

# Exodus 1

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[0:00] I'm going to turn to the book of Exodus. We're beginning a new series in the book of Exodus. I think it'll take us through the winter and probably into the spring. Exodus 1, verse 1 to Exodus 2, verse 10.

I don't know if you're one of those people who's always disappointed by the film version of a book that you've read. There are those people out there, as they walk out of the cinema, it wasn't as good as the book.

Or perhaps you're one of those people who doesn't even bother with the book. You just wait for the film. There are folks like that out there. For many people, my guess is the image that comes to their mind when they think of Moses depends on two films.

If you're of more mature vintage, your vision is of Charlton Heston, isn't it? He's handsome, chiseled, strong-hearted, confident.

Charlton who? If that's what you're thinking. Your image is probably more of the Prince of Egypt, isn't it? Here, Moses there, if you've seen that animated picture, it is.

[1:18] He is sleek and trim. He is quick-witted. He is fun-loving, whether that's on a chariot race with his step-brother, or whether that's kind of kicking up dust in Pharaoh's palace.

He's a tanned superstar. He looks the same in his teenage years as when he's 80. He's everybody's hero. But whichever film version you would think of, I want to convince you over the next few months that neither of them are as good as the book.

And that is the truth, as we're going to see. It is a remarkable story. I particularly like the way that Bill Dunbrow has summarised Exodus. He says this, Exodus starts with slavery, it ends with worship, and the transition from slavery to worship is accomplished by means of a great rescue. Starts with slavery, ends with worship, and what have you got in between? Rescue, redemption. And that's a very helpful summary because of this. That's the pattern of the Christian life.

That is normal Christian living. Every Christian goes from slavery to worship through a rescue. And today I want us to try and get our bearings.

[2:36] And what I hope you and I will see is that no matter how bad things look, you can always trust God as he works everything out for the good of his people. I don't know many of you that well, but no matter how bad things look for you, you can always trust God because he works everything out for the good of his people.

So three points. The story so far, the unlikely heroes who are heroines, and then the ultimate hero. First of all, the story so far. So at the start of Exodus, if you just look at verse 1, there's a really key word that's not there.

There's a really key word at the very, very beginning of Exodus that is omitted by nearly all the main translations. I found one that's got it. It's not a big word. It's not an unusual word.

If you've got your own Bible, you can write it in. Don't write it in on the church Bibles, but if you've got your own, you can write it in. In fact, you have probably used this word many, many times already this morning. It's the word and.

So the Exodus 1 verse 1 literally begins this way. And these are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt. Now, you might think, why are you telling us this?

[3:54] But I want to say that is particularly significant. Because it helps us see that what we're about to read here, we are supposed to read in the light of what has come before. That this is the beginning of the book.

But in a sense, it's actually the second chapter of a book where Genesis is the first chapter. That Exodus is going to continue the story of Genesis.

And it's going to pick up on the story of a people that God has chosen. And at this point, God has brought them into Egypt. So as you turn the pages from Genesis to Exodus, the camera is not sweeping away to another scene, another context.

No, the camera is pointing right where it was pointing when you left Genesis. The camera is pointing on these chosen people who are dwelling in Egypt. So after that, and we get a reminder of what has just happened before.

What has been happening at the end of Genesis. First one is a little bit like previously seen on Downton Abbey. Or previously seen on 24.

[ 5 : 03 ] Previously seen. And whatever they show you at the start of those TV serials, you get a recap at the beginning, don't you? So here you get a recap. Here are the names previously seen in Genesis.

These are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob, each with his household. You get the recap. And it's just summarising what has been going on at the end of Genesis.

In fact, the first six words of Exodus 1 are exact repetition of Genesis 46. Verse 8. With those six words in both of these passages, then you have followed by a list of the sons of Israel.

And when you go back to Genesis chapter 46, you see the names of the sons are listed. In anticipation of them all going down to Egypt. In obedience to God's command.

So let me read you 46 verses 3 and 4. This is what it says. It says, Then he said, I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt. For there I will make you into a great nation.

