

September 21, 2014

Preparation for Salvation

Exodus 2:1 – 25

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. 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. 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.

The core issue in every human heart is who or what do you worship? What is it you value above all else? What is most dear to you? What is it that makes life meaningful and purposeful and full of significance for you? In other words, **What is it that you serve?** And what we saw in chapter one is that **servicing anyone or anything other than God is slavery.** In fact the picture we get there is the background to the truth revealed in the New Testament in 1 John that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. The whole world is in slavery to Satan – serving him, doing his bidding – enslaved. Apart from Christ we are in servitude to this evil Pharaoh. And we need to be rescued.

But not just rescued from something – but rescued to something. We need rescue from the slavery of serving Pharaoh to the freedom of worshipping God. **You see we have a worship problem.** Our hearts are enslaved to this world and the things of this world and so we serve the world, we worship the stuff of this world. Whether it's worshipping some **thing** or some **one**, our problem is that we are not worshipping God. We were created to worship God, not this world or the things of this world or the people of this world, but God. The gospel comes, not to teach us to be better people or to do good and not evil, but to bring us out of the slavery of serving the world, into the freedom of serving the God who made us. Out of the slavery of worshipping anyone or anything other than God into the joy of worshipping Him alone. John Piper has a great sentence in his book, **Let the Nations Be Glad**, **'Missions exist because the worship of God does not'**.

Salvation is all about worship, and Exodus tells us the story of people rescued from slavery to sin and death and the devil to worship the living God. And in this little section this morning I think we can see something of how we are prepared for this salvation. You know everyone has a story of coming to faith in Christ. There is a process, a chain of events, a collusion of circumstances that work to bring you to the point of faith – a kind of preparation. Now everyone's story is different in the details, but generally there are three elements at work in every story and I think we can see these three elements here in chapter two. **God relentlessly pursues those whom He has chosen for salvation; God often uses hard things and even our own failures get us out; Prayer is instrumental in the process.**

I believe this text answers the question: How are we prepared for salvation? What happens in our lives to bring us to faith? How are we brought to faith? What Exodus shows us here is that God has a people He has chosen and resolved to make into a great nation to be a blessing to the world. In Genesis we saw a picture of this chosen people in Jacob and his descendents who had first been saved from the great famine that had devastated the Middle East – particularly Canaan and Egypt. Providentially God had raised up a deliverer in Joseph who brought his family down from Canaan to Egypt where they were given the best land in Goshen. And there they lived for 300 years or so. They probably never even thought of going back to Canaan. No doubt they were content to stay in Egypt and become 'Egyptianized'. We find out later that to a large degree they adopted the culture and the superstitions and gods of Egypt. Many probably even forgot from where they came and even their distinct identity as the people of God.

And then we read in Exodus chapter one: *Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph*. Left to themselves, the people of God would probably have been absorbed into the Egyptian culture and lost their peculiar identity. There is no indication that there was any big movement to return to the land that God had promised Abraham. But God is not content to simply lose the people He has chosen to some evil ruler. ***He relentlessly pursues those He has chosen for salvation***. It is almost as if He says to Israel, 'Oh, so you're content to live in Egypt? Let's see how content you are with a new ruler'. And things begin working in their lives to bring them out. The first thing we see is that ***God relentlessly pursues those whom He has chosen for salvation***. In other words, God sets His sights on us. Ephesians one tells us that before the foundation of the world, God chose us for salvation. ***God has a people that He has determined to bring out from slavery to sin and death and the devil and He is single-minded in that pursuit***.

Christianity is unique among all other religions for many reasons, but one of the most unique things is that it tells about a God who relentlessly pursues His people to draw them to Himself. In every other religious system, people pursue their god, hoping that through moralistic behavior, doing good works, following rituals, caring for the poor or the downtrodden or the marginal or by strict obedience, they will be accepted by the god they pursue. Other religions say, 'I obey, therefore I am accepted'. Only Christianity says 'I am accepted therefore I obey'. Only the Bible has a story like Genesis where God goes looking for His wayward creation when Adam and Eve disobeyed God and ate the forbidden fruit. Only Christianity has a God who comes in love and says, 'Adam, where are you?' Only Christianity has a Savior who says, as Jesus said in the gospel of John, ***'You did not choose Me, but I chose you'***. Or to put that another way as C.H. Spurgeon once wrote: ***'I am quite certain that, if God had not chosen me, I should never have chosen Him'***.

