

EXODUS 1:1-21

A REWARD FOR OBEDIENCE

“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 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. 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 Shiphrath 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.”¹

To an astonishing degree, the Faith of Christ the Lord has been reduced to irrelevance among modern evangelicals. Participants in the services of the churches are focused to a dismaying extent on fulfilling their own desires. Seeking to feel fulfilled and satisfied about their own condition, they fail to seek God or to discover what pleases Him. Without doubt, we have adopted many ideas and concepts which have their roots in the world, bringing them into our efforts to worship God. Thus, we are confused about how we should live as Christians and incapable of pleasing the Lord our God.

One area that reveals a form of spiritual schizophrenia is the contemporary attitude toward children. Increasingly, churches reflect the attitude of this dying world, viewing children as a bother and a burden. Let me illustrate what I mean. In a former congregation, I inherited a “children’s church.” Children’s church can be a blessing to a congregation, but it is a demanding ministry. Consequently, dedicated servants willing to instruct children, giving up their own time in order to provide the service required, grow weary. When staffing that “special time” for the children became a problem, I recommended to the leadership of that congregation that we should look at doing away with the programme, introducing children to the services of the congregation.

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A prominent leader within the church immediately and vehemently objected, stating that if he were required to bring his eight-year-old son into the worship with him and his wife, his family would immediately begin to attend elsewhere. He did not wish his “worship” to be disturbed with the presence of his child. The child was a distraction to what he thought was really important—his personal time of worship.

His attitude was not so very different from the attitude of multiplied numbers of people among the churches of our day. However, that attitude must be contrasted to the expectation of parents that is presented in the Word of God. The LORD instructed Moses, “Gather the people to me, that I may let them hear my words, so that they may learn to fear me all the days that they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children so” [DEUTERONOMY 4:10]. This command is iterated when God commands, “You shall teach [the words that I give] to your children, talking of them when you are sitting in your house, and when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise” [DEUTERONOMY 6:7]. Again, this command anticipates what God would communicate soon after. “You shall teach [My words] to your children, talking of them when you are sitting in your house, and when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise” [DEUTERONOMY 11:19].

Parents are responsible to instruct their children. Though a Sunday School, or a children’s church, or a youth programme can be an adjunct to parental instruction in righteousness, it is the responsibility of parents to teach their children. The church is not responsible to rescue children when parents fail to fulfil their God-given responsibility. Assuredly, refusal to accept responsibility for educating our children religiously is a serious blot on the life of modern evangelicals, but our tendency to view children with disdain is more disturbing still. God rewards those who please Him with children. Surrendered to contemporary culture, modern Christians reject this divine teaching. We do well to consider an incident from the life of Israel in order to understand the magnitude of our sinful attitude.

A LITTLE HISTORY WILL ASSIST OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE TEXT. God had made provision for the sons of Jacob. During one of the times of famine which frequent the Middle East, He provided a haven for them through unusual means. Joseph, the favoured son of Jacob, was sold into slavery. Through a series of strange events, he rose from the position of a slave and a prisoner to become the second most powerful man in Egypt. Through him, God provided a refuge for all the family of Israel, as Jacob had become known.

For nearly four hundred years, the people lived in the land of Egypt. Time brought changes in the relationship between the Israelites and the Egyptians, however. The Egyptians began to fear the growth of the Israelites, because they were obviously blessed [EXODUS 1:6-14]. Though growing in numbers, the Israelites were nevertheless numerically inferior to the Egyptians at the time of this account. They were yet vulnerable and thus reduced to servitude.

This was not the sole indignity. It was but the first of a continuing series of indignities. The king of Egypt issued secret directives to kill any male child at birth. When that tactic failed, a general order was given that any male born to a Hebrew was to be thrown into the river, but any female could live. The impact of this decree could only be that within one generation there would be no Hebrew race. With no males, there could be no perpetuation of the race since the females would be forced to marry—if they married at all—men who were not Hebrew. This was genocide with a vengeance.