[ 6 : 08 ] And I myself will go down with you to Egypt. And I will also bring you up again. Now Moses, the author, he takes those words in Genesis 46 and he repeats them right at the start of Exodus chapter 1.

But now we are looking back in time. Can you see that? We are looking back in time to the past event of the Israelites move from Canaan to Egypt under Jacob.

And boy, what a difference 400 years makes. The end of Genesis, do you remember? Jacob sent Joseph his prime minister in Egypt. He is the golden boy. He is the second in command to the Pharaoh.

And consequently, as Joseph's family and Jacob's family come down to Egypt, and they settle in, well they are very well situated. They are very well provided for. And even as we read the first few verses of Exodus 1, things still seem very positive.

Don't they? Look at verse 5. And all the descendants of Jacob were 70 persons. Joseph was already in Egypt. Then Joseph died and all his brothers and all that generation. But the people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly.

[ 7 : 17 ] So they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong. The whole generation dies. And so on. But in another glance back to Genesis, can you just see the echoes in that verse that I just read?

God is continuing to be faithful to the mandate that he gave to Adam and Eve. Do you remember? The promise that he gave to them. That they were to be fruitful and to multiply.

And God has been faithful to that promise and God is faithful to the promise that he gave to Abraham. Abraham. He said to Abraham, I am going to make you and your descendants as in the universe as the stars in the sky, as the sand on the seashore.

And it certainly seems, doesn't it, from the beginning of Exodus that it's moving in that direction. The Israelites are procreating like rabbits. And there's babies galore everywhere you look.

More babies are being born. Just as God had said this would happen. But in the midst of this numerical expansion, there's a changing ruler in verses 8 to 11 and that brings disaster.

[ 8 : 23 ] And a new king comes on the scene in whom Joseph meant nothing. He came to power in Egypt. Look, he said to his people, The Israelites have become far too numerous to express, come we must deal shrewdly with them.

And he forces them into forced labour. So here is a new pharaoh who knows little or nothing about a man called Joseph. And he, like the rest of Egypt, doesn't remember a famine.

Anything about a famine. No one recollects oceans of stored grain or how a young Jewish prime minister had stepped out of obscurity to save the day.

Nobody remembers the bilateral policy established between Joseph and some long lost pharaoh. That is ancient history as far as anyone is concerned.

It's completely forgotten. All this pharaoh knew was that these Hebrews were so numerous that they couldn't be ignored. And in fact they were a threat. And so he says what happens if Egypt

enters into a war with one of our neighbours and the Hebrews decide we're going to join their army? [ 9 : 30 ] And we're going to join the enemy? It could tip the balance against Egypt. So the threat has got to be dealt with. The order goes out in the palace to make them slaves and so with whips at their backs the Israelites are enslaved.

They build two new cities in Egypt for the pharaoh. And pharaohs think all that hard labor and all that persecution is all kept down on the birth rate.

But not so at all. The Hebrews continue to be as prolific don't they? Verse 12. And so as far as the Egyptians are concerned things just keep going worse and worse.

We're told at the end of verse 12 that the Egyptians dredge the Israelites. So as the officers of Egypt are checking the records and they're seeing that month after month after month the Hebrews are swelling literally they feel sick to their stomach.

And it's getting out of control. And so further measures have to be taken measures which turn well they turn don't they to sheer oppression to utter ruthlessness.

[ 10 : 36 ] What it becomes is kind of a forced residency becomes forced labor which leads to increased brutality and it escalates to enforced infanticide. And finally to this sickening decree that all his people must kill any male Hebrew baby they come across.

It's a wonderful children's story isn't it? Isn't this something we tell to the children? Throwing babies into the Nile? What a difference a few hundred years makes isn't it?

It's hard for you and I to fathom the suffering the Israelites were going through during their time in Egypt. Day after day after day. And so the Israelites their world was a world of experiences without explanations.

And there was adversity without any apparent purpose. There was hostility without protection. And day after day asking the question. The question naturally coming to their lips why?

