

Shaping A Nation - God's Deliverance

Exodus 1:1-21

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Scripture Reading: Exodus 1:1-21, p.48 (Old Testament)

God is active.

God is delivering.

God is shaping.

God is restoring.

Do you believe that?

Do you believe that to be a fact of history?

Do you believe that to be a fact of right now?

We're going to begin a journey this week through the book of Exodus.

Exodus is at the very heart of Jewish identity. It is the core of the story of the Hebrew people as a people of faith, a people rescued, and redeemed, and provided for, and shaped and commissioned by God.

It is the story of God shaping a nation, a group of very peculiar people that were called to be His very own.

It is the story of deliverance - God's deliverance of people completely unable to deliver themselves.

As we take this journey, it is my hope and prayer that you will join me in coming to see this story of deliverance as more than merely some historical recounting of possibly interesting events occurring among a people long ago. Instead it is a story - big, real and true story - that is directly connected to us.

It is in a very real way also **our** story.

The same God who was at work among the Hebrews is at work among us. The same God who delivered them is in the business of bringing deliverance to us. And the purpose for which God brought deliverance to the Hebrews remains the purpose for which God is active in bringing deliverance to us.

Deliverance - getting people out of a destructive situation that is tearing their life apart, and restoring hope of a better day, a good day, a day of peace and life.

Deliverance - sometimes from situations that are bad right from the beginning. And sometimes from situations that started out good, but as with virtually everything else in creation, began to decay somewhere along the way.

For isn't that how it goes? Left alone, nothing remains good. This world has been poisoned by the Fall into sin. It is, on a very deep level, struggling against a curse. That curse somehow warps everything into a downhill direction from order to disorder, from structure to chaos, from growth to decay.

Deliverance - God shapes and works it in our lives on a personal level, on a communal level, and - as we'll come to see - on a global level.

Deliverance. The story of Exodus. God's story. God's story as he works in the lives of ordinary human beings like the Hebrews. Like us.

In Exodus it begins with the family of Jacob seeking refuge in Egypt after famine in their own country. That was a good move, blessed by God. In that context of blessing the clan grows to become a nation. They live as nation within a nation, and the persecution begins. It begins slowly, develops into an organized, systemic oppression and eventually morphs into an evil genocide.

All of this happens in very short order from the reader's point of view - 21 quick verses. Took us only a few minutes to read it all.

And

yet -

For those suffering the pain, it would have seemed an eternity. There are roughly 400 years packed into these few sentences.

I wonder how the Hebrews would have felt.

We have the luxury of reading this with our children safe, our bellies full, well clothed and homes to return to. We skim through it quickly.

They,

on the other hand.....

Well, have you ever suffered?

Then you know how every minute can seem like an hour,
every hour seems like a day,
every day seems like an eternity.

You know, if you have suffered, how it can be almost impossible at times to understand how this can actually be happening.

It becomes impossible to comprehend that there might be a way out.

And you **certainly** can't picture how **any** of this could fit into the big plan of a loving, caring, powerful God **at all!!**

Walk up to a Hebrew father, whose has just received a vicious whipping from his Egyptian taskmaster, who never has quite enough to eat, and whose wife is ready to give birth with the grim reality that this child may be taken away and murdered...

go to that man and let him know that it's OK. God's at work. It'll be fine.

Be ready to duck when he takes a swing at you.

People at Calvin - please see this. Pause long enough to try and feel it, on some level, in your gut.

Can you imagine – even in some small way – how they would feel?

Deliverance doesn't always come like some 30 minute TV show, quick and easy, all nicely wrapped up in a little bundle of time. It can be long. It happens sometimes in a big-picture context where we can't see from one horizon to the other, and where perhaps we don't even live to see it all happen. Deliverance sometimes comes in stages. And sometimes where we are longing to find some greater level of ease and peace for our own existence, we're not able to see or comprehend that we're actually part of something far bigger, a larger scale project that God is guiding.

Deliverance.

Calls for an enormous level of faith and trust in the life of a believer.

May I remind you - faith and trust that you'd want to build up when life is going good. Because the last moment you want to be thinking about building up your spiritual stamina, the last occasion to be considering developing endurance of the soul - is when you're hanging on to life by your fingertips. At **that** kind of moment you have to flex the muscles of faith and use them.

Believer - if your life seems solid and good and peaceful now, thank God! And then use that time in your life to build your faith. Because I guarantee that there will come a season when you'll need to rely on it. It may come sooner than you think!

Deliverance - God works it in divine, supernatural ways... as through giving the nation the ability to continue to grow and thrive, even when being subjected to inhumane living and working conditions.

God also works it quietly – one step and person at a time – through little, very ordinary people that he plants in specific though perhaps unlikely places and situations. I'm thinking here of the two chief midwives among the Hebrews. Two names are mentioned. Bible scholars suggest that Shiphrah and Puah were probably the two who headed up a whole team of midwives. Great and mighty Pharaoh is putting into action his vicious scheme of genocide. And they, in their service to God says v.17, disobey him. His plan fails.

Deliverance - God works one person at a time. Just ask any parent of one of the babies delivered by the midwives and spared from death.

God also works on a much bigger level - family levels, tribal levels, national levels, cosmic levels.

Deliverance.

As it begins here in Exodus chapter 1, it is the story of the reversal of the curse that descended on creation in Eden when our first human parents fell. That curse has brought homelessness, loneliness, suffering and death to every corner of this globe.

