

Introduction

If you have your Bible, I want to invite you to go ahead and open it up to the Book of Exodus. We are beginning a new sermon series this morning. We're going to be walking through the Book of Exodus. Really, to be honest with you, it's not so much through the Book of Exodus, but it's really going to focus in on the life of Moses. We are going to really look at his life. Last summer we focused on the life of Abraham and the things that Abraham was about and the things that Abraham did. Now, you'll probably remember that last summer as we talked about Abraham, the overarching theme that we continually returned to was the theme of faith. We said that Abraham was a man of faith and that God used that faith in order to accomplish His purposes in the world. As we go into the Book of Exodus, this is what I want us to do. I want us to remember, first of all, the promise that was made to Abraham. The promise that was made to Abraham was simple. It was that God would make a great nation out of Abram. So that's the place where we start. As we go into the Exodus, remember that promise; have it in the back of your mind, and remember that God, in His way, is keeping His promises that He has made to Abram, to carry to fruition... to see this great nation to come about. That's one of the things I want us to remember. Then I also want us to remember that the way God does that is through incredible methods that you and I could never, ever imagine or even attempt to accomplish on our own... but God is powerful. So, if the story of Abram is the story of faith, then the story of Moses is about the power of God working out His purposes. Does that make sense? So, as we prepare to read the Exodus together... I tell you, as I've been approaching this text... I don't know, I've just encountered the enormity of this Book. The Exodus is the cultural and theological center of the Jewish people. It is what they return to. It is not just a sacred text; it is right at the center of the sacred texts for them. Things flow from them and go back to the Exodus, time and time again. So for hundreds of years the Jewish people studied the Book of Exodus as the primary identifying story for who they were as a people. Christians have been studying the Exodus, in addition to that study, for 2000 years. Christians view it as God's covenant work that points toward Jesus Christ. This is an important theological moment. Christians believe that when we study the Bible that every page in the Bible is pointing to Jesus Christ. When we read the New Testament... for instance last week when we completed our series through the Book of First John, we believe that everything that John is speaking flows from the work that God has done in Jesus Christ. So the grace that was made available to us in Jesus on the cross gives us the power to enact the things that are listed in the pages of First John. But in the Old Testament, since Christ has yet to walk among His people, everything within the Exodus and within the Old Testament, Christians believe, points looking forward to Jesus Christ. As we read the Old Testament, particularly as we walk through the Exodus together, we are going to be looking for signs that this tells us about who God is and that it points toward God's character and the work that He will do in Jesus Christ.

I've been thinking about this; this is just weighty. We have hundreds of years of Jewish interpretation, then followed by 2000 years of Christian interpretation working in concert with Jewish interpretation. So, to pick this Book up is to be in dialogue with hundreds of years of people and just incredible amounts of conversations that have happened. The story is just written on our global consciousness. Even the secular media has memorialized the story... The Ten Commandments, the classic film that is shown every year on ABC and then, more recently, The Prince of Egypt, the DreamWorks animated version. I made a mistake in the first service: I said that I thought that the Ten Commandments was better than The Prince of Egypt. People came up to me after worship... they did not talk to me about anything I said about the Bible... (Laughter) They said, "You said that The Ten Commandments is better than the Prince of Egypt." I was like, "Yeah." "You're wrong!" I thought, "Whoa! Okay! Alright! That's good to know." If you think that the Prince of Egypt is better than The Ten Commandments, that is certainly your opinion; you are entitled to it

and I apologize. I happen to think that the Cecil B. De Mille version is a little bit better, but that's just me. It's probably because I'm a little old, and that was what I was raised on, and that kind of stuff. But... I tell you the whole point is that it's all been ingrained into our consciousness because Hollywood studios have recognized the beauty of this story, even if they do not recognize the God that is behind the story. So the reason that we need to look at this story and to handle it carefully is because it is packed... and I'm talking packed... with meaning. Every time I approach this Book, I discover something new. This week was no exception. I want us to read this together and to begin to see how it is that God is working and directing us through His timeless, timeless Word. Let's start in Exodus chapter 1; we're going to begin in verse 8:

"Now there arose a new king over Egypt who did not know Joseph." Now pause... if you read the end of Genesis, chapters 39 through 50 is the story of Joseph. What takes place in that story is much too long for me to summarize right here but basically let me say this. God uses Joseph to save the Israelite people by bringing them out of Israel and moving them to Egypt and saving them from famine. So the Israelite people moved into Egypt and were esteemed by the Egyptians because they rescued them from famine. You can go back and read that story for the backstory later this afternoon, but I just wanted to give you that. But now there is a new king who doesn't remember Joseph. That's significant: Verse 9: "...And he..." (this new pharaoh) "...he said to his people, 'Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and, if war breaks out, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land.' Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens. They built for pharaoh store cities, Pithom and Raamses. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad. And the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel. So they ruthlessly made the people of Israel work as slaves, and made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field. In all their work, they ruthlessly made them work as slaves.

"Then the king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, 'When you serve as midwife to the Hebrew women and see them on the birth stool, if it is a son, you shall kill him, but if it is a daughter, she shall live.' But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them but let the male children live. So the king of Egypt called the midwives and said to them, 'Why have you done this, and let the male children live?' The midwives said to pharaoh, 'Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women, for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them.' So God dealt well with the midwives. And the people multiplied and grew very strong. And because the midwives feared God, He gave them families. Then pharaoh commanded all his people 'Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the Nile, but you shall let every daughter live.'

"Now a man from the house of Levi went and took as his wife a Levite woman. The woman conceived and bore a son, and when she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him three months. When she could no longer hide him, she took for him a basket made of bulrushes and daubed it with bitumen and pitch. She put the child in it and placed it among the reeds by the river bank. And his sister stood at a distance to know what would be done to him. Now the daughter of pharaoh came to bathe at the river while her young women walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her servant woman, and she took it. When she opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the baby was crying. She took pity on him and said, 'This is one of the Hebrews' children.' Then his sister said to pharaoh's daughter, 'Shall I go and call you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?' And pharaoh's daughter said to her, 'Go.' So the girl went and called the child's mother. And pharaoh's daughter said to her, 'Take this child away and nurse him for me, and I will give you your wages.' So the woman took the child and nursed

him. When the child grew up, she brought him to pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. She named him Moses, 'Because,' she said, 'I drew him out of the water.'"

1. The Place of Suffering (v. 11)

Now this story, at first glance, feels as if it has absolutely nothing to do with you and me. Most of us are not slaves. We certainly are not being forced to hide our offspring in baskets among the reeds on the river, and we really can't understand why this is such a significant story for us. But again, if we hold to the Christian truth that every page of Scripture is in some way pointing us toward Christ and is in some way telling us about the character of God, I want us to think, "How might this story be informing us and instructing us even today?" You know, as I look at the story, I begin to recognize that the people of God, the Israelites, were under slavery, and God used them even in the midst of their slavery to be delivered, to be brought out, and to do a mighty thing in them. Remember... the over-arching theme of the Book of Exodus is this: It is that God is using His power to make a people for Him... God is using His power to make a people for Him. Now, the Exodus is them being delivered out. How does God begin the delivering process?

Interestingly enough, I think that it begins in the midst of suffering. I think that the way that we begin to understand, first and foremost, the way that God works and the way that God delivers His people starts with the understanding that God allowed them to be enslaved in the first place. You see, the promise that had been made to the Hebrew people through Abram was that they would become a great nation. Now remember that Abram and Sarai waited for years before they could ever have their first child Isaac. I mean, it took years! But apparently, by the time we get to the Book of Exodus, these guys can't stop having kids. Alright? It's like every time you turn around, "Ohhh, there's another Israelite." They are having babies left and right. You would think that they were tied to the preschool department here at our church. I mean, it's like there's kids everywhere. Right? So, they're having all these children. Now pharaoh looks around and he sees, "This is going to be a problem because there's all these people here."

