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Exodus 1:1-2:10 – The Question of God’s Faithfulness

- I. Introduction: Raising the Issue
 - A. How does someone gain your trust? What does a person have to do for you to trust them?
 1. Normally, we learn to trust people as we see them follow through on commitments they make.
 2. We look for integrity in a person. If they lie or don’t follow through on commitments, what circumstances lead them to lie or drop the ball?
 3. We watch to see if they can keep their word. We watch to see if they tell the truth and keep things confidential.
 4. We examine to see where their alliances are. Who are they loyal to and for what reason?
 5. Conclusion: We trust people by looking at their track record of love.
 - B. **Fallen Condition Focus:** Our suffering, hurt, pain, and worry often drive us from trusting God because we think our works commend us to God.
 1. When it comes to God, our failure to trust Him is usually not because we have no evidence of him coming thru on his promises. Certainly, for some of us, this is the case.
 2. But, normally, when we do not trust God it is either because we are sinfully rebellious seeking to live independently of his promises or because we have not learned to apply God’s faithfulness to our lives.
 3. Normally, we fail to trust God because we attempt to operate in a work-righteousness mindset, arrogantly thinking that our works can commend us to God.
 - a. We get prideful towards others when we think we do well, or we get ashamed and are crushed with guilt when we fail.
 - b. Both of these are errors because they trust in human works to gain God’s approval.
 - c. A works righteousness mindset causes us to expect God to bring us happy blessings all the time. We begin to think that God owes us when we obey, and so suffering makes us angry at God.
 - d. A works righteousness mindset causes us to doubt whether or not God will come to our rescue when we think we haven’t earned his support. We worry when we don’t trust God to provide.
 - e. A works righteousness mindset turns us from being satisfied in Christ alone because it turns obedience to God into a means for something else.
- II. Organizational Sentence: Today’s text contains three parts of a story which each teach us something about who God is and how he relates to us.
 - A. Although our text today is a story all by itself, it serves to introduce the book of Exodus by setting the scene and giving us the major characters.

1. Israel
 2. Pharaoh
 3. Moses
- B. Our text today depends heavily on an understanding of Genesis and the stories recorded there.
1. God creates man in his image to rule over the earth, care for it, and multiply in it to live in communion with God creatively.
 2. Adam sins, bringing shame into all relationships and bringing corruption to creation.
 3. God promises that this corruption and its leader, the serpent, will not overcome those who trust in him and live righteously.
 4. God judges evil and protects his chosen people in the flood in order to again commission humanity to be fruitful and multiply.
 5. But, very quickly, God again focuses his love upon a line of descendants in response to sin.
 6. God calls Abram out of pagan idolatry into faithful obedience and promises Abraham that he will make Abraham's descendants into a nation that will bless the whole earth and restore what has been lost due to sin.
 7. God promises that this nation will live in the promise land which is like the Garden of Eden.
 8. Abraham and his descendants are repeatedly disobedient, little in faith, and wicked in action, but God prospers them over and over again.
 9. God sends Jacob, Abraham's grandson, into Egypt to protect this chosen people from a famine in the Promise Land.
 10. Genesis ends with God's people living in a foreign land, but with one of their own ruling in one of the most powerful nations of the world. Though they are blessed, they are not experiencing the fullness of God's promises to them.

III. **God graciously elects:** God prospers a wicked chosen people. (Ex. 1.1-7)

- A. Exodus begins with a conjunction. It literally reads, 'And these are the names of the sons of Israel.' That Exodus begins with a conjunction indicates that to the book is to be read in conjunction with what has come before in Genesis.
- B. Therefore, the survey of Genesis was a vital context in understanding the setting of our book. More observations must be made.
1. Israel has come to Egypt by God's hand to deliver them from the famine in the Promised Land (Genesis 45.7-8, 50.20).
 2. God's promises to Israel included prosperity *in the land of Canaan*, not in Egypt. So, this is not an ideal situation even though God is using it to multiply Israel.
 3. Jacob's 12 sons are wicked. *God chose a wicked people*, not a perfect people. Joseph alone stands out as a righteous person among Jacob's sons, although they do seem to repent and walk by faith later in life.
 - a. Reuben slept with his father's concubine (Genesis 35.22).
 - b. Simeon and Levi deceived Hamor and Shechem and then slaughtered them and their family (Genesis 34).
 - c. Judah slept with his son's wife Tamar (Genesis 38). This story was placed here intentionally so that the reader will see the difference between Joseph and Judah. Yet, God chooses Judah to be the father of David and Jesus.

4. Despite the fact that Israel came to Egypt 70 in number, God prospered them and multiplied their number. This multiplication should be understood as a fulfillment to God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12. God told Abraham that he would make him a great nation! Even though Abraham and his descendents were sinners, and even though they are not in the land, God is faithful to his promise to multiply them into a great nation. They are a people, and they belong to God.

