

Crying Out to God

EXODUS 2:23-25

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****COVID-19 LIVESTREAM****

It is good to be with you this morning! Here at the beginning, we are putting our contact information on the screen. If you have anything we need to be praying about or if there is anything we can do to serve you, we hope you will get in touch. As you can see, we are also putting a summary of God's plan for our salvation on the screen, along with a few pictures this morning. We posted a link to an interesting baptism a few days ago. I think this was down in Texas. But a husband down there was deployed with the military and was able to join in on the online worship at the church where his wife is a member. And the online format allowed him to go back and check the references. He could check up on what the preacher was saying in a way he could not do live and in person. So, as soon as he got home from his deployment last week, he decided to obey the gospel immediately. I personally have never seen a baptism where the preacher is wearing a face mask, but there is a first time for everything. So, we have put the summary of God's plan up here for you to consider.

If you have not yet been immersed in water (as an adult) for the forgiveness of your sins, we would invite you to look up these passages on your own. We have no examples of infant baptism in the Bible. We have no references to baptism being a sprinkling in the Bible; in fact, the exact opposite is true. Not only is the word baptism defined as "immersion," but we have a number of passages where we have people going "**down into the water**" (Acts 8:38), we have John baptizing in a certain place in the Jordan "**because there was much water there**" (John 3:23), and we also have baptism described by Paul as being a "**burial**" (Colossians 2:12 and Romans 6:3-4). We also have no indication that baptism is some kind of sign that we have already been saved; instead, we do have Peter indicating that "**baptism now saves you**" (in 1 Peter 3:21). If you have any questions about any of this, if you would like to connect on the phone, by text, by email, or in some other way (like Zoom or Skype) so that we can study together, please send a message. I would even be glad to meet you at the end of your driveway. We could have a shouting Bible study with each other. The neighbors would love it! But if we can help in any way, please get in touch.

This morning, I would like for us to consider another request from one of the members of the Four Lakes congregation. If you have something we need to cover, if you have a favorite passage that might apply during these times, if you have some special question we need to look at together, I hope you will let me know. But one of our Christian sisters has asked that we look together at some situation where God's people called out to

God for help. She didn't give any specifics, so I started looking and found a passage that we have (surprisingly) never covered in sermon form.

I'm referring to just a few verses at the very end of Exodus 2, so I would invite you to be turning with me to Exodus 2. I will put the text on the screen in just a moment, but if you can find this in your own copy of the scriptures, that would be great as well. The average person speaks at roughly 150 words per minute, but studies have shown that we can comprehend somewhere between 300-400 words a minute. Not only that, but studies have also shown that we can think somewhere between 1000-3000 words per minute. In other words, as I am speaking, you are capable of understanding 2-3 times faster than I can get the words out. Not only that, but as I am speaking, you are also capable of anticipating what I will say, you are capable of having a full-blown argument with me in your head, and you are also capable of planning what you will eat for lunch today, and more! These are just a few reasons why I will always try to encourage you to look up the passage on your own. As I am speaking, I'm sharing what I've learned over the past week, but you are also fully capable of looking at the larger context, looking up cross references, looking up the Greek and Hebrew words behind the text, applying the text to yourself, and on and on and on. So, I hope you will look up the text itself in your own copy of the scriptures. It helps us, I believe, to focus and to take full advantage of the word that God has revealed to us in scripture, if we have the actual scripture open in front of us.

To put this in context, if you go back to the beginning of Exodus, we find that the sons of Israel had come down to Egypt because of the famine. At the end of Genesis, their brother Joseph had basically saved Egypt from a famine. They start out as a family of 70, but they multiply very quickly. Over time, a new king comes in, a king who does not know Joseph, and this king is nervous. He's scared that the sons of Israel will rise up and revolt and take over. So, the new king decides to **"deal wisely"** with the Israelites. Little by little, he starts controlling them. He appoints managers over them. He starts afflicting them with hard labor. And before long, the Israelites find themselves enslaved. They go from a position of freedom and honor to a position of slavery fairly quickly. In Egypt, the Israelites actually build a number of cities. But in their bondage, they continue to do very well. They increase. The Egyptians, then, get even more abusive. They force them to make their own bricks. The king tells the midwives to drown all of the baby boys in the Nile. The midwives disobey as best they can. During this time, an Israelite woman bears a child and hides him for three months. When she can hide him no longer, she puts him in a wicker basket covered in tar and pitch, and launches him out into the Nile. Pharaoh's daughter sees this baby floating in the Nile and feels sorry for the kid, so she rescues him and calls him **"Moses,"** going back to an Egyptian word meaning "to draw out," because she had drawn him out of the river. She raises Moses as her own, but basically hires the child's own mother to serve as his caretaker. At the age of 40, Moses looked out and saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew slave, he's angry, so he looks both ways and kills the Egyptian, hiding the body in the sand. Word gets around, and Moses heads out into the wilderness where he gets married and then works as a shepherd for the next 40 years.

