

## **An Absence of Words**

*Exodus 1-4*

### Introduction

- Crossword Puzzles
  - Aside from reading the headlines in the newspaper, my dad enjoyed working the crossword puzzles
  - I'd watch him meticulously work his way through each clue and then fill in the blanks
  - Three parts to a crossword puzzle
    - Finding a word that fits in the allotted spaces
    - Finding the right answer to the clue
    - The word not only has to fit in the spaces, but it also has to work with the horizontal or vertical spaces that are connected to the word
  - Sometimes the words just didn't come together. There were blanks and an incomplete puzzle.
  - My dad would have to wait for the next day's paper to come in order to get the answer key for the previous day's puzzle.
- There are a lot of puzzles that we are all trying to find the right answers to right now
  - In the moment in which we may feel like we are searching for the right answers, the right words; it may feel like God is absent.
  - We may not know the right answer until tomorrow.
  - It's one thing to have patience for the newspaper to come in tomorrow's delivery, but waiting for God to answer is a whole other experience.
- Sermon Series: Where is God?
  - Explore the story of Moses' call in Exodus chapters 1-4
    - The Israelites reduced to slave labor in Egypt
    - The cry of the people
    - God calls Moses
    - BUT, Moses feels inadequate for a number of reasons, but most prominent is his ability to speak- to find the right words to say
  - Review the story
    - God's presence in the midst of hardship
    - God's promise
    - Moses' obstacles
  - This story will relate to how God might be calling us during this time of hardship and the challenge for us to respond even when God may seem absent.

### God Works Behind the Scenes

- Every once in awhile I would pick up my dad's puzzle and see if I could find the right words to the clues

- I quickly realized that crossword puzzles were not my strength
- Many of the questions related to history or subjects or experiences that I had never been exposed to
- Part of the role of preaching is to be able to recall what God has done in the past and how it speaks into our present circumstances
- As we look back through Moses' story, what we find is that God had been working behind the scenes in response to Israel's cries for help.
- **Exodus 1:8**
  - Joseph was the youngest of Jacob's sons.
  - Joseph's brothers left him for dead on the side of the road
  - Eventually Joseph was discovered and sold as a slave in Egypt
  - Despite his dismal circumstances, Joseph earned credibility with the Egyptian kings
  - Their respect for Joseph earned him a high level position in Egypt
  - Through all of this, God was at work behind the scenes
    - A famine arose throughout the lands
    - Joseph's role in Egypt was to distribute food which was vital to the survival of many people
    - Ironically, the brothers who abandoned Joseph came to Egypt in search for food
    - It was Joseph who heard their case and became responsible for their survival and ultimately the survival of the Israelites.
  - Exodus 1:8 is a reference point for us to consider how God had worked in the past
  - Now that Joseph has passed, the credibility and favor that the Israelites shared was gone
  - It is at this point that the King of Egypt decides
    - Israelites are too large in number
    - May overthrow Egyptian government
    - Solution to afflict the Israelites with heavy burdens-slavery
- Moses enters the story through a miracle birth
  - Part of the heavy burden that the King placed upon the Israelites is that the midwives were to kill all the male newborn babies
  - However, **Exodus 1:17** records how the midwives responded to this order

- “The exemplary actions of the midwives signify a central theme of the Book of Exodus; Israel is called to fear God above any other ruler, nation, or circumstance.”<sup>1</sup>
- Moses happens to be one of the male newborns who survives as a result of the midwives’ actions.
- Again, in an unusual change of events, Moses is discovered by Pharaoh’s daughter floating in a basket in the Nile River.
- Moses grows up in the very presence of the King who ordered that he should be killed!
- So when we read the words of **Exodus 2:23-25** we need to see the connection to God’s work behind the scenes
  - God has provided for his people in the past through Joseph
  - The people feel forsaken in Egypt due to the hardships of slavery; their advocate as died
  - While God may have seemed absent, the truth is, God had already been working on behalf of his people when they cried out to him.
- Application
  - If we can take what we find in just the first two books of the Bible, we can see that God is a redemptive God, always at work on our behalf.
  - When God seems absent, God is really working behind the scenes from what we can see in the moment.
  - This is a consistent theme that we find throughout scripture.
  - Suggest that God is at work behind the scenes of our current crisis
  - Experience on Monday
    - Light Up the Lot- Belpre Campus of Marietta Memorial Hospital
    - Encourage medical workers, first responders and government officials
    - Wonderful time of intercession and celebration
    - We had an opportunity to represent God’s presence in the midst of crisis
    - That representation showed that God has been at work behind the scenes through those who are tackling this crisis on the frontlines.
  - I think what God is asking of us to keep the faith, continue to pray and remain patient as God continues to provide on our behalf.

### God Keeps His Promise

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<sup>1</sup> *ESV Study Bible*, Wheaton: Crossway, 2001. pg. 146.

