say this.

The Bible never says clearly, one way or the other, whether there is an affirmation that Moses was doing right or doing wrong in the killing of the Egyptian. We don't need to answer that question to know that God was using it as a display.

[17:19] It was a display of his delivering instinct and his self-understanding. Interestingly, in Acts, if you haven't read Acts 7 and the speech that Stephen, the early follower of Jesus, gives about the history of Israel, you should read it sometime in the next couple of weeks because it's a great story and it will help you understand Exodus a lot more.

Acts 27 describes Moses' thought at this point in the story in this way. He says, he supposed that his brothers would understand that God was giving them salvation by his hand, but they did not understand.

So Stephen affirms what we guess about Moses, that he knew he was there to be their deliverer and that God had raised him up uniquely to have this position and this role.

But they didn't see God's hand in it either and they rejected him. And the story of what Moses had been done became known and it came to the ears of Pharaoh and Pharaoh, in whose household Moses had been raised and who, as we see further on in the story, Moses looks like an Egyptian to everyone else.

Pharaoh went after him. He knew that this was a betrayal of his loyalty to Egypt and he went after him and Moses was afraid and he fled.

[18:49] One of the interesting patterns we see is that this is one of the first places where we see God's people rejecting God's deliverer.

Moses had a contentious relationship ongoing with the people of Israel. You'll see it in chapter five when Moses comes back to Egypt and tries to deliver them and their work is increased and they grumble and complain about Moses and his interceding and delivering and how much trouble it's causing for them.

And then after God takes them out of Egypt with a mighty hand through the plagues and through the Red Sea, then in the desert, they don't have food one day and they grumble and complain. And the next time, they don't have water and they grumble and complain and then they don't have food again and they grumble and complain and then they grumble and complain about the food they do have and then they grumble and complain again because there isn't water in another place. And they grumble and complain over and over and over again against the very thing that God is doing, the very helper that God has given them.

Friends, I want us to ask ourselves as we think about our lives, do we grumble and complain and resist God's saving work in our lives?

[20:12] Are we too proud to accept his help? Are we too committed to our sense of being in control to allow him to work in a way that we don't expect?

Do we have faith and eyes to see God sustaining and delivering us when it doesn't feel like it? How often are we like the grumbling Israelites?

So the deliverer is rejected. His deed becomes known and he flees Egypt. And he flees to a place called Midian. Now Midian is best described as the backside of nowhere.

Technically, it's probably on the eastern side of the Sinai Peninsula above where the water is. But it's not, the Midianites were actually nomadic people.

They were also long lost relatives. Midian was a son of Abraham by Abraham's second wife in Genesis 25 too. You can look it up.

[21 : 14] So they were Semitic people, but they were not part of the covenant community. But at this point, the distance must have been very great. So he's going out to a different people.

And what we see in this next story is Moses continues in his character of wanting to be a deliverer. He comes upon a well and at this well, there are women, these girls are watering.

And if you've ever seen the description, this helped me see this because it's described really well in verses 16 and 17. They drew water. So in order to water their flock, they had to go to the well and pull the water up out of the well.

And then they had to put it in some kind of feeding trough so that the sheep could then come and take it. And what happened is these shepherds would come, let the women do all the work to get the water ready.

And then they would come and drive off the sons of Jethro, who's also Ruel, and drive them off and then take the water for themselves. So these girls would have to draw water twice, once for the evil shepherds, and then they'd have to do it again for their own thing.

[22 : 20] That's why Jethro said, how is it that you're back so early? Because usually they had to do it twice. Moses steps in and intervenes, and he delivers them.

And you see again, this same instinct, this same, and the storyteller is wanting us to remember, this is the deliverer that God saved from the water.

This is the deliverer that God protected in the palace of Egypt. This is the deliverer that God is going to use. But right now, he's on the backside of nowhere.

And not only is he on the backside of nowhere, but God is providing in ways it looks like he's going to settle in there. He isn't just there, and they say, hey, that's great, thanks.

Why don't you have a cup of water and be on your way? They say, come, eat with us. Come, take my daughter as your wife. Come, bear children.

[23 : 20] I'm going to give you a livelihood. I'm going to give you a home. I'm going to give you everything you need to settle in. The story seems to have hit a dead end.

How is God's deliverance and God's deliverer going to do anything for God's people while he's watching a bunch of smelly sheep on the backside of nowhere settling in to raise his family?

And the literary form of this is beautiful because it leads you to this dead end of the plot line, except, look with me at verse 22. The son that was born to Moses and Zipporah, the one who probably would have, in human terms, nailed the, put the last nail in the coffin of, okay, I am now a Midianite. I'm going to stay here forever. God has taken me out of whatever happened before and he's got me here and this is where I'm going to be. But Moses names him Gershom, which sounds like, I've been, sounds like the Hebrew word sojourner.

Moses indicates that even then, even though the whole flow of the plot line is Moses the deliverer being sidelined, led into a dead end where there's no way out, Moses himself still has this sense.

