

# 1. Be not afraid! - Our fragile church has a faithful God: Rest in God's purpose

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[ 0 : 01 ] Well, do turn, if you would, to Exodus chapter 1. When I was on a week of study late last year before Christmas, one of the books I was reading while the Cornhiller princes were still lounging in their beds was one called *The Word Became Fresh*.

It's a book about preaching Old Testament narrative by my friend Ralph Davis. I'd read it before, but it really is an excellent book, and I was reading it again. I recommend it, by the way, to anybody at all who wants to learn about how to read the narrative portions of the Old Testament, which, of course, is a very large part of our Bibles.

It's a very, very good book. I think it's going to be on the bookstall just shortly. But anyway, I was reading this book, and in the last chapter of that book, he works through Exodus 1 and 2 as an example of how to draw things together.

And I enjoyed it so much that it just made me want to preach these chapters immediately. But it was in the middle of Christmas, so I couldn't really do that, and I'm going to do it now. It's always the mark of a good book, isn't it, or a good message that you hear.

You just want to share that message straight away. Well, I thought a short series on the first two chapters of Exodus would be a good way to start the new year. Because January, of course, is a time of looking back and looking forward, isn't it?

[ 1 : 31 ] We look back at the past year, and we look forward into the year to come, into the unknown. That's evident in the name January, isn't it?

Named after the mythical god Janus, the god of doors and doorways. You go through a doorway, you look back, you look forward. That's why the god Janus is often pictured with two heads, one looking each way.

That's where we get our word janitor, by the way, as well. Somebody who looks after doors. Did you know that? There you are. You know that now. But I find that often, when we are looking back and looking forward like that, and taking stock of the past and wondering about the future, often we find ourselves rather fearful, don't we?

We find ourselves quite anxious. I guess that's true on a personal level. I think it's true also as a church family. And maybe we look back on things that have happened in 2007, things that have changed our lives in a big way, perhaps even forever.

Maybe we wonder as we look ahead how the future is going to work out. Is it going to work out quite the way that we thought? Perhaps there's been a big change in our life that has really made us very anxious about the future.

[ 2 : 51 ] Perhaps there's been a job loss this year, or a career change, or some events in our family that have caused us concern and difficulty, things that are painful, perhaps a painful bereavement.

These things, all of them, can make us fear the future, can't they? Sometimes they can make us fear almost in ways that are crippling to us. And as a church family, of course, together, we are very much at a crossroads in some ways, aren't we?

We can look back on very big changes in 2007 as we've moved out of our church building. And we recognize that we stand on the brink of something very big in 2008, don't we?

But it's still very unclear. Of course, we hope to be back in our ordinary building before the end of the year. But actually, it'll be a step forward, won't it? Into the unknown, much more so than a step back into what's familiar.

Things will be very different. Many of you have said to me, and I think we all realize that even our time out of the building already has changed us as a fellowship, hasn't it? All kinds of ways.

[ 3 : 57 ] Some of them imperceptible, but nevertheless real. And so, as we look to the future together, there are many uncertainties, many unknowns. How is our ministry going to be shaped together by these changes?

What does God have in store for us? Are we really going to be able to do what God wants us to do in this city center? Will we be able to complete the funding of our building project?

No, no, no. It goes. There are so many uncertainties. And without doubt, let me tell you, there are many struggles that are going to face us along the way as well.

That's for certain. It's an abiding principle, you see, that when God opens doors of opportunities for his church and in our own lives, then along with those doors that he opens are the spiritual struggles and battles that are inevitable, inevitable in true gospel progress.

Remember what Paul said to the Corinthians? A great and effective door is opened unto me. And there are many adversaries. Well, you see, it could easily depress us, couldn't it?

[ 5 : 08 ] To think not only of the changes and the unknowns that we face, which are always hard, but of real struggles, of real painful and testing times and difficult times that will face us.

Certainly, it can make us feel very fragile, very fearful. That's one reason I want to look at these first couple of chapters of Exodus in the next few Sunday evenings.

Because the message that they shout out to us so clearly is this. When the future seems uncertain, when hardships come, and when the church's prospects even look very grim, and even when it seems as though God is silent and even absent in our lives and perhaps even in the church, then be not afraid.

