

Exodus 2:23,24

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[0 : 0 0] These are hard times, aren't they? Don't you think they're hard times? Yeah. When you look in the newspapers, when you turn your television on, when you walk down the front at Whitby, when you walk through the centre of the marketplace in Thirst, you look around you and you think, can it get any worse? Can it get any harder? We might have our small encouragements, but the question is, when we feel like that, do we ask this question, does God really care?

Does he really care? As a Christian, do you ask that question of yourself sometimes? With all that I can see going on around me, I get my little encouragements, but does God really care about the bigger picture? Well, I hope this evening we're going to get some encouragement.

If you're a Christian, I'd like to think that this evening you leave this building encouraged in what God does. And to base our thoughts, we're going to base our thoughts around these two verses at the end of Exodus chapter 2, verses 24 and 25. So God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob, and God looked upon the children of Israel, and God acknowledged them. What do you expect from a good and adventure novel? What do you expect from a good adventure novel? A bit of romance perhaps, perhaps a bit of intrigue, perhaps a bit of cruelty, a bit of excitement. Build your anticipation.

The unexpected happens, those little twists in the plot that keep you interested. Some of these writers who write novels are very creative, aren't they? Well, you probably expect all these things. And in the first two chapters of Exodus, you've got it all. If you want a novel in miniature, you just read those first two chapters of Exodus. But it's not a novel. It's not a made-up fictional piece of writing. This is telling us something about the way God is dealing with his people, the children of Israel, his covenant people. It's telling us about the way in which he's caring for them, the way in which he's building his purposes up for them. So we're going to look for a few minutes on these two verses in order to understand something about God's people. So perhaps first of all, we just need to go over what we've read.

The people of Israel, God's chosen people, are now in Egypt. They went to Egypt as guests, as honoured visitors.

[3 : 5 8] They had a lot of status. They were given the best land to live in. But of course that's all changed. The first few verses tell us that Joseph is dead. Everybody who knew Joseph has died off. There is now a new king, a new pharaoh, who doesn't know him. But they've got a dilemma. The Egyptians are not sure of the loyalty of the Israelites. And the people of Israel, their numbers are growing. And this is scaring the Egyptians.

So they tried to hinder their growth. And they tried to hinder the growth by working them. It says they worked them ruthlessly.

They really put them under the cosh. And when that didn't work, they tried to get the midwives to help out with killing the babies and that didn't work. And then they gave this order that all the babies born were to be killed.

And so because of this edict, because of this situation, when Moses is born, his mother hides Moses in the ball rushes. A very famous story told to children around the world.

And it has got those elements, hasn't it, of excitement, of intrigue. You know, who could believe the story of Moses?

[5 : 37] Moses is born. He's born. He's kept quiet for three months. Then he's put in a basket in the river. And then the pharaoh's daughter, the man who's trying to kill all these babies, she finds him.

And she doesn't hand him over to dad and say, I found one. She actually organises for his own mother to look after him until he's old enough to then become her son.

And then he's brought up as a prince. This boy who should have been killed ends up a prince in Egypt. It's what fairy tales are made of.

You couldn't make up a story like that, really, could you, with all those twists and turns. What an amazing situation.

But then, tragedy. Moses kills an Egyptian for beating up an Israelite. And when he finds out it's known, he flees, he runs away.

[6 : 47] And he becomes a shepherd. And there he meets one of Jethro's daughters. He marries Zipporah. And in the meantime, back in Egypt, the pharaoh who wanted to kill Moses, he dies and another one takes his place.

Will Moses go back? Well, no, he doesn't. This pharaoh is even worse than the one before in one sense because he just works the people harder.

And the people begin to feel the burden, the oppression of their situation. So they've gone from being honoured guests, treated to the best of everything, to being under the cosh, the heart ruthlessly, ruthlessly dealt with.

Ah, do you remember about them taking, not even allowing them to get the, supplying the straw for them? They had to go out and do that as well, but supply the same number of bricks.

Do the same... It was hard work for them. And then we hear that they cry out to God.

[8 : 22] When we're at our lowest, when we think things can get no worse, we turn to God. Common.

A common thing even in our day. The number of people who try to do it their own way. And then, when they realise that all their own energies are expended, they turn to God.

And that's what these people did. The people of God got to a position where they turned to him. And they cried out to the Lord.

That's what we're told in verse 23 of Exodus 2. And this cry, you know, wasn't an inward, inward cry.

