



## Exodus (Part 3) – Days of Darkness

Matt Chandler – September 4, 2016

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[Video]

From darkness to light, this is the story we all share as the people of God. He draws us out to draw us in. From the birth of Israel to the church today, God delivers and dwells with his people. He draws us out of our sin, our Egypt, and draws us into his presence into relationship with him.

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Well, happy Labor Day weekend, unless you have to work tomorrow. Then just, "Hey, how are you?" If you have your Bibles, go ahead and grab those. We're going to finish Exodus, chapter 1, in our time together today. I think it's a difficult text, but I also think it's a really beautiful text. We'll have to navigate that so we can land encouraged in the Lord.

We've said so far in our study of the book of Exodus that Exodus is part two of five parts that tell one story, the story of the Pentateuch. We have to keep ever before us kind of this narrative arc of what's going on. We said last week that God has a plan. That plan is good, but that plan rarely works itself out like we think it's going to. If we're not careful, we'll develop expectations of how God does things that are out of line with how God is actually going to accomplish that good plan.

Since that's going to happen and probably has happened to most of us already, there are some things we talked about we need to weave into our lives so we can be rooted well in the good God of the universe. We said there has to be an acknowledgment of our limitations. We are limited in a way God is not. I am smarter than my 13-year-old. My 13-year-old is smarter than my 7-year-old.

The infinite God of the universe is smarter than all of us, and it doesn't matter how many books I read or the different fields I can become an expert in. There is only one Sovereign who sits outside of time and sees everything at once and puts it altogether, one event into the next event into the

next event into the next event without ever growing weary or needing a nap or feeling stressed out. That's God. There has to be an acknowledgment in me of my limitations when difficult days come. I have to be able to go, "Gosh. I don't know."

Then the second thing we talked about is we have to read the Scriptures honestly. Again, if you ever hear someone who just doesn't want to believe in God start talking about the Bible like it's been messed with and tweaked... This is the worst propaganda job in the history of mankind. **"In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome..."** It's bad propaganda! Right? The Bible's heroes are so flawed, and continually the Bible is talking about how we're going to suffer. In fact, the only way we're going to come to Christ is to come and die. That's bad propaganda!

Good propaganda is, "Hey, give your life to Christ, and your dreams will come true." That's good propaganda and the testimonies that back that up. "I gave my life to Christ and never hankered for a drink again." "I gave my life to Christ, and immediately my addiction to heroin was gone." "I gave my life to Christ, and all of a sudden my wife and I came together in ways you can't even fathom. Emotionally..."

"I gave my life to Christ, and my kids immediately will listen to everything I say." "I came to Christ and then put my ATM card in the account, got \$10 out to go buy some more Ramen noodles and a Dr. Thunder. Then it said on the receipt that there was already like an additional \$400,000 in my account. Praise his name!" That's good propaganda. The Bible has terrible propaganda, but it's true. It meets us in the world we actually live in, and that's good news.

The griminess of the Bible, the faults of its heroes, the power of God working through broken people should be a stunning encouragement to the people of God. We need to read Scripture honestly. Then lastly, we said regardless of what life's hurdles are, we look to the cross, and the cross clears those hurdles.

If we've come in today and we feel like there's just no way this can be for us... I know some of you are here. It's Labor Day weekend, so you've come to Dallas for whatever reason. You're visiting your weirdo religious friends. I don't know what you're going to do after this. Shop? I mean, I don't know what you do when you come to Dallas. They've dragged you to their weirdo religious gathering.

You think, "Man, I get kind of faith and God and all that, but I just think I've sinned too far. I just don't think this could ever be for me." Well, we only need to look to the cross to clear that hurdle,

right? The cross is Jesus dying for all of your sins (past, present, and future) and absorbing all of God's wrath toward those sins so there's no wrath remaining for those who repent and put their faith in him.

Maybe you're in here, and you're like, "Whatever, bro. I am awesome. I don't need anybody to die for me." Well, okay, so you (limited in knowledge and understanding of all that's going on) have a sovereign King of the universe who is looking at you, going, "Oh, no, no, no, bro. You're in a lot of trouble, so much trouble that blood needs to be spilled. Because I love you, I'll spill blood that's not yours."

The cross clears those hurdles. If we're going to live in a world where the promises of God play out differently than we think we're going to in God's good plan for us and for his glory, then keeping those things in view is going to be really important.

