

**“Let My People Go”**  
**Exodus 1:8-14**  
**October 18, 2015**

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**INTRODUCTION:**

Our focus this fall is on our church’s vision, mission and core values, and we’re beginning today to consider our core values. We understand a core value to be a biblical core belief that drives our ministry. It is not simply something we want to be, but something we already are. Our core values express the unique stamp God has placed upon our church. Though churches state things differently, most church vision and mission statements are very similar. The reason is that we have already been told what we are to be and do as a church. It is in the area of core values that we recognize where churches differ from one another. These differences amount to recognizing the strengths God has built into our churches. These strengths will then help define how we go about seeking to achieve our vision and mission. So think of the core values as the unique strengths of a church. We believe that God has given us five: we are a worshiping, welcoming, healing, generous and teaching community.

As we begin with the core value of worship, I want us to focus on the first two chapters of the book of Exodus. The theme of the book is stated in those familiar words that God speaks to Pharaoh through Moses: **“Let my people go, that they may serve me”** (7:16). The word “serve” is a term for worship, which is why we call our corporate worship on Sunday mornings a “worship *service*.” The theme of Exodus is this movement from the harsh service of Pharaoh to the life-giving service of God. Here’s how one commentator summarizes the book.

The book of Exodus moves from slavery to worship, from Israel’s bondage to Pharaoh to its bonding to Yahweh. More particularly, the book moves from the enforced construction of buildings for Pharaoh to the glad and obedient offering of the people for a building for the worship of God. Exodus advances from an oppressive situation in which God’s presence is hardly noted in the text to God’s filling the scene at the completion of the tabernacle (Terence Fretheim, p. 1)

We follow this same pattern from slavery to worship. The story of the exodus is our story too. Let’s look more closely at the deliverance from bondage and into the worship of God, as it is described in these first two chapters.

**I. The Need for Deliverance**

Israel was in bondage to a harsh master. They had come to Egypt almost 400 years before this, when Joseph had ascended to the highest position in the

land. And God had been good to them there, fulfilling his promise to Abraham that his descendants would multiply and become a great nation. But now there was a new Pharaoh in charge, and he became alarmed at the rapid growth of these immigrants. He was afraid that they might ally themselves with one of the invading forces and help in the military defeat of Egypt. So he came up with a plan that seemed initially to be very clever. He would diminish their numbers through hard work at the same time that he would profit from their hard labor. So he set taskmasters over them and forced them to work, building two cities for Pharaoh. But his plan backfired, and it resulted not in diminished numbers of Israelites, but even greater numbers. So he ordered that they be treated cruelly, probably hoping that the combination of hard work and despair due to this cruelty would work to his desired end of reducing their numbers.

When his plan to diminish their numbers through hard work and cruel treatment failed, he resorted to an act of almost unimaginable cruelty. He summoned the Hebrew midwives to himself and commanded them, **“When you serve as midwife to the Hebrew women and see them on the birthstool, if it is a son, you shall kill him”** (1:16). But that too failed when the midwives feared God more than Pharaoh. So his final effort was to enlist the aid of all the Egyptians. **“Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the Nile, but you shall let every daughter live”** (1:22).

Such an edict must have brought great fear into the hearts of all Israelites. Chapter 2 opens with a story of one such parent. We learn later that the name of Moses’ mother is Jochebed. She succeeded in hiding her son for the first three months of his life. But the older and bigger the child, the more difficult it becomes to hide him. So she devised a plan to leave the baby beside the river, a place where detection by a woman would be likely. Women were the ones who usually came to the river, for purposes of bathing or washing, and it was probably her hope that feminine compassion would prevent the cruel murder of her child. As you know, her plan worked even better than she could have imagined. Moses was found by Pharaoh’s daughter, who then hired Jochebed to nurse Moses until he was weaned. But even then, he had to be turned over to Pharaoh’s daughter after the weaning. In a sense, she still lost her child.

What does all this have to do with worship? The answer is that just as Israel had to be delivered from their Egyptian bondage in order to worship and serve God, so we need deliverance in order to worship God. Verses 13-14 of chapter 1 capture well the situation each of us is in. A literal rendering of this sentence would be, **“And the Egyptians cause the sons of Israel to serve with harshness, and make their lives bitter in hard service, in clay, and in brick, and in every kind of service in the field; all their service in which they have served is with harshness.”** Interestingly, the same word that is translated “service” or “serve(d)” in verses 13-14 is used of Israel’s worship of God when God says, “Let my people go, that they may *serve* me.” In other

words, everybody is worshipping someone or something. We can't help but worship. The only question is, "Are we worshipping a master who makes our lives bitter or are we worshipping the true God who truly liberates?" We all need the liberation described in this book, from the service of harsh taskmasters to the service of the true God, from the bondage of Pharaoh to the worship of God. Until you come to worship the true God, you are worshipping someone or something who enslaves you to your destruction and who takes what is most precious to you, your children.

What are some of these things that are worshiped other than the true God and from which we need deliverance? Let me tell you about a man I know (not a member of our church), whose ambition was to become a professor. After years of schooling and some difficulties in finding a position, he finally landed his dream job. Now he is miserable, wants to take his life, and pretty much blames God for the entire fiasco he feels his life has become. He made something other than God ultimate in his life and is now being destroyed. He needs deliverance. At the 2005 Commencement address at Kenyon College, novelist David Foster Wallace said it like this.

