



Exodus (Part 2) – More Numerous Than the Stars

Matt Chandler – August 28, 2016

[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. This story began several thousand years ago, and it began with a promise from God to Abraham that he would make his offspring more numerous than the stars in the sky, a great nation who would one day dwell in the Promised Land.

More than 400 years passed, and Abraham's descendants had not seen this promise fulfilled. Instead, the Israelites lived as foreigners in the land of Egypt. Fearing the Hebrews would grow into a mighty nation and overtake them, the pharaoh of Egypt forced them to work as slaves. But Israel continued to grow.

In response, the Egyptians increased their oppression of God's people, and Pharaoh gave a terrible decree. Every son born to the Hebrews would be thrown into the river. But a Levite couple defied this rule, trusting God's will for their son's life. God *did* have a plan for this child. Pharaoh's daughter found the baby and took pity on him. She named him Moses because he was drawn out of the water.

As Moses grew older and saw the suffering of his people, anger burned within him. When he witnessed an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, Moses killed the man and fled Egypt to hide in the desert. Years passed, and Moses made a new life for himself in Midian. Then, one day the voice of the Lord called out to him from a burning bush. God told Moses that he saw the persecution of his people in Egypt, and he heard their cries. He promised to deliver the Israelites from slavery, and he commanded Moses to go before Pharaoh on their behalf.

Moses was terrified, so God sent Moses' brother Aaron to go with him. The brothers went before Pharaoh performing signs and wonders, but Pharaoh would not listen. So God brought down plagues upon Egypt, yet Pharaoh's heart remained hard as stone. To prepare for the tenth and final plague, the Hebrews marked their doors with the blood of spotless lambs. That night the angel of death passed through the kingdom, killing the firstborn child of every Egyptian household that did not bear the mark, including Pharaoh's.

Heartbroken, Pharaoh told the Israelites to go. They were finally set free. The Spirit of God led the people out and toward the Promised Land, but Pharaoh's grief soon turned to rage. He changed his mind and then commanded the Egyptian army to pursue them. When the Israelites came to the Red Sea, Moses lifted his staff to the sky, and the waters parted. The Hebrews passed through the towering waves, and the Egyptians were swallowed by the sea.

God had indeed drawn his people out of bondage, out of darkness, and into the light of his presence. The story of Israel is the story of us today. We are God's people. He draws us out of our sin, our Egypt, and draws us into his presence into relationship with him.

[End of video]

Well, good morning. I pray you are well. If you'll do me a favor and grab your Bible, we're going to be in Exodus, chapter 1. We started last week what will be 11 months through the book of Exodus. We talked about why that would matter for us in 2016. We did a flyover last week, and now what I want to do now is start to dive into the book. It's important to know...

In fact, I'll remind you of this especially. We won't watch this bumper video before every sermon for 11 months, since that would be like a year of our lives spent watching that bumper video, but I'm trying to give you a sense of what's happening, because what Exodus is is it's the second book of what's called the *Pentateuch*, the first five books of the Old Testament. Those five books are telling a singular story. There's one story being told across those five books of the Bible. If we just kind of pull one out, then we get confused. Maybe this will be a helpful illustration.

On December 18, 2015, the heavily anticipated film *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* came out. This was film seven in the story of *Star Wars*. Now what makes that unique and confusing is that part seven came out in 2015. Part four came out in 1977, and part one came out in 1999. If you are a

nerd and you're like really geeked out about all that stuff and you were amped up and then you tried to explain it to a non-nerd, it was complicated, right?

It was like, "Okay, so what happened... Well, no, Luke's father... No, no. Okay, so. No, I have no idea what Jar Jar Binks says. I don't know why he is even in this. That was a mistake. Someone is filled with regret over that. What happens is there are these things called midi-chlorians... If you're not watching..." It's just really confusing moments.