Now the next part of the text as we finish up Exodus, chapter 1, is just continuing in this story, but there are some really specific things. The temptation is going to be in this text to sanitize it, to turn it into a two-dimensional felt board of Sunday school folklore. We can't afford to do that as men and women living in the real world. Let's look at this. Exodus, chapter 1, starting in verse 8:

**"Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. And he said to his people, 'Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and, if war breaks out, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land.'**

**Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens. They built for Pharaoh store cities, Pithom and Raamses. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad. And the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel. So they ruthlessly made the people of Israel work as slaves and made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field. In all their work they ruthlessly made them work as slaves.**

**Then the king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, 'When you serve as midwife to the Hebrew women and see them on the birthstool, if it is a son, you shall kill him, but if it is a daughter, she shall live.' But the**

**midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live.**

**So the king of Egypt called the midwives and said to them, 'Why have you done this, and let the male children live?' The midwives said to Pharaoh, 'Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women, for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them.'**

**So God dealt well with the midwives. And the people multiplied and grew very strong. And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families. Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, 'Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the Nile, but you shall let every daughter live.'"**

Again, I just want to point out this is a *horrific* passage of Scripture for the people of God. You cannot sanitize this. This is Genocide 101. This is how to oppress, dehumanize, and ultimately eradicate a people group from planet earth. Throughout human history if you study history or sociology, the playbook you see here is the playbook for making a subset of your population seem subhuman and working toward their destruction.

See here are the forces at work against God's people in this text. The first thing we see is political shrewdness based on fear. Look at verses 9 and 10. **"And he said to his people, 'Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and, if war breaks out, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land.'"**

Here's what Pharaoh is doing. He is beginning to create a narrative that the downfall of the Egyptian Empire is actually tied to the Hebrew people, that there are too many, and if they don't do something about them, then all the good jobs and all the safety and all the things the Egyptians desire are going to be taken from them via this migrant population. See, this is political shrewdness. This is, "You can't go straight to physical violence. You have to start setting the tone early."

So in the back halls of the king's palace, there's political maneuvering going on to deal with the Hebrew problem. In the same way, in the back halls of Hitler's Germany, there was a lot of talk about the Jewish problem. In Mao's China, there was a lot of talk about what to do with the Christian problem. On and on we could go. This is textbook genocide.

By the way, don't worry about political shrewdness based on fear. We live in 2016. There's no way that could happen. Then from there, political shrewdness always moves to oppression and physical force. Look at verse 13. **"So they ruthlessly made the people of Israel work as slaves and made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field. In all their work they ruthlessly made them work as slaves."**

This idea of hard labor or "ruthlessly" is really the idea of violence. There was always violence around the Hebrews. We're going to see this later on when Moses gets involved and delays the deliverance of God's people by about 40 years.

We see here in this that no matter where the Hebrews go, there is legalized, sanctioned violence against them. There are few things that rob a people of their dignity and value like legalized oppression where there's no one to call when there are acts of violence against you because those acts of violence have been sanctioned by a government. Then from there, it moves to secret manipulation. Look at verse 15.

**"Then the king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, 'When you serve as midwife to the Hebrew women and see them on the birthstool, if it is a son, you shall kill him, but if it is a daughter, she shall live.'"** Now if you've studied the Civil Rights Movement and you've read anything King wrote about that time, one of the harder decisions Martin Luther King Jr. had to make is he marched into towns where he knew there would be physical violence against him and against the people he was leading.

Yet what he was attempting to do when they peaceably marched into those places was he banked on the cruelty of the oppressor to make public what had been going on in private throughout the South throughout Jim Crow. Nothing is going to turn the stomach of people with a conscience like watching a people beaten, sprayed with fire hoses, and with dogs sicced on them.

What Pharaoh is doing is he knows he is trying with the hardness of his heart to out and destroy this people. But if this violence gets too public too soon, man, then the Egyptians might even turn on them. I mean, you can't in your head *not* believe that there are some relationships between Egyptians and Hebrews that are warm and friendly. Yet in this case, he has turned to secret manipulation. Here's his tactic: kill all the boys.

