

**Dave Sattler October 2, 2016 North Shore Alliance Church**

**Sermon Title: "From Despair to Faith and Back Again"**

**Series: "Out of Egypt" Text: Exodus 4:29 - 6:12**

**Sources:** NIV Life Application Bible; Exodus Commentaries: Enns, Gaebelien, & Motyer; Books: [How to Read Exodus](#) by Tremper Longman III, [Seriously Dangerous Religion](#) by Iain Provan, [Ministry in the Image of God](#) by Stephen Seamands; Online: [dawnbible.com/1993/9307cl-2.htm](http://dawnbible.com/1993/9307cl-2.htm), Wikipedia - "God's Mighty Hand", & [alpha.org](http://alpha.org) (Bear Grylls' Quote); Classics: J.R.R. Tolkien's Gimli.

### Introduction:

- **<Slide>** Good morning everyone, I'm Dave Sattler, one of the pastors here, today continuing our series "Out of Egypt" — the grand story of the exodus.
- Full of unlikely heroes and plot-twists; rife with irony, this narrative truly grabs you.
- While it reads fantastical at times, this is an account of real-life events. Not written like your typical history textbook, this author's more theologian than historian. Theological history, **Exodus is meant primarily to illustrate WHO God is and HOW God works.**
- It's about "covenant," relationship — God with His people, and His people with Him.
- To walk with God as Christ-followers, it's imperative we not just know in our heads, but experience, who God is — His divine character and revelation, and, how God works — in our lives and in our world. In this way we have much to learn from Exodus.

### Review:

- So, where're we at in the story?
- The Israelites, God's chosen, had now been in Egypt 400 years.
- Far from the comforts of home and culture, they hadn't 'heard' from God in a long while; perhaps they'd even given up listening for Him; and they lacked leadership. Still, they were a fruitful bunch — multiplying to, some historians say, 2 million, at the time of the exodus.
- **<Slide>** Pharaoh, King of Egypt, that era's most powerful person, at first orders the execution of all their male babies. But he couldn't stunt Hebrew growth. Now, Pharaoh choses, instead, to harness the resource and exploit the Israelites as slaves to build his empire.
- **Where is God in all of this?** What about all those promises He'd made to Abraham (cf. Genesis 12) — to "bless" His people, to give them land, to make them into a "great nation?"
- Has God forgotten?
- Then, in the midst of this despair, God raises up Moses. Born Hebrew, floated in a basket down the Nile River, kept alive, adopted into Pharaoh's own family — made a prince. Unbelievable!
- And such an inspiration! Especially if you, too, feel like a bit of a 'basket case' ...
- **<Slide>** This reminds us all, Q: "Don't give up, Moses was once a basket case."
- And, just when the fairy tale seems perfectly scripted, the plot thickens. One day, grown up Moses witnesses the hideous plight of his fellow Hebrews; and, enraged, he murders an Egyptian slave-driver, perhaps to win favour with his biological relatives; however, he is flatly rejected by them and, his adopted father, the King of Egypt now wants to kill him. So, he flees to Midian.
- There, Moses marries, starts a family, becomes a shepherd, and lives a normal life.
- In hiding. For 40 years. Until God's comes calling in a burning bush, (Ch3),
  - Q: 'Moses, you're the leader I'm choosing. The elders of Israel will listen to you. It won't be easy. I will harden Pharaoh's heart. But go, I will use you to lead my people out of Egypt.'
- Moses makes several objections about why God could/should never use him, to which God makes corresponding promises (Ch4), Q: "I will go with you. I will equip you with miraculous signs. I will tell you what to say." By faith, Moses eventually heads back to Egypt.
- Where we pick up the story at the end of Exodus 4, p.47-48 in the blue Bibles in the seat rack in front of you. Or, you can turn their on your electronic device to Exodus 4:29.