If you did go see that movie on December 18, then there were these moments that were really exciting for you that someone who hadn't been a part of that *Star Wars* background completely missed. It didn't mean anything to them. When Han Solo boarded the little freighter and everybody was like, "Oh my gosh! It's Han Solo and Chewie," and Chewie was making his noises, and you were like, "Yes!" somebody who doesn't know the story is like, "What's the giant, hairy monkey thing?" because they don't have the context of what's going on.

Oftentimes what's going to happen to us in Exodus is we're going to read something that's unbelievably significant. If we don't know the narrative, if we don't know the story, then it will lose some of the weight it should have for us, right?

This text is one of those. The first eight verses is one of those because there's this unbelievable moment in the first eight verses that for most of us, we just kind of read through and don't even realize what just happened, but this is kind of the equivalent of Han Solo and Chewbacca boarding the freighter and us getting amped up if we know the story. All right?

If you still don't know the story and the *Star Wars* references are completely lost on you, maybe this will help. This is William Wallace on the back of his horse with his face painted blue. This is a moment, but it's just going to read like not a moment if we pull this out of the narrative.

I have two points. That's it. There are two points and then what to do about it. Here are my two points. *God is working a good plan*. The second point is *that plan built on his promises rarely plays out like we think it's going to*. Those are my two points. God has a plan. He is working that plan. That plan is built on his promises, and those plans and his promises rarely play out like we think they're going to. Then what to do about that, because that's really good news but really hard news. Okay? Let's read this. Exodus 1, starting in verse 1:

"These are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob, each with his household: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin, Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher. All the descendants of Jacob were..."

How many people does your Bible say were there? Seventy. That's going to be important. I'm going to ask you again later, and you're going to respond with, "Seventy." When I ask for a number later, just shout, "Seventy!" You'll be fine. Okay? I just promise you 70 is the only number I'm going to ask you for, so file "70," and then you can participate a little bit later in the sermon.

"...seventy persons; Joseph was already in Egypt. Then Joseph died, and all his brothers and all that generation. But the people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them. Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph."

I'll just stop there. Really I probably should've even stopped in verse 7, but I'll just kind of bait you there for next week by letting that one hang there. Here's what we have happening here. We have the people of Israel in Egypt. We saw they showed up as 70 people. Now we read in verse 7 that they're growing. The kind of words they're using around their growth is they were growing *exceedingly strong*. They're growing fast, and they're growing big as a people.

What happens is we just kind of read that, and it's some names. We feel sorry for some of the sons. "Gad? You named your kid *Gad*?" Apparently Joseph was famous. Just name your kid something ridiculous. You see in this text things that might not jump off the page, but if you knew the story, see, God had made some promises, and God is fulfilling those promises even as we read these seven, eight, verses in a way that's kind of staggering, kind of stunning, and yet simultaneously it's not playing out like anyone would've guessed or, I would even say, would have wanted.

With that said, we have to talk about the plan of God. Let me start by saying this. As Christians, we're not deists. Here's what I mean by that. Maybe you know what I mean by that, but really deism is referring to an intellectual kind of position of the seventeenth and eighteenth century where there was an acknowledgement based on reason that there was a creator God, but that God did not intervene in the affairs of man.

There's a God who makes everything that is. You look up at the stars. You look at the earth. You look at the planets. They would say, "There's a God who created all of that, but that God is not interested

in the affairs of man." They would chalk God up to the God who built the car but had no interest in driving it. "God doesn't intervene in the affairs of mankind. He started the engine, and he lets it play out."

Now if there is a spectrum or a continuum of belief, we are so far from that that it's hard to even communicate. We believe God is *always* in our business. We believe God is *always* intervening. He is *always* actively at work. He is *always* in our space. Joy, sorrow, life, death, maneuvering, setting. We believe the Bible says kings and rulers are put in place to serve the glory of God. Highs and lows are given to us via God's sovereign reign for his glory and our joy. We just believe God is in our business all the time.