Now I don't know if there had been desires for the Israelites to leave, but that's not indicated at all in the Scripture. In fact, we really don't know why it was that they stayed because God's plan had been for Abram and Sarai to have a people and to be a great nation... but in the land that God showed to them. God showed them that land. Now, they were delivered and rescued into Egypt from famine, but apparently they were supposed to go back to their original place of living, but they did not do so. This was a problem. Since they did not do that, God said, "Look, My purpose is for you to be My people but not just My people; You're to be My people in this particular place." And they did not go. So, God allowed pharaoh to enslave them because they had chosen to live in Egypt. Now, I don't know why they lived in Egypt. Maybe they had better coffee in Egypt or they had better Wi-Fi service or... I don't know... better roads. For whatever reason, they liked the amenities because ancient Egypt was the pinnacle of ancient civilization, and they decided to stay there. Now, they started to make the pharaoh nervous, though, because now they were having all of these kids. Pharaoh probably didn't even know what demographics was in his day, but he looked around and he said, "Every time I start counting noses, I see more Hebrew noses than Egyptian noses." He thought, "Over time, this means that we are going to lose our land." He said, "You know, if we go to war and these guys turn against us, they're going to overthrow us."

Arthur Kemp, the South African demographer has a great saying... I think it's a terrific quote. This is what he says: "Demographics is destiny." What does he mean by that? He means, "If you show me the demographic trends in a neighborhood or within a city, I can, with startling accuracy predict the future of that community. Kemp understood and pharaoh innately saw that whatever happened population-wise

within this community would eventually determine the destiny. Since there were going to be more Israelites than there were going to be Egyptians, pharaoh knew he was going to lose his throne to military power if the Hebrews ever turned on him, so he said, "We've got to do something about it." He did what political leaders do whenever they feel threatened that they might lose their power. He took action. What did he do? He made the Israelites slaves. Now, he had them build store cities. Now, the store cities that are listed here are listed in verse 11: Pithom and Raamses. There's actually a theory out there that the Hebrew word for "Pithom" is referring to the city of Tanis. Anybody out there seen Raiders of the Lost Ark? Do you remember...two of you have seen it... that's good. The scene with the pole and the crystal, and it shoots the laser on the map. No... not one. Okay; never mind! Well that's the city of Tanis, in case you were wondering. You can go home and watch that later. But, at any rate, there's a possibility that the cities that they were forced to build, Pithom and Raamses, would actually be the place where the Egyptian pharaoh that's theorized to have stolen the Ark of the Covenant, took it to hide. If that's not crazy enough, that in slavery they were building these cities, and they were building store cities, according to Exodus chapter 1. These store cities would be used to store grain so that they could avoid famine. Do you see the rich irony here? Five chapters earlier in Scripture, Joseph is saving the Egyptians from famine, and now five chapters later... many generations or years later... the Hebrew people are building cities as slaves to store grain to save the Egyptians. Their entire fate has turned because a new pharaoh has come to power, and he has declared that they will be under his boot.

There are people much smarter than I am that are Hebrew scholars that have theorized that the sentence structure of verse 14 was supposed to, whenever you read it in Hebrew, to sound like whiplashes going over the backs of the Hebrew people. Verse 14: "*They made their life bitter...*" (sound of whip) "*...with hard service*" (sound of whip) "*... in mortar and brick...*" Just over and over... it's like you can hear the whips; you can hear the cries of the people. It's miserable. There's this sense, literarily, that things are terrible for the Hebrew people. You begin to sense that they are miserable. They are under pharaoh's boot. They've gone from being highly esteemed to becoming slaves. The question, I think, for you and for me as we read this text has to be this: "Why? Why does God allow His people to become slaves?" Now, I mean, we can't know for sure. There's no way that we could ever certainly know this.