This is a special kind of crazy. There's your normal just crazy. Amen? Then there's kind of dark crazy. Then there's, "Let's kill all the baby boys." Now why baby *boys* and not little *girls*? Well, little girls can be used. Little girls can be trafficked. Little girls can be sold. Little girls can be used as sex slaves. Little girls are of no real threat to the empire. We'll get to the irony of that in just a moment. We'll get to the *real* irony of that in just a moment. The plan is, "Kill the boys. Breed out the Hebrews via their daughters." It's disgusting and dark. It's secret manipulation.

Then finally he turns to popular feeling. Look at verse 22. **"Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, 'Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the Nile, but you shall let every daughter live.'"** Now this is an edict. He has said to all the people, "Here's the new law in the land. You see a Hebrew baby boy. You grab that boy, and you throw him into the Nile River." So the conscience of Egypt is now so severed that an edict can go out from the king, "Kill all the Hebrew baby boys," and the nation doesn't bat an eye at it.

In fact, repeatedly in this text you see the people of Egypt begin to dread Israel, begin to hate Israel, begin to work them harder. They hated the Hebrews. Now you have a nation whose moral compass has been so severed that they're willing to grab infant boys and chuck them into the Nile River. We titled this sermon *Days of Darkness* because...listen to me...it doesn't get darker than that.

Even as I preach, here's one of the things I love about The Village. I love it when I preach every weekend you can always hear a little kid talking or you can hear a baby start to cry. I love that sound because that's the sound of a church that's alive and growing and moving. Dead churches don't have young babies crying in the sanctuary. No, no, no. That's churches that are growing, and there's life there.

If you could just imagine what it would be like for it to be legal for someone who is a different ethnicity than you, a different nationality than you just to be able to walk up and strip your son out of your hand and walk away and kill that son and you be powerless to do anything about it, and to fight back in any way would just heap more violence upon you and your family, this is the state of our brothers and sisters in Egypt. It hardly gets more horrific than this.

Yet I want to show you something about the power of God in this. Let's look back at verse 9. This is Pharaoh talking. **"And he said to his people, 'Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and, if war breaks out, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land.'"** There's Pharaoh's

plan. "We have to do something about this people. There are too many of them. We must dwindle their numbers down. We have to get rid of quite a few of them."

His plan? His plan is genocide. "Kill all the little boys." He is executing that plan, but look at verse 12. In fact, if you write in your Bible, this is a great verse just to kind of underline, or maybe you have a device you can put a Bitmoji by it or something. You want to pay attention to verse 12. Listen to this. **"But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad."**

I tried to test the Saturday night services. They failed miserably. This is my last go at it. Okay? You have Pharaoh, who has set his mind to destroying the Hebrews. The edict is, "Kill all the firstborn sons." Now we know when the nation of Israel comes into Egypt, there are 70 men in households. There are 70 people, but when they leave in chapter 12, how many grown men leave Egypt? Six hundred thousand men!

Here's just a quick note here. The most powerful man in the world who rules as king not with a congress, not with branches of the government, the most powerful man in the most powerful nation the world has known up to this point in history has set his mind to destroy the people of God. Every time he acts, he tightens the noose around his own neck and loosens the bonds of God's people.

No matter what he tries, he fails. This is not to say there weren't little boys thrown into the Nile. That's not to say this wasn't horrific. It is to point out that the most powerful human inventions on earth cannot stay or destroy the church of God. We'll talk more about that in the weeks to come. What do we learn here? Well, I think we learn three things in this text that I think we need to grow in confidence of. Here is the first thing we see happening in this story.

1. *God is working behind the scenes of all this.* All of this is happening. It's not quick. We read it in a few minutes. This is *decades* of this. We see God is working behind the scenes in secret and ceaseless care. He is working in secret and ceaseless care. Let's talk about *secret*. When I say *secret*, what I mean is it's hard for us to see. We know God is active, but it's hard for us as his children, as his followers, to really see what he is up to.

We talked about why that is last week. We're just limited in a way that God is not limited. If I could ever encourage you in any direction, it's to feel small. I'm telling you there is more rest in feeling

small than there will ever be in feeling strong. To understand that God knows and we don't is something we have to grow in as the people of God. It's secret care.

I love this quote from Charles Spurgeon. In fact, as a given in the future, if I'm quoting it, I love it. I'm not going to say, "This is an okay quote." If I'm quoting it, I love the quote. Here's what Spurgeon said. "God is too good to be unkind, and he is too wise to be mistaken. And when we cannot trace his hand, we must trust his heart." I love that. When you cannot trace his hand, you can trust his heart. How do we do that? Well, we're looking at the cross. We can always just see Christ dying for our sin as the objective evidence that he is for us and not against us. He has made a way for us.