- If you have work a crossword puzzle, it can be frustrating when you don't have all the answers.
  - One answer can impact the rest of the puzzle
  - There was always the promise that tomorrow's paper would have the answers
- There's an important clue in **Exodus 2:24** to God's action
  - God Remembered
  - A covenant that began with Abraham, which we looked at last week as he was challenged to sacrifice God's promise
  - Again it is evidence of God working behind the scenes
  - God always keeps his promises which is significant to our faith at this time as we wait patiently for an end to this particular crisis.
- God's answer to the cry of the people is Moses
  - At first God appears to Moses through a burning bush
    - Interestingly enough Moses fled into the wilderness because he killed an Egyptian who was beating an Israelite.
    - Moses appears to be alone, forsaken until God shows up through the burning bush
  - As God reveals his presence to Moses, he provides a promise
    - Presence- "I will be with you" (Exodus 3:12)
    - Power- "I will strike down the Egyptians" (Exodus 3:20)
    - Provision- "I will be your mouth and teach you what you shall speak" (Exodus 4:15)
  - Pause to remember guiding principles for our journey "Where is God?"
    - Forsaken but not abandoned
    - Find God in obedience
    - Find God as we cultivate our relationship with God
  - As we consider the story of Israel we can see that God reveals himself through his promises
    - He will not abandon us
      - The promise of his presence
      - "I will be with you"
    - In order for Moses to answer the call Moses will need to
      - Obey so that God can reveal his power and provision through Moses

- Obedience comes as Moses cultivates his relationship with God-trust
- When God seems absent it can be difficult even frustrating to patiently wait on God
- Important for us to remember that God keeps his promises
  - Presence
  - Power
  - Provision

### Will we answer God's call?

- Like Moses, we are challenged during this time with whether we will answer God's call
- My grandfather and word puzzles
  - No more than a high school education
  - He liked puzzles because of the challenge
  - Bought him a dictionary as a Christmas gift
  - As he worked through the puzzles he would often refer to the dictionary to find the right word to the puzzle
  - We may not have all the answers right now, but we do have a dictionary of God's promises that tell us that what God has done in the past, God will do again!
- When God first revealed himself to Moses through the burning bush Moses responded, "Here I am" (Exodus 3:4)
  - Like Abraham, Moses did not hide from God
  - Remember last week how important it is for us to be present even if it seem as though God is not
  - It means that we are attentive to God, in a position to hear from God
  - Moses does exactly as God tells him
    - He comes to the burning bush
    - Removes his sandals
    - Listens to what God has to say
- BUT, as Moses listens to God's plan, he is overcome with feelings of inadequacy
- Moses asks, "Who am I?" (Exodus 3:11)
  - "God does not answer Moses' question in the way that he asks it, instead God says, 'I will be with you' which indicates that his presence with Moses is essential

to the call. When the O.T. says that God is with someone, it stresses God's power that enables the person to carry out his calling."<sup>2</sup>

- Again, a reminder that in our inadequacy that we recognize the importance of God's promises
- Later Moses asks, "Please send someone else. I'm not an eloquent speaker." (Exodus 4:10&13)
  - Despite God's promises, Moses only sees obstacles in his path
  - This says less about Moses' ability and more about Moses' faith
- If we consider our circumstances today is it possible that God might be calling us in the midst of what seems like his absence?
  - Rethinking how we do life- the new normal, maybe its not about how to enjoy what we once enjoyed but how to live out our faith
  - What is most important?- relationships, God's promises, prayer, faithfulness
  - Obstacles or Opportunities
    - "God used Israel's experiences in Egypt to prepare them for the special tasks He gave them to accomplish on earth: bearing witness to the true and living God, writing the Holy Scriptures, and bringing the Savior into the world."<sup>3</sup>
    - Last week we talked about the significance of how we respond during this crisis is an opportunity for us to bear witness to the presence of God.
    - I know that this crisis has created a disruption, at the least, to our routines-but I believe that God is working behind the scenes to provide us an opportunity to trust in his promises and bear witness to His presence!

### Conclusion

- Eventually, Moses would depart from the burning bush in the wilderness back to Egypt where the Israelites were enslaved
  - God did everything he promises he would do for Moses
  - Moses was able to find the courage and the words to confront Pharaoh
  - He found the right words to encourage the Israelites to have faith in the midst of obstacles
  - And, Moses eventually led people to where God had instructed-bearing great witness to the active presence of God.
- I have no doubt that God wants to do the same thing in each of our lives
  - We may not have all the right answers

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<sup>2</sup> *ESV Study Bible*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2001. pg. 148.

<sup>3</sup> Warren Wiersbe. *The Wiersbe Study Bible, NKJV*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2018. pg. 87.

- I know I don't have all the right answers, but I can find where God has revealed his presence in the midst of great darkness
- Every time that God showed up, He did so to save his people
- I want to encourage you today, to embrace these difficult times as an opportunity for God to work through you.
- Don't allow your fear, inadequacy, or hardness of heart to get in the way
- Say, "Here I am, Lord. As you have done in the past, so do again. Reveal your presence in the midst of uncertainty and darkness. Help me to be present where you are and bear witness to your promises."