December 7th

Exodus 1-2

Have you ever experienced a change? Perhaps it was in a job - things just stopped clicking like they used to. Something felt off. Maybe you couldn't quite put your finger on it, but you knew something needed to change. The patience and grace you once had for that role, your customers, or even your coworkers had all but disappeared! You knew that something had to change. Of course, some seasons of change are far more difficult than others. And sometimes change isn't simply something we *desire*; it's something we desperately *need*.

This desperate need for change - for redemption - begins to take shape as our story develops into the history of national Israel. According to Exodus 1:8, many years after Joseph and his family moved to Egypt, *"...a new king came to power in Egypt who knew nothing about Joseph or what he had done."* This Pharaoh began to feel threatened by the growing number of Israelites that inhabited his land, so he sought to control the perceived "*threat*" by enslaving the entire population. He began to extort and mistreat them for Egypt's gain.

A place that once had been a land of provision had turned into captivity and death. Exodus 1 recounts how their situation continued to deteriorate under Pharaoh's rule. Yet, even as Israel faced increasing oppression, God's promises to Abraham were still unfolding as God preserved the life of a baby boy called Moses. God saved Moses not only saved the terror all around him, but He also made provision for him, through the very daughter of Pharaoh. Despite the surrounding oppression of his people, this Hebrew child was brought up in the safety of the palace (!), with training and education that would serve him in ways he could never dream of. God is the orchestrator of the impossible.

In the midst of chaos, God brought a Deliverer into Egypt. For a people desperate for peace and deliverance from oppression, God was moving in ways they were completely unaware of. How much peace does it bring you to know that this is the God we serve and worship this Christmas? **No one can stop His plan of redemption.** He saw us in our captive state, separated from Him because of the sin nature we were born into. **And just as He raised up Moses to deliver His people from their slavery, He sent Jesus to deliver us from sin.** Jesus - The One who would make **PEACE** between God and man, covering the brokenness of our sin and restoring us to Himself.

December 8th

Exodus 2-4

Mistakes, regret, pain, fear, and insecurity plague us in this broken world, don't they? How many times have you made a decision that left you wanting to run from it? Maybe you've been running for a moment, a season, or what feels like your entire life. Scripture never sugarcoats our brokenness. Instead, it tells the story of a God who continually reaches into our brokenness to redeem and save, **in spite of us.**

After growing up in the comforts of Pharaoh's household, Moses witnessed an Egyptian beating a fellow Hebrew. Moses' heart was **for** his people, but that didn't mean his actions or timing were right. He reacted in anger, making a decision that would cause him to flee Egypt for his life, and settling in Midian. James 1:20 says, *"For the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God."* From a palace to a wilderness, how different Moses' life had become!

Our deepest formation doesn't usually happen in comfortable places or through our successes. Moses lived in obscurity for 40 years on the back side of the desert. But at just the right time, God would call him to deliver Israel. While tending sheep, Moses witnesses a bush that is on fire but somehow not burning up! Through this bush, God speaks to Moses, revealing His compassion for His people and His plan to use Moses to bring freedom to Israel.

How did Moses respond? Well, with almost every possible excuse to **not** be used by God. From needing miraculous signs to asking for God's name, and even saying, "*please just find someone else*" – at every turn, Moses' response was driven by anxiety rather than faith. Significantly, God does not provide a "pep" talk about how great Moses is. Rather, He addresses every fear of Moses with a revelation of who He is. **Moses was focused on everything he lacked. God kept reminding Moses of everything He was.**

Maybe you struggle with self-doubt, fear, regret, or insecurity. The answer, however, is never found in simply gaining confidence in ourselves. The Israelites couldn't save themselves. Neither could Moses accomplish this deliverance apart from God (John 15:5). The answer was always - God. God heard the cry. God preserved a deliverer (Moses), and God is still responding today with deliverance and action dependent on ***HIS*** character, not ***ours***.

Just as God heard Israel's cries and raised up Moses to deliver His people, He saw our need for a Savior and sent His Son. Our hope has never been rooted in what we can do, but in who God is and what He has done through Jesus.

December 9th

Exodus 19-21 | Hebrews 12:18-29

In modern times, handwashing is common practice when it comes to cleanliness and the prevention of germs. But did you know that handwashing wasn't widely accepted as a life-saving practice in hospitals until the late 19th century? Something that seems second nature to us today was not broadly understood as essential to protecting the sick and those undergoing surgery until relatively recently. Although we cannot see bacteria being carried on our hands, it doesn't mean that there aren't devastating effects as that bacteria is transferred from one person to another.

The holiness of God can be a hard thing to fathom or understand. But just because it may not be visible to our eyes does not mean that it does not have incredible implications in our lives.

Moses would go back to Egypt as God's ambassador to Pharaoh. Through many signs, wonders, and plagues, he would lead the Israelite people out of Egyptian slavery, as God would continually pave the path for each next step. Finally, the Israelites would arrive at Mount Sinai, where they would encounter **the holiness of God.**

In Exodus 19, we see the presence of God, as He speaks with Moses, literally shaking the mountain. His presence is powerful and all-consuming, and God establishes boundaries for how His people can approach Him - **for their own sake.** Because of our fallen, sinful nature, humanity could not simply enter into God's holy and pure presence on its own terms.

