

**Preaching Christ....
...by the power of the Holy Spirit
...and the authority of the Word of God**

Date: 30 July 2023
Services: *Across the Diocese*
Series: All about Jesus
Title: In the beginning - Genesis
Passage: Exodus 19:1-8a

God's people:

1. **Enslaved**
2. **Rescued**
3. **Commissioned**

- Susan and I saw the latest Mission Impossible movie last week on our day off...
- Pure escapism of course... and filled with drama, twists and turns; moments of high tension when you're sitting on the edge of your seat wondering how those involved are going to escape **this** impossible situation or **that!**
- Now – the book of Exodus which we explore today in our Old Testament overview, may not move as *quickly* as the plot in a Mission Impossible movie, but the story *is* filled with twists and turns and moments of high drama... and if put into a two-hour film – could easily match the likes of the Mission Impossible franchise for 'seat of your pants' drama!
- Let me remind you how it is we find the people of God in Egypt.
- Long story short, there was a **famine** in the land God promised Abraham...
- ...and Joseph – great-grandson of Abraham, had been appointed by God to serve Egypt as Prime-minister and save Egypt – and surrounding nations – by gathering food through 7 years of plenty and then storing and distributing that food, through the 7 years of famine which would follow.
- Joseph's brothers travel from Canaan to Egypt – desperate for food.
- Joseph is reconciled to his brothers. (You remember they had sold him as a slave.)
- And Joseph then arranges for the whole family to travel to Egypt so that he could provide for them for the duration of the famine. From Exodus 1:5 – this was around 70 people.
- Joseph was highly esteemed throughout Egypt – he had been greatly used to save both the Egyptians and Israel from the famine...!
- However....!
- The opening verses of our book of Exodus today are ominous...
- Things do not look good for the fledgling nation of Israel in a foreign land...
- ...it looks like they may have overstayed their welcome... Have a look with me at Exodus 1:6-11a

⁶ Now Joseph and all his brothers and all that generation died, ⁷ but the Israelites were exceedingly fruitful; they multiplied greatly, increased in numbers and became so numerous that the land was filled with them.

⁸ Then a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt. ⁹ "Look," he said to his people, "the Israelites have become far too numerous for us. ¹⁰ Come, we must deal shrewdly with

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them, or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country."

¹¹ So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labour...

- **Not good!! ///**
- so let's explore the account of Exodus this way:

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- First

1. ENSLAVED

- Things went quickly from bad to worse for Israel.
- Ch 1 v12: *But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread; so the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites ¹³ and worked them ruthlessly. ¹⁴ They made their lives bitter with harsh labour in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields; in all their harsh labour the Egyptians worked them ruthlessly.*
- The Egyptian midwives were even told to kill any boys born to Israelite women... which they refused to do... and we read in Exodus 1:20...

So God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous. ²¹ And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own.

BUT!

²² Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: "Every Hebrew boy that is born you must throw into the Nile but let every girl live."

- Now – maybe you remember the story... *one* of those boys who his mother had tried to protect by putting in basket in the river, was rescued by none other than Pharaoh's daughter and was raised in Pharaoh's home!
- God preserved his life because he was God's person to lead the rescue of God's people...
- So here are God's people... stuck in Egypt... in the harshest of circumstances – under the cruel slavery of the Egyptians.
- We read these sobering verses in 2:23-25 - *The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. ²⁴ God heard their groaning, and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. ²⁵ So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them.*
- There was nothing they could do to rescue themselves.
- No effort, no work, no ritual or religious rite was ever going to make a difference.

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- They were trapped and powerless.
- So they cry out to God for help...
- God heard them and remembered his covenant with (or agreement with or commitment to) their ancestors... and he was concerned about them. ///
- I want you to see here – a parallel between the Israelites' situation and ours!
- Before Jesus, we were enslaved - enslaved by sin and death.
- They were our masters.
- Sin reigned over our life and death had the last word.
- And there was nothing we could do to save ourselves.
- No effort, no work, no ritual or religious rite was ever going to make a difference.
- We were trapped and powerless.
- Our only recourse...? – to cry out to God for help! ///
- And when Israel did that, they were:

2. RESCUED

- Now by the time the Israelites cried out to God, he had already put rescue plans in motion
- Moses had been rescued from the Nile by Pharaoh's daughter.
- When he was a young man, he had an altercation with an Egyptian and had to flee into the desert.
- There, God dramatically revealed himself to Moses – do you remember? – at the burning bush that didn't burn – and commissioned him to rescue Israel.
- *3:7 - "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. ⁸ So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey..."*
- Moses is not too sure about this commission – but promises to be with him... as the great I AM – the one who simply IS!!!
- But the task will not be easy. Moses will not simply rock up to Pharaoh and say, 'let my people go'!
- God warns Moses in 3:19-20 - *But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless a mighty hand compels him. ²⁰ So I will stretch out my hand and strike the Egyptians with all the wonders that I will perform among them. After that, he will let you go.*
- So what was this 'mighty hand'... these wonders, God will perform among them?
- As Pharaoh kept changing his mind – 'you people can go' – 'no you can't' – and did that repeatedly, God sent ten plagues to show him who is in charge.
 1. the Nile turned to blood,
 2. frogs swarmed the land,
 3. lice infested people and animals,
 4. wild animals or flies invaded the land,
 5. a pestilence killed livestock,
 6. boils afflicted people,

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7. hail destroyed crops,
8. locusts devoured what was left,
9. darkness covered the land, and finally,
10. the death of the firstborn in every Egyptian household.

