

Sonoraville Baptist Church
Sunday, June 12, 2011 – 11:00 AM
Rev. Steve Skates, Pastor

Like a Good Neighbor - Exodus 2:23-25

Introduction: I have to make this disclaimer this morning before I begin. I am in no way serving as a pitch man for the State Farm Insurance Company. However, I do want to use their slogan as a title for today's message. State Farm Insurance has been around for a long time, and lately, they've produced some of the funnier commercials on TV these days. In a typical ad, some poor person is standing looking at their damaged car, when then suddenly they remember their insurance carrier, so they sing, "*Like a good neighbor, State Farm is there,*" and "*poof*" their agent appears ready to come to their rescue and take care of their car. The aim is to show that this insurance company is one they can trust to take care of them when they are needed.

Now we know that this is not always going to be the case when it comes to insurance companies, because let's face it, how many times have we had to wait and wait and wait on an insurance adjuster? And then when they do come, we're not always completely satisfied with their handling of the situation, are we? Truth is, insurance agents are human. They don't and can't just magically appear on the scene whenever or wherever we need them.

But when we think in terms of being completely satisfied and taken care of in a spiritual sense, we do have a good neighbor who will always be there for us. But He's more than a good neighbor – He's our Heavenly Father who is more than able to meet us at our point of need each and every time we call upon Him.

Let's turn to the book of Exodus and see our Providential God in action. I want to read Exodus 2:23-25, but our story encompasses the 1st and 2nd chapters. *23 During that long period, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. 24 God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. 25 So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them. Exodus 2:23-25 (NIV)*

The literal meaning of the word "*Exodus*" is "*Exit,*" "*Departure,*" or "*Going Out,*" and in a way, the book describes the birth (the exit of) of the nation of Israel. That is an interesting description because in one commentary I read, the writer described Egypt as the "*womb,*" and the experiences of the sons of Jacob as "*birth pangs.*" He further described Moses as the one God chose to "*deliver*" this nation from the "*womb*" of Egypt.

Anyway, Exodus is a book that has many themes and sub-themes, but the theme I want to focus on this morning is the providence of God. Specifically, we're going to see how God met the needs of His people during their birth as a nation. Now the experiences of God's people during the most important and celebrated time in their history teaches many truths about God. But this morning, it's my prayer that we'll begin to understand the awesome promise of God that He takes care of His people.

You know, one of the things that initially draws people to God is His providence. Whether it is the assurance of knowing we have a home in heaven or the peace of knowing that someone loves us, God made us with this inner longing for security. We want to know that we're cared for and needed. And throughout the book of Exodus, we see God's providence vividly portrayed in His care and guidance of one family – Jacob's family, which ultimately became the people of God. From the moment Jacob's little family came to Egypt under duress, to the time they had multiplied to approximately 2 million people and entered the Promised Land, the loving and guiding care of God is evident.

Jacob's family first came to Egypt to escape a severe famine in the land of Canaan. If you'll recall, one of Jacob's sons, Joseph, had been sold into slavery in Egypt by his own cruel brothers. But they had told their father that he had died from an animal attack. Meanwhile, God was taking care of Joseph despite many hardships, setbacks, and unfair treatment. Eventually, Joseph rose to great power in Egypt - second in command under Pharaoh. And by the providential hand of God, Joseph and his family were reunited in Egypt. Pharaoh gave Joseph's family the land of Goshen to live. And for several years, the family prospered and multiplied. Eventually, they grew to a couple of million people.

Over time, another Pharaoh came to power in Egypt. This Pharaoh knew nothing of Joseph, and saw the group of 2 million people in the land of Goshen as a threat to his power. He began to use force against them and made them into his slaves. They were forced to make bricks under the hand of cruel taskmasters. The good life they had known for many years had turned to hardship, disappointment, and frustration. They cried out to God in

anguish and great sorrow, but the divine providence of God they once knew seemed nowhere to be found.

But all the time, God was watching and listening. All the while God was still caring for His people. Even through the cruelty of this Pharaoh, God was showing Himself as the God who would ultimately take care of His people. And that's the key point of this message: God provides for those who trust Him. This morning, I want us to discover three insights about the providence of God.

1. God's Providence Endures Time

5 The descendants of Jacob numbered seventy in all; Joseph was already in Egypt. 6 Now Joseph and all his brothers and all that generation died, 7 but the Israelites were fruitful and multiplied greatly and became exceedingly numerous, so that the land was filled with them. 8 Then a new king, who did not know about Joseph, came to power in Egypt. Exodus 1:5-8 (NIV)

As I mentioned earlier, over time it seemed as though God had forgotten His people. As the people were subjected to more and more bondage, and more and more freedoms were being taken away, they grew weary of it all, and wondered if God still cared. As they recalled how God had brought their ancestors to Egypt through His providence, they knew that they were still a part of that family, but they wondered if God still cared for them as He had their ancestors. They had cried out but they hadn't heard from God.

During the hard times in life, it may seem that God is silent. When things are going bad, or we've been treated unfairly, or sickness or disaster comes, we desperately want to hear from God. But when He doesn't respond immediately or in the way we expect Him to, that is when we begin to doubt. We begin to think He doesn't care, or that He's forgotten about us.

But the story of Israel's bondage in Egypt is a clear demonstration of how God works in His time and in His way. The people of Israel wanted immediate action. They were like a baby who wants attention of its parents at the first whimper. They wanted God to act **NOW!** But they had to learn that God works in His own time and in His own way.