IV. God sustains in suffering: God's faithfulness to fulfill his promises is threatened. (Ex. 1.8-22)

- A. At some point, and we don't know for sure, though it is most likely at 1730 B.C or 1580 B.C., a new Pharaoh arose who did not have a connection to or loyalty with Joseph and the Hebrew people. At this point, the slavery began.
- B. Moses, the author, begins this book by showing that Pharaoh is opposed to God and his people. Pharaoh, who represents Egypt as a nation, sets himself against God and his people by imposing slavery and eventually, mandating death to the children. Pharaoh and Egypt are now seen as a threat to God's fulfillment of his promises to make Israel a great nation.
- C. However, we see right off the bat, that no one can oppose God. He is the sovereign ruler of the universe, and what Pharaoh intends for destruction, God uses for the multiplication of Israel. The more Israel was oppressed, the more God multiplied them. This led Egypt to fear Israel and its strength.
- D. This fear led them to oppress Israel more, making their labor bitter and hard. This key phrase in verse 14 is later picked up on in the Passover ritual where Israel is to eat bitter herbs to remember their painful toil in Egypt.
- E. When slavery did not seem to be working for Pharaoh, he turned to murder. He called up the leaders of the midwives, and ordered them to kill all male babies born to Hebrew women.
 1. Some think the truth of verse 15 is questionable because the names of the two women mentioned are most likely Hebrew names. Many think it odd that Pharaoh would tell Hebrew women to murder Hebrew children. Also, it seems odd that there are two women only given responsibility to be midwives for thousands upon thousands of Hebrews. However, most likely, these two women were the superintendents of all midwives and so they were given charge over all other midwives who were to carry out these orders.
 2. If these women were Hebrews, then their fear of God was an expression of faith in God's promises to Abraham. If these women were Egyptian, then this is an example of God's blessing of Abraham coming to the nations already!
- F. When it became clear to Pharaoh that these women were not carrying out his order, these women were called to account for their disobedience. They answer Pharaoh in a mocking way, claiming that the Hebrew women are too vigorous. This is simultaneously an insult on Egypt, claiming that the Hebrews are better, and an insult to Pharaoh in that it is almost as if the midwives are playing dumb.
- G. God rewarded the faith of these women by giving them families of their own.
 1. Notice the progression here: God makes promises to Abraham → the midwives trust in these promises → they obey in the fear of God → they are blessed

2. Notice that God first graciously promises, man responds in faith, faith always results in obedience even when there is a threat of persecution or suffering, and obedience is rewarded.
 3. This is a common situation in the Old Testament.
- H. After attempting to carry out murder through the midwives, Pharaoh extends his edict to murder Hebrew male children to all Egyptians, so that all of the nation can murder Hebrew baby boys.
- I. The main point to take away from this section is that God's promises are under threat, but that he is sustaining his people through the suffering. Surely, some Hebrews were killed. This was a difficult time. All of the people are enslaved, and many are dying. Later we will see that the Hebrews are crying out in their suffering. God is still with them in their suffering, and he is even using their suffering to prosper them into a great nation. God sustains in suffering. He is faithful and will not forsake his promises.
- V. **God faithfully saves:** God provides a savior for his people ensuring that he is faithful. (Ex. 2.1-10)
- A. If chapter 1.8-22 established the threat to the fulfillment of God's promises, if it caused us to question God's faithfulness, then chapter 2.1-10 is clearly meant to show God's faithfulness in providing a savior.
 - B. Remember, Israel receives the book of Exodus after they began wandering in the wilderness and before they entered the Promise Land. They already know who Moses is and have been led by him out of Egypt. This narrative accomplishes a number of things.
 1. First, it establishes that God is faithful and that he sovereignly worked through extraordinary circumstances to bring about a leader who would deliver Israel. This narrative shows that God is faithful.
 2. Second, this narrative shows that Moses is God's man. If you read Numbers, and even parts of Exodus, you will find Israel groaning and complaining and even challenging Moses' leadership as THE mediator for Israel. This narrative shows God's unique setting apart of Moses for this role. Notice the similarity to Jesus in this respect.
 - C. Moses was born as a descendant of Levi. His brother Aaron and his sister Miriam were both older than him, but they are not mentioned here. Later we will learn that the Levites will be the caretakers of the tabernacle and Temple, while the descendants of Aaron specifically will serve as the priests.
 - D. Moses could not be hidden forever from the Egyptians. At a certain point, it became too risky to keep him without him being discovered. So, like many women do today, she planned to give him a safe home that she could not provide by putting him where someone could find him that could take care of him. This was a common practice that was considered a way of placing a child in God's providential hands.
 1. It says that Moses' mother made, literally, an ark for him. The readers of Exodus who have read Genesis would immediately pick up on the repeated word and situation.
 2. In the same way that God brought Noah and his family through the flood in an ark, so too God brought Moses through the river into the hands of one who would care for him.

