

Fragile, Failure, and Faithful – The God Who Delivers

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The God Who Delivers

By Steve Williamson

Bible Text: Exodus 1:22—2:22

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Metrocrest Presbyterian Church

1265 E. Hebron Parkway

Carrollton, TX 75010

Website: www.metrocrestchurch.org

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/metrocrestchurch

Well, it is good to be back. Thanks for coming out. In our last visit to Exodus a couple of weeks ago, you know, we saw that God remained faithful to his promises that he had made to the patriarchs and that he continued to build the people of Israel from just 70 to a swarm. Well, this raised the ire of Pharaoh and the ire of God's ultimate enemy the devil and he began to persecute them and treat them terribly. He whipped them mercilessly and ultimately he ordered abortion and then, finally, infanticide trying to stop the work of God.

And yet despite all that and, in some ways through all that, God continued to do his work of growing the people, multiplying them and making them strong. And we learn that God is going to be faithful to his promises and that you and I in the midst of our difficulties, we have to begin to look at the providences of God, many of which we don't understand. We have got to look at those providences of God through the lenses of his promises and know that he who began a good work in us will carry it unto completion until the day of Christ.

Now what took 30 minutes for us to go through a couple of weeks ago we have to remember was a lived reality for the people of that day. We knew the ending. We can finish the book. They were living it and I am sure that they were filled with all kind of angst and questions and disturbances and problems and wonders about what in the world is going on. And like us, they faced trials. They faced severe hardship. They faced beatings. They faced a government that was hostile to their faith and to their lifestyle. And they were sorely stricken down.

And they had to have had questions like: Will God deliver us? Or, more personally, will God deliver me? Right? Does God know? Does he care? Does he see what is going on down here amongst his people under this regime of Pharaoh? Where is God? Why doesn't he listen to us?

And it is into this context that our story continues. And we are going to see that God was, indeed, listening. And he did know and he was at work.

But as Moses records God's earliest work in bringing the deliverance for God's people, he shows us that that beginning, it was pretty fragile. And then in this chapter he is going to show us that God's deliverer had a failed delivery attempt. But he is going to wrap up this chapter and this story that he has come to us but also to the people to remember and focus on the God who delivers. And so what we are going to see this morning is a fragile beginning to a delivery, a failed delivery attempt by God's deliverer, but also a sure focus for you and I on the God who delivers.

In your programs you can see this morning's text on page four, five, thanks. It is a long one, so bear with me. Read along if you will or if you have your Bibles you can go to Exodus chapter one, the last verse of that chapter rolling in to chapter two.

Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: "Every boy that is born you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live."

Now a man of the house of Levi married a Levite woman, and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. When she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him for three months. But when she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile. His sister stood at a distance to see what would happen to him.

Then Pharaoh's daughter went down to the Nile to bathe, and her attendants were walking along the river bank. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her slave girl to get it. She opened it and saw the baby. He was crying, and she felt sorry for him. "This is one of the Hebrew babies," she said.

Then his sister asked Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?"

"Yes, go," she answered. And the girl went and got the baby's mother.

Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you." So the woman took the baby and nursed him.

When the child grew older, she took him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son. She named him Moses, saying, "I drew him out of the water."

One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labour. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people. Glancing this way and that and seeing no-one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. The next day he went out and saw two Hebrews fighting. He asked the one in the wrong, "Why are you hitting your fellow Hebrew?"

The man said, "Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian?" Then Moses was afraid and thought, "What I did must have become known."

When Pharaoh heard of this, he tried to kill Moses, but Moses fled from Pharaoh and went to live in Midian, where he sat down by a well.

Now a priest of Midian had seven daughters, and they came to draw water and fill the troughs to water their father's flock. Some shepherds came along and drove them away, but Moses got up and came to their rescue and watered their flock. When the girls returned to Reuel their father, he asked them, "Why have you returned so early today?"

They answered, "An Egyptian rescued us from the shepherds. He even drew water for us and watered the flock."

"And where is he?" he asked his daughters. "Why did you leave him? Invite him to have something to eat."

Moses agreed to stay with the man, who gave his daughter Zipporah to Moses in marriage. Zipporah gave birth to a son, and Moses named him Gershom, saying, "I have become an alien in a foreign land."¹

And hold on because there is a little bit left off. I didn't notice that. So if you have got your Bibles go to Exodus two.

During that long period, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. So God saw the Israelites and God understood.²

May God add his blessing to the reading of his Word.

Let's pray together.

