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Exodus 1:1-22

God's Exodus People:

Hope in a Hostile Story

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Website: The rescue story found in Genesis continues in the book of Exodus. In Exodus 1:1-22, God's people have multiplied and filled the land of Egypt, but the evil Pharaoh is plotting to destroy them. God rescues his people not through worldly strength or power but two humble Jewish midwives who trust in God and obey him. Listen to learn more as we kick off our new series, *God's Exodus People*.

God's Exodus People: Hope in a Hostile Story

I love stories. I don't consider myself a natural story teller, but I wish I were. Do you ever have a friend who tells a story and it's just spell binding, your so drawn in, it's so interesting, and by the end, you realize it's the story of your friend tying her shoelaces? I'm not that kind of storyteller, but I do love good stories.

Today we're inundated with stories. When you hear a radio ad or watch a tv commercial, that's a story. The story goes a bit like this. Feeling depressed? Sad? Anxious? We have the solution! We have the fix to your need. For only 17 payments of \$32.99 each, we'll give you this stainless steal back-scratching sport. With this back-scratching spork, you will feel better, be happier, and be enriched as an individual, but we'll have your money.

Movies take the same concept and expand it to 90 minutes. A protagonist, the hero, is confronted with an inciting incident, with conflict, with a need they have to face. They're forced to either enter into the story to overcome the challenge, or to run away. But once the character chooses to go forward, the story begins to unfold as the hero encounters conflict, rising action, overcomes, has momentary rest, and then is confronted with more conflict, building and building to the ultimate climax of the movie, followed by the resolution. This is what we call a story or narrative arc.

One of the reasons I like The Lord of The Rings, Star Wars, and the Marvel Universe is they take standalone stories and show how they fit into a larger narrative, into a story of epic conflict and scale. Now imagine for a moment, you're a character in your favorite story. This could be your favorite book, movie, or tv commercial. Just imagine you're now in the story! For me, that means I have a lightsaber, a ring that turns me invisible, and I shoot webs out of my wrists. How would you feel in your story? Excited? Panicked? Hopeful? Wondering if the story will play out for you as it plays out for Luke Skywalker or Frodo?

Today I want to tell you about a grand story arc that you're a part of, a story much bigger than your favorite tv commercial, your favorite movie, your favorite book. This is the **story of everything** and it's found in the pages of the Bible. This story is imagined by God, written by him, and set in motion, all by him.

I. The story of everything begins in Genesis.

God is the author of everything that's happened since before day one, not chance, not evolution, not aliens from another universe. God wrote this story and you and I are experiencing a little bit of it right now. Today, I'm going to give you an overview of how the story began. Genesis means "beginning." We need to understand the beginning of the story so that we understand chapter two, the book of Exodus.

A. God starts the story really good. (Gen 1-2)

God created everything perfect and good. Animals and people and the whole world was at peace with itself. God called everything he made "good" but when he made the first humans, he called them "very good" (1:31). We were so good he gave us the task of going out and making more good things, more good creations. In **Genesis 1:28b**, God said, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it..." (NIV®) In other words, get out there and fill my creation with my goodness and beauty, men and women made in my image (1:26-27). But something bad happens...

B. We introduce hostility into the story. (Gen 3-11)

The serpent enters the garden of Eden, Satan comes to paradise to tempt the first two people, Adam and Eve. They believed for a moment that God might not be good or have their best interests at heart. In that moment, they disobey God, and everything falls into sin and brokenness.

We, not God, introduced hostility into our relationship with God and with other people. The consequence of our sin is death. We were supposed to live forever, but now we die. **Genesis 3:19** says, “By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.” (NIV®) We turn to dust because we disobeyed.

