

# EXODUS

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## **Exodus Sermon #2 - God Laughs**

**Exodus 1:15-2:10**

**September 16, 2018**

We are going back to Exodus today.

When life gets hard, we will either turn toward God and draw strength and peace from God, or we will turn from God in bitterness and anger.

And it certainly seems common in our day for people to have what looked like a vibrant walk with Jesus to encounter hardship, and then turn from him in anger that He let things get that bad, or in disbelief: how could God be good and in control when life seems to go so badly.

Fifteen years or so ago, I got a chance to meet my favorite singer/songwriter. He was a Christian musician and wrote songs with incredible lyrical depth, he did an album that to this day is my favorite, his lyrics shaped my faith. And I got to hang out with him in his green room and then go have a garbage plate with him. And for me it was like getting to hang out with Bono.

But his life took a sad turn. (I don't think it started with the garbage plate). But as his life progressed, he fell into some serious sin, he cheated on his wife, he didn't repent well, she divorced him, his church confronted him and he took that as Christians forsaking him. And he quickly moved to a place where he has renounced Christ and started a podcast for people who have renounced Christ to call in and tell their deconversion stories.

So his disobeyed God, things went very badly for him as a result, he suffered because of his own sin - and finally essentially said God must not exist. And so many of the callers tell similar stories - stories of a flimsy faith that doesn't withstand any suffering at all.

And it is sad that it doesn't seem to take much to topple many peoples' faith. We say "Life is hard, and therefore, God isn't good." And I think some

of this is this the fruit of us breathing in prosperity preaching for a generation, teaching that says if you have God life will be prosperous. When that doesn't pan out, it can look like God failed or the story was a lie, and it is common for people to tap out.

But we have an important antidote for that.

God has revealed Himself to us. And none of us could ever know God fully - we can only see the tip of an infinitely deep iceberg. But because of His revelation in His word, the Bible, we can know Him truly.

God doesn't reveal his ways to us so we can be smart and win debates and have a lot of theology in our heads alone. It's so we might know Him, and trust Him, and be formed by Him, and follow Him, and make sense of a world that doesn't make sense, and have hope in the darkness, and to know His ways enough to stay in the fight, especially when it's dark.

And so far in Exodus, we've seen mostly darkness in the story of God's people.

The Jews have been multiplying exceedingly, burgeoning, and swarming the land. And Pharaoh is afraid.

So in Exodus 1:9, Pharaoh calls his cabinet into a dark and smoke-filled room:

**Exodus 1:9-10 "And he said to his people, "Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us. 10 Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and, if war breaks out, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land."**

So Pharaoh, afraid of these people, turns the machine of his government against them. He puts together a scheme to stop these people from multiplying. Because he is afraid that if they get invaded, all of these Hebrew men will join their enemies.

As a result, there there are generations of brutal slavery for the Jews in Egypt, even though they went there in response to God's leadership. The slavery was brutal - it was designed not only to get cities built for Pharaoh but to be so harsh and cruel that it stopped the Jewish population from growing.

Generations come and go without any hope, verse 14 says their lives are bitter, we haven't heard from God.

But in today's story light starts to break in. And you see God's goodness and sovereignty at work. You see that nobody can stop his plan. You see Romans 8:28 in action as God causes all things to work together for the good of his people. You see that no power of hell, no scheme of man, can stop God from blessing his people. And he turns those shrewd schemes that were intended for evil into part of His plan for the good of his people.

So where we pick up, the schemes of a few generations of Pharaohs have not worked. The more the Jews were afflicted the more they spread because God is blessing them.

So Pharaoh turns up the heat.

**Exodus 1:15-16 "Then the king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, 16 "When you serve as midwife to the Hebrew women and see them on the birthstool, if it is a son, you shall kill him, but if it is a daughter, she shall live."**

So Pharaoh enacts a new secret policy. He orders the midwives to kill the baby boys as soon as they are born. Remember, he is worried about the Jews joining his enemies in war. The boys could grow into soldiers, the girls couldn't, so he orders the midwives to kill the baby boys - because the girls are no threat to Pharaoh.

And it seems like Pharaoh hopes this happens secretly. That the midwives would make it appear that the boy died in childbirth. It would be a secret policy, carried out in secret, maybe the Jews themselves wouldn't understand what was happening. *Nobody will know.*

And over time, there would be lots of Hebrew women, but no men, and no soldiers.