- Now, to whet your appetite for today's passage, let's conduct a little **Sattler Straw-Poll**.
- **<Slide> SSP#1)** In a book, movie, or sports match, do you appreciate: A) Predictability in the plot, OR B) Unexpected twists & outcomes? By show of hands, how many for A? B?
- **<Slide> SSP#2)** When fighting opposition, do you prefer to: A) Crush them yourself, OR B) Help them self-destruct? How many for A? B?
- **<Slide> SSP#3)** As a leader, when things don't go as expected, do you: A) Become impetuous (Definition: a state of mind characterized by sudden or rash action, emotion) OR, B) Go with the flow? How many for A? B? Bet you know which one's my default!
- If you answered 'A-A-A,' you likely have moderate to severe control issues. Like me. And Moses evidently.
- **<Slide>** <Read Text> "4:29, p.47: Moses and Aaron brought together all the elders of the Israelites, 30 and Aaron told them everything the Lord had said to Moses. He also performed the signs before the people, 31 and they believed. And when they heard that the Lord was concerned about them and had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshiped."
- Pray: "God, control me by Your Spirit. Move me out of the way. We're hungry to hear from you."

### **Narrative Outline:**

#### **<Slide> Meeting #1: Elders with Moses & Aaron (Exodus 4:29-31)**

- Just as God had promised, Moses & Aaron's first meeting back in Egypt goes remarkably well.
- After hearing their message and seeing the signs, the elders of Israel "believed" (31a).
- But, what really grabbed them was when they "heard" that the Lord was still "concerned" and had seen their misery" (31b). After centuries of quiet, God had not forgotten! He saw them; they were still on His radar. At this, they "bowed down and worshiped" (31b).

#### **<Slide> Meeting #2: Moses & Aaron with Pharaoh (Exodus 5:1-5)**

- "Ch5:1: Afterward Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'Let my people go, so that they may hold a festival to me in the wilderness.'" 2 Pharaoh said, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord and I will not let Israel go." 3 Then they said, "The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Now let us take a 3-day journey into the wilderness to offer sacrifices to the Lord our God, or he may strike us with plagues or with the sword." 4 But the king of Egypt said, "Moses and Aaron, why are you taking the people away from their labour? Get back to your work!" 5 Then Pharaoh said, "Look, the people of the land are now numerous, and you are stopping them from working."
- Moses & Aaron come in strong, "Thus saith the Lord" (1) and appeal to Pharaoh to let their people go on grounds of religious freedom.
- But Pharaoh blows them off, "Who is this feeble god of Hebrew slaves that I should obey?! I've never even heard of him or seen him in action. Why should I listen to him?" (2) This conflict, Pharaoh pitting himself over & above the God of the Israelites, drives the next 15 chapters.
- When Moses & Aaron ask again, a bit more politely this time around, Pharaoh flatly denies their request and says, "I'm not letting your people go. Not if it stops production in my empire." (5)

#### **<Slide> Meeting #3: Pharaoh with Slave Drivers & Foremen (Exodus 5:6-19)**

- A number of meetings ensue. And Pharaoh exacts his will on the people. He calls together his Egyptian slave drivers & Israelite foremen and issues an order to, "no longer supply the people with straw" (7), but still "require them to make the same number of bricks as before (8)."
- As one might imagine, with straw hard to come by, brick production goes down.
- And the Israelite foremen pay for it: they are physically beaten by their slave drivers.
- Then, to belittle their suffering, Pharaoh dubs the Israelites "lazy" (8/17) for wanting to sacrifice to their God rather than work for him, obey him, do what he wants them to do.

### <Slide> Meeting #4: Israelite Foremen with Moses & Aaron (Exodus 5:20-21)

- Hot from their meeting with Pharaoh and smarting from the punishment in their minds they've unfairly received, the Israelite foremen now turn against their leaders, Moses & Aaron.
- Forgetting Moses' display of God's power just a chapter ago, in Exodus 5, V21, they unload: "Curse you! You have made us a stench to all of Egypt and put our lives in jeopardy!" (21b)
- Ahhhh, did you hear that? The sweet 'accolades' of Christian ministry! For Moses & Aaron, all part of the wonderful 'perks' of leadership.