We're just so far from the deists, right? The deists are like, "There is this majestic, amazing God who started. Look how beautiful he is, yet he, with all that power and might, simply doesn't care too much to get involved in our affairs." Now I always want us to have the kind of relationship where we can be honest with one another. Sometimes it seems like that's how the Lord operates, doesn't it?

I mean, if we're just really honest with one another, almost all of us have experienced or have had seasons where it certainly feels like it would be easier to reconcile deism than it would be to reconcile a loving, sovereign God. We've lost. We've endured sorrow. We've been confused. Then trying to figure out how God is good and God is actively working a plan in us... If we're honest, some of us have felt abandoned. Some of us have felt forgotten about.

Just to encourage your heart, if you have ever been in that kind of space, would you do me a favor and just raise your hand really quickly? "I've felt abandoned. I've felt more like there is a God and I'm sure he is good, but man..." Keep your hand up for a second, all right? Now look around. Now this is a *lot* of us. This is a lot of us, right?

Now I want you to give yourself a break because if that's you, you're in great company. I don't mean the people around you. Don't nudge your wife and go, "Yeah, we are!" No, that's not what I'm saying. You're in the company of Abraham, a man by the name of King David, a prophet by the name of Jeremiah who at one point accused God of seducing him. He used the Hebrew word *patha*. "You tricked me! You deceived me! You seduced me, and now you've left me."

This is not an uncommon wrestle with those who love the Lord. Here's what I want to show you. I want to get us into this story, this narrative, because here's what we see happen. God creates the world and everything in it. The refrain of that creation is that it's good, it's good, it's good, it's good. He creates man and woman, and what he says about man and woman is, "They are naked and unashamed." That has nothing to do with nudity and everything to do with the state of their hearts.

He is saying they feel no shame, and they don't feel like they have to hide anything. Can you imagine? It's like an infant. Infants are not aware of anything they need to hide, and they don't feel shame. If you've ever changed a baby's diaper, they're not like, "Oh! Oh! This is so awkward!" Right? They don't care. There's an innocence there that they just don't care. I mean, they're just like, "Whatever. Clean it up." They're just not nervous about this at all.

Now what's happening is they're naked and unashamed. They don't feel like there's anything they need to hide. Yet what the Bible tells us in Genesis 3 is that when sin enters the world, it fractures that. Immediately shame and hiding become the norm of the human experience. Although we as infants don't hide and don't feel shame, that does not last long, does it? In fact, very early on (by 3 or 4), we start hiding because we feel shame.

Sin enters the cosmos and fractures everything God says was good, including man and woman and the relationship they have with one another. Then there's this pronouncement of judgment. One of the things I just want the Holy Spirit to sear in your mind and heart is the graciousness of God always. In the pronouncement of judgment on mankind and creation because of this rebellion against him, we get our first glimmer of grace.

See, God's plan is for his glory and our joy. Let's look at the plan. In Genesis 3:15, God is cursing man and creation and everything. Romans 8 says he is subjecting the creation to futility and hope. In the pronouncement of that judgment, here's what he says. Genesis 3:15: **"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise..."** The actual Hebrew word is *crush*. **"...your head, and you shall bruise his heel."**

This is the first messianic prophecy in the Bible. This is the first shadow of what would come in Jesus Christ in the pronouncement of judgment on creation. Now think about the grace of God in that. Here at the pronouncement of judgment in the midst of rebellion that fractured all that was beautiful in God's creation, God says, "I'm going to get you out of this mess." What he says about it is

pretty stunning. It's not going to be some sort of ethereal spirit-angel driven thing. It's going to be grimy. It's going to have flesh on it.

One will be born of woman, and he will crush the Serpent's head, but the Serpent will bruise his heel. Now that's kind of what we want in this battle, right? Sure, the Serpent is going to get the heel, but if you ever saw a fight and somebody punched a guy in the face and knocked him out, nobody who was a proponent of that fight was like, "Yeah, but I bet your knuckles hurt!"

