

WELCOME 4th June 2023 – 1st Sunday after Pentecost '23 A

Exodus 1:1-2:10

Welcome! It's great to be together again today! **Bible Study Qs** are there to equip you so God can lead you deeper into His word/work in your life, & so you can share that w/ someone else. We also use them for our **Zoom Bible Study Catch-ups** on Friday @ 1p.m.

As we move into this week... **The** Prequel In film or literary terms it's "the story before the story" – the backstory – the events that led up to what you know as *THE STORY*. As we open the pages on the Exodus Journey from slavery to a living relationship as a people w/ God...there *IS* a prequel, there *IS* a backstory...a Promise that shapes all the promises even to this day.

The story of the Exodus begins with God's promises to Abraham:

I will make you a great nation. I will bless you & make your name great, & you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you & curse those who curse you.

All the families on earth will be blessed through you." – **Gen 12:2-3**

But that grand majestic promise will come only through persistent faith & patient endurance.

The LORD said to Abram, "You can be sure your descendants will be strangers in a foreign land, where they will be oppressed as slaves for 400 years. But I will punish the nation that enslaves them, & in the end they will come away with great wealth. – **Gen 15:13-14**

God promises to reclaim the world from sin death & evil by drawing us into a relationship with himself through his grace mercy love & power at work through Abraham's descendants. But that promise of a relationship with God leads through slavery & struggle, suffering & death into freedom life & salvation.

Their descendants, the Israelites, had many children & grandchildren.

In fact, they multiplied so greatly that they became extremely powerful & filled the land.

God works through his faithful people & their circumstances to see his promise to fulfillment.

We'll experience & share that today...Let's pray...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Most wonderful God, forever beyond our grasp yet by your Spirit always within us

Most wonderful Christ, forever ahead of us in wisdom and love yet through your Spirit always beside us,

Most wonderful Spirit, forever larger than the whole universe yet living in our hearts,

Work in our hearts & lives today to kindle boldness & assurance in faith. Let your Word be the power that motivates all we are & all we do. Move us in your mission to the world to the people we know with the promise that in you all things are made new. To your praise and glory: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God to be ever loved, adored and served! Amen!

Let's sing...Sing to Jesus

FAITH CHAT:

1. How is the story of your life, & especially your life with Jesus, a "story of promise"?
2. How does that "promise" affect your daily living & your relationships?

1 PENTECOST '23 A – A JOURNEY OF PROMISE: PROMISE OR CURSE

For any of us who grew up around the **Star Wars** movies...we know prequels. The movies that help you understand the movie you just watched. Originally planned as 7 feature films, episodes 4, 5 & 6 came first, then 1, 2 & 3 to bring you up to speed on what you already knew. Novelist Elizabeth George wrote "**What** Came Before He Shot Her" to explain how a young man happened to be walking past Inspector Lynley's home & shot his wife.

The narrative from Exodus we'll be engaging for the next few months is often read or taught in pieces...disconnected from the greater story of God's grace & presence among his human creations. We know about/study the Plagues, Passover, crossing the Red Sea, 10 Commandments...Sinai Covenant...Moses we know, even if he sort of looks like **Charlton** Heston in our minds.

But those pieces are part of a larger more glorious expression of God's love for his sinful fallen world. There's a backstory of grace & redemption...prequel of liberation & restoration that actually begins...*Then the Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all animals, domestic & wild. You will crawl on your belly, grovelling in the dust as long as you live. I will cause hostility between you & the woman, & between your offspring & her offspring. He will strike your head, & you will strike his heel."* – **Gen 3:14-15** Embedded in our brokenness is a promise toward which all human history moves...a promise of sin's ultimate defeat, & death's death. Embedded in our brokenness is a promise of restoration & reconciliation to relationship

But that promise moves through the specific family lineage of Abraham/Sarah & their descendants...*The Lord said to Abram, "Leave your native country, your relatives, & your father's family, & go to the land I will show you. I will make you a great nation. I will bless you & make your name great, & you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you & curse those who curse you. All the families on earth will be blessed through you."* – **Gen 12:2-3** Abraham is not some paragon exemplar of faith in Yahweh. He's a pagan in a pagan land...**Josh 24:2**...Until the moment God grabbed him by his scruffy old neck he worshipped other gods. He & Sarah had no children & no expectation of children or any of those blessings & promises until God said otherwise. There's a promise ^{b/4} & behind the promise...

But that grand majestic promise will come only through persistent faith & patient endurance...*The LORD said to Abram, "You can be sure your descendants will be strangers in a foreign land, where they will be oppressed as slaves for 400 years. But I will punish the nation that enslaves them, & in the end they will come away with great wealth."* **Gen 15:13-14**

You cannot forget: **God's** promise holds you & holds firm through suffering & struggle. **"You can be sure** your descendants will be strangers in a foreign land, where they will be oppressed as slaves for 400 years. **But I will** punish the nation that enslaves them, **& in the end they will** come away with great wealth. When you're not feeling real confident in the promise...prayers aren't getting immediate results, when the tumor's getting bigger & the bank acct's getting smaller, when the person you love from forever just went off the rails, when there seems to be no end in sight to the chaos...hurts just to breathe or you think you'd have to die to feel better...You. Can. Be. Sure. God has not forgotten his promise & he is right now preparing a deliverance that will make the pain somehow seem a picnic. Really? Yes...really...