For years, God allowed the people to grow and multiply. And for years they had to learn to be dependent on Him. But all the time, God was preparing a leader. God was providing them someone to deliver them out of their womb of dependence.

Time does not erase God's providence. He may appear to be silent, but He is always working, always watching, and always providing. We won't always see Him in action, but we can be assured that He will inevitably work for His people who trust Him.

The second insight we can see here about the providence of God is the fact that:

2. God's Providence Withstands Attacks

8 Then a new king, who did not know about Joseph, came to power in Egypt. 9 "Look," he said to his people, "the Israelites have become much too numerous for us. 10 Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country." 11 So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh. 12 But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread; so the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites 13 and worked them ruthlessly. 14 They made their lives bitter with hard labor in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields; in all their hard labor the Egyptians used them ruthlessly. Exodus 1:8-14 (NIV)

During an attack, the enemy seems stronger. And to the Israelites during this time of hardship and burden, Pharaoh's strength seemed stronger than God's. But as we shall see, they thought wrong. God's providence is stronger than the enemy's attacks. God would ultimately prevail.

You see, the Pharaoh could only attack as God permitted. During the time of Pharaoh's persecution, the people groaned and questioned God's strength. Pharaoh was exercising great power over them in three ways:

- He tried to break their spirit by making them servants (1:8-14).
- He tried to cause the Hebrew midwives to turn against their own blood by killing their male babies (1:15-21).
- He tried to personally destroy all the Hebrew male children (1:22).

Pharaoh's power and dominance seemed preeminent. But God is stronger than any enemy. In fact, the entire exodus experience demonstrates that very fact. Every time things looked bleak, God came through. Every time it seemed like Pharaoh was gaining the upper hand, God made a way of escape. From the steadfast

faithfulness of the Hebrew midwives, to the inexplicable compassion of Pharaoh's own daughter toward baby Moses, God's providence turned back the attacks of Pharaoh.

So, the next time you're under attack, and you think your enemy is gaining the upper hand. Just remember that you've got a heavenly Father whose eye is always on the sparrow. You've got a Father who owns the cattle of a thousand hills. Your heavenly Father has ten thousand mighty angels and more just waiting to be dispatched to come to your rescue. You've got a Father who has already put things in motion to take care of you. God will make a way when there seems to be no way. Finally, we need to understand this about God's Providence:

3. God's Providence Defies Explanation

1 Now a man of the house of Levi married a Levite woman, 2 and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. When she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him for three months. 3 But when she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile. 4 His sister stood at a distance to see what would happen to him. 5 Then Pharaoh's daughter went down to the Nile to bathe, and her attendants were walking along the river bank. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her slave girl to get it. 6 She opened it and saw the baby. He was crying, and she felt sorry for him. "This is one of the Hebrew babies," she said. 7 Then his sister asked Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?" 8 "Yes, go," she answered. And the girl went and got the baby's mother. 9 Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you." So the woman took the baby and nursed him. 10 When the child grew older, she took him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son. She named him Moses, saying, "I drew him out of the water."

Exodus 2:1-10 (NIV)

Reading about the miraculous events surrounding the birth of Moses helps us to realize the unseen forces of God at work around us. There is no logical human explanation for how Moses survived those first few months of his life. Pharaoh's own daughter wasn't supposed to protect a Hebrew baby. Moses' own mother shouldn't have been hand-picked to care for the child. Baby Moses shouldn't have grown up in the same house of the very Pharaoh who had ordered his death. None of these things were supposed to happen, but they did. And it defies human explanation.

But it doesn't defy spiritual explanation. You see, since God called Abram from his own land to settle in the Promised Land, God had a special purpose for Israel. During the years of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God was working His plan. But now, the fate of an entire nation was hanging by just one tiny thread, a little baby floating in the Nile River in a wicker basket.

The events surrounding the birth of Moses are unbelievable to human understanding, yet God used the most unlikely of prospects to bring it about. You cannot explain it without acknowledging God's providence and care. It defies explanation.

I'm sure if many of you were to look back at some of your own situations, you would say the same thing. I think about people like Margaret Burks, who at 75 years of age, answered God's call to missionary service, went to seminary, and is still active in ministry at age 97! How do you explain that?

I think about a man like David Ring whose mother was urged to have an abortion because her unborn baby boy had cerebral palsy. But she refused, and chose to bear her son and care for him. And today, David Ring is a husband, a father, and is one of the premiere evangelists in America, in spite of his disability. How do you explain that? You can't other than it's the providential hand of God working behind the scenes taking care of our problems.

Conclusion: I want to read you the word of a song that has spoken to me many times. The song says,

*"God will make a way, where there seems to be no way
He works in ways we cannot see; He will make a way for me
He will be my guide; Hold me closely to His side.
With love and strength for each new day
He will make a way, He will make a way.
By a roadway in the wilderness, He'll lead me
And rivers in the desert will I see
Heaven and earth will fade, but His Word will still remain
He will do something new today.*

God will make a way, where there seems to be no way.”

You may be going through a trial or a storm today, and it may seem like you can't hold on. You may have cried so much you just can't cry no more. You may have been talked about, laughed at, or left for dead. But listen...it's not over until God says it's over.

You've got to know that God is always faithful. You serve a God who's able to take care of you no matter what. And He will make a way for you.

Do you have that assurance today? If you don't, then I invite you to come and meet the one who will always love you, always protect you, and always have your back. If you come to know Him, and trust in Him, He will take care of you.