That means that everything in our lives is working to bring us to faith. Look at Moses. God is determined to bring His people out of bondage and He is going to use Moses to do it. First of all, Moses is under a sentence of death from the moment of birth – Pharaoh says, 'Kill all the male children'. But his mother weaves a basket, makes it waterproof, and puts him in the basket in the river. She then tells his sister to keep an eye on the basket. Along comes the daughter of Pharaoh to take a bath in the river and she happens to see the basket, hear the baby cry, and gets her servants to bring her the basket. Miriam runs up and says, 'Do you want me to get someone to nurse him for you?' And Pharaoh's daughter says, 'Sure' and Miriam runs and gets mom. Now it is apparent to everyone what's going on – clearly Pharaoh's daughter was not so dense as to miss the fact that there is a baby in the river in a basket and somebody just happens to be around when she finds it and just happens to know a wet nurse that is handy. Everybody knows.

But just look at how all the details are orchestrated by God. He's got everything in hand. Nothing is left to chance. The fate of the whole nation was wrapped up in this little basket, but God was in charge of every little detail. And He is in charge of every little detail in your life. If you look back on your journey to faith, you will see the evidence of God's controlling hand in your salvation. Moses would not have even been there if not for the decision of Pharaoh to kill all the boys. But this was unusual. The usual thing back then was to kill the girls. Until the rise of Christianity in the world, women were treated little better than servants or slaves. Archaeologists have discovered a letter from an Egyptian businessman around the time of Christ who is in Rome writing his wife, who was pregnant back in Alexandria. He says, "Hope things are going well," "If the child comes before I get there, fine. If it's a girl, kill it." That's in the letter. "And by the way, if it's a girl, kill it."

But here we have a ruler going against the cultural norm and calling for the murder of all the boys. And so Moses gets dropped in the water. Which, by the way gave him his name. 'I'll call him Moses because I drew him out of the water'. If not for Pharaoh's daughter, he probably would have had another name. A large part of his preparation and training for his role as leader of God's people came because he got dropped in the river and adopted by royalty. In the book of Acts, Stephen related the circumstances of Moses' preparation before the council: *Pharaoh's daughter adopted him and brought him up as her own son and Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and deeds*. If Pharaoh had not tried to kill all the boys, Moses would never had had that training that made him a leader capable of leading this oppressed people out of Egypt. He would never had on the one hand, understood who he was as a Hebrew, or on the other, gotten a world class education and training that made him the right man, the only man, for the role of deliverer. Only God can so order the details of your life to bring you to faith.

That's the first thing. God relentlessly pursues us to faith. Which brings us to the second point: **God often uses hard things and even our own failures get us out, to bring us to faith.** You see, left to themselves, comfortable and safe in the land of Goshan, the Israelites were not looking to get out. It was only when they were made slaves that they began to seek God. God often uses hard things to wean us away from the world. Down in verse 23 we read: *During those 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.* Often it takes hard things to put us out of taste with the world and begin to seek God. God often makes us feel the chains of our slavery by first causing us to realize we are slaves – slaves to our appetites, slaves to our passions, slaves to sin, slaves to our circumstances. We are made to feel the heavy burden of our bondage and we groan because of it. Are your circumstances hard right now? Don't say 'Where is God when things are hard?'. Very likely that *is* God at work in your life to bring you to faith. There's a song that shares this truth and one line goes like this: 'God blessed the broken road that led me straight to you'. Sometimes it is a broken road that leads us to Christ. Erik Hines, a pastor in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, shared his road to faith like this: ***Drug addiction led me to crime – crime led me to jail – jail led me to a discipleship program – the discipleship program led me to Christ.***

And that speaks to the other part of this – ***God uses even our failures to bring us to faith.*** Look at Moses. *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. 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?" He answered, "Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" Then Moses was afraid, and thought, "Surely the thing is known." When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh and stayed in the land of Midian.*

Moses had grown up in the court of Pharaoh. He lived and moved in the seat of power and privilege and luxury. He was, for all intents and purposes, an Egyptian. But it is clear from the text that he also was keenly aware of his Hebrew identity. He could never have been the deliverer of his people unless two things happened. First that he got some leadership training and that happened because he got adopted into privilege. But secondly, he could never have been the deliverer of Israel if he did not identify with them. We don't know how long Moses lived with his own family, but it was at least for the first five years of his life. And no doubt he got some training in his early years with his father and mother, teaching him who he was and who God was and the whole history of his people. Which is why he apparently decided to strike a blow for freedom. Stephen again referred to this in his defense: *"When he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brothers, the children of Israel. And seeing one of them being wronged, he defended the oppressed man and avenged him by striking down the Egyptian. He supposed that his brothers would understand that God was giving them salvation by his hand, but they did not understand.*