Chapters 1-2 of Genesis describe the peace and joy we had before the world fell into sin, then **chapters 3-11** describe what the world’s been like since then. The story gets pretty bad. There’s a lot of conflict, people murder each other, men abuse women, everything is broken. We can’t rescue ourselves, we can’t evolve into a new story. *This is all because we introduced hostility into our relationship with God.*

C. God introduces a plan to rescue us. (Gen 12-50)

There’s good news, even when men and women are receiving the consequences of their sin, God gives us hope. God shares the **proto-euangelion**, the first gospel, the first good-news. Right before Adam is told he will die and return to dust, God promises one of Eve’s descendants will defeat the Serpent, Satan, once and for all. **Genesis 3:15** says:

And I will put enmity
between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
he will crush your head,
and you will strike his heel.” (NIV®)

So one of Eve’s descendants will defeat the serpent. Skip forward to Genesis chapter 12 and we meet a man named Abram (who God eventually renames Abraham). When we meet Abraham, he seems special, and we wonder, is he the one who will crush the serpent? No, but God promises that it is through Abraham’s family that a rescuer, the serpent-crusher, will come (Genesis 12:1-3).

Abraham has a son, **Isaac**, and Isaac has a son **Jacob**, and Jacob has **twelve sons**. Just like God renamed Abraham, God renames Jacob to Israel. It’s Jacob’s twelve sons that become the twelve tribes of Israel. One of Jacob’s sons, Joseph, is stolen away to Egypt where God raises him to a place of prominence in the government. A great famine comes on Israel and his sons. God uses Joseph to providentially spare them by bringing them to Egypt. At first things go well, but before long, the people of Israel will need to be rescued.

D. Application: Do you want to be rescued?

Before we continue the rescue story, I got to ask, are you interested in being rescued? Throughout the book of Exodus, the people of Israel wrestle with whether or not they really want to be rescued. The only way to want to be rescued, is become convinced that you need to be rescued. That there’s something wrong.

At the beginning of every good story, the protagonist is confronted with conflict and a choice. He or she can either go forward into the story, or they can ignore the problem and fade away. We love Frodo because he decided to enter into the story. But what about all the other Hobbits in the shire? What about Hobbit Larry who loves to fish? Why don't we hear his story? It's because Larry doesn't believe he needs to be rescued from Mordor and the All-Seeing Eye. But Frodo discovers the problem and acts. Do you realize you need to be rescued? Do you want to be rescued? You have to enter into the story to be rescued.

II. Our rescue-story continues in Exodus. (Exodus 1:1-12)

Our modern name for this book, Exodus, comes from the Greek translation of its name, *exodos*, which means "a going out" or "departure." When we're rescued, we're pulled out of the black water, out of the burning house, out of the quicksand. God is about to pull his people out from their physical captivity to show them they need release from spiritual captivity.

A. God's people have multiplied and filled the land of Egypt. (Ex. 1:1-7)

When Israel's family arrives in Egypt, there only 70 people, so what do they do? They obey God's **Genesis one command** to multiply, working towards the fulfillment of God's **Genesis 12 promise** to make Abraham's descendants into a great nation. It's through this family the rescuer will come.

But at first, nothing happens, year after year. 100-200-300 years pass. In Genesis, 15:13-14 God promised Abraham his descendants would be enslaved in a foreign land for 400 years. They know something is coming, something is going to happen. God is going to show up.

Songs also tell stories. Have you ever listened to a power ballad? It starts slow and ebbing, and then builds to a loud, passionate, chorus with drums, guitars, and sometimes choirs.¹ *We Are The Champions* by Queen is a theatrical power ballad.²

*I've paid my dues
Time after time.
I've done my sentence
But committed no crime.
And bad mistakes –
I've made a few.
I've had my share of sand kicked in my face (*building!)
But I've come through.*

(And I need just go on and on, and on, and on)

*We are the champions, my friends,
And we'll keep on fighting 'til the end...*

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sentimental_ballad#Power_ballads (accessed 12/15/16)

² <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/queen/wearethechampions.html> (accessed 12/15/16)

Exodus chapter one is that loud up chorus. God has finally arrived! But so have God's enemy.