There is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship. And the compelling reason for maybe choosing some sort of god...is that pretty much anything else you worship will eat you alive... Worship your body and beauty and sexual allure and you will always feel ugly. And when time and age start showing, you will die a million deaths before they finally grieve you... Worship power, you will end up feeling weak and afraid, and you will need ever more power over others to numb you to your own fear. Worship your intellect, being seen as smart, you will end up feeling stupid, a fraud, always on the verge of being found out.

How can you tell what you are worshipping other than the true God? Ask yourself two questions. First, what do you most fear losing? You worship what you most fear losing, whether it's health, children, fear or any number of otherwise good things. The fear of God alone liberates. All other fears destroy. The second question is similar. What is the thing for which you are willing to sacrifice everything else? To worship someone or something means to give everything to that person. That's why Jesus says that if we are not willing to forsake all to follow him, we cannot be his disciples.

## **II. The Path of Deliverance**

Everything we might worship other than God will destroy us. How are we going to be delivered from this destruction? As in the case of Israel's Egyptian bondage, deliverance must come from outside ourselves. Ultimately, this deliverance comes from God, and we see two ways he brings deliverance. He does so through weak people and through his control over events. God delivers

through weak people so that it will be clear that the deliverance is from him. One of the things commentators point out is the number of women in these first two chapters and the way God uses them to carry out his purposes. Women in this culture were in a position of weakness, and yet they are the ones God uses. He uses the two midwives, Shiphrah and Puah. Midwives were close to the bottom of the social structure in Israel. Not only were they women, but they were barren women in a society that commonly viewed barrenness as a judgment from God. He uses Moses' mother and Pharaoh's daughter.

Moses is the one deliverer of strength in the story. He has received all the benefits Egypt could give to one of its princes, including the best military training. At forty years old, he is at the height of his physical and mental faculties. But this one man we would expect God to use lasts exactly two days on the job of deliverer. Pharaoh hears of his first action of slaying the Egyptian who was mistreating a Jewish slave, and Moses flees in fear for his life. Forty years of training and preparation to be Israel's deliverer, and he lasts two days. He would need to learn humility before he would be able to be used by God, and it took forty years of tending sheep in the wilderness to learn it. God uses weak people to deliver from the bondage of false worship and into true worship to demonstrate that he is the real deliverer.

This encourages me about our own church. We are far from the biggest, most significant church of our city. Your pastor is far from the most able preachers of the city. When I tell people that I'm a pastor, I'm asked next to name the church, after which I'm usually greeted with a blank stare. We're located on a road that few people travel on. When they do, they usually don't see our sign out front. And if they do see our sign, it confuses them because it says that "Altadena Valley Presbyterian Church Meets Here," making some people think that someone else owns this building and lets us meet here. Many see the charming, but traditional architecture of our building, and assume that we're a dying church with just a handful of old people attending. All of that is okay, because God uses weak people. But what we want them to experience should they happen to visit is a place that lifts up the Lord and points to him even in our weakness.

God also delivers through his control over all circumstances. Pharaoh thought he was in control of all things. If he wanted cities built, they were built. If he wanted baby boys killed, they were killed. But a closer reading of the text reveals all kinds of ironies that show that the real power lies with God. For example, Moses is saved when his mother does exactly what Pharaoh had ordered—that male babies be cast into the Nile. Jochebed is paid from the treasury of Pharaoh for doing the very thing she most wanted to do—nursing her baby boy. The thing Pharaoh most fears, an Israelite uprising, he helps to promote by raising and training the man who would lead it. But the biggest irony of all is that the one who seems to get everything he wants, Pharaoh,

ends up getting destroyed, while the ones who seem to have everything against them, the Israelites, get delivered. The people who get liberated and are able to worship God are the ones who seem to have the most difficulties.

### **III. The God of Deliverance**

If you read these two chapters carefully, you will notice that God's name is almost completely absent in these first two chapters until the very end. That's because it often feels like God himself is absent when our troubles multiply. But then at the end of chapter 2 God's name is mentioned repeatedly. Notice the verbs of which God is the subject in the final two verses of the chapter. **"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."** God hears, remembers, sees and knows all about our needs. And for God to know is to act.

God hears of our bondage and acts to deliver us through a new Moses. Jesus is the new Moses. An evil king tried to kill him too by killing all the baby boys in Bethlehem. Just as Moses went into the heart of the kingdom of evil and grew up in Pharaoh's household, so Jesus has gone into the heart of darkness by becoming sin for us. Just as Moses had to become weak in order to be Israel's deliverer, Jesus became weak, even to the point of dying. Just as Pharaoh got everything he wanted but ended up losing, Satan got everything he wanted when Jesus died. But it was this very death that caused him to lose completely. In Luke's Gospel, he reports on something that happened when Jesus went up the mountain to pray and three of his disciples were able to see for just a moment the true glorious nature of Jesus. At this transfiguration, Luke says that Moses and Elijah met with Jesus and spoke of his departure. The Greek word that is translated "departure" is *exodos*. Jesus led a new exodus out of bondage and into the worship of God.

### **CONCLUSION:**

The application is simple. We are called to trust our new Moses as he delivers us from the enslaving worship of whatever we worship and into the worship that brings life and joy. We cannot deliver ourselves. We are just like that basket into which Moses was placed. It was a rudderless, powerless raft that would only drift where the current would take it. Baby Moses was completely powerless, just like us. But just as God took him right where he needed to go, God knows how to lead us out of bondage. I invite you to follow this new Moses, our Lord Jesus, leaving all to follow him.