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Getting Out – From Slavery to Salvation

Exodus 1:1 – 22

If there is one Old Testament book that the New Testament invites us to read in a Christ-centered, gospel focused way as a paradigm of salvation, it's the story of Exodus. Exodus is the story of God's people, enslaved by an evil world ruler, forced to do his bidding, being rescued, saved, through a deliverer, raised up and sent by God and led out of bondage from a foreign land and led into freedom in the land of promise. In fact if you could ask an Israelite at that time to describe his experience of this salvation, his response would be remarkably similar to the response a Christian today might give.

At the Gospel Coalition Conference in 2011, Pastor Tim Keller related a story about the time when he was a seminary student, gathered with some other students in R.C. Sproul's living room talking about the Old Testament. And one of the foremost Old Testament scholars, J. Alec Motyre happened to be there as well. And R.C. invited Motyre to talk about the connection between the Old and New Testament. So Motyre posed this question: What would an Israelite who had come out of Egypt and crossed the Red Sea say about that experience? And this was his answer: I was a stranger in a strange land, a slave to an evil ruler, under the sentence of death, but I took shelter under the blood of the Lamb. And our Mediator, our Savior, led us out and we have crossed over from death to life and now we are on our way to the promised land but we're not there yet. But the One who mediated for us and saved us has given us His law to make us a community and He's given us the tabernacle, because you have to live by grace and forgiveness. And His presence is in our midst and He's going to be with us until we get home. And Motyre said, 'That's almost exactly what a Christian would say.'

If you want to know about salvation, if you want to see a picture of how God saves His people, there are few better places to look than the story of Exodus, and the life of Moses. In Exodus, God is revealed as the One who saves, the One who rescues, the One who leads out. Exodus is about getting out. What we are getting out of; how we are getting out; and why we can get out. Exodus is the gospel in pictures. As we said when we were going through Genesis, the gospel is the good story of God's work to rescue and redeem, hostile rebels from their sin and guilt and ruin and bring them into worship. Exodus begins in slavery and ends in worship.

So we start here with chapter one. The first few verses in chapter one tell us that Jacobs family prospered and multiplied from seventy people to a multitude that filled the land. Specifically it says, *the people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong so that the land was filled with them.* In chapter 12, the writer tells us that this happened over a period of 430 years. And then verse eight says a new king arose that did not know Joseph. He didn't know the history of how Joseph had saved Egypt. All he saw were these foreigners taking over the place and he put together a plan to deceive, dominate and destroy them. And the rest of this chapter describes how the descendents of Jacob become enslaved to a cruel tyrant intent on their destruction.

But in here also is the story of salvation. And there are three things about salvation we get from this passage: Serving anyone or anything but God is slavery; God is always at work, even in the hard times, so trust Him; God saves by means of the weak and the powerless, not the strong and the powerful. What I'd like you to see in this passage are these three principles of salvation; ***Serving anyone or anything but God is slavery; God is always at work, even in the hard times, so trust Him; God saves by means of the weak and the powerless, not the strong and the powerful.***

Verses 9 and 10 tell us that this new Pharaoh looks at the exploding Israelite population and says: *"Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us. 10 Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and, if war breaks out, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land."* So he devises a plan to fix the problem.

Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens. They built for Pharaoh store cities, Pithom and Raamses. The strange thing is though, in spite of the affliction, in spite of putting them to hard labor, the people of God not only did not go away, they thrived. *But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad. And the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel. Persecution and affliction only work to further the purpose of God, not hinder it.* Steven Khoury, a Palestinian pastor in the Shofat area of east Jerusalem, whose church was recently forced by hardline Muslims to relocate, did not view this persecution as a setback but rather as a promise of further growth. He said, 'Most of the growth that happened in this location, happened as a result of persecution'.

Instead of ease and comfort, the descendents of Jacob began to experience loss and hardship. Instead of freedom, they were turned into slaves. And yet the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied, and the more the Egyptians began to fear them. So they worked them harder. *So they ruthlessly made the people of Israel work as slaves and made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field. In all their work they ruthlessly made them work as slaves.* Now we don't really get the impact of what was going on here, but these two verses expose one of the main themes of Exodus.

It doesn't get translated in the English because the word that means work or labor here is one word used over and over. In English we would say '**So they ruthlessly made the people of Israel serve as slaves and made their lives bitter with hard serving, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of serving in the field. In all their serving they ruthlessly made them serve as slaves**'. We change it up when we translate this so it doesn't sound so repetitious and boring. But in doing that we obscure one of the main themes of Exodus. We read Exodus and often miss the forest for the trees. But here is the big picture.

