

The God Who Is Near (Part 6 of 6)

Exodus in Review

Mark Vroegop

"During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel—and God knew." (Exodus 2:23–25, ESV)

"Then the LORD said, 'I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.'"" (Exodus 3:7–10, ESV)

My grandparents on my mother's side had a tradition whenever we would leave their house. We would say our "goodbyes" inside the house and load up in the car. After we backed down their driveway and as my dad put the car in drive, we would look toward the house and always standing in the window were my grandparents. As we pulled away they would be waving goodbye, and my parents would always say, "Wave goodbye to Grandpa and Grandma." That picture is burned in my memory. It is part of my history.

Going to my grandparents' house was always a blast, but not because their house was filled with the latest and greatest toys. It was a blast because it was filled with history. The model train, the old tools, the wood-working shop, a modified swing in the basement, a manual typewriter, and a counting machine with a crank lever were our toys. Part of the "fun" was experiencing a bit of history – my history – in their home.

That is how I feel today as we say "goodbye" to the book of Exodus. Since September of last year, we have walked through this great and historical book, and we have learned a lot about the history of God's plan for redemption. We have looked at the foundations of the gospel, and as we have watched God deal with Israel, we have been reminded and challenged about the way that He deals with us.

This is the fifth book that we have studied together in the last five years, and I am sad to see it go. It has been a rich journey – one that has helped us see the "big picture" story of what God is doing. The book of Exodus gives you a rich lens that helps you see the gospel more clearly and leads you in worship.

What's Next?

Before I walk us through Exodus one last time, many of you have asked me where we are headed next in our study of God's Word. I am so glad that you are asking that question; it tells me that you love learning and growing in the Scriptures. Let me tell you:

- Next week begins a three week focus on global missions, what we call REACH|13. For the next three Sundays we are going to talk about our passion to reach the nations with the gospel. As you have heard, our theme is "It's time for that." When we built this facility we answered the question about why we would spend so much money on a facility when there are millions of people who have never heard the gospel. We said, "*This* is for that." Pastor Nate will be preaching next week, I will preach the following week, and Dr. Joseph Stowell, President of Cornerstone University, will preach the final week.
- Then we are going to turn our attention to a very important core value at College Park called "Extravagant Grace." It is a very unusual core value, but it is one that is very compelling and is a part of the story of God here. So I'm going to take three weeks to remind us and challenge us as to what this biblical core value is and why we should embrace it.
- During Advent season we are moving the Christmas Musical to a Friday and Saturday-only event so that we can maximize it as evangelistic and attractional event. And we are going to use the Christmas Hymn "Come Thou Long Expected Jesus" as the outline for looking at some great Biblical themes in some incredible Biblical texts as we celebrate the advent of Jesus Christ.
- So what is the next book? In January, we are going to begin a study of the book of Romans. I am starting to map out that series, and right now I have no idea how long it will take us. My preaching hero, Martin Lloyd-Jones, took thirteen years to preach through Romans; I'd like to move a bit faster than that. But I'm looking forward to walking through what I think is the most important New Testament book in the Bible. It will be a great and glorious journey as we learn about some of the central truths connected to Christianity and how to live in them.

So that is where we are headed in the next three months. While we will not be in a book study per se every week, we will be walking expositionally through key texts related to the themes we are dialing into. And we will jump into another full-fledged book study the first of the year.

Exodus is about God

From the beginning of our study of Exodus, I've tried to help you see that this book is really about God. Israel, Egypt, Pharaoh, and Moses are all key players in the drama of this book, but the central figure, the ultimate message of the book is the unfolding revelation of God and His redemption.

You might think this unusual, but it is not. The storyline of God's deliverance of Israel is the storyline of the gospel. God's aim is to magnify Himself – to demonstrate His supremacy as God through the redemption of helpless people. The book of Ephesians says it this way:

"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the

coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” (Ephesians 2:4–7, ESV)

So the gospel and grace are all about God. And the Exodus and the Law and the Tabernacle are all about God. Let me show this you this in a brief overview of the six sections that served as the outline for our study.

