

# distress relief

exodus 2.11-25

Turn over to Exodus chapter 2, verse 11 this morning. We're going to finish up this chapter.

So far this book has been hammering us with example after example of deliverance. God is teaching us how He does things and how we should do them too.

Today, we're going to look at 3 instances where people were in distress, but in each of those instances we see 3 very different responses.

So let's look at our text and see what we see.

**Exodus 2.11-25 - Now it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown, that he went out to his brethren and looked at their burdens. And he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his brethren. So he looked this way and that way, and when he saw no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. And when he went out the second day, behold, two Hebrew men were fighting, and he said to the one who did the wrong, "Why are you striking your companion?"**

**Then he said, "Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you intend to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?"**

**So Moses feared and said, "Surely this thing is known!" When Pharaoh heard of this matter, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh and dwelt in the land of Midian; and he sat down by a well.**

**Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters. And they came and drew water, and they filled the troughs to water their father's flock. Then the shepherds came and drove them away; but Moses stood up and helped them, and watered their flock.**

**When they came to Reuel their father, he said, "How is it that you have come so soon today?"**

**And they said, "An Egyptian delivered us from the hand of the shepherds, and he also drew enough water for us and watered the flock."**

**So he said to his daughters, "And where is he? Why is it that you have left the man? Call him, that he may eat bread."**

**Then Moses was content to live with the man, and he gave Zipporah his daughter to Moses. And she bore him a son. He called his name Gershom, for he said, "I have been a stranger in a foreign land."**

**Now it happened in the process of time that the king of Egypt died. Then the children of Israel groaned because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry came up to God because of the bondage. So God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God acknowledged them.**

At the beginning of this passage we see Moses out among the Hebrews and he encounters this Egyptian severely beating an Israelite.

Moses is a really interesting guy. The Bible calls him the meekest man to walk the earth, so he doesn't talk himself up very much. But when we cross reference what's said about him by Stephen in the book of Acts and what we read in Hebrews, we know that at this point in his life he was about 40 years old. He had received the finest education available on the planet at the time. Because his parents had instilled in him additional teaching about the God of Abraham, he had at some point determined to renounce his rights as the son of Pharaoh's daughter and his potential inheritance of the throne of Egypt. We don't know how, but somehow he had an idea that he was going to be the deliverer of Israel. And from this passage we know that he could handle himself.

Actually, that's an understatement. Moses seems to have been quite a fighter. He murders this Egyptian here and later in Midian he single-handedly wards off a *group* of shepherds, who had to be rough and tumble guys themselves in order to protect their sheep from animals and other thieves.

So, we put all that together and find that Moses was a very interesting guy. Now, at this point, he thought that by murdering this oppressive Egyptian he was going to usher in the Israeli revolution and begin the deliverance of God's people.

Stephen said in his sermon:

**Acts 7.24-25 - He saw an Egyptian mistreating an Israelite. So Moses came to the man's defense and avenged him, killing the Egyptian. Moses assumed his fellow Israelites would realize that God had sent him to rescue them, but they didn't.**

Moses had this big plan, but it wasn't what God wanted to do. The Lord had something so much greater planned for Egypt and His people. And the Lord's intention was not for Moses to use the sword, but to deliver the Word of God to Pharaoh and the Israelites.

God's plan was to definitely and powerfully show Pharaoh and Egypt and Israel and all of human history just how powerful He was. He wanted to demonstrate real, miraculous strength and providence. Not just start some little rebel uprising that led to a few battles and skirmishes.

So, Moses here is trying to start a civil war in Egypt, hoping that in the end the Israelites would win some freedom. In the mean time, the Lord was going to *give* them freedom without having to fight for it, *plus* He wanted to send the people out with their possessions and their livestock and plunder from Egypt. He had a way bigger and way better plan to deal with the suffering of the people.

We have a quick-fix mentality. And, on top of that, we tend to rush to the physical and political solutions to needs that we see around us.

The truth was that the Israelites didn't just need freedom. They were going to need a leader who could get them to the Promised Land. They were going to need an intercessor between them and God. They needed someone who could receive God's word and deliver it to them. They needed someone who God would raise up to keep the nation unified and on course.

Even though Moses was going to be that guy, he wasn't ready to be that guy yet.