Be not afraid and remember that our fragile church and our fragile lives, too, have a faithful God. See, these things, these things that happened in the former days, long, long ago in the time of Moses, they're here in the Bible for us.

That's what Paul says, isn't it? They're written for our encouragement. That through endurance and the encouragement of the scriptures, we might have hope. And I want us to be encouraged in these studies, in the wonderful things that we're going to see about the faithfulness of our God.

[ 6 : 31 ] So that if, like me, you feel very fragile at times, well, then together we might go into the year 2008 and be not afraid. I'm very, very grateful to Ralph Davis for his help and his illumination in this chapter.

I want to acknowledge that very publicly right at the beginning. I've already said to him how much help it's been. And I'm so glad that he's going to be with us later on in this year, in June. He's coming to speak to our Cornhill Younger Ministers Conference and I very much hope that he'll be able to preach to us here as well.

I know many of us have been greatly helped by his books. Well, with that by way of introduction, then I want to look tonight, particularly at Exodus chapter 1 and see what encouragement it should be for us at the beginning of this year.

And it couldn't be a more powerful message of encouragement and of hope to a people who perhaps feel a bit fearful and to churches who are very conscious of their own fragility as we face the future together.

Because this chapter says to us in no uncertain terms, be not afraid. Rest in God's purpose. God's purpose is unchanged and unchangeable, however much circumstances might at times suggest otherwise.

[ 7 : 49 ] Rest in God's purpose. Because he always accomplishes what he purposes for the people that he loves and cares for.

That's the message of this chapter before us tonight. So let me focus our thoughts on it under two main headings. First of all, notice how this chapter highlights for us that God will never forget the people that he loves.

He'll never ever forget the people that he loves. The very first verse of the chapter reminds us of that. Look how it starts. These are the names of the sons of Israel.

It's interesting, isn't it, when we come across lists of names in the Bible. We tend to rather skip over them. Oh, it's just another list of names. A bit boring. A bit pointless. Like these genealogies.

But it's funny, isn't it? They seem to be very important to God. Because he's always having the Bible writers write them. Have you ever read the first nine chapters of the book of Chronicles? Well, lists and lists of names, isn't it?

[ 8 : 54 ] I wonder why we tend to get so impatient about lists of names. After all, lists of names can be very, very important to us too, can't they? I still very, very well remember going to the notice boards at the University Medical School in Aberdeen.

And only one thing mattered. Finding my name on the lists of names that were there in the boxes with the results of the exams. If your name was on the list, you'd pass the exam.

If your name wasn't on the list, well, you hadn't passed the exam. Was my name there? Was my name known to the one person who had power to authorize my continuing future as a student? And later on, my graduation as a doctor? The lists of names can be very important, can't they? And in the Bible, how much more so? You see, this chapter with its focus on the names of God's people is a powerful reminder to us that God never forgets the people that he loves, the people he's called for his own.

Way back in Genesis chapter 46, God had said to Jacob, I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make of you a great nation.

[ 10 : 10 ] I myself will go down with you, and I will also bring you up again. And here we are, hundreds of years later, and God hasn't forgotten a single name of all of those that he'd called his own.

Because when God gives himself to his people, he gives himself to them forever. And he remembers our names. He's a personal God. He never forgets his people's names.

My name from the palms of his hand, we sang, eternity will not erase. Impressed on his heart, it remains in marks of indelible grace.

And those words from the hymn, they do encapsulate one of the great themes of Scripture about the wonderful nature of our God. Just listen to what God says through the prophet Isaiah in this way.

Isaiah 49. But Zion said, the Lord has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me. But, says God, can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb?

[ 11 : 22 ] Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands. Your walls are continually before me.

You see, he never forgets the people that he loves. That's why Jesus tells his followers, isn't it? Not to fear anything that man can do to them.

Not to fear anything that this world can throw at us. Fear not, he says. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground without your father.

But even the hairs of your head are numbered. Fear not. You are of more value than many sparrows. You see, he knows our names.

