

Exodus: The Way Out of Despair

Welcome/Prayer

Foreword

In this sermon series, “The Way Out,” we are studying the Book of Exodus, the story of the deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian slavery. For this message, we’re going to look at what happened when the people of Israel found themselves in a desperate situation and cried out to God. As we study their example, we will realize that so, too, in our lives, God provides a way out of despair.

Introduction

One dictionary defines *despair* as “a state in which all hope is lost or absent; the feeling that everything is wrong and nothing will turn out well.” Synonyms for *despair* include “pain, misery, doom and gloom, anguish, depression, distress, hopelessness, despondency.” These words describe the state of the Israelite people as the story of Exodus unfolds. With their future deliverer, Moses, living in a foreign land, the Israelites were miserable and could see no hope for relief in their circumstances. In desperation, they cried out to God, and we’ll learn how He provided His people a way out of their despair.

1. What are some difficult situations you've faced in your lifetime?
2. Have you ever felt afraid and all alone? If so, what were the circumstances you were facing, and what did you do about it?
3. Describe a time you've cried out to God, and share what happened as a result.

Preparation

Read the following text related to today’s message:

Exodus 2:23b-25 (Holman Christian Standard Bible)

²³ The Israelites groaned because of their difficult labor, and they cried out; and their cry for help ascended to God because of the difficult labor. ²⁴ So God heard their groaning, and He remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. ²⁵ God saw the Israelites, and He took notice.

Break it Down

Deliverance from feelings of hopelessness and helplessness comes when we gain an adequate and accurate view of the One who receives our desperate plea. In the above referenced scripture, four verbs are used to describe what the Lord did in response to the Israelites’ cries for help. Like these people of old,

We find the way out of despair when we realize...

God hears.

God heard the Israelites’ groaning (v. 24a). The word used in this chapter (translated “heard”) means more than merely hearing; it suggests that God gave attention to and understood the Israelites’ situation. As Christ followers, we can find comfort and reassurance in the words of the psalmist: “The Lord hears His people when they call to Him for help. He rescues them from all their troubles.” (Psalm 34:17 NLT) In the same way God *heard* the Israelites, He hears us, understands our despair, and responds to our pleas.

1. What is the difference between hearing and listening? Give some examples.
2. What are the qualities of a good listener? In what ways does God exhibit these characteristics?
3. What would you want God to understand about your current situation?

God remembers.

...and He remembered His covenant (v. 24b). God remembered His covenant with the Israelites' forefathers, and He kept His promise to them. Because they were suffering in their despair and not able to see an end to their plight, the Israelites must have felt that God had forgotten them. Even at the time of the prophet, Isaiah, God's people declared, "...The Lord has deserted us; the Lord has forgotten us." (Isaiah 49:14 NLT) Contrary to what we might think or feel in our despair, God reminds us that He remembers us... (ref. Genesis 9:15, 30:22; Exodus 2:24; Leviticus 26:42), and He will show us a way out.

1. What are some of the promises God has made to us?
2. Have you ever forgotten about somebody and been forgotten by someone else? What happened?
3. In what ways have you experienced the truth that God will never leave us or forsake us?

God sees.

God saw the Israelites... (v. 25a). It's one thing to hear or read about tragedies, but it's another to witness them. Seeing starving children in Syria or victims of a natural disaster creates a "compassionate awareness" in us that will likely move us to action. Jesus regularly demonstrated this throughout His earthly ministry, as He taught, healed, and ministered to others. As we feel the weight of despair, let us remember that God sees our circumstances, and our compassionate Father will act accordingly.

1. Describe a tragic situation you saw with your own eyes that had a significant effect on your life.
2. Under what circumstances have you received compassion from another person?—demonstrated compassion *for* another?
3. As God looks at your life right now, what does He see? What might that knowledge cause Him to do?

God takes notice.

...and He took notice (v. 25b). The real meaning of this phrase is more clear in the New Living Translation: "[God] looked down on the people of Israel and *knew it was time to act.*" (emphasis added) When the Israelites were groaning about their circumstances, they didn't realize that God took notice of them. But, behind the scenes, God was active and, in His perfect timing and according to His divine plan, He would deliver His people from what seemed to be a hopeless situation. He showed them a way out, and He does the same for us.

1. When has God's timing not necessarily been your timing?
2. Describe a time when something you witnessed caused you to take action.
3. Share about a time the Lord acted in your life when you didn't expect it? What happened?

Conclusion

All of us have faced—and may currently be facing—difficult and challenging circumstances in our lives. As we continue to study the Book of Exodus and recognize how God demonstrated His faithfulness to the Israelites, we'll gain a greater understanding of how He is at work in our lives, as well, and He shows us a way out of our despair. He will answer the cries of His children because He hears, remembers, sees, and takes notice.

1. Are you or a loved one facing a difficult or even desperate situation? Call out to God and know He hears, remembers, sees, takes notice and will act accordingly.
2. Trust Him to do so.

Close in Prayer