It was during this time that two women, Shiphrah and Puah, became heroines of the Faith. Though their names are not readily recognised, their actions are instructive. Their lives and their actions instruct God's people in courage and determination, and in basic truths that are important for each believer. There are at least three great lessons which these two women teach us. How important are these truths when we have forgotten God's reward for obedience!

OUR VIEW OF LIFE REFLECTS OUR VIEW OF GOD. The first lesson that we should learn is that our view of life reflect our view of God; what we believe is demonstrated through how we live. Two courageous women are identified by names which speak of their character. The first is named *Shiphrah*, which means *Brightness* or *Beauty*. The other midwife is named *Puah*, which we in English would translate as *Splendid*. These two women, *Beauty* and *Splendid*, teach us to trust God. The **seventeenth verse** reads, "The midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live." They were commanded to kill any male child born to a Hebrew woman, but they refused. The Word of God identifies their motive for refusing the Pharaoh's order—**THEY FEARED GOD**.

Perhaps the most damning accusation which can be brought against any nation—or which can be said of any individual—is that the people do not fear God. Paul's summary statement of the race gives precisely such a damning indictment [**ROMANS 3:10b-18**]. He concludes with the words of the Psalmist [**PSALM 36:1b**] to state of those whom God calls "wicked," "There is no fear of God before their eyes." We are each familiar with those ancient words of the Wise Man;

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge."

[**PROVERBS 1:7**]

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom."

[**PROVERBS 9:10**].

Two classes are noted within humanity. The first class is made up of those who through fear of the LORD have commenced a journey toward wisdom and knowledge. The second and opposing class is composed of those who are consumed with self and who are characterised as having no fear of God. For the one, God is central to every consideration and concern. To the other, God does not fit into their equations since their personal desires take precedence over all else. The former has a broad world-view, and a reverence for life since God is the author of life. The latter of necessity has little reverence for life since they do not acknowledge the Author of life. Those who fear God revere life; those who do not fear God exalt their own being and revere their own self-defined rights.

Though *Beauty* and *Splendid* could not know of the commandments which God would give Moses, they practised the truth which would be summarised by those Ten Commandments. Think of those great truths enshrined in the Ten Commandments in a somewhat different light.

THE FIRST TRUTH IS THAT THERE IS BUT ONE GOD.

THE SECOND TRUTH TEACHES THAT MAN MUST NOT HAVE ANY IDOL IN HIS HEART—EITHER AN IDOL MADE WITH HIS HANDS OR CREATED IN THE SECRECY OF HIS HEART (PERSONAL HAPPINESS NOT EXCLUDED).

THE THIRD TRUTH RELATES TO MAN'S PERCEPTION OF GOD.

THE FOURTH TRUTH RELATES OF MAN'S WORSHIP OF THE LIVING GOD.

THE FIFTH TRUTH CONCERNS HONOUR TOWARD THE AUTHOR OF LIFE THROUGH HONOUR TO THOSE WHO GAVE LIFE.

THE SIXTH TRUTH TEACHES A REVERENCE FOR LIFE WHICH FLOWS FROM REVERENCE FOR THE AUTHOR OF LIFE.

THE SEVENTH, EIGHTH, NINTH AND TENTH TRUTHS ARE EACH CONCERNED WITH PRACTICAL REVERENCE FOR INDIVIDUALS CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD.

That each of these commandments flows from truth that is yet more ancient which should be recognised innately by all mankind. Focus on two passages of Scripture found in the first Book of the Bible. God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.

“So God created man in his own image,
“in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

“And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘**Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion** over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth’” [GENESIS 1:26-28].

Consider the second passage which relates the command of God given immediately after the flood had subsided and the ark had landed on Ararat. God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, “**Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.** The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth and upon every bird of the heavens, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea. Into your hand they are delivered. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man.