He will never forget the people he loves. That's why the risen Lord says to John in Revelation chapter 3, the one who conquers will be clothed in white garments, and I will never blot out his name from the book of life.

[ 12 : 27 ] I will confess his name before my father and his angels. That's why he goes on in Revelation chapter 14, to speak of the perfect number, 12,000 times 12,000, who have the name of the Lamb written on their forehead, every one.

In chapter 20, how he speaks about the names of God's people written in the book of life. In chapter 21, he talks about the names of the apostles of the Lamb and of the founders of the tribes of Israel inscribed in the very foundations of the new Jerusalem, the eternal city.

He will never, ever forget the names of the people he loves. Their names, he says, are always before me.

One of the most wonderful reminders of that is later on in the book of Exodus in chapter 28, when we read about the priestly garments that Aaron was to wear as high priest. And the names of the tribes of Israel were inscribed upon his breast in the ephod.

And God said, they shall be on Aaron's heart when he goes in before the Lord. God never forgets the names of the people that he loves.

[ 13 : 46 ] And that means you and me and everyone who loves the Lord Jesus Christ, those of us who are alive now and those of us who have gone before us as well as those who come after us.

Maybe some of us just need to remember that fact tonight and dwell on it. We have a great high priest who dwells with his name, with our names on his heart.

And he intercedes with those names before the throne of God forever and ever and ever. Doesn't that encourage you as we start the year ahead together, wondering what it holds for us?

Whatever seems to be going on in world history, whatever seems to be going on in our personal circumstances, what really matters is that in the midst of it all, God's focus is on the people that he loves.

He's present with them to bless them and to guide them. He never forgets their names. You see, this whole chapter is pointing up to us how God's view of history is so different so often from ours.

[14:59] We care about the big names, about the important people, big events, big things happening in the world. So you see, if you and I were writing this story of Exodus chapter 1, we'd be careful to tell all about the big things, all about Pharaoh and all about his cities.

We'd be listing all his achievements and so on. But can you see when you read through this chapter, God isn't interested in any of those things, is he? Pharaoh doesn't even get a name. Do you see that? There's nothing about Pharaoh except that he didn't know about Joseph. He didn't know about a name that did matter to God. Just like the midwives.

Look at verse 15. We don't get Pharaoh's name, but we know that these two midwives are called Shiphrah and Puah. Isn't that great? You see, they're nobodies of this world, aren't they?

They're just ordinary people doing an ordinary job. But God thinks they're far, far more important than kings and emperors because they're his people and he loves them and he never forgets the people that he loves.

[16:04] And because they're his and he loves them, he uses them, doesn't he? Quietly, just in their own way, doing their own day job. But he uses them to play an integral role in his whole plan of salvation for the world.

Isn't that staggering? And isn't that encouraging to you and me? Yes, God did need Moses. And he needed prophets and apostles and evangelists for his plan of salvation.

But he also needed midwives. And he still does. And builders like Nehemiah and fishermen and homemakers and teachers and doctors and musicians and lawyers.

Well, I'm not sure about lawyers. Maybe even lawyers. But isn't that encouraging? He never forgets the people that are his and that he's called to himself.

Don't miss that wonderful testimony of the names that matter so much to God. Don't ever think that you don't matter to him that much if you're his.

[17:11] You may be just an ordinary person. You may be doing just an ordinary job seeking to live by faith. But be not afraid. God will never forget the people that he loves.

He knows the names of all his own. They're on his heart forever. But secondly, nor will God ever forget the purpose that he has for the people he loves and is called to be his own.

No, for what he has purposed he shall certainly accomplish as he works all things together for good to those who are called according to that purpose. And this chapter shows us that whatever seems to be the case to us at times, nothing but absolutely nothing can ever interfere with God's perfect plan and purpose for the blessing of his people.

Nothing can. Not ever. Ever. Ever. First of all, we see that time doesn't wear out his purpose. That's the first thing I think this chapter reminds us.

Because of course this story isn't a new story beginning here, is it? The first verse takes us back immediately hundreds of years to the story of Jacob and his family's descent into Egypt in the time of Joseph.

