

Exod 03-02-16a

Well, for our scriptures reading this morning, turn with me to the Psalms. Psalm 56 is another in the category of Psalm, such as we looked at last week, that talks about God's deliverance in times of stress, in times of pressure. This is what's going on with Israel.

God is in the midst of delivering them. God is speaking to Moses at the burning bush in our passage, beginning in Exodus chapter 4 this morning. And yet, the people in Israel know nothing of this.

They don't know that their deliverance is already in the works. It's already underway. All they know is they are ready for God to deliver and they have cried out to Him.

They don't know yet that He has heard their voice. They don't know that He has set the wheels in motion and that He has commissioned Moses to come back and lead them out of the land of Egypt. They don't know that.

We know it because we are, in the story, we're looking at it from the omniscient point of view. We know what's going on in Egypt. We know what's going on at Mount Sinai.

And so, we take it as a commonplace. Well, here's the burning bush and here's Moses. But think if you're Eliab stamping clay into bricks back in Egypt and you've been praying and praying.

You say, Lord, I've been praying for 20 years that You would come and deliver me and deliver my family. I see my children growing up in this life of oppression and slavery. I don't see any light at the end of the tunnel.

I see no change. If anything, the oppression is getting worse. Where is your deliverance? Where is this promise? I even know, I've heard the stories told around our evening cook fires about Abraham and what you said to him.

What we have in Genesis chapter 15, that after 400 years you'll deliver. Well, it's been 400 years since the time of Abraham. I know that Abraham lived in 18-something B.C. Of course, if you ever find a coin that's stamped 18-something B.C., you pretty well know it's a fraud, right? Because there's no such thing as B.C., B.C. didn't come into effect until A.D. But they said, we know that 400 years ago, you know, nobody's going to stamp a coin 337 B.C., right? That reckoning did not exist.

So, there's a little tip for you to not be taken in. If you see one on eBay, don't buy it. But from our reckoning, our modern reckoning, 1800 B.C. or so is when Abraham lived.

Well, this is 1400 B.C., 1445 or so to be exact. And it's been over 400 years since God made this promise of deliverance. He said, your people are going to, your descendants are going to be oppressed, but I will deliver them and they will come out with great possessions, Genesis 15.

Well, maybe this man Eliab knows that and he's praying to God and he says, I'm praying, I'm trusting you for deliverance. I don't see a sign of improvement. I see things going and getting worse and worse.

Where is the promise of your coming? Well, we have a notice about that in the New Testament as well. It says, in the latter days, there will be people who doubt and people who say, where is the promise of his coming? All things continue as they have from the beginning. That's what's going on in Exodus chapter 4. Moses is already getting the word.

Just like right now, there's a lot of troops standing around saying, we have no idea if we're going to attack Iraq or not. We don't know how or where or with what kind of force. But there is a plan and there are wheels moving behind the closed doors of our government.

And we're not supposed to know yet. It would be a faulty sort of operation to spill the beans and say, well, this is what we know. And this is where the weapons of mass destruction are that we've spotted and that we've known about for a couple of years.

And the reason we're going to war. They can't unload that information. So this past couple of days, you had four million people around the world, four million people getting the little peace sign, the footprint of the great American chicken, they used to call it back in Vietnam days.

They give peace a chance, more inspectors. My question is, I won't even tell you what my question is. I think you know what my question is.

But the point is, if those people, if you could take all four million of those people and stick them in a room and give them an intelligence briefing like the president has, they would all fold up their signs, pack up their tents, jump in their Volkswagen vans and drive home. It's out of ignorance. They have no faith in the need for going to war because they don't have the facts.

And they don't have faith in the leadership who do have the facts. If they had the faith, they would be like the military people who are, these people have nothing really to lose. The people in Tokyo are marching, people in Sydney, Australia are marching, you know, I just, it's, the older I get, the more disconnected I get with even being able to comprehend why people do what they do.

But the point here is, these people are looking at it from their point of view and saying, this has to stop with the information that I have. We've just got to march and stop and flood the plaza in Washington, D.C. and march in protest. Well, think about the people in Israel.