Charles Spurgeon, the great Baptist preacher, theorized that the people of Israel would simply have assimilated into the Egyptian people and begun to worship other gods if God did not make them slaves so that they could eventually go out and be His own people. I want you to think about that... that God might have lost His people in their comfort. They were so comfortable in Egypt, they might have just stayed there and eventually assimilated, and there would have been no Israelite people. They would have just faded away into history. Spurgeon theorizes that God had to make them uncomfortable so that they would be willing to embark on an incredibly difficult journey. He needed them to go and do something that they could never imagine. If you look through the pages of Scripture, you'll begin to see something, and I cannot understand it but it is true. It's this: It's that God regularly makes His people uncomfortable; I think uncomfortable is too weak of a word. He often breaks His people so that His people will be used for His purposes. God allows the Hebrew people to be brought into slavery, and He does it for a very particular reason because He knows that if He does not make them slaves, they probably will not be willing to leave.

I was telling the first service that many years ago I was a graduate student full-time at Baylor, so that meant I was making zero dollars, and my wife was embarking on a very lucrative career as an administrative assistant at an environmental firm, so she was making just a little over zero dollars. Together, zero plus a little over zero... not a whole lot. We weren't making a lot of money, but I was a full-time grad student. We were excited about this. God began to just allow circumstances in our life to kind of go haywire. I don't

know if you've ever gone through these times. Over those nine months, things happened. You know, there's broke and then there's flat broke and then there's nothing left. We were kind of down there, maybe even below that, right? In that place of having no money and nothing, I was diagnosed with heart disease while we lived there. Medical bills started to pile up. We didn't know what we were going to do. We were too far away from a city that had a good hospital. I couldn't carry anything that weighed more than ten pounds. I was having to take my books to class in a rolling suitcase. I was the butt of academic jokes everywhere. (Laughter) It's okay... you can laugh. And then on top of that... because it wouldn't be a good story if this didn't happen... Joy got pregnant because what good is it to be broke if you're not also having a baby. (Laughter) On top of that, our house got broken into. Someone kicked in our back door. We didn't really have anything, and they realized that once they broke in. They were kind of disappointed so they just basically tore our house apart. My grandmother had sent Joy a \$100 bill and said, "Look, you just got a job so I want you to go buy some clothes for work"... and they took that. We had nothing left. We had one couple that we had made friends with at church, and we were excited about that. They had us over for dinner one night and they said, "We just want you guys to know that we're getting a divorce." "Wow...this stinks! This is terrible." We were just miserable. There's a whole lot more that I can go into and tell you about, just how we were in this place where we were like, "Lord... what are You doing right now?" I got a call from a church in Kaufmann, Texas... First Baptist Church of Kaufmann. Whenever they called... I want you to know, I had never heard of Kaufmann. I had never seen Kaufmann. I didn't know anything about this. They called and they were like, "Hey, we got your name; we need a youth pastor at our church." I was like, "Alright... Just a second." I put down the phone, and I walk into the bathroom. Joy was in the shower. I hollered in there: "Hey... I just got a call from First Baptist Church Kaufmann; they need a youth pastor." She looks around the curtain, "Sounds good." I was like, "Alright." I walked back in there, "Yep, we'll take it." Then I hung up the phone. We tell people, "We prayed for three seconds about that." I know that's not very spiritual, but I'm just telling you we had been on our face before God and we said, "Lord, we know you are moving us. We just don't know where. Let us know where. Let us know." We knew immediately that was what God was doing. What's the point that I'm trying to tell you? It's that God had made us so uncomfortable that we would go. Let me tell you what. This town I had never heard of, and if you drove through it you wouldn't think there was anything special about it... we had the richest ten years of our life in that town. Our children were born there. We had incredible ministry. I got to lead literally dozens of kids to Christ. I became the associate pastor at this church. God just used us in that place. We never would have experienced the rich blessings of that ministry if we had not been made exceptionally uncomfortable and willing to go wherever God wanted us to be. The funny thing about that is that I know that God, throughout the Scripture, over and over demonstrates His power by making people uncomfortable so that they will do things that, left to their own devices, they would never choose to do. You would say, "No... I'm not doing that." He says, "Ohhh... Okay... Let Me just turn the heat up just a little bit. How are you feeling now? Would you do it now? Okay... A little hotter then?" He will turn up the heat until you are ready to dance His dance, and He will move you the direction that He wants to move you.