Didn't God tell our forefather Jacob that he was going to come down with us to Egypt as he brought us here? But God doesn't seem to give any specific answer to that question of why.

[ 11 : 48 ] Which you and I know if we've lived the Christian life for any length at all we know that that is par for the course most of the time. But when you pull the camera back, when you pull the camera back from the specifics and from the close up shots and as you pull it back to the more panoramic view there are some truths that we can affirm through this passage about when suffering comes into our lives.

Let me just say a couple of things. This passage reminds us that it is unhelpful to immediately make a kind of one-to-one correlation between our suffering and our sins.

So because we have sinned we suffer. Now don't get me wrong there are consequences of sin in your life and in mine. More often than not that will bring suffering.

However for some of us our default reaction to suffering is I must have done something wrong. I must have done something wrong. God is now punishing me.

It's actually the reflex idea of the fallen human heart. But look at this passage. The Israelites had done exactly what God had told them to do. And they were in Egypt by divine command.

[ 13 : 06 ] God had told their forefather Jacob to come here so that he and his family had done just as they had been instructed and now they look around and all they see is brutality and infanticide.

And God is permitting horrific suffering in their lives but it is not punishment for their sins. He does the same to you and he does the same to me.

And it's at those times that you have to remember that for those who follow Jesus his purposes are always good. Even if it doesn't make any sense. But he loves us.

A part of God's love for us is to make us more and more like his son Jesus. And in his wisdom God uses suffering to achieve that goal.

Do not make the mistake of always gravitating to say well because I'm suffering I must have sinned. It's possible but it's certainly not always the case.

[ 14 : 14 ] Secondly suffering should not take us by surprise. So while the Israelites do not have any specific answer to this question of why is there all this suffering I am pretty sure that those in Egypt have been told by their parents and by their grandparents what God had told Abraham back in Genesis 15 in that vision.

Here's what God says to Abraham. Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers for 400 years in a country not their own and they will be enslaved and mistreated there but I will punish the nations.

So Israel did have some inclination of what was going to happen to them because God had told their forefather Abraham about this and the reality for us is that as we read our Bible we have far far more warning than the Israelites did.

That suffering for the Christian will be part and parcel of our lives. You can look at any number of verses but here's one. Look at 1 Peter 4 verse 12. Peter writes this.

He says dear friends do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you as though something strange were happening to you. Do you see Peter's point? Don't do trials and sufferings in your life as if they're out of the ordinary.

[ 15 : 32 ] As if they are strange. If you've got life you've got troubles. you've just got to live long enough. If you've got life you've got troubles.

And that's the reality. And the context here Peter is talking about suffering we experience for being Christians. And you and I need to get to the point where however hard it is to see that suffering in this life is not strange.

And a huge part of your struggles and trials and tests in this life is that they take us by surprise don't they? They knock out our feet from underneath us. I read a quote this week.

A huge amount of the discouragement we go through. This person suggests that even up to 90% of the discouragement and trouble we encounter comes from the surprise we are having trouble.

The surprise that we're having trouble. I don't know how accurate that statistic is. But our real problem isn't actually the situation it's our shock that this could be happening to us.

[ 16 : 44 ] Whether it's losing our job or whether it's getting bad news from the doctor or whether it's being treated badly by a so-called friend. We get down not because of the situation but because we weren't expecting it.

We have this mindset that life should just be a bed of roses and everything is supposed to run smoothly isn't it? I can't believe that this is happening to me. But the Bible teaches us that one of God's primary tools to grow you and I into conformity with Jesus and to increase our godliness and our holiness is through suffering.

And we don't like it. And we would never vote for it. But we should stop being surprised by it. So what does it look like in your life when you have developed a more godly approach to suffering? Well I think we'll see that as we go through Exodus. That brings us to our two unlikely heroes.

They're heroines actually.