B. Pharaoh is determined to enslave and destroy God's people. (Ex. 1:8-14)

The opening of Exodus **parallels** the opening of Genesis. In both, people are blessed and doing well, then an evil figure comes to destroy them. In Genesis, it's the snake, Satan, and in Exodus it's Pharaoh, who embodies evil. He hates the Israelites, he's hostile towards them. *Why is that?* When Joseph came to Egypt, it's likely that a non-Egyptian Pharaoh was sitting on the throne. From about 1700-1500 BC, the **Hyksos** ruled Egypt, but they weren't native Egyptians; they actually came from a semitic background like Joseph, which might be one of the reasons he was promoted.

Eventually the native Egyptians pushed the Hyksos out, and you could see very quickly why the new Pharaohs would be anti-Israel; because the semites, the Jewish people, were aligned with the old kingdom. In v. 10, Pharaoh is wary the Israelites will rise up, perhaps with the old Hyksos kingdom, and overthrow him. So to deal with them, he sets them to work making mortar and brick. This **parallels** the curse in Genesis, when God cursed all people with death. What is death symbolized by? **Dirt! Dust! Mud! Mortar!** *Pharaoh is driving the people of God into the dirt, into mud, into death!*

He's doing this because he's hostile to God. In fact, I think he views himself as a God. In the ESV, v. 8 says, "Now there arose a new king over Egypt." Notice the posture of Pharaoh. He rises to power. He has authority over others. He thinks himself to be tough and powerful and strong, but he's about to find out he's not God. The first half of Exodus is really a **power-narrative**, a conflict between God and Pharaoh. God proves himself time and time again to hold the true power, and he does so in surprising ways.

C. God uses the faith of two ordinary women to defeat Pharaoh (Exodus 1:15-22)

Pharaoh commands the Hebrew midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, to kill every baby boy. The Hebrews probably needed more than just two midwives, so these two may be the leaders of their midwives guilds. To be a midwife in that culture, was much more than just helping the mom give birth in the delivery. Midwives gave input on conception, pregnancy, birth, and caring for the child. Here are two women who are supposed to give life, and Pharaoh tells them to take it. I spoke with our very own doula this week; she told me she can't imagine taking the life of a child she's trying to help give life too. The serpent's plan was to turn eternal life into eternal death; that's always his plan, to turn life into death, and Pharaoh wants that as well.

So what do Shiphrah and Puah do? They obey God and not man. Verse 17 says the midwives "feared God". This fear is a reverent fear, it "relates to honor, respect, and awe."³ The Hebrew midwives know Pharaoh is powerful, but they know God is more powerful. Pharaoh can take their lives, but God can take their souls. Pharaoh rises up in Egypt, he dominates over the land, but God's footstool is the world. Pharaoh hasn't realized it yet, but through the book of Exodus, he's going to realize he's a **very tiny big man**.

The Saturday before Thanksgiving, my Crossfit gym had their annual Thanksgiving Throwdown, which is a workout competition for teams of two. At this competition, I got really pumped up and excited because I beat my personal record. I "cleaned" (aka. lifted to my chest) **225 pounds**. For me, that's a lot of weight. I walked

³ Mounce's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words. H3707 (yra)

around that day feeling pretty big. Then last week I saw a video of a man lifting **465 pounds** above his head. Suddenly, I didn't feel so big anymore. That's what's going to happen to Pharaoh. So what does this mean?

D. Application #1: God wrote our story and has all the power.

I hope as we go through Exodus we'll realize, like the midwives, where true power lies. It's not in me, I'm not that big and strong, but God is. He's the one who rescues his people from Egypt, he defeats Pharaoh, and he is still saving anyone who trusts him today. On my best day, I'm tiny. I can't compare to the creator, to the one who writes the big story of everything. That's the first step to realizing we need rescue. We have to realize no matter how strong we may feel, we are not God. He has the power. He wrote the story.

E. Application #2: We can find our place in God's story by faith.

If you don't find your place in God's story, you will search for it in other places. Right now we live in a time of media over-saturation, of story over-saturation. We can subscribe to Netflix, Hulu, Disney, HBO, Stars, Amazon Prime and the list goes on and on. This is because we all hunger to be a part of something bigger than ourselves; and so we look for our place in these stories. Which story are you trying to find your place in? Maybe it's television, film, or tv-commercials. I really enjoy Star Wars, but I should never believe that I'm truly a part of that story. If I do, I'm putting my faith in the wrong place.