It wasn't something that people were saying, like we say our prayers quietly. We're crying internally, anguish. The word cry here is an equivalent cry to the sort of noise and hubbub that was described in the time of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis chapter 18.

[9 : 46] Where it says that this noise, this revelry that was heard in Sodom and Gomorrah came up to God.

He heard it. It's that sort of outward loud cry. There was wailing. There was noise. There was sadness in the land of Egypt.

because of the oppression that the people of God felt. This people, the children of God, Christians of their day, if you like, in one sense, God's chosen people, these were a people who had known so much blessing and goodness from God's hand.

Hadn't he saved them numerous times? Hadn't he brought them out? Hadn't he cared for them?

Hadn't he? Hadn't he? Hadn't he? Hadn't he? Hadn't he? Hadn't he? Hadn't he? Hadn't he? All through the days of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, time and time again, we read about God coming to the rescue of his people.

[11 : 20] And this people of Israel, they would have known these things. But this hardship, this oppression that they were feeling, the tenor of the chapter is that this was unbearable.

It was so hard that it drives them to cry out. And with this in view, with this situation firmly fixed in our minds, we then read these two wonderfully rich verses.

Matthew Henry says within these verses are four expressions of God's kind intentions towards his people. And these are the four expressions that we're going to look at.

Does God care for us in hard times? These verses reassure us that he does. And this is the way he deals with us.

What does he do? Well, it says this. And it happened in the process of time that the king of Egypt died. Then the children of Israel groaned because of the bondage and they cried out.

[12 : 55] And their cry came up to God because of the bondage. And it says, so God heard their groaning.

They cried out and God heard. In spite of their rebellion, in spite of their sin, in spite of everything that had gone on prior to this particular time, it says, God heard.

We've already read some of the reasons as to why they were crying. They were slaves. slaves. But that was all past. They were slaves.

The past, they had been different. Their relationship in Egypt, their status had been different. The afflictions laid upon them had been afflicted with real rigour.

[14 : 10] rigour. They were being kept under the boot. There are other aspects to this, you know, that make us surprised that God heard their groanings.

But he did. We also know that at this point in the history of the children of Israel, their worship had not been true worship.

They had strayed from their first love. They had moved away from God. They had intermingled marriages. Job 36 tells us that they were like hypocrites in their hearts.

That heap up wrath. They cry not when they bind them. So for years, for years in Egypt, the Israelites had been quite happy.

You know, they had been guests. Yeah, they've had to work a bit hard, but life was okay. They hadn't wanted to go back to their land. They had not thought about moving anywhere.

[15 : 44] They were happy to abide all the time, day by day, little by little, moving away from God's promises, promises, moving away from his commands.

But now, they're at this point in time where they suddenly realise they're not in a good place.

Ezekiel 20, well, in part of Ezekiel, you get some of the history of the Israelites' time in Egypt being recounted. And Ezekiel, in Ezekiel 20, describes for us there how rebellious Israel had been.

But it also gives us this lovely picture that as they groan, groaning, and God's listening, there's this lovely picture from Ezekiel, in the day I chose Israel, I lifted up my hand and made myself known to them in the land of Israel.

He's now hearing their groaning. They're again at a point where they realised they could do no more. they called upon his name and he inclined his ear toward them.

[17 : 23] Have you ever been in that position? As a Christian, have you been in that position where you felt so far away and you cried on his name?

And the Bible says this indicates to us that he will hear our groanings. Then he goes on to tell us that God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob.

Now we have to say from the outside, don't get into your mind the thought, that God had forgotten his covenant because that's not what this is saying. He remembered his covenant.

It may have appeared to the Israelites that he had forgotten his covenant. They had forgotten him. They were quite happy in Egypt but now circumstances were such they had been driven back to call on his name.

And he heard their groaning. And this, if you like, this, what did I call it at the beginning?

[18 : 58] Sorry about this. this particular intention that God has is that he's mindful or he recounts to himself the covenant that he has with these people.

This covenant goes back to Genesis chapter 12 and 15 where God promises to Abraham on these two occasions that he would become the father of a great nation his descendants whom God had chosen would become the people whom God would rule over.

They would inherit a land chosen by God and that after a period of exile or servitude is this period of the covenant this is where we're at in it.

We see him bringing this part of the covenant to an end. God has chosen his people they are as numerous as the stars.

God wants to rule over them. He's got a land that he's got ready for them. But before they can do that they were to go into a period of exile and servitude.

[20 : 21] And this is the part of the covenant where we see ourselves. And God in a sense is recounting to himself that was my covenant with them. And we're up to this bit.