The early part of Exodus is full of heroic women. The heroines and the two midwives. Look at verses 15 to 21. Then the king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives one of them was named Shiphrah and the other Purah when you serve his midwife to the Hebrew women and see them on the birth stool if it is a son you shall kill him but if it is a daughter she shall live.

[ 18 : 15 ] But the midwives feared God that's the important thing and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them but let the male children live. So the king of Egypt called the midwives and said to them why have you done this and let the male children live.

The midwives said to Pharaoh because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them. So God dealt well with the midwives and the people multiplied and grew very strong and because the midwives feared God he gave them families of their own.

Now notice we're told twice in this passage what a godly approach to suffering is. We're looking around Sunday evening it wasn't planned but it is to fear God. Let me try and tease out what does it mean to fear God.

I think it means this the fear of the Lord is a trembling trust. The fear of God is a trembling trust. And even with the very limited revelation that these midwives had they had an absolute trust in God and his goodness even with everything going on around them.

And at the same time as knowing God is not to be messed with however powerful Pharaoh may have seemed for these women the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was way more powerful.

[ 19 : 34 ] And much much greater. So in verse 15 we see Pharaoh holds this private conference with these two midwives Shifra and Puer. And Pharaoh's assistant is saying all we need to do is bring these two women in and they will just crumble before Pharaoh and they will do whatever he tells them to do.

And the midwives are told that when the Hebrew women give birth they are to kill the males. So are these women intimidated by Pharaoh?

Not in your life. They fear God more than they fear man. We're going to see that tonight. They fear God who is the author of life.

The God who is passionate about the sanctity of life. So are they going to abort life? Of course not. Pharaoh's wing doesn't mean that things are not going as planned so he hauls the women back in for an explanation and they are like well goodness king.

These women are fast. They're really fast. We hear they're about to give birth. We rush over the house and it's already happened. The baby's already there.

[ 20 : 45 ] What are we meant to do? Their response is grounded in the fact that they fear God. And a right response in the midst of suffering is that the fear of the Lord produces obedience no matter what the risk.

No matter what the cost. Because we fear God more than we fear Pharaoh. So it's not to cut corners in order to minimize your suffering which every one of us is tempted to do but it is to do what is necessary.

Not only for your own blessing and flourishing but for the blessing and flourishing of others and the author tells us that as a result of our actions God is kind to these women. And there's another very subtle way in the narrative where it tells us that God approves of their actions.

That is demonstrated by we know their names don't we? You might think why is that significant? You might not think it's terribly significant at all. But I think it is because for all the apparent greatness we're never told Pharaoh's name.

These midwives, these ones that Pharaoh must have regarded as kind of little ants as mere tools of his policy, they are remembered individually. We say their names. I think that's so great.

[ 22 : 03 ] That from the Bible's perspective who is truly important in God's eyes, it's the one who fears the Lord. And they might not be the great ones as the world defines it, but the ones who fear the Lord have a name.

And they have an identity. Pharaoh gets no name because that's all he is. He is a king. He is defined by his role. That is his whole identity.

But these midwives, Shufra and Pua, the fact that you and I can speak their names is a pointer. That they have a lasting identity and that is because of the bedrock of their lives which is God himself.

And so let me lastly point to the ultimate hero in this passage. He's actually the ultimate hero of the book of Exodus and it's not these heroic women and it's not Moses.

The hero of the book of Exodus is God himself. Despite the fact that they knew that God had foretold their suffering and slavery in Egypt. Despite the fact that God had told Jacob that he will go with them when they go down to Egypt.

[ 23 : 13 ] You've got to bet, haven't you, that in Exodus 1, God seems so distant to the people of the time. To the people at this time, in the midst of all that they were suffering.

But what Moses, the author, does here, is that he's written in such a way that we can see through the entire passage that God is relentlessly working. God is working behind the scenes in astonishing ways to protect his people and to prepare them for rescue.

And we see this most clearly in the last scene of the passage in the first part of chapter 2. So I don't know whether you noticed that Neregeus skillfully narrows down the focus.