Maybe the story you're finding your place in has nothing to do with entertainment. Instead, you're looking to find your place in a love story, a family story, a career story, an education story, a success story. We certainly have roles to place in these stories, but only as we recognize we're a part of a greater redemptive narrative, the grand narrative, the story of everything found in the Bible and written by God.

As we go through Exodus, we'll see that Pharaoh believes everyone is a part of his story. God gives him plenty of chances to realize this is not the case, but over and over again Pharaoh hardens his heart. He doesn't want to believe the story is not about him. This mistake leads to the destruction of Egypt, the death of his firstborn son, and his own spiritual ruin. Don't take the path of Pharaoh. Take the path of the Hebrew midwives who put their **faith** in God and find their role to play. God uses their faith to save many lives. I want to be a part of the story like they are. *We find our place as we have faith in God and trust that he knows our best place in the story.* That's what faith is, believing the story is not about us, and finding our place in God's rescue story.

F. Application #3: When the story has conflict, we can have hope.

Notice how the first chapter emphasizes how God's people multiply and flourish. It says they multiplied greatly three different times (v. 7, 12, 20). In the face of hostility, God still grows his people. If you're facing hostility at work or school or anywhere in-between because of your faith in Jesus, God can use that. In *Exodus for You*, by Tim Chester, he tells how the church has grown in the face of hostility.

In the 1970s, President Mengistu in Ethiopia implemented what was called the Red Terror. 1.5 million people died and church buildings were closed down. When Mengistu fell, no one was sure

what would remain of the church. But Christians had been meeting secretly in homes, and the church had not only survived but grown.⁴

G. God is the hero of the story and he has come to rescue us.

Ultimately, the story of everything is a rescue story, but it's not about us. We're not the hero of the story, God is. God is the hero! We're the damsels in distress. We're not Mario. We're Princess Peach. We're not Peter Parker in *Spiderman*. We're Mary Jane Watson. We're not Westley in *The Princess Bride*, we're Princess Buttercup. The role is reversed in *Enchanted*, we're not Giselle, we're Robert who gets captured by the witch and needs to be rescued by his princess.⁵

But God doesn't shame us for our need, he loves us, and he's come to rescue us. He gives us hope in a hostile story. God is going to rescue his people Israel from captivity in Egypt in the book of Exodus, and wherever you're held captive, God wants to rescue you. Are you held captive to your career, your money, your relationships, your body, your food, your...? You fill in the blank. God has come to set you free. He does this by freeing you from sin. Sin is our first problem. It's why we need rescue.

God rescues by sending his one and only Son Jesus Christ, our knight in armor, to pay the penalty for our sins. Just like those two Hebrew midwives put their lives on the line for the unborn babies, Jesus put his life on the line long ago for us. He was wounded in the battle, wounded by the snake. He dies. He tastes dirt. He tastes dust, mud and mortar, the texture of death. But then he rises again. He lives! He rises far above Pharaoh to sit enthroned in the heavens. Now whoever believes in him will receive eternal life (John 3:16).

A story arc has an inciting incident, rising conflict, and high point called the climax. It's the peak of the story. Jesus is the peak of God's story, and yet, he invites us to join him on the peak. He pulls us out of our sin and captivity so that we can join him at the very top of the story. The Bible doesn't call us a damsel in distress, but we are called the Bride of Christ. Do you want to be his Bride? Do you want to be rescued? *God is the hero of the story and he has come to rescue us.*

Preview: I hope you'll come back this Saturday at 5pm for our Christmas Eve service. Bring a friend.

Jude 24-25 To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen. (NIV®)

⁴ God's Word For You: Exodus. Page 16. See also https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qey_Shibir (accessed 12/15/2016)

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Damsel_in_distress (accessed 12/15/2016)