

Exodus 1

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[0 : 0 0] Great, well thank you Johnny for leading us thus far in our service. There's a sermon outline handout this morning. If you've not got one of them in the way in, please put up your hand and the guys at the back will sort you out with one. But I want to begin this morning by asking you a question. When was the last time you had a conversation with someone and they used a word and you had absolutely no idea what it meant? I'll give you an example of this in my own life. So I'm from the west coast of Scotland, don't hold that against me. But six years ago I first moved to Edinburgh and I found that there was this one word that people in the east use all the time and I had no idea what it meant. And it's the word ken. Has anyone heard of the word ken? I had no idea. I thought that was a person when I first moved here. I thought I need to meet this guy. Everyone's talking about him. But I realised that people in the east use that word ken almost as if they say, yeah I know what you mean. So it's like an agreement word. And especially when it comes to a person, to say that you ken someone doesn't mean that you know them, it just means you know who they're talking about. There's a big difference between kenning someone, knowing about someone, and truly knowing someone. And I wonder if that's true for a lot of us this morning when it comes to our relationship with God. You know how many of us actually if we had to describe that this morning, it would be a lot more on kenning terms than it would be on knowing terms. You know if I asked you this morning to describe God, what are the words that are coming to your mind? And I wonder this morning, these words that you're thinking of, are they words that you just associate with God? Or is this the God that you know and have experienced in your own life? Do you ken him? Or do you know him? Because right at the heart of this book of Exodus, the big theme, the big theme, if you like, is the God who makes himself known. Known to Israel, to the Egyptians, to Pharaoh, and to the watching world. The God who reveals himself, reveals who he is, that he is holy, gracious, sovereign, mighty, rescuer, just, patient, loving, near, not just empty words, but wonderful truths about who God is that should cause us to stand in awe of him and worship him and serve him wholeheartedly. The God who makes himself known. As we'll see, the God who rescues a people, not so that they could just be informed about him, but who rescues and redeems a people so that they can live in relationship with him. Knowing God, write at the heart of this letter.

You know what my prayer is for my own walk with the Lord this year? What my prayer is for my family? My prayer is for us as a church. 2015, this would be a year when we know God better. Yeah? That his grace, gospel grace, would so transform our lives that it would transform the life of this church, our lives individually, this church corporately.

Oh, that we would know God better. This is the story of a people who go from canning God to knowing God. So with that introduction, turn with me to Exodus chapter 1.

And I guess the big idea that I want us to see this morning from chapter 1 is that even in the deepest darkness, God's plan will prevail. And we pick up the story with the people of Israel in Egypt.

[4 : 1 5] Now that begs the question, how did they get there? Well, really, we've got to go back to Genesis chapter 12. That's where it starts. God reveals himself to Abraham and he tells him to go, leave his homeland and follow him. And God makes Abraham a threefold promise, a covenant that from Abraham would come a great nation. So there's a people that he would give them a land for their own. There's a place that through them, God would bless the nations, a blessing. And in Genesis 17, we see that there's a fourth element to this promise, a relationship. That God would be their God, they would be his people.

That's the plan. So Abraham goes. Really, the rest of the book of Genesis is the story of how those promises begin to develop. And what we see is that those promises, they don't end with Abraham.

They continue down the family line. Isaac, Jacob, and then we meet Joseph. I love Joseph. Someone should write a musical about him. Joseph, betrayed by his brothers, sold into slavery. And after a spell in an Egyptian prison, God orchestrates it, God orchestrates it so that he rises from the prison to the palace.

He's got a say and he's got a seat at the top table in Egypt as the king's right-hand man. And then there's a famine. And down come Joseph's brothers to Egypt looking for food.

And what do they see? They see Joseph and they see that he's a big deal now in Egypt. And so back they go to dad and at Joseph's invitation, the whole family leave the land and they come to be in Egypt with Joseph.

[6 : 14] That's the story so far. And here's where Moses breaks the number one spelling rule that your English teacher told you at school.

The very first word of Exodus, chapter one, word one, the original Hebrew, is the word and. I know the teachers out there, I can feel it. I know. And.

But that's the link that Moses wants us to see. He's bridging the events of Genesis to what he's about to write in Exodus. Because this story hasn't finished.

The story of promise continues. So this is how verse one reads, okay. And these are the names of the sons of Israel who went to Egypt with Jacob, each with his family.

Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah. Ishikar, Zebelin and Benjamin. Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher. The descendants of Jacob numbered 70 in all.

[7 : 16] Joseph was already in Egypt. So here we are. God's people are in Egypt. That's the setting for the next chapter of this story of promise.

But here's what we might miss. That gap might well be one page in your Bible. But the time gap between that Joseph generation coming to Egypt and the story that we pick up here in Exodus one. We're not talking a few weeks difference. This is roughly 320 years. 320 years of silence. That's a long time.

Now on the one hand, I guess you could say not a lot's changed because they're still in Egypt. But on the other hand, an awful lot has changed. Look at verse 6 with me.

That time gap has led to a problem. Now Joseph and all his brothers and all that generation died. So that Joseph generation, that golden generation who had heard firsthand from God, long gone.

[8 : 28] Not only have that golden generation gone, but there's a new sheriff in town. That name Joseph means nothing to him. Now maybe you've experienced something like this in your own life.

And I remember when I was a trainee solicitor. Part of your training was that you moved around departments. You changed seats every so often. So I remember I only did it in my two years there. I did it once, the change. I changed boss. But I remember well, I spent a whole year working with this boss over here. I knew him. He knew me. I knew how he worked.

He knew how I worked. I knew his jokes. He knew my jokes. Very next day, new boss. I was very aware he didn't have a clue who I was. Now he's a very nice guy in actual fact.

But imagine if he had given me a job on day one. Graham, here's a job for you. And I'd have said, no, no, no, no, no. That's not how I work. That's not what I used to do over here.

[9 : 28] Do you think that's going to fly? No chance. But that's exactly what's going on here in Egypt. New boss, new rules, no relationship.

Because previously, that name Joseph, his legacy in Egypt, the work that he'd done for that nation, that carried with it massive kudos. I mean, Joseph is an Egyptian legend.

And as long as Pharaoh knows Joseph, these Hebrew people are guaranteed privileged status in Egypt. But whereas under a previous Pharaoh, Joseph's name meant something, fast forward a few generations, this Pharaoh, Joseph means nothing to him.

And this is the story here and now. Because there's a king who stands against. And he looks at these Hebrews. And what does he see?

He doesn't see allies. He sees aliens. He looks around and he sees Israel being too many and too mighty for him. He sees a cheap and effective workforce who will build for him cities.

[10 : 48] And in Egypt, remember the superpower of the day? This guy is the superpower of the superpower. And he's treated like a god. So you can imagine.

Here's a people that claim to worship another god. I don't think so, says Pharaoh. They answer to me. Not some god that they claim spoke to their forefathers in ages gone.

And so what does he do? He aggressively seeks to assert his authority and his power over this people. And the conditions that the people of God find themselves in that are described for us here, they are brutal.

And Moses goes to lengths to make sure that we understand that. So here's where we need to do some text work in our Bibles. Look at your Bibles. Verses 11 to 14. This is what Moses writes. I mean, that is all in three verses.

[12:03] And I see if we just drop down a little bit to the next section. We see the most horrific genocide attempt as Pharaoh seeks to wipe out all these baby boys.

That's who this guy Pharaoh is. Nothing's going to stand in his way of him getting his way. Friends, we need to see Moses' drift as he writes this.

Because this is real slavery. This is real suffering. And Israel have moved from being a free and protected ethnic group to abused, downtrodden slaves.

This is something akin to the Jews in Nazi Germany. That's what we're talking about. Now, here's where I want us to pause for just a minute. Now, imagine that you're a Hebrew living in Egypt at this time.

Now, you've heard about these wonderful promises that have been passed down from that generation. You've heard about how God has been at work in that generation. But then you look at what you see unfolding in front of you.

[13:13] And what do you see? You see chains. You see violence. You see oppression. You see death. What do you think you're thinking? What are the questions that would be on your mind?

Just take a minute and think about that. You know what one of my favorite worship songs is here that we sing? You know that song, How Great Is Our God?

How great is our God? I love that song. They are not singing that in Egypt. Do you know what they're singing? Where is our God?

Who is our God? Where is this God that I've heard about? Where is this God that I grew up hearing about?

That my dad told me about? That his dad told my dad about? Where is this God? Interesting little side point there.

[14:15] Thinking as one who's Lord willing about to start raising a child. She grows up. And she watches me in action. She sees what makes me tick.

You know, is she going to see someone who just knows facts about God? Or is she going to see a living faith lived out in front of her? It's a big challenge here, isn't there?