Here's something else that I think is important to note that in the next couple of weeks you'll see vividly. I've already said it, but I want to highlight it. Pharaoh, for all his attempts to destroy Israel, finds himself serving the purposes of God even as he hates the God of Israel. Every edict, every decision, every move he makes... That's dangerously close to being a Phil Collins' song.

Every time Pharaoh acts, Pharaoh is, in the hardness of his heart, serving the purposes of God. Every edict, every command, every step, everything he does in trying to ratchet down, control, and destroy simply serves God's overarching purpose to glorify his name and to make known his name to the nations and to rescue and ransom his people from oppression.

Now I think we do need to take a minute or two to handle this *ceaseless* one. God's care is a secret care often. Now sometimes we get glimpses of it, and sometimes we can see it. Most of the time we can see his care it's always in retrospect. If you're in your thirties and up, I almost guarantee we can look back on a season of our life that felt dry, that felt scary, that felt like we couldn't find God. Now we can see, "Oh man, the Lord really was being merciful to me in that season."

The reason I'm putting that age on it is I think at 20, it's still kind of hard to see those things. It just takes a little bit of life to be able to get to the place where you can look back and go, "Thank you for saying *no* 4,000 times to me. I acted like a child and impetuous little brat about that, but thank you."

Now we need to talk about *ceaseless* care, and I'll tell you why we need to talk about *ceaseless* care. The idea that God's care for us never ceases has to be laid over the experience of life in a fallen world. How do you talk about God's ceaseless care to a woman who has been raped? To a child who grew up in an abusive home? To a woman who is married to an abusive man? How do you talk about God's ceaseless care in those spaces?



I want to try to answer it in the most theologically honest way I can. I don't know, but I will say this to you. This is the reason why church, above all else, should be a safe place to struggle with doubt and to struggle with fear and to be honest about us not being able to make sense of this together. See, the version of Christianity that says once you give your life to Christ, you don't wrestle with doubt anymore, you don't struggle to understand God's plan, you don't worry about what he is up to, that's a fairy tale version that's not rooted in the Word of God.

That's an insidious prosperity gospel nonsense that doesn't line up with Scripture. I tried to show you last week, look, if you really go, "I don't know where God is in this. I don't know what he is doing. In fact, it feels awful. In fact, it looks terrible," you find yourself in such great company. Abraham. King David. Jeremiah.

Since it's football season, those are all-district players. That's no third-string tight end. If you're a third-string tight end, you just keep practicing hard. God bless you! These are not only starters, but they're all district selections. The coach is like, "Who would you pick?" "I'm picking David. I know that dude plays the harp, but he killed a bear with his hands. I want him on my team." "Well, you know, he said, 'How long, O Lord, will you forsake me? Forever?' He wrote a song they sang."

What about Jeremiah? "You tricked me. You seduced me. You lied to me, God." That sounds like a pretty dark moment of Jeremiah's life, as he lay bloodied and naked in a ditch after being beaten by people he told that God's judgment was coming. Then Jeremiah's life ends by going into exile with everyone else. "You tricked me. You deceived me."

We could just go on and on and on here. Wrestling with doubt, being honest about doubt, is something that's distinctively Christian. There should be no shame in that wrestle, and there should also be no secrets. No shame, but no secrets. You have not been designed, nor has God designed his people, to wrestle with that alone.

If you're here and you have doubts and you're struggling and you're in that place where you're like, "I just don't know what to do with this," the play isn't to kind of work it out and keep that smiling veneer face on. "How are you doing?" "I'm blessed, brother. Praise his name!" Meanwhile you're confused, broken, lonely, in despair. Please don't operate like that here. I'm telling you it's nonsense.

We must be a safe place for people to go, "I'm just really struggling with how the Lord is good in this" and have people come around us and say, "I have been there. I'm praying. Is there any way I can serve you? Is there any way I can come alongside of you and walk with you through this because I don't see it either, but I can look to the cross. I know I read in the Scriptures. I'm here for you to walk with you in any way. I can as long as you need to wrestle before the Lord brings peace to this area of your heart." The church of Jesus Christ must be that kind of place.

