



"We are in week four of our sermon series, The Story. Two weeks ago we looked at Joseph's incredible life of being sold into slavery by his brothers, sold to Potiphar, wrongfully accused and sent to prison, and his amazing rise to power as pharaoh's number two man. Joseph's life reminds us of God's sovereign hand in our broken lives. When the curtain closes in Genesis, the people of God are a small tribal family living in Egypt. When the action begins in Exodus, they are a large nation, living under intense bondage and cruel oppression. Enter the next hero of The Story—Moses. Even if you didn't grow up in church you've probably heard of this man and seen him on TV as either Charlton Heston or the Prince of Egypt!

Moses is an amazing story. One Sunday, a 5-year-old boy was asked what he learned about in Kids Church. "Well, mom, today we learned how God sent Moses behind enemy lines on a rescue mission to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. When he got to the Red Sea, his army built a pontoon bridge so all the people could get across safely. Then Moses called in bombers and attack helicopters to destroy the bridge and all the Israelites were saved." The mother was stunned, "Honey is that really what they taught you?" The little boy smiled, "No, but if I told you what really happened, you'd never believe it!"

Today we are going to look at Moses's life, what really happened, and how that relates to our lives. Have you ever wondered where God was in the midst of your suffering and pain? Have you ever cried out to God and felt those cries fall on deaf ears? Have you ever been in a situation and needed God to rescue you but God seemed to be taking his sweet time? Have you ever wondered if God is truly all powerful? Maybe you are struggling with one of those questions today. In the story of Moses we will see the length God will go to reveal himself and deliver his people out of slavery. In three moving scenes, 14 chapters of Exodus, God reveals his name, his power and his plan.

Scene One: God Reveals His Name

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

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

So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread; so the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites and worked them ruthlessly. 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 (Exodus 1:6-14).

Joseph and a generation of God fearers had died. In fulfillment of God's promise to bless Abraham and make his descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky, Israel had grown into a huge people group. Scholars say that the total population was in the millions, anywhere from 1-4 million people. Meanwhile, the throne of Egypt had changed several times and the current pharaoh had never even heard of Joseph. For 430 years, Israel lived under Egyptian rule. They weren't slaves that entire time, but at some point they became slaves and that lasted for a few hundred years. God was not surprised by any of this. Generations earlier, God told Abraham about Israel's dark future (Gen. 15:12-14). The situation for God's people would get even worse.

Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: "Every Hebrew boy that is born you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live" (v. 22).

Instead of seeing God's hand of blessing on the Israelites, instead of remembering the prosperity they enjoyed under Joseph, pharaoh, out of fear, takes matters into his own hands. This choice would eventually lead to Egypt's demise. God's covenant with Abraham was clear, "Those who bless you, I will bless, those who curse you, I will curse." Rebellion against God's people is rebellion against God. It wasn't enough to break their backs with manual labor; the pharaoh planned an infant boy genocide. By killing off Hebrew boys Israel would no longer continue to multiply like crazy and they would not be able to build an army for themselves. But, again, we see God's hand at work. Not only were the Hebrew midwives God fearers, but a baby boy, from the tribe of Levi, would be sent down the river and right into the arms of pharaoh's daughter. Moses would be raised in the king's palace. God's plan for deliverance was beginning to unfold. He heard

the cries of his people, remembered his covenant with Abraham, and acted by revealing his name to Moses.

Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up."

When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!"

And Moses said, "Here I am."

"Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God. The Lord said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt" (3:3–10).

Moses at this point is about 80 years old, happily married, living life as a shepherd and minding his own business. I love it when God interrupts a person's life to use him or her for his plan! God suddenly appears to Moses and says, "There's been a change of plans." Are you open to God changing your plans? Do you hold the dreams for your life loosely? If you have your life all mapped out, be careful, because if your plans all make sense, they might not be God's. God's timetable and his plan are seldom like ours. He calls Abraham at 75 years old and gives him a son 25 years later when he is 100. Joseph is a slave and in jail for 13 years. The Israelites were in bondage for 400 years and Moses is 80. God simply says trust me, I know what I am doing. Is there something going on in your life where God is saying, "You just need to trust me?"

