

Exod 04-02-22a

Let's continue our worship this morning by taking a moment at the outset to go to the Lord in prayer. This is the 22nd day of February 2004 and we will be continuing our study in Exodus chapter 23. As we do, we want to take a moment at the outset to be sure that God the Holy Spirit has a clean and clear field of endeavor in our souls.

It is a reminder that we should acknowledge our unconfessed sins and invite His ministry to make the Word of God clear to us and also to make it a part of what we can remember and apply in our ongoing circumstances. So let's take a moment to go to God in prayer. Father, we thank you for this day.

We thank you that you have sustained us and provided for us and given us an opportunity to continue to pursue growth and the fulfillment of our calling in this life. We thank you for our country and for our leadership. We thank you for answering our prayers.

With regard to our security, we have lived for many months without a serious terrorist attack or any severe mass loss of life. We know that our appeals and our entreaties are considered before your throne. We thank you for your preservation of our security, both at a national and community level.

We thank you for those who serve in our armed forces, both at home and abroad. We pray for the families of those who are losing loved ones on an almost daily basis. Someone is killed in the line of duty.

We know that this is the price that we pay for keeping this warfare on the home turf of those who oppose us rather than on our own soil. We thank you most of all for the Lord Jesus Christ and for our perspective, our understanding, the great hope that you have put before us, the open door that you have set before us. We pray that our study this morning will help us to see that even more clearly and to remember our opportunity to be Christ-like and to avail ourselves of the wrestling match in which we are engaged so that we can strengthen ourselves and be built up in the faith and be ready for the kingdom and the eternal future.

We ask your blessing on us now as we study. Give us insight and understanding of your word. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. Well, for our script reading this morning, turn with me to Psalm 46. Psalm 46.

This is subtitled to the chief musician, A Psalm of the Sons of Korah, a song for Alamot. Psalm 46. God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

Therefore we will not fear, though the earth be removed and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea, though its waters roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with its swelling. There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God, the holy place

of the tabernacle of the Most High. God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved.

God shall help her just at the break of dawn. The nations raged, the kingdoms were moved, he uttered his voice, the earth melted. The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge, Selah.

Come, behold the works of the Lord, who has made desolations in the earth. He makes wars cease to the end of the earth. He breaks the bow and cuts the spear in two.

He burns the chariot in the fire. Be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.

The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge, Selah. Well, this is a psalm of recognition of the omnipotence of God and of the certainty of God's future rule over the earth. The thing that is interesting about this is that at the time that the sons of Korah wrote this psalm, which is probably after the time of David or perhaps contemporaneous with, might have been in the reign of Solomon.

We don't know exactly how the psalms were organized. They are certainly not in chronological order. But when it says that God is our refuge and strength and our very present help in trouble, therefore we will not fear.

These words were written in a time of trouble. They were written in a time where there was a temptation to fear. And it is a reflection of the same kind of thinking that David himself did.

We see this in our study of 1 Samuel where he has to go back to what he knows. When he is tempted to be afraid, if he actually gives in to fear or uncertainty or pressure of any kind, what happens to our thinking? We seize up. We have a difficult time seeing clearly and prioritizing properly.

The biggest thing that happens, if you think about it, think about the last time you were really stressed. Or maybe you are currently really stressed. What happens in our thinking? It is just difficult to see clearly.

On a calmer day, without the pressure, it would be easy to recognize goals and evaluate priorities and remember our values, the relative weight of things. What is the most valuable? What has the most merit? When you have things that have a similar degree of merit, which one takes priority in this particular case? And what is the goal of my life? All of our thinking can be summarized under those three general categories. And yet, when we are under pressure, and fear is one of the most significant kinds of pressure there is, we lose the ability to think clearly.

We lose our objectivity. Our eyes are on circumstances. Our eyes are on self.

Our eyes are on other people. And it messes up the system. It messes up the thinking system.

So, you can realize this. Have you ever thought about this? When you are under this pressure

and you know your thinking is messed up, you say, I've got to get a grip here. I've got to cool it.