All of this brings us to the last few verses in Exodus 2. And this is almost something of a "meanwhile, back in Egypt" kind of statement. As Moses is in the land of Midian for those 40 years, this is what is going on back in Egypt. Let's look together, please, at Exodus 2:23-25,

23 Now it came about in the course of those many days that the king of Egypt died. And the sons of Israel sighed because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry for help because of their bondage rose up to God. 24 So God heard their groaning; and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. 25 God saw the sons of Israel, and God took notice of them.

Notice this passage starts by letting us know that over the course of many days, the king of Egypt dies. So, we are talking about the 40-year period as Moses is away in the land of Midian. The pharaoh who ordered the killing of the babies has now died. We might assume that things would get better, but they are not getting better. The new Pharaoh is apparently continuing the policies of the previous Pharaoh. And so, the suffering continues. It's hard for some of us to try to picture the timing on this. We are accustomed to our leaders here in the United States being in office anywhere from 2, to 6, to maybe 8 years, especially if we are talking about governors or presidents. And so, it is hard for us to imagine a ruler ruling for multiple decades. It's also a bit hard for us to picture being in bondage as a nation for 400 years. As far as I know, we don't even have any buildings here in the United States going back 400 years. We think back 400 years to the year 1620, what was it that happened in 1620? 1620 is the year the Mayflower set sail and eventually arrived in what would later be known as Plymouth, Massachusetts. This is roughly the same length of time the Israelites have been in Egypt. Again, it is hard for us to even picture this. But here they are. As far as we know, they have no written history at this time. Moses is the one who will eventually write the books of Genesis – Deuteronomy. As far as we know, they didn't have any prophets during this time. Perhaps, though, they might have some of the stories passed down. And there is at least a chance that they might have heard by word of mouth that promise that God made to Abraham many years earlier (from Genesis 15:13-14), ***“Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions.”*** It's remotely possible, then, that somebody remembered this. There's a chance that somebody put two and two together and figured that deliverance was coming at some point, that the 400 years were nearly up. We don't know. But we do know what we have here in Exodus 2. The people are suffering.

So, as we look at this request for a lesson on God's people crying out to God for help, let's look at this from two points of view – first of all, let's notice what Israel is doing here, and secondly, let's close by looking at God's response.

- I. **But we start this morning with a record of what the PEOPLE are doing, and most of this comes in verse 23 as we have three words that are used to describe what's going on here.**
 - A. **The first term comes in the middle of verse 23 as we find that the people “SIGHED BECAUSE OF THE BONDAGE.”**

This word that we translate here as ***“sigh”*** goes back to a Hebrew word that's found twelve times in the Old Testament, primarily in the prophets. But in the order it's found in the Bible, the next time this word is used comes in Proverbs 29:2, where King Solomon says, ***“When the righteous increase, the people rejoice, but when a wicked man rules, people groan.”*** And that is exactly what is happening here in Exodus: A wicked man is ruling, and the people are ***“groaning”*** or ***“sighing”*** under his leadership. The previous Pharaoh dies, and there might have been a glimmer of hope, but now the new Pharaoh is perhaps even worse than the last one, and so they ***“sigh because of the bondage.”***

- B. **The second term comes next as the people are described as “CRYING OUT.”**

So, a ***“sigh”*** might be something we keep to ourselves. Something happens and we ***“groan.”*** But now, as things get worse, the people actually ***“cry out.”*** And what I find interesting is that this seems to be the first time. This has been going on for quite some time, and yet it doesn't seem that we have too much ***“crying out”*** going on either in Exodus 1 or even up to this point in Exodus 2. In other words, the slavery is perhaps something that

comes on somewhat gradually. Perhaps the previous Pharaohs increased the burdens on these people so slowly that they never saw the oppression as getting so bad that they needed to cry out about it. Sometimes, though, people will reach a limit. The burdens imposed by an oppressive government get to be too much, and the people cry out. That is what happens here. After 400 years of putting up with this, they finally cry out.

