

Sermon 6, Reminded By the Screams, Exodus 2:23-25

Proposition: When politics has no help and the pain mounts, God remembers His covenant, listens to His people, and knows their situation.

- I. The Political Solution that Fizzled, v. 23
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Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, our sermon this evening deals directly with the character of God. In many ways the passage before us is connected to the next section, where God not only knows but also takes action to redeem His people. But I want us to focus on this passage together this evening because it highlights the character of God apart from and prior to any “action” as we would conceive of that category. We know that God is pure act, or maybe better pure actuality. He is divorced from the category of potentiality because He is entirely and completely what He is. Put yet another way, in God there is no distinction between what He is and what He ought to be. The two are one and the same. But as these matters relate to us, when God is silent and takes no action to ease our pain, it gets really easy to wonder if He has changed, if He has forgotten, if He is no longer interested — or if He somehow enjoys our suffering. Our passage tonight, then, is a reminder that God does indeed hear our cries, see our pain, and know our suffering. He will never forget His promises; He will never remain ignorant of what you and I are going through.

I. The Political Solution that Fizzled, v. 23

Our passage begins with two phrases that highlight the pain and misery of the situation: “during those many days” and “the king of Egypt died.” We are not talking about the oppression lasting for a few weeks. We are talking about lasting for years, centuries even. God had already warned that the residence in Egypt would be 400 years or 4 generations. By either measurement, that’s a very long time. You will be oppressed long enough to have great-grandchildren! You will be oppressed, in fact, longer than the length of a single human lifetime. You will be oppressed so long that your grandchildren will die in chains.

What kind of situation is this? It is a situation lasting those many days. It isn't a short-lived situation. Specifically, of course, the text is talking about the forty years that Moses lived in Midian. That was a lot of days when Israel was suffering under Pharaoh's genocidal policies.

A. Pharaoh Dies, v. 23a

In fact, the situation lasted so long that it killed Pharaoh. The wicked perish in their wickedness. Everything goes right for them, but they still die.

B. His Policies Live On, v. 23b

But though Pharaoh died, his policies lived on. Though the accession of a new Pharaoh appears to have been traditionally a time for mercy, the policy of Hebrew genocide was not revisited. Far from it. The text reminds us in the next breath that Israel is still enslaved.

Brothers and sisters, the political solution failed. Are you hoping for a political solution to the problem of persecution, the problem of losing our country, the problem of suffering? Don't get your hopes up. No. Political solutions don't always work. Obviously politics in Egypt, where the Pharaoh called himself a god, are rather different than politics today, when our rulers are much more aware of their limitations . . . oh wait. Politics, alas! Rarely are they a better solution for us than they were for the Israelites.

Are you suffering? Don't put your faith in a political solution. If you are called to politics, it's fine and good to work for political solutions. But if that's where your hope is, you are miserable indeed.

II. The Pain of Israel, vv. 23-24

Misery. Let's talk about that.

A. Groaning

The misery of Israel is described here in three ways. The first is crying or groaning. This refers to the inarticulate noise that says "I'm in pain." It hurt to be enslaved in Egypt. Having been free our whole lives, we simply don't understand the kind of pain that God's people went through. We can talk to people who have been enslaved and ask them what it's like. But at the end of the day, the endless misery and insecurity of being subject to someone else for a lifetime, and knowing that your parents lived that way and your children will too, is an experience so bad we can hardly imagine it. No wonder Israel groaned!

B. Screaming

They also screamed aloud. The pain was worse than the low inner rumble that produces groaning. It was intense, too. It was the kind of thing that makes you scream. Ow! Again, brothers and sisters, though we have seen God's care for Moses and for the ladies in his life over the course of this chapter, we cannot forget the misery of God's people. We also have to remember that this kind of misery is not exactly abnormal for the people of God. As we will see in the Acts series we are starting soon, at the center of Acts is the teaching that we must through much tribulation enter the Kingdom of God. That's in ch. 14 of 28. If yours is a non-screaming Christianity, get ready. That may change.

C. Crying Out

Finally, we are told that God's people cried out for help. They were driven to prayer. That's how bad this situation was. I'm only half-joking. It's an old saw in Christian circles, of course: "It was so bad that you actually *prayed* about it?" But the reason it's a joke is that we often fail to pray until the situation has reached a crisis point. So it was with the people of God in Moses' era. While Moses was wandering around the desert of Midian with a flock of sheep, the Israelites back in Egypt were suffering so much that they had to ask God to deliver them. That's a lot of suffering. That's a lot of pain. It is so fascinating to me that it doesn't say that they cried out to God. They simply cried out for help. To whom? We're not sure. Why? Of that we're definitely sure. They cried out for help because they needed help! They were not able to handle the situation.