If you look closely in these verses, the emphasis is on God's plan and his work. God says, "I have seen," "I have heard," "I am concerned," "I have come down," and "I am sending you." Moses only needed to do one thing—go! God's plan is not based on what **Moses** was going to do, it's based on what **God** was going

to do. Moses would be God's human agent of deliverance for his people. All Moses had to do is obey. Obedience is where the rubber meets the road in our faith. Obedience is proof of our trust. But, Moses, like us, had a list of excuses why God's plan wasn't going to work.

But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"

And God said, "I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain."

Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?"

God said to Moses, "I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I am has sent me to you'" (3:11–14).

Truth is, what God asked Moses to do was a little crazy. Egypt was the most advanced civilization since the dawn of history in that part of the world. The Egyptian empire had been around for 1700 years before Moses was even born. By the time Moses was born, the pyramids were already 1000 years old. Egypt was the greatest power in the world. And God wanted Moses to waltz right in there and free the greatest source of slave labor the Egyptians have. Really?

God, in his grace, chooses Moses to lead the deliverance despite his excuses or his past. Moses had four good excuses: "Who am I" (v11)? I'm just an old shepherd. "Who is this god and what is his name" (v13)? Moses didn't seem to even know God, at least not by name! And he says, "What if they don't believe me" (4:1)? Then he says, "You know what, I'm not even a good speaker" (4:10). Was he terrified of public speaking? Did he stutter? Don't know. Moses also worried about his past. Remember, he killed an Egyptian and had to get out of town. But God says, your past won't hold you back Moses. All those who wanted to kill you are dead (4:19). Finally, Moses, the great leader says, "Can you send someone else, God" (Ex 4:13)? God says, no, you are my man and I'll allow you to take Aaron along to help. Once again, we see the type of people God uses—broken, weak, faithless, and confused. Whatever excuses you have as to why God can't use you, are just excuses. He can call and use anybody.

In all this drama, God reveals his name to Moses. Names in the ancient world were more than labels. They gave insight into the nature, character and destiny of the person. To learn a person's name was to enter into a relationship with their very being. God says to Moses, "I am who I am." God introduces himself in a very personal way. This is a name of relationship. God says you want to know more about me, I Am. I Am is always here and now and always acting. God is not in the past and he is not only in the

future; God is a present tense verb. He is always right here, right now. I am not saying God doesn't care about the past or the future. He died for our past and he is working for our future. But he lives now. He is alive today. If Moses was going to follow God he was going to have to let go of his past, surrender his future, and trust that God knows what he is doing in the present. And the same is true for us. Instead of worrying about our past mistakes and regrets or worrying about our future, we need to learn to trust God in the here and now. What ever it is that you are going through today, he is right there with you. He is already at work with his plan for deliverance. Do you believe that?.

Scene Two: God Reveals His Power

Afterward Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'Let my people go, so that they may hold a festival to me in the wilderness.'"

Pharaoh said, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord and I will not let Israel go" (5:1–2).

Pharaoh doesn't listen to Moses and makes life for the Israelites even more harsh. Moses is frustrated and complains to God.

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh: Because of my mighty hand he will let them go; because of my mighty hand he will drive them out of his country" (6:1).

God uses the oppressive sinfulness of the Egyptians as an opportunity to reveal himself. Israel's deliverance will not happen quickly though. God will save his people by judging the Egyptians through a series of ten plagues:

- » The Nile turns to blood
- » Frogs, gnats and flies swamp Egypt
- » All cattle and livestock die
- » Boils break out on the people
- » Hail rains down from heaven
- » Locusts invade
- » Darkness falls
- » All the firstborn of Egypt dies

These plagues were not randomly selected by God. Each of the ten plagues were a deliberate attack against the gods of Egypt. There were no atheists in Egypt! They believed in many gods. But who was the most powerful god? Each plague was an attack on a specific Egyptian god:

- » God turns the Nile to blood—he is more powerful than Hapi, the god of the Nile.
- » God sends frogs—he is more powerful than Heqet, the fertility goddess with the head of a frog.
- » God sends gnats against Set, god of the desert.

- » God is greater than Uatchit, a god represented by the fly.
- » God is greater than Hathor, goddess with the cow head.
- » God is more powerful than Sekhmet, goddess of health.
- » God is more powerful than Nut, goddess of storms.
- » God is the god of harvest, not Osiris.
- » Pharaoh was believed to be the son of Ra, the sun god, and God says no, I am God of the universe.
- » God is greater than Isis, the goddess who protected children.