In the first two chapters he begins in a kind of wide scale. And he looks at all the Israelites who are suffering under the hands of the Egyptians. And then he narrows it down to these midwives and the Hebrew babies that are being born.

And as you come into chapter 2, the focus is just on one family, and particularly the newborn son of this family. So chapter 2, verse 1. Moses' mother is another hero in the story.

[ 24 : 48 ] In fact, in Hebrews 11, we're specifically told that this act of hiding Moses for three months was an act of faith in God. Because they did not act in fear of Pharaoh's decree.

She feared God instead. But once she could hide him no longer, we're not told why. Maybe his lungs were such that three months, well I would have thought for the first three months it's pretty hard to keep a baby secret.

But he's a lot louder now, isn't he? And she gets to the point where she can hide him no longer. So she gets a basket for him. And here's the coolest thing in Exodus 1 and 2.

Do you know what the word is for the basket? The word for basket and the word for container? It is ark. It is ark. It's the only time in the Old Testament where this word ark is used.

It's here in Genesis 6-9 of Noah's ark. And so as we read Exodus chapter 2 we have to pick up the echoes of part 1, Genesis.

[ 25 : 54 ] And the same instruction is given, that was given to Moses, that she's put pitch and bitumen on it for his ark. And again it's not an accidental detail. Because it's telling us that even before we get to the main part of the story of the rescue, we have been clued into the fact that this little ark is an ark of salvation.

It's an ark of salvation for the boy. And that actually becomes clear, doesn't it? But just as we've known, the salvation of humanity is going to depend on this little ark.

And I'm guessing that Moses' mother was extremely strategic in where she put this ark, in where she placed it in the Nile. She placed it among the reeds, because she knows that the water is shallow there, the current of the mighty night is not going to carry the basket away.

But she also knows where Pharaoh's daughter normally comes to bathe. So she puts the basket on the path to the bathing spot. But I've been said all of that, to put your three month old baby in a basket on a river and then leave it there, well it numbs the heart of any parent, doesn't it? the odds of this turning out well are ridiculously low aren't they? Are they? Well look what God does, Pharaoh's daughter turns up, she sees the basket and she opens it up.

[ 27 : 24 ] Just notice the nerita slows everything down. Here. A little baby. Oh, a little boy. Oh look, the boy's crying.

She's moved to compassion. It's one of the Hebrew babies. And such is her compassion.

Compassion of the daughter of Pharaoh that she adopts this child as her own.

Well, it just so happens that the baby's sister is there. She approaches the royal daughter and she says, wouldn't it be a good idea to have a Hebrew slave nurse this Hebrew baby, wouldn't it?

And it just so happens that the royal daughter agrees. So Miriam, the baby's sister, goes and gets the baby's mother and it just so happens that the baby's mother comes back and Pharaoh's daughter says, I want to pay you to nurse this baby.

Get him paid to care for your own baby. So for Moses, his formative years, he will sit on the lap of his mother and he will learn of his Hebrew roots and his God and he will learn who he truly belonged to.

[ 28 : 40 ] And then the time will come when his mother will have to return Moses to Pharaoh's daughter. When he will be educated in all the ways of Egypt and everything that had to happen for Moses to fulfil the role that is still 80 years in the future.

The important thing to see in all of these details is that all of this, every single part of this is directed by the sovereign loving hand of God. Every single bit of it.

And God doesn't step in at the last minute having heard the decree of Pharaoh that he's going to kill all the male babies in Egypt thinking, oh my goodness, I didn't know this was going to happen, what am I going to do now? No, it is precisely by means of the decree of Pharaoh.

Pharaoh gives an order that all the baby boys are going to be killed. It is precisely by the means of the decree of Pharaoh that God is going to bring about the deliverance of his people. God is in full control of Moses' birth.

God is in full control of the swirling circumstances that threaten to undo his birth. God could have removed Pharaoh from the situation. God could have struck Pharaoh down.

[ 29 : 52 ] The second any threats were being made, in fact I'm guessing that if you and I were there, our prayer meetings would have been about that. God rescued Moses from the situation.