[18:28] And that promise to Jacob that it would be there that God would multiply that family and make them into one great nation. And of course that takes us even further back doesn't it? To the time of Abraham.

Right back to Genesis chapter 12 and God's great promise to Abraham. Do you remember? We'll soon be getting there in our Genesis studies. But God said to Abraham I will make of you a great nation and through you all the families of the earth will be blessed.

And that promise, that covenant promise is repeated again and again. We see it in Genesis 15 and Genesis 17 then we see it again to Isaac in Genesis 26 and then as we've already read to Jacob. But now here we are hundreds and hundreds of years later and what do we read in verse 7? The people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly.

They multiplied and grew exceedingly strong so that the land was filled with them. You see time doesn't wear out God's promise and his purpose.

[19:32] Just in case we hadn't noticed that, Moses hammers it in a couple of more times. Look at verse 12. But the more they were oppressed the more they multiplied and spread abroad. In verse

20 And the people multiplied and grew very strong.

Now you see he's emphasizing that precisely because it looked as if God's promise had been worn out. It looked as though God's purpose for his people had found it. Outwardly the picture seemed very bleak didn't it?

It was very dark. It seemed as if God had disappeared. It looked as if God had died. Hundreds of years had passed and there was no sign none at all of the great future that he'd promised to Abraham.

No sign of the homeland. No sign of the multitude of offspring. No sign of a worldly paradise of blessing. God seemed so silent.

You notice I wonder that God never speaks at all all the way through chapter 1 or indeed all the way through chapter 2. In fact God's barely mentioned is he? Just two little mentions in the bit about the midwives.

[ 20 : 38 ] Now the voices that dominate in chapter 1 are the voices of God's enemies and the oppressors of his people aren't they? It's the voice of Pharaoh. It's the voice of the Egyptian task martyrs.

They're the ones who seem to be in the ascendancy. It's so like today isn't it? The ascendant voices in our culture the voices of the secularists the pluralists and now increasingly the voices of other false and dark religions.

That's what we hear in the media isn't it? That's what's becoming the voice that's predominant in our legislatures and so on. And it's so easy isn't it to think that God's purpose has been worn out with the passing of time.

When you find yourself thinking that maybe it's just unconsciously. But we don't really expect do we? That God would do great things in our day. Did great things in the past we read the biographies we read the history but that was then and this is now.

But you see this chapter reminds us not to go by appearances. It was hardly noticed but God's purpose was marching on just exactly as he had planned the purpose that it would.

[ 21 : 53 ] for his church. His church was growing his people were multiplying and they were beginning to have an impact on the world. Those 400 year old promises were still just as good as the day that they were made.

And friends the 2000 year old promises that we read of in the New Testament that our Lord Jesus Christ gave to us his church are still just as strong and just as sure as the day he issued them. time will never wear out God's purpose for the people that he loves. Not ever. I will build my church says Jesus and the very gates of hell themselves will not prevail.

Not in our day and not ever. Ever. And we need to remember that don't we? we need to remember it especially when it seems to be the day of small things for us.

When the culture around us confidently seems to proclaim the death of God and the demise of the Christian church. Remember what Peter said in his second letter? In the last days scoffers will scoff.

[ 23 : 05 ] Where is the promise of his coming? They'll say. The nurse says Peter don't forget God's promise. Time can't wear out his purpose.

For with God a day is as a thousand years. And there's purpose in his delay. He desires that many should come to repentance. It's so easy isn't it for us to fall into the trap of doubting God's purpose and his faithfulness.

Just because he isn't working to our timetable. Just because he isn't working in our preferred pattern. We need to learn about God's pattern. And so often God's pattern is subversive, isn't it? It's often far from ostentatious when he's doing his greatest work in the world. When he's doing his great works of salvation and judgment. Often it's so hidden. Isn't that right? You could hardly be more incognito, could you?

Than having the incarnation in an outhouse in Bethlehem. That's why Frederick William Faber's great hymn has these lines in it.

[ 24 : 11 ] Thrice blessed is he to whom is given the instinct that can tell that God is on the field when he is most invisible. No, time doesn't ever wear out God's purpose for his people.