Father, you people were in desperate straits and your deliverer faced desperate times. But it was your good pleasure to do it this way. And all over this story we see your great hand of providence and your great works to bring into the world your servant Moses to deliver your people. And, Father, right now some of us are feeling a bit like the Israelites. Where are you? Are you listening? Do you know? Will you deliver us? And, Father, I pray that through the hearing of your Word we might not only know that you

¹ Exodus 1:22—2:22.

² Exodus 2:23-25.

will, but that we would run to you until you do. Thank you for this time. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

So as the story continues God continues his work of multiplying his people. But they were still in the clutches of Pharaoh and he was still actively working their demise and Moses is born into this situation. The beatings were going on. Babies were being thrown into the Nile River and many innocents lost their lives. And despite all of this and the glimmer of hope that the midwife rebellion might have caused, the people were still miserable. Where was the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph? And the answer to that question was: He was in the fragile birth of a beautiful baby boy.

You know, we read about Moses' birth this way that really it is in very plain detail. Did you notice again no names? His parents aren't even named. They are just two Levites marrying, conceiving and trying to be faithful to do what God had told them to do which was be fruitful and multiply.

They already had two children, but there was something about this one. Your text that we read says that "she saw that he was a fine child, [and so] she hid him for three months."³

Now this is a pretty interesting word. And if you will just sort of take a glance at the English translation you can see what we mean. The New English translation has, "healthy child." The English Standard Version and the New International Version have "fine child." The New American Standard and the King James Version have "beautiful child." Eugene Peterson in *The Message* says that she saw something special about him. And when you look into the New Testament for the commentary on Moses' life in Acts seven, in Stephen's message, he says that he was a beautiful child and he employs a pretty rare Greek word, in fact one that is only used twice. And both of those times it is in telling the story of Moses' countenance or whatever. So this is a really weird word. What was it that Moses' mom and dad, too, saw in him? Is it just that he was a good looking baby? Probably not, ok? Is it that, you know, he had this divine halo around him like some medieval portraits of holy children?

No. The word here actually is good. That is the Hebrew word. It is the word good. She saw that he was a good child.

Does that mean that he was perfect? No. Well, then what is going on with this word? Well, it is a very important word in the only other book that Moses has written up to this point, because on every day of creation what did God see? He saw that it was good.

And so what is Moses doing, sort of? Because, remember. He is writing this about himself. He is drawing a direct connection between him and the work of God in creation. What is Moses' birth? Why is it recorded this way? Why is he a good child? Because God is about to do something like the creation. He is about to bring about a new creation, if you will, through this good child. This is the work of God in Moses. He is the good work of God and he is about to do great work of God.

³ Exodus 2:2.

And there is another connection that makes this story really kind of fantastic. For three months they hid this child. And then they had to let him go for whatever reason. Neither the Old Testament nor the New tells us why. Ok? We know why. Because it was God's will.

And so what does mom do? She puts him in an ark. That is right, I said ark.

Why are you saying ark?

Because the word for basket here is only used one other time in the Bible and that is in the story of Noah where Noah built an ark to deliver his family and ultimate human population from sure destruction by God. And what is Moses showing us here in this sort of biography that he is giving us about his life? He was a good child which ties him to the creation account. And he is in an ark like another deliverer of God's people.

And so right here, just in this little bitty segment, which is pretty short, of the story of God's deliverer for his people, you see two great themes of the Bible emerging, creation and deliverance.

And Moses in his description as being a good child and in the details of him being floated down the Nile in a little bitty ark, we see already who is coming on to the scene and what kind of work he is going to do.

Remember the question, where was God? How many times have we asked that. Where are you? What are you doing? Even [?] saying God must be busy, right? What is he doing?

And the answer to that question is found in the birth of a baby boy, a baby boy with direct connection to the God of creation and the God of redemption.

Now did you note? See the irony here of this story as well. Mom and dad let him go. And little big sister is over her in the bulrushes watching the basket float down the Nile. You know, 13 foot crocodiles, by the way, in the Nile on average. And all of the sudden who should appear on the scene? Pharaoh's daughter.

Now if you are reading this for the first time you don't know if this is a good thing or not. Here is the daughter of the man who ordered the infanticide that led to Moses ultimately being put into the Nile and off he floats right into her path. This is really bad luck or really wonderful providence, because what happens? She sees him. She opens it and here is a boy crying. And she feels compassion for this child. And what does she do? She takes him, not to hold him under, but to lift him up.

And sister over here in the reeds has got to be going nuts. Right? What is going to happen? And so she runs and says, "Hey, should I go get somebody to nurse him for you?"