“Whoever sheds the blood of man,
by man shall his blood be shed,
for God made man in his own image.

“And you, **be fruitful and multiply**, teem on the earth and multiply in it” [GENESIS 9:1-7].

Who can forget the prophecies made during the past forty years about disaster resulting from population growth? It made no difference if the prophets of doom focused on the Third World or on the Economic powerhouses of the western world, all they saw was disaster. These doomsday scenarios were common from the early sixties onward, continuing to the cusp of the new millennium. What do you hear today from those same prophets of doom? The official position of virtually all world governments is that we need more and larger families. Canada is not replacing its ageing population by natural means and must therefore encourage ever-greater immigration, with all the attendant problems accompanying that temporary solution.

Have you noticed that the less we fear God, the greater our social problems? The dimmer our view of God, the greater the difficulties we face as a nation. Consider some numbers from the '60s revolution? Generated in the United States, they nevertheless reflect the Canadian scene. Between 1960 and 1999, we witnessed a 523% increase in out-of-wedlock births, a 270% increase in the percentage of children on welfare, a 215% increase in the percentage of single-parent families, a 210% increase in the rate of teenage suicide, a 130% increase in the divorce rate. There was a 370% increase in the violent crime rate, and a 75-point decline in the average SAT score. Emotional and behavioural problems in children tripled from 1979 to 1996. The number of cohabiting couples increased tenfold from 1960 to 1999. Picking up steam in the '90s, the number increased by 50%. Forty percent of all out-of-wedlock births are to cohabiting couples. The chance of such a couple staying together more than 10 years? One in ten.²

Throughout this same period, anecdotal evidence suggests that faith in God diminished as churches exchanged the truth of the Word for pop psychology, all in an effort to be relevant. Obedience to God, embracing the central concept of group rights balanced against individual responsibility, was exchanged for a one-size-fits-all evangelicalism. Parents tried to entertain their children into the Faith, and baby boomers demanded that they not be made to feel uncomfortable by the preaching of the Word. God was transformed from holy and awesome into a distant deity that is more concerned with being liked than being revered.

How do you view God? That should have been an easy question for Christians. I want to follow up by posing a second, related question. How does your view of human life reflect your view of God? The question is actually asking you how you view children. In your estimate, is human life sacred? Are all children a gift from God? Does a child, even the child of an impoverished, uneducated labourer, reflect the image of God? Are families with ten children more blessed than families with no children? Do parents in drought stricken, famished countries have the right to bring more children into the world?

Are you uncomfortable, yet? Struggle through a few more questions which provide the needed corollary. Does your attitude toward others, even those toward whom you feel antipathy, reflect your profession of God? Is the child of the poor, though dressed in rags and unwashed, made in the image of God? Though you do not support abortion as a method of population control, are you willing to inconvenience yourself and be involved in pregnancy counselling? Are you willing to adopt a child to keep that child from being slaughtered in the abattoir of the abortionist? Would you provide shelter for that same child if the mother couldn't care for it? Would you open your home to the unwed mother to save that child?

Ultimately, we live what we believe. It is not so much what we say that touches our world—it is what we practise. When I capture a vision of God as Holy, Sovereign, Majestic, that vision of necessity affects my worldview. I find that my relationship with my fellow man changes. Fellow citizens of this planet, though perhaps lost and quite unlovable, are made in the image of God. They are a reflection of His glory. Armed with a high view of the living God, I see a beauty through the grime and filth of human existence. For God's sake, I am willing to risk my comfort for the sake of others—when I have captured a vision of Holy God. By this criterion, how many of us have witnessed the presence of God?

² Elizabeth Nickson, Women don't need patronizing government help, National Post, March 1, 2002, Page url: <http://www.nationalpost.com/commentary/columnists/story.html?f=/stories/20020301/203022.html>

OUR VIEW OF GOD DETERMINES HIS TREATMENT OF US. “God dealt well with the midwives.” Summed up in this one, tight sentence is an exceptional, even a stunning thought. Though the midwives lied in order to protect themselves from the wrath of the Pharaoh, because they feared God and refused to kill the infant boys, God was good to them. Our Lord has spoken to this issue: [God] “makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust” [MATTHEW 5:45b].