[24 : 55] This is not my home and these are not my people. I'm just here a while. That's what it means to be a sojourner. I'm just here for a while because my people are back in Egypt and my true home, well, Moses has yet to find where his true home will be.

He's living in exile, both from the home he grew up in and from the people that he identified with. So he too is living in this place of uncertainty with unexpected twists.

No, it never says it. It's possible Moses himself was asking the question, God, what are you going to do here? I know I belong somewhere else, but what are you going to do here?

And the narrator, in a brilliant narrative form, then leaves us there. Leaves Moses on the backside of nowhere, raising his family and raising his sheep in the household of Jethro and makes a turn. Moses will be there for 40 years, according to Acts. Again, I want to ask, stop, just ask a question for a minute.

[26 : 15] How hard is it to wait for God's deliverance in our lives? When we're facing a hard situation, when we're looking at something and we think, God, I don't know how to get out of this.

I don't know what it's going to look like. I don't see how you could ever redeem this situation. I've reached a dead end. What areas of your life are you longing for deliverance?

How long has it been? Will you submit your storyline to the story that God has written for you?

Will you trust him? Of course, you might ask, why? Why would I trust him? If you were Moses, you'd think, okay, God, I don't get it.

I don't see you, and I'm here for a long time wondering what the heck you're doing. We feel that way too. But the narrator knows this, and he set us up for verses 23 through 25, because having walked

this unexpected path where deliverance has been delayed and seemingly derailed, we then come to the end of the story, and the narrator helps us turn the corner to see why we should trust God even in the middle of it.

[27 : 39] Because what we see in verse 23 through 25 is the unexpected God of deliverance revealed. If it were a movie, the lens changes from Midian back to Egypt.

But the story there doesn't look good either, does it? It's actually gotten worse. In two verses, the writer uses terms for groaning and crying out twice.

It's not the same term. There are actually four different words that are used here to describe the plight of God's people in Israel, or God's people, the Israelites in Egypt.

They are enslaved. They are oppressed. They are groaning under the weight of their oppression. And they are crying out, please help us.

Please save us. The narrator says, a new Pharaoh has risen up. Maybe that leaves the door open for Moses to come back.

[28 : 49] But the people, meanwhile, just as Moses had gone off to a dead end, the one thing they knew that God had delivered this one baby boy who maybe could be their deliverer, he's now gone.

For a generation, 40 years, he's gone. But God is not gone. And you see, for the first time in Exodus, oh, there are a few mentions of God in chapter one as he relates to the Israelite midwives and how they rescued some of the Hebrew boys.

but really for the first time, for the first time, God becomes a major actor in the story. And it's such a striking thing. If you read this with literary eyes, it's such a striking thing because 23 talks about the slavery and the groaning and the crying.

At the very end, it says that the cry of rescue for slavery came up to God. And it's not as if God had never heard it before. It's not as if God was deaf and suddenly decided that he would listen or that he was somehow unable to hear and now he was.

But what it means is that God in his perfect timing was now willing to pay attention. God was now willing to hear and respond in a particular way. He was now, in his timing, going to engage with their cries and with their situation.

[30 : 15] And there are four action verbs in verses 24 and 25 that are beautiful because of what they tell us about God. Verse 24, and God heard their groaning.

It wasn't just that he heard the thing for the first time, but that he was, his ears were open to them and he engaged with them on the basis of what he heard.

And not only did he hear their cries, but he remembered. He remembered his covenant. Now this does not mean that God has forgotten.

It doesn't mean that God thought, oh gosh, that's right, that thing with Abraham. What did I say? Oh right, about a people and a land and a, yeah.

Oh, I gotta go back and look that up in Genesis so I remember what that's about. God didn't forget. But what it means is that God remembers in a way that is now moving him to action.

[31 : 15] God is remembering the promises that the descendants of Abraham would be blessed by God and be a blessing to the world. That he would make them into a great nation.

That he would deliver them into a promised land where they would enjoy all the bounty and the fruit and the blessing of being his people. And he would be their God and through them he would display his glory to all the world that the nations would come and know what a great God, the God of the Hebrews is.

This is the covenant that he promised them. That he would do these things. And they are as far from it as you can imagine. They're an enslaved people in a foreign land.

But God remembered that covenant and is ready now to act. 25 keeps going about who God is. Because he doesn't just hear and he doesn't just remember.

But he sees. Maybe you know what it's like when someone sees you in your situation with understanding. Where someone gets the depth of your trial.

[32 : 24] The hardness and the pain that you've endured and suffered. the confusion and the questions that have run through your brain. What it's like when someone really sees you.

This is what this means here. Just like Hagar as she fled from Abraham and Sarah after their failed attempt to fulfill God's promises in their own way.

As she fled into the wilderness thinking she was going to die there. She met with God. El Roy. The God who sees. The God who will look after her.

God who sees and acts on their behalf. And then finally God doesn't just see them but he knows them. Maybe you all know this already but if you don't you should know this.

