

GOD IS KEEPING HIS PROMISES IN UNEXPECTED WAYS

Exodus 1:15—2:10

Please review this week's catechism question.

Did you meet a new person this past Sunday after the worship service?

INTRODUCTION

Describe what made a favorite movie or book suspenseful. Do you like it when your real life is full of suspense? Why or why not?

What most enjoy in movies and books, suspense, we do not enjoy in our real lives. None of us enjoys the suspense of wondering if there will be enough money in the checking account to pay the bills at the end of the month. No one likes sitting in the hospital waiting room to find out if a loved one survived the surgery. We like it when the bank account is full, everyone is healthy, and there are no risks in front of us. We don't like suspense in our lives. We want assurances that everything is going according to plan and there are no uncertainties. Unfortunately, that is not how life goes. While we hate to admit it and work like mad to keep reality from forcing its way into our lives, the fact is that we live in a very uncertain world. None of us knows what the next day holds. Accidents, illness, financial calamity, other people's sinfulness, our own sinfulness all conspire to keep us from living a secure life. The Bible is written for people who are living on the edge of their seats, fearing the uncertainties that face us all. In today's passage we will see how God works to save his people when they have absolutely no control over any part of their lives.

STUDY

1. What are some ways that the future existence of the nation of Israel is put in question in this passage?

There is little reason for optimism in any part of this story. The king, who has absolute power over the people of Israel, is full of racist hatred toward Israel. He is intent upon their destruction as a people. He enslaves the entire nation and uses them to profit himself and the rest of the nation of Egypt.

In v. 15 we see that the Pharaoh has developed a plan that is so brutal that he cannot announce it publicl. Rather, in secret he calls for the two women who are in charge of the midwives of the Hebrews, Shiphrah and Puah. He commands these women to kill all the baby boys of the Hebrews as they are born into the world. The command carries with it the threat of death if they do not obey the vicious king. It is a cunning plan of genocide worthy of the greatest tyrants the world has ever produced.

In v. 22, when the midwives refuse to cooperate with his genocidal mania he goes public with his plan. He turns the entire population of Egypt into executioners. His fury knows no bounds. He is determined to eliminate the seed of Abraham, to eliminate the chosen people. It is his intention to destroy the nation through whom God has promised to bless all the nations of the world. The survival of God's people and therefore of God's plan to save the world, hangs by a thread. In chapter 2 we see how this plan for the destruction of an entire race is experienced by one family, by one mother and her baby boy. It would be hard to imagine a more hopeless situation than the one facing the nation Israel and the parents of Moses we see described in this passage.

2. How does the Pharaoh's fury against Israel compare with the fury of Satan against the church? See Ephesians 6:10-12, 1 Thess. 3: 1-5, 1 Timothy 4:1-2, 1 Peter 5:8-9.

We see here the fury of Satan himself, set out to destroy the people of God and thus remove the blessing of God from the human race. The hatred of the world for the people of God is here clearly portrayed. All the power of the world and of the devil is arrayed against the church to destroy every vestige of God's grace from the universe. It certainly does not appear that the people of God have much hope of surviving this onslaught. The enemies of the church have all the

power. The people of God are powerless slaves. The heirs of the promises have no way to defend themselves. It is an accurate picture of the condition of God's people in every generation. The church is always one generation away from annihilation. The threats against us corporately and individually cannot be overstated. The church around the world is under attack by those who hate us. Satan's fury is vented on the church through persecution, false teaching and the sowing of dissension through unresolved conflict. His goal is to murder us and to destroy us by destroying true faith in the true Christ.

3. How have you felt the fury of Satan against you personally? How have we felt the fury of Satan against us as a church?

God keeps his promise to save his people against all odds.

4. Why do the midwives disobey the king of Egypt and rather than kill the Hebrew boys, preserve their lives?

They do it because they fear God.

5. What does it mean to fear God?

Fearing God, throughout the Bible is shown to be the most basic and rational of human responses to God. The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, we are repeatedly told in the Proverbs. Several things are true of those who fear God. First, they are chiefly aware of the fact that they are dependent upon God for all things. They know that they live in God's world and that all they have has come from him. Second, they know that they are always living in God's presence. He knows everything they think, say and do. There is nothing hidden from his eyes. There are no secrets in the universe for God knows all. Third, they know that this God to whom they owe everything and who sees everything is a God of justice. He does not let the guilty go unpunished. They know that there is a day of accounting, a day of judgment in store for all humanity and they will have to answer for what they have done and what they have left undone. They know that "it is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the Living God."