God is good and His goodness is witnessed through His treatment of the inhabitants of this fallen world. His goodness is revealed throughout Scripture. Peter recalls God’s goodness. “The Lord is not slow to fulfil his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance” [2 PETER 3:9]. Paul, in the letter to Roman Christians, points to God’s goodness demonstrated through providing salvation. “While we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. . . . God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” [ROMANS 5:6, 8].

Notice also the Apostle’s message delivered in the cultural centre of Athens. “The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for

“‘In him we live and move and have our being’;
as even some of your own poets have said,
“‘For we are indeed his offspring.’

“Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead” [ACTS 17:24-31].

It is equally true that God has special love for those who fear Him and who reveal that fear through their worship. Understand one great truth: true worship flows out of a proper concept of God and from a proper relationship to God. We do not worship in order to be accepted—we worship because we are accepted. God's love is specially directed toward those who fear Him and who know Him [EPHESIANS 1:3-6; JOHN 14:15-24]. How often does the Word promise rich benefits to the one who loves God. Think of the frequent mention of this aspect of His munificence in the Psalms.

PSALM 119:165 – PEACE

PSALM 119:77 – MERCY

PSALM 119:76 – COMFORT

PSALM 86:13 – DELIVERANCE

PSALM 5:11 – JOY

Knowing God as holy and righteous, and knowing His goodness, I am invited to come before Him, petitioning Him for my needs. “If you ask Me anything in My Name, promised Jesus, I will do it” [JOHN 14:14]. And Paul likewise encourages us to exercise full confidence in God. “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” [PHILIPPIANS 4:6, 7].

Surely you will agree that these are precious promises which comfort our weary souls. Such promises as we have just read do not extend to those who refuse to accept God as regnant over life. For them there remains but one sharp warning.

“If one turns away his ear from hearing the law,
even his prayer is an abomination.”

[PROVERBS 28:9];

and,

“The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination;
how much more when he brings it with evil intent.”

[PROVERBS 21:27].

Bear in mind where we started as we began to explore this incident in the history of Israel—our view of life reflects our view of God. What we believe about God is seen in how we live. Likewise, our view of God determines His treatment of us. Regardless of what I profess, my lifestyle effects God's treatment of me. Do I enjoy intimacy with God? If not, perhaps it is because I have failed to reflect a holy attitude toward those He created—my fellowman. Are my prayers answered? If not, perhaps it is because I have thought myself sovereign in areas of my own life, thus excluding God from reigning over my life.

Could this be a reason why the churches of our day seem so very powerless? Are we, as some have suggested, practical atheists? Have we so compromised the Faith that it is no longer recognisable as being delivered from the hand of God? What would happen if each of us this day determined that we would serve God with a radical abandon? What would be the outcome if each of us determined that, regardless of the cost of sacrifice, we would enshrine God as sovereign in our life, surrendering each area of life to His mastery? I am convinced that we would experience blessings we cannot even imagine as God demonstrates kindness toward us.

“Lord, here is my work, an offering to you. Do with it as You will. Master, here is my worship, a sacrifice of praise to You. Do with it as You will. My Sovereign, here is my family, each area given to You. Do as You will.” Having done this, surely the windows of heaven would be opened and we would experience spiritual power to truly worship God, knowing Him in the fullness of His power.

OUR FEAR OF GOD BRINGS HIS RICHEST REWARD. Read that **twenty-first verse**: “Because the midwives feared God, He gave them families.” Modern believers believe God punished the midwives through giving them families! Is this because we do not believe the Word of God? Or is it that we do not understand the Word of God! Will we reject the teaching of the **127th PSALM**?