They've been in oppression for half of that 400 years. First 200 years they were doing okay, but after Joseph and the pharaoh who knew not Joseph, they became worse and worse and it's been a downhill trend. And now they're being killed, they're being oppressed, their babies are being slaughtered.

And they, we're praying to God, we got the message here, but I don't see any signs of change.

Well, God has got it in the works. Moses is at the mountain, the bush is burning, the word is being delivered, the plan has been formed and is going into operation, but they don't see it yet.

They've got to have patience. Our Friday night study and our Tuesday night study both have been talking about inheritance. You have need of patience so that after you have suffered a while, you receive the promise.

That's what Peter says. Paul says the same thing. It is by faith and by patience that we inherit the promises.

It is faithfulness and endurance. Well, nobody likes enduring. If I'm long ago when I was in the dentist chair, I didn't want to endure when the guy was shooting needles into the wrong places in my gums and then drilling on my teeth.

I didn't want to put up with that. I wanted it to stop. But you certainly learn self-control.

We saw a rendition of Great Expectations recently, the Charles Dickens novel. And if you know anything about the plot of that story, there is an individual named Pip who is the, I wish he'd have picked a different name, but his name is, his name is Pip. I guess people were called Pip in those days.

And he's an orphan, more or less. And he has a lot of hard times. And he falls in with this lady, this woman who got jilted by a conniving man who led her on and got huge sums of money.

There are guys that do this today. I knew a lady that was dating one of these men and nearly and lost thousands and thousands of dollars. There was a fad of this going around where there were men going around getting sweet on middle-aged women that had lots of money and saying, oh, well, you know, if you help me start my business, I just need, you know, 20 or 30 grand here.

I need 50 grand there or buy me this car. And the woman would do it out of love and affection, thinking they were fixing to get married. Then the man would just vanish and their bank account would be cleaned out.

Well, this is basically what happened to this woman. And so she takes in an orphan girl and raises her, and she's going to use this girl as a weapon against all mankind. This girl is going to do to men what men have done to her.

Well, Pip falls in with it. She pays for Pip to come over and be a companion to this little girl. And they just abuse him mercilessly and take advantage of him and call him names and mock him and make fun of his singing and tell him he's got ugly hands and just really, you know, work on his self-esteem in a bad way.

So Pip goes up and this girl goes up and she goes away. Well, then a mysterious benefactor makes Pip into a gentleman. And he thinks, well, it's got to be the old Spencer woman.

She took a shine to me after all, because she knew I didn't like being a blacksmith's apprentice. So she's kicked in and he goes to gentleman school, becomes this fine gentleman. Well, then the cruel Estella reappears, the girl that was picking on him all the time she was little.

And she is, of course, he just falls madly for her because she's gorgeous and moves in the circles and all this. And she's going around breaking various hearts, including his. And the whole point here is he can't get over his feelings for her.

He knows he's been told she was created as a weapon against mankind by the the cruel spinster lady who got left at the altar. Her mission in life is to disappoint and to break hearts and to wreak revenge on men. But he is smitten.

He is enamored and he is just obsessed with her. And so he winds up getting all kinds of destroyed over her because he can't control his feelings. He can't rein himself in and be patient and wait and see how things fall out.

He sees her. He has to have her has to have her now. He throws over.

He goes into debt. He winds up going to prison. All kinds of bad things happen because he could not have patience.

He could not rein in his feelings. So I was telling my girls that it's a good illustration of the importance of learning self-control. You have to let your head rule your heart and not the other way around because emotions can't think.

Emotions do not reason. They can't exercise logic. They just feel.

They say, gimme, gimme, gimme. I want, I want, I want. Jerry Reed, when he was trying to quit smoking, said, give it to me.

Give it to me. Give it to me. I just have to have it.

And it doesn't think. It doesn't reason. It doesn't map out consequences.

It doesn't weigh factors. It doesn't evaluate priorities. It doesn't measure against values.

It just says, give it to me. And part of what God is doing, a large part of what God is doing in leaving us here in this life and putting us in challenging circumstances is teaching us that one part of the fruit of the spirit called self-control. You've got to learn to do the same thing God does.

God has great compassion, but it is circumscribed by his righteousness and his justice. And that's what we have to do. So, I say all of that to say that our scripture reading this morning is in Psalm 56.

This is a very interesting psalm because we know the circumstances of its writing. It's not just

an anonymous psalm. It says it's for the choir director, according to Jonath Elam Rehokim.

Or, you'll notice if you've got a New King James, it says to the chief musician, set to the silent dove in distant lands. What does that title make you think of? If you had a tune, I told you there's a tune and the name of it is The Silent Dove in Distant Lands. What sort of an image does that conjure up in your mind? Here's a dove.

Maybe there's a big storm. He got blown clear out of his own land and he's landed somewhere. He looks around.

He doesn't even make a dove noise. He's a silent dove in a distant land. He has been blown out of the area.

If he was a ship, he'd be blown out of the water. It's going to be a mournful tune, right? It's going to be sad. It's going to be kind of a dirge.

Because what is sadder than looking at a dove? Doves are beautiful birds, by the way. If you ever get a chance, there used to be, before we had cats lurking out here, there used to be a pair of doves that lived in our backyard. And they make this sound in the morning and in the evening.

And when you look at them, the shape of a dove and the way they move, they are so graceful. And they always make me think just a little bit on the melancholy side. Because they are prey for all kinds of beasts and animals and things.

And they just... There was a little dove that wasn't even very frightened. He lived out here in our driveway. And we'd go out to the car and he would not fly away.

If you got too close to him, he would walk away. But he was kind of like, you know, I wish you all could just kind of let me be. Let me have my area here.

I'm just trying to find a little bit of food. Silent dove in distant lands. This is a miktom of David when the Philistines captured him in Gath.

I told the story a week or two ago about David's panic, lost his self-control when Saul was chasing him. He goes to Nob and gets the sword of Goliath. No other sword like it.

It's unique. It's like Excalibur. And then he goes to Goliath's hometown and tries to hide, dragging this five-foot sword around at his waist.

Well, he got recognized and they captured him. So, David has to let the spit run down his beard and so on and act like a crazy man. And the king of Gath says, was I running short on crazy men that you had to bring me another one? Well, on that occasion, David writes this.

And what does it say? Be merciful to me, O God, for man would swallow me up. Fighting all day, he oppresses me. My enemies would hound me all day, for there are many who fight against

me, O most high God.

When I am afraid, I trust in you. In God, I will praise his word. In God, I have put my trust.

I will not fear. What can flesh do to me? All day they twist my words. All their thoughts are against me for evil, for calamity.

They gather together. They hide. They mark my steps.

When they lie in wait for my life, shall they escape by iniquity? In anger, cast down the peoples, O God. Now, you think about the terrorist threat. You think about the duct tape and plastic and the bottled water that people are collecting and saying, well, I need these things.

I am all in favor of prudence and common sense, but it's like the director of Homeland Security said the other day, we're not at the point of taping our doors and windows with plastic and living off of bottled water. But there are those who gather together, who hide, who mark our steps, who are trying to find these soft targets in the United States, right? There is a legitimate concern. Every other time Osama bin Laden has released a tape, within a week or two there has been a terrorist attack.

Well, he just released a tape last week, and that's the reason we're on orange alert, and that's the reason they've tightened up security and why there's a guard at every gate in and out of Dallas-Fort Worth Airport out there where you get your parking ticket. There's a guy in camis out there randomly searching cars and looking for suspicious looking characters. That's why I'm not going out there.

I might not make it through. But look, they gather together, they hide, they mark my steps, they lie in wait for my life. Shall they escape by iniquity? Are they going to succeed in their plans? He prays to God, in anger cast down these people, O God.

Look at verse 8, You number my wanderings, put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book? When I cry out to you, then my enemies will turn back. This I know, because God is for me.

In God I will praise his word. In the Lord I will praise his word. In God I have put my trust.

I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? Man cannot do any more than what God allows. God has allowed certain things to Israel in Egypt.

He has let them come to a certain point and no farther. Vows made to you are binding upon me, O God. I will render praises to you, for you have delivered my soul from death.

Have you not kept my feet from falling that I may walk before God in the light of the living? Why would God save us only to let us be overcome by evil? Why would God deliver us only to have us get stuck in the mire? It's all a matter of a very simple equation, a simple analysis. Ask yourself this question. What is more real to me? Threats and challenges in this life or the promises and

the assurances of God? Which one's more real? If the threats and challenges of this life are more real, then we fall into despair because we don't think God can really help.

Think about that Israelite Eliab praying to God with his family every night. Where is the promise of your deliverance? I don't see anything happening. And yet at that very moment, out at Mount Sinai, God in the flaming bush is commissioning Moses.

We just have to have faith. We have to have patience. We have to believe that God does what he says.

Okay, well back to our passage now. We start a new chapter in Exodus, Exodus chapter 4. And it begins, Then Moses answered and said, Well, what is Moses answering? God has just said for about the third time that he's going to deliver Israel. He's going to give the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians.

Not only will they be delivered and get out of slavery, but they're going to come out with great plunder. And God repeats that. He says, You will not go out empty-handed, in verse 21.

You will plunder the Egyptians, in verse 22. So now Moses answers. This sounds like a great outcome, doesn't it? Here is the deliverance that they've been looking for for decades.

But Moses answers, and he's envisioning. He's looking at the practicalities. Moses is a pragmatist.

You know what a pragmatist is? It's someone who looks at things in a common sense sort of way, who tries to envision the obstacles. Some people are optimists. They look and they say, This is a great idea.

This is a great plan. I've worked for some optimists who had big plans and who thought that a particular product or a particular direction was going to be the be-all and end-all and was just going to make great piles of money. And then some of us are pragmatists.

And we say, Yes, but what about this? And what about that? And what about the other? And, of course, the pragmatists are the ones who have to exercise self-control and not say, I told you so, when the views and visions of the optimist don't pan out. I'm talking about the business world at the moment. So Moses is something of a pragmatist.

And he says, Well, God, that sounds great. Deliver with a mighty hand. Plunder.

We're going to go take this land away from eight different peoples who currently live in it. That all sounds great. But I see a few bumps in that road and let me tell you what they are.

So Moses answered and said, But suppose they will not believe me or listen to my voice. Suppose they say, The Lord has not appeared to you. It's basically just my word.

I'm going in there and saying, Well, God appeared to me. And they say, Look, God has not

appeared to anybody since the days of Jacob. Isn't that the last time in the Bible we have God appearing to anyone? We don't have God appearing to Judah or to Manasseh or to Ephraim or to any of Jacob's sons.

Joseph had a couple of dreams and interpreted some dreams, but the last time God made an appearance and spoke was Jacob until this day. So they're saying, Look, you're putting yourself up there with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. You're saying you're such a big wheel that God came down and appeared to you.

And there is some legitimacy in that claim, is there not? I'm very suspicious of people on TV today who say, Well, God told me to tell you God appeared to me last night. God gave me a vision and God gave me a dream. Well, what if I say the Lord has not appeared to you? What if I say that you're just a money-grabbing merchandiser of the Gospel and that you're going to be in judgment because God does not appear to people in this day? So there needs to be some sort of proof.

If I came to you this morning and I said God appeared to me and told me to tell you to pack up your belongings, we're going to march out of Texas and we're all going to the promised land of Banff, Canada. We're going to all go to Banff because they'll never bomb Banff. And it's beautiful and we can ski and we can go down to Calgary for pizza and it'll just all be wonderful.

Can't march to Hawaii, or I'm sure we'd be going to Hawaii, so we'll go to Banff. Well, what sort of bona fides do I have? What sort of proof or substance can I put behind the fact that I tell you it's God's will? And you need to have something like this. Look at the Jones cult that drank the Kool-Aid or look at Koresh who got all of his people roasted down there in Waco.

They just took his word at face value that God had spoken and they took him as a prophet of God with no commission, with no proof. So this, in a way, is a legitimate question. So look at what God says in verse 2. The Lord said to him, What is that in your hand? Does God know what Moses has in his hand? Why does He ask this question? This is how they do group participation.

They say you learn more, you remember more if you not just hear something, but you participate, you engage in an activity, reinforces it. So God says, look, you're the pragmatist, you're the one looking at concrete things. What have you got in your hand? He says, I've got a stick.

It's a very interesting word for stick in Hebrew. This is the Hebrew word mateh, M-A-T-E-H. Mateh is a word that comes from a verb that means to stretch out, to stretch forth, to spread out, to branch out.

And it has the idea that this is like the branch of a tree. And it's a double entendre because you have this branch of a tree that you stretch out in authority. You stretch out a rod as a king.

That's what a scepter is. A scepter is just a fancified tree branch. The old rulers had a rod.

The shepherd has a rod. Remember Psalm 23, Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me. It's a symbol of authority.

You stretch out. You spread out over something. So this rod is a shepherd's rod.

What have you got in your hand? Well, I'm a shepherd. I've got a shepherd's rod. So he says, I've got this mateh.

In fact, Moses just says one word. He says, what is that you have in your hand? Yad, Y-A-D, hand. He says mateh.

The hand, by the way, is a symbol of power. I will strengthen thee, yea, I will help thee, yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. The power of my righteousness.

The authority of my righteousness. Anytime you see hand, you want to be watching for the overtones. What do you have in your hand? Well, right now, I have the authority of a shepherd.

A rod. So God says in verse 3, cast it to the ground. So, he cast it on the ground.

And it became a serpent. And Moses fled from it. Now this, I think, would have been comedy.

If there had been any bystanders, I think they would have probably giggled. Because here's Moses' very solemn moment. What is that you have in your hand? Mateh.

Cast it to the ground. He throws it to the ground. It turns into a snake.

And Moses, like, startles. He backs up and runs away, runs away from his own rod. Runs away from his staff.

So, to make matters worse, here's Moses kind of hightailing it out of the area. And God says, Moses, stop. You go grab that thing by the tail.

Any snake charmer knows if you're going to grab a snake, where do you grab it? You grab it by the neck. You grab it up by the head so you can control the fangs. Nobody in their right mind grabs a venomous serpent by the tail.

Because that just gives him the leverage to work around and bite you. You always grab a snake right behind the head. He says, grab it by the tail.

He reached out his hand and caught it and it became a rod in his hand. Well, we have a lot to look at here in this first of three signs that God is going to give. Because he's going to go on to say that this will cause them to believe that the Lord God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob has appeared to you.

Well, think about us today. We're looking for deliverance. We come to God.

Do we have such a supernatural sign that God is going to deliver? We do. We actually do. And

that's what we're going to look at when we come back from our break.

It takes faith. It takes patience. God has deliverance in the works.

It is a matter of trusting in Him. He could easily tell us ahead of time exactly what He's going to do and how He's going to do it. He could have had an angel march through the streets of Goshen and the streets of Egypt and tell the Hebrews, go house to house and say, you know what? God's already got a man on the way that's going to come and deliver.

There's going to be ten plagues and you're all going to come out. God didn't tell Him any of that. Why? Same reason He doesn't tell us how He's going to deliver us.

Where is the faith if you can see it coming? Where is the faith if it's all mapped out? Faith is the substance of things you hope for that you can't see yet. Where is the developing of self-control? It doesn't take any faith. It doesn't take any self-control to say, oh, I see.

Well, they say they're going to be here in 15 minutes. I'll just sit on the curb and wait. No big deal.

It's trusting God for what we cannot see that teaches us self-control and teaches us the faith that we need for the eternal future. Well, we'll see the details of this right after our break.