### <Slide> Meeting #5: Moses with the LORD (Exodus 5:22 - 6:8)

- "Ch5:22: **Moses returned to the Lord** and said, "Why, Lord, why have you brought trouble on this people? Is this why you sent me? 23 Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has brought trouble on this people, and you have not rescued your people at all."
- I would argue, those first 5 words of V22, are the 'game-changer' in the story.
- Instead of running off to Midian alone, this time "Moses returned to the Lord" (22).
- The best — the only place to go with our failures & frustrations.
- He goes to God and rants, "Ever since I started doing what you told me to do, things have only gotten worse! Pharaoh won't listen, Israel won't listen; and God, clearly you're not listening to me anymore either. What's the point?!" (23)
- Entitlement — disappointment dripping from his words.
- And God says in 6:1, "[Moses], now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh: [Not because of your words or the signs you perform, but] because of my mighty hand he will let my people go." (1)
- **<Slide> ILL** - Let's pause here for a moment. This term, God's "mighty hand" ...
  - o Is a traditional Jewish phrase that represents God's infinite power and dominion — His control over earth and all His enemies.
  - o Used throughout the OT, and particularly here in Exodus, God's "mighty hand" and "outstretched arm" is always at work. Behind the scenes, God is looking out for His people and moving mightily on their behalf.
- In Exodus 6:2-8, God reminds Moses:
  - o I AM the God of the past — Who "appeared" to your forefathers (2-4).
  - o I AM the God of the present — "I have heard your groaning" right here in Egypt (3-5).
  - o And, I AM the God of the future — "I will free you" from slavery, "I will redeem you", "I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God." (6-8).

### <Slide> Meeting #6: Moses with the Israelites - Round 2 (Exodus 6:9)

- "Ch6:9, p.48: Moses reported this to the Israelites, but they did not listen to him because of their discouragement and harsh labor."
- One commentator says this of the Israelites in Exodus,
  - o Q: "Their present reality dictates what they believe God can and cannot do." - Enns, p.175
- After his visit with God, Moses gathers the Israelites a second time to tell them what God had said. And this time it doesn't go well. Their lives had turned so badly they could not see or believe anything God was saying to them through Moses.
- The King of Egypt's cunning plan to turn Israel against itself and self-destruct, was taking shape.

### <Slide> Meeting #7: Moses with the Lord - Again! (Exodus 6:10-12)

- "6:10: Then the Lord said to Moses, 11 "Go, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the Israelites go out of his country." 12 But Moses said to the Lord, "If the Israelites will not listen to me, why would Pharaoh listen to me, since I speak with faltering lips?"
- Moses returns to the Lord. Again! And, what does God tell him?
  - o Q: 'Moses, get back up on that horse!' "Go back to Pharaoh and try again." (11)

- Impetuous, Moses' insecurities bubble to the surface, "I can't do it, Lord, maybe I'm the problem." (12) He turns inward. Drowning in a dark pool of leadership self-pity.
- Sounds like Sattler after another big 'fail.'
- When all Moses can see — all I can see — is myself. My failure. My pain.

### Applications:

- Let's 'land the plane' with a few application points.

#### 1. <Slide> When we've been wounded on account of obedience to God.

- Problem is: often when we step out in faith to obey God, we expect faster results, fewer problems, more rewards, less pain. But we mustn't 'sugar-coat' it.
- Sometimes hardship comes as a direct result of serving God. And this doesn't necessarily indicate we've fallen out of favour with God or somehow gotten it all wrong.
- Like Moses, when we have been wounded on account of our obedience, it can fuel anger inside of us and cause us to pull away from God.
- ILL - 20th Century Australian pastor, J. Sidlow Baxter said this:
  - **<Slide>** Q: "Have we not all ... felt the unmistakable urge of the Spirit to some new form of service, or to some special line of action, and have obediently pressed forward, confident that the inward urge itself was the guarantee of immediate success. Then, instead of success, opposition and disappointment and seeming failure have stunned us into bewildered despair, until we have been ready to fling the charge of unfaithfulness in the face of God." - JSB in Seamands, p.71
- APP - Wounds inflicted on us in the ministry feel especially painful.
  - It hurts when you finally get up the courage to talk to a family member, friend, or neighbour about Jesus and you are flatly rejected. When you agree to lead a small group then people complain about your leadership, it's hard. And, it can be devastating when a person you invest time in to disciple 'falls off the rails' and blames you — or begins to avoid you all together ... ducking into the frozen foods cooler at the grocery store when they see you coming!
- Times like these, we may question God's faithfulness, feel 'hung out to dry,' or like God owes us.
- And we put up a wall between us and Him.
- **<Slide>** APP - I have to say from experience, 'Do not turn inward. And stay there.'
  - Yes, self-reflection is important, but we mustn't navel-gaze too long.
  - Instead, acknowledge the pain; you don't need to hide it from God. Or in church.
  - Process your disappointment. If you bottle it, it will only blow one day like Mt Vesuvius on a hot day in Napoli! And that'll be ugly!
  - No, speak with others. Bring your failure to God — a great place for a re-start.
- A vital message God's been showing me of late is this: as leaders, we must learn to trust Him to see beyond the inevitable setbacks & spiritual reversals in the people we love. And, don't give up. Never stop serving God.