One plague at a time God destroys the Egyptian gods. By doing so, he is destroying the very foundation of Egyptian power and rule. None of these plagues had to fall on Egypt. There was a way out. Moses said, "Let my people go" six different times right to pharaoh's face. God graciously gave pharaoh six times to repent and change his mind. But pharaoh wouldn't listen and obey. God displayed his power in this way so that his people would remember him and know that he can be trusted to keep his promises in the future. God, the Great I Am, is once again with his people in power.

Scene Three: God Reveals His Plan

Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household.

The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats. Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the members of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight. Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the door frames of the houses where they eat the lambs. That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast.

This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the Lord's Passover.

"On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn of both people and animals, and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord. The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt (12:3,5-8, 11-13).

The tenth plague not only reveals God's power but it points to God's ultimate plan of deliverance. In the final plague God will strike down every first born male. This is the only plague that affected **both** the Egyptians and the Israelites. Why would God do this? The Israelites have a master; they are enslaved to

pharaoh. The reality is that a master will never let a slave go for free. Why not? Because it would cost him too much. Pharaoh didn't want to lose his free workforce. There is always a price that has to be paid by someone to free a slave. Since pharaoh will not agree, it will cost him the first born in his home and all of his country. Deliverance always has a price. For the Israelites, they too needed someone to pay for their deliverance and the life of their first born males. Freedom, redemption, and the chance to leave slavery have a price.

God's plan included a provision for anyone who acted in faith. God said to take a perfect lamb, without defect, and slaughter it as a substitute. I'm told that this lamb, because it needed to be perfect, would be cared for by the family like a pet. It lived with the family for a year. Then the family would sacrifice it, roast it, and eat it along with bitter herbs and bread without leaven. The blood of the lamb would then be wiped on the door frame of the house. Bitter herbs symbolically represented the bitterness of slavery and tears shed under captivity. The bread without leaven was symbolic of Israel not having enough time to wait for the bread to rise. That night, anyone who did exactly as the Lord commanded, the angel of death would pass over their home and their first born would be spared. Whoever had the blood on their home was passed over. The Passover would become a major festival for Israel and is still celebrated today.

In the last scene of deliverance, pharaoh, heartbroken over the death of his son, begs the Hebrews to leave. Millions of Israelites leave Egypt in a hurry but pharaoh changes his mind and goes after them. At the Red Sea, Moses raises his staff, the waters split and Israel passes safely on the other side. Pharaoh's armies pursue and in poetic justice, instead of Hebrew infants being drowned in the Nile, the armies of pharaoh drown in the Red Sea. The exodus was God's greatest act of salvation in the Old Testament. It's God alone who saves his people. In this story, God

reveals himself as the mover of empires. His power could not be matched by any other god. His name is I Am and his plan would include sending another sheep to the slaughter.

We might not be slaves to pharaoh, but there are other masters robbing us of the life and freedom God desires for us to have. The Bible tells us that sin wants to master us, enslave us, and rob us of our freedom. What God created that was good and free and beautiful is now mixed with evil, captivity, and ugliness because of sin. What sin is robbing and enslaving you today? To save us and set us free there is a price. There is a cost. And it's a high price too.

Like Israel, we too need the blood of a lamb to cover us. John the Baptist, upon seeing Jesus cried out, "**Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!**" (John 1:29). Jesus began his earthly ministry in the wilderness and his life was a fulfillment of the exodus. Jesus went to the cross during the time of the Passover. He became the Passover Lamb. Apostle Paul said, "**For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed**" (1 Cor. 5:7).

Truth is, you and I have a deliverer. His name is Jesus. God keeps his promise to deliver people from bondage through Christ, the Passover Lamb. A Christian is a person, who in faith, asks for the blood of Jesus to be put on the doorframe of their soul. We then live a life of radical trust in who Jesus is and what he has done for us. Is the blood of the lamb covering your heart? If you are a follower of Jesus, the exodus story also reminds us that no sin, no bondage is ever strong enough to keep you enslaved. Jesus, the Passover Lamb, now lives in you! You can be delivered from anything.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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