

God's Big Story: Deliverance

Exodus 2:23-25; 3:1-12

A sermon preached by Dr. Calvin Warpula

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Believers today are part of a big story, God's story, that begins on the first page of the Bible and continues for thousands of years, even through now, and will someday culminate around the throne of God in the heavenly city of God. This story begins with the first verse of the Bible, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." God created man and woman perfect, pure and innocent but man disobeyed God and suffered the guilt and consequences of sin. Adam and Eve were cast out of the beautiful garden into a world of pain and hurt, suffering and sorrow, and disease and death.

In Genesis chapter 12 God called a man named Abram from Ur of the Chaldeans and made a great promise to him [Gen. 12:1-4]. This promise was later enlarged when Abraham moved by God's guidance into the land of Canaan. God promised that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore. God also promised that his descendants would someday own and occupy all the land that he could see to the north, south, east and west. Abram's name was changed to Abraham which means "father of a great multitude." For 25 years God had promised that Abraham and his wife, Sarah, would have a son, but he was not born until Abraham was 100 and Sarah was 90. Isaac was the child of promise. God made the same promises to Isaac that his descendants would be numerous and that the land would someday be his. Isaac married and had two sons, Esau and Jacob. Abraham died at the age of 175 and only had one son and two grandsons to show for the great multitude and only a half-acre burial plot at Machpelah to show for the land promise. Isaac died and was

buried at Machpelah but he had neither great number of descendants nor any amount of land except the cemetery plot.

God chose to work through Jacob whose name was changed to Israel because as the name means, he “struggled with God.” Jacob had 12 sons and one daughter. Out of these God promised to build a great nation and to give them this land of promise. Jacob and his sons were shepherds and moved from place to place following the grazing land for the sheep and cattle. The sons married and had children but they were still just a small clan and owned no property except the burial plot at Machpelah.

Jacob’s life is filled with family struggles and problems. His four wives are contentious and jealous of each other, his sons are sometimes troublemakers and deceivers like their dad, and Judah, his fourth son, fathers his own grandchildren through his son’s wife. Besides all this, the ten sons of Jacob are jealous of Joseph their 17-year-old younger brother and conspire against him and plan to kill him but settle for selling him to a bunch of merchants in a caravan headed to the Egypt, far to the south. They think they will never see him again. “Good riddance,” they think. “We’re through with him.” Wow. What a turbulent, troubled family? Can God do anything with this mess? Has God made a mistake? Maybe he needs to clean house and start all over with some other people, maybe ones whose lives are not so messy and sinful.

The last thirteen chapters of the first book of the Bible, Genesis, are about Joseph in Egypt. God works in his young life. He is sold, lied against, imprisoned, and forgotten but finally at the age of thirty interprets Pharaoh’s (the king) dream of seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine. Joseph is selected by Pharaoh to head up this giant administrative project of saving up food during the years of plenty so that the people will not starve and perish during the years of famine. Joseph is promoted to be the Prime Minister of Egypt. After seven years of plenty and two years into the famine, nine years total in all, Joseph’s brothers show up wanting to buy food for their famished families back in the land of Canaan. They do not recognize Joseph but he recognizes them. It has been twenty-two years since he has seen them. During that time he has not had one word of communication from his family. He doesn’t even know if they are dead or alive until this time. After a while Joseph is revealed to his brothers. They are

afraid of him thinking that he will order them killed for their selling him into slavery, but Joseph sees God's big hand of providence in the whole story. Joseph says, "It was not you, but God that sold me into the land of Egypt so that I could save you alive during this world-wide famine." Joseph had this entire family of 70 people counting the sons, their wives and children, and his aged father Jacob, brought to Egypt. They live there and prosper for many years. They are in the eastern Nile delta, a land called Goshen. They prosper, increase and multiply. After 17 years, Jacob died and his request to be buried back at Machpelah is honored. Years go by. Joseph ages and dies at the age of 110. He knows that Egypt is not their home. He knows the promise God made to his great grandfather, Abraham, to his grandfather, Isaac, and to his father, Jacob, that someday all the land of Canaan would be theirs, their promised land. Joseph then requests that upon his death that his body be mummified and stored until the day comes that all of them leave Egypt. The last chapter of Genesis tells this story. The last words of Genesis are "a coffin in Egypt."