And of course, these midwives will do whatever Pharaoh asks. Pharaoh is thought to be more than a king, but a god-like creature in Egypt.

And the midwives are lowest of the low. They are Hebrews, which for generations now have been the slave class in Egypt with no rights to speak of. They are women, so they are considered to be less important than the men in their culture. And they are midwives. In their day, midwives became midwives because they couldn't have children of their own. They weren't able to become mothers, so they participated in motherhood by helping others become mothers.

But their state of barrenness would have commonly been thought of as a curse from God. So they were as low as you could go in their society.

And not only that, they are now 140+ years into horrible oppression - they are part of an exhausted and broken and beaten down people who don't need one ounce more trouble in their lives, they certainly don't want the kind of trouble that could come from ticking off Pharaoh.

So you have godlike Pharaoh commanding two cursed wretches to carry out his plan to kill the Jewish baby boys and stop this insane growth of their population. So of course this plan will work.

**17 But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live.**

The midwives feared God.

They cared more about God's judgment than Pharaoh's. They believed in God.

This is remarkable. Because if anyone had grounds for being bitter against God, it was the midwives. Think of their story: their people followed God's leadership and moved to Egypt. God told Jacob, their forefather, "Go to Egypt and I'll go with you."

And now they are 144 years into horrible oppression, where the whole machine of Egyptian government has been perfectly tuned to make their lives miserable.

And the one bright spot is that God keeps blessing these Israelites with kids. But the midwives don't get any of that blessing. So what has God done for them lately? If anyone could be justified in saying, "There is no evidence that God even exists" it is the midwives. But the midwives feared God.

That's a resilient faith.

The midwives have endured suffering they didn't cause, they have it worse than others, and they feared God.

Like Jesus, they're suffering as innocent people, but still fearing God, still holding to a faith that cares more what God thinks of them than what Pharaoh thinks.

I'm praying for faith like that in our church. A faith that can withstand the hard realities of life and a culture that has decided that the church is not good and that the Christian faith is not true or helpful. A faith that withstand the mockery and scorn of our neighbors that comes if we uphold a biblical view of sexuality, or the family, or love for the outcasts. A faith that will still fear God when it's hard to see how He could possibly be good and in control.

And I'm sure this was hard for them- he's Pharaoh, and they are nothing. You don't disobey Pharaoh, especially if you're a lowly Hebrew midwife. But their lowness, their suffering, their being on the receiving end of generations of injustice provided no excuse for them to give up the fear of the Lord.

When life gets hard, we will either turn toward God and draw strength and peace from God, or we will turn from God in bitterness and anger.

When you suffer, you will either say God isn't good or God doesn't exist or allow bitterness against God to fester, or, you'll say, "God's all I've got and He's enough."

You'll either be bitter against God because life is hard, or totally dependent on God because life is hard.

And these midwives, despite their sorrows, feared God. So here's what happens:

**Exodus 1:18-19 "So the king of Egypt called the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this, and let the male children live?"  
19 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."**

These Hebrew women, they're big do-it-yourselfers. They give birth before we get there - totally on their own! And they're vigorous - so it happens in a snap. They're like Gremlins popping all over the place. We get there, and the kids are already learning to ride bikes. It's crazy, Pharaoh.

So the midwives lie to save lives.

Now obviously, lying is usually bad. It's in the ten commandments. But there are a few places like this one where people are commended by God for lying. And there is a lot written about when something like this is OK. And so often we'll justify what we call little white lies with stories like this one: sometimes it's OK to lie. But situations like this one are very rare.

When is it OK? Take a more stark example: God says do not commit murder. But in certain situations, some wars for example, killing is justified. We read in Romans 13 that the government bears a God-given sword. So in times of war, if you're on the right side in a right cause as a soldier, you can kill.

So if you can kill with a God-given sword in a just war, certainly you could lie to the enemy in that war. And Pharaoh here has declared war against God's people, and these midwives, as something like faithful soldiers, lie in battle. Which wasn't sin.

And it took tremendous bravery, and God approved:

**Exodus 1: 20 "So God dealt well with the midwives. And the people multiplied and grew very strong. 21 And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families.**

So God blessed them for their courage, and even miraculously gave them families of their own, which they never thought they would have.