For parents. You know, what are we passing on to the next generation? Are we giving them words? Or are we teaching them what it truly means to worship God?

But anyway, that's what the people in Israel are asking. So one, what's happened to those promises that God's made to us? Number two, is God really in control?

Number three, is God still present with us? Where is God? Now, why do you think they're asking that question?

[15:18] Probably, precisely, because of the reasons that you and I ask that question at times. You ever ask that question of God? Where are you, God? Why do you ask that question?

Precisely because it doesn't look like it sometimes. Am I right? Where are you, God? It doesn't look like you're in control. How do you make sense of the chaos that happens in your life?

How do you make sense sometimes in life when stuff doesn't turn out like you wanted it to turn out?

Because that's the tension here in Exodus chapter 1. There's a mismatch between the words of God, the promises of God, and in the painful reality of the situation that these Israelites find themselves in at grounds you.

Where are you, God? But here's the thing. Suffering might not mean singing, but silence does not mean that God is sleeping.

And what Moses wants his readers to see is true in Egypt is what we need to see is true in our own lives today as well.

[16:35] That even in the deepest darkness, God's plan will prevail. Because there may well be a king who's standing against, but there is a God who stands above.

So let's just walk our way through those three questions that we said would be on the minds of the Hebrew people. Because I think Moses, as he writes this, I'm sure he is aware of those questions. So question one, what about the promises of God?

Have they failed? Remember what we said the four promises were? The people, the place, the blessing, the relationship. Well, as for the land, certainly aren't in a land flowing with milk and honey.

As far as being a blessing to the nations goes, well, it certainly doesn't look like it. In terms of the relationship, well, they're not free to worship God, are they?

But what about the people? What about this great nation that God promised would come from Abraham? Well, notice again how often in this passage, Moses alludes to the fact that they are a growing nation.

[17 : 48] Look with me, okay? Verse 7. They multiplied and grew strong and the land was filled with them. Verse 8.

This is Pharaoh's words. He says, the Hebrews are too many. Verse 12. They multiplied. Verse 20. They multiplied and grew very strong.

And I guess verse 12 is the key one for us to see. You see how that works? The more Pharaoh oppresses them, the more they grow. Don't ask me how that works.

I'm not sure. But the more Pharaoh oppresses them, the more they grow. Do you see what's going on there, friends? You see, no man is going to stand against God and God fulfilling his promises. No human being is going to stand and stop God fulfilling his plan. You think that is futility. And as we continue on in this book of Exodus, we'll see how those promises, they continue to develop.

[18 : 50] Have the promises of God failed? Absolutely not. God's promises are trustworthy. And even in the deepest darkness, his plan will prevail.

Question 2. What about his plan? Have the purposes of God in Egypt, have they been thwarted? Because if we're honest, it kind of looks that way, doesn't it? If we're honest, it looks like Pharaoh is standing almost like a roadblock.

That God didn't see him coming. But it's all part of the plan. This is what God said would happen all along. Now, you don't need to turn there, but if you want to, you can.

Genesis 15. So, in the same passage where God had told Abraham about his offspring, do you remember that? As great as the number of the stars could be, right after those words, God says this.

Genesis 15. Verse 14. Know for certain that for 400 years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and that they will be enslaved and mistreated there.

[20 : 01] But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterwards they will come out with great possessions. So, you see, right there from the start, these events in Egypt are all part of the plan.

God knows. So, when Isaac is but a twinkle in Abraham's eye, God's already told Abraham this is how it's going to play out. But, Graham, why would God lead them into Egypt knowing that this is what they're going to meet?

I mean, what kind of God is that? Great question. Well, might it be that God is sovereignly allowing them to experience adversity, their plight, their helplessness, so that they would know that it was God alone who had rescued them from slavery, and so that they would know his greatness even more?

Do you not know that to be true of God, that sometimes he allows us to experience darkness? He brings us low so that we would turn and see him high.

You know, I know that it's been true in my own life, and if I'm honest, in my own testimony, that I know when things are going smoothly, when things are going well for me, I'm tempted to think, Lord, I like you.

[21 : 26] I don't know if I need you. And I know that the Lord has allowed me to experience things in my life to bring me low so that I would turn and see that he is everything that I need.

But this Egypt episode, this isn't a curveball that's come God's way. It's all part of the plan.

