

Our Destination Set by Grace 2021
Exodus 6:2-9 Romans 8:1-2, 5-6, 9, 14-18

Exodus 6:2-9 (New Revised Standard Version)

God also spoke to Moses and said to him: "I am the Lord. I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name 'The Lord' I did not make myself known to them. I also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they resided as aliens. I have also heard the groaning of the Israelites whom the Egyptians are holding as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant. Say therefore to the Israelites, 'I am the Lord, and I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver you from slavery to them. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my people, and I will be your God. You shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has freed you from the burdens of the Egyptians. I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; I will give it to you for a possession. I am the Lord.'" Moses told this to the Israelites; but they would not listen to Moses, because of their broken spirit and their cruel slavery.

Romans 8:1-2, 5-6, 9, 14-18 (New Revised Standard Version)

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him. I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us.

During the 1980's, when I lived near the naval base at Norfolk, VA,
the Navy had a string of terrible and seemingly careless accidents
one right after another, each a tragic loss of life.

In response, the Secretary of the Navy ordered a 24 hour 'stand-down'
during which anything non-essential came to a complete halt,
no missions except for a complete review of safety procedures...
... and nothing was to move or happen until they got it figured out.

Sometimes in life we too need to "stand down", pause and just stop,
to reconsider our priorities, our true purpose, task and mission,
and refocus on what's really most important and critical.

Back when I took a motorcycle-rider safety course,
one section was about learning to make quick sharp turns.
My tendency was to look at the row of pylons beside me,
and I found it difficult to turn quickly and smoothly.

The instructor said, don't look at where the motorcycle is right now,

but instead, you turn your head toward where you're trying to go,
and then you will naturally lean and turn in that direction.

Motorcycle riding involves many spiritual truths, such as:

**don't obsess on the now, but look ahead toward the promises of God,
for where you are is far less important than where you are going.**

Sometimes we focus on our immediate troubles, fears and failings,
and seem to doubt or forget the amazing promises, our hope in God.

The Apostle Paul's letter to the Christian community living in Rome
is a very clear and concise exploration of Christianity & faith,
a call to stop, refocus and think deeply and carefully
because there's more to it than just our present context.

For seven chapters Paul has explained God's gifts of grace and life,
that by that wonderful grace, we are freed from sin's penalty,
and yet even with that grace, we do still fail & sin, all of us.

The passage we read earlier today is about the Holy Spirit,
and Paul explains, we are in *Christ* and so the *Spirit of God dwells in us*,
present & active guarding & guiding the life of every believer.

The Holy Spirit points toward Christ to strengthen our walk with God.

Paul's phrase *in Christ* is something like riding in an airplane.
In an airplane
the laws of aerodynamics overcome the laws of gravity,
just as *in Christ* overcomes the consequences of sin.

In *Christ* as Paul explains it, vs. 1-2

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are **in Christ** Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of
life **in Christ** Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.

But outside of the airplane, the laws of gravity takeover, vs. 5-6, 9

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live
according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to
set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of
God dwells in you.

Paul is writing about the battleground of our minds and desires.

How the defective and deceptive values, loyalties, and longings
of our self-centered nature and of this world are in conflict
with allowing the Holy Spirit, God's presence in us,
to guide us toward more Christ-like faithful living--

-- **two fundamentally different & opposite ways and modes of living.**

By "flesh", Paul isn't referring to the flesh on our bones,
but as a metaphor to describe our human tendency
to seek and possess things of immediate desire and pleasure.

It's life under the domination of this world's ways and power,
that defy God's blessings, purpose, righteousness and love.

He's referring to the orientation and values **behind what we do & say**,
the things of this world that can drive and motivate us, such as
our need to satiate our pride & ego, & desire to acquire & impress,
or even the things we fear or that make us feel anxious.

It's all distraction from what God intends for us along our walk of faith.

Flesh, as he uses the term, describes when our lives are lived under the bondage of external wants, urges and worldly desires that can keep us self-centered, mine and me first orientation, and endlessly striving to prove our own value & worthiness.

In sharp contrast, the Spirit, refers to the Holy Spirit of God, the promised presence of God who indwells all Christians, who nudges, calls, speaks in prayer & opens Scripture to us.

It is the Holy Spirit who creates a hunger and longing in us to grow deeper toward more authentic & faithful Christian living, toward the joyful, meaningful & abundant life God intends for us.

In this passage, Paul's focus is on what motivates and drives us.

Is it our fear, our wounds and desires of this corrupted world,
or is it **gratitude and trust that God will do as promised, and accomplish in us what we cannot do for ourselves?** ...

... which as Paul explains to the Christians in Rome, vs. 6, 10-11

To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ... if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

The point is, the same power that raised Jesus from the dead, is the same Spirit present and powerful in us, and with us,
and who will most assuredly fully accomplish and complete all that God has promised and intends for us & through us.

Through the Holy Spirit we have been and are being grafted
into the continuing love-story of God's grace and blessings...