The God Who Hears

The book of Exodus begins with the sad state of Israel suffering under the weight of their bondage in Egypt. Egypt has long forgotten the days of Joseph, and the people are wondering if God has forgotten about them as well. But Exodus 2:23-25 sets the tone for this book, promising that God had not forgotten His people:

“During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel—and God knew.” (Exodus 2:23–25, ESV)

God’s deliverance is going to come through a man named Moses who was spared from the male baby genocide, hidden in the Nile, adopted into Pharaoh’s family, fled Egypt due to his killing of an Egyptian master who was beating an Israelite, and encountered God at the burning bush. In this revelation of God, Moses is called to be the deliverer of Israel, and we learn about God’s plan which is connected to the very essence of who He is. Exodus 6 provides a great summary of God’s heart, His plan, and Moses’ role:

“But the LORD said to Moses, “Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh; for with a strong hand he will send them out, and with a strong hand he will drive them out of his land.” God spoke to Moses and said to him, “I am the LORD. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by my name the LORD I did not make myself known to them. I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they lived as sojourners. Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the people of Israel whom the Egyptians hold as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant. Say therefore to the people of Israel, ‘I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. I will give it to you for a possession. I am the LORD.’” (Exodus 6:1–8, ESV)

God is a God who hears.

The God Who Delivers

God is going to rescue His people, but He is going to make a statement about His supremacy over Pharaoh, Egypt, and the so-called gods of Egypt. Pharaoh has been brought to power for this purpose, his heart will be hardened by God and himself for this purpose, and the Ten Plagues will target the Egyptian gods for this purpose.

"And the LORD said to Moses, "See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet. You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall tell Pharaoh to let the people of Israel go out of his land. But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and though I multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, Pharaoh will not listen to you. Then I will lay my hand on Egypt and bring my hosts, my people the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great acts of judgment. The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring out the people of Israel from among them."" (Exodus 7:1–5, ESV)

The battle between God and Pharaoh climaxes with the killing of the firstborn and the Passover where the blood was sprinkled on the door posts. This traumatic deliverance through judgment and salvation by the covering of blood becomes Israel's most important celebration and a harbinger of the sacrifice of Jesus in the New Testament.

The God Who Provides

Deliverance from slavery was only part of the story for Israel and their relationship with God. Life outside of Egypt is not safe, and the people of God need to learn how to trust God. "I AM" is not only able to deliver them from Egypt, but He is also able to provide.

In the case of the Red Sea, we see God's ability to deliver His people even after their exodus from Egypt and despite their fear and complaining. The people when faced with challenges will quickly run to ridiculous and fleshly statements. For example: *"Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness?"* (Ex 14:11) And one of the most important statements made by Moses is found in Exodus 14:13.

"And Moses said to the people, "Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again." (Exodus 14:13, ESV)

After the Red Sea is parted and Pharaoh's army is destroyed, the people panic again about the provision of water and food. Once again, God provides by giving them "manna from heaven" (Exodus 16:4-5) which would appear every day except the Sabbath, and God provides water when the rock is struck by Moses in Exodus 17. In both cases God is showing the people that He is able to be trusted – that the God who delivers is a God who will provide.

God is able to be trusted for moments of powerful deliverance, but He is also able to be trusted every day for our "daily bread."

The God Who Commands

The people of God are led to the base of Mt. Sinai for a very important lesson. They have seen the deliverance and the provision, but they need to understand something about God: He is not like them. In Exodus 19, the people gain a new understanding of who God is.

"On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled. Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the LORD had descended on it in fire.

The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly. And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder. The LORD came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain. And the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. And the LORD said to Moses, "Go down and warn the people, lest they break through to the LORD to look and many of them perish." (Exodus 19:16–21, ESV)

It is not that God is angry, but the people needed to understand that God is not like them. He is their deliverer, and they are His people. And on the basis of His deliverance and His power, God gives the people the Ten Commandments.

"And God spoke all these words, saying, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. "You shall have no other gods before me." (Exodus 20:1–3, ESV)

All of God's commands are rooted in who He is. The Ten Commandments provide a summary of the law of God in Exodus 20, and it is expressed even further in the specific instructions regarding justice, compassion, and fairness in Exodus 21-23.

God is not like them. He likes them, but He is not like them. And His commands invite them to be like him.

The God Who is Holy

The God who hears is the God who delivers is the God who commands is the God who is holy. And His holiness is expressed through worship. The people of Israel were to be regularly reminded who they were and who God was by virtue of their corporate gathering. The center of that gathering is the Tabernacle, and chapters 25-33 detail the specifications for every aspect of this worship center.

The Tabernacle was designed to communicate both the transcendence and the immanence of God. Its purpose was to help the people understand the "otherness" of God, but also to be reminded that He lives in the midst of his people. The most important element of the Tabernacle was the Ark of the Covenant:

"And you shall put the mercy seat on the top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony that I shall give you. There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you about all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel." (Exodus 25:21–22, ESV)

The Ark is so holy that it cannot be touched, and it is kept in the Holy of Holies, a place entered only once a year by the High Priest. It contains the Law of God with a covering on which are symbols of God's presence. Once a year blood is sprinkled on this "covering." And it is here – between the cherubim – where God will meet with His people. Therefore, it seems obvious that the Ark was the central feature of the tabernacle because the central message of the entire Bible is atonement. The Ark was the center of gravity because atonement is the only means that an unholy people can be in the presence of a holy, transcendent God.