And Pharaoh's daughter is like, "That is a great idea. Why don't you do that?"

So what does she do? She goes and gets mom. And what does Pharaoh's daughter do? I am going to pay you to nurse your own baby.

And there is another irony here. What is Pharaoh trying to do? He is trying to prevent the Israelites from ruining his kingdom. And now what happens? His very daughter brings the very deliverer of the people of Israel right under his nose and what happens? The New Testament picks it up this way that he is trained in the best training of all of Egypt and he becomes powerful in word and in deed right under his nose.

Do we have an amazing God? Do we really believe that? Can you see why William Cowper would write:

God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform.
He plants his footsteps on the sea,
And rides upon the storm.

What a God, right?

Why can I not trust him? And what or maybe who can I not trust him with? We don't know what was going on in the mind of Moses' parents. I am sure their hearts were rent completely. He is crying in the basket. Maybe he was just a crier and there was just no way to keep him covered up and it was like I can't throw him in the Nile. I am going to do the best I can. I am going to make him a little boat and send him off. And God delivers.

Shouldn't we have faith like Moses' parents and like the midwives who feared God and did what was right according to what they knew to do? And yet so often we try to take things into our own hands. And in a moment we are going to see what happens when we do that.

But first I want to take kind of a detour, ok? Because the question is still sort of lingering there. Why is it that when I am praying to God for deliverance he doesn't bring it? Why when I am praying for deliverance doesn't he just do it? I mean, here the people are crying out. They are making their petitions known to God and yet God seems to be really slow in answering.

Two answers to that, I think. First of all, we should take comfort in the fact that while the people were crying out God was at work. Moses is born. For three months he is kept. He is sent down the Nile and who would find him but Pharaoh's daughter and he is raised to become the deliverer. And all of this, I am sure, went completely unnoticed by everybody but Moses' family. And they don't know what is going to come of this. They just know they have got a man in the house.

Sometimes when we think God is least active he is most.

But, secondly, and Jonathan Edwards really helped me to see something else here. While I may be praying to God for something, some deliverance, some blessing, some mercy, he knows that I am not fit to receive it. And if I did receive it not only would it not benefit me. It might actually lead to my ruin.

The Israelites were quite sure that they needed meat. And so they cried out to God, “Give us meat.”

And he said, “Ok. Here is meat.”

And they gorged themselves to where it was coming out of their nostrils the Bible says. And many of them died.

Edwards writes it this way. “God’s manner is first to prepare men’s hearts and then to answer their prayers. A preparedness for a mercy sought consists in being put into a due capacity for the enjoyment of it.”

And I know what you are thinking because I thought it the first time I read that, too. I am ready. I am ready to enjoy it. Bring it.

And God is saying to me, “Steve Williamson, you are not. You are not most certainly ready for my deliverance.”

But, secondly, a preparedness for a mercy sought consists in a preparedness to acknowledge God in it. And this is sobering. He goes on.

“God prepares men for mercies by preparing them and making them ready when the mercy is bestowed to acknowledge the author of it and to his own hand in it and to give him the glory of it. Many are not prepared for this. If they should have the mercies they seek, they would have no sense of their absolute dependence on God for it. They would not ascribe it to him, but to themselves and to second causes because they have so little sense of God, of his being and his influence. They are so self sufficient in their own eyes that they would not be sensible how their mercies were from God, but would be ready to ascribe the glory to themselves.”

That is so true. I think that I am ready. What I am really ready for is to treat God like an ATM machine. I pray. You deliver. End of story. See you later. Bye, bye. And God knows my heart. And he knows that if I got everything I asked for when I wasn’t ready to get it, it would ruin me, because if I got it I would take so much credit for it myself that I would miss life and life, brothers and sisters, is knowing God, knowing his glory, relishing his glory, swimming in his glory.

And so let's be patient. And Edwards goes on to say that, "Hey, as you are praying for God's mercy," whatever that might be. Give me this. Help me this way. Free me. Also pray, "God make me ready. Do whatever work you need to do in me so that when this mercy comes I will be a fit receptacle for it."

That is a hard prayer, but glorious as well.

Moses had to learn this. And so before he could lead God's people he had to fail. Steven's sermon in Acts seven recaps this part of the story for us.

"And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and deeds."⁴

Which is funny because later on he is going to say God, "I can't talk right."

