

Bought
Exodus 6:6-8

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A little nine-year-old boy was asked by his mother what he had learned in Sunday School. Well, Mom, our teacher told us how God sent Moses behind enemy lines on a rescue mission to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. When he got to the Red Sea, he had his engineers build a pontoon bridge, and all the people walked across safely. He used his walkie-talkie to radio headquarters and call in an air strike. They sent in bombers to blow up the bridge and all the Israelites were saved.

"Now, Joey, is that REALLY what your teacher taught you?" his mother asked.

"Aw, Mom, if I told it the way the teacher did, you'd never believe it!"

I guess the Exodus story really is pretty unbelievable. The people of God, the Israelites, are slaves in Egypt. Their life is miserable. God shows up and tells a guy named Moses to go to Pharaoh, only the most powerful ruler of the time, and say, "Let my people go." And how does that go? Not so well. Before you know it Pharaoh hardens his heart. Instead of letting the people go he makes life more difficult, telling the Hebrew slaves they have to make bricks with no straw. And then...the most amazing things happen, signs and wonders from a staff that turns to a snake to a river that runs red with blood , frogs and gnats and plagues on livestock and a hailstorm that wreaked havoc and still Pharaoh's heart was hard. Then came the night of the Passover, when the Hebrew people put the blood of a lamb on the doorframe of their house and the Lord passed over their homes. But the angel of death visited every home that did not have the blood on the doorframe. On that night the Hebrew people escaped and things looked great until they came up against the Red Sea and Pharaoh's army was bearing down on them. Moses held up his staff, the waters parted, and the Israelites crossed over on dry land. When Pharaoh and his chariots followed they were drowned in the flood. And just like in our opening sentences the Israelites lifted their voices in praise, "I will sing to the Lord, for he is highly exalted. The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea. The Lord is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation."

I understand how a child hearing that story might go home and say, “If I told you what my teacher really said you would never believe it.” But the people of Israel believed that story. They told of it again and again in songs and in celebration. They gathered once a year for the Passover, recreating and remembering the night when God passed over their homes and brought this incredible deliverance from the bondage of Egypt. The people of Israel believed the story of Moses and the Red Sea and the God who set his people free. And yet as amazing and miraculous as the Exodus is, with waters parting and plagues being poured out, it is important to grasp that believing in the Exodus is not only believing in God’s power. To believe in the Exodus is to believe in God’s love. The story of the Exodus is a story of God’s love for a particular group of people, a people chosen by God as God’s own special people.

The Exodus moves at a lightning quick pace. It starts on an upbeat note as God has used Joseph to bring all the tribes of Israel to Egypt where there is safety, security, and plenty of food. As Joseph said God intended it all for good. And then, the bottom falls out. A new king comes to power, who does not know Joseph, and the oppression starts. Instructions are given to kill the baby boys and later to throw them in the river and by the end of chapter two we hear that during this long time of suffering and slavery the Israelites groan and cry out. They cry for help. Chapter three begins with a burning bush in the desert and this man named Moses out tending sheep. The Lord appears to Moses in the burning bush, and what the Lord says to Moses might well have sounded unbelievable. To a people oppressed and crushed under the cruel reign of Pharaoh, God tells them some good news. “I have seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers. I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them.”

Exodus has all sorts of fireworks. I mean God does some amazing and awesome things. But behind the fireworks, behind the miracles, behind the shock and awe of the plagues, is a God who remembers the rescue plan of restoring and repairing this broken world; behind the miracles is a God who remembers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; behind the miracles is a God who sees when his precious children suffer; behind the miracles is a God who hears their cries; behind the miracles is a God who is concerned; behind the miracles is a God who comes down to help. I don’t know what is more

unbelievable, that there is a God who can do great and mighty miracles, or that there is a God who sees, who hears, who cares, and who comes down to help. You can't miss the fact that Exodus tells of a God who is powerful. Today I pray you will understand that Exodus tells us of a God who is filled with love for his broken children. Do you believe there could be such a God? When God speaks to Moses through the burning bush, the Lord says, "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." When God reveals the depths of God's love and God's concern for his children, it is holy ground.

Earlier this morning we read in Exodus 6 the words God said to Israel. "I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God." I have titled this sermon "Bought" as a result of a key word in the passage. That word is redeemed. I read once that redeemed means to be *bought* back at a great price. The story of Exodus is the story of God acting to redeem his people. Israel had been enslaved. Israel had been degraded. Israel had been crushed. How do you think it sounded to the Israelites to know that they, a band of slaves, were so precious and valuable to God that he would redeem them, buy them back at a great price? It must have sounded unbelievable.