So Pharaoh decided to reduce the Jewish population through Jewish midwives. And God decided to increase the population through these midwives.

Pharaoh's plans aren't working.

So now he is done with secret policies. He's done with shrewd scheming. He's done with trying to work through a few secret agents in the midwives. He gives an outright command to all of his people:

**Exodus 1:22 "Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, "Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the Nile, but you shall let every daughter live."**

So the girls are not a threat - put the boys in the Nile River.

And this is the rule for everybody - Pharaoh said this to all his people. Your job as an Egyptian citizen is if you see a Hebrew baby boy, you throw him in the river.

And you don't oppose Pharaoh.

You don't mess with the greatest power in the land. He has an army with chariots and spears, and if you refuse to obey his order, you fall under his wrath, and it's the end for you and probably for your family. This is the strongest power in the land, and if it's against you, you're dead.

Why the Nile?

The Nile was also seen as a god in their day. It was a river that never runs dry, so it gives life to the whole region. At the same time, it is riddled with piranhas and crocodiles so it was a deadly place. It was the giver and taker of life.<sup>1</sup>

So you throw a baby in the Nile, and if the baby dies, the Nile decided that. It's a sick way of absolving your conscience for the murder you just committed. The Nile kills the babies, not me.

And now you can imagine the fear among the Jews. If they have babies, they have to keep them quiet, because all of their neighbors are commanded to kill them or face the wrath of Pharaoh. This is like the movie "The Hiding Place", where if a baby makes a sound it means death. So this is real terror.

And we're supposed to feel the personal nature of this edict. Pharaoh doesn't just say "If it's a boy, toss him in the Nile." He says, "If it's a *son*, cast him in the Nile." These are somebody's infant sons. He's putting the sons to death.

And chapter 2 zooms in on one such son:

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<sup>1</sup> Stuart 84

**Now a man from the house of Levi went and took as his wife a Levite woman. 2 The woman conceived and bore a son, and when she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him three months.**

She hides this baby for three months, which is a monumental achievement. She's a slave woman, owned by somebody else. She doesn't have privacy and a place to hide him. Hiding a baby for three months is a long time.

And the new testament commends Moses's parents for this:

**Hebrews 11:23 "By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they were not afraid of the king's edict."**

But she knows she can't do that forever - he's growing, soon he'll be crawling and walking and everybody will soon see that she let a boy live.

**3 When she could hide him no longer, she took for him a basket made of bulrushes and daubed it with bitumen and pitch. She put the child in it and placed it among the reeds by the river bank.**

So she gets a basket, and seals it with pitch. The only other place this word for basket is used is in Genesis 6 through 8, where it is translated "ark."<sup>2</sup> Noah built an ark, sealed it with pitch, and by entering it, he was saved from the flood and became the deliverer of humanity.

And here is Moses' mom, Jochebed, building a little ark, sealing it with pitch, and putting her fine child inside. Maybe praying that he would also be a deliverer. Who knows.

And she carefully hides him among the reeds.

**4 And his sister stood at a distance to know what would be done to him.**

This poor girl is sitting by watching her brother bobbing in this basket. She's waiting for a crocodile or, worse, an Egyptian to hear his cry. And then he'll certainly be destroyed.

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<sup>2</sup> Stuart 88

**5 Now the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her young women walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her servant woman, and she took it.**

So Moses' sister, we learn later that her name is Miriam, has to be freaking out. The daughter of Pharaoh just saw the basket. And Pharaoh is the genocidal maniac who wants her brother dead. This is certain death for Moses. She's going to run to her dad, say she found a Hebrew baby boy in the Nile, and that will be the end for him.

**6 When she opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the baby was crying. She took pity on him and said, "This is one of the Hebrews' children." 7 Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and call you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?" 8 And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Go." So the girl went and called the child's mother. 9 And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child away and nurse him for me, and I will give you your wages."**

So Miriam goes down to the river to watch her baby brother die. He's certain to die when the daughter of Pharaoh finds him. But instead, she has pity.

Miriam hears her talking to the baby affectionately, and walks up and, with incredible poise and courage, asks, "Should I get a Hebrew woman to nurse him?"

Pharaoh's daughter says "YES! Do that!"