He is at work for his people and he is at work through his people. And he hasn't forgotten you or his purpose for you either.

And that's why Paul can encourage us, can't he, in 1 Corinthians 15 when he says, you know, therefore, that none of your labors for the Lord are in vain. Because time will never wear out God's purpose for his people.

neither will trouble ever suppress God's purpose for his people. When you read verses 8 to 14 you see, don't you, that it paints for us a picture of God's people facing very real and present trouble and strife.

But far from suppressing God's purpose and his promise, in fact, it only acts to serve God's purpose, doesn't it, all the more. God has blessed his people, he's multiplied them, he's increased their numbers and so the Egyptians get worried and they do all they can to discriminate against them, to afflict them, to exploit them as, well, as ethnically inferior.

[ 25 : 40 ] Verse 14, they ruthlessly made them work as slaves. It's also contemporary, isn't it? It's so true to human history. But it doesn't suppress God's purpose.

It serves God's purpose. Look at verse 12. The more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied, the more they spread abroad. It was all part of God's plan to do it that way.

His purpose was to bring glory to his people through their afflictions. And that's exactly what God had promised. If you read back in Genesis chapter 15, God said to Abraham there would be years of affliction and then there would be blessing and glory to follow.

Now, it's something that can seem so strange to us, isn't it? Why does God allow such suffering in the lives and in the experiences of his people like that?

Why doesn't he just bring victory and glory straight away without all of that? Surely he could do that. Well, of course, you see, the answer for all the mysteries involved is ultimately a very profound one, isn't it?

[ 26 : 54 ] And it's to do with the closeness of the bond of God's people with God himself as their deliverer, their redeemer. And this pattern of suffering and glory and indeed glory through suffering is right at the heart of the whole story of the gospel.

Our Savior suffered that he might be glorified and bring glory to all his own, to all who are truly bound up with him.

And therefore, the Bible tells us that all of us who are truly bound up with him will be bound up in that same pattern. That's what it means to be heirs of God, isn't it? says Paul.

Romans 8, he says, we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. And all through Old Testament history, God's people are allowed to suffer because this is the way God works in us.

In order to bring us to glory. In order to bring us to that glorious future that is bound up with our own Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ. And you'll see that pattern of glory through suffering, of resurrection through death.

[ 28 : 04 ] You'll see it etched over the experience of God's people again and again and again in the pages of Scripture. And that's because they too, just like us, as Paul says to the Philippians, they've been granted not only to believe, but also to suffer, to share in the sufferings of Christ.

You see the big point? No trouble, no strife, no danger can ever suppress God's purpose for his people's lives.

No, by contrast, they serve God's purpose. purpose. And that means, friends, that when you and I, when we face struggles and hardships from without or within, it's not that God has forgotten us. It's not that God somehow has become powerless to help you or to bless you. It's his way of doing it. It's because he wants you to share in his subsequent glory that he allows you also to share in the sufferings of the present time.

And that's so important. So important for you to know and understand. I can't tell you how important that is. Because if you don't grasp that, you can get it so, so wrong about God.

[ 29 : 28 ] You can get it so wrong about what God is doing in your life. You can so easily get bitter and disappointed and even resentful of God. Listen to this hymn by John Newton.

Maybe you know it. It expresses this so wonderfully well. I asked the Lord, he says, that I might grow in faith and love and every grace, might more of his salvation know and seek more earnestly his face.

It was he who taught me thus to pray and he, I trust, has answered prayer. But it has been in such a way as almost drove me to despair. I hoped that in some favored hour at once he'd answer my request and by his love's constraining power subdue my sins and give me rest.

Instead of this, he made me feel the hidden evils of my heart and let the angry powers of hell assault my soul in every part. Yea, more, with his own hand he seemed intent to aggravate my woe, crossed all the fair designs I schemed, blasted my goods and laid me low.

Lord, why is this? I trembling cried. Wilt thou pursue this worm to death? It is in this way, the Lord replied, I answer prayer for grace and faith.

[ 30 : 49 ] These inward trials I employ from self and pride to set thee free and break the schemes of earthly joy that thou mayst find thy all in me.

