

## Exodus 2:1-24

### ‘How much more will God?’

#### Introduction

It was 11 September 2001.

The man was Pakistani in origin and Muslim in faith.

He worked in the twin towers and managed to get out of them before they fell.

And then, in the panic of fleeing, he fell.

He found himself lying on his back looking toward a massive cloud of dust and debris that was rapidly approaching.

Around his neck he wore a pendant similar to a cross, inscribed with an Arabic prayer for safety.

A man approached him.

He had all the distinctive marks of an Hasidic Jew.

He grasped the pendant, read out the Arabic, and then stretched out his hand and said in a deep Brooklyn accent,

‘Brother, if you don’t mind, there is a cloud of glass coming at us, grab my hand, let’s get the hell out of here.’

He helped the Arab man get up.

And together they ran without looking back.

Now I don’t know whether this story is apocryphal or not.

But I am not surprised at it.

For although humans are capable of the most horrific and barbaric acts, they are also capable of the most extraordinary acts of human kindness.

And in today’s story we see both at work.

We see extraordinary barbarity. \_\_\_\_\_

And we see great kindness and human compassion.

Let's take a look and see what God can teach us about himself as we see these people in action in God's world.

Please turn with me to Exodus 2 in your Bibles.

## **Exodus 2:1-24**

### ***Remembering where we were***

Before we get underway in taking a closer look at this passage, it's helpful to remember where we were.

Yesterday we saw that the book of Exodus occurs in the context of God's great promises to Abraham and his descendants.

God has granted the promise of children.

Israel is now a great nation just as God promised.

But they are not in the land that God promised.

And a new King of Egypt is on the scene.

And his reign is characterized by harsh and oppressive rule.

He is rigorously pursuing a policy of genocide against the Israelites.

Yesterday we saw that the plan of the king was thwarted by a couple of midwives – Shiphrah and Puah.

So in Exodus 1:22 he embarks on another plan—he enlists the aid of 'all the people' in his plan to wipe out the Israelites.

He gives an order to 'all his people': 'Every boy that is born must be thrown into the Nile, but let every girl live.'

And so the scene is set.

The River Nile, which was meant to be a source of life, is to become a place of death.

All male children are to be drowned in it.

So, let's see what happens.

## Incidents in Egypt

### *The birth of Moses (2:1-10)*

Verse 1 tells us that God's people continue to thrive.

And the focus falls on one particular couple—a Levite couple.

They marry.

And like the rest of Israel, they multiply.

At first a girl is born.

She is mentioned in verse 4.

And because she is a girl, she is exempt from Pharaoh's edict.

But then the woman becomes pregnant again.

She gives birth.

And just as Exodus 1 echoed the language of Genesis 1, so verse 2 echoes the language of Genesis 1.

Genesis 1 told us that God's creation was 'good' for God's purposes.

The NIV translation tells us that the baby boy is a fine child.

But the Hebrew tells us that this is a 'good' child.

It is just a small link, but perhaps it is enough to raise some questions for us.

Perhaps this might be the beginning of a new era in God's creative purposes.

Anyway, the parents decide to try and protect this child.

Verse 3 tells us that at first they hide him for three months.

And then they decide to use Pharaoh's agent of death as an agent of life.

They decide to use the river to save their son.

They decide to do a Noah.

In Genesis, water enveloped the earth and killed every living thing.

But God saved Noah by placing him and his family in an ark.

And so this woman makes a basket and sets it on the river among the reeds.  
Now the word for basket that is used here is only used on one other place in the Bible.  
It is used to refer to the Ark that Noah made.  
Yet again we have strong echoes to Genesis.  
And again we wonder if perhaps God is doing something like he did then.  
And while we are wondering, the daughter of Pharaoh appears in verse 5.  
In verse 5 she sees.  
And then she sends.  
In verse 6 she opens.  
And then she sees again.  
She notes his crying.  
And she takes pity, she has compassion.  
Her father meant the river to be an agent of death.  
But she acts against his will makes it an agent of life.  
However, Princesses don't look after babies.  
And so this princess looks for a nursemaid.  
And the child's sister rushes from nearby and volunteers an ideal candidate – the child's mother.  
And so it was that these early days of this child are spent with his mother.  
But now this child has two mothers.  
One, his natural mother.  
And the other, Pharaoh's daughter.  
Verse 10 tells us that eventually he leaves home to go and live with his new mother.  
He is adopted and this Princess gives him the Egyptian name we know him by.  
He is named 'Moses'.

And his name has a double edge.

This Egyptian name is linked to the Egyptian verb that means 'to be born' or the Egyptian noun that means 'a child' or 'a son'.

But it also sounds like a rare Hebrew word meaning 'to draw out from'.

His name therefore not only tells us where he comes from.

