

Read Through the Bible

Week 3, January 18 – 23

Readings: Genesis 41- Exodus 6; Matthew 13-16

Introduction to Exodus:

The human race is in trouble. We've been in trouble for a long time. Enormous energies have been and continue to be expended by many, many men and women to get us out of the trouble we are in—to clean up the world's mess. The skill, the perseverance, the intelligence, the devotion of the people who put their shoulders to the wheel to pull us out of the muck—parents and teachers, healers and counselors, rulers and politicians, writers and pastors—are impressive. At the center and core of this work is God. The most comprehensive term for what God is doing to get us out of the mess we are in is *salvation*. Salvation is God doing for us what we can't do for ourselves. Salvation is the biggest word in the vocabulary of the people of God. The Exodus is a powerful and dramatic and true story of God working salvation. The story has generated an extraordinary progeny through the centuries as it has reproduced itself in song and poem, drama and novel, politics and social justice, repentance and conversion, worship and holy living. It continues to capture the imagination of men and women, especially men and women in trouble.

It is significant that God does not present us with salvation in the form of an abstract truth, or a precise definition or a catchy slogan, but as *story*. Exodus draws us into a story with plot and characters, which is to say, with design and personal relationships. Story is an invitation to participate, first through our imagination and then, if we will, by faith—with our total lives in response to God. This Exodus story continues to be a major means that God uses to draw men and women in trouble out of the mess of history into the kingdom of salvation. About half the book (chapters 1–19 and 32–34) is a gripping narrative of an obscure and severely brutalized people who are saved from slavery into a life of freedom. The other half (chapters 20–31 and 35–40) is a meticulous, some think tedious, basic instruction and training in living the saved, free life. The story of salvation is not complete without both halves.

Reflections and Questions for Thought

By Brian DeVries

Who doesn't like a good story? I remember when I was a child listening to my father read the Chronicles of Narnia to me and my sisters while sitting around the campfire during our summer vacation. My sisters and I always looked forward to after dinner when he would break out the spine broken book and perform the summer tradition. He would talk to us about the lessons, characteristics, parallels, of Edmond, Peter, Susan, Lucy, and our hero, Aslan to what we had learned in Sunday School and church regarding Christ's gift of salvation through the cross. Christ spoke in parables. When asked by his disciples as to why he

spoke in parables, Christ responds *“to create readiness, to nudge the people toward receptive insight. In their present state, they can stare till doomsday and not see it, listen till they’re blue in the face and not get.”* (The Message Matthew 13:11-13)

Mathew 13 is full of parables. Christ speaks of everything from mustard seeds, yeast, treasures, merchants and nets. My favorite one is the parable of the Four Soils. In it Christ speaks about a farmer sowing seeds in his fields. The seed lands in four different environments. Some seed fell on the path where birds quickly gobbled it up. Other seed fell on rocky places without much soil where the seed quickly took root, sprang up quickly and then died. Still other seed fell on thorny soil, where the weeds choked out the good seed. And finally, there was seed that fell on good soil. The four different soils represent four different “receptions” that people can have when hearing about the “seeds” of salvation. One thing that struck me is that the farmer didn’t meticulously plant the seeds only in good soil. He wasn’t a soil inspector. He cast the seed and let the wind, sun, and rain do the rest. Sure, some fell on unreceptive soil. I think often we get caught up in trying to say the right thing at the right time when conditions are perfect and expect great crops. Have you ever seen some of those plants growing sideways out of a crack in the side of a hill? Most of those plants are beautiful and serve a significant purpose. Our job as Christians is not to judge who is the right audience for the message of salvation. We need to spread the Good News and let the Holy Spirit do the rest of the work.

Where have you cast the seed lately?

Have you pre-judged your audience or waited for the right crowd to share the Gospel?