

*Sermon on Exodus 1, 2:23-25 by Jonathan Shradar*

Imagine that you are courtside at the game of the century. It has been a game that seems to have been hyped for generations. One team clearly dominant, with the strongest players, seemingly an unstoppable force. They are described with words like “vigorous,” “exceedingly strong,” “mighty.” There is even a sense in the stands that the opposition is outnumbered and everything is primed to go their way... as if they had been living a charmed, promised existence and just needed to take the court to demonstrate their perceived dominance.

Then the whistle blows and the game begins. From the moment the ball is tipped the game goes in the direction opposite of what is expected. The opposition owns the court, as if the star team is merely a tool in their toolbelt to take the championship. In spite of the strength, even if only perceived, they are lorded over by the team with a better strategy and weapons at their disposal.

There is no regrouping at halftime and by the end of the second half the floor is covered in sweat and the game has become a bitter enterprise of losing... leaving the players once called strong to wish there was a mercy rule.

This is our story today... a people described as strong, embittered and longing for change, for a new situation. It is part of the old, old, story of redemption that shows us something of our own circumstances and whether or not we should believe the hype!

Here is the big idea for today from Exodus 1 & 2: **Even the strong are captives in need of God’s grace.**

These three verses are what we will cling to this morning.

**Exodus 2:23-25** “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. [24] And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. [25] God saw the people of Israel—and God knew.” (ESV)

“Old, old, story...” as we transition into Summer, having just finished a study of 1 Corinthians, we wanted to turn the clock back a bit and be reminded of the work of redemption from the old, old, story told in Scripture. Many of us will know these stories from children’s church, or from Hollywood attempts to enhance the accounts. Truth is that this old, old, story tells the most important story of all - that if Jesus.

So it is to Exodus that we turn and will camp for several weeks, moving from captivity, to wilderness, and the persistent hope in God in spite of the messed up people he calls his own! Together we will see Jesus, the provision of cool water in the desert, the light shining the way, the unfolding grace of God for those in desperate need.

This book is believed to be written by Moses, one of the hero-types we will encounter, and it flows from Genesis which ends with the death of Joseph, the technicolor dreamer that rose through the ranks in Egypt, eventually saving the family that sold him into slavery, all because God has a bigger plan.

And from a clan of 70 that moved to Egypt, the people had followed the earliest of commands from God, to be fruitful and multiply. Even in the first two chapters of this “exit” story, we encounter slavery, infanticide, rescue, escape, oppression and cries for help.

For our purposes today we want to recognize the “Strong” Situation the people find themselves in, the Saving Solution that is revealed and then what it means for those that are on the far end of Exodus, the Saved Situation.

### **1) Strong Situation**

All of the sons of Israel, the tribes, have been in Egypt after the great famine that drove them there to meet Joseph and have hope and harbor... as one generation died, (7) “the people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong so that the land was filled with them.”

We enter a scene that is brimming with the people of Israel. Exceedingly strong... so much so that when a new king ascends to the throne in Egypt he determines to change their circumstance from people freely participating in the culture to a people forced to work, given heavy burdens, building great cities, because they were “too many and too mighty.”

The more they were oppressed though, the more they multiplied and spread all over the kingdom. This rightfully freaks out the Egyptians, who live in dread of the people of Israel. From being heavy burdened to being owned, the people are made slaves not because of their weakness but because of their strength.

Pharaoh orders infanticide, the murder of all the male children at birth... but again the Hebrew women are called vigorous, having a strength that prevents the midwives from carrying out the order... If they are so strong then, just discard the sons into the Nile...

As the story of the exit from Egypt is setting up, we get a sense that here is the land teeming with Israelites, and they have not only numbers but the strength to be feared. As if they could rise up and throw off the oppressors if they just had the right leader to organize them and set things in motion.

Moses is born into this environment and his mother is careful to protect him and build him a basket boat and gently send him down the Nile, where he will be discovered and cared for by the daughter of Pharaoh.

- Important character
- Could this be a savior?
- Is the murder of an Egyptian the spark?
- Runs away in fear

Years of continued slavery, with the death of the king comes only continued oppression and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and are crying out for help.

From mighty, feared, and vigorous to bitter and groaning under burden in just a few paragraphs of the story. Their once “strong situation” leaves them enslaved and in need of a solution.

As I was studying this week, it was the strength of the people of Israel that I kept coming back to. Previously reading Exodus I don’t think I ever payed much attention to it because I knew where the story was heading and what was going to happen.

But here is a people that goes from privileged to slavery in a generation... and still they are described as strong. Their strength actually becomes a liability. A force to be reckoned with but captives all at the same time.

What a picture this is of the human condition. Even in our day... those we see as powerful, as succeeding... captive to something. What is a physical reality in Egypt is a spiritual reality today. We become too big to fail, living a charmed existence, but remain slaves, embittered by the burden and groaning for something more. With each increasing accomplishment we are driven deeper into slavery.

Like a spectator to this story, we expect all we need is some motivation and we can cast off the captors; all the more stuck in need. Strong isn’t what we think it is.

The story of Israel is the story of humanity. The setting might be different and the specifics unique, but in the grand story of redemption, it is true.

### **Even the strong are captives in need of God’s grace.**

This is where God begins to work. At the bottom. When what is described as strong has run out of rope. When all we can do is cry out for help.

