

Know Your Faith – The Egyptian Experience

Sunday 9th November 2025

St. John's, Mt. Roskill

Rev. Dr. Colin S. Marshall

Readings: Psalm 105:12-42, Exodus 3:1-10, Exodus 12:1-12, John 12:31-36

Question: What does it mean to be in exile?

Today we continue to examine key aspects and understandings of the Christian faith, so we are able to talk about it with people in an intelligent and informed manner. This morning we are going to talk about the experience of the Hebrew people in exile in Egypt, their escape from there and why it is so important. Next week we will talk about Babylon and then it will be time to start our walk towards the Nativity of our Lord.

One of the most pivotal events in Hebrew history is the period spent in exile in Egypt. This is an important episode at multiple levels as it reveals to us God's pro-active work in bring about His purposes and reveals more of how God can relate to us both as individuals and nations.

The story begins in Genesis with the Israelites ending up in Egypt. Last week we spoke about how Jacob was one of the patriarchs and that through his sons would come the twelve tribes of Israel. One of the younger brothers was Jacob's favourite. His older brothers despised him to the extent that they sold him off as a slave to some passing slave traders and this young lad ended up in Egypt unknown to all the others. His brothers had told Jacob he was dead. His name was Joseph. In Genesis 46 we see that during a time of famine in Israel God told Jacob in a dream to take his sons and family and move to Egypt. There they would find food and the family would flourish. This was after the brothers had gone to Egypt a couple of times to buy food and they had met up with Joseph who had, by that stage, risen to be second in power to Pharaoh in all the land. Quite a story but not for today you can read it for yours in Genesis. The net result was that Jacob led his entire family to live in Egypt.

The family did indeed flourish in Egypt to the extent that after four hundred years the number of Jewish people in Egypt was considered a threat to the Egyptians. The Pharaoh of the time, Ramesses II, known for his great building projects, was increasingly fearful of the Jewish numbers, so he increasingly enslaved the Hebrew people and made them work for him. Exodus 1 tells us that memories of Joseph's exemplary leadership, even though he lived to a great age, were well gone. Or maybe the fact that Joseph was a Jew was ignored, sort of like the way Aussies love to claim Kiwi stars as their own. One wonders if one of the reasons for this enslavement was the degree to which the Hebrew people had adopted Egyptian gods and customs and abandoned their own, and their God. But certainly not all had. God always has a faithful remnant through every trial and persecution; those who will carry the flag forward as others fall by the wayside.

What had become a place of refuge had become a place of exile. The people were not able to return to their homeland, nor could they freely carry out their own traditions, customs and worship. They were slaves. So, God chose to intervene.

Now here is one of the startling facts about this narrative and an important one. God's action was pre-emptive. God determined to act and put the actors in place. The Hebrew lad Moses had been brought up in Pharaoh's household after Pharaoh's daughter had famously found Moses amongst the bullrushes. The infant Moses had been set afloat in a reed basket on the waters of the Nile during one of the times of persecution. Exodus 1:15 tells us that Pharaoh, wanting to reduce Jewish numbers, had told the mid-wives to kill all newborn Hebrew babies. Instead, and likely unknown to him, Pharaoh ended up with a Jewish child growing up as a member of his household. Some irony there. This should give us pause to think. God acts long before we are aware of it. This is so often true in our lives as well. When we look back on our own lives, we can often see multiple instances where God has been calling, speaking into, influencing our lives, making us part of things that reveal His presence or purpose. We see it if our eyes are open to it. God never ceases drawing us to Himself. It is only our rebellion and stubbornness that gets in the way. Our hard hearts that hold us from all the good God has for us.

Now Moses wasn't the greatest of people. He killed an Egyptian that had abused one of his countrymen. When he found out he had been seen, Moses ran away into the desert to the remote town of Midian to escape the consequences. There he married and remained. Maybe Moses had an anger problem you think? A trace of cowardice? Not the ideal candidate to do God's work? Well, God so often chooses the unlikely, the unskilled, the ordinary to do the incredible, so that His power might be revealed. God had brought Moses this far. Moses' personal failures and insecurities wasn't going to thwart God's purpose for his life any more than our shortcomings can stop God working things out for us as He shapes and moulds our lives. While Moses is sorting out his life, or so he thinks, the people's suffering worsens.

Exodus 3 outlines an incredible experience. In the desert God famously attracted Moses' attention with a bush that burned but was not consumed. An unusual experience becomes a profound one. God spoke to Moses from the bush saying, **"I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob."** **At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.** If Moses knew anything about God and the stories of his people he knew that God was holy and that from the time of Cain's murder was a serious evil. Moses had every reason to be afraid confronted by the Holy God.

If you read Exodus 3 and 4 you will see that as God outlines His plan to use Moses to rescue God's people from the Egyptians Moses reveals his insecurities big time. He is not good enough. Who am I that they would listen to me? So, God shows Moses

a sign he can use. Pick up a stick. Moses does and it turns into a snake. So, Moses runs away. I'm not good enough at speaking. Now God gets annoyed, angry at Moses. *"You brother Aaron is coming, even now, to find you and he will speak for you"* (paraphrase), says God. Now pick up the staff and get on with the job. And Moses does. It is not good to have God get angry at you!

The rescuing of the Hebrew people from Egypt is not straightforward as one might imagine. We are talking of a population of some one million Jews in Egypt out of a population of around four million. This is no small task. And would Pharaoh be keen on losing his slave task force? One of the wonderful things however was the Hebrew leadership. They had been praying for deliverance and when Moses and Aaron appeared and told them what God had done and said they believed. They bowed down and worshipped God, giving thanks God had heard their prayers and was responding.

Also, a good lesson here. How often have we prayed and then when God has come through just continued as if we are taking the blessing for granted? Just like some men who Jesus healed that were lepers. To forget gratitude is to miss an even greater blessing, that of an ongoing relationship with the Lord.

As Pharaoh increasingly hardened his heart against Moses and what God had requested great plagues came upon Egypt that Moses told Pharaoh would happen.

There were ten plagues firstly the Nile River and all the water in Egypt turned to blood, killing the fish and making the water undrinkable. Then a swarm of frogs came up from the Nile and invaded every house. Then the dust throughout the nation swarmed with lice that terrorised the people and the animals. Then flies swarmed over everything Egyptian, possessions, people and livestock. Then a deadly plague killed off most of the Egyptian livestock. Even though Pharaoh was given chances to change his mind between plagues he stubbornly refused to listen as his heart got harder and harder. As a result further plagues continued. Painful boils broke out on the Egyptians and all their animals. Then a massive hailstorm devastated all of the Egyptian crops and trees. Then, if there was anything left, a massive swarm of locusts consumed any remaining vegetation. When Pharaoh still refused to listen three days of thick, paralyzing darkness covered the land of Egypt. Then sadly, the last plague got Pharaoh's attention. every firstborn Egyptian son, including Pharaoh's own, and firstborn of the livestock died. In all this time the houses of the Hebrews were protected. The area of Goshen, in particular where the Hebrews lived, was not touched by the plagues.

One notable episode amongst these plagues is now marked annually. God told Moses to tell the Israelite families to institute a practice now referred to as the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread. Integral to this was the slaughtering of a Passover lamb and putting its blood on the sides and tops of the doorframes to the house. They

were also to cook unleavened bread, bread without yeast. These were firstly, a sign to the angel of death that it was a Hebrew house and to be protected, to “passover” the house, and secondly a reminder that the exodus would take place quickly with little time to prepare. Unleavened bread can be prepared immediately. Leavened bread takes time to set, rise and be cooked. This household ceremony would become a central part of Jewish culture and still is today. The blood offering was a sign of the seriousness of sin and rebellion against God and a pointer to the Lamb of God who would one day redeem the whole world, once and for all with His blood.

The core themes for us to take from this are: (1) God has a wider plan for humanity and He is working it out through history. (2) God’s plan involves us. God wants a faithful and responsive people to call His own. (3) God knows our hearts, our strengths, our weaknesses, our failures and that does not stop God from incorporating us into His plan. If we respond positively and grow in the relationship, even if we struggle at the start, there is great reward as Moses experienced. If we reject God’s will there is increasing pain as Pharaoh learned. (4) God takes the initiative. His ways are surely greater than our ways. God is working things out for us and in our lives even before we are aware of it because He loves us and wants good for us.

When we embrace God’s plan, not just for our lives but for all things, life gets easier and better even in hard times. Even through the hardest times, and we get these for a variety of reasons, we can be assured that God is there with us, alongside us, strengthening and helping us through. And when God brings good, wonderful things and people into our lives we will naturally rejoice with thanksgiving and worship. In all of this we grow and become a blessing to those around us; our family, our friends, our brothers and sisters in Christ, even to the world itself. Are you a blessing? If you are walking with God, you are or will be, even if you can be stubborn like Moses, because God wants good for our lives and those around us!

Amen

Next week we discuss Babylon.