Romans 8:28: *"We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose."* James 1:2-4: *"Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."* Listen. This is the truth that I want you to hear today. It's not really about discomfort because slavery is much larger than discomfort. Do you know what it is? It's this: It's brokenness. God will take His people at His pleasure and in His time, and He will allow them to be broken, and He will do that so that then, as He pieces them back together and allows their pain to be redeemed, that they will no longer point to themselves but they will point to Jesus Christ.

I read a poem this week. I had forgotten about it, but it was one that I used to turn to over and over whenever I was a young man. I don't even know who wrote it. I don't know if we've ever discovered the author, but I want you to hear this:

When God wants to drill a man,
And thrill a man,
And skill a man;
When God wants to mold a man
To play the noblest part;

When He yearns with all His heart
To create so great and bold a man
That all the world shall be amazed,
Watch God's methods, watch God's ways!

How He ruthlessly perfects
Whom He royally elects!
How He hammers him and hurts him,
And with mighty blows converts him

Into shapes and forms of clay which
Only God can understand;
While man's tortured heart is crying
And he lifts beseeching hands!

Yet God bends but never breaks
When man's good He undertakes;
How He uses whom He chooses,
And with mighty power infuses him;
With every act induces him
To try His splendor out-
God knows what He's about.

There are people in this room right now... you are under the vice of grace, and it does not feel like grace right now. There is cancer in this room. There are people in this room who are losing their home. There are people in this room that are walking through a sin struggle so powerful that they cannot see any way out. There are people that are here right now that their marriage feels like it is hanging on by a thread, and each of you has fallen on your face and you've said, "God... Why? Why?" ...Because God will take the hammer to His people so that when He puts them back together, the cracks allow the light of Jesus Christ to shine through, and the grace that is in you shows the entire world that even though you have been broken, you are not bitter. I want you to hear me whenever I say this. I have met people over the course of my life, and I have discovered something very essential. There are arrogant people in this world and there are confident people in this world. Do you want to know the difference? Redeemed brokenness. People who are arrogant have yet to be broken and redeemed by God. If you meet someone who has a quiet, confident faith about them, I can almost guarantee you that behind that quiet, confident faith is a person who has been crushed and then rebuilt and redeemed by God... and you say, "Wow. Thanks a lot, Steve. I'm not really looking forward to coming to church next week. I feel like I'm just going to get crushed." Listen to me. If you have yet to be broken and hammered by the grace of God, get ready because it's coming. And the reason that it's coming is that God has to shape you before He can use you. If you do not allow Him to shape you, you will never understand the power of being used in His name. I want to encourage you to seek that and say, "Lord, use me." It may mean that you will be broken in many ways,

but then He can put you on display and no longer do you point to yourself but you start to point people toward Jesus Christ.

2. Brings Surprising Power (v. 17)

Now, in the middle of this slavery, God does something. Now this is something that I want you to understand. When you read the Book of Exodus, you will notice... there is actually a big historical debate about which pharaoh is being referred to throughout the Book because the pharaoh is never named. Why is that? ...Because Moses does not want to give the pharaoh any glory. You see, the Egyptians thought of pharaoh as a god, the son of the sun god Re. He said, "No... I'm not even going to name him. We're just going to call him "pharaoh" because he's really just a placeholder in this story because this is about puny, tiny, powerless god versus the Lord, so the Lord is named. On top of that, throughout the entire Book, you will see how the Lord always stands over other opposing gods and imposes His will and His power upon them. So, in the midst of this slavery, pharaoh issues an edict to two people... but guess what? We get their names... that's another literary throw-in there. "Hey... this pharaoh, he doesn't matter. But these two ladies... Puah and Shiphrah... Now you need to know their names. Nine months from now, I'm hoping that there will be a spate of Puahs filling our nursery here at the church. Just go home and say, "Why is that?" Let me tell you why you should name your daughter Puah or Shiphrah. Are you ready? ...Because these two women who, in the culture would be considered powerless, stood up to pharaoh. When pharaoh ordered them to kill the children of the Israelites, they said "No." They knew that Psalm 127 had declared that children are a heritage of the Lord. They knew that God loved His people. They knew the covenant promise that had been given to Abram in chapter 12 of Genesis... that God wanted to make a great nation. God doesn't want us to get rid of our people. He wants us to multiply. Right? It's a good reason to have kids, by the way. You should have kids because you can spread the Gospel. The more kids there are, the better "demographics is destiny." Right? Go home and have some kids. (Laughter) So there you go.