## **2) Saving Solution**

**Exodus 2:23-25** “...the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. [24] And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. [25] God saw the people of Israel—and God knew.” (ESV)

The hero the people need is God himself. It was not their strength he noticed. It was not their numbers. It was not their potential... it was their need. He heard them, and it was his promise that sparks what is to come. SPOILER ALERT - they are brought out of slavery out of Egypt! It takes two chapters to get to the main character of Exodus but here he is. The God who hears and remembers. He remembers his covenant of grace, his unbreakable promise of salvation. The covenant is God's love relationship with his people — his eternal promise that he will be their God and they will be his people.

It is the promise God gave to Abraham that all nations would be blessed through him (Gen. 15: 17:1-8). Amazingly, one of the things God promised when he made this covenant is that he would deliver Abraham's descendants from the house of bondage:"

**Genesis 15:13-14** "Then the LORD said to Abram, "Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. [14] But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions." (ESV)

We read these words in Exodus two and hopefully what happens is in our minds and hearts something is triggered... 'This is how it is unfolding! This is the moment.' A people in need, crying out. God hears and he remembers... not their sin or anything they once did for him... he remembers his promise.

"Even if his people had forgotten this covenant promise, God still remembered." -Ryken

His grace is the saving solution for the captives.

But this is not merely the unfolding of what is exclusively Israel's story... this is the unfolding of redemption... for all captives in need of God's grace, in need of his hearing, seeing and knowing them.

What began in a garden with the promise God gave to Eve that her offspring would crush the devil and all his evil works (Gen. 3:15), has moved into Egypt, and will follow the people to the wilderness, to Sinai and the gift of the law, to the promised land, the battlefield, the majestic temple, even to exile and other oppressors. The one constant is God's promise and the people's need.

Even in hundreds of years of silence, God still remembers, saw and knew. And he came as the promise. Because the old, old, story of our text points to the ultimate exit from captivity that is coming. To redemption. To Jesus.

The truer Moses, the perfect mediator between God and man. The offspring of Eve... the offspring of Abraham. The promised Redeemer to free us from our slavery to sin, a Son to keep the whole law for his people, and a Lamb to take the punishment for our sins. From beginning to end, our salvation depends on God remembering his covenant and his accomplishing it.

And Exodus 2:24 & 25 are the historical marker of his remembering. And we are recipients, we benefit from what is just beginning to develop in this story. We can rejoice that captivity is over...

### **3) Saved Situation**

Ultimately this is what God's hearing and remembering tells us: Salvation is God's work beginning to end. God is at work in all of the story - his grace is central to Israel's story and his grace is meant to be our story too.

Now as those that believe in Jesus, that the full and final redemption he brings is for us, we live the Exodus life. Throwing off the shackles of what once enslaved us.

We live in full reliance on his grace. Knowing it is not our perceived "strength" or even potential that makes the difference... it is his promise.

All we bring to this situation is our need. We don't even need to hide behind a facade of being "strong..." we are all losers!

Desperately in need of forgiveness, of hope, in need of joy that can only be found in Jesus. And our need is met and overwhelmed by his grace.

**2 Corinthians 12:9** "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me." (ESV)

Spurgeon - "We are dust. Held together by daily miracle." The miracle is God's grace for us. That grace goes all the way down, into our mess, to the depths we don't even want to explore... and it brings light, healing, reconciliation... it makes what is weak strong. (*Like a child held by a father...*)

An end to striving for the label, to prove yourself... trusting in Jesus' finished work to make your right with God... to free you from what held you captive.

The God of the covenant, the God who sees, hears, and remembers, is the God who knows our situation in all its desperate need. Our need, met with his provision, his promise.

"If we belong to God by faith in Jesus Christ, then we are part of his eternal covenant. We have a right to every blessing God has promised in Christ, and we are free to claim the benefits of that covenant when we pray, "Dear heavenly Father, remember that your Son and my Savior, Jesus Christ, has kept all the terms of your covenant on my behalf. Remember that he died on the cross for my sins, establishing a new covenant in his blood. Remember that you have promised to give me every blessing of the covenant in Christ — to forgive my sins, to care for my needs, to

comfort my sorrows, and at the end of it all, to take me home to glory.” We can pray this way because we have God’s covenant promise. When God remembers his covenant, he remembers that we are in Christ and that in Christ he has promised to save us to the very end.” - Ryken

From our cries for help to the mission of freeing other captives. To finding the physical and spiritual slaves in our day and empowered by Christ’s grace, working for their exodus, their desperate need met by Jesus.

How will you live your “Exodus life?”

Let your cry for help be heard, and hear God’s response to you in Christ. You are loved. You are redeemed. You are free.

*Even the strong are captives in need of God’s grace. All are in need of God’s grace, and he freely gives to all who believe.*

We began with imagining a basketball game, the team labeled strong, turns out they were the underdog all along... hopeless and tired, just waiting for the buzzer. Then the coach tells the team to sit down, and he comes from behind to win.

Maybe for you, a lot of days feel like waiting for the buzzer... but you are seen and heard. God has given his grace in Jesus.

**2 Peter 3:9** “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.” (ESV)

He is the faithful, covenant-making, covenant-keeping God. Turn to him, trust him. Live free.