The Hebrew word to know is not simply capacity for intellectual understanding. understanding. It is not simply gathering more information. Knowing in Hebrew is almost always a relational term.

[33 : 33] It is used for a deep intimacy of knowledge. Usually with people that has this sense of connection. It's used for what happens when a husband and wife come together physically and in all other ways in union in marriage.

that they know one another. And after we've seen God take his people and his deliverer on a very unexpected journey to seemingly a dead end the writer of the story comes back and he says God knows.

God knows what he is doing and he is intimately connected with his people through it all and he is now ready to act. Deliverance is on the way because God is now ready to act.

He has not forgotten his people or his deliverer and Nick will have the privilege of telling us how God is going to show up and turn the corner in this grand story.

Friends as we walk through our paths of life and when we go through the periods where we wonder whether God has led us to a dead end and we wonder and cry out and groan to him about our situation it is God's character that he has not forgotten or abandoned us that is the basis of our hope.

[35 : 02] When it seems like God is absent when we can't see his plan when we can't see his hand at work when it feels like our current place of suffering is not only that but it is in obscurity we wonder why God's plans are so strange.

Friends the reason why God's plans are so strange is simply this God doesn't work in this story so that we would think Moses is going to be the great deliverer of Israel this story God takes Moses on this unexpected journey because he wants to remind Moses and his people that Moses is not the deliverer of his people God is the deliverer of his people God is the main character in this story God is the savior of his people and he is doing all of these things so that we would see and know this God as our deliverer and that we would not fall into the oh so human desire that someone else would be our savior and someone else would be our deliverer and that some human agent can step in and actually fix our story and change our trajectory and rescue us from dead ends and from obscurity

Moses has characteristics of how God's deliverance is going to look like he has instincts to deliver he has a courage to identify with his people but even then even in this story part of what we see is a storyteller telling the story so we say oh it's God who's going to deliver not Moses and we know more broadly from the storyline of the Bible that Moses though he delivered his people from Egypt did not deliver his people from sin Moses delivered his people to the brink of the promised land and yet his failures and his weaknesses and his sin and the sin of the people continued and they grumbled and complained and did not trust God even after he had done great things for them because in the grand plan of God's deliverance even this was a signpost pointing ahead to something greater even these acts of deliverance are pointing ahead to one greater than Moses friends it points us to Jesus Jesus who was saved miraculously at birth Jesus who lived 30 years in obscurity as a carpenter Jesus who at the very beginning of his ministry when it looked like he was going to blast out in his baptism and start his big public ministry instead was sent into the wilderness but more than that Jesus who came to identify with us with humanity who took on flesh and blood to identify with us to take on flesh and blood he who bore our sin he who did not sin but who bore our sin in identification with us forsaking as Philippians says the privilege and the honor that was his in heaven to be the equal of God he forsook those privileges to take on human flesh and blood to identify with us so that he might be our deliverer and he delivered us from slavery to sin and the oppression and the wreckage and the pain and the suffering that sin causes in our lives and he delivered us from the penalty of sin and the wrath of God that is rightly upon it because of our rebellion against him

Jesus is a greater deliverer Jesus is the certain deliverance that by his life of perfect obedience so that he could stand in our stead by his death in our place a substitute and a sacrifice for us so that the penalty and power of sin are taken away in our lives and he who rose from the dead so that he might be the ultimate victor over sin and death in this world and in our lives this is the great deliverance that we have and friends we also still now because we still groan because we still live in this fallen world because we still suffer because our lives still have many unexpected twists and

turns and detours when we wonder God why can't you just make the path straight and the end easy we know that he has promised that he will come back and he who has worked all that is necessary for our salvation he will come back and save us one day and we not just save us individually but he will save this world and he will make it new and all evil will be punished and all suffering will end there will be no more tears no more crying no more sickness and no more death he will make all things new and so we have confidence to wait for that just as the Egyptians could look at the character of God and wait for a deliverer back in their time friends

[41 : 14] God is trustworthy he is worth us giving him control of the storyline of our lives we can look back on the work of deliverance on Jesus Christ living dying and rising again and know for certain that this is the character of the God that we have been called to know and to trust if you're here this morning and you haven't put your trust in this God or if you're here this morning and you are struggling I call you to think that the God who leads you on unexpected paths and what seem like dead end roads he has not forgotten you and he's calling you to him to trust him to put your faith in him to know that what he's done in Jesus is for you let's pray Lord we thank you this morning for this passage and we thank you for your word

Lord and how it points us to you Lord I do pray that by your spirit you would help us to see you as you really are and Lord you would give us hope this morning Lord I do pray that you would strengthen our faith today as we look at this passage Lord that we would know you to be a God who hears and a God who remembers a God who sees and a God who knows us and a God who being all of those things has done what is necessary in Jesus for us to be delivered to be delivered unto you Lord Lord we pray that you would help us this morning to have that confidence we pray this in Jesus name amen