You don't say that. You got knocked out, bro. Like, "Yeah, but how bruised? I bet you had to ice your hand." You just don't. That's the kind of fight that's being described here. One person gets their head crushed, and the other gets their heel bruised. This is the first promise that God is going to unwind the brokenness of the world mankind is now living in. Then in Genesis 12 we get a bit more of that picture.

Genesis 12:1 through 3 says this: **"Now the LORD said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse...'"** Now you know where we're going in the book of Exodus. That is certainly going to be true, but listen to this. **"...and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."**

God has this promise. Here's how the promise is unfolding. "I'm going to undo, unwind sin, death, destruction, despair. I'm going to untangle it and unwind it. I'm going to make all things new. That plan is going to have flesh on it via someone born of woman." Now what we know is that's coming through Abram and this nation God is going to make out of Abram. This is also an interesting promise in that God has just made this promise to a really old man with a really old wife who is barren and has no children.

Now if you're going to be the father of a great nation, you kind of need some sons. We see this all the time in the Bible. If you've read the Old Testament, it's not uncommon to see, "These are the sons of such and such." Then like four chapters later, you're still walking through this list of names of dudes and their wives and their sons. You get this promise coming in a way that just doesn't make any sense. You have this really old man with a really old wife who has been barren her whole life, and God is going, "I'm going to make a great nation out of you."

Then from there in Genesis 15:1 through 6, we read this: **"After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: 'Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.' But Abram said, 'O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?'"** I don't know if you have a weirdo cousin, but that's who this is.

He is like, "Whoa, whoa, whoa! How am I going to be a great nation when really the heir of my household is Eliezer? You know that guy. Listen. You're awesome. You're not making a great nation out of that guy. I can't even believe he is still alive!" Then from there God begins to remind Abram of his promise. Verse 3:

"And Abram said, 'Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.' And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: 'This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir.' And he brought him outside and said, 'Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your offspring be.' And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness."

Man, I'd love to just preach on that sentence, but that will be another day. Here's the promise to Abram. "You will have a son, and out of that son a great nation will be born." This is so comical that when Abram goes back and tells Sarah his wife what the Lord told him, Sarah laughed at him. "Hey, I was just hanging out with the Lord outside the tent. We were looking up at the stars. Here's what God wanted. We're going to have sons. We're going to have a son. We're going to be a great nation." Sarah was laughing. "You're crazy, bro. I'm like 90 years old. I ain't havin' no baby."

This is the kind of conversation. Here's an important note. When Abraham dies, he dies clutching in his hand nothing but a set of promissory notes from God on high and one son. One son of promise. How are we going to get a mighty nation from one son? By the way, this whole family is more dysfunctional than yours. All right? If you're like, "Well, you don't know me," I'm just saying, you read the book of Genesis, and you text me or email me, "You're right. I apologize. It's far more dysfunctional than mine."

This family is a train wreck. It would be like one of those... Reality TV would not want them on. It would just be too much. "You cannot be on *The Bachelor*. You're out of control." I mean, this is this family. They're crazy, and yet God has this plan he is working through them. Abraham dies, and he dies clutching these promises that have yet to be fulfilled. See, the plans of God rarely play out like we think they're going to.

Yet if we're reading this as a story, if we've seen all the movies, then here's what just happened. How many came into Egypt? Really? I don't know if you're feeling shame and nakedness right now, but you should be. All right? Seventy. So from one son to 70 in Egypt. Then you get this great sentence in verse 7 of chapter 1. **"But the people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them."**

Now 12 chapters later, we get a sense of just how exceedingly large Israel has grown. In chapter 12, verse 37, here's what Exodus 12 tells us. We'll be in this text again around Christmastime or closer to Christmastime, but I'll be emphasizing something else. I'm pulling this from the narrative arc. Chapter 12, verse 37, says, **"And the people of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children."**

We're not counting women and children here. We just counted men: 600,000 of them. If each is married, then we're at...what? One point two million. There's no birth control in these days, which is why you have chapters and chapters of... By the way, they're forbidden to kind of *not* have kids even. Why? Because God is fulfilling his promise to make them a great nation.

Conservative estimates by historians and theologians are that when Israel walks out of Egypt plundering this empire, they walk out between 2.5 and 3.5 million people. What's just happened here is we're reading these first eight verses, and 70 people have showed up in Egypt. Now they're growing exceedingly great in strength and power. You can see what the reader would have felt. This is a pivotal moment in this series of films where now the promises of God are gaining traction.

We went from one son to 70 sojourners coming in to Egypt. Now we're at 3.5 million people and growing. This is that Sons of Scotland moment where they're like, "Here we go! Let's charge the field. I'm in. This is amazing." Yet no one would have guessed it played out in slavery. No one would have guessed it would play out in oppression and hard labor and being marginalized and used and abused. Nobody would have guessed it would play out that way, yet the plan of God is moving forward.

Here's what I want to talk about in a really honest way. Life is difficult and confusing, and loving the Lord in the midst of all of that can get confusing. You already saw earlier easily more than half the room go, "Man, there are times it's really hard for me to reconcile that God is good, and he is present, and he is working a plan in my life. It's just hard for me. I've been in seasons where it's near impossible for me to believe that. I can't see well that that's actually what's happening."

Okay, so here's the answer to that. If we were in Sunday school and I had a felt board, I could just stick a man up on the felt board, kind of talk about it. The answer to life in a Genesis 3 world is we must trust God has a plan and that plan is good. Now here's what I know because I'm a pastor.

It's not like I just said that and you were like, "Oh, okay! Say that again! I just learned I have cancer, but tell me again what to do?" "Hey, my spouse is abusive. Tell me exactly what to do." "Oh, so my kid is wallin' out. Tell me. I'm just to trust God is good. Then just let me write what else? Say that sentence again so I can get it down so I can stop being anxious and frustrated and overwhelmed. Help me with that again, Pastor."

So we know in our head that's the right answer, but how does it look to kind of cultivate the kind of faith that says, "God *does* have a plan, God *is* good, and I'm going to cling to him as we walk through maybe what the psalmist would call the valley of the shadow of death"? That's what I want to do with the last few minutes I have with you is just walk through three ways I think we can bolster our faith in God despite circumstance. Here is the first one. I think if we're going to trust God is good and he has a plan that's working for our joy and his glory...

1. *We have to acknowledge our limitations.* I have a 13-year-old daughter and a 7-year-old daughter, and then a son who is 10 in the middle. You know, 13-year-old girls are new creatures. I'm new to it. I'm trying to figure it out. Man, it just gets really weird, and you just have to kind of go, "Oh. I'm using reason. I need to do something else here." I've learned answer feeling for feeling, fact for fact. Right? Don't respond to a feeling with a fact. That just doesn't go well, honestly with wife or daughter. Men, just write that down. Feeling for feeling...fact for fact.

If she is like, "I just feel..." don't go, "Well, let me tell you why you shouldn't feel that way." That's not going to go well for you, men. Write that down. That's a gift. That's not in my notes. I'm trying to help. One of the really consistent conversations I have with my 13-year-old right now is how much

smarter she is than my 7-year-old daughter. I'm just setting her up. We get along great. I mean, we have a great relationship, but I'll oftentimes if she is just...

"Why? I just want..."

"Okay, let me ask a quick question. Are you smarter than Norah?"

"Yeah!"

"Okay, why are you smarter than Norah? Have you read more books? Why are you smarter than Norah?"

I don't have to answer that question. She knows the answer. "Because I'm 13, and she is 7." Now I got her. "Okay. So you're 13, and that makes you really smart when it comes to a 7-year-old. So hypothetically let's say I was 42 and you were 13. Would that not then mean I see some things and I'm aware of some things you cannot see and are not aware of because you're 13?" Now at this point she has never answered that question. She just kind of smiles and feels like she lost a chess game. She knows I'm for her; Dad likes to play.

I want to say *yes* to everything I can *yes* to so that my *noes* matter. I think that's a good way to do it, dads. It's a good thing to say *yes* as often as you can so your *noes* matter. In that, we know intuitively that we're limited. If this is true and I'm smarter than my 13-year-old (and I am) and she is smarter than her 7-year-old sister (which she is), surely I have to, with great humility, acknowledge that God is going to operate in ways that are very confusing to me and very disorienting to me.

If I'm 42 and he has always been and will always be and sees all things simultaneously at once as one who is outside of time, can you see that our perspectives are going to be a little different? Where I'll be limited, he is not limited. He is sovereignly leading in ways that are for his glory and for my good that I can't see. There are seasons where they don't *feel* good to me, but surely at this point in life...

I'm looking around the room. If you're 9 in here, this might not be true about you, but most of us have been through fires and have come out the other side now and can look back on them. Although we wouldn't want to do it again, we're glad God brought us through it. It's changed us, and it's molded us for the better.

In that season, we were thinking, "Seriously, God? Really? Did you not say? Did you not promise? Have you not...? Did you really...?" We become the Israelites. "Have you pulled us out of Egypt just to destroy us?" We have to acknowledge our limitations. We don't know; he does. Now I've tried to say this to you for over a decade. This is great news. When life isn't about you, that's great news.

See, if we go back to that illustration about infants and being naked and unashamed, you and I are tiny, but we're not insignificant. We're weak, but we're protected by the most powerful being in the universe. We are small, but we deeply matter to the heart of God.

Our God is actively involved in this big story to redeem and restore what was broken in the fall, but he has also very much invited you into that story so your ups and downs and your moves and shakes and your joys and sorrows are being navigated and sovereignly ruled over by the God of the universe who is walking you into joy.

Sometimes joy means surgery. Sometimes joy means surgery! I had a tumor in my right frontal lobe. That had to come out. The doctor wasn't cruel because he did that. When Dr. Barnett was like, "You need a craniotomy. It's going to be surgery. It will probably take seven or eight hours. Right frontal...spatial reasoning. I don't know. We'll see," which was comforting. The "I don't know; we'll see" part was really comforting to my heart.

Now nothing he did to me was cruel. Drilling holes into the side of my head and wiring me into it, you know, putting me into one of the halo things so I wouldn't move in surgery, taking a saw and cutting open my skull wasn't cruel. Taking a scalpel and scooping out a big portion of my right frontal lobe...

I know some of you are like, "Okay. We got it! We got it!" We have those bags in front of your chair if you want to just go ahead and let that go. You'll feel better afterward. There was nothing enjoyable about any of that. I don't want to do it again, but it saved my life. See, we have to acknowledge our limitations, our inability to see overall what's going on, but that's not the only thing we need to do. I also think...

2. *We have to learn to read the Scriptures honestly.* Here's what I mean by that. Suffering, difficulty, loss should never surprise the believer. The Bible is filled with it. Unfortunately, what happens

(probably because of where we're growing up in the Bible Belt) is verses that really have far weightier, deeper, thicker meaning are pulled and watered down and slammed on a coffee cup.

Now that we've pulled them out of their context, we can put them on things that they were never meant to be tied to to get a feeling, "We're going to be blessed, and we're going to be happy. Hard things don't happen to Christians." The Bible doesn't read like that. The Bible is grimy. Jesus says, **"In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."** You see really silly things all the time. I'll give you two.

When the Bible says you can do all things through Christ who gives you strength, can I set that in its context really quickly? The apostle Paul says, "I have learned to live in plenty." He has a nice house. He has a little coin. His relationships are good. Everything is stable. He has plenty. He is eating steak for dinner.

"I've learned I can do that and love the Lord, and I've learned to be in want. When I'm in prison, and I haven't had anything to eat, and my body is broken down and bruised, I've learned I could do that too. In fact, I've learned I can do *all* things through Christ who gives me strength." The point of Philippians 4:13 isn't that you're going to succeed in Christ. It's that no matter what happens, Christ is there, and he'll be enough. Do you see how we twist it?

I saw one time a person who had a coffee mug with Habakkuk 1:5 on it. Let me read Habakkuk 1:5 to you. It's beautiful. **"Look among the nations, and see; wonder and be astounded. For I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told."** That sounds awesome, except it's about God judging the people of Israel and them being sent into exile. "Astounding, amazing, wonderful things for me!"

That verse is about God's judgment, but that's what we do as Bible Belt Christians. "Oh, astounding things! Put it on a..." No! Yeah, astounding things, all right. We have to learn how to read the Bible honestly. The suffering we endure has purpose, and it's not punitive. Are you tracking with me? The wrath of God toward me and toward you as Christians has been fully absorbed by Jesus on the cross.

We might be disciplined by our Father. What I mean by that is he is shaping us into something that will be greater than what we are now, but his actions on us are never punitive. His wrath has been drained fully on Jesus Christ. We need to learn to read Scripture honestly. In fact, Israel would've

done well for this. In Genesis 15:12 through 16, in that same chapter that God said, "Abraham, step outside your tent really quickly. Look at those stars. You're going to be like that, bro. Are you ready? Go tell Sarah..." Genesis 15, starting in verse 12:

"As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. And behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him. Then the LORD said to Abram, 'Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants [or slaves] there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years.

But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. And they [your offspring, this mighty nation] shall come back here [in the land of the Canaanites (we'll get to that)] in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."

This is Egypt foretold. We tend to mirror Israel because, like I said last week, this is our story. It's not just *their* story; it's *our* story as the people of God. We're guilty of this. We read this text, and then you have to wonder what in the world is going on when Israel is like, "What's going on here? This can't be possible!"

"Well, you were told it was coming. You were even told the timeline: 400 years." Do you know how long they were there before they were let out? Four hundred and thirty years (four generations). We should not be surprised as believers when difficulty comes. It is the kindness of God at times to wound his children.

I don't know if you struggle with anxiety. You wish you wouldn't have come today. But would it not be kind of God to allow you to endure some of your greatest fears and get you to the other side so those fears no longer can control you? Wouldn't that be kindness? I think we have to learn to read the Bible honestly. I think we have to learn to acknowledge our limitations. Then lastly I think...

3. *We have to remember the cross.* Again, if we want to just talk about promises not playing out like anyone thought they were going to, here is Jesus. He is cursing storms and telling them to stop, and they do. He is cursing a fig tree, and it withers. He is telling dead people they're not allowed to be dead. Who gets to do that? He is telling sick people, "You're not sick. Get up." "I've been blind my whole life," and he says, "Not today."

I mean, this is just Jesus, to where there are men and women saying, "You are the Messiah. You are Genesis 3:15. You are here to crush the head of the Serpent. It's time." Then he is arrested in the middle of the night. He is stripped naked. He is beaten, and then he is slaughtered. In so doing, he crushes the head of the Serpent.

See, what hurdle do you have that the cross does not answer? That's why we look to the cross. It's why we end our services in Communion every week. We're trying to root you in the presence and power of Christ in the Lord's Supper. Why? Because we want you to keep looking there, because it answers and clears all of our hurdles.

If you've come in here and you're like, "Man, I am really guilty of some really terrible things. In fact, I feel uncomfortable because I just know if you people knew who I was, you would judge me harshly," well, Christ has you and the cross. There is no sin with more power than the cross of Jesus Christ. Even if you're a serial killer, God has that covered, because he saved and drew to himself one of those in the Bible.

Maybe you say, "I don't need any of this." You're happy being your own god. But if there really is a God and he sends an atoning sacrifice for your sin... It might be your 42-year-old view, 36-year-old view, 24-year-old view of yourself that you're awesome and don't need this, but the one who is outside of time and is the Alpha and Omega and knows all things thinks you're in a lot of trouble. I mean, like "hell forever" kind of trouble and has graciously made a way.