Once again, God establishes a covenant (promise) with the Israelites. "The Law" is given to govern and guard them as a nation – all of this is as **an invitation to encounter, follow, and live under the blessing of God as His people.** Sometimes, the God of the Old Testament is mistakenly made out to be wholly different and opposed to the Jesus represented in the New Testament – as if Sinai reveals God to be unapproachable, while Jesus is approachable by all. But even at Sinai, God was graciously inviting people to encounter, follow and live under His blessing and protection.

The Law was always pointing to something greater. Our God has made peace with all humanity through Jesus Christ. Generation after generation, faithfulness upon faithfulness – all of this ***HIS***tory is the continual story of God on a rescue mission to redeem what was lost in Eden.

Jesus would one day accomplish what this Sinai Covenant and its sacrifices could not – Jesus established the way for lasting reconciliation with God.

December 10th

Exodus 32 | Acts 7:40-41

When you see a gift, with your name on it, sitting under the tree, what is your procedure as you wait to open it? Do you shake it a couple times a day? Ask incessant questions to get a clue? Or are you a patient person who loves the anticipation and mystery of what it could be? What we do in our times of waiting can often shape our lives in the season that follows. If you shook that present multiple times and it was fragile, you might not be too happy with what you open on Christmas morning!

Exodus 32 is a moment of waiting for the Israelites. Moses goes up the mountain to speak with God, and he doesn't return for 40 days. The people grow tired of waiting and decide to take things into their own hands – they start to shake the box. Acts 7 reveals the posture of their hearts: impatient, doubtful, and desiring to worship something they create rather than waiting for God to instruct their next step.

In many ancient religions surrounding Israel, people sought to appease their gods through rituals and sacrifices, often without knowing what would please them. They were throwing "*religious spaghetti*" at the wall, hoping something would stick. But Yahweh, the God of Israel, was spending significant time with Moses, giving detailed instructions on how God was to be worshiped and how His people were to approach Him. But rather than patiently wait for Moses' return, the Israelite people chose to create a statue of a golden cow, of which they proceeded to worship.

God had invited His people into a covenant relationship with Him, but Israel would show us time and time again how quickly the human heart is prone to wander. We desperately needed more than laws and instructions to redeem us.

If you have been following God for 5 minutes or 5 decades, you have probably realized you cannot meet His standard yourself. No amount of discipline, scheduling, or productivity-maximizing can make you right with God. But Jesus can - and Jesus did. Through Jesus we have more than laws and instructions for righteous living– we have peace and reconciliation with God.

The Israelite people would wait generations for the Messiah. Some would perceive their waiting as God's inaction. But just because we're asked to wait, does not mean that God is not acting. He was preparing the greatest gift humanity would ever receive.

So what is it for you? How will you choose to wait? Is there an area of your life where waiting has caused you to question what God is doing? Could it be that even in the waiting, He is working in ways you cannot yet see?

December 11th

Deut. 34:1-8 | Matt. 17:1-3

Remember how we said that *what we do in our times of waiting can often shape our lives in the season that follows*? After receiving the Law, God led the Israelites to the edge of the Promised Land. But due to fear and unbelief, they did not enter. This same group who grew impatient after a mere 40 days of waiting would now spend 40 years wandering because they refused to believe what God had said.

Moses was familiar with the wilderness. He had already spent 40 years there himself. God called him out of it to lead these people through their own wandering. Perhaps, this is why Moses had such a tenderness for them. On multiple occasions, Moses would plead their case before God. In Exodus 32 and throughout the book of Numbers, we see Moses' heart to intercede on their behalf. Maybe he knew what it meant to be redeemed; to be given a second chance.

Moses would lead the Israelites through trial, difficulty, rebellion, and pain. He was faithful. He not only led the people, but he loved them. There were times God threatened to start over with a new people, but Moses would intercede for their salvation and mercy. He was a strong leader, but we are also reminded of his humanity. In Numbers 20, the Israelites come to an impasse in the desert with no water nearby. They scold Moses for his leadership of their situation. Moses was just trying to live out what God had called him to do - to follow God and lead this people. And his reward from the people was constant complaining and verbal abuse.

God told Moses to speak to a rock and water would flow. In exhaustion and irritation, however, Moses *struck* the rock, twice. The attrition of his assignment combined with the recent loss of his sister overwhelmed his sensibilities. His disobedience would cost him the ability to enter the Promised Land.

This can seem like such an unfair consequence to a life mostly characterized by sacrifice and surrender, but God specifically says *"...Because you did not trust me enough to demonstrate my holiness to the people of Israel, you will not lead them into the land I am giving them!" (Numbers 20:12)*. Yet even though Moses could not enter the land, God still cared for him in the most tender way, burying him on the mountain where his earthly journey would end. The next time we see Moses again in Scripture, he is standing with Jesus Himself on the Mount of Transfiguration! Earthly consequences and circumstances don't have to be the end of our story. God is writing an eternal story. Even when we are disciplined by our loving God, we are not forsaken.

Although it was a broken caricature, Moses foreshadowed Jesus, who would become the ultimate Intercessor between God and man (Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25). Even Moses, who faithfully interceded for God's people, could not redeem himself. He needed the very Savior his life pointed toward. And so is the theme of humanity - in dire need of saving, but incapable of saving itself. There's only One Name in whom **PEACE** with God may be found.