When he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brothers, the children of Israel. And seeing one of them being wronged, he defended the oppressed man and avenged him by striking down the Egyptian. He supposed that his brothers would understand that God was giving them salvation by his hand, but they did not understand. And on the following day he appeared to them as they were quarreling and tried to reconcile them, saying, 'Men, you are brothers. Why do you wrong each other?'

But the man who was wronging his neighbor thrust him aside, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?'⁵

Right?

What do we see here? You can't work deliverance on your own. You can't work deliverance for yourself on your own. You can't work deliverance for others on your own. You can't do it on your own because God isn't in it for your glory. God is in it for his glory. And what happens when we try?

Or look at Moses. At this point in his life he is the man, right? He is going to deliver his people. He is going to fix it. The problem, of course, is he is not the man. These aren't his people. He can't fix it. But God can.

Moses is a lot like Abraham in Genesis who attempted to do God's work in Moses' own way, right? Every time Abraham... not every time, but many times Abraham was confronted with a threat to the promise that God has made, twice he lies about Sarah to protect the promise and, really, to protect himself. And then, of course, there is the while ordeal with Hagar and we all know how that turned out for everybody on the planet as

⁴ Acts 7:22.

⁵ Acts 7:23-28.

she gives birth to Ishmael who becomes the father of the Arabs and ultimately the Muslim nation, right?

Sometimes, many time when we try to take God's work into our own hands, when we try to do redemption on our own, when we try to do deliverance on our own, there are really drastic results. But not always. Sometimes it works out sort of. What we miss when we do it is the greater glory of knowing God.

Proverbs says, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death."⁶

And the same is true for you and me. You know, since the Garden of Eden, what have we been busy doing. Hiding and sowing fig leaves. I am going to work deliverance for me. I am going to make a name for myself. I am going to create heaven here on earth. I am going to fix the world's problems. And we can't do that. But we keep trying because we have struck out in independence from God and off we go.

Most of us have at times in our lives relied on simply being good enough. But that won't work either.

In C S Lewis' classic *The Great Divorce* Lewis in this novel sort of paints this picture of residents of hell that they get a holiday, if you will, to journey on a bus into heaven. It is a fantasy. It is a dream. So don't get too uptight, ok? And each of these people go and it is a wonderful story of what keeps people from trusting Christ and different ways that our flesh sort of controls us.

And they meet solid, real residents of heaven. Each of the visitors gets to meet someone who has been sent to sort of plead with them and sort of counsel them as to how they, too, could become residents of heaven.

There is one story of a character called the big man. More properly he is called the big ghost because they don't have any substance to themselves. And the big man meets a former employee of his named Len. Now Len, L E N is a murderer and he murdered another employee called Jack. And the big man who is in hell meets Len who is in heaven and he can't believe, the big man, that he has met him. And this is sampling of their conversation.

"Personally," said the Big Ghost with an emphasis which contradicted the ordinary meaning of the word, 'personally, I'd have thought you and I ought to be the other way round. That's my personal opinion. Look at me now," said the Ghost, slapping its chest (but the slap made no noise). "I gone straight all my life. I don't say I was a religious man and I don't say I had no faults, far from it. But I done my best all my life, see? I done my best by everyone, that's the sort of chap I was. I never asked for anything that wasn't mine by rights.

⁶ Proverbs 16:25.

“I would be much better not to go on about that now,” says Len.

“I am only telling you the sort of chap I am. I only want my rights. I am not asking for anybody’s bleeding charity.”

“Then do at once ask for the bleeding charity. Everything is here for the asking and nothing can be bought.”

“That may be well for you, I dare say. If they choose to let in a bloody murderer all because he makes a poor mouth at the last moment, that is their look out. But I don’t see myself going in the same boat, you see. Why should I? I don’t want charity. I am a decent man and if I had my rights I would have been here long ago and you can tell them I said so.”

And away he goes.

There is more to that story. It is really a fascinating read. I encourage you to look at that.

But after a bit more conversation wherein Len shows the big ghost that he really wasn’t a decent chap in the way that he thought he was and Len confesses that, you know, “I murdered Jack, but many, many times I have murdered you in my heart because you were such a jerk. But I am here to ask your forgiveness and to plead with you to take the bleeding charity.”

Len goes off.

Lewis writes, “There are only two kinds of people in the end, those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those who in the end God says to them, ‘Thy will be done.’”

Often we think, if I pray more then God will have to honor that an answer. Or if I read my Bible more and show God how serious I am...

Can you see how that really is a work, putting a faith in the work? I have had days where I have been irritated with God because I did my devotional, but the Coke machine took my money. Can you see how that is really putting faith in a work and how at least a smidgeon, at least a smidgeon of self is going to creep in and take glory away from God when he does the work?