The story continues in the second book of the Bible, the book of Exodus, one of the three or four most important books of the OT. So here we have the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in a foreign land. They are prospering and multiplying. They are in this land for 400 years. The faithful among them pass on the stories of the patriarchs. They remember the promise God made to Abraham that his descendants would be captives in a foreign land for 400 years and then they would be delivered. Things get worse and worse for the descendants of Israel (Jacob's second name), called Israelites, in Egypt. A new government arises that does not know Joseph or remember the good that he did for Egypt. This new administration looks at these foreigners in two ways. They see them as a big threat to overthrowing the government. If a foreign power invaded Egypt, perhaps they would side with them and overthrow the government. On the other hand, these people are good slaves, migrant worker types, who through their work and industry add to the gross national product and thus build the economy. So the new Pharaoh decides to intimidate these people with harsh taskmasters who make them slaves making bricks, digging canals, and manning foot pumps to irrigate their fields. The people keep increasing so much that Pharaoh says that every new male baby should be thrown into the Nile River to drown and be eaten by the crocodiles. Where is God in all this mess?

God has not forgotten his people. God has not forgotten the promise he made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God cares. God loves. God is getting ready to act. That's what the Bible says here in Ex. 2:23-25 [read].

So what does God do? Does he send in a foreign army to win a big battle? Does he press for a new election to throw out the old administration and bring in a new one that will change courses? No. God doesn't use bullets, battles, or ballots. Instead, God uses a baby.

Have you noticed that when God gets ready to change the world he starts with a baby? He did this with Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Hannah and Elkanah, Zechariah and Elizabeth and with Mary the virgin. God changes the world through the birth of a baby.

Two unknown, insignificant Israelites, a godly couple named Amram and Jochebed, have a little baby. We don't even know the baby's Hebrew name. After three months, Jochebed was afraid that her baby boy would be discovered by the soldiers and killed. So she made a little basket and used waterproofing materials so that the basket would float. He placed her little three-month-old baby in it and took it to the Nile River to a place where she knew that the daughter of Pharaoh would find the child. You might say that Moses was a "real basket case."

I find it interesting that

God's plan for the deliverance of His people was now reduced to the slender thread of a tiny baby under the decree of death set adrift on a river in a fragile basket. Hundreds of years later His plan for the deliverance of mankind would again be reduced to the slender thread of a tiny baby, this time in a manger in Bethlehem (Luke 2:1-20).

[F. B. Huey, Jr., Exodus. Bible Study Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977, p. 22].

Sure enough, the princess came to bathe there and found the little baby floating in the basket. Nobody can deny a little baby so she said she would adopt the child and rear it as her own. She named the little Hebrew child, "Moses," meaning, "I brought him up out of the water." Miriam, the baby's older sister, was watching and ran up to the princess saw the baby in her arms, and asked if she

could run get a Hebrew woman to care for the child as a nanny until the child was old enough to move into the palace with the princess. Moses' mother Jochebed may have reared him until he was five to seven years old. She evidently taught him all about his people, who they were, the stories of the patriarchs, where they came from and God's big promises to bring them out of this land someday.

This is all in Exodus chapter two verses one through ten. The next verse is forty years later. The OT writes sometimes do not give us all the details we would like. What happened during those forty years? Well, the Christian preacher Stephen in the NT, Acts chapter 7, gives us the answer. Listen to what Stephen said, [read Acts 7:20-22]. Stephen says Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians. The Egyptians were the dominate world power. They developed advanced mathematics, astronomy, science, building construction [in Moses' time, the pyramids were already a 1000 years old], hieroglyphics and cuneiform writing, architecture, music, and medicine. The mummies of Egypt show signs of dentistry and primitive brain surgery. As the step grandson to Pharaoh, Moses had a world class education, the finest in the land.