Despite God's holiness, the people of Israel rebelled. Moses' absence for forty days caused them to fall into the trap of idolatry and immorality. The contrast between the instructions given to Moses

about the Tabernacle and the people's disobedience was stunning. And yet, after God punished the people, He was willing to give them a second chance. Despite the colossal failure of the Golden Calf, God invites Moses to return to the mountain for another set of tablets.

The God Who is Near

God's purpose in rescuing Israel from Egypt was so that they could be His people and He could live among them. God's aim was to glorify Himself by the display of His glory in and through His people.

Part of that display involved the glow of Moses' face from being in the presence of God's glory. Moses reflected the glory of God. He was different because he was near the presence of God.

What happened to Moses is what also happened in the Tabernacle after it was constructed. After the people and Moses did exactly as the Lord commanded, God came down from the mountain and enveloped the Tabernacle. Everything in Exodus was leading to this moment:

"Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Throughout all their journeys, whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the people of Israel would set out. But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out till the day that it was taken up. For the cloud of the LORD was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel throughout all their journeys." (Exodus 40:34–38, ESV)

Now Israel has not yet arrived in the Promised Land. They have a long and difficult journey ahead of them. But the book of Exodus establishes Israel's relationship with God. They are rescued slaves; they are His people.

And God had revealed Himself to them. He rescued them, delivered them, provided for them, gave them His commands, demonstrated His holiness, and then came to near to them. Exodus is the amazing unfolding of God's glory through the redemption of Israel. It is a book that shows us God!

Key Lessons from Exodus

As we say "goodbye" to this book, I think it would be helpful to reflect on a few of the major themes or lessons which have been a part of our journey together. There are many more than I can share here, but let me highlight a few of the most important.

1. God is Supreme

You cannot read the book of Exodus without seeing a very clear picture of God's supremacy over everything and anything. The demand to let His people go, the back-and-forth with Pharaoh, the Ten Plagues, the parting of the Red Sea, and the scene on the top of the mountain are all designed to send an important message about God's supremacy over all things.

The book of Exodus has been a good reminder to us that the message of the Bible is ultimately about God's victory over everything and anything that challenges His authority including the devil, death, and sin.

2. Redemption is amazing to behold

One of my favorite parts of studying Exodus has been seeing the foundations of redemption emerge and then blossom in the New Testament. To see deliverance from slavery, the protection by the blood on the doorposts, and the sacrifice of a lamb in Exodus is to read about the grace of God through Jesus Christ through a beautiful lens.

As you read Exodus, you cannot help but fall in love with the plan of God that you can see in part in Exodus and fully in Christ. It is no wonder that the writer of Hebrews describes these things as "a copy and shadow of the heavenly things..." (Heb. 8:5). You love redemption more by reading Exodus because you see yourself in Israel, and you see the grace of God on display.

3. Worship and obedience matter

As we walked through the intricate detail regarding the Tabernacle, its place in the life of Israel, and the importance of Israel's obedience, it struck me how important worship and obedience are to a relationship with God. Belief is the starting point of that relationship, but God's people need to be reminded regularly about what is really central, what is really important, and then it needs to show up in how they live their lives. Over half of Exodus centers on these two themes.

4. God can be trusted

As we have walked through this book, it is very clear that God is worthy of our trust. But what I've found by studying Exodus is that God can be trusted for the big, crisis moments of life – like standing at the brink of the Red Sea. And He also can be trusted to provide bread every morning or make it not rot when the Sabbath day comes.

I have found my heart greatly challenged by the way in which Exodus has called us to take the long view when things get tough and remember that the same God who delivered us from our sin is the same God who can be trusted in big and scary crises. But it is also good to know that what Jesus was saying when He prayed, "... give us this day our daily bread. . ." He was helping us to see that the same God who brought manna to panicked people in the wilderness is the same God whom you and I can trust.

5. God keeps His promises

The entire book of Exodus begins with a statement about God's promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel—and God knew." (Exodus 2:23–25, ESV)

No doubt things were difficult and dark for Israel, but God had not forgotten about them. They were trapped and in what seemed like a hopeless situation. But God remembered His covenantal promise to Abraham.

And the fact that God keeps His promises is really important because it is what you put your faith in when you receive Christ as your Savior. It is really important when you read about future events in the New Testament, especially the book of Revelation. And it is really important when you are walking through a dark and painful valley.

We need to be reminded that while it is sometimes dark, painful, and dreary – God always keeps His promises.

He hears. He knows. He delivers. And then He comes!

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