6. How does the fear of God keep them from doing evil and motivate them to do good?

There can be no doubt that a king who has devised such a barbaric plan to kill innocent babies will not think twice about killing those who resist his will. However, they do not think twice about obeying the king. They fear God and therefore they are not afraid of the king. They would rather be killed by the king than have to stand before God with the blood of the babies of God's chosen people on their hands. If you fear God, then you will not fear men. If you fear men, then you will not fear God. These two fears are mutually exclusive. The fear of God restrains the women from evil and motivates them to do good and the lack of fear for God is what drives the fury of the king.

7. Do you fear God? Has the fear of God restrained you from doing evil? Has the fear of God motivated you to do good? If you don't fear God, what should you do about it?

8. How did the midwives respond to the king when asked about why they didn't kill the baby boys? What does this tell us about these women?

He calls them into his throne room and demands to know why they are allowing the Hebrew boys to live. The women, who have acted so courageously, in their preserving alive the Hebrew boys, now waffle. They lie in order to preserve their lives. Rather than use the opportunity to bear witness to the power of God and rebuke the king for his lack of fear of God, they mix a truth with a lie in order to save their own skins. It is true that the Hebrew women are more vigorous than the Egyptian women but it is a plain falsehood that the midwives are never present when the Hebrew babies are born. We discover in this interaction that these women are not perfect. They are sinners even though they fear God and act courageously in defending the lives of the Hebrew boys.

9. What are the results of the midwives' courageous resistance?

In v. 20 we are told that God is kind to the midwives. The word for “was kind” is literally, “did good to.” It is frequently used in Genesis and throughout the OT for God’s kindness or goodness to his chosen people. God promised Jacob that he would “do good” to him. In Deuteronomy, God regularly tells Israel that it is his intention to “do good” to them. In other words, God treats the midwives as one of his own people. He counts them among the people of God and recipients of all his promises. Now, what is so important to notice here is that God’s kindness isn’t earned by their behavior. Verse 19 immediately precedes v. 20. While the midwives do the right thing in preserving the lives of the babies, they do the wrong thing in lying. In the act of lying, we discover that these women are sinners. God is kind to them in spite of their sin. These women fear God as a work of grace, not due to some natural ability in themselves.

Additionally, God preserves their lives. The “wise” king believes their silly lie and does not kill them. Then, the wise and powerful king of Egypt is not only duped by the lie but his desire to destroy the nation of Israel is thwarted by the foolish and weak women. The nation Israel multiplies and becomes even more numerous. God’s plan to save the world goes forward through the work of lying women who fear God. Finally, notice that the fury of the king increases and he turns the entire Egyptian population into executioners. He commands that every Egyptian seize and throw into the Nile River every Hebrew baby boy while permitting the baby girls to live. So it is with the wicked when their plans for a secure future are thwarted, their anger increases and they resort to even more violent methods.

God keeps his promise to save his people through weak sinners who fear him.

10. While Moses doesn’t tell us explicitly, what can we conclude is happening to Hebrew baby boys from this Levite mother hiding her baby and then setting him adrift in the Nile River?

Hebrew baby boys are being killed.

11. According to 2:2 why does she hide him for three months? (NOTE: Verse 2 literally says, “The woman conceived and she gave

birth to a son. She saw him, that he was good and she hid him for three months.”) What does this mean? (Clue: See Genesis 1 & Heb. 11:23)

Seven times in Genesis 1 God saw what he had made, that it was good. In short, the woman, when she saw this child, knew, in some way, that he was no ordinary child. Somehow, she knew that the blessing of God lay upon this child in a special way and so she worked to preserve his life. She saw that he was good in the same way that God saw his creation was good. The writer to the Hebrews in 11:23 says this, “By faith Moses’ parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king’s edict.” Here again we see a woman acting courageously to preserve the life of a Hebrew baby because of her faith in the promises of God.

12. What does she do when it is no longer possible to hide the baby boy? Why does she do this? What motivates her? What is she hoping will happen?

It is difficult to know exactly what the woman was doing by placing her three-month-old son in a watertight basket among the reeds at the edge of the Nile River. Could the danger to him be greater in her home than lying in the waters of the crocodile infested river? Every Egyptian was under orders to throw every Hebrew baby boy into the river and so what hope did she have of the child being saved by an Egyptian rather than being thrown into the river? That she believed that he would be saved by her actions is clear in that she posted the boy’s older sister to keep watch in order to know “what would be done for him.” She expected that God would do something to save the boy. Did she know that this is where the princess came often to bath? Did she know something about the character of this princess? We are not told. The woman acts in faith to preserve her son and God does immeasurably more than she could ever have hoped for.

