

The Book of Exodus: Who Is the LORD?

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Sermon 1, From Slavery to Worship via the Knowledge of God: An Introduction to Exodus, Exodus 1:1-6, 20:1-2, 25:8

Proposition: The book of Exodus moves from slavery in Egypt to the completion of the tabernacle in two action-packed years, showing that the way from slavery to worship leads through the knowledge of God.

- I. “Now These Are the Names:” Israel’s Family Enslaved, 1:1
- II. “Who Is Yahweh? I Do Not Know Yahweh:” God Reveals Himself to Pharaoh’s Ignorance, 5:2
 - A. “You Shall Know that I Am Yahweh Who Brings You Out:” God Frees His People, 6:7
 - B. “When I See the Blood, I will Pass Over You:” God Saves by Lamb’s Blood, 12:13
 - C. “And God Spoke All These Words:” God Rules His People, 20:1
- III. “Let Them Make Me a Sanctuary, That I May Dwell Among Them:” God Provides a Way for Worship in His Presence, 25:8

Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, this evening we begin looking together at the book of Exodus. I am excited to be studying this book with you. Reading the commentaries was a delight (not something that is true of every book of the Bible, by a long shot). Sharing the glorious truths this book presents will be a treat. I want to lead you through the book this evening by looking at half-a-dozen key phrases. The main theme of Exodus is the knowledge of God. It is the knowledge of God that leads His people out of slavery and into His presence for worship. Thus, the first third of the book deals with getting out of Egypt, and the final half of the book deals with the Levitical way of access into God’s presence for worship. God reveals Himself in bringing His people out, and He reveals Himself through the tabernacle, the law, and the covenant. The climax of this book is at the very end, when God comes to live with His people. The path to that climax is rocky, as we see God reveal His ways through Israel’s enslavement, through His rescue of them, and then through His revelation of His law, covenant, and worship. But the payoff is all the more earth-shattering because getting there has been so hard. So let’s trace the path of God’s people from slavery to worship via the knowledge of God.

I. “Now These Are the Names:” Israel’s Family Enslaved, 1:1

Exodus opens with a continuation of the story begun in Genesis, with the word “now” resuming the story that Moses had begun to tell in that book. As you can see, of course, the book

presupposes that you know that Jacob and Israel are one and the same man. It presupposes that you know this man had sons and that they came with him into Egypt. And there, my friends, we have a point that will preach. Why did God bring Israel into Egypt to suffer and be enslaved there? The narrative simply does not say. They went into Egypt for good reasons. In fact, God Himself told Jacob to bring his family down to Egypt. And the sons of Israel prospered there for some time. The family was already of pretty large size when it came to Egypt — seventy persons. We will talk about that more next time. But these first seven verses set the stage for the rest of the book in its dramatic story of deliverance from slavery through the knowledge of God. And they speak to us, wherever we are at in our stories. Are you suffering? Are you hurting? Are you oppressed by an evil government? Know that such a thing is not a first for God's people. God sometimes sends pain, tragedy, sorrow, and loss into your life for the same reason that He sent it to Israel in Egypt's land: so that you too can move from slavery to worship through the knowledge of God. You can know Him better through deliverance than you can through an unbroken good time. If everything were going well for you, how would you know you need Him? But if you're in trouble, then you know that you are not able to make your life work right.

II. “Who Is Yahweh? I Do Not Know Yahweh:” God Reveals Himself to Pharaoh's Ignorance, 5:2

So the scene of Exodus is clear: Israel in Egypt, sometime during the bronze age or iron age. Archaeologists debate the chronology of Egypt. They don't agree among themselves exactly how many years ago various things happened. They also dispute when and even whether Israel ever lived in Egypt at all. Brothers and sisters, I am not an archaeologist. But I can assure that they disagree. That tells me, layman that I am, that the evidence does not overwhelmingly point in one direction. All human beings agree that the sky is blue and the sun rises every morning. But not all of them agree that Mohammed is Allah's messenger or that this pot in this layer of ashes proves that Joshua the son of Nun burnt this particular city in the year 1400 B.C. Brothers and sisters, I admire and respect the practitioners of this science. But I do not believe that their piece of pottery is better evidence than my written testimony. Moses was there, and the archaeologists were not. They would call that statement question-begging; I would call their skepticism laughable. Would a road sign from the route of the exodus be better proof than the text of the second book of the Pentateuch? Would another historical document, this one by an Egyptian and preserved in only one copy, somehow verify Exodus? The attitude that can doubt one eyewitness testimony can doubt four eyewitness testimonies (see the Gospels) or, if it comes to that, 66 eyewitness testimonies. The idea that if it's one book it's a lie can sound very plausible. But unfortunately for historians, many truths can be written down only once.

Anyway, Israel was in Egypt. And in Egypt God started a war with Pharaoh. Pharaoh claims that he does not know Yahweh. The rest of the book tells us who Yahweh is. By ch. 14, Pharaoh knows Yahweh very well indeed.