Now here's the thing. Listen. This is beautiful because then these women who are powerless actually have all the power because, as verse 17 tells us, *"...they do not fear pharaoh but they fear God."* So they don't carry out the order. So pharaoh calls them in. He says, "Hey... why didn't you take care of this?" And they say, "You know, Hebrew women... they're just not like Egyptian ladies. They are vigorous. They're Texan. They don't need anesthesia. They just have the babies before we get there." This is the crazy thing. Through that act of obedience, it says that God blesses them. This is just another dig at pharaoh. Did you see how God rewards them? He gives them families. He gives them kids. The thing that pharaoh is trying to stop. Pharaoh is so powerless; he can't even keep the midwives from having kids. I mean, you are so powerless. The Lord is just blessing and He's multiplying. In the face of this oppression, God keeps moving His purpose forward to build a great people and they continue to multiply. Now this obedience takes place in the face of a man who would be deemed a god by those around him.

So here's the question for you and for me: "Who are the pharaohs in your life that you are afraid to be obedient toward and under because you fear the consequences they might bring on your life?" You see, even in the midst of suffering and great slavery, Puah and Shiphrah demonstrate faithfulness because they refuse to cow down before the pharaoh. They say, "Pharaoh, you may have power in some respects, but you are not powerful compared to the Lord; therefore, we will do what it is that God has called us to do, and it is not to take the life of these children... it is to bring these children into the world." So, because of that, God rewards them. Now, this is the whole point we're building toward: Their obedience and your obedience matter in this moment. Let me tell you why. In the midst of your suffering... in the midst of your spiritual slavery... in the midst of whatever trial you are walking through... when you question and say, "Why should I continue in faithfulness? Why should I not turn my back on God right now? Why shouldn't I simply give up?" In the midst of all of that, your obedience may pay dividends that you will never understand, see, or comprehend. I want you to think about this. Are you ready for this? Puah and Shiphrah are obedient... and because they are, Moses is born. Because they refused to kill the children that pharaoh commanded them to do so, this is where this whole thing leads.

Whenever Moses' mom gives birth, apparently Puah or Shiphrah was there, and they refused to take his life. At that moment, Moses' mother places him in a basket. The Hebrew word for the basket that is used there is "tebha." "Tebha" is only used one other place in the Bible. Do you want to know the only other place that it's used? It is used in Genesis to describe that boat that Noah and all those animals got on. That's a "tebha"... it's an ark. The only other place that it's used is the basket. Why would God use that word in Scripture? Because He's saying, "Look... Do you see this? The very first covenant that I made where I said I wouldn't destroy My people? It's now connected to the next step in that covenant... keeping of that promise that is right here. That ark is connected to this ark. It's your deliverance and I'm carrying you through and I'm carrying you out." It looks right back and says God keeps His promises, and then is it any accident that it's a baby in that "tebha"... in that ark? Looking forward, guess what you're also going to see? You're going to see a baby that's going to bring deliverance hundreds of years later, in the name of Jesus Christ. Right there in that moment there's a looking back and a looking forward to God's covenant promise in that place.

