

Meadow Creek Presbyterian Church
Reading Together
The Golden Thread—The Story of Jesus

February 6 – Exodus 4: 1 – 17

So God called Moses to go and rescue his people, the Israelites, from slavery and oppression in Egypt, but as we read these verses we see that Moses didn't really think he was up to the task. The question Moses asked in yesterday's reading was really a very good question.

Exodus 3:11 But Moses said to God, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"

That is a question we should always ask when we believe God has called us to do something. Who am I? If you remember from yesterday's reading, God answers that question by saying who He is, and then in today's reading God gives Moses extra tools to do the work He has called him to do. In verses 1 to 9, God shows Moses the extraordinary powers that Moses will have to do miracles to validate his calling and his message to the people of Israel and to Pharaoh. But Moses still isn't satisfied, because Moses is worried about his speech, so God gives Moses his brother Aaron to be his spokesman.

Jesus has called us and left with an enormous task. Jesus has told us that we are to take the message of his gospel to the ends of the earth.

Matthew 28:19-20 *Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.*

But like God did with Moses, Jesus does not leave us on our own, or expect us to do this in our own power. Just as God gave Moses his staff, and Aaron, Jesus gives us his Holy Spirit to live inside of us, to empower us, and to speak for us.

Acts 1:8 *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

Luke 12:11-12 *"When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, ¹² for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say."*

February 7 – Exodus 4: 27 - 5: 21

In Chapter 4, God proves to Moses that Moses is the man to lead Israel out of Egypt. God even sends Aaron out to meet Moses while Moses is

Meadow Creek Presbyterian Church
Reading Together
The Golden Thread—The Story of Jesus

still on the way. Moses and Aaron excitedly tell the Israelites everything God has said and done, and it causes the Israelites to bow and worship the Lord. But, something very interesting happens as God sends Moses and Aaron to meet with Pharaoh. Pharaoh says, “No!” In fact, what Pharaoh says exactly is:

Exodus 5: 2 “Who is the Lord, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord and I will not let Israel go.”

I am sure Moses and Aaron were a little taken back by this, my guess is they probably thought Pharaoh would just say yes. It’s clear that the Israelites didn’t expect Pharaoh to respond this way, or they probably would have not have allowed Moses to go to Pharaoh. They didn’t want life to get harder, they wanted life to get easier. There is a strain of thinking in American Christianity that is like the Israelites thinking. When a person becomes a Christian life should get easier. But Jesus never promised that. In fact, just the opposite:

John 16:33 I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

I think that is why Jesus said over and over again that if a person wants to have a relationship with Christ, they must be willing to take up their cross and follow him. Jesus walked down the road marked with suffering, and as his followers, if we are following him, we should expect to travel the same road. When the Apostle Paul became a Christian, he went from an easy life to a life of unimaginable suffering. He records some of that suffering, as he defends his ministry in:

2 Corinthians 11: 21 – 29 But whatever anyone else dares to boast of—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast of that. ²² Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they offspring of Abraham? So am I. ²³ Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. ²⁴ Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; ²⁶ on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; ²⁷ in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and

Meadow Creek Presbyterian Church
Reading Together
The Golden Thread—The Story of Jesus

exposure. ²⁸ And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. ²⁹ Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?

All of that suffering was because of Christ. But you know how the story of Moses and the Israelites ends in Egypt. Life does get harder for a while for them, but God triumphs over Pharaoh. Now think of what Jesus said in John 16:33, when he promised us that in this life we would have trouble. He also said, "Take hope, I have overcome the world." We know how the story will end. Jesus has defeated Satan, sin and death. He has triumphed. Whatever you are dealing with today, take heart. Jesus has overcome.

February 8 – Exodus 5: 22 -- 6: 12

Today, we find out why God allowed Pharaoh's heart to be hardened. It was so God could show Pharaoh, the Egyptians, the Israelites, and even the watching world what His mighty hand and outstretched arm can do. 40 years later, when Israel finally begins the conquest of the Promised Land, people will still be talking about what God did to Pharaoh.

Joshua 2: 9 (Rahab) said to the men, "I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. ¹⁰ For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction. ¹¹ And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the Lord your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath.

There is no question, that what happened to the Israelites in Egypt and even in the wilderness, on their way to the Promised Land, made them miserable, but God was using what was happening to accomplish His purpose.

1500 years later, as Jesus walked the earth, and performed his earthly ministry, Jesus and his disciples came across a man who was born blind. The encounter resulted in the following conversation:

Meadow Creek Presbyterian Church
Reading Together
The Golden Thread—The Story of Jesus

John 9: 1 – 3 As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. ² And his disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” ³ Jesus answered, “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.

