

Journey to Freedom.

PART V

Introduction

We're going to be continuing with our "Journey to Freedom" series this morning as we make our way through the book of Exodus in the Old Testament.

This morning we're going to continue together with Part 5 in our *Journey to Freedom*:

In this passage we are given the first mention of God in the book of Exodus. We're going to see an amazing transition in the way people relate to and understand God as we continue this journey. This passage shows the Israelites crying out to a God they don't really know, someone they know is faithful and whom their ancestors worshipped, but a God whom they have had no personal experience of.

Today we're going to see an interesting pattern in the way in which God interacts with us concerning the fulfilment of His promises and in regards to prayer.

Please turn in your 'travel guides' to Exodus 2:23-25 as we continue our *Journey to Freedom*...

Scripture – Exodus 2:23-25

^{NIV} **Exodus 2:23** During that long period, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. ²⁴ God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. ²⁵ So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them.

Overview

There are three significant developments in this passage for us regarding the way in which we understand the nature and process of God and how we fit into His plans.

The first thing we can see is that the Israelites chose to put their faith and hope and trust in God. They did this, firstly, by recognising that He was the only One they could turn to, and secondly, by actually transferring this belief into faith through doing something about it and crying out to God.

There's a distinction that must be made about believing or understanding that God is the One who can save and actually putting that belief into practice. We can call this faith.

The second significant development that we can observe from this passage is that God heard and He acted, however, it is important to note that God didn't begin to act until the Israelites had first turned to Him and invited His intervention.

The third significant development has to do with the changing nature of God's interaction with humans. In this passage the Hebrew word we have translated here as "God" is the word "Elohim" which literally means 'a divine being'. As we journey through Exodus we will see God reveal His personal Name to the Israelites and so Exodus is a book which is the account of God making Himself knowable.

Let's begin with the response of the Israelites...

Crying Out

^{NIV} **Exodus 2:23** During that long period, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God.

There are three elements to their response:

- i) they "groaned"
- ii) they "cried out"
- iii) they "[cried] for help"

GROANED

This word, "groaned" is translated as "sighed" in some Bibles. "Gasp" is another way in which it could be translated. It is a painfully intense word and is the same word used in Ezekiel to describe the pain of having broken arms.

^{NIV} **Ezekiel 30:24** I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon and put my sword in his hand, but I will break the arms of Pharaoh, and he will groan before him like a mortally wounded man.

I'm sure many of us have been in a place where we're groaning or sighing; where things are painful and horrible – the situation unbearable. The thing is, often times this is as far as we get. It doesn't seem as if it is a natural response for some of us to go beyond here and we develop a 'grin and bear it' attitude.

Nothing is going to change unless something further is done; unless there is another expression which invites change.

CRIED OUT

The Israelites groaned, for sure, but the situation was such that they also “cried out.”

In a sense, groaning is passive, but crying out is active. The phrase could mean to complain or to shout out or even to call out a rally cry. It’s an expression implying that they came together in unity to call out in response to the situation.

Crying out is an active response intended both to bring attention to the cause and also to see the situation changed.

Even this, though, is something I’m sure many of us have done; crying out to God protesting about a situation or circumstance. Brought to a point where the pain or frustration or madness of a situation has left us no other course but to cry out to God.

Even this, however, is not the end of the matter.

CRY FOR HELP

Crying out doesn’t necessarily change the situation. We can see that the Israelite’s cry to God was deliberate and directed and specific.

It wasn’t just a cry; it was a cry *for help*.

You see, we can groan and complain and even cry out to God. But there is a distinction that must be made between crying out of frustration of angst and crying out for help.

You see, crying out to God for help actually means something.

Crying out to God means that we believe there’s a God and that He is mighty to save. Crying out *for help* means that we have faith that He *can* and *wants to* and *will* help. It says that we believe God will help.

The Israelites, in their crying out to God for help, demonstrate that they have confidence in the promises and plans and purposes of God and that they recognise that He is intimately concerned with them.

God’s Response

This belief in God’s attention to Israel is something which is reiterated in the way in which this final passage is written.

The NIV bible is a dynamic translation which means it has been translated to accurately convey the *intention* of the original authors – this is because translating things literally have issues such as the differences in expression among different and, especially ancient languages.

What this sometimes means, though, is that repetitive language is condensed to make it more readable and to make more sense following the rules of English grammar.

Bibles such as the King James or the New American Standard are more literal translations which make them harder to read and sometimes leads to errors in translation, especially in the King James, however – sometimes they reveal some fascinating things about what the original authors were trying to convey.

Like in this passage:

The NIV translates it:

^{NIV} **Exodus 2:24** God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. ²⁵ So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them.

This reads easily and is an accurate translation, however, the original Hebrew text actually reads:

וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹהִים אֶת־נַאֲקָתָם וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים
אֶת־בְּרִיתוֹ אֶת־אַבְרָהָם אֶת־יִצְחָק וְאֶת־יַעֲקֹב: ²⁵ וַיֵּרָא
אֱלֹהִים אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֵּדַע

Which I cannot understand, so...we turn to the New American Standard:

^{NAS} **Exodus 2:24** So God heard their groaning; and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. ²⁵ And God saw the sons of Israel, and God took notice of *them*.

Notice the four-fold repetition of “God” in this passage? It doesn’t change the meaning at all, but it’s especially significant in that for nearly two chapters hardly anything has been mentioned at all about God and here, in the space of two sentences, God is mentioned four times.