- E. The irony of this passage stands out. Pharaoh and the Egyptians oppose God and seek to enslave and murder his people. However, all of their plans to destroy Israel are thwarted within the very house of Pharaoh. Pharaoh himself ends up providing for and cultivating the very man who would destroy him.
 - 1. Pharaoh's daughter takes pity on Moses.
 - 2. Immediately, Miriam shows up and coincidentally asks if she can help the princess care for the child by finding a woman to nurse and care for the boy.
 - 3. In God's kindness and providence, Moses is taken back to his mother to be nurtured. Furthermore, she is paid to raise her own son!
- F. Probably when Moses was too old to nurse, he was brought into Pharaoh's house to be raised like other royal children. He was educated and trained to be a royal leader. Ironically, this would not be for Egypt.
- G. Finally, we find that Pharaoh's daughter names Moses a Hebrew name which comes from the word for 'to draw out,' since she drew him out of the river. Ironically, this name also prophetically looks forward to Moses drawing Israel out of Egypt.
- H. The point of this narrative, as mentioned before, is to clearly highlight God's control over Israel's plight to show that he is raising up a man to save Israel.

VI. Message of the Text and Proposition:

- A. Message of the Text: Despite the opposition and suffering Israel encounters, God's people must believe that God is faithful to his promises given to those he has graciously chosen.
 - 1. What does this text teach us today? How do we apply it now? First we must see the gospel connections.
 - 2. This passage teaches us the gospel in shadow form. We see here God's gracious election, evil that calls God's goodness in to question, and God's power to save by providing a savior.
 - a. The Gospel of Matthew especially picks up on the link between Moses and Jesus at the beginning of his Gospel.
 - b. Jesus is born at a time when King Herod is killing Israelite children. He miraculously escapes because of God's protection.
 - c. Matthew notes that Jesus' parents took him down to Egypt to escape Herod, but also to fulfill what the prophet said, "Out of Egypt I have called my son."
 - d. Jesus is also seen as the second Moses, especially when he gives the Sermon on the Mount.
 - 3. We also see in this passage that there are powers opposed to God and his people. In the same way that Pharaoh and Egypt opposed God's people through slavery and murder/death, so too Satan and his demons seek to enslave us with the power of sin and death. Before we are born again, we are enslaved to sin and this sin results in death. In the same way that Israel needed deliverance from their oppressors, we need deliverance from the power of sin.
 - 4. We also see that God's people encounter suffering. Suffering always raises the question of God's faithfulness. Hasn't God promised blessing? Why then are we being persecuted? Don't we belong to God? Why does God allow us to be enslaved and put to death?

5. Israel was meant to read this text and remember that God is faithful to his promise to make them a great nation. What has God promised us in Christ?
 - a. Forgiveness: There is no condemnation for those who in Christ (Rom. 8.1).
 - When we are racked by guilt, we must remember the sufficiency of Christ's payment for sin on the cross.
 - This reminder of God's grace in Christ frees us from guilt and empowers obedience.
 - b. Eternal life/Joy: Jesus came that we might have life, and life abundantly (John 10.10).
 - When we fear death, or anything, we must remember that God gives us hope that we will be glorified and brought into his presence.
 - Death is not an end for us, but a refinement that will result in our glorification.
 - When we are bored, we must remember that there is joy in knowing God and that we can know him through faith in Jesus Christ.
 - c. His presence: Jesus died, rose again, and ascended to heaven that the Holy Spirit might be sent to dwell in us to bring us comfort (Romans 5:5).
 - When we grieve over loss, when we hurt from others who injure us, when we are alone, we must remember that God dwells in us and promises never to leave us.
 - We cannot despair because there is no where we can go and nothing we can do to flee from God's presence or to have God's presence removed.
 - d. Justice: The cross ensures that God will punish sin, for he has exalted Christ as king and judge (Ephesians 1:15-23, Romans 12:19, Revelation 19:11-21).
 - When we become bitter and angry at a wrong done to us, or at injustice in the world, we must remember that Jesus is coming again as the exalted king with all authority to judge heaven and earth.
 - We cannot seek vengeance. God is faithful to his promises.
 - e. His love as Father: Jesus came so that we too might be called children of God (John 1:12-13; Ephesians 1:3-14).
 - When we become insecure and alone, we must remember that we are beloved children of God.
 - We can live without trying to gain love and acceptance from others because God has first loved us, and his love satisfies because it is not conditional upon our beauty, wealth, education, class, etc.

B. Proposition: All of God's children must trust that God is faithful to his promises given to us in Christ even amidst costly suffering.

1. We must learn to preach the gospel to ourselves so that we can be reminded of God's faithfulness.
2. This story is meant to call us to see that God is faithful. If he has been faithful in the past, we can trust he will be faithful in the future.
3. God has a track record of loving faithfulness. Trust in him.
4. Not only must we trust in God, but we must trust in him alone. It is easy to say that we trust in God while still putting faith in other things to help us deal with pain. God wants us to find our sole refuge in him.

VII: Other important points:

A. God is sovereign.

1. From the beginning of Exodus, we see God controlling all things. Even when things are bad, God is working according to his purposes.
2. We see this in God bringing Israel to Egypt, God multiplying Israel, and God preserving Moses' life to be a savior.

B. God elects.

1. Just as in Genesis, we see that God chooses and then calls out his people.
2. Abraham did not choose God. He was chosen and then could do nothing but follow. He did disobey many times, but his life was characterized by faith so much that he is seen as a model of faith in the New Testament.
3. Israel as a nation did not choose God. Their fathers were not good men, but men who repeatedly threatened the fulfillment of God's promises with their disobedience and evil. God is gracious and chooses sinners.