

introduction

This week, we begin a new series, *Searching for Salvation*, through the book of Exodus. Exodus tells the story of God rescuing his people from slavery in Egypt, but throughout the Bible, the exodus also becomes a pattern for understanding God's larger work of salvation. It gives us a picture not only of what it means to be rescued, but of the long journey of learning to live as people who have been rescued.

The questions Exodus raises are still relevant to us today. What holds us in bondage? What does it actually mean to be free? We all look to all kinds of things to give us a sense of security, wholeness, or freedom. Exodus invites us to examine what we really need to be rescued from, what true freedom might look like, and ultimately, what it means for God to be the one who rescues.

In our passage today, we'll consider what it means to trust God when he seems absent and begin to ask what kind of freedom God's rescue is meant to bring.



When you feel stuck in a situation, what's your instinct: change it, wait it out, ask for help, distract yourself, or _____?

read

Exodus 1:1-14, 2:23-25 (NIV)

^{1:1} These are the names of the sons of Israel who went to Egypt with Jacob, each with his family: ² Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah; ³ Issachar, Zebulun and Benjamin; ⁴ Dan and Naphtali; Gad and Asher. ⁵ The descendants of Jacob numbered seventy in all; Joseph was already in Egypt.

⁶ Now Joseph and all his brothers and all that generation died, ⁷ but the Israelites were exceedingly fruitful; they multiplied greatly, increased in numbers and became so numerous that the land was filled with them.

⁸ Then a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt. ⁹ "Look," he said to his people, "the Israelites have become far too numerous for us. ¹⁰ Come, we must deal

shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country.”

¹¹ So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh. ¹² But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread; so the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites ¹³ and worked them ruthlessly. ¹⁴ They made their lives bitter with harsh labor in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields; in all their harsh labor the Egyptians worked them ruthlessly.

^{2:23} During that long period, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. ²⁴ God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. ²⁵ So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them.

Take a few moments to reflect on the Scripture. Share some insights, questions, or points that strike you. Then read what follows.

context

The book of Exodus begins with the people of Israel living in Egypt. Generations earlier, their ancestors had come to Egypt during a famine, where they settled and grew as a people. But by the time we get to Exodus 1, much has changed. A new king has come to power, the Israelites are now a large population, and the Egyptians have begun to see them as a threat. Pharaoh responds by forcing the Israelites into slavery and increasingly harsh oppression. This is the situation that sets the stage for the rest of Exodus and for God’s rescue of his people.

when God seems absent

The opening chapters of Exodus raise a difficult question. The Israelites are God's people, and they are in Egypt because God had brought their ancestors there. God had also promised that this family would grow into a great nation. In fact, that seems to be happening — the Israelites continue to multiply even as Pharaoh tries to stop them. And yet, from their perspective, it must have seemed like God had forgotten them. They had been suffering for generations, with no obvious sign that God was going to do anything about it.

At the end of chapter 2, their circumstances still haven't changed. But for the first time, we're told explicitly what God is doing: he hears their groaning, remembers his covenant, sees them, and knows (2:24-25). The Israelites can't see what we as readers are able to see now. God hasn't forgotten them, even though their experience may have suggested otherwise.

There are times when what we believe about God can feel difficult to reconcile with what we are actually experiencing. Exodus doesn't give the Israelites an explanation for why they have suffered for so long. But it does tell us something about God in the midst of it.

*"...they were where they were by divine command, under divine promise, awaiting divine intervention. Of these things, however, they saw no outward sign. Heaven above was as silent as earth around was threatening...Experience without explanation, adversity without purpose, hostility without protection — that is how life will always appear for the earthly people of God."*¹

—Alec Motyer

¹ Motyer, Alec., *The Message of Exodus*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove: IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005).

discuss

1. Look back through vv. 1-14. What signs do you see that God may still be at work, even though the Israelites themselves may not have been able to see it that way?
2. When your circumstances don't seem to match what you believe about God's goodness or care, what are you tempted to believe about God?
3. Think of a situation in your life that feels unresolved. If God doesn't change things soon, or explain what he is doing, what would it look like practically to live with continued faith in him? Or, if faith in God will be difficult, what about this passage do you find reassuring or difficult to believe?

what are we being freed for?

In this passage, we're given a stark picture of Israel's slavery. Pharaoh sees the growing Israelite population as a threat, and responds by trying to control them. He puts slave masters over them, forces them to labor, and makes their lives "bitter with harsh labor" (vv. 13-14). Increasingly, their lives are being determined by Pharaoh, and what he demands from them.

When we think about freedom, we often think first about what we want freedom **from**: something that restricts us, controls us, or keeps us from living the way we want. For the Israelites, what they need to be freed from is obvious. But over the next several weeks in our study of Exodus, we'll see that their rescue is about more than getting out from under one man's control. Later, God tells Pharaoh, "Let my people go, so that they may worship me" (cf. [Exodus 9:1](#)). God is bringing them out of Egypt and into a new life with him — a life that will include worship, obedience, and his presence among them.

This raises a bigger question about salvation: What is God rescuing us **for**? If freedom is more than simply being released from whatever holds us captive, what kind of life are we being freed to live?

discuss

4. Notice the contrast between Israel multiplying in vv. 7 and 12 and Pharaoh's attempts to suppress them in vv. 9-14. What is Pharaoh trying to accomplish, and what is actually happening? Where do you see dynamics like these at work in our city or world today?
5. Our culture often associates freedom with being able to choose for ourselves how we want to live. What do you find compelling about that vision of freedom? Where might it fall short?
6. What is one area of your life where you find yourself wanting freedom *from* something? What might change if you also asked what you want to be freed *for*?

group application

Take a few minutes on your own to reflect on these two questions:

- What is something you long to be freed *from*?

This could be something external (e.g., in your circumstances), or something internal (e.g., “idols of the heart” such as specific fears, “over-desires,” anger, resentment, etc.).

- What might God want to free you *for*? (Or, what would be possible in your life with the freedom you long for?)

As you consider what you want removed or changed, consider also what kind of life with God you desire to grow into. More specifically, what might greater freedom allow you to give yourself to — loving God or others, serving, taking a risk, practicing generosity, etc.?

Share as much or as little as you'd like in a large group or in pairs. Pray for one another.

upcoming

- Tuesdays, starting October 13 | **Alpha: Dinner & Conversation Series, 7-9 pm**
Do you have a non-Christian friend in the city who has been wrestling through some of the “big questions” in life? Consing the uider sharpcoming Alpha opportunity with them where they can explore the Christian faith in open conversation and community.
redeemerws.com/alpha
- Mondays, starting October 19 | **Faith & Work 101, 7-9 pm at RES (150 E. 91st St)**
If you’ve ever wondered whether God cares about your work, take this cross-vocational course that traces God’s intention for work through the story of the Bible. Discover how our every day vocations fit into his larger work of renewal.
faithandwork.com/101
- Thursday, October 22 | **The Mystery of Unanswered Prayer, 7-8:30 pm**
Sometimes our prayers are not answered in the time frame we want, or in the ways we hoped. How do we persevere in prayer amid such disappointment? Pastor Bijan will be expounding on the mystery of unanswered prayer and host a Q&A.
redeemerws.com/mystery