

'God our helper'

You may be familiar with the story of God dealing with the nation of Israel (Gods chosen people) in the book of Exodus in the Old Testament;

At the very beginning, after they had moved to Egypt with Joseph & his brothers they lived for a long time in relative peace & security, but when the Pharaoh who was kind to them died a **new king** came along and things deteriorated very quickly for them - it says in:-

Exodus 2:23

*"Now it came about in the course of those many days that the king of Egypt died. And the sons of Israel sighed because of the bondage, **and they cried out**; and **their cry** for help because of their bondage rose up to God".*

& Exodus 3:7 -8

*"And the LORD said: "I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, **and have heard their cry** because of their taskmasters, **for I know their sorrows.***

So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey."

There is so much to learn about Gods dealing with the children of Israel in the OT - so many lessons for us as Christians we can learn from them;

For Example we see... The **discipline and holiness** of God when a whole generation forfeited their right to enter into the promise land due to their disobedience.

We see **awesome power of God** displayed in countless miracles, signs and wonders - like parting the red sea.... and much more

But most of all we see the **compassion and mercy** of God to those He has chosen. It brings great comfort to me that God **hears our cry just** like He did with the people of Israel, expressed in those verses, a God who is attentive to our every need - a God who knows our pain, our struggles and our battles.

I want to pose a question to you this morning: - **what is the cry of your own heart?** Perhaps it is some healing in your own life, or for others you know, or to see your family come into the kingdom of God, maybe some breakthrough you have been praying for years.

It could be a whole host of things - I don't know your heart's desire.

But what I do know is; **He here's the cry of our hearts.** Psalm 18:6

*"But in my distress I cried out to the Lord; yes, I prayed to my God for help. **He heard me from His sanctuary; my cry to Him reached His ears**".* For me I suppose I suppose my hearts cry is; **to be more like Jesus.** I am very aware of the big **I** in my own life, my own selfishness, how much my thoughts revolve around me.

And I **have cried out to God for change** in this area. Just as much I'm sure you have in your own areas.

Growth is measured in the Christian life by what John the Baptist says in John 3:30 "He must Increase I must decrease"

The apostle Paul says "I no longer live but Christ lives in me" (Gal: 2:20) that should be our goal if we are a Christian, **more of Jesus less of us** (but keeping our own personality) - I'm not sure whether I am anywhere near there yet, but change is a gradual thing.

Here's a good test; Look at your life; **are your** needs, **your** wants still on the throne? Do they still take first place in your life? Or do you want to please Him more and yourself less?

Are you growing in humility rather than pride? **If that's the case then you're moving in the right direction.**

So this morning I want to look at these scriptures and understand a little more about this place of need - what is this 'crying out to God'? - How do we do it, how do we get there and what happens when we do - there are 3 stages we can pick up on from the verses we read in Exodus:

Firstly you only cry out when you're in need - in desperate need in fact!

However to begin with we should say that there is a difference between **calling, or a speaking** out to God and **crying** out to Him. **Crying** is more intense than **calling**.

We can call out to God and should do every day in prayer, but **we cry out to God** in those times when our backs are truly up against the wall.

Every parent knows the difference between **a child's call** and **a child's cry**. Crying comes from a place of emotional or psychological or physical distress.

As we read earlier "And the sons of Israel sighed because of the bondage, **and they cried out**; and **their cry** for help because of their bondage rose up to God".

God allows us to get to that place where we are in desperate need. Where there is no one else to cry out to and no other place to go. You cannot help but see our banner with Jesus words from Mathew 11:28 on the wall outside the church.

"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest"

Notice how it's **the weary and burdened** Jesus makes His offer to! -Jesus said earlier on in chapter 9 *"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance"*

Jesus hasn't come to save those that have it all sorted, whose lives are ticking by very nicely thank you very much – he's called those who have a need.

Thank God for it if you're in need! If you lack something, if you fall short! **Self sufficiency is an enemy of God** – People out there are far too 'healthy today'! They don't seem to need anything more than what they have already, but they are sleep walking into disaster.

Here's the rub though; **Christians are to 'healthy today as well'** - don't think that you have arrived when you come to faith! That you can just move forward in a positive proclamation of your faith and get by with a bit of God and a bit of your own efforts! - It doesn't work that way.

God has designed you that you can't get by without Him; you will always have to depend on Him in every area of your life.

Many of us however often 'hover' around that place of need where we pray or call upon God, but it's also entwined with our own self sufficiency, we can get by if He doesn't answer us. It not a heartfelt cry, & we don't really

know what it is to be fully dependant on God. To need Him at that deep level (include myself in that category)

I really believe, life's circumstances are meant to make us cry out to God. Make us see we can't cope on our own.

But consider this also regarding our times; You see for the people of Israel (God's chosen people) in Egypt, for a time they were ok, they mixed in with the Egyptian society, life was good, they had all they needed, they had respect, freedom.

However when a new king came along he forgot their past and he 'turned the screw' on them, in stages, until it became full persecution, until they ended up in cruel slavery. **It was then - and only then they cried out to God for help.**

Perhaps it's very similar to where we are today in this country. We could say as Christians we have had it easy, no real persecution, after all we were living in a Christian country, at one time anyway!

Not so now, we have become a minority, aliens in a foreign land, just like the Jews, Gods chosen people in Egypt. Things are getting tougher for us; people are saying 'you are a bigot an extremist' if you hold to the gospel truths.

They are trying to clamp down on what we say and even what we think. Has God handed this country over to judgement because of its wicked ways? I think so.