We're getting towards the bit where we're going to come out of the servitude. We've done that. God is mindful of these things.

And what has God done? God has prepared himself during this time. We think that while all this has happened that it's all sort of random stuff that just sort of happens and eventually it all comes out.

A bit like some people think about the world isn't it? You know the world was created randomly. It just sort of all happened somehow. I'm not sure quite. But God has purpose. Think about Moses.

Moses was miraculously saved. When everything in the world around him should have said that when Pharaoh's daughter found him that he should have been killed.

[21 : 34] But she didn't do that. God had a plan. Moses spent 40 years gaining the knowledge and the awareness and the customs of Egypt.

He then went to the extreme opposite and spent 40 years in the desert areas as a shepherd. The timings and preparations have been finely tuned by God.

I'm sure that Moses probably didn't have a clue at this point what God was going to do with him but these were his preparation days.

The people were now ready. We've got to this point where the people are ready. They are calling on God. They are groaning to him.

They are at their wits end. They don't know what to do. They can only call on God to help them. Moses' training is being directed towards what he will have to do.

[22 : 55] To know how to deal with Pharaoh. That's what that 40 years in Egypt being a prince was about. Knowing all the protocols, all that was necessary of how we can gain entrance in to see Pharaoh and deal with the people.

And as for becoming a shepherd, he was going to have to lead some silly sheep. The people of Israel, he was going to have to lead them. Being a shepherd was good training for dealing with the people who were willful and who needed to be looked after.

That was a covenant that God was dealing with, was preparing. That's what he reminded himself of. I've been preparing Moses. I've been preparing him.

I've been preparing the people. I've got them to the point where they're ready to come out, where we're ready to continue on in my covenant for them. We are going to move towards the promised land.

God cares about us. When we're at our worst, he's waiting for us to call on his name. God has made a covenant with his people.

[24 : 30] He's made a covenant, hasn't he? He will hear us, he will save us all the time. He's working with us towards an end.

Thirdly, God looked upon the children of Israel. I love this. You want to have an encouragement, you want to be encouraged in your souls.

God looked upon the children of Israel. God then saw, that's what it means, he looked with his own eyes eyes, to see what was going on with the children of Israel.

This word, looked, carries with it a sense that he viewed them, but more, he had personal experience, he took a personal interest.

He didn't rely upon hearsay, he had a good look. chapter 3 verse 7 tells us, doesn't it, I have surely seen the oppression of my people.

[25 : 51] He doesn't say I just heard them crying as I'm responding to that, but he looked. And often we're like that, aren't we? I don't know what you're like, but I'm a bit like that.

A bit sceptical sometimes as a human being. I've got five brothers and two sisters, and currently my mother is not very well, and of course we all go and visit, you know, and they ring me up or they email me, and it's all different, different messages.

So one person says, oh she's alright, another person says, oh no she's really poorly, and you don't know do you? You don't know who to believe, so what I have to do is get in the car and go and see for myself.

That's the tenor of this. God sees for himself, he's heard the cry, he's remembered his covenant, and he takes a look to see exactly what's going on.

God is interested in our lives, that's what this tells me. As a Christian in 2013, in Whitby tonight, God is interested in what we're doing, and when we cry to him, he has a look, he doesn't ignore you, he doesn't say you're not worth it, he says, looks upon it.

[27 : 24] You see, he's the high priest, isn't he? he's not a high priest, we don't have a high priest who cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities.

He feels things, he sees things in us, it evokes emotion in him, he looks on us, he knows what we're going through, even when he sits in the glories of heaven, he looks and sees what we're going through.

Now, Moses was a different kettle of fish. In chapter 2, verse 11, we see that when Moses saw something, when he was a prince, what did he see through his human eyes?

He'd been taught by his mother about his own people, even though he was a prince of Egypt, he went out and he looked at his own people, that's what it says, he knew that the children of Israel were his own people, but he was looking through human eyes, his passions were aroused, and his actions, very premature, very much on the horizontal plane, wasn't he?

He wasn't thinking about God, he was just thinking about reaction. God sees things from this panoramic view, he sees all things, he sees it all as it happens, he's hearing the anguish of the children of Israel, his people, and he's looked, and he wants to help them.