God’s greatness is best displayed through our weakness. The Apostle Paul was afflicted with what he referred to as a thorn in the flesh. (The Greek word for thorn is actually more like a stake. Meaning that Paul wasn’t just pricked and irritated by what was going on, but was impaled by whatever it was.) Paul prayed for this “thorn” to be removed. Here is what Paul says God’s response was to his plea:

2 Corinthians 12: 9 -10 “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰ For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Through weakness God’s power is displayed and God is glorified, but through our suffering God also brings good to our lives.

Romans 8: 28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

Through the suffering of Israel in Egypt, God’s glory, might and power were displayed, and as a result Israel’s faith was strengthened. The same is true in our lives.

1 Peter 1: 3 – 9 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷ so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. ⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, ⁹ obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Meadow Creek Presbyterian Church
Reading Together
The Golden Thread—The Story of Jesus

February 9 – Exodus 7: 1 – 21

In today's reading we read about the first of the miracles God performed through Moses. We commonly refer to the miracles that Moses performed as the Ten Plagues on Egypt. We won't read about each of them, but just to refresh your memory, after God turned the water of Egypt to blood, there were nine other plagues: a plague of frogs, a plague of gnats, a plague of flies, a plague on livestock, a plague of boils, hail, a plague of locusts, darkness, and finally the death of the first-born son in each Egyptian family. As you read today's reading you see that Pharaoh's court magicians were about to duplicate the first few miracles that God performed through Moses and Aaron, but from the plague of gnats on they couldn't keep up with the power of God. In fact, in Exodus 8:19, they are forced to admit that, "This is the finger of God."

In God's power and might, he could have made Pharaoh give up his hold on the Israelites without unleashing all of these miraculous plagues, but instead God chose to put on a show for everyone to see; why? As you read Scripture you come across times when the power of God is displayed in amazing ways. In fact, if you were to analyze Scripture carefully, you would see that whenever God wants to reveal himself in a new way to people, there are always miracles that confirm that what is happening is from "the finger of God." We always think of these miracles in terms of Pharaoh and the Egyptians, and how they viewed the God of Israel, but remember the Israelites also need to know that their God was powerful who was worthy of trust, obedience and complete worship. These miracles that happened in Egypt weren't just to bring Pharaoh to his knees, they were also designed to bring the Israelites to their knees—to make a lasting impression on them, so that they would know who their God was and what he could do.

As we think forward to the New Testament and to Jesus' coming, we see the same principal at work. The miracles Jesus did weren't just to put on a show or draw a crowd. They were specifically done to impress upon people that he was who he claimed to be—the Son of God.

When John the Baptist was in prison, he sent some of his disciples to find out if Jesus was indeed, the real deal. Look how Jesus answers John's question:

Matthew 11:2-5 *When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples ³ to ask him, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect*

Meadow Creek Presbyterian Church
Reading Together
The Golden Thread—The Story of Jesus

someone else?" ⁴ Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: ⁵ The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor.

Jesus is saying the miracles he performed proved that he was the Messiah, the one they had been waiting for, the Son of God.

John 10:37-38 *Do not believe me unless I do what my Father does. ³⁸ But if I do it, even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father."*

Just as God proved himself to the Israelites as the great God who alone was worthy of their worship, Jesus proved himself to be the Son of God who is worthy of our faith, worship, and obedience.

February 10 – Exodus 8: 20 – 32

In spite of all of the plagues that God unleashed on the Egyptians and Pharaoh, Pharaoh's heart remained hard. Even though his eyes saw the hand of God at work his heart refused to believe that he should bow down and worship God. God allowed Pharaoh's heart to follow the path it wanted to follow. God allowed his heart to be hard, so that God's plan and God's purpose could be accomplished. Pharaoh was the most powerful ruler in his day, and he had no desire to give up that power. The Apostle Paul gives us a glimpse into the heart of man in Romans 1.

Romans 1:18-23 *The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, ¹⁹ since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities-- his eternal power and divine nature-- have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. ²¹ For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.*

God didn't force Pharaoh's heart to be hard, it naturally came that way. What God did was allow Pharaoh's heart to go where it wanted to go. Pharaoh could see the truth, but his hard heart chose not to believe it.

The same was true in Jesus' day. The Pharisees were very comfortable in their position of power. They didn't want anyone to mess it up. So,

Meadow Creek Presbyterian Church
Reading Together
The Golden Thread—The Story of Jesus

no matter what miracles Jesus did they simply chose not to believe—just as Pharaoh's heart was hard, so was theirs.

In John 11 we find the miracle of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. You would think that a miracle of this magnitude would soften the hearts of the Pharisees and make them believe in Jesus, but as we read what happened we see the miracle did just the opposite.

