

Text: Exodus 1:15-21

Title: "God provides deliverance through two midwives"

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Introduction: I have been in the birthing room of a hospital three times in my life. The occasion of the birth of a child is one of the most intensely emotional experiences I think a couple can experience together. For me, two of those three experiences were quite trying. When our first was born, my wife was in labor for 22 hours. My ability to comfort her as a strong supporter lasted about 22 minutes, falling far short of meeting the need.

When our second was born, Kara had her umbilical cord wrapped around her neck. Had we not been in the hospital with its sophisticated monitoring equipment, we would have lost her. I have never been asked, and likely no one would ever ask me, but were I ever asked, I would recommend giving birth in the hospital and not at home because of what we went through with Kara.

One of the big helps we had available to us under those circumstances, that we did not have with the birth of our first, was the services of a doula. Sometimes a doula or a midwife is utilized as a replacement for the medical services of a hospital, but in our case, we had both, and I was very thankful for each on the happy day we said "Hello" to Kara for the very first time.

Delivering babies is the work of midwives, but in our passage, we read of two midwives, likely leaders of a larger guild, whom God called upon to help deliver a nation. The nation of Israel would be born in the exodus event and through the legislation of Sinai, and it turns out that this

birth of a nation needed the courage and faithfulness of a couple of doulas in the birthing room of Egypt.

Clearly, one perplexing question confronts the reader of this account at the outset – why would Pharaoh initially pick midwives instead of his soldiers or executioners for this infanticide? I think his strategy may be intelligible if we remember that the ancient world was plagued with high infant mortality rates in childbirth. If the midwives committed the murders, the killings could appear to be more of the same natural tragedy. Perhaps that was the reason for the king’s wicked plan.

Last week we saw that the Book of Exodus begins with a description of Israel’s need for deliverance, and the rest of this chapter through chapter 4 will show us that wherever a need for deliverance exists, God always uses weak human instruments to help meet that need. Moses is, of course, the primary human instrument of God in Exodus. But before he could be that, some less well-known sister-believers had to be God’s instruments in their own time and place. Moses delivered because Shiphrah and Puah did. Notice this morning three things about these two midwives through whom God provides deliverance for His people.

I. They were Hebrews (v. 15a).

Illustration: We remember the title of John Bunyan’s 1678 allegory about the life of Christian as *The Pilgrim's Progress*. That is actually only part of the original title of that work. The full title is *The Pilgrim's Progress from This World to That Which Is to Come: Delivered under the Similitude of a Dream Wherein is Discovered, The Manner of His Setting Out, His Dangerous Journey; and Safe Arrival at the Desired Country*. And so the first thing *Pilgrim's Progress* teaches its reader

about the Christian and his life is that he is a pilgrim on a journey that begins in this world and ends in the next.

Application: The first thing we are told about these two women is that they are Hebrews. Some have thought that perhaps they were Egyptians who were Hebrew midwives only in the sense that they took care of Hebrew mothers in childbirth. But the names of these women are Semitic and not Egyptian, and more importantly the term *Hebrew* in both Genesis and Exodus refers specifically to Abraham and his people (Gen. 39:14, 39:17, 40:15).

The adjective *Hebrew* comes from a verb that means *to pass through*. In English, our word *pilgrim* is similar. It comes from the Latin *per* meaning *through* and *ager* meaning *country* [*Dictionary of Word Origins*, 394]. So the biblical label for God's people in the Old Testament – Hebrews – tells us that they were pilgrims. Moses names his son *Gershom* (*banished stranger*), and the reason he gives for doing so is “I have been a stranger in a strange land” (Exod. 2:22).

God's people have always been strangers in a strange land. We are on a journey that began in this world and ends in the next one. We are citizens of that heavenly kingdom though we live here in this earthly one.

Understanding this is critical for a believer's faithfulness (Heb. 11:13-16: “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is,

an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.”).

This world is not my home. I am just passing through. What do you see as your home? Are you a pilgrim passing through on your way to heaven, or are your affections set instead on the things of the earth as you try to make a home here? Is God ashamed to be called our God, given our attachment to earthly things? He was not ashamed of these midwives. They were faithful pilgrim Hebrews.

II. Their names were known (v. 15b).

Illustration: One of the greatest challenges of coaching a team made up of 12 3rd and 4th graders is the task of learning and remembering all their names and the names of their parents. What I have learned is that it is difficult for me to let the light of the gospel shine before them as a coach if I cannot remember their names. There is just something that says “I care” when someone remembers your name. 36 total names are a lot of names to remember, but it is important that I work hard at that. I believe we all should have a gospel context in which we are having to learn new names.