- Each plague more devastating in its impact than the first.
- You may ask 'was this fair'?
- But we must remember that this was God's judgement being played out on a rebellious people.
- It's like asking – is it fair that the offspring of Eve will one day crush the serpent's head...?
- God will act against evil!
- And in that final plague...
- The threat of the firstborn being killed comes to every household – Israelite households too....
- But everyone is invited to trust God and call on his saving work, by killing a lamb and painting the blood of the lamb on their doorposts.
- And at every house where that happened? – the firstborn was spared.... Nothing happened! All were safe! //
- Pharaoh – in utter grief following the loss of his own firstborn... decided to let God's people go....
- *Ex 12:31 During the night Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, "Up! Leave my people, you and the Israelites! Go, worship the Lord as you have requested. ³² Take your flocks and herds, as you have said, and go. And also bless me."*
- And they go! And take much of Egyptian wealth with them!
- Pharaoh had YET ANOTHER change of heart.
- ...and that sets the stage for another miraculous event: the parting of the Red Sea where God's people pass over in safety, chased by the Egyptian army. ///
- Despite Pharaoh's hardened heart and last desperate attempts to re-enslave them, God continued to protect them and rescued the Israelites once and for all!
- How totally wonderful!
- Finally rescued and free to serve God! /////
- I wonder if you can see again, any parallels with our situation?
- Remember: enslaved by sin and death, there's nothing we can do to save ourselves.
- But God stepped in with his mighty works to save and rescue us!
- And fascinatingly, just like the shed blood of the lamb, who died in the place of the firstborn and thereby brings about the final rescue of God's people...
-it was the shed blood of *another* lamb...- what does John the Baptist call Jesus? – "*look – the lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world...*"
- Through **his** shed blood – **OUR** lives are spared and our rescue won!
- We are freed from the power of sin and death to serve the living God!
- God did it!

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- His work!
- His rescue! //
- And just as Israel – through the celebration of the Passover – were never to forget that their God was the God who brought them up out of Egypt... into safety...
- So WE, through the Lord's Supper – are never to forget that our God is the one who rescued us from sin and death through the death the resurrection of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord! //// Isn't that fantastic.
- Well – finally – we see God's people:

3. COMMISSIONED

- Rescued and free...
- ...but not just to do what they want!
- They have a special role to fulfil in the world...
- Remember God's promises to Abraham from last week in Genesis 12 – that through the nation that would come from him – ALL nations would be blessed?
- That promise is starting to play out now.
- Because God's rescued people were to be a light to all the nations of the world to show how brilliant it is to be in a relationship with God.
- So in Exodus 19, Moses is summoned up Mt Sinai...
- He will be given the law – the 10 commandments – but not before he receives a message and commission for the people of God.
- (note in passing – the vital point that the 10 commandments are not given so that through keeping them God's people might be saved... they have just **BEEN** saved... the 10 commandments are given to show how they must **RESPOND** to their salvation...how to live out this commission.
- So – here's the commission – Ex 19: God tells Moses to say to Israel ⁴ *'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. ⁵ Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, ⁶ you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'* These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites." ///
- Kingdom of priests – mediating the news of God to the world... a holy nation – set apart from all the other nations – to be a beacon – a light to the Gentiles... ///
- Now... let me show you something very exciting. //
- Did you know that God's commissioning of Israel here, matches perfectly – the commissioning you and I have been given as disciples of the Lord Jesus?
- 1 Peter 2:9 - *But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*
- God has rescued us from sin and death, so we are free – not to do as we like – but free to fulfill his commission.
- We too are God's treasured possession – chosen people – a royal priesthood... a holy nation – set

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apart...

- **...that we may declare God's praises!**
- If you like – so that we might **SHARE JESUS FOR LIFE!**
- //
- Let me **close...**
- God's people were enslaved... Israel – by the Egyptians // – we who now believe – by sin and death
- There was nothing they or we could do to save ourselves
- But we were rescued by God's mighty hand and wonderful works...
- The shed blood of the lamb who died in our place, was the means to our final rescue – for both Israel – and you and me
- And both Israel and we – once rescued – were powerfully commissioned to mediate – to radiate God's redeeming love to those around us... as God's priesthood – as God's chosen ones – declaring God's praises ///
- And have one simple question as I close
- **Are you** living up to your commission?
- Are you – as part of God's people today – are you – and is your church – declaring the praises of God who has called us out of darkness into his marvellous light?
- **ARE we – SHARING JESUS FOR LIFE?**