Hence my claim that the central theme of Exodus is not going out of slavery. It's not liberation. It's not worship. It is rather the knowledge of God, as that plays into these other things. Pharaoh did not know Yahweh. So Yahweh showed Him.

A. “You Shall Know that I Am Yahweh Who Brings You Out:” God Frees His People, 6:7

What in particular do we learn about God in this book of Exodus? Well, the obvious theme and the one memorialized in its Greek-English name is that God brings His people out of bondage. God is the God of the Exodus! Pharaoh didn't know that about Him. God's own people didn't know that about Him; when Moses first comes and says “God is going to deliver you,” they don't say, “Oh, yes! The promise to Abraham. I guess our four hundred years are up. Hot dog!” At first they believe — but when the going gets tough, they quit. They are rather like God's people today, their modern counterparts.

What does it mean that God is the God of the Exodus? Here's what our flesh wants it to mean: That God is committed to seeing me delivered from political oppression. God wants me to live in freedom — first of all political freedom, but also financial freedom, even sexual freedom and moral freedom. Is that what God revealed about Himself in the book of Exodus? Well, we know that the book is clearly about deliverance from Pharaoh. But where does it end? With worship. In other words, if you think that God is liberating you for wealth, you're wrong. If you think He's liberating you for political freedom, you're wrong. If you look to Him to liberate you for the sake of free love and cheap sex, you're wrong. God showed His character as the Exodus God. No doubt. But as God said to Pharaoh, “Let my people go, that they may serve me.” You have been saved to serve. You have been freed in order to worship. If you won't serve, if you're not interested in worship, the liberation of Exodus is not for you. The deliverance is for worshippers, because the point of the deliverance is worship.

Do you know that about God? Do you recognize this truth when you pray that God would keep you from poverty? Do you actually want to have enough so that you have more time for private, family, and corporate worship? Or would you still never lead family worship even if you had five times as much free time as you have now? Would you still never go to church even if you had way fewer Sunday morning workouts and way fewer Sunday evening football games? Brothers and sisters, God revealed Himself as the God who delivers for the sake of worship. If worship is not what your heart dearly wants, don't expect to get too much deliverance from God. He didn't save His people so that they could set up a Pharaoh of their own and serve him instead of the Egyptian version. He didn't save His people so that they could build store cities, this time for the state of Israel instead of the king of Egypt. And He didn't save you so that you could have a more prosperous existence than you used to.

God freed His people to live with Him in the promised land. And that is what He has freed you for too. You are free to live in the most heavenly way possible here on earth, knowing that God didn't free you to recreate Egypt and have slaves of your own, but to live in a totally different way than Egypt lived.

Do you believe that? Do you believe that you exist for worship? The rest of the Bible calls that belief “holiness.” It's a statement of purpose. The holy exists for God. The profane exists for worldly purposes. Exodus teaches that God saves for Himself. He saves you to make you holy so that you worship Him.

B. “When I See the Blood, I will Pass Over You:” God Saves by Lamb’s Blood, 12:13

But that is not all. God revealed Himself as the God of the Exodus, the God who delivers His people. But He also revealed *how* that deliverance happened. It happened through the blood of the lamb. The Exodus reveals *that* God saves, but the Passover reveals *how* God saves.

God established this principle of substitution at the climax of Abraham’s life in Genesis 22. There the Almighty made it clear that in order for the promises to fully come about, the son of promise would have to go up as a whole burnt offering. At the last minute, God substituted a lamb for the son. But the origin of the substitution already implies that it is in fact a temporary substitution, that the day is coming when the life of the firstborn son of promise will in fact be demanded after all.

God revealed during the Exodus that that time had not come — yet. He accepted the sacrifice of a lamb in place of the firstborn for all the people of Israel. But the Egyptians who would not take refuge under the blood of the lamb saw their firstborn sons killed instantly nationwide. Once again, the point was made: God most surely demands the life of the firstborn. He will allow a substitution, but for those who will not accept the substitute, there is no alternative. God will take their firstborns.

Do you know this God of the Exodus? I just asked you whether you believe that you exist for worship. Now I ask you this: Do you believe that God’s promises can only be realized through the death, not of a firstborn son but of The Firstborn Son, the Son of Promise who we know as the Anointed One, Jesus? And are you hiding under the blood?

Pharaoh did not want to let himself know that God would indeed take his firstborn son. Pharaoh would not accept the substituted lamb. And so Pharaoh forfeited his son. If you are not hiding under the blood of Christ today, if he is not the lamb of God for you, then you have an appointment scheduled with the angel of death. You may try to miss it, but you can’t skip out on death. “Life you may evade, but death you shall not. You shall not deny the stranger!”