[29 : 35] And we know this because later on again in Ezekiel, as I told you before, we have this recounting of the history, he says, I made myself known to them in the land of Egypt, God makes himself known to them, he looks, he takes it all into account, hearing their cries, and he's going to help them, we know that, because we have the scriptures, we know God's going to help them, but we're still at that point where he's looking on them, seeing their situation, Christian today, God knows your situation, he knows what your difficulties are, he knows how your heart is, he knows the things you have to face at work, he knows the pressure that you're under, and we do live in a world of pressure, but he sees, don't think he doesn't, he sees what you're going through, he knows where you're at, and finally

God has respect for them, when we use the word respect, we have this thing about high esteem, about status, I don't think this is what we're getting to here, realistically this word means, that after this process of examination, he's heard their groanings, he's reminded himself of his covenant to these people, his promises to them, and he's looked and seen, when he's examined all of this, he acknowledges them, he cares for them, it evokes a passion, emotion in them, if anybody says Christians don't get emotional,

I'm sorry, but they do, because God gets emotional, it brings out a passion, because they're his people, we read don't we later on in the Old Testament, Deuteronomy, now my people, my special people, I have loved them with an everlasting love, love, this is a response of that covenant love, God has remembered his covenant with them, he loves them, he has called them to be his people, he has compassion for them, do you know what compassion is?

Love in action, that's what compassion is, it's that love we were talking about this morning, love one another, compassion for one another, act, there isn't any compassion if there's no action, again I used Charlie Brown this morning, didn't I?

Well I'll use him again this evening, I don't know whether you've seen that one where Charlie Brown is soaking wet and Lucy comes along and she's got an umbrella and she just stands and looks at him and says be of good cheer Charlie Brown and then she walks off and leaves him in the rain, that's not compassion, is it?

[33 : 52] Compassion would be to share the umbrella, love in action, why does God have compassion for these people?

Because they are still his people, in spite of their sin, in spite of their waywardness, in spite of their disobedience, he has chosen them, a position sometimes we can be in, you know, sometimes we can be in that position where God has saved us, but we're not doing what he wants us to do, we're not living in a way that we should be living, we're not working for him as we should do, yet we are his peculiar people.

Just read Exodus 19, Deuteronomy 14, 1 Peter 2, all these verses, just build up this picture, that when God has bestowed his love upon you, you are his, you know you are his, and he loves you.

God has one commentator has said about this particular intention that we've been looking at, that his eyes, God's eyes, are fixed on the children of Israel to show himself strong, to show himself God on their behalf.

this is the start of something that God is going to do with these people. They have heard, he's heard their groanings. God is going to do a work worthy of himself.

[35 : 54] a work worthy of God is going to be done following what we have read because of the way in which he has kept his covenant, the way in which he has listened to them, he has seen the position they are in, and he has had compassion for them, he recognises them, he cares for them, and he is going to act.

Opus Deo Diagram, how's that? I don't often speak a foreign language, but that means a work worthy of God. That is what he's going to do for these people.

And he can do it for us. Does God care for us in the hard times? Yes, he does. But we are to call on him.

He will hear us. He tells us that. He will remind himself of his covenant to us as his chosen people. If you're a Christian tonight, you're one of his chosen people.

He will look upon your situation and he will care for you and he will do a work worthy of himself in you.

[37 : 33] But remember these things. At all times, these statements when put together, do not reveal any sort of awakening or change of heart or change of attitude by God.

They are simply declaring what has been forever true. That the children of faith in the hour of difficulty may comfort themselves by knowing that God is not unmindful and never forgets his covenant.

God is out. Be encouraged Christian friend. We have a God in heaven who hears us if we call upon his name.

So tomorrow morning when I'm fighting with some young men in Leeds and my life is getting more complicated, I have a father in heaven who will hear.

Whatever you're doing tomorrow, if you feel Satan coming in, if you feel the pressures of life bearing down upon you, God is on his throne waiting to hear your cry, waiting to answer and do a work worthy of himself in you.

[39 : 08] So as we draw to a close, let's be encouraged that we have a God who hears us when we cry to him, who remembers his promises to be with us and never forsake us.

He sees our every situation and because of his love for his people, he cares for us. Now I don't know whether you are all Christians, some of this might be gobbledygook to you, might not mean anything but the same is true for you.

If you call upon the Lord Jesus Christ, if you call upon God, you ask him to hear your cry, you ask him to forgive you your sins.

He will remember his promise that if anyone calls on my name, they will be saved. He'll remember his promise and he will look and he will care and he will save.

Don't let tonight pass you by. Don't leave here knowing that you had an opportunity to seek the Saviour and you let it pass you by.

[40 : 40] Amen. Amen.