I would also just point out briefly here that they are not specifically described as crying out to God. It does not say, "...and the people prayed to God." But instead, it simply says that they "***cried out.***" Yes, God hears those cries, but it's possible that the people didn't really know how to cry out to God at this point. It had been so long. A bit later, in fact, it seems that the Israelites had perhaps shifted over to worship some of the Egyptian gods. Nevertheless, they "***cry out.***"

C. The other term that's used here comes at the very end of verse 23, as we find that "...THEIR CRY FOR HELP BECAUSE OF THEIR BONDAGE ROSE UP TO GOD."

This term isn't as common as the last one, but it's used most often in some of the Psalms of David and also in Jeremiah and Lamentations. It's not just a "***cry,***" but it's a "***cry for help.***" And to me, this is where their cry seems to cross over into the realm of PRAYER, because here we see that their cry "***rose up to God.***" And so, this seems to be a cry specifically directed to God, asking for help, asking for God to intervene in some way, asking God to step in. This is a "***cry for help.***"

I suppose, in some way, this is perhaps one benefit of trouble – it forces us to go to God for help. And that is what happens here. Ultimately, then, the lesson for us from the first part of this passage is that we also have the ability to call out to God for help. When we are overwhelmed by life, when we are going through a difficult time in a relationship, when we are concerned about our health, when we are having concerns with our mental health, we have the example here at the end of Exodus 2 that we have the ability to call out to God for help. And as flawed as we might be, as imperfect as our knowledge of God might be, we can always call out to God.

II. And this leads us to the rest of this short passage as we come to the GOD part of this.

And in this second part, we actually have the word "***God***" used four times. One of the commentaries points out that there are only 15 Hebrew words in these verses, and yet "***God***" is repeated four times. We obviously have an emphasis on the Lord here, and in particular, the Lord's reaction to these cries for help. I would also point out that by the time we get to the cries and God's response to these cries, God is already in the process of raising up Moses! And that is encouraging to me. It's not as if God is caught off guard by this! "Oh wow, my people are crying out! I'd better pay attention now!" That's not what happens here. Remember: Up to this point in Exodus 2, we already have God preserving Moses from death in the Nile, we have Moses uniquely prepared as a future leader by being raised in Pharaoh's household, and we have Moses continuing his training as a leader by working as a shepherd in the wilderness. So, quite a bit is already happening here. I'm reminded of something a good Christian brother from Tennessee said in a sermon several years ago. He said, "Has it ever occurred to you that nothing has ever occurred to God?" And what he meant by that is that nothing takes God by surprise, and that is obviously true here in Exodus 2. Nothing takes God by surprise.

A. So, let's notice the Lord's response, starting with the fact that "GOD HEARD THEIR GROANING."

The fact that God hears means that he is always nearby. And based on what we learned in verse 23, these sighs, these cries for help, were probably not very loud. They most likely were not out there protesting in the streets.

They weren't out there yelling and demanding their rights. No, these were "*sighs*." And this reminds us, if I have understood the New Testament correctly, that God is more likely to hear us as we pray in our closets at home than if we are yelling those prayers on a street corner somewhere. God hears our most private thoughts. Volume doesn't have anything to do with it. God hears their groaning. And if God heard them, he can obviously hear us as well. Whether we are in Egypt or Madison, God is able to hear his people.

B. The second part of this is that "GOD REMEMBERS HIS COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM, ISAAC, AND JACOB."

And again, as I alluded to before, it's not as if God has forgotten and that these prayers suddenly jog God's memory here, but it seems that the emphasis is on God responding and acting in keeping with his promises. Hundreds of years earlier, God had promised Abraham that he would make his descendants into a great nation and that through his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed. And now, God is ready to act on these promises. He's in the process of keeping his word.

We might compare it to marriage. Sometimes, in marriage, we need to act based on what we've promised. It's not that we forget the promises we've made, but we act because we remember. I promised to love this person sacrificially; therefore, I will do this instead of this. And this seems to be what is happening here. The people cry out, and God not only "*hears*," but he "*remembers*" as well.

And again, this is also comforting to us, isn't it? Hasn't God also made promises to us? Aren't we as Christians also in a covenant relationship with God? We are! And no matter how bad it seems to get, there's comfort in knowing that God remembers.

