

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER FOR VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING 2023

INTERNATIONAL
SOCIAL JUSTICE
COMMISSION



I HAVE HEARD THEIR CRIES



ADULT PREACHING RESOURCE

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'The Israelites groaned under the slavery, and cried out. Out of the slavery their cry for help rose up to God. God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob' (Exodus 2:23-25 NRSV).

INTRODUCTION

Modern slavery and human trafficking is a multi-billion dollar criminal industry that denies freedom across the globe to an estimated 49.6 million people. That's women, men, girls and boys who are forced into different forms of labour and sex trafficking and forced marriages.

Across the world today, The Salvation Army stands united in this fight for freedom by joining together to pray for people who have experienced modern slavery and human trafficking. We want to be praying for the families left behind and for the Church to rise up and fight. We want to pray for an end to the demand that fuels modern slavery and human trafficking and for the traffickers and exploiters who engage and benefit off this social injustice.

As we prepare to engage in prayer, we are going to look at an early account of slavery in the lives of the Israelites found in the beginning of Exodus and specifically in Exodus 2:23-25, of how God's heart is to move people out of the darkness of slavery and into his light.

The beginning of Exodus helps us to understand the situation the people of Israel were experiencing at that time - their struggles, oppression and slavery in Egypt. When we look back into the history of Israel in this foreign land, we find Joseph being sold into slavery by his brothers.

Slavery is when one person controls another person as if that person is a thing or a possession. That control is based upon the threat of and/

or actual use of violence whether physical, emotional, psychological, spiritual or financial. When people are experiencing slavery, they are being exploited. This means that they are being treated unfairly for another person's selfish advantage and gain.

People who are enslaved are dehumanised and treated as if they are an object. Their identity and ability to make choices are stripped away from them. Restrictions are placed on every area of their lives. They are forced to sacrifice their hopes, dreams, loved ones, their past and their future. If they are paid for their work, it is barely enough to survive. It takes away their freedom and is a violation of their human rights.

In being a slave to Pharaoh, Joseph experienced many hardships, pain and oppression. Yet, God had a purpose for the life of Joseph. God delivered Joseph from his struggles and lifted him up into the highest levels of leadership in Egypt. Joseph forgave his brothers during the time of famine and helped them to resettle in Egypt. After Joseph died and a new Pharaoh came into power, the Egyptians were afraid of the rapid growth of the Hebrews in their country and to solve this 'problem', intentionally sought to kill any male Hebrew newborn.

But God intervened and saved Moses for his purpose. Seeing that the Israelites were still rapidly increasing in numbers, the Egyptians forced them into forced labour - slavery. Even though the Israelites had become citizens of Egypt and were working to build and improve this country, they were no longer considered to be human beings and their rights were stripped from them. They were oppressed - their lives were full of injustice hardships, inequality, pain and bitterness. There was no one to challenge the power of Pharaoh or fight for justice. Out of their pain and bitterness, they 'groaned under the slavery, and cried out to God' (Exodus 2:23).

Exodus 2:24-25 describes God's response to the cries of his people. His response is mentioned in three short phrases: he heard their cries; he remembered his covenant; he was concerned. Let's look at each of these responses.

GOD HEARD THEIR CRIES

In the *New International Version*, the word 'groan' used in Exodus 2:23 is intimately connected to the idea of 'crying out'. This word 'groaning' is used only three other times in the Old Testament: Exodus 6:5, Judges 2:18 and Ezekiel 30:20. The Israelites were groaning and crying out because of the physical distress that their situation of labour slavery was causing in their collective lives. The Hebrews at that time had no leader - nobody to turn to. They were utterly helpless and hopeless. The only thing they could do was cry out to God. Their cries for help did not go to some pagan god but to the Creator of this world and all humanity. Their cries rose up to the God of their forefathers and God heard their cries. All throughout Scripture, we learn how God hears the cries of all his people.

1 Peter 3:12 says, 'For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil' (*NIVUK*).

Psalms 50:15 says, 'and call on me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honour me.'

Psalms 34:17 says, 'The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles.'

These specific passages of Scripture and so many more tell us that our God hears the cries of his people. He heard the cries of Hagar in the wilderness and so many others. He met Hagar and others in their difficult situations and saved them. That same God still hears the cries of all the

people experiencing slavery. His heart is to hear and meet them where they are.

GOD REMEMBERED HIS COVENANT

God not only heard but he remembered or thought of the covenant he made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Exodus 2:24). The word 'remembered' in Hebrew is 'Zakar', which is an important theological theme in the book of Exodus. In Hebrew, remembering is not just an intellectual exercise but it includes acting on that memory. God had made unconditional promises to Abraham and his descendants. Unlike humans, God is faithful. He does not forget the promises he has made. He will fulfil them even if it seems to us that he is taking a long time to do so. These beautiful lyrics, 'In his time, in his time, he makes all things beautiful in his time' remind us that when his timing comes about, he remembers his children. He never forgets. Psalms 105:8 shares that 'He remembers his covenant for ever, the promise he made, for a thousand generations'. He remembers his children generations after generations. He remembers all those who are afflicted and experiencing slavery. God is a God who delivers people from all kinds of bondage and brings the complete release of salvation.

GOD WAS CONCERNED

God not only heard the groaning and cries of the Israelites and remembered his covenant, but he was also concerned about the children of Israel. The God of Israel was not ignorant of the

plight of his people nor unwilling to save them from bondage. He was planning to do something to save them from the slavery they were experiencing in Egypt. These actions of hearing, remembering and being concerned were indications of his faithfulness and compassion towards his creation.

As it says in Psalm 146:6-9, 'He is the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them - he remains faithful for ever. He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets prisoners free, the LORD gives sight to the blind, the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down, the LORD loves the righteous. The LORD watches over the foreigner and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked.'

As we move into a time of prayer and moving through our prayer stations, I cannot stress enough that as we read the beginning of Exodus and move into Exodus 2:23-25 that God does not approve of slavery, human trafficking and exploitation. Our God is a God who hears, remembers and is concerned for all people experiencing this injustice. Every person was created in his image and has been created to be free in every sense. His heart is to bring people out of the darkness of these injustices and into his light. Let's take time to pray as we move around the prayer stations seeking his heart and response for all those experiencing slavery, human trafficking and exploitation.

'He **remembers** all those who are afflicted and experiencing slavery. God is a God who **delivers people** from all kinds of bondage'