“Children are a heritage from the LORD,
the fruit of the womb a reward.”

[PSALM 127:3]

I am convinced from the Word of God that children are a blessing from God. We are not convinced in many instances that families—large families—are a blessing from the hand of God who delights to give us good things. We are permitted to participate in a miracle through the birth of children, but it is nevertheless God who gives children. We must either acknowledge this, or admit unbelief concerning the Word of God.

How tragic is the discovery that we cannot have it all. Career and family don't necessarily mix. The biological clock for women begins to run down at about age twenty-seven, and for men at about age thirty-five. If you don't have children by that point, the prospect of children diminishes at an exponential rate. We plan our lives so precisely. Each family will have one child, or perhaps two children, and we will wait until women are in their mid- to late-thirties. God is not part of the equation. We are not as adept at family planning as we thought!

Is the view of families I have presented in this message an outdated cultural remnant, or is it the will of God and is it the intimate involvement of God which grants children to families? Think of the incidents recorded throughout the Word of God. Leah received children from God [GENESIS 29:31, 32]. The statement is not her perception, but is rather a deliberate statement recorded by Moses guided by the Holy Spirit to pen these words. Rachel, crying bitterly because she had no children, was rebuked by Jacob who asked, “Am I in the place of God, **who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?**” [GENESIS 30:2]. Later, we read that God remembered Rachel, and in mercy [God] listened to her and opened her womb [GENESIS 30:22]. Rachel realised this was the gracious hand of God in response to her prayer, for she is recorded as stating, “God has taken away my reproach” [GENESIS 30:23].

The divine text teaches us that “the LORD gave [Ruth] conception” [RUTH 4:13]. Do you suppose this is merely an outmoded concept? Or is this the revelation of the will and the mind of God? Though Hannah mourned for a child, the Bible says that it was “the LORD [who] had closed her womb” [1 SAMUEL 1:5]. In answer to her heartfelt cries for His mercy, “the LORD remembered her” and in the course of time gave her a son [1 SAMUEL 1:19]. Hannah recognised the divine grace; she named the boy, Samuel...because said she, “I have asked for him from the LORD” [1 SAMUEL 1:20]. Is her expression merely eastern hyperbole? Or is the birth of children under God's purview? According to the last of the Minor Prophets, God blesses godly marriages with children because He seeks “godly offspring” [MALACHI 2:15]. Do you suppose Jesus spoke in ignorance when he stated that the birth of a child brings joy to a mother [JOHN 16:21]? I fear that by our attitudes, we of this modern world deny the Word of God, despise God's richest blessing, and sacrifice joy which should be ours. We are wrong. We have sinned.

“Preacher, all you have cited is based in the Law or reflects oriental patterns of thought.” Not so, rather the truths are based in the very character of God as revealed in His creation. That which was cited preceded the Law or had its roots in antecedents to the Law. Is not the God of the Old Testament also God of the New Testament? Do we worship a new God who is foreign to the Old Testament? Has the Old Testament been relegated to mere ethical platitudes with no real impact in our lives? Are the principles given in that portion of the Book superseded by other

principles? Where are those newer principles? If superseded by newer principles, how do you know that yet newer principles have not superseded those to which we might appeal? No, that which is given in the first chapter of Exodus speaks of personal relationship to God. The principle transcends time and culture. It lies at the very root of human existence.

Our view of life reflects our view of God. Our view of God determines His treatment of us. Our fear of God brings His richest reward, children. Therefore:

- (1) let us guard our attitudes as revealed through our speech and actions;
- (2) let us seek to bring every area of life under submission to Him;
- (3) let us seek forgiveness where forgiveness is required, confessing our sin;
- (4) let us enthrone God as supreme in every area of life.

On this Right to Life Sunday, let us rejoice in God's continued grace to us as evidenced through giving children. Let us each pray that He will bless our families in that manner which has ever revealed His grace, entrusting children to our care. Amen.