Do you expect that this is going to be part of the Christian life? A situation so awful that you can't handle it on your own? Or, in general, do you expect that you will be able to field everything that life throws at you? Think again, Exodus says. God took His people down to Egypt and there they were enslaved. And they needed help. They needed rescue. They had to cry out and ask God for it.

III. The Passion of God, vv. 24-25

At least, whoever they were asking — even if they were just asking in general, a distress call sent out on all frequencies to anyone who might be listening anywhere, God heard. Our passage ends with four verbs in a row that have "God" as their agent. The distress call rose, and God heard it. It came up to God. And with that, the name of God comes back into the narrative. He blessed the midwives at the end of the previous chapter. And then His name has been missing from ch. 2. Where is God when Pharaoh says "Kill all the sons"? Well, here He is. He's listening to His people's prayers, even if those prayers aren't even addressed specifically to Him.

A. God Heard

The first thing God did was to hear. He heard their groaning, their screaming, and their cries for help. What would you give to know that God heard you? You don't have to give anything to know that. You know how sometimes you send an electronic message and wait for the little "read" sign to pop up underneath it? You desperately want to know that the person on the other end received your message. Well, there is no need for that "read" sign on your prayers and mine because all of them are read! God reads them all. He pays attention to them as soon as they come in. You are heard, because you serve a listening God. He asks us to listen to His voice, of course. But that is because He listens first. He hears first. He pays attention first.

Do you believe that God is listening? If you do, you will pray. You talk to the people who are listening. You stop talking to those who aren't listening.

B. God Remembered

But the next notice is even more compelling. God not only heard the groaning. God remembered. What specifically did He remember? His covenant. God had made promises to Abraham, that He would be his God and that He would give him a numerous seed. These promises took the form of a bilateral relationship called a "covenant." A covenant is a bond in blood, sovereignly

administered. God had bound Himself and Abraham together in a covenant. Part of the covenant was a promise not only to Abraham, but to his seed, culminating in the promise that in Abraham's seed all the families of the earth would be blessed. Well, Abraham had a son, Isaac, with whom God renewed the covenant. God then renewed the covenant with Isaac's son Jacob. God thus can be said to have made a covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And when Jacob's descendants in Egypt cried out, God remembered His covenant with them. He remembered that He had promised Abraham a seed and a blessing.

Does this mean that God ever forgot His promise? Of course not. But from the perspective of Israel in Egypt, God had forgotten it. At least, their sojourn there didn't *feel* like blessing. But God had remembered His promises nonetheless.

C. God Saw

He saw His people. They were in front of His face, right at the top of His mind. They were always His priority, of course. But His attitude about them was different than their attitude. They wanted to be rescued yesterday. But God was able to look on their sufferings and let them keep suffering! Do not assume that He has missed your plight just because it lingers. The fact that the suffering is continuing is not proof that God is absent. He heard, remembered, even saw exactly what was going on.

D. God Knew

And He knew. The puzzling ending, where God is simply said to "know" without saying *what* He knew, has bothered a lot of people over the years. But the reason no object is specified is that God knew everything. He knew all about it. There was no part of it that He didn't know.

Do you trust in God for this? If you thought He knew, how would that change things for you? It's easy to say "God doesn't know what I'm going through." But such a statement is totally false. He knows! Whatever you're going through, God knows. Wherever the church is at, God knows where we're at.

If you are convinced that God knows, you will no longer be angry at Him for His indifference. You may know that He knows and that might make you mad. "He knows how much I'm hurting, and yet He still won't take action? What is wrong with this deity?" Brothers and sisters, that is the wrong approach. What's wrong with the deity is that He has different plans, goals, and desires than you do — and He knows a lot more about how to get there than you do. It would seem fairly obvious that God's goals will not be exactly like yours. But He does know what you're going through, and He is concerned about it as part of His larger plan. Your comfort is not His be-all end-all. Nor should it be yours. But when you're suffering, He knows. He hears. He remembers. He will never fail to keep His promises. He never promised Abraham "your seed will never suffer." But He did promise to bless Abraham's seed. And they shall be blessed, Pharaoh or no Pharaoh.

God's idea of blessing may not overlap with yours. But it will never be frustrated or fail. Trust Him. He knows. Amen.