

Even in Adversity

Over the years, I have had many people tell me they have trouble reading and understanding the Bible. There may be many reasons for this problem. One may be that we tend to read the Bible as a collection of scattered stories about disconnected people that apparently are meant to teach us a lesson. Yet, somehow, we fail to see the common threads that run through the Bible that really connect all of those stories together into a masterful message of love, hope, forgiveness, and salvation.

One of the dangers of this approach to Bible study is we begin to look at the Bible as a collection of myths and folk lore. In fact, there are many theologians and preachers who have embraced this idea and as a result no longer believe the Bible is the word of God as revealed to His creation. I personally have a severe problem with casting the Bible as a collection of myths and folk lore. It cheapens God's words and leaves us without a moral compass to guide us in our journey through life. At that point, we must accept that God has expectations of us that are not clearly delineated thus God has erred in His duty to provide a path for us to seek His favor. You can see where this will lead. It leads us to either worship a fallible God or it leads us to reject God all together. I believe the Bible to be the inspired (God breathed) words of God left for us to learn of Him and learn what is expected of us as we take up our cross and follow Jesus. With that background, we begin this week's message.

A few weeks ago, I had a mid-week devotion about being pilgrims. In that devotion, I mentioned that the pilgrimage involves living in situations that are not home. Often, the pilgrimage involves living in spartan circumstance and enduring tribulation. Are we prepared for the adversity of serving God?

This morning we will read through a familiar story from the Old Testament. In this story, we will see people who put their trust in God. Their faith is one of those common threads that is woven throughout the Bible. It is my hope that when we finish today's message, we may find that the Bible is less intimidating and we may find renewed desire to become better acquainted with the marvelous word of God.

Just two weeks ago, we spoke about God putting us in places for a reason. In that message, we looked at Joseph. He was certainly mistreated on many levels yet God managed to put Joseph where he could do the most good for the region.

Today, we pick back up on the scene in Egypt. The family of Joseph had come to Egypt and had been welcomed. In the beginning verses of Exodus, we learn how few people came to live in this new country.

All the persons who came from the loins of Jacob were seventy in number, but Joseph was *already* in Egypt. (Exodus 1:5 NASB)

Joseph's 11 brothers and their families arrive in Egypt and settle down in Goshen (Genesis 47:1-6). At this point, I want to share a few dates to help us understand the setting of the first part of Exodus.

Around 1733 BC, Joseph went to Egypt as a slave. He was 17 years old. About 22 years later, Joseph's brothers and father (Jacob) moved to Egypt. This is around 1711 BC. This is when they settled in the region of Goshen.

They lived there for 17 years and Jacob died at the age of 147 (Genesis 47:28). This is around 1694 BC. Joseph lived a total of 110 years and died (Genesis 50:26). This brings us to the year 1640 BC.

During this time frame, the rule over Egypt changed radically. According to an article by Theresa Machemer published in the Smithsonian Magazine (July 17, 2020) the Hyksos conquered the Nile Delta region around 1638 BC. Establishing a new dynasty. It was likely an immigrant uprising that displaced the former dynasty. They ruled from 1638 BC until 1530 BC. I know that is a lot of dates and events. I share them to help place the events in a reasonable perspective. At times, we may read about the birth of Moses and think that centuries have elapsed between Joseph and Moses while there is only 64 years. The reason for the king not knowing Joseph is it was a new king from a different family with a different background. If you missed any of these dates and are interested in having them for future reference, the text of this sermon will be posted on our web site by noon tomorrow.

With this rather lengthy introduction, to our story. Most of us remember from our days in Sunday school that the new pharaoh wanted all of the male children killed at birth. Let's begin by opening our Bible to the first chapter of Exodus beginning in verse 8.

Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. He said to his people, "Behold, the people of the sons of Israel are more and mightier than we. Come, let us deal wisely with them, or else they will multiply and in the event of war, they will also join themselves to those who hate us, and fight against us and depart from the land." So, they appointed taskmasters over them to afflict them with hard labor. (Exodus 1:8-11a NASB)

The children of Israel are compelled to work in construction and farming tasks. All very labor intensive. The children continue to thrive so an idea about curbing the population was imposed.

Then the king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other was named Puah; and he said, "When you are helping the Hebrew women to give birth and see *them* upon the birthstool, if it is a son, then you shall put him to death; but if it is a daughter, then she shall live." But the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt had commanded them, but let the boys live. So, the king of Egypt called for the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this thing, and let the boys live?" The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not as the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife can get to them." So, God was good to the midwives, and the people multiplied, and became very mighty. Because the midwives feared God, He established households for them. Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, saying, "Every son who is born you are to cast into the Nile, and every daughter you are to keep alive." (Exodus 1:15-22 NASB)

At this point, we may notice that there are several issues that tend to create adverse conditions. It sets up an adverse condition for the mothers and the families when they realize that their sons are to be killed. It also set up an adverse condition for the midwives to carry out the sentence of murdering the children.

The idea of killing all of the male children was to suppress the Hebrew population. The females could be taken by Egyptian men for wives or for other purposes. Without the males, there would be no danger of a revolt against their rule and authority.

Notice that God intervened to keep the midwives from being instruments of murder. Now the order is to all women that birth a male child. They are to throw the child into the Nile River. To say the least, these were adverse times for male children. God again steps in to protect the child that will deliver His chosen people out of captivity and lead them to the Promised Land.

As we begin the second chapter of Exodus, we are introduced to a child that is destined to become a central figure in God's ultimate plan of salvation.

Let's read a few verses starting with the first verse of chapter 2.

Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a daughter of Levi. The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was beautiful, she hid him for three months. But when she could hide him no longer, she got him a wicker basket and covered it over with tar and pitch. Then she put the child into it and set *it* among the reeds by the bank of the Nile. His sister stood at a distance to find out what would happen to him. (Exodus 2:1-4 NASB)

We could say that Moses' mom technically obeyed the command about putting her male child into the river. One of the finer points that is often omitted in the Sunday school lesson is that while she made the basket water tight, she could not avoid the crocodiles that live around the Nile River. Her child could easily become a noon time meal for a hungry crocodile.

This child was most certainly in an adverse situation. God intervened and this child we know as Moses was rescued by the Pharaoh's daughter. She reared him in the royal court and he became the instrument used by God to deliver the sons of Israel and their families out of captivity and back to the Promised Land.

This story is not in the Bible to give us material for a Sunday school lesson. It is there to help us realize that God is always there to deliver us from adverse situations.

Pause for a moment and think of other people of whom we read in the Bible. Jonah was in the belly of a fish but God delivered him. Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego were thrown into a furnace and God delivered them. Later in the same book, Daniel was thrown into the lion's den and God delivered him.

We may even pause to consider the adverse situation in which Jesus was when two Roman governors had found no fault in Him yet to silence the mob, Jesus was nailed to a cross. We all know how that turned out. Once more, God delivered Him.

God is our God even when we are in adverse situation. Even in adversity, God is there for us and will deliver us. This is one of those threads that is woven deeply in the fabric of the Bible. God loves us and will always be there for us even in adversity.