We see God is working behind the scenes with secret and ceaseless care. Then the second thing. I love it. This is one of my favorite parts of this text, but it's also a place where I want us to consider some things.

*2. God reveals his glory almost always in the Scriptures by using the weak and the powerless to accomplish his purposes.* He doesn't tend to go after the guy with six-pack abs who bench presses 470 and can kill a hundred men. He is looking for the guy with a keg who sounds like Darth Vader from getting off the couch and walking to the kitchen.

God is like, "I'm going to use you profoundly and powerfully." Let's look at that happening here. I love that some of you are like, "I'm his man! Yes! Cancel my gym membership!" Don't do that. Be a good steward. Here we go. Verses 15 through 21:

**"Then the king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, 'When you serve as midwife to the Hebrew women and see them on the birthstool, if it is a son, you shall kill him, but if it is a daughter, she shall live.' But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live.**

**So the king of Egypt called the midwives and said to them, 'Why have you done this, and let the male children live?' The midwives said to Pharaoh, 'Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women, for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them.' So God dealt well with the midwives. And the people multiplied and grew very strong. And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families."**

Now it's important to note that in this point in human history, women are viewed just a step below cattle. Their word was not admissible in a court of law. You could trade women. You would almost

always trade your daughter for cattle or weapons or things to make your house stronger. Women are seen in a very real way as subhuman.

You see this in Pharaoh's just complete and utter dismissal of them. "Kill the boys. Let *them* live." Yet by the power of God, the most powerful nation on earth at that point in human history falls and is destroyed and goes into the grave by the power of God working through five women: the midwives, Moses' mama, Moses' sister, and Pharaoh's own daughter.

Now a couple of things to note. If you're ever a part of describing what it means to be male or what it means to be female (which I know will get you in a lot of trouble in 2016), if you're ever a part of that discussion (and I don't like how we do it)... What I want you to pay attention to if you ever find yourself in this room is when they're talking about the man... "Men are strong. They're courageous."

All of a sudden, there will be a couple of feminine ideas (or at least what our culture historically has defined as feminine ideas) that... "He is compassionate. He is a nurturer" maybe will find its way into the male list. Do you know what *never* finds its way into the female list? Masculine qualities. If you're making a list of what it means to be a man and what it means to be a woman, you'll rarely find someone who goes, "Here's what a woman is. A woman is bold and courageous and ferocious."

You just don't hear that. Let me tell you. If I'm going into battle, give me these midwives over a lot of the fools I know. Do you know how gutsy these ladies are right there? This is a king who has declared, "Murder babies! Murder them!" You don't think that they don't know that by this act of defiance more than likely they've signed their own death warrant? Not just their own death, but maybe the death of their friends and their parents.

This is a cruel tyrant of a man who can sleep at night doing the kind of things he is doing. Have you thought about that? How do you sleep after you use your power to murder babies? He is able to do it. These women, the Bible tells us, fear God more than they fear Pharaoh. They're just not afraid. As we move through the Pentateuch, we'll also see that later on a woman named Rahab once again delivers the people of God out of the hand of God's enemies.

I also love this. I want to highlight this. If you're a single woman in here, I love this in our climate and culture. I want you to notice the midwives are blessed by God, and then he gives them families, which means they didn't wait around for a husband to be relevant. I just love that. I kind of find some of our single women are just kind of waiting around to get married.

Marriage is a good thing, and I'm sorry we don't have more godly men to pursue you in a way that honors the Lord. I apologize for that. We're doing the best we can. There's just a large herd of morons here who are trying to grow up. In time, they will, but right now, we just have to preach and hope and pray. We're with you in that. I apologize. We're doing all we can. If you're like, "Is he talking about me?" uh-huh. I am, actually. Thank you for asking. Yes.

In the end here, what I love about this is these midwives aren't going, "I'll be relevant when I have a husband." They're saying, "No, no, no. The power of this God is at play, and I will surrender to that power." They are used mightily by the Lord as single women. It's a beautiful text. Let me just wrap this section up like this. Never believe you're too small, because it's the power of God at work in that tininess that God reaps his glory and our joy.

When we know it's not us but him, there's a freedom that is found in that place. To not carry the weight of success and failure but simply give yourself over to obedience is one of the more beautiful surrenders a Christian can make. We have here that God works through weak and powerless. God is working behind the scenes with secret and ceaseless care.

