

Far From Home

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Preacher: Donald Smith

[0:00] It says God's Word. Please do keep that passage open in front of you. Let us pray for the Lord's help with it as we turn to it together. Amen. And he was put in a coffin in Egypt.

It's not quite, and he lived happily ever after, is it? But that is exactly how the book of Genesis ended. If you haven't been here for long, you might have missed at least some of our long-running series in Genesis.

It was so long-running, I missed some of our long-running series in Genesis, and I've been here for two and a half years. But after 50 chapters of epic history, from the creation of the universe to a universal famine, after reading about God's amazing promises to Abraham to make of him a great nation, to bring his descendants to the promised land, to bless all the nations through him, after all that, that was how the book ended.

With a coffin in Egypt. It might have felt like something of an anticlimax, but it wasn't really an anticlimax, because it wasn't the end of the story.

Like the end of any kind of well-written chapter of a novel, or well-produced installment of a TV show, it was something of a cliffhanger. An ending that leaves you wanting to turn over the page and find out what happens next.

[2:00] And so that is what we are going to do at the start of this year. We're going to turn over the page into Exodus, where we find another epic book, in length, but also in content.

As we go through this book together, we're going to come across some of the most well-known parts of the Old Testament. The burning bush, the ten plagues, the crossing of the Red Sea, the Ten Commandments that we started thinking about this morning.

It is packed with well-known Bible stories. And those are all well worth knowing about. It is good to know what happened. But hopefully as we go through this book verse by verse, we will also see the even more important point of why all these things happened.

What was God doing through those moments in history? And what does that mean for us today? That is all kind of waiting for us over the coming months.

And I hope it's a series you are looking forward to. I know it's one we're looking forward to preaching through. But as we begin our series this morning, we want to begin just by setting the scene a little bit. That is always kind of a helpful thing to do, but particularly so here, because setting the scene is where Exodus begins.

[3:19] Let's set the scene, or let Exodus set the scene for us. In our first point this morning, verses 1 to 7, God remains faithful, far from the promised land.

In these first seven verses of the book, we learn two things. God's promises have not yet been fulfilled, and God is fulfilling His promises.

Early on in Genesis, God had promised Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky, and that his descendants would live in the promised land. At the end of Genesis, there were 70 descendants of Abraham.

We see that again there in verse 5 of Exodus chapter 1. It's a decent-sized family gathering for sure, isn't it? But it's hardly a great multitude. There's a lot more of us here this morning than there was of them.

Abraham's descendants were not yet a great nation, and they were not in the promised land. God had promised to bring them to a place called Canaan. But where was the coffin at the end of Genesis?

[4 : 36] Not Canaan, but Egypt. And in the opening verse of Exodus, we learn that is where God's people still are. In Egypt, not where they belong.

But they are far from home. This isn't just a holiday. They've not been away for a few months. They're not off to go and see the pyramids. It is for generation after generation.

Verse 6, Then Joseph died, and his brothers, and all that generation, and they're still in Egypt. Egypt. But we also see in these verses that God remains completely and utterly faithful to his people and to the promises he has made to them.

There might not be that many of them at the start of the book. They might be far from the land that God has promised them. But just look at what is happening there in verse 7. The people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly.

They multiplied and grew exceedingly strong so that the land was filled with them. The promise that was repeated time and time again through Genesis. These people might be far from home, but God is still near to his people.

[6 : 05] He is still fulfilling his promises. He is still faithful to his words. We might be in a new book, but this is the very same God that we saw at work throughout Genesis.

We saw that time and time again, didn't we, through those 50 chapters, that God was forever faithful to his people, even when his people seemed to be forever unfaithful.

As we turn into a new book, we immediately see that this is not a new God. It is the same story and the same faithful God.

He does not change. And I think that is helpful for us to remember as we come to this book, which records the historical events that happened thousands of years ago, thousands of miles away from here.

It might feel very distant, very remote, but the narrative might be gripping. It might be a good story, but what difference does this all make to us today? Why spend so much time in a book like this?

[7 : 13] We might find ourselves asking the same question as we start our series in Zechariah this evening. What does all this have to do with us? There are a number of good answers to that question, but I think one of those answers is found in verse 7 of Exodus 1.

God's faithfulness does not change from Genesis to Exodus because God does not change. Not between Genesis and Exodus, not between Genesis and Revelation, not between the beginning of history and the end of time, because he is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

And so as we learn about who God is through the book of Exodus, and we are going to learn a lot about who God is through this book, we are learning about who our God is right here, right now, in Aberdeen in 2026.