The theme of Exodus is getting out – getting out of Egypt, getting out of bondage, getting from under the hand of a cruel taskmaster. I'm sure many of you have seen that old movie, The Ten Commandments, and you heard Charlton Heston telling Yul Brenner, 'Let My people go'. The problem is that Moses never says that. Or rather, Moses never **just** says that. What Moses says over and over, what Exodus emphasizes over and over is what he actually says, 'Let My people go – **that they may serve Me.**' 'Let My people go that they may serve Me in the wilderness'. And the essence of this service is explained in chapter five as Moses explains to Pharaoh that this service to God is to worship Him. In other words, 'Let My people go, that they may worship Me'. Exodus begins in slavery, but it ends up in worship.

We often miss this about Exodus, because the first half of the story is full of exciting drama and images. We've got the evil villain and the heroic midwives. We've got the intrigue of the baby in the basket being rescued by the princess, and a murderer on the run. And then we have all the miracles and special effects of the plagues and the narrow escape across the Red Sea and Pharaoh's army drowned in the water. Then the miracles of bread and water in the wilderness and Moses meeting God on the mountain with thunder and lightning and fire and smoke – and then we come to the last half of the story and it sort of bogs down in tedious details about laws and how to build the sanctuary of God. And we tend to miss the point. At the end of the story what we have is a people who have been rescued from slavery, gathered around the tabernacle of God in worship. Exodus begins in slavery, but ends in worship.

And here is the first point. **Serving anyone or anything but God is slavery.** Serving something is to worship something. This passage shows us that Exodus is about salvation from bondage, freedom from slavery – getting out. Salvation means freedom, it means liberation. But when we hear the word freedom, we have a totally skewed sense of what that means. When we hear freedom, we think of not having any master at all, out from under authority, being able to choose what you want and live however you want without someone telling you what to do. As Americans we value this more than anything else. It may have some application on certain political or social levels, but at the spiritual level it's a myth. The whole Bible, but Exodus in particular, is subversive to that idea of freedom. God is not saying, 'Let My people go that they may live their lives any way they want'. He says, 'Let My people go that they may serve Me, that they may worship Me'.

Exodus works to destroy the notion that you can have any real freedom without God. Everybody serves something. Everybody lives for something. As Bob Dylan, my favorite pop theologian once said, 'You gotta serve somebody'. There is something that you put on the top shelf as the reason for your significance. There is something that you value above everything else. There is something you serve that gives you meaning and drive and purpose. Whether it's money – 'If I have money then I'll be happy'; or morality, 'I'm significant because I'm a good person'; or it's your family or your accomplishments; whatever it is, everybody has something that if they have it they feel good about themselves or secure in their lives, or their lives have meaning and purpose. But anything or anyone you have to make you feel good about yourself, or valued or secure is something or someone you are in bondage to. Your heart is chained to it and without it you feel worthless and insignificant.

If you don't have it, you're unhappy, you're restless, you feel unfulfilled and you're in trouble. Despair and anxiety set in – you live in fear that you'll never have it. You're enslaved. Anyone whose life is not centered on Christ is still a slave. Only if God is your master can you be absolutely free. Only if His love is the most important thing in your life, only if His approval is the ultimate source of your significance, can you be absolutely free and live life large. Your exodus out of slavery isn't finished until you give yourself to worship God, to serve Him and Him alone. If He is not the foundational center of your life, you are still a slave, still serving Pharaoh, still making bricks. If you are making anything in your life more important than God, you are still serving a harsh taskmaster. And it's never enough. You can't make enough bricks to satisfy Pharaoh. You can't make enough money – you'll never have the perfect family – you'll never be good enough. Serving anyone or anything but God is slavery.