For our present troubles are small & won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them & will last forever! So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever. – **2 Cor 4:17-18** You. Can. Be. Sure. God has not forgotten his promise & he is right now preparing a deliverance that will make the pain somehow seem a picnic. God's promise holds you & holds firm through suffering & struggle.

And that means...**In** whatever circumstance, refuse to believe you are powerless. God people, in spite of their harsh slavery became the great nation God promised. **Their** descendants, the Israelites, had many children & grandchildren. In fact, they multiplied so greatly that they became extremely powerful & filled the land. In fact, Pharaoh looks at his slave labour force & sees not slaves but a national crisis. **Eventually**, a new king came to power in Egypt who knew nothing about Joseph or what he had done. He said...*"Look, the people of Israel now outnumber us & are stronger than we are. We must make a plan to keep them from growing even more. If we don't, & war breaks out, they will join our enemies & fight against us...Then Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, gave this order to the Hebrew midwives, Shiphrah & Puah: "When you help the Hebrew women give birth, watch as they deliver. If the baby is a boy, kill him; if it is a girl, let her live."* **But because the midwives feared God, they refused to obey the king's orders. They allowed the boys to live, too.** God's promise holds you & holds firm through suffering & struggle & through oppression there is increase

It is always the right time to act in faith trusting God to somehow act on your behalf. So the midwives not only outwit but abjectly lie to Pharaoh. They live accountable to the higher sovereignty of Yahweh that Pharaoh doesn't understand...but soon will. *Because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own.* In whatever circumstance, refuse to believe you are powerless. It is always the right time to act in faith trusting God to act somehow on your behalf & through oppression there is increase We saw that in 1 Peter...Harder Rome beat on the church the more gospel spread...true for us?

Then Moses' mother & big sister do exactly the same thing. Courage & faithful compassion are always the right way to confront injustice:¶. Moses' mom & big sister do everything in their power to preserve the life of this child that Pharaoh had decreed should die. But they confront that injustice not w/ hunger strikes or protests, change.org petitions or by supergluing themselves naked to the Sphinx. Courage & faithful compassion confront the injustice of Pharaoh & Moses not only lives but flourishes under Pharaoh's own roof. Throughout their time in Egypt, God will not only thwart but overthrow every evil scheme unleashed against his people so that the results are the opposite of what Pharaoh intends. God will demonstrate his sovereignty against every power & principality including death...

Let's repeat...: **God's** promise holds you & holds firm through suffering & struggle You. Can. Be. Sure. God has not forgotten his promise & he is right now preparing a deliverance that will make the pain somehow seem a picnic so **in** whatever circumstance, refuse to believe you are powerless. It is always the right time to act in faith trusting God to act somehow on your behalf. Courage & faithful compassion are always the right way to confront injustice or suffering tragedy & hardship. Why? **God** acts through his faithful people & their circumstances to work his promise to fulfillment. God promises to reclaim the world from sin death & evil by drawing us into a relationship w/ himself through his grace mercy love & power at work through Abraham's descendants. But that promise of a relationship w/ God leads through slavery & struggle, suffering & death into freedom life & salvation.

We are as time unfolds generations away from this: *But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children.* – **Gal 4:4-5** We are generations away from: *The time for judging this world has come, when Satan, the ruler of this world, will be cast out. And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself.* – **Jn 12:31-32** But it is in fact the lifting up to death of that Son sent to purchase our freedom that ultimately frees us from death. The Exodus is but a preview of a greater deliverance – an eternal liberation from sin death evil & the powers & forces & rulers of this world. God acts through his faithful people & their circumstances to work his promise to fulfillment which ultimately leads to the arrival of Jesus born of Mary... Immanuel = God w/ us --- Jesus = God saves. *For all of God's promises have been fulfilled in Christ with a resounding "Yes!"* - **2 Cor 1:20**

Just as each person is destined to die once & after that comes judgment, so also Christ was offered once for all time as a sacrifice to take away the sins of many people. He will come again, not to deal with our sins, but to bring salvation to all who are eagerly waiting for him. - **Heb 9:27-28**

The grand majestic promises of God will come only through persistent faith & patient endurance.

TAKE IT HOME –

Where will you commit to living with courage & faithful compassion this week so that God's eternal promise might become "the promise" for someone else?

Let's pray with that in mind...

Lord Jesus, you transformed your disciples through the power of the Holy Spirit, filling them with courage, boldness & conviction. Fill us with that same power, the power to proclaim your name daily in our lives, for you alone have the power to rescue heal & bring salvation to this world. We ask this in your powerful name. Amen.