What this tells us is that Moses actually was trying to be obedient to his divine calling as he understood it. But there was a problem. He tried to do it his own way. No doubt he expected a general uprising after he avenged his Israelite brother, but it didn't happen. They didn't understand. As a deliverer, Moses was a failure. He failed at the very purpose for which he was raised up. Not only that, he was a criminal failure – he murdered someone. And then he ran away. But if Moses hadn't failed, he would never have gotten to the place where he could actually be the deliverer. He had training, he had a world-class education, he knew how to lead, but he lacked one necessary ingredient – ***humility.*** He would never have learned humility in Pharaoh's court. He could only learn that in the wilderness. ***To learn to be a leader of men, God first made him a leader of sheep.*** He sent him into the desert to build what was lacking in his character. It is obvious that this guy had a temper problem. How is he going to lead hundreds of thousands of people out of bondage into freedom if the only recourse to problem solving he has is to kill somebody? He needed some time in the desert – forty more years to be exact. But in the end the Bible says that Moses was the humblest man on the face of the earth.

Moses also needed to identify with his people as foreigners in a foreign land. Even though they had lived in Egypt for at least 300 years, they were still a distinct ethnic group. And Moses had grown up as a Prince of Egypt, but he had not fully realized his role as a Prince of Israel. It took some time in the desert to bring him to come to terms with the fact that even though he grew up in privilege and power and luxury, he was still a foreigner in a foreign land and needed to get out as much as the rest of Israel did.

He goes into the desert, and again, by God's design, meets up with the daughters of Jethro, or Reuel as he is called here, marries one of them called Zipporah, has a son, and names him Gershom, which means 'foreigner', because he says, "*I have been a sojourner in a foreign land.*" He is beginning to understand who he is and what God is calling him to. And Reuel, or Jethro, becomes a vital advisor to Moses at a crucial moment later in the story. God is weaving all the stuff together, all the good bits and all the bad. So here he is, hiding in the desert, fallen from privilege, hounded into exile. His career in ruins; not a leader of an empire but a leader of sheep and scrub. For forty years! There is no deliverance happening. The chapter ends with the people of Israel groaning and crying for God to save them. Things look bleak. So where is God?

He is right in the middle of this. He is taking Moses' obedience and his failure and weaving success. Here is God, taking the utter failure of his chosen instrument to weave deliverance. Here is God, taking what Pharaoh meant for evil to accomplish good for His people. God is working everything out. He's weaving your obedience and your disobedience. He's weaving your mistakes and your triumphs. He's weaving all this stuff together so that in the end we will stand back to see the grand tapestry and say, 'How marvelous – I didn't know – You were there all the time'. This is the meaning of that great passage in Romans where God says, '*And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose.*'

And I know some of you might be saying, 'I'm not sure I really love God, but I'm even less sure that I'm called. How do I know?' The promise is conditional to those who love God and who are called according to His purpose. You may not be sure you really love God, but the way you know that He has called you is that you have within yourself a desire to know Him. You might not be there yet, but you're conscious of Him, you are in some way seeking to know Him. That is not true of those whom God does not call. In speaking of the unregenerate heart, the Bible tells us that 'No one seeks for God'. The only ones that seek for God are those whom God is already seeking. A.W. Tozer says in his book, *The Pursuit of God*, that, '***We pursue God because, and only because, He has first put an urge within us that spurs us to the pursuit.***' If there is something awakened in your soul toward God, but you have not yet put your faith in Christ, be assured that He will not let you rest until you find your rest in Him. And everything in your life is working to bring you to faith, even the hard things and even your failures.

And right when everything looks like failure, we see the barest glimmers of hope. *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.* God relentlessly pursues those whom He has chosen for salvation; He often uses hard things and even our failures to bring us to faith; and **prayer is instrumental in the process**. It wasn't until Israel began praying that salvation began happening. The text says 'Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help...their cry from rescue from slavery came up to God'. This was not some inarticulate groaning or crying. Their prayer was specific – 'Rescue us from this bondage!'

