

Following God Out of Bondage – Exodus

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After Jesus was raised from the dead, he met a couple of people walking from Jerusalem to their home in Emmaus, and Jesus joined them, but they were unaware that it was Jesus.

They were telling Jesus about the things that had taken place in Jerusalem, of Jesus being crucified, of his body being missing from the tomb that morning. They were distraught.

Jesus did not reveal his identity and after listening for a while, he said, “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” 27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.” (Luke 24:25-27 NIV)

Now that is a lesson I wish I could have heard because Jesus took the stories of Hebrew Bible, our Old Testament, and in the time it took them to complete their walk from Jerusalem to Emmaus, he summed up how those stories pointed to himself.

As we go to Exodus, which is where we will find the story of Moses, it’s important to note that Jesus connected what happened with Moses with himself. It will be appropriate for us to do the same.

Exodus begins with the author naming the sons of Jacob, all twelve of them, including Joseph, who was made second in charge of all of Egypt by Pharaoh.

Let’s reach back into Genesis for a moment and talk about Joseph.

He was the great-grandson of Abraham, whom God had led from his home in Ur of the Chaldees, about 1750 miles away, to a land that God said he would give to him and his descendants.

Abraham took all of his possessions and faithfully followed God. The land where he settled was called Canaan, a land flowing with milk and honey, the land where Jesus would one day be born, crucified, and resurrected.

Joseph and his brothers were living in Canaan, but at age 17, Joseph’s brothers sold him to a caravan of merchants headed for Egypt. His brothers thought about killing him because he was always telling them about dreams he had where the brothers were bowing down to him. Besides that, Joseph was his dad’s favorite son, and they hated him for it.

But in God’s providence, Joseph grew into a man whose ability to interpret dreams allowed him to foresee the coming famine.

He encouraged the Pharaoh to save seven years of grain for the seven years of drought that was approaching. When the drought came, Joseph was put in charge of a distribution plan to feed the people. Because he saved all the lives of the people through his weather forecast, he rose to power.

People from all over the region came for food, even Joseph's family that had sold him into slavery. They had to face their brother, not knowing it was him.

After an emotional reunion where Joseph both confronted his brothers and then forgave them, he moved his entire family to Egypt.

Exodus begins by telling us that when a new king came on the scene, he forgot about all the good that Joseph had done, and that did not bode well for his descendants.

All of them were strangers in a land that was not their own. They were of a different culture and a different ethnic origin. They became an easy target for abuse and so the Egyptians enslaved them.

These slaves were Hebrews, or Jews as they would eventually be called.

As I've mentioned, they already had a home. God had already given them a homeland.

It was called Canaan. It would also become known as the Promised Land, Zion, the Holy Land, or Israel, after Joseph's father Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel.

These people were not only estranged from their land, but they were also alienated from their God.

While they didn't know their God, their God knew them, and God worked to change that.

There are people today who do not know God. God is always working to change that.

What we learn about this God in Exodus is still true about Him today.

1) You may not know God, but God knows you and pursues you.

God had promised Abraham that He would be His God and to his offspring after him. Yet, these people seemed to have no concept of Abraham's God.

While there is some burden on us to share the love of God with those who don't know Him, God is not without responsibility Himself to show up in the lives of those He loves to demonstrate His love and to show that He knows us and loves us.

In Exodus, we see God at work as He puts on a full-court press to win the freedom of the Hebrew people and to demonstrate his love and care for them through his miracles.

All this began with his calling of a man named Moses.

God got Moses' attention through a bush that was on fire but was not being consumed and told him he'd been chosen to go and win the release of God's people from Pharaoh.

Moses was the son of a Hebrew slave family, but he had grown up in Pharaoh's court.

At the time he was born, there were so many Hebrew babies being born, that Pharaoh began having the male babies killed, so Moses' mother coated a basket with tar, placed him in it, and hid him among the reeds of the river. That's where Pharaoh's daughter found him when she went to bathe.

She kept him for her own and raised him as an Egyptian. Ironically, she actually hired Moses' own mother to help her in the early stages of his life. When Moses was 40, he killed an Egyptian in defense of a fellow Hebrew. He later ran to the desert to escape being killed himself when he was identified.