3. To Point to Sovereignty. (v. 2:3)

This is what I want you to hear. Are you ready for this? The obedience of Puah and Shiphrah made the resurrection of Jesus Christ possible. Whoa! Can we just think about that for a minute? ...Because they, in their time, were obedient to God, Jesus lived, died, and was resurrected because it is a straight line from what happened there to the covenant promises of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. You see, I think sometimes we're too shortsighted in our obedience. We know that God has commanded us to be obedient in a particular way, but we refuse to do so and oftentimes our reasoning is very simple. We say this: "I don't really see how that's going to make a difference"...or... "I don't really see how that's going to help." Guess what? You don't have to see it for it to still be necessary. God wants us to be obedient because in our obedience He uses that to point toward the things that He plans to do. God's purposes cannot be thwarted because God is using whom He will use to carry out the very things that He wants to be accomplished in the world, and it is this thing... this obedience... that points toward the very sovereignty of God and the fact that God sovereignly rules over to demonstrate His power to take place what He wants to take place which is the pursuit, the perfection, and the provision of a people that are in His name. God wants a people... He makes a people... and He does it through an act of obedience by two women that you would think would be inconsequential. Actually Puah and Shiphrah are the two people on whom the story turns. If not for their obedience, then no deliverance. I want you to consider this fact... that your act of obedience this week in response to the grace of Jesus Christ may plant seeds which generations from now may blossom into oak trees under which generations of future believers may take refuge. You may never see them but your acts of obedience matter deeply. I want you to hear and consider this as well: That perhaps you are in this room today because someone else's act of obedience has brought you here as well. You may have never intended to be in this room today, but through an act of obedience of other people, God may have sovereignly arranged it for you today to hear this truth: That He is pursuing you, that He loves you, He has created you, and He has redeemed you in Jesus Christ, in His death on the cross and His resurrection. He has sovereignly pursued you and He wants you to return to Him right now and to come to Him.

You see, these are the things that our God does. He uses slavery as a redemptive tool to bring us, to be used for His purposes. These are the things that our God does. He takes minor acts of obedience by people we would consider to be inconsequential characters, and He turns it out to be the very tool by which He brings about redemption for all of humanity. These are the things that our God does. Our God pursues us in Jesus Christ, and He brings about redemption through people that we wouldn't expect and in ways that we would never know. These are the things that our God does. Our God is powerful... He is over all... He is sovereign. He is arranging things and He is doing things and He is asking this: "Will you allow being crushed and formed by the hand of God so that you might be obedient to the call of God, so that then the sovereignty of God might be placed on display so that His purposes could have their way?" That's the call of the Church. So church, as we approach Exodus 1, God is making a people and you may not even know

it, but He was doing it then and He is doing it now. Right here in this place God has His hand and He is working out circumstances we cannot see to form hearts and minds in this place. You may be going through a broken time in your life, and God is using it to form you. You may be going through a difficult season where you don't know how you're going to be obedient, but God is using it to form you. There may be a plan that is bigger... that you may never even see... but your obedience bears fruit that brings glory to the name of Jesus Christ. May the Church of Jesus say "Yes" to these moments, and may the Church of Jesus Christ respond faithfully when called upon, and may those of us who are being crushed recognize that through the gracious hand of God perhaps we are being formed for His use. May we say "Yes." Amen and amen.

"Father, we thank you for your goodness. Lord, we are so grateful for the fact, God, that You have given Jesus... God, that You have redeemed us, You have saved us, and Lord we can't even begin to comprehend that. Lord, we can't comprehend the fact that You chose to use characters that we probably would ignore on the street today to bring about the very deliverance of the Israelite people. Father, maybe we feel like we are insignificant. To hear that story just brings us great joy to know, Lord, that You could find us in our place and use us for Your purposes. So God, I pray this: That those of us that are being crushed and formed right now would look to Your purposes for it to be redeemed. And God, for those of us that are under a fierce place right now, would look for ways to be obedient, and Lord, we would always look and trust that Your plan is at work and God that You are arranging things and You are doing so perfectly and so sovereignly so that Your name might be lifted high. We pray this and we trust it, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen."