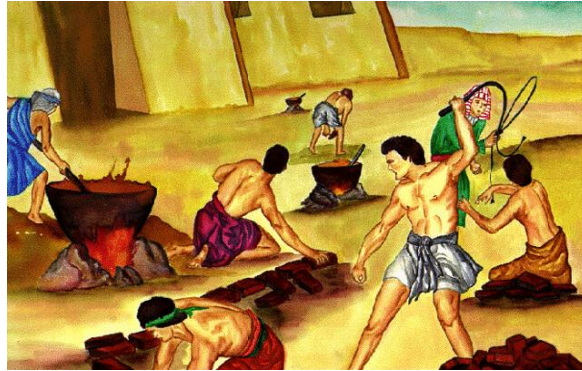


Sermon – July 11, 2021
“A New King Arose over Egypt”
The Rev. John C. Wright



Text: Exodus 1:1-14

Pray with me: Father, let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Come, Holy Spirit, come, visit, fill and anoint the sharing of these words. Make them to be a blessing for your people, a blessing that leads to life eternal and fruitful labor as we tarry here on this mission field. Lord, come and astonish us with your word this day. Amen

Good Morning. This morning we are moving into the Old Testament book of Exodus. During the coming months of summer and early fall, we will journey with the Israelites as they seek to follow God and transition from slaves oppressed in Egypt to a people following God and journeying in His presence to the Promised Land. It is a journey that many of us will be familiar with only from the movie “The Ten Commandments” which I hope we can watch together at some point in our journey. As we move into this Old Testament book, we rightfully should ask why we as Christ followers should bother to read these ancient texts. Don’t we know the outcome and shouldn’t we be focusing our attention on Jesus Christ, the endpoint of these writings? Yes, we do know the outcome and we are witnesses to the cross, an empty tomb, and a resurrected Jesus who now sits at the right hand of God and who will come again. We are citizens of the Kingdom of God through belief in Jesus Christ, but these texts are given to us to help us understand and define what that kingdom looks like and what it should look like in our time. These are texts that give us insight into the very nature of God: how He views the people of God, how great is the steadfast love of God, and the lengths that He will go to redeem His people and to establish His kingdom. These texts, if we will engage them, help us understand our response to God’s redemptive works. They will shape us as a people of God if we will engage

with them and will be open to the God that we find at work in them. Old Testament texts let us witness the struggles of God's people, witnessing their successes, failures, and God's mighty hand working in their lives. Exodus is also a key text for the New Testament writers. They looked back on these texts with the knowledge of Jesus Christ and pulled them with fresh understanding into their writing. As we seek to understand what they left us in the scriptures, we need to also understand the events they are referencing and how they point to Jesus. The Passover is a key event for us as Christians, and we want to understand the context, the implications, and history of this event, so that we might arrive at a deeper experience of remembrance of the redemption that God brought through Jesus for all people. Here in Exodus we can witness God's hand at work through people, and we can then look around at those in our lives and see with new awareness the body of Christ at work in this place and time to bring forth redemption for all the people of the earth. God's steadfast love for people is on display in these Old Testament texts, and while we also have the endpoint in Jesus and the love of God seen in him, looking back at these texts gives us a deeper, wider, more robust idea of the depth of God's love for people.

The Old Testament is a collection of many types of literature. Exodus is best read as theological history. Exodus, at its best, teaches us about God and what it means for us as a people of God, citizens of the in-breaking Kingdom of God, to live with knowledge of God. As we journey through Exodus, we will learn about God and will be challenged to let what we learn from these texts change us into a people who act upon our gained knowledge. Now, having stated that this is theological history, let me be clear that there are many key points in Exodus history that we cannot verify from a historical standpoint. We do not know the year or years of the Exodus. We do not know who the new Pharaoh is who rises and does not know Joseph or Joseph's God. We do not know which sea the Israelites cross, and we do not know the location of Mount Sinai where the Law, or Ten Words, was given. There is a lot about this book that we do not have verified in history. We also know that this book has been written and given to the church and has been a witness for thousands of years and is part of the canon of the church universal. As scripture, these words can and will speak into our hearts, transforming our ideas of who God is and how we are to live as citizens of a heavenly kingdom breaking into the now of our lives. What we will witness in Exodus is the fulfilling of God's creational and historical promise among the people of God living in Egypt. We will also witness the threat to God's plan

by an oppressive Pharaoh. I hope that all of this introduction does not bore us but will inspire us to read these texts for ourselves and to let them transform us and give us fresh insight into the steadfast love of God for His people. Let's look at the introduction to Exodus this morning.

Our translations typically omit the first word of Exodus: "And." It seems unnecessary to the reading of the text, yet it makes the point that what we are hearing is a continuation of Genesis. We will see this same idea in the repeated verses found in the opening lines that come from the Genesis text that give the names of the sons of Jacob who came from the land of Canaan and settled in Egypt. The point of this repetition is that this is not a stand-alone book but a book about the continuing story of God's people, Israel. We also should note that in some form there is a great shift from the story of Jacob's family in Genesis to a nation, the nation of Israel, the people of Israel found in Exodus. This is the movement from a tribe to a nation. The words, "people of Israel" occur some 125 times in Exodus, noting that this book is about the nation of Israel. God's creative work continues as Israel multiplies and begins to fill the earth, here the land of Egypt. At this point in the story of the people of Israel, God is not seen directly among them, but His action is seen in their multiplication, their fulfilling of God's command to be fruitful and multiply. The people of Israel came into Egypt few in number, but God is blessing them and bringing forth a new nation. We should remember the honor with which Jacob and his sons were greeted by the older Pharaoh and that they were given the best of the land of Egypt to settle on. Note that God's name is not mentioned in these opening chapters and His hand is not seen in the events that take place. Only in the background can we sense God at work blessing His people.

Look in your Bibles at verse 8, "Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph." The implication is that a new political group has come to power in Egypt. They may have forgotten the great things that God did through Joseph in their land to make them into a great nation or they may simply be choosing to ignore what they know of God. The latter is a common occurrence in new governments and new leadership throughout time. It is a question that we as citizens of the United States should be asking each time we elect new leadership. We should ask if our leaders know God and are planning to follow Him as they lead. We need to be those who are praising actions that are consistent with what we know of God, and we need to be those who are crying out to God if their actions are not. Leadership of this country comes and goes over time, and we as the people of God need to remember that it is not political events,

good or bad, that direct our paths, but it is God alone who is the director of our paths. It is God who brings blessings when we enjoy peace and stability, and it is God to whom we turn when we need deliverance. It is God we praise no matter our circumstances until he brings redemption in times of trouble. This is one of the great themes of the Book of Exodus.

Notice that there is no event where the Israelites are seeking to resist or overthrow the leadership of this new Pharaoh. The actions taken are instead based on hypothetical statements. The new Pharaoh tells his followers that if the Israelites increase and if there is a war and if the people of Israel side with an enemy, then they might overthrow us and escape from us. Because of this hypothetical circumstance, we need to act to manage their growth to keep these hypothetical things from occurring. Calvin's comments on this approach sums up Pharaoh's plan as being "a classic example of using an alleged threat as an occasion for one's own wickedness."¹ What we find is Pharaoh positioning himself against God. This is the other early theme found in the Book of Exodus and we will see this conflict grow as Pharaoh refuses to know this God of Israel and instead insists that he, Pharaoh, is God.

In light of this made-up idea of Israel fighting against Egypt, this new king and his court put taskmasters over the people of Israel and force them to build two cities, named in the scripture as Pithom and Rameses. These are supply cities for Egypt, and I think when the leadership see what they can do with a slave force and how they can enrich themselves, they want more of this type of result. Notice that God's hand is behind the scene as He defeats the objective of Pharaoh to control Israel's growth. The result of oppressive labor is that the population of Israel increases. Pharaoh then comes up with a new approach that is stated best in the NASB translation as, "The Egyptians used violence to compel the sons of Israel to labor." This is not raising the taxes on the Israelites or requiring them to work at a public project. This is the beginning of cruel actions to force them to work. Pharaoh and his leadership team are seeking to keep the numbers of the people of Israel at the right level that both meets their desires to prosper from Israel's labor and keeps the number of Israelites from becoming too large to be controlled. The Israelites are no longer welcome guests, but slaves forced to labor through violent means. Under these circumstances, the people begin to cry out to God for redemption. Pharaoh's hand is also now clearly against God's plan for the people of Israel. Pharaoh is opposing God's creative blessing on His people.

This morning we leave our family members, the Israelites, in a desperate situation in Egypt, yet we know that God is working and that their suffering and faith will lead to Jesus' arrival. The violence against the enslaved Israelites in Egypt is a difficult event for us to find in our history as God's people. It is also difficult for us to understand why God allows such violent suffering for his people. Part of the answer is that Pharaoh is acting in opposition to God, but another aspect of their situation speaks to God's nature. The enslaved Israelites have no choice but to cry out to God and learn to surrender to God's nature and rule in their lives. God is steadfast love, and those under violence must have faith in order to have an exodus out of such bondage. Part of their struggle as a nation is to see their situation in light of God's character rather than to decide that he is absent or present. Their situation gives us fresh insight into our own situations today as we struggle in our bondage to sin and death and cry out for redemption for ourselves, our families, friends, and neighbors. As God acted to redeem His people in Egypt, so also God is seeking to work through his people today to bring them out of violent bondage and into the peace of Christ that overcomes our own struggles in today's world. God's nature will be revealed to the people of Israel as God's steadfast love is given to them through an exodus from their suffering. We today may not be able to move out of our struggles in a physical manner, but we can find the love of Jesus Christ given to us that we also may have an exodus from our bondage into everlasting life. The stage has been set for Israel. Pharaoh has stood up to impose his will over the will of God, and the people are caught in between these two opposing kings, and for the moment it seems that Pharaoh is prevailing. Yet God is on the move and at every turn of the journey of His people from Egypt to God, we will see God's will prevail over Pharaoh. Let us join with our ancient family members and cry out to God for redemption for those in the cruelest bondage around us. Let me again challenge us to read Exodus over the coming weeks as we journey with the people of God.

Pray with me: Lord, too often we grow comfortable in our current situations in life. Give us faith to leave behind that which clings to us and to journey with you in faith into the unknown of the wilderness. Lord, we cry out on behalf of our brothers and sisters who are on a journey to suffering for eternity from their violent bondage to sin and death, and we ask that you would act in their lives to redeem them, to set their feet upon an exodus from death to life, abundant life in Jesus. Hear our cries, O Lord. Amen

ⁱ Childs, Brevard S.. *The Book of Exodus (1974): A Critical, Theological Commentary (The Old Testament Library)* (p. 15). Presbyterian Publishing Corporation. Kindle Edition.