3. *All of us fear something.* All of us are in awe of something that kind of shapes our lives. *Awe* and *fear* are almost interchangeable here. The idea of fearing the Lord isn't, "Oh my gosh! He is going to light me up with a lightning bolt." The fear of the Lord is we're so struck by his majesty, have so much awe for who he is, that we're far more anxious about *that* awe than we are the awe of anything else.

When the Bible is talking about a fear of the Lord, it's not talking about, "Oh my gosh! He is going to crush me," although he is certainly able to do that. It's more the feeling you get if you've ever been to the Grand Canyon or if you've ever stood in front of the Pacific Ocean.

My family got to go on a little vacation earlier this summer. We went out to Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. I don't know if there was a storm out there or something, but the pull of the ocean was... You know, I spent some time in California, been in the Pacific a bunch. This was my first time on the Atlantic side of things.

I was in there with my kids. As we walked up, the lifeguard said, "Don't get in past up to your chest." They told my 13-year-old, "Don't get in past your waist." They told my 10-year-old son to not go in

past his knees and told Norah it would be better if she just didn't get in past her ankle. I was like, "Well, gosh! That sounds like a party at the beach then. Play in there in your ankles." Right? I knew what he meant as soon as we got in there. As soon as we got in there, I could feel it pulling me.

Here's how we had to play at the beach that day. Mom set up shop *here*, because Lauren is just going to read and turn brown. I just turn red and then peel and freckle. She is reading a book. We'd go about 200 yards down. We would get in, we'd bodysurf once, and we'd already be past her by about 50 yards. We'd have to come back out, then walk back down, then get back in, and then go. We could feel it.

We went two days, and then we stopped going because it was one of the first times in my life that in the ocean I thought, "There's nothing I can do if it grabs them. There's just nothing I'd be able to do if it grabbed them." In those moments where you're standing at the base of a mountain or you're standing at the edge of the Grand Canyon, you feel small, and you feel tiny. That's awe. That's fear.

The third thing we learn from this passage is fear must be appropriately placed on who deserves to be feared. Again, I love the midwives here. The excuse the midwives give... "Why did you do this?" Can you imagine that moment? Midwives are coming. They know why they were being summoned. They know what they had done. Here they come. They're now before the king. "Why have you done this?"

They make up this really crazy lie. "Well, you know, the Israelite women are vigorous. I mean, before we can even get there, they've had the baby, and they're gone. I mean, we just clean up. We don't know what to do." The Bible tells us what their motive really was and what was really going on. They feared the Lord more than they feared Pharaoh. What was actually happening wasn't that the Israelite women were more vigorous. It was the midwives feared God. Fear was appropriately placed.

Now a couple of things to consider. If you live online, then all you're kind of drinking in right now is doom and gloom. By "live online," here's a good kind of just litmus test. If the last hour of your day is you lying on your side flipping through Instagram and Facebook before you set it down and finally go to sleep two hours past when you *thought* you were going to, that's probably living life online. I'm not judging. I'm just saying that's a good way to kind of go, "Do I have a problem?"

What your intake is, almost constantly, is overwhelmingly negative, that America is on our dying breath, this election is... Listen. I don't want us to hide our heads in the sand. I don't know if you're picking up on this, but our popularity as Christians is not skyrocketing. Our sexual ethic alone makes us bigots and hatemongers. I don't know if you were paying attention. That's not getting better anytime soon.

It's not like in the next couple of months we can expect some big article in the *Washington Post* or the *New York Times* going, "Thank you, Christians. We get it! You guys are great. Thank you for all you do around the world to push back darkness. Love you guys. How can we come alongside of you and tell the truth about what you really believe? You're just so gracious and compassionate. We love you guys! Where would we be without you guys? We love you guys."

We know the tide is changing a bit on how we're viewed, but where fear is appropriately placed... What we see happening in this text is not then that we would become a passive people but that we'd be a people who live fearlessly in action. We don't withdraw because of hostility. We actually fearlessly engage, and as we engage, we engage with compassion and graciousness.