What this conveys to us is the understanding that God was intimately acquainted and involved in the situation the Israelites were facing. I mentioned this briefly earlier, but here where we see “God” it is the Hebrew word “Elohim” which simply means ‘God’ or ‘divine being’. This was how the Israelites related to God – there was not yet any special connection with Him or any real understanding of what He is like or how to interact with Him.

We’re going to see in the coming weeks how God reveals Himself to us and makes Himself knowable and expresses a desire to interact with us personally.

That was really a little digression, the main thing I'd like to explore in this second half of the passage is how God responds to the cry for help of the Israelites.

^{NIV} **Exodus 2:24** God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. ²⁵ So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them.

There are four things God is described as doing in response to the Israelite's cry for help:

- i) God heard their cry
- ii) God remembered His promise
- iii) God looked upon them
- iv) God was concerned about them

This is something which needs a bit of exploring to understand the true response of God as these words don't really seem all that exciting!

The Israelites cried out and God heard them and He remembered that He'd promised to look after them and protect them. Doesn't this seem a little bit odd?

Does this mean that sometimes God can't hear us? Does it mean that for a couple of hundred years God had forgotten about His promise? That doesn't reflect the nature of God that the rest of the Bible reveals.

The verbs "heard" and "remembered" form the first part of this stanza and in Hebrew are used in the context of active response. To 'hear' means to respond to what was heard. To 'remember' means to act on the basis of what was remembered. When we're talking about God, of course, God never forgot His promise, what this describes is actually something which is initiated from the Israelites rather than from God.

We've seen how the Israelites cried out to God for help – why would they do this unless they believed that the situation was not something God desired for them? By crying out for God to help they are inviting Him to intervene and to change the present circumstances because of an understanding that whatever is happening is not the experience that God has promised them or has desired for them.

It is the invocation of a promise made by God and hung onto by the Israelites that He would be their God and protect them and bless them and give them a land of their own.

When God 'remembered' it means that He responded to the faith of the Israelites who recognised that they weren't living in or experiencing what God wanted for them or had promised to them and so they had chosen to *act* on this faith and invite God to change the situation and to deliver on His promise.

When God 'hears' and 'remembers' it means He responds, He acts, He moves.

Likewise, we read that God "looked" on the Israelites and was "concerned" about them. Some Bibles say that God "took notice" of them. This reveals another amazing thing about God – He wasn't ignorant of the plight of His people, He was intimately acquainted with their situation and was moved by their plight – He was concerned and acted out of love and compassion for them.

Catalyst for Response

As we draw to close I want to backtrack for a moment and examine the reason God acted.

^{NIV} **Exodus 2:24a** God heard their groaning

God acted because He heard the people cry out. This word "groaning" is different to the first usage where it meant to cry out in pain. This is a more general word which sums up the total response of the Israelites.

Why did God act?

Because the Israelites cried out; because they reached out to God for help He responded.

It was St. Augustine who, writing around 400 years after Jesus, famously said:

"Without God we cannot; without us God will not."

This raises an extremely important aspect of how we interact with God. It is clear that although God can and does act without us in certain situations, there is a clear pattern demonstrating His desire for His plans and purposes to be outworked *with us*, in *co-operation* with us, *through* us and *involving* us.

We see a consistent pattern in Scripture of God acting in *response* to the cries or prayers of people.

^{NIV} **1 Chronicles 5:20** They were helped in fighting them, and God handed the Hagrites and all their allies over to them, because they cried out to him during the battle. He answered their prayers, because they trusted in him.

^{NIV} **Nehemiah 9:27** So you handed them over to their enemies, who oppressed them. But when they were oppressed they cried out to you. From heaven you heard them, and in your great compassion you gave them deliverers, who rescued them from the hand of their enemies.

^{NIV} **Matthew 14:30** But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" ³¹ Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"

The reality of this principal in practice is seen in Matthew:

^{NIV} **Matthew 6:6** But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. ⁷ And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

Jesus goes on to teach His disciples the way to pray and approach God through the Lord's Prayer. On the one hand He says that God already knows what we want or need before we ask, and then immediately following this Jesus teaches us how to pray, how to ask God for what we need.

The catalyst for God to act and to respond is for us to cry out to Him in prayer.

This has incredible implication on the way we live our lives and our attitude towards the situations and circumstances that we find ourselves in. It can be very tempting to only call on God or pray when we feel the situation is big enough and we need to 'bring in the heavies.' Or to just hunker down and try to get through until things get desperate.

The Bible makes it very clear that God is intimately acquainted with every little detail and is concerned about what goes on in our lives and is just waiting for us to cry out for help.

What we have here in Exodus is the revelation that God's response is active – when we cry out to Him He acts. Now, this may not always be in the way we expect, but God will respond according to His good purpose and with our best interests in mind.

I was chatting with someone the other day and they commented that it was funny how sometimes when we pray about a situation God doesn't change the situation but changes our heart or our perspective.

Conclusion

God responds to our cries for help – it doesn't have to be a major situation, God is interested and desires to be involved in every facet of our lives. Crying out to Him invites His intervention, it invites Him to demonstrate His character in whatever we're facing, it demonstrated faith that we believe in the promises He has made us and we're going to hang onto them.

Don't forget to cry out to God. Don't leave it till things get crazy. Involve God today.