John 11:47-53 *Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. "What are we accomplishing?" they asked. "Here is this man performing many miraculous signs. ⁴⁸ If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." ⁴⁹ Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, "You know nothing at all! ⁵⁰ You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish." ⁵¹ He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, ⁵² and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one. ⁵³ So from that day on they plotted to take his life.*

Like Pharaoh, the Pharisees wanted to protect their place and their power, and they were willing to do anything to keep it—even if it meant putting the Son of God to death. Just as the hardness of Pharaoh's heart was all part of God's plan, so too, was the hardness of the Pharisees' hearts. Just like with Pharaoh, God worked through the hardness of the Pharisees' hearts to accomplish his purpose. Moses came to Egypt to set his people free, Jesus came to earth to set us free. For that to happen, Jesus had to go to the cross and die.

Romans 8:1-2 *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ² because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.*

In the world we live in today the message of the cross is often rejected and it is all because of the hardness of men's hearts.

1 Corinthians 1:18-25 *For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.... ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.*

Only God can soften a hard heart.

Ezekiel 36:26 *I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.*

Meadow Creek Presbyterian Church
Reading Together
The Golden Thread—The Story of Jesus

In order to melt Pharaoh's heart, God took Pharaoh's firstborn son. In order to melt our hearts, God gave his only son.

February 11 – Exodus 12: 1 – 36

The final plague that God unleashed on the Egyptians was a plague that caused the death of the firstborn son of each Egyptian family. We can only imagine the horror of that night as death went from one house to another; even Pharaoh's family was not spared. The only homes that were spared were those that were shielded by the blood of the lamb. It was only the homes that had followed God's instructions and placed the lamb's blood on the doorframes of the homes that were spared that awful night.

As you read this passage, stop and consider all the things the blood of the Lamb did for those who painted it on their doorframes. First, as we have already pointed out, it saved them from death. Second, it marked their home as being different separate from the homes of the Egyptians. Third, in a very real sense, it was what set them free from their slavery to Pharaoh. Look at verse 33. Because of how horrible this plague was, Pharaoh finally relented and not only allowed Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt to freedom, the Egyptians hurried them on their way. Fourth, it was the blood of the lamb that secured their inheritance. In a sense this happened on two levels. It set them on their journey to the land that God had promised to Abraham as an inheritance for his offspring. But also, look at verses 35-36. As they leave Egypt the Israelites receive gifts of gold, silver, and clothing from the Egyptians that they would need for their journey. Remember, they had been slaves and probably were living in poverty in Egypt. These gifts would provide for their needs as they journeyed to the Promised Land, the place of their true inheritance.

In order to be saved from this plague, the Israelites had to have faith—faith that led to obedience. They had to believe that they would be spared by placing the blood of the lamb on their doorframes, but their belief had to lead them to obedience. If they just believed but never followed through and actually painted the doorframe, they would have faced the same plague that fell on the Egyptians.

The Passover was powerful sign to both the Egyptians and the Israelites, but it is an even more powerful sign to us. It is through faith in the Blood of the Lamb that we are saved from death.

Meadow Creek Presbyterian Church
Reading Together
The Golden Thread—The Story of Jesus

Romans 5:8-9 *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!*

It is through faith in the Blood of the Lamb that we are brought out of slavery to sin and into an eternal inheritance that can never be shaken.

1 Peter 1:3-5 *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade-- kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.*

February 12 – Exodus 13: 1 – 16

It is clear that God wanted Israel, to always remember what God had done for them by leading them out of slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land. One way they were to remember was by celebrating the Passover, but here in this chapter we see another way that God called them to remember as well. It was by the consecrating (giving to God) the firstborn of their flocks and their homes. In each family, the firstborn male child was to be set apart as belonging to the Lord to be used in service to the Lord. In verses 14-16, God tells the Israelites that He is commanding them to do this so that they will never forget that it was God who brought them out of Egypt. But while the animals that were given were to be sacrificed as an offering to the Lord, the firstborn sons, were to be redeemed (bought back). This was very different from many of the pagan cultures who offered child sacrifices to their gods.

This law was still in effect when Jesus was born.

Luke 2:21-24 *On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise him, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he had been conceived. ²² When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³ (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"), ²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons."*

Stop and think about that. Why did God's own Son have to be given over to God? Paul tells us in:

Galatians 4:4-5 *But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, ⁵ to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.*

Meadow Creek Presbyterian Church
Reading Together
The Golden Thread—The Story of Jesus

These words that Paul writes, not only remind us that Jesus, God's Son, became like us, they also remind us why he came—to redeem us, so that we could become sons. As you think about how all of this ties together you see a very powerful picture that develops. The redemption of the firstborn by the Israelites wasn't just so they would always remember; it also serves as a very powerful Old Testament picture of what God was going to do with his own Son. The Israelites were commanded by God to give their firstborn sons over to him, and then they were allowed to redeem them, so they would not have to be sacrificed. But God gave his firstborn son over to us, just so he could be sacrificed, so that we could be redeemed and become children of God.