See, the cross clears all our hurdles. "I've sinned too far." The cross is there going, "No, you haven't." "I don't need you." The cross is there going, "Oh, absolutely you do." Now this story of redemption, of reconciliation, this is what God is up to. God is working that plan, and you and I are caught up in that plan whether we are Christians or not.

As sons and daughters, God sovereignly reigns and rules over our lives, sends both joy and sorrow to detach our hands from the things of this world and give us what we really, truly need: him. I usually say it this way. God is at work in the mess. It's not easy, which is why God has given us community, he has given us his Word, and he has given us his Holy Spirit.

I oftentimes have conversations with people who are at The Village, and The Village is a large church. I'll oftentimes say the guy who just comes on the weekends and sits here and listens has a

completely different experience of The Village Church than the one who comes and sits here on the weekend but is also a part of a Home Group. That guy has a completely different experience than the guy or gal who comes here on the weekends, is in a Home Group, and has found a place to serve.

For the person who has done those three things, this is a small, intimate church where they know a lot of people, and they're cared for, and they get asked the kind of questions that are soul-level, care-oriented questions rather than this time of year where everyone's college team is going to win the national title this year. We're just fully confident of it right now that it's our year. Now all that will change next Saturday, but for now, it's our year.

We must fight the urge to stay at this surface level and take the risk of stepping into the scary waters of deeper, richer conversations rooted in the confidence that God is working a plan in us, and that plan is good. We know how this ends. Please don't be pessimistic at where we find our lives playing out. I know we're looking at the election and the economy. Everybody is like, "Oh my gosh! This is it. This? No way! He has to come back before November. There's just no possible..."

Listen. No, no, no. God is working a plan here. Listen. There's no panic in him, not concerning your illness, not concerning your anxiety or fear, not concerning the election or the future of the United States of America or your children. There's just no fear in him around those things. He is working a plan. That plan is good. Trust him.

"I don't know if I can." Okay, well then, let's acknowledge that we don't know and he does. Look to the cross to see he is good and he really cares because he saves. You have not been forgotten. You may have walked in in a moment of your life that's a real high. You just got a promotion. You just found a girl you're going to marry.

You just found a guy who wasn't just a little boy in a man's body but like a real, live *man*, a unicorn man, someone who cherished you and pursued you and let his intentions be known and was really serious about honoring you as a woman. Like a *man*! They have not gone the way of the dodo bird. You've come in on a high.

You have all this money right now, so you've come in on a high. You've started your senior year of college, and you're amped up about that. You're not in college for the first time this fall, and you're like, "Phew! I'd like to go back to college." You're on this high.

Or maybe you've walked in and, man, the floor has fallen out from under you. It's not like in this season (by the way, which will pass) God somehow turned his head away for a second. It's like, "Oh gosh! Who? The floor!" That's not what's going on here. He is working a plan, and he is good. Let's pray.

Father, I thank you for your mercy and grace on our lives. I pray for my brothers and sisters in here just knowing that for some of us, this isn't a word that we'll come back to in the future, but it's a word we needed *today*, in your providence bringing us into this place today to hear these things. What just a generous, kind thing, Father. We praise you for that.

I ask, Father, you would give us a glimpse of our inadequacy to fully understand or see what you see and that that would humble us in a culture that despises weakness. We would cling to our weakness so we might line up with those purchased by your blood who are naked and unashamed. Father, for those of us who are in a season of just everything is lined up, I pray we would be aware that you have blessed us and are worthy to be praised.

The promise you have given us is we would have you, and you are far more important than all of that. I pray we would not live our lives in fear but rather live our lives with an openhanded gladness that you are not just our King but our Father. You are gracious and good to us. We praise you. It's for your beautiful name I pray, amen.