Bernard Ramm says in his commentary:

*“Before Moses could be the deliverer, the ruler and leader of the people, he needed two kinds of education. He needed 40 years in the Big House of Pharaoh to learn how to organize and manage people, to master the administration of law, and the crafts, art, skills and techniques of a highly civilized people. He also needed to know the rough ways of a semiarid country for he would spend 40 years in such terrain with Israel. So now he fled to Midian where he would complete his education.”*

When we see someone in distress or in need we’ve got to resist the urge to knee-jerk. When we act impulsively, with those knee-jerk reactions, we end up doing things that either aren’t powered and propelled by God, or things that Christians should be doing at all.

Moses was concerned about a real problem, but his response was to just murder this Egyptian outright. He had no business going that route in his attempt to be used by God.

Whole groups in Christendom get off track because they choose the knee-jerk response to suffering and needs. A prominent example is the social gospel movement. The needs are real. The motivation isn’t necessarily wrong. But in an impulse to do something physical, people start doing things that aren’t directed by God. They try to start a revolution when God has something completely better in mind.

For some reason I often think of the Christian life like a construction site. The Lord has invited us to come and build with Him. Responding impulsively to distress or needs is like seeing rain clouds and frantically trying to get a roof up when the Lord hasn’t completed the walls yet. It’s just not going to work and we’re actually going to slow progress down if we’re not in line with God’s work plan.

Let’s move on to our next situation. It starts in verse 16. Let me read it again.

**Exodus 2.16-18 - Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters. And they came and drew water, and they filled the troughs to water their father’s flock. Then the shepherds came and drove them away; but Moses stood up and helped them, and watered their flock. When they came to Reuel their father, he said, “How is it that you have come so soon today?”**

Here we see another kind of response to distress. But don’t look at Moses this time, look at these ladies’ father, Reuel (who’s also known as Jethro).

The way it’s worded, it seems like Reuel knew his daughters faced these attacks at the watering hole, yet he did nothing. When they come back he says, “Well, you guys are back early!” And when they are talking about what happened, they don’t relay the attack as if it were something unusual, they say, “Yeah, today a guy delivered us from *THE* shepherds.”

*Thanks dad!*

We don’t know what Reuel’s deal was, but, for whatever reason, he had given up trying to help his daughters out of this distress. His response to their need was to do nothing.

We can't allow that to happen in our lives. We can't allow ourselves to become discompassionate. And it *will* happen if we don't actively keep it from happening. Our hearts are like sponges. You have to keep running water over them if you want to keep them from drying out.

One great thing we can say for Moses in this passage is that his compassion motivated him to do big things. He put himself on the line for these ladies who he'd never even met so that they could get some water for their animals. His compassion motivated him to act.

The same is true of God. The Bible says that the Lord is gracious and full of compassion that does not fail.

So, the same should be true of us. We're supposed to be living a Christ-like life and that means that we'll be actively pursuing ways to help those who are in need because of the Godly compassion that has been poured into our hearts from heaven.

Our final look at distress is in verses 23 through 25.

**Exodus 2.23-25 - Now it happened in the process of time that the king of Egypt died. Then the children of Israel groaned because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry came up to God because of the bondage. So God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God acknowledged them.**

Pharaoh died. In my thinking this would be the perfect time for God to raise up a Pro-Israel leader in Egypt who would pass laws and policies that brought freedom and abundance to God's people. But that's not what God did.

Here's what the Lord *did* do: He **heard**, He **remembered**, He **looked** and He **acknowledged**.

That's it? That doesn't seem like much considering the cries of these afflicted slaves.

But, beginning in the very next chapter, the Lord starts His extraction from Egypt. He is going to save and repay. And we see here that this is something that He's not only been mindful of, but it's something He'd been working on for over 500 years.

When we realize that and think about it, there are a couple of things to remember:

First - God is into long-term solutions. We're into quick fixes. But the Lord has the whole in mind. And, even on the human level, we know that long term solutions are always arrived at in different ways than quick moments of satisfaction. Whether it's health or finances or whatever else, the route to long-term success is going to be very different than the thing that feels good fast.

Second - God is all about you and me developing a deep, ongoing relationship with Him. That requires time. It requires trust. And it requires we walk together.

Our knee-jerk reaction to distress or suffering is to want a vending machine. But the Lord wants to give us a home and feed us forever.

What we see here is that when we are in distress, we should pray. We should call out to God because He hears us and remembers us and acknowledges us.

When we see others in distress or in need, the answer is not to do nothing, like Reuel, we've got to do *something*. But what we do matters. The end doesn't justify the means. And if we try to do something that the Lord isn't doing, then our efforts are going to collapse. Instead, when we respond to distress, we have to pause and seek the Lord and make sure we're in line with what He's already been putting together since before the foundations of the earth.

That's how we bring real relief to our lives and to the world around us.