The more the temperature is heated up, the more we're gracious and compassionate. The more we're belittled and mocked and marginalized, the more we extend grace and compassion, because our fear is not in what man can do to us but the God we serve. In fact, Hebrews 13:6 says as much. **"So we can confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?'"** I love that question! **"What can man do to me?"** Because here's the answer: a lot! Man can do a lot to us, but nothing when we compare it to eternal glory.

The writer of Hebrews is saying, "What are you going to do? Kill me? That's glory forever for me. That's ever-increasing joy. Go ahead. Just make it quick, please. Are you going to throw me in prison? Are you going to take my stuff?" You should read the book of Hebrews and what they're going through. I mean, this is where you get these beautiful passages about what suffering accomplishes, what marginalization accomplishes in the hearts of God's people.

Watching the apostle Paul live his life is a good kind of way to think about what it means to be in awe of God and fear God more than you fear anything else. What could you do to the apostle Paul? I mean, think about it. If you try to kill him, he'd say stuff like, "To die is gain."

"Well, we'll leave you alone."

"To live is Christ."

"We'll put you in prison."

"Well, I'm going to worship the Lord and convert all your guards."

"Well then we'll torture you."

"Well, I don't consider the current struggle and pain to be worthy to compare to the future glory."

You can't touch the man. He is the freest man ever. This is what it means to fear the Lord, to be in awe of God rather than awe of other things. This is what we see happening in this narrative. This is what we can take from this narrative: God is at work in secret and ceaseless care, God uses the weak and the powerless to overthrow and conquer the strong and mighty, and, lastly, fear when appropriately placed, awe when appropriately placed, leads to freedom and fearlessness in action.

The thing about this text that I want to draw your attention to locally and globally is that this kind of thing is not something from thousands of years ago. This is happening right now all over the world. What it means to be a Christian in our day is to be active where we are, to be giving ourselves over to pushing back darkness wherever we find ourselves.

If you're kind of visiting, you don't know, "Is this going to be my church home? Is this not?" We're never going to be kind of a hyper-political church. I just don't believe in a federal savior. I just don't think we're going to find that one president who is going to right everything that's wrong. I don't believe that can happen, but I do believe in local involvement from Christians in a given location, to be actively involved on school boards, PTAs, supporting teachers, involved in schools.

We can speak a kingdom language even when we can't work a kingdom external voice. We can be faithful teachers who love students well. We can be faithful businessmen who operate ethically. We can be strong husbands, good wives, great parents given over to the flourishing of a community. We do that first, and then where we have opportunity to be a part of things globally, we do that.

Now one of the philosophies at The Village is we don't want to build things that already exist when we can just partner with those organizations that already exist for our good. We don't want to build

out something we can't do and would have to staff with 40 people when someone has already committed their time and energy to that.

One of our strategic partners for a while now has been IJM (International Justice Mission). IJM was founded by a guy named Gary Haugen who was the lead investigator for the United States government on the genocide that occurred in Rwanda several years ago.

If you ever watched the movie *Hotel Rwanda*, he was the American on the ground helping them research what happened in that and was so brokenhearted at what he saw that he started this organization called IJM.

IJM works globally with law enforcement and with governments to see the eradication of slavery, oppression, sex trafficking, all those kind of horrific acts. They work with judges. They have lawyers and lobbyists. They're the most well-run organization I've been around on this front.

It's not a fairy tale. They really have freed tens of thousands of men, women, and children globally from the kind of oppression and slavery we've read about in our text today. I want to show you just a quick three-minute video of some of the things IJM is up to, and then we'll go from there.

[Video]

**Matt:** We've worked with IJM for quite some time now. We have vetted them. We love what they do globally. They're at all of our campuses today. There's a table in the foyer where they have volunteers here. They're wearing, I think, black polo shirts (or they were last night).

If you want to kind of check into this, their website is [www.ijm.org](http://www.ijm.org). There are all sorts of ways to be involved with IJM. I think they're looking for Freedom Partners. You can do that online. You can go by their table when we dismiss here in just a few moments.

There are things we can do locally, and we're working toward doing those things because a lot of even this is happening just a couple of exits down Highway 35 in our backyard. You get off down in those apartment complexes that are primarily migrant workers and, I'm telling you, there are some horrific, awful things going down in our backyard.



We've already begun meetings about what we can do and how we can leverage your gifts and abilities in where you are to push back darkness locally. What they do globally is just beyond any church's ability. That's why we want to partner with IJM.

[End of video]

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