

It is an easy thing to lose focus on how God is at work in this world when we read news headlines. It's an easy thing to think that Satan is winning. And perhaps it was easy for the Israelites living in Egypt to forget about God's covenant promises.

Indeed, if you were to read the first chapter of Exodus 1, you would find the people of God in a very sorry state of affairs. Joseph was dead, the Pharaoh who acknowledged the Spirit of God in him was dead, and now a new king who was filled with hatred rose to power and oppressed them. What were the Israelites to make of it? We are to focus not on what man is doing, or trying to accomplish, but upon what God is doing.

This opening chapter of Exodus demonstrates the folly of man as Satan worked that enmity between his seed and the seed of the women. He was actively at work in striving to prevent the blessings of Abraham for the world to be realized. If the line of Abraham were cut off, then the Messiah could not come, and God's promise to Adam and Eve could not be fulfilled.

We find in this chapter a series of increasingly radical measures that Pharaoh took against the Israelites, the people of God. First, the Egyptians enslaved the Israelites. The Israelites were to work for the Egyptians. The Egyptians certainly benefited from this relationship, as their infrastructure improved on the backs of the Israelites. But the hidden intent underlining this practice was not being realized. Though the Egyptians were gaining a great deal from how God was blessing the Israelites, they still did not pause and seek out where that blessing came from. What would happen if the Israelites turned on the Egyptians? Pharaoh and his people did not repent of their wickedness despite the material gain they had, and instead hardened themselves.

The second step the Egyptians took was intensifying that slavery. They ruthlessly made the people of Israel work as slaves. They wanted the Israelites to effectively drop dead from their labours. The value of Israel as slaves was lost on the Egyptians, as Pharaoh sought hard to somehow reduce the people of Israel.

We see in this the terrible reality of living in sin. Even after exploiting the Israelite labour, and receiving from their handiwork the glory that rightfully belonged to the Lord, the Egyptians were not grateful, and in fact were alarmed. Ever dissatisfied, ever unhappy, they worried.

Is this not the folly of man? Can we not look about and see testimony to what man can accomplish with the life that the Lord allows him? Do we not see progress and development all over the world as new technologies are discovered, new cities are built, new monuments are raised?

People receive more and more from the fruit of labour, but does it lead to a blessed life? No, it does not. The folly of man is that he does not acknowledge the authority of God, and becomes more and more alarmed by things beyond his control, and strives harder to try to control them.

For that's exactly what Pharaoh did. Not content with his attempts to contain the Israelites, he called for the death of the male children discretely. If hard labour would not end the line of Abraham, covert operations might. With no more men to carry on the name, their lines would fail, and they would be assimilated into Egypt.

There was still a subconscious recognition of that sovereign law that speaks out against murder. They knew that it was not right to kill off the Israelites. Even the Egyptian people would recoil at the thought, even in the midst of their dread of Israel. The law of God is written on their hearts. They knew it was improper to murder babies.

Is this not so with every society? People have a glimmer of what is right and what is wrong. Society knows that unjust death is wrong. Even in Canadian society, we witness this. Reports have risen of thousands of children being buried at residential schools. Many of them were abused. Canadians are rightfully incensed that such tragedies were allowed to happen under government direction, and frequently under religious supervision.

But such anger and zeal for justice does not carry forward to every child laying in unmarked graves. There are hundreds of thousands of children whose names we will not know, whose final resting place we will not know, because they are quietly removed from society. Every year countless children have their lives sacrificed on the altar of sexual liberation, as their parents, so enslaved to sexual passion and the pursuit of financial gain, terminate their lives. There is no public outcry for this loss of life.

The Egyptians were not content to leave things covert. When their attempts to contain the Israelites failed even at a subtle infanticide, Pharaoh called the death of the male children openly. The path of hardening their hearts against the blessings of God could only result in one thing: utter abandonment of all the values the Creator had instilled in the creature.

This is the end result of mankind living in sin. Completely oblivious to the blessings a sovereign God can pour out upon a people he favours regardless of their circumstances, willing to deny even the most fundamental of moral law, the humanity that continues down the path of rebellion against the most high majesty of God only finds itself in the very place the God of life warns us would result from denying him: complete destruction, death, suffering, and sorrow.

Rather than repenting of terrible sins, turning to the God of grace who gives life so abundantly and receiving blessing upon blessing; mankind would rather harden himself in his own foolish ways, resolve to commit further and greater atrocities, and give himself over all the more fully to his passions and desires, abandoning all sense of justice for his ignoble idols.

This is the world we live in. Though great progress is made in infrastructure, in science, in medicine, in agriculture, in every field imaginable. Though civilization has the means to receive from the Lord incredible blessing, peace, and prosperity, it would deny itself such gifts, and resolve to continue down the path of destruction. And considering such things could drive us to despair.

But over and against the folly of man, the LORD God remains sovereign. And this God of life gives life, regardless of the will of man. For the thread being weaved throughout this first chapter is in fact that of blessing, not curse. Yes, Israel was suffering terribly. Yes, Israel was enslaved by Pharaoh and treated terribly, progressing even to the point of open genocide. But underneath the folly of man, we find the gift of God.

Exodus began by telling us the people of Israel were fruitful and multiplied greatly, so that the land was filled with them. The God of their forefathers blessed the people. They were blessed with life.

And such blessing was not taken away from them regardless of the will of man. Pharaoh could decide a great many things, but his decisions would not change the course of history. God had ordained that a Saviour would come to redeem the world from its own sin, and though Satan might try to prevent it, the Lord would see his covenant promises prevail.

For all the suffering the Israelites experienced, they still received the miracle of grace. They still had access to life, both in their physical lineages, and in what those lineages would lead to: eternal life in the work of Christ Jesus, who came in the flesh to redeem both them and us from our sins. Even though the will of man decreed that they die, the God of grace chose to give life to his people.

The God of grace chooses to give to us life in Christ Jesus, even though we deserve suffering, persecution, and death. Reflect not upon the death intrinsic to the world because of fallen man and despair, but focus on the one who is working perfectly even in the midst of such terrible calamity to bring about perfect reconciliation, so that we are not left as slaves to sin, but in freedom of life! For by the work of Christ Jesus, who came from the lineage of Israel despite the schemes of Pharaoh, we have eternal life! Thanks for listening