Stephen continues the story of Moses in verse 23, where he says [read 7:23-29]. Moses knew God. He knew God's promise to bring his people out of Egypt. He loved his own people. He defended an innocent fellow Israelite and killed an Egyptian who was hurting him. Moses assumed the people would thank him for his act of courage and bravery and they would rally around him and follow him in a rebellion against the Egyptians. But they didn't. They rejected Moses. Moses knew now that there would be a price on his head and a warrant out for his arrest and death. So Moses fled to the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula.

Moses thought that God was calling him to lead the people but this was all Moses' idea. God did not tell him that. Moses acted on his own and got into trouble. When we act without divine guidance or without listening to God we get into trouble. I have done that several times in my life.

Moses now was far away from his people. He was all alone but God was with him still. Moses married a woman from there and had two sons. He worked as a shepherd in the wilderness of Sinai. There he learned humility. He learned to trust God. He learned to listen to God. All alone in his solitude out there

keeping sheep for his wife's father, he learned the meaning of obedience and servant hood.

Stephen tells us that another forty years passed. Moses is now eighty years old. He is a different man than he was forty years ago. He is no longer trusting in his human abilities, his education, his training or his powerful position as step grandson to the Pharaoh.

Now God is ready to act. So God calls Moses at the burning bush. God tells Moses to take off his shoes because he is standing on holy ground. If you were to analyze that soil around the bush, it would be no different from soil anywhere else in the land. Anywhere God is holy ground. God says, "Moses, I have heard the cries of my people in Egypt (this is the first time that God calls them his people). I want you to go back to Egypt and lead my people out of bondage." Moses is not campaigning for this job. He is no longer the arrogant, self-appointed leader, chomping at the bit to do something big for God. Keeping dirty, smell sheep for forty years has a way of humbling a person. He says, "No, Lord, I can't do this." He offers excuse after excuse why he cannot do it. God answers every one of his excuses. Moses says, "I can't, I can't, I can't." God says, "You can, you, you can, because I will be with you." Moses reluctantly accepts God's command and direction and goes back to Egypt. This reminds us that God does his work through weak, imperfect people, not through perfected saints. Other great men of the Bible like Jacob, David, Elijah, and Jeremiah also had their moments of weakness and failure.

Dwight Moody one time commented on Moses situation. He said, "Moses spent forty years in Pharaoh's court thinking he was somebody, forty years in the desert learning that he was nobody, and forty years showing what God can do with a somebody who found out that he was a nobody."

Isn't it interesting how God uses aged Moses to deliver his people? I know some people today that think that once you get 65 that you should get a rocking chair and Medicare and retire from active duty. There is a lot of age discrimination in our world today. Once a person turns 50 and gets a little gray hair, it is hard to get a job in today's market. But God is an equal opportunity employer. God can

use everyone in his service. We never get too old to serve God. We never retire as Christians. God still has important work for older people to do.

I see this clearly in Philippians 1:6. Here the aged apostle Paul says, “God began doing a good work in you, and I am sure he will continue it until it is finished when Jesus Christ comes again.”

Do you see what God is doing? A good work in you.

Do you see when he will be finished? When Jesus comes again.

What’s the message? God isn’t finished with us yet. Remember, that Moses’ greatest achievements were after he was eighty years old. His name is more than 700 times in the Bible. He was used by God in greater ways than any other OT character.

Can you imagine the scene when two octogenarians, Moses and his brother Aaron, appear before the most powerful man in the world and demand, “God says, ‘Let my people go.’” Pharaoh laughs at them and says, “Who is your God? A puny God of your puny people. Get out of my presence with your absurd demands.” Moses does miracles before Pharaoh but he thinks his magicians can do the same sort of tricks.

Pharaoh then decides that the people, if they are thinking of independence, they must not be working hard enough, so he increases their work load. He begins to push them even harder to produce more with less. The people then go to Moses and say, “Moses, you are a troublemaker. Look what you have caused. You have made things worse, not better.”

God performs a series of ten plagues against the Egyptians, the Pharaoh, and the gods of the Egyptians (Ex. 12:12). Every one of the plagues is against one of the gods of the Egyptians. They show God’s power over everything.