So Miriam goes home to her weeping mother, her mother hears the door open and is probably wondering whether she'll hear about a crocodile or some tragic death for her son. And Miriam says, "Pharaoh's daughter found him."

"Oh no."

"Oh yes. And she wants to pay someone to nurse him. So I got you this job application..."

And now, for probably 3 or 4 years, Moses' mother not only doesn't have to kill him, but she is nursing him, and she is on Pharaoh's payroll for doing so.

**9 So the woman took the child and nursed him. 10 When the child grew older, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. She named him Moses, "Because," she said, "I drew him out of the water."**

So Moses is delivered from death, and now his mom doesn't have to fear, because Pharaoh is protecting Moses.

If someone asks her why she is caring for a Hebrew boy, she can say, "Because Pharaoh said, and you don't mess with the greatest power in the land. He has an army with chariots and spears, and if you refuse to obey his order, you fall under his wrath, and it's the end for you and probably for your family. This is the strongest power in the land, and if it's against you, you're dead."

Now that great power is protecting the one who would be the rescuer of the Jews.

And the section ends with him being raised as a young prince of Egypt.

Because nobody can stop God from fulfilling His plan.

God had said He was going to bless His people and make them great, so that God's name would be made great among all nations.

But Pharaoh was afraid. So he schemed and plotted and took his stand against God and his plan. And God was not outwitted, overpowered, outplanned. Pharaoh was nothing. And there's so much irony in this section that you have to wonder if God laughed.

Because according to Psalms, this is just the kind of thing He laughs at:

**Psalm 2:1 "Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? 2 The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying, 3 "Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us." 4 He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. 5 Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, 6 "As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill."**

Look at how God turns all of their schemes against them and used them to bless his people.

Remember Pharaoh's plan:

**Exodus 1:9-10 "And he said to his people, "Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us. 10 Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and, if war breaks out, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land."**

Deal shrewdly, reduce their population and reduce their power. They're too many and too mighty, let's fix that.

So he decides to manipulate the weakest jews, the barren midwives, to get them to fulfill his purposes of reducing the population. They end up being shrewder than him, and not only do they not kill a single baby, God laughs and gives the barren midwives families.

The midwives are supposed to reduce the population, and now they're pregnant.

And Pharaoh in his wisdom knows that girls aren't a threat, so he says just kill the boys.

And these girls who fear the Lord thwart his whole plot. So we have the heroic midwives, Moses's mom, Moses's sister, Pharaoh's daughter. Those women that weren't even on Pharaoh's radar thwart his whole plan. And God tells us the names of the midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, and never tells us Pharaoh's name. They're more significant than he is.

Godly women who fear the Lord are a fierce force for his kingdom, they rest in God's goodness and power, they find their identity and security in Him and live for Him.

And at the end of this story, Pharaoh's whole empire is toppled by these women that weren't a threat to him. Pharaoh's plan fails and God's plan succeeds. And God laughs.

Pharaoh enacts this plan because he doesn't want these people to become too mighty. And as a result, Moses gets a place in Pharaoh's household where he'll be protected, fed, and educated.

He is far more mighty than he would have been had Pharaoh not decided to make the Jews less mighty. And God laughs.

Pharaoh made a policy that could pass the blame to the Nile. And the Nile allowed this one baby to survive that destroyed Pharaoh's power. And God laughs.

Pharaoh also planned to use the waters of the Nile to drown God's people and God's promises. And because of Pharaoh's policy, Moses is put in the little ark, is found by Pharaoh's daughter, and this little baby Moses comes out.

And he grows and leads the people of God, who had only become bigger and stronger, out of Egypt. He comes to the Red Sea and it looks like the waters will kill them. But the water stands up in walls to let God's people through.

**And then, Exodus 14 "26 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen." 27 So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its normal course when the morning appeared. And as the Egyptians fled into it, the LORD threw the Egyptians into the midst of the sea. 28 The waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen; of all the host of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea, not one of them remained. 29 But the people of Israel walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. 30 Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore.**

Pharaoh orders the destruction of God's people in the water so they can't become soldiers. And as a result, all of Pharaoh's soldiers drown in the water.