These oppressed slaves had been subjected to hard labor. They had experienced the bitterness of life. They had endured taunts of lazy, lazy, lazy, worthless, and good for nothing. It is safe to say God saw something in Israel that the Egyptians did not see. I wonder if we might also say God saw something in Israel they did not see in themselves. When you have been beaten down and crushed and humiliated long enough, you start to wonder if your life has any value, any meaning, any purpose. Today I want to say to any of you...today I want to say to all of you who have been in that place, that place of wondering if your life has any meaning, any purpose, any value, there is a God who sees the suffering of his children. There is a God who sees your misery. There is a God who sees when people who are beaten down, battered and bitter. There is a God who sees all this. And this God sees more. This God sees all the way back to Genesis when the humans he created were created in God's very own image. Egypt saw worthless and lazy slaves. God saw his own image in these Hebrew slaves. He saw their misery, he heard their cries, he was concerned, and so he came down to rescue them. He came down to redeem them. He came down to redeem them with an

outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. He came down to take them as his own people and so he can be their God. He came to buy them back at a great price, because they were his treasured possession. (Exodus 19:5)

I want to take a few moments to look at the word redeem. “The word redeem...designates a process by which something alienated, or at least subject to alienation, may, in some circumstances, be recovered for its original owner by the payment of a sum of money.”¹ In the realm of family law redeem denotes primarily the action of the next of kin to recover the forfeited property of a kinsman or to purchase his freedom if he has fallen into slavery.² The one who redeems buys back what is lost, whether it is property, or a person’s freedom if they have sold themselves into slavery. We see redemption enacted in the book of Ruth. There Boaz, a relative of an older widow named Naomi steps in to redeem her land when her life has become bitter and broken.

The relation of the redeemer and the Exodus narrative is spelled out in these words. “Since the essential purpose of a redemptive act is to deliver a person or thing from captivity or loss, it becomes an appropriate image for God’s saving actions....”³ As God acts to deliver Israel from captivity, his saving actions are the work of a redeemer. We will see throughout the pages of the Old Testament that God continues to act as the Redeemer for Israel, especially during the dark days of the exile, when they once again lived as foreigners in a strange land. The later chapters of Isaiah address the deep longing for redemption during the days of exile. “The word Redeemer is one of Isaiah’s favorite names for God, pointing, as it does, not merely to the fact that Yahweh delivers his people, but that he has an obligation to do so because of having adopted them for his own.”⁴

May we stop and ponder the implication of that. The nearest relative, the closest relative, is obligated to be the redeemer. By the time of the prophet Isaiah Israel has come to understand God is obligated to be their Redeemer because he is their closest relative. God has adopted Israel as his own children. Israel belongs to God and God is obligated to watch over and care

¹ Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible R-Z, p. 21.

² IDOB, 21.

³ IDOB, 22.

⁴ IDOP, p. 22.

for Israel, to act as their redeemer. So it is that the prophet Hosea, one who witnessed all the failures and frustrations God had with the unfaithful children of Israel, nevertheless has the Lord saying, “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.” Don’t let the special effects like the parting of the Red Sea and the bread in the wilderness or the spectacle of the plagues with frogs and gnats and boils and blood keep you from seeing that Exodus is a story of God redeeming his beloved children, of buying them back at a great price, delivering them from slavery and binding them to himself with cords of love.

The notion that God takes on the obligation to be the redeemer for Israel is such a powerful statement of who God is. In the Old Testament, even though the nearest relative is obligated to be the redeemer, that doesn’t mean the one who is obligated always steps up and fulfills their obligation. In Deuteronomy 25 we are told of the obligation one brother had to another. If a man died without having a son through his marriage, his surviving brother was obligated to marry the widow of his brother who died and to produce offspring so the brother’s line would carry on. By fulfilling this obligation the brother’s name would carry on. The surviving brother, the nearest relative, had an obligation to act. But not everyone acted to fulfill their obligation. “If a man does not want to marry his brother’s wife, she shall go to the elders at the town gate and say, ‘My husband’s brother refuses to carry on his brother’s name in Israel.’...if he persists in saying, ‘I do not want to marry her,’ his brother’s widow shall go up to him in the presence of the elders, take off one of his sandals, spit in his face, and say, ‘This is what is done to the man who will not build up his brother’s family line.’ That man’s line shall be known in Israel as the Family of the Unsandaled.” (Deuteronomy 25:5-10) If you fail or refuse to fulfill your obligation to be the redeemer, your sandal is removed and you get spit on in the face. Being a redeemer is serious business. Step up and fulfill your obligation. Step up and fulfill your obligation, or you will be known as the family of the unsandaled.