The second thing we learn is **God is always at work, even in the hard times, so trust Him.** The interesting thing in this section is that things just keep getting progressively worse. First Pharaoh enslaves the people and ruthlessly puts them to hard labor. But that doesn't solve his problem because they continue to thrive. So he devises a plan to kill off all the males, no doubt hoping that the females will be assimilated into the Egyptian population as the Israelite male population dies out. But the wily midwives concoct a scheme to subvert his plan and the male children continue to appear. So finally Pharaoh resorts to open genocide and orders all his subjects, Hebrew and Egyptian to kill any male child they find. Open season on the Israelites. Instead of getting better, things are getting worse and worse. **Slavery to infanticide to genocide.**

And apart from a few mentions, God doesn't seem to be around; or at least He's doesn't seem to be doing much about the problem. In fact if you read into chapter two, the one guy who seems like he might be able to do something about it, makes a real mess of the thing and has to run for his life. This story seems to highlight what is a common human response to disaster – '**Where is God when bad things happen?**' He doesn't seem to be around. But this story makes it clear that God is always working, even when we don't see it. And especially in the hard times. This story works to kill the idea that if bad things are happening, God must not be involved or He is far away and uncaring. But if you read on you realize that all of Pharaoh's plans actually accomplish the exact opposite of what he intended. What he intends for evil, God intends for good.

Look at Pharaoh's attempt to keep this population under control by enslaving it – they not only survive but they thrive. They not only thrive but it works to make the Egyptians fear them. And this fear eventually leads to their liberation and prosperity. Chapter 12 tells us that when Israel left they **plundered** the Egyptians. Egyptians were giving them silver and gold and jewelry and begging them to leave. When slavery didn't work, Pharaoh tried to kill off the newborn males, which is where we get Moses, the deliverer of Israel. Furthermore, it is only because of this decree that Moses is found, rescued, brought up in Pharaoh's court where he got the necessary leadership skills to eventually liberate his people. In other words, **the very decree designed to destroy the people was the very decree that worked to produce a deliverer.**

Here's the lesson. When God seems unconcerned about your situation- He's not. When He seems absent or hidden – He's not. He is always working for good behind the scenes where you can't see Him. He's always working for good and justice even in the worst kind of tragedies. Our problem is we don't have the perspective on it.

We can see it in Exodus because we've read the story – but our story isn't finished yet. The Bible tells us some immovable, unshakeable truths – God is compassionate and long-suffering with us, not taking any delight in the suffering of anyone. But behind all the suffering and pain and tragedy, He is working infallibly to bring about our goodness and justice.

Our reasoning in hard times is usually full of holes. We say, 'I don't know why this is happening to me. I can't see any good reason for it. Therefore there must not be any good reason for it'. That is not only faulty reasoning, but it's arrogant as well. Are you God? If you were, you would know whether there was a good reason for it – but you're not so you don't. It is just like when we pray. You see the Bible says that we don't know how to pray as we should – but the Holy Spirit prays in our prayers.

And what the Holy Spirit is doing is taking our prayers and praying what we would have prayed if we knew everything that God knows. Was this slavery and attempted genocide a bad thing, a disaster? Yes – absolutely. So where was God? He was right there directing everything, taking what Pharaoh meant for evil and imposing His will for good on it. You see, ***sometimes we are prepared to be liberated from the slavery to sin through hard and difficult times.*** Kim and I have a friend whose testimony is that it was through nearly having a mental breakdown over her second son that she and her husband finally came to Christ. Kim and I had witnessed to this couple throughout our time at college, but it was only when things got really bad with their son that they found Christ.

Finally what this passage shows us is that salvation comes through the weak and the powerless, not the strong and the powerful. **God saves through the weak and powerless.** That is, God never seems to work through insiders, only through outsiders. God works for and with the poor, the marginal, the excluded, and the oppressed. He works through weakness not through power. He works through failure, in a way, not through achievement. We saw this in Genesis as well. God works through Abel, not Cain. He works through Isaac, not Ishmael. He works through Jacob, not Esau. He seems to always work through the wrong person. He works through the barren woman, or the older woman, or the less beautiful woman, or the unloved woman. It is always Sarah, not Hagar. It's Leah, not Rachel.

So what's happening here? Who are the heroes in this story? Who is it that saves Israel? It's the women. All the heroes are female. The only guy in the story is the villain and he isn't even given a name. But the heroes are women and they are named. Shiprah and Puah. **And** they are midwives. Now we might not get the significance of that but in this culture, the fact that the heroes are midwives is incredibly important. Historians tell us that midwives of this era were usually women who did not have children of their own. They were either unmarried or barren. And women who did not have children were considered at best, useless, and at worst, cursed by the gods. They were just above slaves on the social ladder. Shiprah and Puah were childless. We are pretty sure that is the case because the reward for their courage and faithfulness is that God gives them children in the end.