... which is the gradual process of the Spirit at work in our lives drawing us away from this world's defective ways and thinking toward entrusting ourselves to God's care, will and purpose.

This section of Paul's letter to the Christians living in Rome is about the implications of the Spirit on a Christian's life, the Holy Spirit indwelling, the ongoing presence of God.

But sometimes amid our failures, struggles, mistakes and losses, we may suppose that God must be upset or disappointed in us, since so often we stray so far and can be so very wrong, and can get so easily distracted, anxious and fearful.

I've found in my life, that it's easy for my focus to slip off mission, especially when stress & pressure build up & threaten to overwhelm, when what I really need most is to pause, step back and reflect on how very much God loves & guides me, continually blesses me.

In the Exodus reading, we're given a picture of that, vs. 6-7,

Say therefore to the Israelites, 'I am the Lord, and I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver you from slavery to them. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. **I will take you as my people, and I will be your God. You shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has freed you from the burdens of the Egyptians.**

The story of the Exodus is about God bringing hope and liberation into a seemingly hopelessly impossible situation of disaster.

The point is that God heard and responded
to the cry and desperation of the people
suffering under the harsh bondage of Egyptian slavery.

That phrase,

“I will take you as my people, and I will be your God. **You shall know** that I am the Lord your God, who has freed you...”

is a critically important and recurring theme of the Old Testament.

The word, **know** is far more than just intellectual knowledge.

In the Old Testament **know** is a very broad relational term,
that describes having a deep trust, connection and confidence,
assurance that hope and promises will all be fulfilled...

... and therefore, just watch what God does, and then you will **know**.

It was an unthinkable promise into a seemingly hopeless situation,
too wonderful for slaves too damaged to believe and receive. vs. 9

Moses told this to the Israelites; but they would not listen to Moses, because of their broken spirit
and their cruel slavery.

Even with God's promise to liberate the Israelites from slavery,
they couldn't imagine or believe that it could really be true.

They were so broken with disappointment piled upon disappointment,
that they're afraid even to hope that rescue could be accomplished.

This is not a rebellious rejection or cold refusal to respond,
but having been so totally beaten down and crushed by bondage,
they were incapable of hearing, or even hoping for such good news.

That is a situation and condition which we too can understand,
for there are bondages & burdens within our own lives & experiences.

There is bondage to guilt concerning dark things of our past,
that may still have power over how we think and live even today.

Or the bondage we feel from bad habits, weakness & failings we battle
things that we just can't seem to conquer, get past and overcome,
that keep us from the rich full life God intends for us.

Or an emotional bondage to fear, greed, resentment, envy or anger,
the whole wide range of defective emotional baggage we carry
that keeps us from enjoying the wonder of God's blessings.

Imagine a stained carpet that after steam-cleaning looks better,
but then eventually the spots and stains always seem to come back.
Our wound, failings and mistakes can be like that.

No one gets through this life is without some damage, hurt & baggage,
without some regrets, shame, losses, sorrow, wounds or brokenness.

But the good news

is that our God is in the business of grace, 2nd chances & new life.

That's what God does because that's who God is.

What the Lord God did for the Israelite slaves held captive in Egypt
is a metaphor for what God's grace, healing and Spirit does for us ...

... though sometimes I wonder
if we really take God's promises seriously enough.

As Paul informs us in vs. 1,

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

That promise means that grace overcomes even our worst ... vs. 2,

For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.

That is the message of the Gospel, that Jesus accomplished for us...

... vs. 14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.

... which as Paul explains further, vs. 18

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us.

Amid the stress, worries, fears, disappointments & concerns of lives

in these passages we are reminded of our hope in God's promises,

that we belong to God who's love and joy for us is infinite,

and upon that truth, promise, comfort, hope & assurance,

we're to focus on the victory that awaits us in the end.

Even though the Hebrews could not believe or accept that it was real,

yet liberation did indeed happen, just as God promised them...

... in fact almost without their cooperation, as they

griped and complained almost every step of the way.

That's what it means for God to promise, even with our flaws,

Children of God, I will take you as my people, and I will be your God.

The deciding factor of Exodus was not

the mighty strength and cruelty of Pharaoh and his army,

or even the weakness, fear and doubt of the Hebrew slaves.

As it turned out, what ultimately mattered **was that the Lord God**

is infinitely more powerful than whoever or whatever enslaves...

... and the bondages and burdens and failures of our lives

do not have the last word, for the Lord sets us **free to be**

his own chosen, precious, beloved and blessed children.

In a world which says that we are nobodies who don't matter,

God disagrees – (Exodus 6:7)

I will take you as my people, and I will be your God. You shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has freed you from your burdens and bondage.

In a world which says that we are nobodies who don't matter,

God disagrees –

for God calls us his own, and we are somebodies who matter,

and so we are called and equipped to live in victory and hope...

... as in (1 Peter 2:9-10)

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.