That's where God came to him 40 years later.

God always knows where we are. At every stage of life, whatever our age. God knows where you are right now. Moses was 80 when God came to him in the desert.

Just like those sheep that Moses was tending out there in the desert, later Jesus said that He was like a shepherd who would leave the 99 sheep that are in the fold to look for the one sheep that had wandered away and was lost.

You might be that lost sheep this morning. But God knows where you are. If you are listening today, this is one way God is coming to look for you. Jesus said that he is the Good Shepherd and he is happier when he finds that one lost sheep than the nine-nine that did not wander off. (Matthew 18:12-13)

God found Moses and convinced Moses to win the release of the Hebrew people from Pharaoh? Why?

2) The second thing Exodus teaches us is that God cares about our suffering.

Suffering became a part of this world when Adam and Eve aspired to be their own gods. They were cast out of the garden and suffering became the consequence of rebellion from God.

Sometimes we see a clear cause and effect between suffering and our sin. Other times, it's not so clear. The fairness of life is questioned. Sometimes good people suffer. Nothing they did wrong caused their suffering.

We've clearly seen this, this week with Robby Kinney's death. Robby was a young father of two teenage boys, a loving husband, a faithful follower of Jesus, a well-respected police officer, and a volunteer coach. He and Candi loved going on youth campouts and spending time

together as a family. Robbie and Candi went to Liberia with me several years ago because their hearts had been opened to the suffering of the people there through the stories I had shared.

Their compassion and love were on full display at Ricks Institute as they worked and interacted with the students during our time there. They unofficially adopted a young boy named Armstrong, the son of one of the teachers. Just a couple of years ago, Armstrong's father died and Robby and Candi help him through their grief. Now this teenage boy is grieving again, as his American father has died.

Thirty-three people have died of Covid-19 at Northeast Georgia Hospitals and there are over 100 Covid cases in those hospitals now. These people die with no family present and then their bodies cannot be returned to the family upon death. There is suffering all around us.

The Hebrew people that were enslaved by Pharaoh had done nothing to deserve being enslaved.

However, God was at work in the midst of their suffering. Exodus presents God as one that cares about the suffering of humanity.

When suffering surrounds your life, remember that God cares. We need to see and understand that while He cares, it has never been His purpose to remove all suffering from us or from this world.

Sometimes we suffer even though we are in step with God.

The Apostle Paul suffered greatly during his ministry and once wrote to the church of Corinth that he had prayed on three occasions for God to take some issue of suffering away from him, but instead, God had said to him, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." (2 Cor. 12:9 NIV)

So Paul said to the Corinthians, "Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong." (2 Cor. 12:10)

Paul offers us a sober reminder that our faith in God is not a faith designed to deliver us from every unwanted and uncomfortable situation in life.

However, the book of Exodus tells us that does not mean that God does not care, nor does it mean that God will not intervene.

We know this by the name that God revealed himself by in the burning bush to Moses, "I Am Who I Am." One meaning of God's name is that God will do whatever God desires to do.

In the case of the Hebrews, their plight moved God, and God took notice. In speaking to Moses, God said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering." (Ex. 3:7).

God knows us. God pursues us. God cares about our situation and especially our suffering.

3) The Exodus story teaches us that God gives us a choice as to whether we want to begin a faith journey that leads down a path that draws us closer to God.

For the Hebrew people, they watched as the Pharaoh grappled with their release each time Moses announced a new plague. On several occasions, Pharaoh came close to releasing them, only to have his heart grow hard.

How many people have come close to beginning a faith journey with God, only to rebuff the prompting of the Spirit of God and then return to the same lifestyle, the same sins, the same attitudes, the same habits?

Exodus is about leaving behind an old way of life. It's about beginning a new way of life. But to do that, you have to exercise trust.

You must be willing to leave behind what you know, especially if what you know is bondage, and trust what you don't know to find true liberation.

Just before they left Egypt, Moses gave them all instructions to take a one-year-old lamb without any defect and kill it. They were to take blood from the lamb and place it on the doorposts of the houses.