Then comes the final plague. God tells Moses to have the people take lambs without spot or blemish and sacrifice them to the Lord and to roast the meat. They are to take the lamb’s blood and sprinkle it on the doorways of their houses. They are to gather all their families inside and eat the Passover meal with roasted lamb, unleavened bread, and bitter herbs. The minister of death will pass over

Egypt in the night. All those houses that do not have the blood on the doors will experience the death of the firstborn child in the family. Even Pharaoh's son, who is supposed to be a god heir himself, will die. The people are to ask the Egyptians for silver and gold and to carry it with them when they leave. They are to eat the Passover meal with their staffs in their hands and their shoes on their feet. God is going to deliver his people this night.

Just like God said, the minister of death passed over that night. All of Egypt was filled with death, crying and mourning because of the death of the firstborn males. But Israel, protected by the blood and by God's grace, escaped all harm.

The next morning Pharaoh told them to leave the country, to get out, totally out, and not to ever come back. They were unwelcome and unwanted. And Israel left following the leadership of Moses. There were six hundred thousand men, not counting their women and children. In all, there must have been a million or so of them.

They marched north and then east and back in a southerly direction. They came to an impasse. Mountains were on the left, the desert was on the right, and the Sea of Reeds was in front of them. They looked back and saw Pharaoh's army of six hundred chariots and other soldiers chasing them. Pharaoh decided that this was a prize to lose so he changed his mind and was going to capture them and bring them back to slave labor once more. The people cried out to Moses, "Why did you bring us out into the desert to die? Why didn't we just stay in Egypt? Do you realize what you have done? You're going to get us all killed or be enslaved all over again."

God caused a cloud to come between the fleeing Israelites and the approaching Egyptians. This cloud was dark for the Egyptians but light for the Israelites. God told Moses to take that dead stick of wood, that rod of his, and hold it up over the Sea of Reeds, and the waters parted. God sends a strong east wind that dried up the ground, and Israel began to march forward through the dry sea bed. When they were all across, God removed the cloud and now the Egyptians could see the Israelites on the other side so they came after them, right into the parted waters of the Sea of Reeds. When they were all in the middle of the sea, God told Moses to put down his rod and the waters became together again and the

entire Egyptian army and all their soldiers, commanders, and chariots perished in the flood.

Israel was now free, free at last. Their enemies were destroyed. This was their big Fourth of July, Independence Day. This is the most dramatic event in the history of Israel. It was commemorated every year for the next 1400 years in the annual Passover feast until the coming of Jesus. It is still commemorated today by Jewish people as the great, most dramatic event in their history. It was during the Passover meal that Jesus took bread and wine and gave them spiritual significance signifying himself. Jesus says that he is our Passover and it is his blood that forgives our sins and marks us as his. He is the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world.

There are many parallels between Israel's situation and that of the church. Israel was in Egyptian bondage. We are in bondage to sin. God sends a deliverer to lead them out. God sent Jesus into the world to be our savior. The people had to come under the blood of the sacrifice so that their lives would be saved. We have to come under the sacrifice of Jesus and the giving of his life, his blood, to be forgiven and saved from God. The people had to believe and trust and obey God in order to be delivered by God's grace. We have to believe, trust and obey God in order to be saved by God's grace. The people were not free until they "were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea" (I Cor. 10:1-2). We are baptized into Christ, into the benefits and blessings of his death and resurrection. The people were at last free and a recognized people. We in Christ are the congregation or community of Christ.

Today we have seen God at work. He has taken seventy people in a small clan and turned them into a mighty nation of people. Our story has shown us the birth of a nation, the building of a nation, and the deliverance of a nation. The story continues in weeks ahead as God shapes and refines that nation with his laws and teaches them how to live together and worship him. Stay tuned.

Today, God is still at work. His Big Story is still in process. You can become a part of God's nation now, the church of Jesus Christ. You can be a part of God's big plan for the universe. God loves you. He cares for you. He sent Jesus into the world to die for your sin. He wants to have a relationship with you.

Jesus told his disciples to go into all the world and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:18-20). God says that when you trust in Christ for your deliverance from sin that he will forgive all your sins, give you the Holy Spirit, and make you a part of his big plan for the universe. No matter who you are, or what you have done, God invites you to come to him now, while we stand and sing.

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