So it is that God meets Moses in Exodus 3 in the burning bush. As Moses approaches God tells him, “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” On that holy ground Moses is unsandaled. Moses is unsandaled as God reveals his character. Moses is unsandaled as he stands before the God who sees and hears and is concerned and comes down. Moses is unsandaled as God makes his intentions clear that he has come to

redeem Israel, to rescue Israel, to set Israel free, to lead Israel to the Promised Land, and to claim Israel as God's very own treasured possession. In all of this Moses is unsandaled. Unsandaled is the sign and symbol for those who will not fulfill their obligation. I can just imagine God finishing his speech about how much he cares for Israel and the commitment he has to redeem Israel with outstretched arm, and then saying to Moses, "Now get your sandals on. I have an obligation to fulfill. I am going to redeem my chosen and precious people."

- Moses straps his sandals on and tells Pharaoh that the Lord says, "Let my people go."
- Moses straps his sandals on and plagues come left and right, frogs and flies, boils and blood.
- Moses straps his sandals on and the Red Sea parts.
- Moses straps his sandals on and water spews forth from a rock.
- Moses straps his sandals on and leads the people out of slavery and toward the Promised Land.
- Moses straps his sandals on and God leads his children by a cloud in the day and a pillar of fire by night.
- It is through Moses, who has strapped his sandals on that God says to Israel, his beloved child, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."
- Moses straps his sandals on because God has come to redeem his people, to buy them back at a great price.

I love the image of Moses strapping on his sandals. It is an image that says so clearly God has come to fulfill his obligation, the obligation of a loving Father to redeem his hurting children. When Moses straps on his sandals, it is as if God is setting the stage for the most incredible, the most beautiful, and the most amazing act of redemption. That incredible, beautiful, and amazing act of redemption happens when God himself straps on a pair of sandals. That incredible, beautiful, and amazing act of redemption happens when God wraps himself in human flesh and jumps with both feet into our world. When Jesus Christ came to this world, he came to redeem this world. He came to buy this world back for God at a great price. The God who sees us in our misery, who hears the cries of our hearts, this God is concerned for us, for each and every one of us. And so this God, our God comes down to help. Because God so loves this world he sent his Beloved Son to save this world,

to redeem this world. When Jesus entered this world he strapped on a pair of sandals. Of course he did the miraculous. This is God's Beloved Son. He strapped his sandals on and he walked on the water. He calmed the seas. He took a few loaves and fishes and fed 5,000. Moses struck a rock and out came water. When Jesus strapped his sandals on he took water and he turned it into wine. I'm just saying, Jesus had some awesome power.

But just like in Exodus, God did not simply show his power. When Jesus strapped his sandals on he showed the love of God in ways beyond what we could imagine or hope for.

- He strapped his sandals on and he walked a mile in our shoes. He knew what it was like to be hungry, to be thirsty, to be tired, and to suffer physical pain.
- He strapped his sandals on and walked right into the pain and suffering of the lepers and the lame, the blind and the deaf, the broken and downhearted, the lost and the lonely.
- He strapped his sandals on and with a towel around his waist he knelt down and washed the feet of his disciples. He who was the greatest, the Son of God, emptied himself, lowered himself, humbled himself and became a servant. He strapped on the sandals of a servant.
- He strapped his sandals on and experienced rejection, humiliation, betrayal, sadness, and sorrow.
- He strapped his sandals on and he walked a mile in our shoes... and then with those sandals strapped to his feet he walked another mile. He walked a mile no one else could walk. He walked up the hill called Calvary, where on the cross he suffered and died. His death was what the Bible calls an atoning death. His death is referred to at times as a ransom.
- He strapped his sandals on and gave his life for you and for me and for this whole world.
- Jesus Christ strapped his sandals on and he bought back this world.

A little boy came home from Sunday school and tried to describe the Exodus with the plagues and the Red Sea. He said to his mother, "If I told you what my teachers said you would never believe it." This morning I am telling you something that might be so hard to believe. But the prayer, the prayer I offer from the bottom of my heart, is that you will believe what the gospels tell us. This morning I am telling you there was a moment in time

when God Almighty, the maker of heaven and earth, the one who is immortal, eternal, invisible, the one who is All-knowing and All-powerful, there was a moment in time when that God became flesh and dwelt among us. There was a moment in time when that God, our God, strapped a pair of sandals on his feet and gave his life for us. Do you know why our God did this? I have to warn you, it really does sound unbelievable. God did this, God strapped a pair of sandals on his feet and lived with us and died for us, because God loves us. He strapped a pair of sandals on his feet because he loves all of us, all of his precious children who are crushed and broken by the weight of this world. Late one night, when a Pharisee came to Jesus under cover of darkness, Jesus let the light shine in the darkness, and he made it crystal clear why he came to this earth, why he strapped a pair of sandals on his feet. “For God so loved the world he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him would not perish, but have eternal life.”