They were given instructions on how to cook the lamb. Moses said they were to eat it with their cloak tucked into their belt, their sandals on their feet, and their staff in their hands.

I guess you could say, this was the first fast-food meal. The Hebrew slaves had to be ready when Pharaoh released them, lest he changed his mind. They were going to have to leave in haste.

The bread was to be made without yeast because it wouldn't have time to rise. And you always wondered why the bread from the Lord's Supper tasted so bland. You are tasting bread made in haste. You tasting a bread that was later broken by Jesus, representing his body given for us.

The last plague was the death of every firstborn son. It affected everyone from the animals to the home of Pharaoh.

Yet death didn't have to come. Moses told Pharaoh that the plague was coming. He'd seen nine others come. He should have known God would deliver on the tenth. But he refused to listen.

Every Hebrew had a choice about applying the blood of the lamb to their doorposts. God had said to Moses, "The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt." (Exodus 12:13 NIV).

4) Exodus teaches that God has the power to deliver us from bondage.

Anyone that has ever been oppressed should look to Exodus with hope because it says that God has the power to change your life.

God can win your freedom and change your circumstances against overwhelming circumstances.

Never believe that a person cannot be reached because God can find ways to communicate with people when no one else can.

The Hebrews watched God win their release through a series of plagues.

Then with a moment's notice, hundreds of thousands of slaves left Egypt and headed North. With the first GPS, God led them with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.

When Pharaoh changed his mind and with chariots of soldiers in hot pursuit, these slaves became trapped between their old home and the Red Sea, and then God revealed his power by parting it with wind from the East.

You would think they would never doubt God again, but they complained in the desert when there was no water, but God provided water to flow from rocks.

When they complained because there was no meat, God provided manna from heaven and quail by the thousands.

The Bible is written so that we might know that something more than manna came from heaven to sustain us.

John's Gospel says that "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." John 1:14 (NIV)

While Jesus came from God, he came to Canaan, born into the same lineage as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

He fulfilled what the prophets said that the Messiah would come from the lineage of David. This is probably part of the story Jesus told about himself on that road to Emmaus.

Once Jesus said that whoever obeyed his words would never taste death. Those who heard him say this thought a demon-possessed him. They said, "Even Abraham died. Are you saying you are greater than our Father Abraham?"

In answering them, Jesus spoke as if he knew Abraham personally.

Again they challenged him.

57 "You are not yet fifty years old," they said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!"

58 “Very truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “before Abraham was born, I am!” 59 At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds. (John 8:57-58 NIV)

These words affirm what John wrote about him: “In was the Word and the Word was made flesh.” John 1:1 (NIV)

Jesus’s words are also a reference to the words God spoke to Moses at the burning bush. Jesus is claiming to be God, the Great, “I Am.”

We can also connect the cross of Jesus with the sacrificial lamb offered during the Passover meal, the night the Hebrews were freed from their bondage.

1 Peter 1:19 says that we are redeemed by the “the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.”

We celebrate that redemption each time we observe the Lord’s Table and break bread, which symbolizes the body of Christ given for us and drink the cup which symbolizes the blood of Christ shed for us.

These were parts of the Passover Meal that Jesus shared with his disciples.

They are vital to us, too, because, through Jesus, God frees us from the bondage of sin.

We see in Exodus 19:5-6 that God desired to make Israel a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

However, they failed to fulfill that role.

In the fulness of time, God sent Jesus to be the priest that we need, to help us find our way to God the Father.

That’s the reason Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 16:6 NIV)

You may not know God this morning, but God knows you and is pursuing you. Even though this message, God is speaking to you in some way.

If you are suffering in any way, or know someone who is, Exodus teaches us that God cares about your suffering.

God gives all of us a choice about how whether we are going to begin a faith journey with Him. Will you draw closer to the Lord and seek to be conformed to the image of Christ?

If so, **Exodus teaches that God has the power to deliver you from the bondage of your sin.**

You can begin that journey with God today if you commit to following Jesus in all that you do and say.

First, you need to confess that you need the Lord in your life because you are sinful.

You need to ask God for the forgiveness of your sins.

You need to ask for God to come into your heart and have control of all of your life.

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