Here's a man who knows and understands the way that God works to bless and to bring glory into his people's lives. And friends, 2008 may indeed face us with many troubles personally in our lives and together as a church, but we need to remember these things can never, ever suppress God's purpose for us as the people that he loves.

No, rather in his grace they can and they will serve that purpose and serve it wonderfully, even if painfully. Time can't wear out his purpose, trouble can't suppress his purpose, but terror and tyranny also can't destroy his purpose for us.

The verses 15 to the end of the chapter tell a terrible picture, don't they, of state oppression and social engineering. infanticide and genocide. And again, it's so true to history, isn't it?

It's one of the reasons that the present situation in Kenya is so frightening for us. It reminds us, doesn't it, of that dreadful situation in Rwanda not so long ago and all sorts of other atrocities.

[ 32 : 19 ] And here it was a desire to kill all the male children. It's just the same actually today in many parts of the world, isn't it? Although it's the other way around, it's little girls that get aborted or left to die in many parts of the world, China, India.

But what we're reading about in these verses is a society where tyranny and terror is organized, where ruthlessness, where evil reigns supreme. And God's people in such a situation seem utterly helpless, don't they?

And yet, as we see again, the marvelous mystery of God is at work. Because far from destroying his purpose, the very worst, the most demonic opposition to God and his purpose only succeeds in demonstrating God's sovereign power.

A power that will never, ever be overcome, even by the powers of hell or by the schemes of man. Nothing can destroy God's purpose for his people.

One of the marvels of God that's revealed in scripture, that he constantly turns evil upside down and uses it, turning it to good for the blessing of his people, for the glory of his name.

[ 33 : 36 ] And the devil can do nothing about it. The gates of hell can do nothing. Every enemy of God on earth can do nothing about it. It's one of the great emphases of William Still's ministry.

One of the great things in his preaching, he loved to preach about God turning every trick and every attack of the evil one to the good and the blessing of his people. And how I thank God that I learned that under his ministry.

Because it's so wonderfully liberating to see exactly how true that is. Look at verse 20 once again. Despite everything, everything that the serpent himself and the seed of the serpent could throw at God and his people, nothing could destroy God's purpose.

The people multiplied and grew very strong. Bob was mentioning this morning, Joseph's words at the end of Genesis. Remember?

You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good. And God turned around that evil for the blessing and for the future of his chosen people.

[ 34 : 46 ] Where do you see in the history of the world the greatest ever evidence of that? Well, of course, you see it at the cross at Calvary, don't you? The darkest, the most dreadful and awful day in the history of this universe.

And yet, at the same time, the most glorious and wonderful day in all eternity. When all the powers of hell, when all the wrath of man were made to serve the glory of God and the ultimate triumph of God's people.

people. And that's always the pattern. That's why you see it in the lives of God's people all the way through history, in the Bible and beyond. And often it is around the greatest opposition, even tyranny and terror, and through it that God works the greatest wonders of his redemption.

Because these can never destroy God's purpose for his people. Think of Daniel in his day and the evil arrayed against him and God turned it and used it for his glory.

Think of the book of Esther and that great reversal with Haman, the implacable enemy of God's people, quite literally hoist on his own petard, hanged on the gallows that he had prepared for God's man, Mordecai.

[ 36 : 04 ] Think of Nero and his persecutions of the Christians in early Rome. And the end result of that was that the whole empire of Rome was Christianized. Think of the communists in the East and in China and of fascism under Hitler.

Have any one of these terrors ever destroyed God's purpose to build his church among every tribe and tongue and people and nation? Have they?

Quite the reverse. Look at China today. Think of the grief and the sorrow of the believers all over the world when the China Indian Mission were thrown out of China with all the missionaries in 1950. And yet look at China today. The burgeoning churches and the numbers coming to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And always it's been that way, right back to the beginning. It was Tertullian, the father in the early church in the second century, who said the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.

And always it has been so because tyranny and terror and even the gates of hell shall never destroy the purpose of God in Christ for those people that he loves.

[ 37 : 21 ] And God turns even rank evil on its head so that it must ultimately serve his purpose and serve his people. The very wrath of man, says the psalmist, in the end will always praise the God of heaven.