Moses thought he was ready to deliver. And the people through they were ready to be delivered. But God knew that neither was, not in the way that God was going to do it to maximize his glory and the joy of his people.

Moses would go into exile for another 40 years and God prepared him to deliver and the people to be delivered, but it took 40 years.

Will you trust in the will of God as he delays in answering your pleas for mercy and deliverance? Will you trust that he knows, that he has a very good reason for delay? Or will you miss the greater glory of God in your life by taking matters into your own hands?

As Tim Keller said once, “Do I trust God? Or am I trusting my agenda for God?”

I hate that question. But how can I know that he will deliver? When life seems to be going crazy, when I can’t get my hands around something or even my mind around something, how can I know that he will deliver?

I am sure it seemed to the people that God was turning a deaf ear to their cries and there are many times where you and I think and feel the same way.

This chapter ends, however, with a strong statement to the contrary. He tells us why you and I like the Israelites can trust in the God who delivers. It is in verse 23.

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.⁷

The people cried and groaned. God heard. God remembered. God saw. And God knew.

Have you noticed something interesting there? Every verb ascribed to God has an object except the last one. The people cried, God heard their cries. God saw the people. God remembered his covenant. And God knew. My translation has dot, dot, dot at the end of it.

What did he know?

Well, the word here is the same word for just absolute intimate knowledge. Like in the King James where Adam knew Eve. He knew his people. He knew their plight. He knew their exact situation and their exact need. He knows.

Bo doesn’t know God, Bo, like God does Bo.

Steve Williamson doesn’t know Steve like God knows Steve.

Metrocrest Church, we don’t know ourselves the way God knows Metrocrest Church. God knows. But he knows something else, too. He knows what he is going to do.

We live in a fallen world full of terrible evil. In fact, that is really probably the biggest objection to Christianity ever. If God is all good he would want to do something about

⁷ Exodus 2:23-25.

evil. If God were all powerful he could and would do something about evil. But evil still remains. Therefore God doesn't exist.

Some have therefore concluded that God is either not all good or not all powerful. Or if he is he is not worth trusting.

Job's real question and his real complaint was God doesn't know. When you get to the end of Job that is really Job's question. Do you know? And what does God do? He riddles him with questions to show Job just exactly how much God knows.

I don't know where you are with that question. But I do want to show you why this isn't the death nail for Christianity.

Remember earlier we saw that Moses was tied to Noah and to creation? Can I give you one more layer of sort of fantasticness about this passage? Ok, looking at a bigger picture. Think about Noah. Deliverance for a family came from a man on a piece of wood. Moses deliverance for a nation came from a baby on a piece of wood. Jesus deliverance for the world, a man on a piece of wood.

What does God know? God knows. He knows exactly where his people are and he knows exactly what he is doing. The difference, however, both Noah and Moses' life were spared by the wood they were on. Jesus' life was taken by the wood that he was on.

You know, why should we trust the God of Christianity? Because when he hears the cries for deliverance, when he remembers the good creation and his covenant with me, when he sees the evil that is occurring he is not an aloof spectator who didn't get involved. Unlike all the other gods, the God of Christianity, he got personally involved in the evil of this world. And looking backwards through the lens of the New Testament we see that all along God knew what he was going to do.

The author of Hebrews puts it this way.

What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him? You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor, putting everything in subjection under his feet.”

Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one

who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.⁸

Why can I trust God? Because he is the God who delivers.

A lot admit, as you have to, as well, he does it in some really fantastic and mysterious ways. He hears us. He remembers his promises to us. He sees our plight and he knows. He knows suffering and he knows how to deliver. He delivered Noah who by faith built an ark. He delivered Moses whose parents were not afraid of the king's edict. He delivers sinners who rest and forsake their own independence by trusting in Jesus.

And as the author of Hebrews says, "He is coming again to deliver the world from its bondage to decay and restore all things, all things to himself."

If you have got your hymnal I want to close by looking at the last stanza of the first hymn that we sang, hymn number four.

How do we respond to this God?

Then come before his presence now,
And banish fear and sadness.
To your Redeemer pay your vow,
And sing with joy and gladness.
Though great distress my soul befell,
The Lord my God does all things well.
To God all praise and glory.

Brothers and sisters, we cry out. But we cry out to a God who sees, hears, remembers and knows, but not from aloof distance. He knows because he has lived it and he will deliver when he is ready, when we are ready and in his perfect time.

⁸ Hebrews 2:6-9, 14-15.