The revelation of who God is gets more and more detailed as you go through the Bible. The picture gets clearer, but the picture never changes. And so it is absolutely worth our while spending time here in Exodus because it reveals to us who our God is, who he still is today.

Jesus says that every part of the Old Testament is all about him. Much of it points us to our need for him, but much of it also tells us about who he is, because he is God, our God, the very same God that he has always been.

[8 : 50] And so as we learn about the nature and character of God through this book, we are learning every step of the way about who Jesus is, together with the Father and the Spirit. So we begin this book with the same faithful God that we saw in Genesis, the same faithful God that we worship today, and we also see in the opening verses, don't we, that that same faithful God is at work, even in a faraway land.

One of the many things we will see in Exodus is that there is no God like the God of Israel. And already in the first few verses, we see kind of some of the rays of that glorious truth bursting through the clouds.

that the ancient Near East, kind of where around Egypt, Israel, it was, at this time, it was awash with kind of localized gods, regional gods who ruled over a certain place or a certain thing.

But immediately we'll learn that as far from home as God's people might be, they are never far from God. because, verse 7, God is multiplying his people even in this faraway land.

Even in Egypt, God is there. Now that might not, at first, seem that revolutionary as the typical person in the UK is not kind of a polytheist who believes in lots of different gods who rule over lots of different things in lots of different places.

[10 : 20] But even if we do only believe in one God, do you truly understand it that he is God everywhere, in every area of your life, over everything that happens in your week?

We'll press this home a little more fully later, but I think it is worth stopping here briefly now because it is actually wonderful news for the Christian. It is a great thing. Are you able to truly rest in the wonderful assurance that there is nowhere in your life, there is nowhere in this world that God is not being faithful to the promises he has made to his people in Christ Jesus?

However much you might feel far from the heavenly home he has promised you, however difficult some days are, however challenging life at home might be, however distant you feel from him, he is always there, and he is always faithful, always faithful to his every promise to you in Christ, to keep you in him until the end, to make you more like him.

And it is just what David says, isn't it, in Psalm 139. If I ascend to heaven, you are there. If I take my bed to Sheol, you are there. If I take my wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.

That is a really wonderful truth. And yet perhaps we sometimes struggle with it. Perhaps we struggle with it because the way we hope God will fulfill his promises and the way God is fulfilling his promises look quite different from one another.

[12 : 20] As we move into our second point this morning, let me ask you, what would you expect a life of blessing to look like? What do you think Monday will bring if God is being faithful to his every promise in Christ?

I think we often expect, don't we, even if we know it's not true, I think we still often expect God's blessing, his faithfulness to his promises to manifest itself in an easy, comfortable, straightforward life.

Free from hardship, free from pain, free from difficulty. Because that is what we ultimately want. I don't think it is wrong to long for that future.

But because that is what we long for in the future, that is maybe sometimes what we feel God's faithfulness should look like now.

But that is not what God has promised for us now. And so that is not what God's faithful blessing looks like now. And we see that by simply reading on in Exodus chapter 1.

[13 : 30] Where we see our second point this morning, God's people enjoy blessing and endure persecution. We might think those two things shouldn't go together.

And yet very often that is exactly what happens. We've just seen that God has been faithful to his promise. He is making his people into a great nation. Just as he had promised to do, he is being faithful.

And significantly, there is no indication whatsoever that his people are being unfaithful. We saw time and time again in Genesis, didn't we?

That the Bible does not gloss over the failings of God's people. If anything, it is the opposite. The failings of God's family are often brought into sharp focus. That'll happen later on next to us, but there is no mention of any of it here.

And more than that, in coming to Egypt, but back in Genesis 46, Jacob was obeying God's command. He was doing exactly what God had told him to do.

[14:38] They were where God had called them to be. God is faithfully blessing his people. The people are not being unfaithful. They have been faithful to God's word.

And yet, what is the very next thing we read about in verses 8 to 14? Just maybe look at the very end of verse 14 there to get a summary of it all. In all their work, the Egyptians ruthlessly made God's people to work as slaves.

The king of Egypt persecutes God's people. He makes them slaves, ruthlessly works them to the bone, building cities with their bare hands from the ground up, always under the watchful eye of taskmasters.

Pharaoh makes life truly miserable for God's people. Why does he do it? Look at verse 9. Because there are so many of them.

Do you see what's happening here? Because God is faithfully blessing his people, they are being persecuted by the forces of this world.

[15:57] That's not how we often think it will go, is it? I mean, really, God's blessing is not the cause of persecution, is it here? It's the catalyst.

Because ultimately, this persecution arises because God's people have a very real enemy who does not want to see God faithfully fulfill his promises.

Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, is unnerved by this growing population. And so the enemy of God's people uses all of his power to try and squash this growing covenant family.

We might well be living thousands of miles away thousands of years later, but we can expect a very similar story to play out in the church today. We read earlier from the book of 1 Peter, at the beginning of that letter, the apostle calls the New Testament church exiles, people who are far from home.

Not because we have been physically displaced, but because, as we heard in our call to worship, our home is in heaven. That is where we belong.

[17:11] In this world, we are far from home, and just as with the Israelites, that is part of God's plan. We are supposed to be here. This is where God wants us to be. But again, just like God's old covenant people, we should not expect life far from home to be straightforward.

The passage that Ed and I read for us in chapter 4 began with the words, Do not be surprised. Do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you, as though something strange were happening to you.

It is to be expected. And it is to be expected because there is an enemy of God. There is an enemy of God who does not want him to be faithful to his promise to grow his people.

There is an enemy of God's people who does not like what he is seeing when he sees the church grow. God has not promised an easy life for the church on earth.

But he has promised, doesn't he, to establish his kingdom, to add to his people. As we see that happening amongst us, do not be surprised.

[18:30] Do not be surprised if the devil, together with the flesh and the world, the very real enemies of Christ's church today, wage war against his people. We are in a privileged position, aren't we, where we don't have to worry about government forces kind of barging through the door and putting a stop to our services.

But just because there is no tangible force trying to oppress us, do not think that there is a very real spiritual force trying to disrupt the spread of the gospel. Trying to distract, deceive, ultimately destroy the church.

So do not be surprised if life in the church is not all plain sailing, even when it seems that things are going well. But also, do not be surprised if opposition brings about even more blessing.

Did you notice what happens every time Pharaoh attempts to crush this nation? he ruthlessly works the people to the bone as slaves, but what is the result in verse 12? Did you notice it there?

The more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied. Pharaoh is trying to squeeze out the Israel population, but all he succeeds in doing is squeezing out more Israelite babies.

[19:56] Pharaoh's forced labor does nothing to foil God's faithfulness. But what that means is that the king of Egypt ups the stakes.

He doesn't back down, he goes further in. He calls in the Hebrew midwives with a truly wicked plan to cull the population by cutting them off at the source.

It is an awful decree, an insight into the heart of God's people's greatest enemy, but amazingly, the pattern repeats itself.

No doubt the Israelites were living an incredibly uncomfortable life at this point, but the midwives refused to listen to Pharaoh, and so look what continues to happen in verse 20.

God dealt well with the midwives, and the people multiplied and grew very strong. Persecution and blessing and persecution and blessing and then persecution again.

[21:08] Followed by the midwives, the Egyptian Pharaoh goes all in on the third occasion and enlists the entire population to carry out his commands.

Throw every baby boy in the river. Every Egyptian is not only permitted to, they are commanded to, if they see a Hebrew child, pick him up and throw him in.

Just think for a moment what that would have meant for mothers who have just given birth. for family members expecting a grandchild, a niece or a nephew.

Every single one of the population wants to pick up that child and throw them in the river. We can get familiar with these stories, can't we?

But what God's people are enduring here is truly harrowing. God is still there and God is still faithful.

[22:22] Even in the darkest circumstances, even when it no doubt felt like he was very far away, even when no good could possibly be seen to come from it, God was still there and God was still faithful.

that the next 39 chapters of this book show God fulfilling his promise through this awful persecution.

He is still faithful. We can see God's faithfulness, can't we, most clearly in the greatest suffering of all. there is an even greater injustice that happened than what we read about in Exodus 1 when the one truly innocent man was nailed to a cross and executed as a criminal.

And the one who had lived the perfect life bore the punishment of every sin of his people. It was the most unjust suffering.

And yet we now, can't we, now we can see the most amazing blessing that has come to God's people through it. Well, like the disciples in Jerusalem, sometimes we will see the blessing that comes through the suffering in our lifetimes.

[23:53] But not always. But most of the events that happen in Exodus happen 80 years after what we read about in Exodus chapter 1.

At least 80 years after Pharaoh's decree to drown every baby boy. There would have been mums and dads who only knew the pain. God's people will be blessed through suffering, but that does not mean every individual member of God's covenant family will see the purpose of their pain in this life.

That is difficult, isn't it? That is really difficult. That is one thing to not understand why, why things couldn't be in another way.

It is another to never live to see any goods come through it. God's people who are faithful. But God still remains faithful. Faithful to his promises to his church.

Faithful to his promises to one day bring his people home. Maybe today you feel that that home is very far away.

[25:14] Maybe right now you are experiencing much pain from the trials in the Christian life and seemingly feeling very little joy from its blessings. How are we to keep on going?

How can we persevere when fiery trial comes upon us? Let me just remind us of what Edna read for us at the end of 1 Peter chapter 4.

He writes, therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful creator while doing good.

It doesn't answer the why, does it? But we are told what to do. When we are suffering as God's people we are to entrust our souls to a creator we can see is faithful while we are doing good.

if you want to know something of what that looks like I think it may be helpful just to take a closer look at the midwives in Exodus 1. At a glance it might not seem like Pharaoh and the midwives have much in common and yet there is something very important that is true of each of them because there is something that is true of every one of us because Pharaoh Shiphrah and Pua are all motivated by fear.

[26:45] Pharaoh is afraid of the Israelites and so he does what is wicked. Shiphrah and Pua who do they fear in verse 17? That they fear not Pharaoh but God and so they do what is good just as Peter calls us to do what is good.

They are able to entrust their souls to a faithful creator and do what is good because they fear God more than they fear the king of Egypt and that is an amazing thing.

We wouldn't bat an eyelid if verse 17 read the midwives feared Pharaoh and so did what he commanded. We wouldn't think twice about it.

Of course they do. Look at what this man does to people he does not like. This was one of the most powerful men on earth who was very willing to use his power to mercilessly murder.

Most people wouldn't they would put their hands up and say okay Pharaoh whatever you want I'll do it. And yet amazingly it was not Pharaoh that the midwives feared. It was God's not a fear that left them frozen in terror but a healthy fear that drove them to please God more than men whatever the cost.

[28:09] There is so much that could be rightfully and helpfully said about the fear of God because we don't have much time to think about in depth just think about this question who do you fear to displease or to put it positively who would you live to please whose smile do you want to be upon you if we live to please God above anyone else no matter the cost we like the midwives will be able to do good even when it means risking everything even if it means losing everything the Lord blessed them they were given families I'm sure there were faithful people in Israel who were not so fortunate you can imagine can you the midwives as they went in sometime later to explain their actions their hearts would have been in their mouths when

Pharaoh asks them in verse 18 why have you done this and let the male children live I don't think they were going to be that optimistic that their response was going to fly the Hebrew women give birth really quickly how could they be so bold in front of the most powerful king in the world because they live to please a far more powerful king in heaven that didn't guarantee them an easy life by no means but it did guarantee their names would be recorded not just in Exodus but in the book of life that they would one day be taken home because even when they faced suffering they entrusted their souls to a faithful creator while doing good you fear God do you live to please him do you fear to displease him do you fear

Jesus he is God do we live to please him if you do let me assure you this morning if you live to please Jesus let me assure you whatever trials you are facing I know some of them I know there are many I don't know whatever trials you are facing God is and always will be faithful to his every promise that he has given to you it might not always feel like it there might be times when you cannot see it but he is and always will be who he always has been and forever will be faithful to every one of his people faithful to every promise he has made to his church faithful to grow his church faithful to bring his church faithful to bring every member of his church home to be with him in heaven forever he is faithful to his promise even when the enemy uses all of his might to try and crush it he will be faithful to his promise to bring you home

Moses was writing these words to a people on the edge of the promised land people who no doubt heard the harrowing stories of generations gone by but were now looking across and seeing that God was indeed faithful through a century of suffering!

God we thank you that you are forever faithful that there is nowhere in this world that there is no area of our lives there is no moment in our years where you are not present and you are not for those who love you or we thank you and praise you for your faithfulness which is great and which never changes Lord we thank you that even in this life even far from home we still get to enjoy many blessings but Lord we know we must also endure suffering for that is what you have called us to do as we follow in the footsteps of our suffering saviour the Lord Jesus Christ Lord in the midst of whatever we are going through our family as individuals Lord pray that you would help us to be able to step back to look at your workings with your people over history and see that you are always and forever good even when we cannot see the purposes of your ways in a moment

[33:52] Lord help us to rest and rejoice in the fact that you are God over all that you are God forever and that you will always and forever be faithful to us in all that you have promised to do to us in Jesus Christ we thank you and praise you in his name amen as