13. What are the evidences of grace in what happens to this baby boy?

The Egyptian princess discovers the crying baby boy in the basket. She immediately realizes it is one of the Hebrew babies. When she utters those words in v. 7, we are completely on the edge of our seats. What will she do? She is the daughter of the king. Does her father’s

vicious blood flow in her veins? Will she toss the baby into the river as he has ordered? But no, we are told that she has compassion upon the crying baby.

At that moment, the baby's older sister steps up to the princess and asks Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?" Again, we are unsure if this girl is acting on the spur of the moment or if this was the plan. Whichever, the result is astonishing. Pharaoh's daughter tells her to go get a Hebrew woman to nurse the child. The girl runs and gets her mother. Pharaoh's daughter gently returns the baby to its mother and tells her she will pay the woman to care for the baby. So the baby is returned to her mother, now under the protection of Pharaoh himself. Pharaoh pays to have the baby cared for by its very own mother! When the baby is weaned, probably at around age 3-4, he is returned to Pharaoh's daughter and he becomes the grandson of Pharaoh. This child who has been specially favored by God grows up in Pharaoh's own home and plays with his other grandchildren and enjoys all the rights and privileges of belonging to the royal family. This is one of the most amazing reversals of fortune every seen. It happens through a woman who believes the promises of God and so acts to preserve the life of her child. This child is none other than Moses, the great leader and Savior of the Hebrew people. As his name means, he was drawn out of the waters of death and thus became the agent of salvation for God's people.

God keeps his promise to save his people through weak sinners who trust him.

14. In John 5:45-47 Jesus tells the religious leaders that Moses, who wrote Exodus, wrote about Jesus. What are some ways this story points ahead to the Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ?

First, the similarities between the birth of Moses and the birth of Jesus are clear. Just as Moses' mother recognized this was no ordinary child, so did Mary knew that this child in her womb was no ordinary child. Just as the tyrannical Pharaoh decreed the murder of baby Hebrew boys, so the tyrannical King Herod ordered the murder of all the baby Hebrew boys in Bethlehem. Moses was saved while numerous other babies perished in the same way Jesus was saved while the boys of Bethlehem were destroyed. Moses was hidden from the ferocious king just as Jesus was hidden from the violent king.

Just as Moses leaves the bosom of his mother and father to live among a sinful foreign people, so Jesus leaves the bosom of his Father to live among sinners. Just as Moses' name reflects both his origin and his destiny: he was drawn out of the water and he will draw Israel out of Egypt; so Jesus' name reflects his origin, he is "God with us" and his destiny, "he will save his people from their sins."

Perhaps the greatest foreshadowing of the crucified Savior is to be seen in the fact that the work of God in this story is effected through women. Egyptian and Jewish culture was very patriarchal. Much like the Arabic world of today, women had no rights and no power. Yet, all of the main actors in this passage are women. The "wise and powerful" king is overcome by "foolish and weak" women. The original readers of this story would have been howling with laughter as they observed the way in which the Pharaoh's plot to destroy the people of God was thwarted by the courage and actions of women and girls. Moses, the deliverer of Israel, is kept safe by women. This surely points to the weakness of the cross, which is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe. Despised women are the agents of salvation pointing to the despised son of Man being murdered upon a cross as a criminal being the agent of eternal salvation for all who believe. At the moment that all seems lost, when the baby is in the river waiting to be eaten by crocodiles or thrown away by an Egyptian, is the moment of salvation. At the moment that all seems to be lost, when the Messiah cries out and dies, is the moment of salvation. God brings salvation to his people in the midst of and through events that appear to be hopeless. It is in the midst of weakness and hopelessness that God is working out his salvation.

Finally, after three months of hiding, Moses is brought into the glorious life of a prince in Egypt. Does not his being saved from death point to the glory of the resurrection? The great reversal that takes place surely points ahead to the greatest reversal of fortune in the universe, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, after three days. So the story points us to our ultimate and great hope, our resurrection with Jesus. No matter how bad our lives get, this is the ultimate hope for all who belong to Christ. Resurrection and salvation are just around the corner so we can be confident and not afraid.

15. What are some ways you are discovering that the "weak" crucified Jesus is your strength?

God keeps his promise to save his people through the weakness of the cross.