**Psalm 135:5-6 "5 For I know that the LORD is great, and that our Lord is above all gods. 6 Whatever the LORD pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps."**

**Daniel 4:35 "all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, "What have you done?"**

God is sovereign. God keeps every promise.

And in the times of darkness, rather than running from Him and becoming bitter against Him and denying His existence, we can, like the midwives, fear Him. And trust Him.

Because God takes Satans schemes and turns them so they work for God's glory and the good of God's people.

And we need this, because as you see in this story, opposition to salvation only grows. God's enemy is always notching up the heat. So we need, as a pillow for our heads, a confidence that the schemes that seem to have outwitted us and the temptations that seem to have overpowered us are being laughed at by God who will turn them for our good and His ultimate glory.

So there are a lot of truths here:

God is working in the dark. Just because everything seems awful and you don't see how anything could be working out for good doesn't mean it isn't.

A big threat to faith is we tend to think that if God is in control and God is good, then why is there so much meaningless suffering in the world?

But when we think that, we presume to know a lot more than we can know. Keller writes, "Just because you can't see or imagine a good reason why God might allow something to happen doesn't mean there can't be one. Again we see lurking within supposedly hard-nosed skepticism an enormous faith in one's own cognitive faculties."<sup>3</sup>

You have to have an awful lot of faith in your ability to see how everything fits together, and in your air-tight knowledge that no good can come of your suffering, to believe that your suffering disproves God's existence.

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<sup>3</sup> Tim Keller, [The Reason for God](#). (New York: Riverhead, 2008). 23.

And though God's people suffer and often don't know why, it is guaranteed for us in scripture that God is working all things together for the good of His people and He has proven Himself in the lives of his people again and again.

God is sovereign. Not everything that happens to us is good, but nothing is outside of his governance. There is no rogue atom in the universe. And even those elements of life that are pure evil will be turned in the end for our good and His glory - and not only when we can see how or when.

Another truth in this passage is that God uses the weak and apparently useless. The midwives are the heroes and the Pharaoh is not even named. In God's upside down kingdom the least are the greatest. So don't worry that you're too weak or insignificant to be used by God.

And make sure you have the same view of the weak that God has - they are not insignificant. This makes Christians those who care for the most helpless, the hurting, the weak, the outsiders - because that's what our God does.

But we have to be careful not to stop with the moral lessons. They are there and important and true. But we don't want to miss the forest for the trees.

**John 5:39 "You search the Scriptures because You think that in them You have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me."**

In the story of the Exodus, Moses is the rescuer - and he is born into a world where an evil king wanted him dead because he posed a threat. So he was put to what would be certain death in the Nile.

But he came up from that certain death to become royalty and a deliverer.

And this is a pattern of what the true and better savior would be like.

Jesus was born into a world where evil king Herod wanted him dead because of the threat he posed. But his parents were warned in a dream, and they protected him. His mother, whose name in Hebrew is Miriam, took him to Egypt to hide him until he could come out.

Then Jesus went not to near death, but to death itself. And came out to save and to reign.

And He is the savior we need.

From greater darkness, oppression, and slavery.

And in conquering the grave, he proved that even what looks like the end, even what is horrible, even the greatest sin ever committed: the killing of the Son of God, can be turned by our all wise God for our good.

And the call is to trust Him.

Notes for Bulletin

Exodus 1:15-2:10 - God Laughs

- I. The Plan of Darkness
- II. The Laughter of God
- III. The Triumph of Light

Questions for Discussion in Small Groups:

1. Why is so much of the faith we see in people flimsy?
2. What would it take for faith to be made resilient?
3. How do you think it was possible for the jews to suffer for centuries but still have a faith that could stand up to Pharaoh? Why didn't suffering erode their faith?
4. How is God's sovereignty a comfort in difficult times?

Psalm 91:1-6 - Call to Worship

Exodus 1:9-10

Exodus 1:15-16

Exodus 1:17  
Exodus 1:18-19  
Exodus 1:20-21  
Exodus 1:22  
Exodus 2:1-2  
Hebrews 11:23  
Exodus 2:3  
Exodus 2:4  
Exodus 2:5  
Exodus 2:6-9  
Exodus 2:9-10  
Psalm 2:1-5  
Exodus 1:9-10  
Exodus 14:26-30  
Psalm 135:5-6  
Daniel 4:35  
John 5:39  
done