In other words, of course, God revealed the gospel in Exodus. The gospel is not liberation theology’s message of political liberation. Oh no. This news is better than letting freedom ring. This is Christian theology’s message of freedom from death through the blood of the lamb who died in your place.

Pharaoh did not know Yahweh. But he quickly got to know Him as the God who saves His people and who destroys those who will not submit.

C. “And God Spoke All These Words:” God Rules His People, 20:1

The third major facet of the knowledge of God that God’s people learned over the course of the events narrated in this book is that God has specific demands on our lives. At the center of this book (ch. 20 out of 40) are the Ten Commandments. God not only leads His people out of bondage into worship, not only substitutes a lamb for their lives, but also gives them perfect moral laws for living. In fact, of course, Exodus contains much legal material, including regulations for worship and for life in the land. But the crown jewel of the laws ceremonial, moral, and civil that Moses wrote down is without a doubt the Ten Commandments, written with

the finger of God. They cover every conceivable human predicament, situation, and moral decision. Every last thing we can do, say, or think falls under the moral principles enunciated so memorably in these Ten from Sinai. They are a revelation not only of what is best for humanity, but of what is important to deity. God has shown Himself, what He values and what He wants, in these Ten. We will spend quite a chunk of time looking at them in the coming weeks. But for now, as we begin Exodus, remember the theme of the knowledge of God — a theme that finds one of its major expressions in the revelation of the Ten Commandments with their rules for human behavior.

III. “Let Them Make Me a Sanctuary, That I May Dwell Among Them:” God Provides a Way for Worship in His Presence, 25:8

But the greatest climax in the book of Exodus, as I observed a few minutes ago, is reserved for the end. The Exodus itself required 12 chapters of buildup. The Red Sea crossing required 13. But the building of the tabernacle required 16, if you count the interlude in which God revealed His back parts and His name to Moses. Even omitting those chapters, the construction of the tabernacle, climaxing in Yahweh’s move-in, still occupies 13 chapters. And of course, the book ends with the payoff: Yahweh comes to live in their midst!

Is that what you live for — to be near God? Is that what you long for? Exodus is about the knowledge of God. How do you get to know Him best? Is it by watching tremendous plagues? Is it by marching through the desert under a pillar of cloud and fire? Is it by seeing the sea split so you can walk through it, or witnessing a huge cloud of smoke and lightning over Mt. Sinai?

Brothers and sisters, we can answer these questions by looking at what Exodus is about. Sure it recounts all of the above, and much more. But the book in its second half is all about building the tent for God so that He can come and live in His tent among the Israelites who are living in theirs. That is so clearly on the surface of the text that you have to be blinder than a mole and a bat put together to miss it. Why is Exodus about building the tent for God? Because Exodus is about the knowledge of God and you really get to know Him through worship in His presence! You get to know Him by living with Him and approaching Him regularly through the way He has set up. In this book and the next, the way of approach is the Levitical way. Now, in the new covenant, we have a better way of approach. But we can learn oh-so-much about the God we’re approaching from how He wanted to be approached in those days. Above all, we can learn that He wants to live with His people in a beautiful house of His own design but their construction. That is what the church is. Jesus designed it, and we build it — that is, we are the materials out of which He builds it.

If you are a convicted liberation theologian, you will find Exodus a disappointment. If you are sure that this book contains the program for delivering you and your community from government repression of any stripe (too many regulations? Too many murderous cops? Too much voter fraud? Too much voter suppression?), you will be very confused as to why half of it consists of rules on how to live with God and instructions on what His tent should look like. The answer, of course, is that Exodus is not about achieving political freedom. Exodus is about

moving from slavery to worship through the knowledge of God. That's what God's people did long ago. That's what God's people are called to do in this generation, and in every generation. And that's why Exodus is still relevant to us. You were once enslaved to sin. You can be delivered from that slavery by the knowledge of God — and when you are, you will worship Him.

You don't have to be politically free to be a Christian. Christianity was still true in the officially atheist USSR, and many Christians there paid with their lives. Christianity will still be true if our own country turns on it for its hopelessly regressive views about human sexuality. Dead Christians are still Christians. One could argue that they are better Christians than the other kind!

But though political freedom is not necessary to be a Christian, spiritual freedom is. You cannot be in bondage to sin and serve Jesus too. You cannot be alive to sin and alive to God at the same time and in the same sense. You can't serve both those masters.

Exodus is about deliverance from slavery through the knowledge of God. Yes, Israel was enslaved to Pharaoh, and God delivered them. But He didn't deliver them and then spend the time at Sinai giving them the kind of military superiority that would prevent them from ever being enslaved again. They spend a good part of the rest of the OT enslaved. No. He did not give them temporal power that would ward off slavery. He gave them something better — Himself. That's why He saved you. Are you ready to trust Him for that? Are you ready to move from slavery to worship? If so, then buckle in. We have an exciting ride through Exodus ahead of us. Amen.