Friends, we need to know that too. We need to stand in awe of a God who can do such marvelous things. Things, yes, far too wonderful for us to grasp and understand.

But when we stand in awe of a God like that, when we truly fear God, then we will be fearless about anything else that this world can ever throw at us. Anything else in life.

Anything that the devil himself can bring against us. And so we'll be able to stand our ground and to serve God faithfully, whatever comes to us in the future.

Like the midwives did in Egypt. You see verse 17? What was their secret? Well, they feared God. They stood in awe of God and therefore they didn't fear the king.

[ 38 : 26 ] They served God and he blessed them and he prospered them in the midst of the struggle and the strife and the reign of terror that they had to face. Now I don't suppose any of us in this coming year will probably experience anything like the kind of terror and tyranny that faced them in that day.

Although we never know. But some of our prayer partners that we'll be praying for on Wednesday night almost certainly will. Isn't that true? In Pakistan, in India, some parts of Africa.

And some of us will, no doubt, have very, very real struggles and face very real assaults in our own personal lives and assaults of the evil one in this coming year so that we feel as if well maybe Satan and all his legions are arrayed against us as we have to fight battles.

Maybe it's a battle with addiction. It's a battle with anger or with sexual impurity or something else, whatever it might be. And you need to remember that even in that darkest hour, no terror, no tyranny of darkness can ever destroy the purpose of grace that God has for the people that he has called his own.

Not ever. Don't you ever forget that when you face the darkness of some of these things.

[ 39 : 59 ] But look at this very last verse of the chapter. Leaves us in suspense, doesn't it? With Pharaoh's awful decree of mass murder hanging over us. Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, every son that is born to the Hebrews, you shall cast into the Nile.

We're left in suspense. What's going to happen? Is it all going to end in tragedy? Well that's the point, isn't it? The whole story this far is about the God who will never forget the people that he loves.

Will never forget his purpose for each one of them. Purpose that can't be worn out by time. That can't be suppressed by troubles. That can't be destroyed by terror or tyranny. So here's the question.

Will the greatest tragedy that could confront your life in the future be able to blot out God's purpose of grace for your life as one of his people?

Will it? If you're one whose name he knows whom he has loved and called to you and shed his blood for you can the worst tragedy that could befall you ever blot out his purpose for your life?

[ 41 : 15 ] I guess there are many tragedies that we could imagine. Many things that could afflict terrible pain on us as human beings as families as a church.

Maybe many things as painful but I doubt I doubt many more painful than losing your children and certainly not having your children murdered.

You see the message of this chapter is that even that terrible as it is can't wrench you out of the hand of God.

Can't blot out his wonderful purpose of grace and of mercy for everyone that he has set his name on and his love on and made a future for.

That's the point. As Ralph Davis puts it the God who has held you all the way through Exodus 1 will never let go of you after verse 22.

[ 42 : 20 ] Not ever. And that's why we can say with Samuel Ebenezer for thus far the Lord has helped us. And it means that come what may we can trust him for the future whatever it might hold for us.

For this is the God whose purpose is unchanged and unchangeable. He always always accomplishes his purpose for the people he loves and cares for. Always. The world can't stop it. The devil can't stop it. Not even your sins hallelujah can stop it. For by the wonderful mysterious workings of his good providence he's always at work confounding his enemies and turning evil into good for the ultimate blessing of those that he's called his own.

So friends as we look back and as we look forward as we look to the unknown of this coming year let us rest in God's purpose knowing that our fragile church and we fragile believers that we have a faithful God be not afraid he will never leave you nor forsake you not now and not ever he never forgets the people that he loves he'll never ever ever abandon the purpose to which he's called you. Let's pray. And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good for those who are called according to his purpose for those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son that I'm sure that neither death nor life nor angels nor rulers nor things present nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

[ 44 : 39 ] Now Heavenly Father we thank you that we have a God like you who loves us and will never let us go help us therefore to rest in your purpose knowing that it's good and wonderful and it's for the glory of your son and for the blessing of us your people for we ask it in Jesus name Amen