It also hints at God's future plans for him – to use him in a great act of rescue.

### ***Death in the sand (2:11-12)***

But let's move on to the second incident in verses 11-12.

Many years have passed and Moses has grown up.

And in those years, the fierce and cruel oppression of Pharaoh has gone unabated.

Moses obviously knows something about where he came from.

And he ventures out to where his people lived and slaved.

He watches them at their hard labour.

And something clicks in him.

He sees an Egyptian harshly treating his countryman.

And so he harshly treats the Egyptian by killing him.

And having killed him, he then tries to hide the fact by burying him in the sands of Egypt.

### ***Attempted rescue (2:13-15)***

Our third section is in verses 13 to 15.

The acts of Moses cannot be hidden.

Verse 13 tells us that when he ventures out to his people again the next day he attempts to intervene in a dispute.

But he is an outsider.

They want nothing to do with him.

Look at verse 14.

The man said:

*<sup>14</sup>The man said, 'Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian?'*

And so Moses realises that his deeds have become known to the Israelites.

And in verse 15 we hear that it has also become known to Pharaoh.

And so the effect of his act is to cause him to become isolated from both his Egyptian and Israelite roots.

He is a man without a home.

And so in verse 15 he flees to neutral territory – to the land of Midian.

### ***In the land of Midian (2:16-22)***

The fourth incident is in verses 16 to 22.

In verse 16 we find Moses alone by a well.

The context is very different.

The last three incidents had been full of violence and brutality.

Of Egyptians killing and Hebrews driven to responding brutality.

But Midian is not Egypt.

This is a pastoral society.

And here there is freedom from the dangers, threats, and abuse of the Egyptian kingdom.

And here Moses finds a home.

For women come to the well as they did all over the ancient world.

These are a particular group of women – the daughters of a priest of Midian.

But immediately the idyllic scene is shattered.

The violence of the previous episodes threatens to erupt here as well.

Some shepherds arrive.

The women are defenceless and are driven away by the shepherds.

Again Moses intervenes.

He rescues the women and they water the flocks of their father.

Then the scene changes.

The women return to Ruel, who is probably actually their grandfather and the head of the household.

They recount what happened.

And Moses finds a home.

He finds a wife.

And he settles into a stable existence as a shepherd.

But it is clear that the story is not ended.

For Moses is not yet where his life will end.

He is not yet the 'good' that seemed on promise in verse 2.

In verse 22 Moses names his first child.

He is named Gershom.

It is a name that echoes that Moses is still an alien in a foreign land.

There are still issues to be resolved.

And this is reinforced by the final verses of the chapter.

For although the king of Egypt dies, the fortunes of the people of Israel do not change.

The objects of God's promise are still under harsh oppression.

And they groan in their slavery and cry out to God.

## **Pulling it all together**

Okay, there is the story.

Let's now see if we can pull it together and make some sense of it.

### ***Introducing the main players***

When we ask why this passage is here, it is obvious that it functions as somewhat of an introduction to the main players in the drama that will follow.

We are introduced to Moses.

We are given his history and credentials.

We are told about his heart for his people and his heart for people under oppression.

We are told of how he comes to be alienated from his natural and adopted peoples.

And we are told of his family and new home.

We are further introduced to the Pharaoh and his successor.

We are told that the policies of Egypt continue.

However, one of the striking things about this story is that we are not formally introduced to God except in the last couple of sentences.

We know he is there.

We know he is acting behind the scenes.

We know the story of Exodus is fundamentally a story about him and his battle with Pharaoh.

But he is not mentioned by name.

Nevertheless, as we shall see, he is strikingly present.

Let me explain.

### ***Introducing the main ideas***

You see, I think the main purpose of this passage is to introduce the main ideas that will be taken up time and time again in the ensuing story.

Think about it for a moment.

First of all, did you notice that all the stories that we have looked at are about disadvantaged people.

They are all about people in situations of distress being rescued.

First there is the child in the basket of reeds.

Then there is the oppressed Hebrew slave.

Then there are the Hebrews fighting amongst themselves.

Then there are the daughters of the priest of Midian.

And finally, there is Moses again, on his own and in need of a place to which he can belong.

The next thing to notice is that in each of these situations there is a rescue or an attempt at a rescue.

Moses is rescued by Pharaoh's daughter.

The Hebrew slave is rescued by Moses.

Moses attempts a rescue of the two Hebrews fighting but is rejected.

The daughters of the priest of Midian are rescued by Moses.

And the priest of Midian rescues Moses and gives him a home.

Can you see what is going on here?

Each of these stories is about the very same thing that the whole of the book is about.

Each of these stories is about people in need of rescuing being rescued.

Or it is about people attempting to rescue them.

Each of these stories are precursors to the story of the Exodus.

And this is not just so in the broad outline.

It's there in the details as well.