Protect him. Lord please get Pharaoh out of the sea. But God is more intent on showing everyone who is really king. Who really rules Pharaoh?

Who really has the power in our world? So God places Moses in the same Nile that Pharaoh intends for harm. Do you see that? throw the babies in the Nile.

God places Moses in the same Nile that Pharaoh intends for harm. He brings the boy, he writes to Pharaoh's goal step and he has him raised in Pharaoh's house. It's unbelievable.

All of which is to defeat the enemy decisively at his own game. At the very heart of his strength. Isn't this the kind of God you want to trust your life with?

[ 30 : 54 ] Isn't this the kind of God who you really wouldn't want to go up against? Isn't this the kind of God whose side you want to be on? You see it doesn't matter how bleak a situation might look in your life right now.

It doesn't matter how hopeless things might look now. This God says you trust in me, you trust in me and he's got everything you need. I guarantee it he says. He says fear me and you will lack nothing.

So we have this what is really a mini preview of the greater rescue that God is going to achieve through Moses as he saves Israel through not the Red Sea but the Red Sea.

But the rescue really here in Exodus chapter 1 is ultimately pointing forward to the greatest rescue that is of eternal significance to you and me.

Because when you turn from Exodus chapter 1 and 2 to Matthew chapter 1 and 2 you find another baby. And you find another son who is laid in a rough basket of sorts. And he is put there by his mother.

[ 32 : 04 ] And you have another son whose very existence has come under threat by the edict of a king to murder all the baby boys in the land. But you see just as God protected Moses he will protect this baby too.

Because this baby turns out to be his own son whom he has sent into the world. And the father has sent his son into the world to achieve the ultimate deliverance. Not a rescue from slavery in Egypt but from the slavery that will condemn you for eternity unless you are saved.

And that is our slavery to sin. And the Bible tells you that is your greatest problem. That your greatest problem in life is the sin that has alienated you from God.

And that sin as a consequence alienates us from each other. And from the world and even from ourselves. And you see the problem with your sin and my sin is that you cannot just snap yourself out of it.

Can you? You can't. You cannot wake up tomorrow morning and recognise, oh yeah, I've seen all the problems of my life and I'm just going to live a different way. It doesn't work like that. It's why the language of slavery is so helpful because it shows us we don't control things.

[ 33 : 12 ] Actually they control us. And they control me. And you need rescue from them. But in the greatest act of defeating the enemy of his own game, Jesus takes the weapon himself, namely death, and he turns the weapon around to defeat the devil.

And Satan thought he'd won the war by putting Jesus to death. But little did he realise that it was precisely through that death that Jesus was going to defeat Satan.

and death. And in the process rescue all those who put their trust in him. Isn't this the God worth trusting your whole life with?

Isn't this the God inside you want to be on? Bill Dumbrell was right, wasn't he? It's not just Exodus. The life of the Christian starts with slavery, it ends with worship, but the transition from slavery to worship is accomplished by means of the most unbelievable redemption.

And right before Exodus begins, right before we read these words, just come with me as I finish, come with me to Genesis chapter 50 and verse 20.

[ 34 : 26 ] Do you see what Joseph says to his brothers? As for you, you brothers, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good to bring about that many people should be kept alive, should be saved, as they are for.

Now we read those verses, and I naturally read those verses, and we immediately think, well that's the summary of the end of Genesis, isn't it? That's all about Joseph.

But actually Genesis 50 and verse 20 is not just pointing back, it is pointing forward. It is pointing forward to what God is going to do through Moses. Moses could say to Pharaoh, you intended to harm me, but God intended it for good, for the saving of many lives.

And of course, that is ultimately the message of Jesus to the evil and Satan. Satan, you intended to harm me, to kill me, but God intended it for good, to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

Many lives like mine, and many lives I pray like yours. So no matter what life holds for you today, or this week, or through the rest of this year, trust your life with this God, and you'll have absolutely everything you need.

[ 35 : 48 ] He guarantees it. Let's pray.