C. This brings us to the end of verse 24, where we find that "GOD SEES THE SONS OF ISRAEL."

It's not just that he sees them, in that he is aware of them, but what he sees moves him to do something. This is the same word, by the way, that's used twice in verses 5-6 of this chapter, when Pharaoh's daughter comes down to the Nile and "*sees*" the basket and the child. It wasn't a matter of seeing, it wasn't just a matter of being curious about something or observing something, but it was a matter of seeing with the idea of being motivated to do something. She sees and then she rescues the child. She takes him out of the river.

In the same way, God sees what the children of Israel are going through. And when he sees, he sees with the idea of doing something. And what was true then is also true today. As we sometimes sing, "Jesus knows all about our struggles." He sees what we are worried about. He sees what we are going through. He sees our financial situation. He is a God who sees.

D. And this leads us to the last phrase here as we find that GOD TAKES NOTICE OF THEM.

This one is apparently rather difficult to translate, and it basically refers to "*knowing*" someone. But it's not that easy, because it refers to "intimate knowledge," as in "*Adam knew his wife and she conceived and bore a son.*" That kind of knowledge! It's not just a matter of knowing facts about somebody. The ESV keeps it simple and just says that "*God knew.*" The NIV says that God was "*concerned*" about them. He sees, and he cares, and he understands – all wrapped into one. God is intimately aware of their situation. In a sense, he feels what they are going through. He has a relationship with these people.

And what was true then is obviously even so much more true today. We think about what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 8:3, when he said, ***“...but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him.”*** God knows us. And specifically, with reference to prayer, we think back to what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6 as he gave the warning, ***“And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. 8 So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.”*** God knows us, and so, when we cry out, he knows what we need even before we think to ask for it.

Conclusion:

As we close, let’s remember that the request was for a lesson on people in the Bible who called out to God. Obviously, I’m assuming it’s because of what we are going through right now. This thing is bizarre, isn’t it? Our lives have changed in so many ways. We might be worried about our jobs, or maybe food or other supplies. We are obviously concerned about our health. We might be worried about school or finances. Everything is weird. Or maybe we have other issues. We might have spouses and children locked down with abusive partners or parents. We might have loved ones with various addictions. We might be struggling with anything from chronic pain to a rebellious kid. Everything is more complicated right now. We’ve helped two people move over the past few weeks. Can you even imagine moving right now? Life has been turned upside down. But there is never a bad time to call out to God. At least we are not making bricks in the desert! But that’s where the sons of Israel were, and they sighed, they cried out, and they called out for help. And in response, God heard, he remembered, he saw, and he knew – he understood exactly what they were going through. And in the next few chapters, God continues working through Moses to lead his people out of Egypt, which he does.

Today, when we sigh, God hears it. When we cry, God remembers what he has promised. And when we call out for help, we can be assured that God has already been working on a solution, because he already knows everything there is to know about us. When we cry out, we cry out to a God who listens.

And the main requirement for being heard by God is that we are open, and honest, and obedient. At the beginning of today’s lesson, I briefly referred to 1 Peter 3:21, where Peter refers to baptism and says that, ***“...baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”*** We need to know that we make that appeal to God for a good conscience in the act of baptism. So again, if this is something we can help with, let us know. In the meantime, the invitation for the rest of us is that we keep on calling out to God in prayer.

I am thankful for the request that led to this morning’s lesson. As we close, let’s go to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

We praise you this morning as the unchanging and eternal God who came to this earth and made a promise to Abraham, a promise that through his descendant all the nations of this earth would be blessed. We now know that the descendant of the promise was Jesus, who came to this earth and offered salvation to all of us. We are thankful for Jesus and for the salvation that’s been made available through his blood.

Right now, in a time of chaos, we are thankful for the good things we see around us. We are thankful that you have heard our prayers over the past few weeks. We are thankful for lives that

have been saved. We are thankful for an abundant supply of good food. We are thankful for the progress that's been made in keeping so many people well. We continue to be thankful for those who work in healthcare.

As most of our lives have been changed in some way, we ask for your continued strength. We ask for patience as we interact with the world around us. We pray that you would give us wisdom as we go forward. We ask for a special blessing for our President, for our Governor, and on all of those in positions of authority. Our prayer is that we might be able to live quiet lives in all godliness and dignity, as your word has instructed. Bless our seniors as well.

We come to you with these concerns in the name of your Son, Jesus, who loves us and gave himself for us. Thank you, Father. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com