I need to get a level head and do the right thing. And it just doesn't happen. It is not the kind of thing you can just decide to do.

I won't be stressed. I saw a thing where a guy said, Well, you've got to take your stress and pretend like it's a red balloon. And it's just leaving.

It's floating upward and blowing away in the wind. And you just watch it sail away. And when you return to yourself, your stress is gone.

Well, it just doesn't work that way. You can't visualize world peace, and here it is. None of those bumper stickers.

I never did figure out whose idea was that. You can't visualize world peace. It's like getting mugged.

Visualize serenity. I don't understand it. And you can't do it by decision.

So, how? If our Christianity is worth anything, it ought to be practical. How do we restart good, sound thinking under pressure? This psalm is an example. Start with what we know.

We have to go to facts. Not just any facts. My house is at a certain address.

My car has a certain size engine. It's not just any level of truth. And this is one of the great mistakes that's being made in Christian education.

The founding cornerstone of Christian education is all truth is God's truth. And it is a big bucket of malarkey. All truth is not God's truth.

I am sure that Ozzy Osbourne has a truth by which he lives, and that is not God's truth. It's true to him. Truth depends on what it is related to.

What's the last thing Pilate says to Jesus? What is truth? Well, it is the truth of the word of God. So, we're back in that situation. We're either fearful or under some kind of pressure.

We're under a strain. We're being ground down. We're going to see people that are under a burden, under some kind of affliction this morning when we get to chapter 23 of Exodus.

How do you restart good, proper thinking? We have to start with facts. We have to start with what we know. We have to start with biblical facts.

The word of God tells us, if you think about Psalm 91, abiding in the shadow of the Almighty, dwelling in the secret place of the Most High, sheltering us under His wing. He is our refuge. He is our fortress.

He is our strength. He is for us. The fundamental, most simple statement of truth is God is for

us.

He is on our side. God is not up there as some of the reformist, Calvinistic view of God is that He's kind of up there looking for an excuse to just hammer great portions of the human race and send them all flailing and screaming into the lake of fire because it's His own inscrutable will. God is for us.

God loves the world. Those of us who respond to His Son, Jesus Christ, God loves us. He has entered us into His family.

He is our Father. He is our Savior and Lord. The Lord Jesus Christ constantly sits at the Father's right hand, interceding on our behalf, arguing our case, defending us against accusation by the accuser, by the adversary.

So, God is for us. If God is for us, then no one who is against us is going to prevail. Anything that comes against us, God is allowing it.

So, God is our refuge. God is our strength. God is a very present help in time of trouble.

Now, we say, well, I've been in trouble for a while now and God doesn't seem to be helping. We have an idea of what help is. We want to immediately be delivered.

We want the Red Sea to part. We want to go across on dry ground. We want to see our enemy drown.

And we'd like it all to happen just right now. If that were the case, we would be very spoiled children. Have you ever seen a child being raised? We don't have any in our periphery, but I have seen some other places where the parents are just so bent upon the child, never encountering a ripple, never facing a challenge.

They have to walk them through the store and the child points at something and says, I want one of those. And the mother says, oh no, dear, I want one of those. And so then they must get it because they don't want to traumatize the child.

They don't want to give them a sense of rejection. And so the moment that the child screams, cries, desires, expresses a wish, the parents, in a sort of misguided idea of what love is, fill that need. And what happens? The child never learns coping skills of pressure, never learns deprivation, never learns to do without, never learns to keep things in perspective.

And God could do that for us, couldn't He? Every time we pray, oh Lord, let this cup pass from me, away goes the cup. What if God had answered that prayer for the Lord Jesus in Gethsemane? Lord, if it be Thy will, let this cup pass from me. Okay, my son, I love you dearly.

You don't want to drink the cup? The cup is gone. Well, we're all in hell. It's that simple.

God's very present help in trouble does not mean elimination of the trouble. It would be simply

God would be a bad father to take away every kind of trouble that we have. He, in most cases, has gone to great pains to coordinate and facilitate and enable and bring together a confluence of circumstances that puts exactly this much pressure on exactly this part of our soul for exactly this much time for our growth.

It's not too much, it's not too little, it's just right. It's exactly what we need to learn and grow. But many times, what do we do? Oh Lord, I'm dying here, take it away, take it away.

If you were giving practical exercises to a child in school and you want them to learn how to do a step, you want them to learn a skill, you want them to learn how to tie their shoes. Did you know that there is a website that teaches you how to tie your shoes? Listen, I highly recommend this website. I'll have to look it up.

Because you can learn the right way to tie your shoes. And some people tie their shoes wrong. I know people personally and intimately who were taught as a tiny child how to tie their shoes in a wrong way.

The knot is backward. When you take the first two laces and you cross them a certain way, then when you make your loop and you wrap the other one around, there is only one way to wrap it that is right. And if you wrap it the other way, your shoes will come untied all the time.

And there are people who go through life thinking, you know, this whole shoe tying business, and they finally go to buckles or loafers or something because their shoes won't stay tied. Well, I was curious about this and I did a great amount of research and I found there is a guy that has investigated and has made a life study of the tying of shoes. Not only does he show you the whole mechanics of it, why some knots bind against themselves and others do not, but he's also got some other ways to tie your shoes.

If you start with that first crossing of the strings and then make not one loop but two, and then wrap the loops around each other and pull, that knot will never come untied until you pull on the end strings. Anyway, this is a skill you want to teach. You want somebody to learn how to tie their shoes.

It's important. You don't want them tripping on their shoes as they're crossing the street. Here comes a car and they trip on their laces.

It's dangerous. Knock a tooth out on the corner of a table or a counter or something by tripping around on their laces. It's an important skill.

And so you're showing them and you're trying to show them this is the right way to tie your shoes. And they just fall apart. Oh, I didn't do it the first time.

It's just hopeless. Oh, please, don't make me tie my shoes. You tie my shoes.

And they go through life and never learn. I mean, it's absurd and ridiculous, right? But you

think about our prayer life in many cases. God is trying to teach us to tie a spiritual knot somewhere.

And we're not taking the test. We're not trying to get through it. We're just saying, take the laces away.

I don't want to try this. It's stressing me out. Please.

I don't want to wear shoes. I'll go through life barefoot. I don't want the gospel of peace on my feet.

Well, God is our refuge and strength. A very present help in trouble. We look to Him in trouble.

We don't wait to be snatched out of trouble. Though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea, this is catastrophic upheaval of environment. Have you ever had, or even lately had, a catastrophic upheaval of environment? All of us have.

Some of us are having it now. Even if that happens, mountains that are supposed to be in a mountain range are cast into the midst of the sea. The sea is supposed to be calm.

It's got these mountains splashing into it. The waters of the sea that are supposed to be calm and allow me to sail and fish and do things roar and are troubled. The mountains shake with swelling.

All of this is abnormal and unusual and somewhat frightening. God is our refuge and strength. Verse 4, There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High.

This is an interesting verse in the light of the earthquakes in Iran and what we've talked about in terms of the system of tectonic plates and the fault that runs under Jerusalem and specifically through the Mount of Olives because there is literally a stream that is going to make glad the city of God. Where is that stream right now? It's hidden. You can't see it.

There is one of the largest, I understand, if the information they put out is correct, the geologists who have studied this fault that runs under the Mount of Olives have found this large freshwater reserve sitting under that fault. And this is the stream that is foretold in the Bible that is going to flow from Jerusalem and is going to go out in the desert toward the Dead Sea and that freshwater flow is going to cleanse and purify that highly mineralized, useless body of water. And the city is going to be made glad.

But what's the nature of that stream? You can't see it right now. And in order for it to be revealed, in order for that great freshwater stream to flow from the city of God, there is going to have to be an upheaval. There is going to have to be an earthquake and a great movement.

There is going to be some destruction and a lot of fear. But it is going to reveal this wonderful blessing beneath. There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God, the holy place

of the tabernacle of the Most High.

God is in the midst of her. She shall not be moved. Even when this earthquake happens and the Mount of Olives, which is just across the Kedron Valley from Jerusalem, an earthquake that is big enough to split the earth of that magnitude, you think, well, the city is just going to be destroyed.

God says, no. It is going to be an earthquake that is not going to move the city. It is not going to destroy it.

She will not be moved. God shall help her just at the break of dawn. Well, what does that mean? It means to me that when the Lord Jesus returns and plants His feet on the Mount of Olives and it splits, it is going to be at the break of dawn.

It will also be, metaphorically speaking, at the break of dawn of the Millennial Kingdom because that will be the first day. The nations raged. The kingdoms were moved.

He uttered His voice. The earth melted. This again speaks of the Millennial reign of the Lord Jesus Christ in Israel from Jerusalem subjugating the kingdoms of the world, ruling them with a rod of iron.

The Lord of hosts is with us. The God of Jacob is our refuge. This is the piece of knowledge we need to cycle through our mind.

How can we stabilize ourselves? How can we reestablish our ability to rightly evaluate circumstances, rightly judge and deal with people, rightly think and decide? We have to remember the Lord of hosts is with us. The God of Jacob is our refuge. Come, behold the works of the Lord who has made desolations in the earth.

When there is desolation, we think, oh, there are these untamed forces of darkness that are wreaking havoc and destruction. No, God controls the forces of desolation in the earth. He makes wars cease to the end of the earth.

He will break the bow and cut the spear in two, burn the chariot with fire. This, of course, is the swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks. He will subjugate.

He will do what no one has ever been able to do in history, which is to completely eliminate warfare on the earth for the better part of a thousand years. Be still and know that I am God. Sometimes this is our hardest task because in order to think these thoughts, in order to jumpstart our spiritual presence, we have to be still.

We want to get up and do something. We want to take an action. We want a solution.

We want something to change. And the Word of God says sit still. Concentrate on your knowledge of God.

Be still and know. Now, what does it mean? I've heard this verse all my life. Be still and know that I am God.

What does that really mean? Do you know that God is God? Well, of course you do. At an academic level, if you are a believer, you say, well, I know God is God. And so why does He give us an imperative? Be still and know that I am God.

This is the idea of dwelling on that knowledge. This is what gets our gears turning. This is what primes the pump.

This is what gets us past our vapor lock. It's very practical. We have to start with known facts.

Bob Thieme was expressing this idea in a little bit different way when he talked about the rationales that are different. He would pull together some doctrines and principles about God and say, well, you have the character of God rationale. You have the plan of God rationale.

But these are basically knowledges about God. And we start with the fact that He's our refuge. He is for us.

He controls everything in the earth. That's what this psalm is all about. He controls nature.

He controls mankind. Be still and know that I am God. What is the ultimate goal? How does this psalm end? Does it say, be still and know that I am God.

I will surely pick thee up out of the fiery furnace and set thee on a great high mountain where it's a nice cool breeze and lotus blossoms and so on. What is God's purpose? God's purpose is not to make sure I never hit a pebble in my road. That I never have a difficult climb.

His purpose is to be exalted among the nations. His purpose is to be exalted in the earth. God is glorified.

That's the goal. For God to be glorified. What did Paul say about God's glory? God's strength.

God's power. His strength is manifest in our weakness. God's glory doesn't really shine off of my strengths or off of my talents or off of my gifts.

God's strength is manifest in my weakness. Well, this is the whole art of cosmetics and fashionable dressing. It's trying to camouflage and mask off your weaknesses.

Some ladies think, well, I've got some bulge in the wrong place or some lack of a bulge in the right place or whatever. So I'm going to dress to camouflage that. I've got a birthmark on my face.

I'm going to get some cosmetics and cover it up. We try to mask off our weaknesses and not let them show. And yet, it is in our weaknesses that God's strength is made manifest.

I saw a guy with no arms. Born with no arms. It was a birth defect.

This guy plays basketball. He plays cards. He plays baseball.

He batted a .388. While I was watching him, he put the bat under his chin. They got a pitcher off a college team to pitch to him. In about 20 pitches or so, his average was like .388. He doesn't feel sorry for himself at all.

He drives a car, an unmodified car. He can drive any car you want to give him. I would start to say, hand him the keys.

But you give him the keys. He uses his feet for everything. He's happy as a clam.

He said, you know, what would you like to say to people? He said, just don't let your deficiencies get you down. He said, there's a way. If you have the right outlook, you can do whatever you want to.

I admire someone who can look at their disability not as an excuse, but as a challenge that's worth meeting. When you meet that challenge successfully, you have a level of satisfaction and a level of fulfillment that someone who has all of their limbs may never reach because they never challenge themselves. They don't find a good thing in weakness.

Well, that's a human example of what this is talking about here. The Lord of hosts is with us. The God of Jacob is our refuge.

Well, in the minutes that remain to us, turn with me quickly back to Exodus chapter 23 because we're beginning another section here in our outline, our 12-point outline that I gave you before of this law that is being given to Moses at Sinai. We've already seen the first nine sections. It began in chapter 20, verse 22 through 26 about the regulations for altars.

This is looking up. Then 21, 1 through 11, servants looking down. Then in 21, 12 through 17, capital offenses.

What are actions against your neighbor that are worthy of death? You have responsibility for physical injuries. If you are at fault and you're the active cause of it in 21, 18 through 27, or if you are liable, if you are passive and yet you're responsible for physical injury in 21, 28 through 36. Then we saw legislation dealing with property.

22, 1 through 4 deals with theft. 22, 5 and 6 deals with damage. 22, 7 through 13 deals with safe deposit.

You have something entrusted to another. And 22, 14 and 15 deals with borrowing. And then the next two verses, 22, 16 and 17, deal with seduction.

So, freedom, privacy, property. If you don't get down into all the gory details of that outline, God says to honor Him first, to honor those who are below you, and to deal justly with those who are in your periphery. Whether it is their person, their property, or their worship and their respect for God, their honoring of God.

Then we started another section in 22, 18, which is capital offenses or capital punishment for offenses that deal with paganism, being led into paganism. And in particular, if you have someone leading others away into pagan worship, sacrificing to any God except to the Lord only, utterly destroyed, do not mistreat a stranger nor oppress him. You were strangers in the land of Egypt.

We dwelt on that for a while. Affliction of the poor is that 22, 21 through 27. Do not afflict the poor.

And this goes back to 21, 1 through 11. Then we had reverence and dedication in the last three verses of chapter 22. Reverence and dedication.

You shall not revile God. You shall not curse a ruler of your people. And this is a ruler, not the ruler.

So, however much we may disagree with someone in politics, someone who is a governor or a senator or a congressman or a president or a federal judge or anyone else who is a ruler of the people, we can disagree, we can point out where we think they are in error, but we should not revile them. If you think about it, you really diminish and demean your own position when you engage in catcalls and boo-hiss type of behavior towards someone. It is beside the point.

It doesn't get at the issue. It isn't a matter of the man and his person or his personality. It is a matter of where one stands on the issues.

And that extends to the way someone lives out their belief system or what they express as their belief system. The private life of public figures is fair game in that category. But again, it has to be looked at objectively, not for the purpose of reviling.

We can take note. If someone is an example of infidelity in their marriage, they take an oath to their wife and then they break it, maybe break it repeatedly, well, this reduces their credibility. And I don't have to revile a man to find him without weight in his arguments when he takes an oath of office and swears to support and defend the Constitution, and yet he also took an oath to his wife, and he has frequently and with malice of forethought broken that oath.

If he has demonstrably broken one oath, how can I trust him to keep any other? The reason we know this is a valid principle is the New Testament gives us the same thing. Someone who is in leadership in the spiritual realm, their private life is fair game. If anyone desires the office, he desires a worthy thing, he should be.

And then it gives a list of characteristics and patterns that are a part of private life. How does he rule his house? How does he treat his wife? How does he manage his temper? How does he handle challenges in those areas? It's fair game. But it does not give you a license to revile.

All of us have seen examples where when someone fails, it goes beyond an objective noting or perceiving of that fact, and it gets into reviling and even persecuting on that account. You shall

not revile a ruler of your people. You shall not delay to offer the first of your ripe produce and your juices.

The firstborn of your sons shall you give to me. Now what has happened to the firstfruits and firstborn principle in New Testament times? Is this still valid? How does this translate when we go through observation, interpretation, application? What does it mean to give God of the firstfruits? We don't have crops where we can take the first few bushels, or grapes where we can take the first... You know, we don't typically have... I mean, my check comes, it all comes at once. There's no such thing as a firstfruits.

Should I take my January check and take something out of that and give it to the Lord, or what? Well, we live in a transcendent age. And when we come to honor God, what are our resources that are reflected in these Old Testament examples? These were resources. These were the staples of life.

What are our staples? What are our resources? We have resources of time, right? Let's just take time as an example. I have, let's say, 16 hours. It's not true, but let's say I have 16 hours of waking time in a day.

Should I devote my best time, when I am freshest and most able to concentrate, to the study of God's Word? Or should I put it off until I'm tired and can't concentrate? Do I find myself falling asleep in my prayers? Do I find myself falling asleep in my Bible study? If so, then I'm not really giving God the firstfruits of my time, am I? I'm kind of giving Him the dregs. He's getting what's left over after I get everything else done. What does this really speak of? What is the whole principle of firstfruits? Remember our three categories of thinking? Priorities.

What is most important? There's a lot of people who may be inconsistent about their personal time with God. Meditation time, review time, study time, prayer time. But boy, when a certain program comes on TV at 9 o'clock, they will be there no matter what.

They will hang up phone calls, they will get off the computer, they will get the dishes washed and get everything put away to be there at 9 o'clock when some particular program comes on. But we look at ourselves and we say, now, when it comes to my priorities, the things that I really make sure get done, am I giving God the firstfruits, or is He kind of shuffled in later on? All of us get convicted on this. But I think this is what firstfruits really means in our day.

What is the most important thing? If I don't get anything else done today, what should I get done? My spiritual life. My acknowledging of God. My meditation time.

My prayer time. My time for thinking in terms of spiritual priorities. Evaluating my decisions and my goals and my actions in the light of my identity as belonging to the Lord.

If I do that consistently, those are my firstfruits. That is giving God the best of my day. The best of my effort.

The best of my time. Not some leavings. Not some crippled thing that is after several other needs and urges have been satisfied.

You shall not delay the first of your ripe produce and your juices. The firstborn of your sons you shall give to me. What does a son represent in Israel? This is the future.

When you make your plans for the future, when you make the plans for your long term, in Israel, this is your sons. This is your offspring. Your heritage.

Your legacy. The Bible says when you look to the future, are you trying to plan retirement? Or are you trying to plan spiritual growth? Are you trying to plan security? Or are you trying to plan spiritual growth? Standing at the judgment seat. When you look into the future, do you see economics? Or do you see the judgment seat of Christ? What do you look at? What do you put first when you look to the future? This is what sons represent.

Likewise you shall do with your oxen and your sheep. He started out with produce and grain. These are things that you cultivate over time.

You plant them and you have to wait a long time. Oxen and sheep, you see them every day. You can do something with them.

These are the immediate short term issues. Whether it's long term, whether it's very long term, or whether it's short term. We have all three of these represented in the crops, which are sort of medium term.

The sons, which are long term. And the oxen and sheep, which are daily short term issues. You can turn sheep and cattle over in a day.

You can't do that with crops. You certainly can't do that with children. It shall be with its mother seven days on the eighth day you shall give it to me.

Once again, same principle as circumcision on the eighth day. Things need to be completed and mature. They need to be perfect.

They need to be evaluated before they're given to God. It's not done in haste. It's not done slap dash.

It's done carefully in a measured fashion in accordance with the word of God. You shall be holy to me. God says.

This is the principle of first Christ. Let's pause and take our break. When we come back, we're going to pick up in chapter 23.