#### 2. Faith when life is difficult and it's hard to see God.

- Hear cf. 1 Peter 4:12: "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you."
- Truth is: faith takes root in trial. If we run, our faith only stays surface-deep, it cannot take root.
- But if we 'sit' in the trial and trust God amidst the cloudy-ness, our faith will deepen and grow.
- Yet we hear this a lot. BQ: If God really cares about my situation — and has a plan, why are things only getting worse not better?
- When God's promise and my reality don't align, I am faced with a critical spiritual decision:
  - Will I press forward with God in faith. Or, will I run from God in anger?

- ILL - I love the faith depicted in J.R.R. Tolkien's dwarf, Gimli in the Lord of the Rings Trilogy.
  - **<Slide>** Facing impossible odds fighting the armies of Mordor, he says pensively,
    - ☐ Q: "Certainty of death. Small chance of success."
    - ☐ Then after a deep pause, Gimli boldly declares, "What are we waiting for?!"
- **<Slide>** Cf. Hebrews 11:24-27 says: "24 By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. 25 He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. 26 He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, **because he was looking ahead to his reward**. 27 By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; **he persevered because he saw him who is invisible**."
- APP - When life is difficult it's so hard to see God.
  - When God appears "invisible" or absent from the narrative of our lives.
  - Perhaps today you're sitting in church and you find yourself stuck in a cloud of disappointment so heavy you're having a hard time seeing or believing God at all.
  - An unexpected illness or death, job or financial loss, someone's unkept promise that's hurt you deeply, and you're living in a blur — stunned by your life's unravelling.
  - Mustering all your resources just to get by. And you too ask, 'Where is God in all of this?'
- There's a huge stigma today around faith in our world. Doesn't make sense.
- It's considered 'weakness' or 'brainless' — to put one's trust in something that cannot be seen or 100% proven ... like believing in Santa Claus or the Easter Bunny.
- **<Slide>** ILL - In the new Alpha film series, Man versus Wild, outdoor adventurer, Bear Grylls ...
  - Says this about his Christian faith, Q: "People ask doesn't that make faith like a crutch? [But] What does a crutch do? A crutch helps you stand, makes you stronger. In that case, I need that. But especially when it's so much more than that. This faith inside is also like a backbone, helping me stand tall and helping me be strong when I'm really up against it."
- The faith Christ-followers are called to challenges our self-sufficiency. Calls us to lift our eyes ...

### **<Slide> 3. And ... Trust that God is in control.**

- ILL - It's a phrase my father used to use and it bugged me then. Still does. But the older I get,
  - And the less control I realize I actually have, the more true I know it to be.
  - Not that it gets any easier, but there is a true freedom I'm finding in being bonded to Christ, 'going with the flow' — in concert with the One Who is truly in charge of my life.
  - Though I have little idea how or what or why most of the time.
- APP - I don't know about you, but some days it feels like this world is out of control.
  - Like evil is winning, like dark things oppress on every side.
  - But Exodus reminds, God is still at work. Even when I can't see it. God has my back.
  - He is there. Right with me. Guiding me. Protecting me from my enemies.
  - It gives me comfort to know God is orchestrating history to His desired end.
  - Our heart-cries never fall on deaf ears.
  - And, we can be 100% certain ... Pharaoh, the enemy, evil will not win.
- God ... is ... in ... control. Beyond our present circumstance.
- For Christ-followers, faith, it says in cf. Hebrews 11:1, is "confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we **do not see**." Like Moses, seeing "ahead to his reward" (26b).
- In fact, this world as it exists now is not even our true home.
- God promises, as He did to Abraham, that all who put their faith in Him, can look "forward" to a new place for eternity, to the city "whose architect and builder is God" (10) Himself!
- Can't wait! This is the Christian hope! And carries us amidst our present darkness. Amen.