Nothing new! He did it time and time again to the people of Israel - but the great hope is; every time when they cried out to Him he rescued them.

So firstly we have to get to that place of real need, we need the Holy Spirit to convict us that we are inadequate, impotent without His presence and intervention in our lives - to get us to a place where we cry out to God daily.

Secondly 'God heard their cry'; He hears your cry also.

In our verse: the LORD said: "I have surely seen the oppression of My people who *are* in Egypt, **and have heard their cry** "

But it goes beyond that! God doesn't just **hear our cry** He experiences our sufferings behind the cry as well. A little bit later on in Exodus 3:7 it says:-

And the LORD said: "I have surely seen the oppression of My people who *are* in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, **for I know their sorrows.**" - **For I know their sorrows**

The Hebrew word used here (**yada'** means "**to know**" - 'to know their sorrows/ sufferings') but it indicates something much deeper than just awareness or **hearing** of their cry, it actually indicates that God is empathising with and feeling their sorrows.

This word **Know** here is an **intimate thing** it's the same word used in Genesis 4 about the relationship between a man and his wife.

Now Isn't that an incredible thought - a God that doesn't just observe **our cries** and stands aloof from them - but a God who makes a divine choice to enter into and experience His peoples trauma & suffering when they cry out to Him.

How can that be? I don't know! How can the God and creator of the whole universe feel our pain and suffering, feel our sorrows on an individual basis. Folks that is the amazing God we serve. He knows us intimately- He knows everything about us.

How similar it is to the example of Jesus in the NT - God becoming man - it says in our verse "I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians" and Jesus (God) came down, flesh incarnate - entering into our suffering - sympathising with our weakness.

Thirdly, it's not much good just hearing our cry He does something about it.

Exodus 3:8 again "So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians **and to bring them up from that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey"**

Psalms 34:17 The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears; **He delivers them from all their troubles**

He answers our cry - but **best of all He delivers us out of them.**

"But here the caveat, firstly He allows us to get to that place where we cry out to Him that place of desperation, He **hears** our cry, He **knows** our sorrows, He wants to take us into to the land of milk and honey, free us heal us, deliver us... **But God will do it in His time & His way!**

He may set us on a path we may not expect! And that's what happened in later on in our story.

And this is what I want to focus on this morning

Firstly the path God took His people down Israel when he took them out of Egypt was **not their expected one** (Exodus 13:17-18) states:-

"When Pharaoh Let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the Philistines, although it was nearer; for God said, 'the people may have a change of heart when they see war, and return to Egypt.' So God led the people roundabout, by way of the wilderness at the Sea of Reeds"

There were 2 paths they could have taken to the promised land, one, the way of the Philistines, the coastal route, the direct route – the nearest point from A to B - a distance of about 200 miles and it could have been accomplished in about a fortnight.

The 2nd way was the long route - the way of the wilderness and it turned out they travelled this journey **for 40 years!**

Put yourself in their shoes, there they were, they cried out to God for help, they had just come out of slavery & cruel bondage under pharaoh, in the desert without the basic of necessities (water), they could of least expected to sit back and enjoy their freedom for a time - even a time of blessing Perhaps ? - But God took them into the wilderness – it must have felt they had 'come out of the cooking pan into the fire'! -**It was not the path they expected.**

But is the shortest route always the best route? The shortest path from sickness to health is a miraculous healing right? One day your sick the next day your well (and God does that sometimes)

The shortest route to wealth is not working for it but to win the lottery right? But perhaps it's not the best route.

And God didn't think so regarding the people of Israel - He thought they may turn back at the first sign of opposition – it was the longer more arduous path He took them on - but through it they would learn character, a measure of self-confidence, and a firm reliance upon God.

These were invaluable lessons **you can't learn on the short route.** There are no shortcuts to holiness in the Christian life. Folks God puts us on the long narrow road where we can only learn these things.

So when God answers your prayer, **hears your cry** it may not necessarily be in the way you think.

There is a teaching today that God will give us everything we want, in the way we want it! And when we want it – Like some formula –or vending machine, you put in your coin and out comes the snack you want.

Or some cooking recipe you put in the ingredients and the outcome is guaranteed the same every time.

If you give your money away you will be abundantly blessed with more - if you pray for healing **it will always happen** because God wants to heal everyone - but you can't 'pigeon hole' God – or short cut the Holy Spirit to work in a certain way, or on your terms.

If you're looking for healing it maybe you're not healed but you receive more of His grace to endure, maybe He is teaching you patience.

Maybe if we are looking for more people to come in to our church or a movement of God in our area. He is saying be faithful with who you have and with those around you.

I don't know, all I'm saying is it may not be as you think. Sometimes I think God works in a 'parallel universe' - we are over here thinking this is what God wants, but he is over there doing something else.

For example; the 'soup and a warm place' we had recently, in the early days when we were trying to get new people in, and they weren't coming, God was blessing us as a church fellowship over a bowl of soup. We were thinking of one thing, He was doing another. **Don't put God in a box.**

God often does unexpected things – when he answers **our cry** it may take us into places we would perhaps rather not go, or down a path we would not expect. **So in Conclusion:**

What is the cry of your heart? Are you desperate enough for it? If you are God has heard your cry, He not only heard it but he is experiencing what you're feeling, He has entered into that place with you but he will also answer your prayer & get you to the Promised Land.

Whether the Promised Land is the other side of this earth I don't know, as my old pastor said there are things we never get over and they will go to the grave with us.

We can be sure of this however. "He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion on the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil 1:6) **whatever path He leads you down.**

Amen

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