Did you notice it as we went through?

For example, did you notice that Moses came to the attention of the princess because he was crying out?

We are told at the end of chapter 2 that the Israelites were crying out and came to the attention of God.

Did you notice that Moses is saved through water?

Did you notice the reference to the reeds?

Later we will hear that God rescues his people through water at the sea of reeds.

Did you notice that the Egyptian princess pays the mother of Moses to look after her own son?

Later we will hear how the Egyptians give great gifts to the Israelites when they finally leave the land of Egypt.

And did you notice in the second incident that it is Moses that rescues the Hebrew slave but that the rescue involves the death of the Egyptian?

Later we will hear how many Egyptians die in the rescuing of the Israelites.

Did you notice in the incident involving the two Hebrews fighting that the rescuer is not always welcomed with open arms?

Later we will hear how Moses is shunned by his people.

We will also hear how God's people shun him and want to return to Egypt.

Did you notice that Moses finds a home in the wilderness of Midian where he finds some welcome and security?

So the Israelites will find some security in the wilderness.

However, the Israelites, like Moses, have a long term destiny and that destiny is caught up with no longer being aliens.

It is caught up with being people settled in the land God promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Can you see what is happening in this story?

And lastly, did you notice the piling up of words recording how Pharaoh's daughter responded to the child?

She sees.

She sends.

She opens.

She notes the crying of the child.

And she takes pity.

Can you see what is going on here?

Step by step the writer is preparing us.

Step by step he is driving toward the highlight of the story at the end of the chapter.

Step by step he is telling us stories about people being rescued.

He is telling us stories about people being in similar situations to the people of Israel.

And then he hits us with verses 23 and 24 in Exodus 2 – The Israelites GROANED in THEIR SLAVERY and CRIED OUT.

And we know what will happen.

For if humans can rescue humans caught in strife, then how much more so will the God of all compassion and mercy?

If an Egyptian princess can hear cries and be merciful against the will of her father, how much more so will the God of all compassion and mercy?

If she can see and hear and take pity and send rescuers, how much more so will God the redeemer?

If Moses can see his people's trouble and the trouble of a group of daughters of a priest of Midian, then how much more so will the God whose nature is to have mercy.

If a priest of Midian can take on board a lonely fugitive and give him a home, then how much more so will the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God who is slow to anger and abounding in love and faithfulness.

If humans can do it, how much more so will God.

And so it is that we hear the final words of this chapter.

For God HEARD their groaning.

He REMEMBERED his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.

He LOOKED on the Israelites.

The Hebrew puts the last phrase briefly and full of pathos.

It simply says, 'AND GOD KNEW'.

## **The nature of our God**

Friends, this is our God.

Nothing escapes his notice.

He is always looking.

Always hearing.

Always concerned.

Always watching for his creation in strife.

Always listening for his people who cry out to him.

Always knowing them.

And it is this that undergirds the whole story of the Bible.

It is confirmed in the most central part of God's purpose.

For the gospel of Jesus Christ tells us the story of our strife.

This gospel of Jesus Christ tells us the story of our strife.

It tells us that we are caught in an oppression that is far stronger and far worse than the oppression that we see in these verses.

The gospel tells us that we are caught in an oppression of our own making.

We are people who have rebelled against God.

Who have acted in wilful independence.

And who have therefore become slaves of sin, slaves of death, and slaves of the devil.

We have become alienated from God and from all that is good.

But when the gospel tells us about Jesus it tells us that God sees our need, he hears our cry, and he remembers his covenant with creation.

He knows.

And in extraordinary and surprising grace, he acts.

He sends Jesus into the world to rescue us.

This is our God.

And if this, our God, did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all.

Friends, I wonder if you have forgotten this God?

In the midst of your disappointment...

In the midst of your hardship...

In the midst of the difficulties of life and ministry...

I wonder if you might have forgotten the surprising and overwhelming mercy and kindness of God.

Friends, our God is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In Christ he has forged a deep covenant etched deeply with his blood.

He has demonstrated that he is a God who hears.

He remembers his covenant.

He sees.

And he knows.

If he has given us Jesus then how much more will he not also, with him, graciously give us all things.

Who shall separate us from the love of this God?

Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword.

No!

In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

God's love in Jesus Christ convinces us.

Nothing will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

For he is the Yahweh, Yahweh, the gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and overflowing in steadfast love and faithfulness.

Cry out to him.

Pour everything out to him.

Call to him.

He is Yahweh who hears.

He is Yahweh who remembers the death of his son and the covenant he has with his people.

He is Yahweh who sees.

He is Yahweh who knows.

He is Yahweh who has shown his love in Jesus.

And if God is for us, who can be against us.

For he who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us, will also, along with him, give us all things.

There is nothing that shall separate us from the loving concern of this God.