And just as slavery is part of the plan, see in those verses there that rescue, and God judging his enemies, that's part of the plan too. Have God's purposes been thwarted?

Absolutely not. God's plans are good and are certain. Question three, is God still with us? I mean, maybe he was with us at the start when we came to Egypt, but he's moved out and he's left us on our own.

Well, this is what God has said to Jacob, Genesis 46. I know this is a bit of a Bible chase, but you can just listen. So Genesis 46, the context is that Joseph's brothers have just returned from Egypt,

and Jacob's weighing up whether to go down to Egypt, to leave his homeland and go and live with Joseph in Egypt.

[22 : 39] And this is what God says. He says, I am God, the God of your father, he says. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there.

I will go down to Egypt with you, and I will surely bring you back again. So God's promise to be with Jacob as he travels to Egypt.

Now, I'm sure if you're a Hebrew, you've heard that story. You've heard that promise passed down through the generations. But it's one thing to hear it, it's another thing to believe it and see it.

But here's how Moses wants us to know that this is true. Because God is still working in the lives of individual people in Israel.

And we see it most clearly in these Hebrew midwives. You know what I love about the way Moses has put this here? You know, the most powerful man in the world at this point, you don't need to know his name.

[23 : 41] But these two run-of-the-mill, ordinary, faithful Hebrew midwives, you need to know their names. These Hebrew midwives.

Now, you can speculate whether at verse 19 they tell Pharaoh a slight lie or not. But I think to do that is to slightly miss the point. These Hebrew midwives, God's agents, whose actions save the lives of these Hebrew boys, they are being commended here because they fear God more than they fear man.

That they fear God more than they fear Pharaoh. And they are obedient to God. And they are here to let us know that even in the midst of such brutality, oppression and evil schemes, God is still working in the lives of individual people to accomplish his plan.

He's got people in this city. And who he is raising up to stand against this oppressor. And that is still true today. That God raises up people from all over the world, right?

He puts them in the right place at the right time to accomplish his plans. You know, we've heard stories, haven't we, from the mission field that that is true? But what I want us to see this morning is it is true on an individual level as well.

[25 : 06] You know, because I don't know what there is in here this morning. A hundred? After this service, we'll all go out. Monday morning comes. Where are we? We're all spread across this city. Different places, different jobs, different neighbors, meeting with different people.

And guys, do not see that as insignificant. Because God might well be raising you up, putting you in that place, because he wants to reach that person through you. He might be wanting to accomplish that job through you.

Never see that as insignificant. God has people in this city to do his work in his time. So is God still with us?

Absolutely yes. Absolutely yes. God's presence is real. There may well be a king who stands against, but there is a God who stands above.

Because even in the deepest darkness, God's plans will prevail. And just as we come to a close this morning, I want to ask you what your favorite fairy tale is.

[26 : 13] Do you know what mine is? Hansel and Gretel. Now I was trying to think why it was Hansel and Gretel. But growing up, my dad was a dentist. Is he the thought of a kid eating a gingerbread house made of candy and gingerbread?

Incredible. But every time I think of Hansel and Gretel, I think of the breadcrumbs. Do you know what I mean? The breadcrumbs so that they could find their way home. Clues that would help them find their way.

But what I want us to see, just as we finished this morning, as we continue in this book of Exodus over the next few weeks, as we read it together in our devotions, we've always got to remember that this event is pointing to the something greater.

Now we must never allegorize this stuff. I mean, these are real events and this is real slavery. But this Exodus, this great rescue, this great salvation is a pointer to the greater rescue and salvation that God would accomplish and win for his people through Jesus.

We've got to see the breadcrumbs, okay? 400 odd years of silence between that Joseph generation and the Exodus. 400 years of silence between Malachi and when Jesus comes on the scene.

[27 : 31] Breadcrumbs. Pharaoh here, who's trying to kill baby boys. Does that remind you of anyone? Of Herod, who was trying to kill the baby boys. You see the breadcrumbs? And God sent

his son, whose name means God saves, into a world, a situation of darkness to redeem and to rescue people from their spiritual slavery, their sin.

The ultimate example that even in the deepest darkness, God's plan will prevail. Let's pray. Father, you are a great God.

Lord, it's our prayer that you would help us to know you better. Father, that you would, this week, inform our minds, that you would raise our eyes, and that you would thrill our hearts.

Lord, that we would know you more, and more and more this week, we pray. Amen.