Application: The book of Exodus remembers only a few names. The Hebrew title of this book is its first phrase, “These are the names.” It turns out that a name is a very important thing in the Book of Exodus, especially when it comes to the names of God.

When Moses comes to Egypt, he tells God’s people that God’s name is “I am that I am” (Exod. 3:13-15). God is working in the history of this book so that His “name may be declared in all the earth” (9:16). A line in Moses’s song of deliverance says, “The Lord is a man of war: the Lord is his name” (15:3). Taking God’s name in vain breaks the Ten

Commandments (20:7). When Moses gets a glimpse of God's true glory, God is declaring His name to him (33:19).

So knowing God's name is most critical, but it is also no small thing if your name appears in the Book of Exodus. Human names mentioned in this book are the patriarchs, Moses and his sons, Aaron and his lineage, the household heads of the tribes of Reuben and Simeon, the gifted tabernacle artisan Bezaleel and his father and grandfather, and these two women, Shiphrah and Puah.

You see, for God to know your name is to have a saving relationship with Him. "And the Lord said unto Moses, I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken: for thou hast found grace in my sight, and I know thee by name" (Exod. 33:17). How does this saving relationship between man and God happen? How can it be that God knows my name and I know His? The answer is grace. The Lord told Moses – you have found grace in my sight. The author of Hebrews tells us that Moses found that grace through faith. God's work of salvation from sin in our hearts and lives is a gracious free gift that a sinner accepts by faith. Has the Lord saved you by His grace? Have you asked Him to? Sadly, Jesus will tell many someday, "I never knew you."

III. They feared God (vv. 16-21).

Illustration: Last week I mentioned the sermon, "Let the Monster Perish," preached by Pastor Henry Highland Garnet, who in 1865 became the first black man to address Congress. The monster he spoke of that day was chattel slavery, and he rightly argued from Scripture that slavery is wrong because the slave is a man, not an animal, and he is a man because he is made in the image of God. He said in part, "Our poor and forlorn brother whom thou hast labeled 'slave,' is also a man. He may be unfortunate, weak, help-

less and despised and hated; nevertheless he is a man. His God and thine has stamped on his forehead his title to his inalienable rights in characters that can be read by every intelligent being. Pitiless storms of outrage may have beaten upon his defenseless head, and he may have descended through ages of oppression; yet he is a man. God made him such, and his brother cannot unmake him. Woe, woe to him who attempts to commit the accursed crime.”

So according to this preacher, no man is an animal because God made man in His own image. We cannot unmake him into something less than a man. Nor can he remake himself. Well, today let me say that no man or woman is a homosexual because God made man in His own image, male and female, and He told them to be fruitful and to multiply and to fill the earth. We cannot unmake heterosexuals into homosexuals, boys into girls, or girls into boys, nor can they remake themselves.

But we live in an America whose laws are beginning to demand that we believe that heterosexuals are homosexuals, that boys are girls, and that girls are boys. This is public policy, but public policy cannot unmake what God has made man. In the words of Garnet, “Woe, woe to him who attempts to commit the accursed crime.” We do the slave who thinks he is an animal no favors telling him he is right. Nor do we good to any trapped in today’s error by saying that it is ok for people to believe it.

Application: You and I battle a certain fear when we confront these truths in our day. We both feel that fear right now, don’t we? We know that suffering may await those who believe in the heterosexual consequence of the image of God in man today. I point that out because I want us to

understand that it was not easy for Shiphrah and Puah to fear God in their day, and it will not be in our own.

Pharaoh, in all his pomp and power, takes on these two lowly midwives. This is the first pitched battle for the preservation of God's people facing their destroyer in Exodus. One would think that it is obvious who is going to win. Surely, two midwives are no match for the king of Egypt. But these midwives feared God. Pharaoh wanted to turn medical professionals into executioners. The enemy has certainly convinced our society to do that very thing today. How might these two sister-believers survive an enemy like that, an enemy whose power is matched only by his cruelty? Very simply, they feared God.

This is the first mention of God in Exodus (v. 17). It contains an article in the original language, which means that it hearkens back to the God of Genesis. Shiphrah and Puah feared the God that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph feared. And God gave in their day a great victory just like He had in the days of the patriarchs (vv. 20-21).

Conclusion: Every day needs its Shiphrah and Puah. Our day needs humble believers who are pilgrims in this evil world, whose names are known to the God whose name they bear before this evil world, and who will fear God in a way that they refuse to fear the world.

Would there have been a Moses without these two midwives? We do not know. What we do know is what happened. There was a Moses and a deliverance for God's people, in part, because God used two midwives to deliver His people.

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*