This tells us that prayer reflects not only our needs but promotes the purpose of God. Centuries before, God told Abraham: *Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions.*' Genesis 15:13-14 But it was not until Israel began to pray that things began to happen. Many times it is the hard things, the difficult circumstances that cause us to groan and cry out to God and begin to pray. And the interesting thing here is that they began to pray exactly what God had intended to do – indeed what He planned all along to happen. This tells us a couple of things about prayer.

Firstly it tells us that God intends that **prayer is instrumental in promoting His purposes** on the earth. The Bible tells us that we don't really know how to pray or even what to pray – but the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. Not only does He pray in our prayers, praying oftentimes what we would have prayed had we known everything God knows; but God works in our lives to bring about those circumstances that have the effect of bringing us to the point where we are willing participants in the purpose of God. God wanted to lead His people out of slavery. Apparently they were content to stay there – until a new ruler came along and enslaved them and tried to kill them off. Then the prayers started going up. And what they prayed for was exactly what God intended to do – get them out.

Secondly this passage tells us that **God has a specific timetable**. Things were bad before Moses was born – but there was no deliverer. Things continued to get worse for forty more years as Moses grew up; and then another forty years go by with Moses in Midian. But then in verse 24 the Bible says that God heard their groaning and He remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Because the Bible was written to us, it has a way of expressing things from a human perspective. It isn't as though God was woken from sleep one day by all the groaning and crying and prayers of His people and said, 'Dear heavens, I'd forgotten those guys down there in Egypt – I'd better do something'. **The prayers of the people of God have such an instrumental role in the purpose of God that the Bible can only make that clear by speaking in terms we understand**. Of course God hadn't forgotten – He never forgets – He can't forget – He knows everything – all the time. One commentator puts it this way '**Our prayers are so effective and delightful in His ears that God condescends to accommodate His eternal, sovereign, providential working to what we can understand, as though to say, 'Oh thank you for reminding Me'**'.

But though our prayers are instrumental, events they work to change are still held within the framework of God's own timetable. Why did God allow His people to be oppressed for such a long time? We don't really know – except that He mysteriously tells Abraham in that same chapter in Genesis that 'the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete'. Apparently there was something that would take four hundred years to complete that was tied up with Israel in Egypt. The bottom line is that we don't know the why of God's timeline. We can speculate and guess, but we don't really know. What we do know is that He has a very specific timeline for everything – even our coming to faith. And He is relentless in pursuing it.

Bill Hybels tells about an experience he had after a baptism service in their church. He said: "I bumped into a woman in the stairwell who was crying. I thought this was a little odd, since the service was so joyful. I asked her if she was all right. She said, 'No, I'm struggling.' She said, 'My mom was baptized today. I prayed for her every day for almost 20 years. The reason I'm crying is because I came this close to giving up on her. At the 5-year mark I said, "Who needs this? God isn't listening." At the 10-year mark I said, "Why am I wasting my breath?" At the 15-year mark I said, "This is absurd." At the 19-year mark I said, "I'm just a fool." But I just kept trying, kept praying. Even with weak faith I kept praying. Then she gave her life to Christ, and she was baptized today. I will never doubt the power of prayer again."

What I see in this text is the marvelous hand of God in salvation – how He brings us out – how He works in our lives to bring us to faith. God is relentlessly pursuing us, and everything in our lives is working to bring us to faith. Nothing is left to chance – God has all the details of our lives in His hands. He uses hard things and even our failures to get us out; and at the right time, the time of His choosing, He answers our prayers and brings us out. This is the story of the gospel. God raises up a deliverer for His people who are in bondage to an evil ruler, to bring them out, to bring them to faith. He raised up Moses, whose deliverance only worked to save his own people. But his story was meant to point to the One to come, Jesus, who would save the world. *'But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.'* Galatians 4:4-5 Moses risked his life to bring his people out, but Jesus gave His life to bring us out. Put your trust in Him today.

Our gracious God and Father,

We thank You for these gospel stories that show us not only Your great love for us but show us how You save. Grant us to see You are a God of history and You are working Your wise and loving plan out through that history. Help us to see you are behind everything and You perform all things for us. Thank You that You do not leave us in our misery, but You pursue us to faith and You are working all things in our lives to bring us out. Grant us the confidence and the humility and the love and the faith that comes from knowing that. Bring us to the cross where You paid the price to redeem us out of slavery. We pray this in the powerful name of Jesus Christ our Savior, Amen.