

Strengthening the Soul Your Faith

Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Exodus 1.1-2.10

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I. Introduction to this Study

This week we begin our summer series, Strengthening the Soul of Your Faith. Through it, we will engage the life of Moses, who learned a great deal *about* God, and accomplished great things *for* God. Many of us are seeking the same kind of life, to be filled with knowledge of God (called orthodoxy), and put our faith into action (orthopraxy).

But to believe the right things and live the right way, we must follow the example of Moses, who allowed God to meet him at the deepest part of his being, transforming him from within his soul.

Without allowing God to meet us at the deepest part of our being, in our very souls, we run the risk of believing the right things and living the right way in order to please God, but without allowing the Gospel to truly transform us from the inside out. This summer, let's strengthen the soul of our faith!

II. Connecting with One Another

How do you greet others? "Hello"? "Hi"? "How's it going?"?

III. Study the Text

- a. Read Exodus 1.1-7. Though it's missing from many of our modern translations, Exodus begins with the Hebrew word "and" or "so", in an effort to show continuity with Genesis.

John Goldingay writes, "Like fall season TV show flashbacks, the first paragraph in Exodus summarizes the end of Genesis, mostly in Genesis' own words." Why would it have been important for the author of Exodus to show a kind of continuity with an earlier book?

- b. While Genesis 50 flows smoothly into Exodus 1, a more specific connection is found in Genesis 46 (note especially verse 4). The list of names in chapter 1 led Jewish rabbis to refer to Exodus as "The Book of Names" - those who brought their families to Egypt escape famine in Canaan.

Recall God's promise to Abraham to "make [him] into a great nation" in Genesis 12.1-3. How does the author of Exodus remind us of that promise in 1.1-7? Why is this important?

- c. Read Exodus 1.8-14. Here we read the first attempt of Pharaoh to suppress the Israelites. Why does he feel the need to do so? For a moment, pretend you don't know the story: Will it work? Why or why not?

- d. Verse 11 states that the Hebrews were used to build "store cities" (see Genesis 41.34-36). These cities were initially designed to sustain life, but are now being used to demean it. Have you ever seen something like that occur, where a positive gift is used negatively?
- e. Verses 13-14 include the Hebrew word "serve" five times. The point is clear: The Israelites are serving Egypt. One of the key themes throughout the Book of Exodus, however, is who they *should* be serving. Terence E. Fretheim writes, "Only in service to God can service without bondage be found. With God, service is freedom." What do you make of that statement? Agree? Disagree?
- f. Read Exodus 1.15-21. Here we encounter the second attempt of Pharaoh to suppress the Israelites. While our bibles reference "boys" and "girls", the Hebrew is "sons" and "daughters." Notice that the writer of Exodus *does not* tell us the name of Pharaoh, but *does* tell us the name of two midwives. John Goldingay writes, "Telling us the midwives' names makes them real people; they are not just anonymous functionaries. They are people who revere God. Exodus knows them by name; we know them by name; God knows them by name. We will later discover the names of Moses' parents and his sister; they too are real people (see Exodus 6:20; 15:20). It is less important for the representatives of the Egyptian court to be so. Not naming them suggests that they are subordinate to the story. They will have plenty of prominence in Egyptian records, which make no mention of the Israelites. The Old Testament has a different scale of values; it is not Pharaoh and his daughter who count. Pharaoh is someone the newspapers think is important and powerful, yet he can be defeated by three or four women."

While it could be seen as a kind of "civil disobedience" that we discussed last week, the author of Exodus points to another reason for the midwives' actions. What is it? Why doesn't this second plan work? What happens instead!?

- g. Read Exodus 1.22. Pharaoh's third attempt at suppression directs all Egyptians to kill Hebrew boys (literally "sons"). This continued effort to eradicate God's people from Egypt prepares the reader for chapter 2, where we meet the deliverer! And yet, this deliverer does not immediately do any delivering. Warren Wiersbe notes, "The phrase *as weak as a baby* doesn't apply in the kingdom of God, for when the Lord wants to accomplish a mighty work, he often starts by sending a baby." What do you think of that statement? What other times has God worked in a similar way? Why does God work this way?
- h. Read Exodus 2.1-10. In the Hebrew, the word "fine child" is the same as God's "good" in the creation accounts, and Moses' "basket" is the same word as Noah's "ark." Further, Moses' Levitical heritage foreshadows his role as a priest for the Israelites. Notice, also, that Moses' mother obeyed the letter of the law, by putting her son into the Nile! Drawing upon the similar wording of the flood story, Terence E. Fretheim writes, "The decree of Pharaoh, with water is the instrument of death, is painted in cosmic terms, which, if successful, would plunge the world into chaos once again." What stands out the most to you in these verses? Why?
- i. Scan Exodus 2.1-10 again. You may notice that God is not explicitly mentioned in these verses (the same is true in Exodus 1.1-16). Where do you see God at work here?

Fretheim notes of Pharaoh's daughter: "A non-Israelite contributes in significant ways to God's activity of life and blessing. In fact, her activity is directly parallel to that of God with Israel! She 'comes down,' 'sees' the child, 'hears' its cry, takes pity on him, draws him out of the water, and provides for his daily needs." What do you think: Does God use people who don't know him? Could God do such a thing!? Why or why not?

- j. In Matthew 2, we read that Christ's early childhood was similar to Moses', as Herod was seeking to kill Jesus. After an angel warned Joseph in a dream, the family sought protection in Egypt until Herod's death. Matthew quotes Hosea 11.1, "Out of Egypt I called my son." What other connections do you see between Moses and Jesus?
- k. Brevard S. Childs writes of Moses and of Christ, "God's plan for his people has a fragile beginning. In both the child serves as the not yet revealed instrument of God's intervention, and in both cases the thread on which everything hangs is exceedingly thin." What do you make of this quote? Do you think God's plans can have "fragile beginnings"!??

IV. Reflect and Respond

- a. What "flashbacks from an earlier season" would you include if you were catching someone up on your own spiritual journey?
- b. In what ways have others, the world around us, or the Enemy sought to suppress the strength of your soul? How instead have you sensed God's continued creation bursting forth?
- c. How have the Scriptures' "different set of values" reshaped your own values?
- d. We've read, "Only in service to God can service without bondage be found. With God, service is freedom." How have you seen this to be true in your life? If you're connecting with God and growing in faith, how is God calling you to serve in love?
- e. Pharaoh's daughter is used powerfully in Moses' life. Who has God used powerfully in your life?
- f. Have you experienced a fragile beginning in your own spiritual life?
- g. John Wesley instructed his followers to start their small group meetings with the simple question, "How is it with your soul?"
So, how is it with *your* soul?

V. Pray

- a. Lift up the final stages of our dismissal process from the PC(USA), that discussions and meetings would be seasoned with grace and peace,
- b. Pray for safe travels and a transformative time for the 14 Good Shepherd families heading up to Forest Home Family Camp this weekend,
- c. Ask God to use this summer series to strengthen our souls for our journey of faith.