Once again, God uses the lowest of the low, the despised, the marginal, to bring salvation to His people. And then in chapter two, which we didn't read, God uses an outsider, a religious outsider and a racial outsider to bring deliverance. God uses a Gentile, Pharaoh's daughter to save His people. God uses some women. God uses the poor. God uses the excluded. God uses the racial, gender, social outsider. What does that mean? It means at least a couple of things. First, what you think about yourself and what others think about you is of no account to God. His is the only opinion that matters. *For though the Lord is high, He regards the lowly, but the haughty He knows from afar.* Psalm 138 God particularly likes to work with people who have been told all their lives, or thought all their lives that they're nobodies. God always works through the lowly, the outsider, the marginal, to accomplish His purpose. *But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.* 1 Corinthians 1:27-29

Secondly this means that since God works this way, we who have been redeemed by Him ought to work this way. We should care for those who are marginal, who are poor, who are despised – the outsiders. People who have embraced the gospel will have the same concern God has for people without privileges and without power. They work for them, and they seek to serve them. They seek to help them. They seek to do justice, and they seek to have compassion for people like that. And we could end right here. There you have it – three things about salvation this passage teaches us. But if we end right here, it will crush you.

See we learned that serving anyone or anything but God is slavery. We learned that God is always at work, even in the hard times, so trust Him. And we learned that God saves by means of the weak and the powerless, not the strong and the powerful. But if that's all that happens, we'll be crushed. If our hearts are convicted by this, we'll go out and try to serve God. And we'll fail. We'll try to keep a stiff upper lip during hard times, but eventually we'll give into despair. We'll try to go out and do justice and have compassion and help the down and out and the poor and the marginalized and the outsiders – and we'll get burned out.

Because if all you have is the teaching without encountering the person to whom this all points, you'll fail utterly. You'll be crushed. Do you see? What does this story ultimately point towards? Who is the real deliverer here? Who is Moses pointing toward in this story? It has a familiar ring, doesn't it? The king commands that all the male infants be slaughtered, but a child grows up to be the deliverer of His people. He's rejected by His own – He spends forty days in the wilderness and is anointed by the Holy Spirit and returns to lead them out. He's under the sentence of death – but through that very sentence He is raised up to be the prince and liberator of His people. Moses, here in Exodus, is pointing directly to Jesus.

And Jesus Himself refers to this when He was on the mountain with Moses and Elijah, and Luke tells us that they were talking about His departure. But the word Luke uses is unique – it's not the normal word – Luke says they were discussing His *exodus* – His getting out. They were talking about the immanent crucifixion and death of Jesus as His exodus. As great as Moses' exodus and liberation was, it only saved one people group and liberated them from human bondage. But Jesus' exodus liberated the world from the slavery to sin and death. Moses liberated the people at the risk of his life – Jesus liberated His people at the cost of His life. Unless you embrace this Jesus as your liberator from sin and death, this teaching won't help you, it will crush you.

What you need to see is the One who to whom all service is owed, all worship is due. Jesus who died so that He could lead you out. You need to kneel at the foot of the cross, the place where the very worst of things turned out for the very best. The place where the sky was dark and God seemed to be hidden, and yet there He was, behind the scenes bringing ultimate good out of ultimate bad, bringing everlasting joy and gladness out of sorrow and sadness. You need to be brought to that place where your weakness gets you in. Where you realize that you are accepted, not because you're strong and capable but because you're weak and need help. Where you can say, 'Lord, accept me on the merits of Your Son, not what I have done. I'm a mess. I'm a failure. I'm a great sinner, but Your Son is a great Savior'.

Our gracious God and Father,

We thank You for sending Jesus the Deliverer, who came to free us from the slavery to sin and death so that we might worship You and live to the praise of Your glory. Forgive us setting our hearts on lesser things and worshiping them instead of You. Lead us out of bondage from every other affection into the freedom of serving Your dear Son. Help us to know, especially in the hard times, that You are always with us, working for good even when we can't see You. Remind us again and again of Your saving love and compassion for the lowly, the marginal and the outsider, the weak and the powerless, and grant us to care for them in Your name. Bring us to the foot of the cross where our weakness is met by Your great strength and the bitter chains of our slavery are replaced by the sweet cords of Your salvation, we pray in the strong name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

***May the Lord bless you and keep you
and make His face shine upon you.
May the Lord be gracious unto you;
May the Lord lift up His countenance on you
and give you peace.***