Exodus is the story of displacement undone, as the Hebrew people are given first the promise and eventually the reality of a home in Canaan.

Exodus is the story of distance from God undone, as the people who had lived in despair for centuries come to experience the direct voice of God, and very real miracles occurring right around them.

Exodus is the story of suffering and cursing undone, as Israel is brought to a land flowing with milk and honey.

Exodus is a story of death undone, as they are set free from slavery and ushered into freedom.

And here's the thing - it is Eden's curse undone because God doesn't bring deliverance to these suffering Hebrew people just to make their own lives a little more manageable and hopeful and fruitful. He brings deliverance to them so that **through them** deliverance can come to people of all times and all places.

God brings deliverance to the Hebrews so that through them light can shine into a very dark world. Of all Old Testament writers, centuries later it will be the prophet Isaiah who gives best expression to this calling given to the Hebrews. God says through Isaiah:

Is 42:6 I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations,

Is 49: 6 "I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

Israel will bring the undoing of displacement, distance from God, suffering and cursing, and death -
- the undoing of these in every corner of the globe.

It will do it by welcoming strangers into its own fold.

It will do it by becoming a living example of God's shalom.

And it will do it by becoming the community in which Messiah is born - Jesus, the Saviour of the world.

What has all this got to do with you and me sitting here in a church removed by thousands of miles and centuries from these events?

Consider the following parallels, parallels between Israel and the One who came from Israel as Redeemer - Jesus.

Exodus reveals to us Israel beginning their existence in a time of horror, where the king orders the death of all male children.

Jesus' life begins in a time of great horror, when king Herod orders the death of all male children in Bethlehem.

Exodus will narrate for us the freedom given to Israel through the Passover event - a lamb slain and its blood sprinkled over the doorpost to ensure that the angel of Death would pass over the Hebrew homes.

Jesus is announced by John as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world". He celebrates Passover with his disciples just before he will be sacrificed as the Great Passover Lamb, to provide believers refuge from everlasting death.

Exodus will reveal to us Israel being launched into their existence by a journey through water.

Jesus begins His ministry with baptism in the Jordan river.

Exodus will reveal to us Israel coming out of the water, and meeting with God at Mt.Sinai, where His fire and cloud descend and His will for them is confirmed and given.

Jesus begins to serve after coming out of the water, and having the Spirit descend on Him, and a voice from Heaven declare God's will and pleasure with Him.

Exodus will reveal to us the story of Israel being prepared for service by 40 years in the wilderness.

Jesus began His ministry with a time of testing and preparation of 40 days in the wilderness.

Exodus will reveal to us the story of Israel organized in 12 tribes.

Jesus' ministry revolves around him organizing his followers under the direction of 12 disciples.

The Exodus story will tell of God nourishing his people in miraculous ways through the provision of food for the masses in the desert - Manna.

Jesus, who calls himself the "bread of life" is surrounded on two occasions by thousands of people, and provides for them bread, nourishing them in miraculous ways.

The exodus story will tell of God calling Moses through a burning bush.

The ministry of Jesus is carried on in his disciples through the power of the Holy Spirit, who comes at Pentecost in flames of fire descending on their heads.

Friends, the God who delivered in the Old Testament is the same God who brings deliverance to the world through Jesus.

To those of you who put your faith in Jesus, know that God is still in the business of bringing hope and release and new beginnings into your life, too!

God is in this world.

God is active in this world.

God is active in your life through Jesus.

Jesus, in His very life, takes up the deliverance that God brings to Israel, and carries it - through His life, death and resurrection - to all who will believe in Him.

And then - mystery of mysteries -

the call that came to the delivered people Israel

the call to be a light to the world

the call to become a people of Deliverance to a world in despair

that call then comes

through Jesus

to we who believe.

Friends,

God is still in the deliverance business.

He delivers from addictions.

He delivers from evil intentions.

He delivers from painful situations.

If you are caught in a situation that seems hopeless or out of control, I urge you not to leave here before sharing it fully with the Lord.

And may I encourage you to share it with a Christian person you trust so that they can walk with you and pray with you.

Perhaps consider sharing it with one of the prayer partners that are available after this service in our prayer room.

God is still in the deliverance business.

And, as He delivered Israel so that they could become a nation of deliverers, so He - through Jesus the Great Deliverer - sets us free so that we can be purveyors of deliverance in this world.

That's the whole reason for the Micah Challenge, calling Evangelical Christians around the world to a renewed emphasis on deliverance ministry, on setting people free from hunger, from injustice, from oppression, from needless disease. Remember - you can find out about this Micah Challenge on the CRWRC web site. And you'll hear more about it here at Calvin in weeks to come.

That's the whole reason why there will be a gifts assessment workshop coming up here in the Church - to help you determine where and how you can best serve as an agent of Renewal and Hope for the Lord here in this city.

It's why the Calvin Ministry Initiatives invites you to join a group that goes downtown each week to work at Ottawa Innerscity Ministries.

It's why our deacons collected backpack supplies for the Caldwell Centre.

It's why we hold Vacation Bible School and Coffee Break - to spread the news of a God who is here in this world, active, and delivering.

It is, quite frankly, the whole reason for our existence.

The story of deliverance.

The story of Exodus.

God's story - and through Jesus, our story.