Exodus - Commentaries by Walter Potter

Gathering Up the Fragments, Chapter 2

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RedemptionExodus 3

Exodus 3:7-8

"And the Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of My people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows;

And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites."

"Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord, and spake, saying, I will sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea.

The Lord is my strength and song, and He is become my salvation: He is my God, and I will prepare Him an habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt Him.

"Thou in Thy mercy hast led forth the people which Thou hast redeemed: Thou hast guided them in Thy strength unto Thy holy habitation."

Exodus 40:18-19, 33-35

"And Moses reared up the tabernacle, and fastened his sockets, and set up the boards thereof, and put in the bars thereof, and reared up his pillars.

Exodus 3 17

And he spread abroad the tent over the tabernacle, and put the covering of the tent above upon it; as the Lord commanded Moses." .. .

"And he reared up the court round about the tabernacle and the altar, and set up the hanging of the court gate. So Moses finished the work.

Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.

And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle."

For the children of God the book of Exodus has a certain charm because of the character of the book and its contents. Redemption is the great outstanding feature of the book of Exodus. The subject of the next book, Leviticus, is approach to God by a redeemed people. Numbers presents redeemed people being conducted through the wilderness to the rest that remains. In the third chapter of Exodus we learn about the source of redemption. Further on in the twelfth and fifteenth chapters we learn the way of it.

In redemption God is known in a way in which He delights. There is a certain class of creatures which have and always will have a joy peculiar to themselves, and that is the joy of redemption. We learn God in redemption in a way He is not known in creation.

In the verses we read from chapter three, we get a most marvelous thing as to the character and nature of God. We find that He is a Spectator, and an interested Spectator, in all that is going on here below. Certain characteristics brought God into exercise—into play. Thus, for instance, we find Him moved in His nature, moved by what He sees here below: a burdened, suffering, sorrowing, oppressed people. He had seen, He had heard; and His seeing and hearing have moved Him to action. He is come down (another blessed feature of the book of Exodus) to deliver.

God delights in the confidence of the poor sinner; such is His nature, His character. Hear Him saying, I have heard; I have seen; I know their sorrow. Has not God wrought marvelously, and is He not working marvelously in this poor world today? Oh yes, He is doing a work in which His whole nature is engaged, a work He has been doing for long, long centuries that shall be to His eternal praise and glory. He saw a certain class of His creatures in certain conditions and He was moved by those conditions. It is most touching to know God as the One who not only looks down in compassion upon this sin-burdened scene, but as the One who has also come into it in compassion. "I am come down to deliver."

His work in the earth today is that of a mighty, blessed Deliverer—One whose love, pity, compassion and mercy have moved Him to action and still move Him. The compassions of His love sustain God in the work He is doing today which meets with such opposition here below. To nothing are we greater strangers than to the very nature of God Himself. Indeed it is in redemption, what He is doing on behalf of a sin-burdened people, that we learn what that nature is.

You and I and every redeemed one have a joy in God that we will have eternally and that no other creature of His will ever know! There is no joy in heaven so great as the joy of redemption. There is nothing God Himself has greater joy in than in the work of redemption.

So He says, "I am come down to deliver them...and to bring them out," and not only to bring them out, but to bring them in; and blessed be His Name, He is working according to the fulness of His own nature and character and love. He has seen our sorrow and heard our cry, as it were, from the lash of the taskmaster here below and Satan is a hard taskmaster. What is the ultimate reward of those who are undelivered from his authority? "The wages of sin is death." "The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

We feel, and feel increasingly, in communion with God, the groan, the burden of creation, the burden under which all here below labor. We witness the many efforts in different ways by which poor man seeks to hush the groan, but still there is the groan. There is but One who can meet the need—the blessed God Himself, and He would have us know our need. The gospel tells the wonderful message of God come down to deliver; and the God who came down to deliver is the God who has seen and heard above and says very sweetly, "I know their sorrows."

"What brought the Son of God from heaven?" we sing sometimes;

(We like to change a word there and say, "Did draw Thy sovereign favor")

Did our crying bring the Son of God down here? No, it was our burden and our condition. There was no cry going up to heaven for deliverance; there was an effort to make the best of our circumstances and that is still the case today. Where is the eye and the heart that looks to heaven for deliverance? Where is the confidence in God and in His love? How few there are who lift up their voices in thanksgiving and praise to God for coming down here in the Person of His Son to deliver. To see, or hear Him saying, "I know their sorrows" is most touching. There is One far away up in heaven who knows our sorrows and feels for us in them and proclaims to us a Deliverer—Himself come down in the Person of Christ to deliver. Most blessed it is to see God Himself moved to action by the compassions of His own nature for His fallen creatures.

The source of that redemption that the gospel speaks of is mercy. "Thou in Thy mercy hast led forth the people" (Exodus 15:13). The means of it is the blood of Christ. Let us ask ourselves, what is the measure of our acquaintance with God as the One who came down to deliver? How many of us can sing with joy and reality,

"We joy in our God, and we sing of that love, So sov'reign and free which did His heart move! When lost our condition, all ruined, undone,He saw with compassion, and spared not His Son!"

Do you join in that song? How God delights to hear it! What a welcome that song finds in His ear. God's joy is in redemption and His people's joy is in the God of their salvation—the God of their redemption.

In Exodus we have Him come down for a certain purpose: to deliver and to bring into blessing. He blesses us according to His nature, and He blesses with no meager hand. All is typical, and so He blesses His people of old to bring them out of the Land of Egypt into a good and large land. How good and how large is the blessing into which the redeeming love of God brings us! "A good land and a large." Shall we endeavor to know something of what that good land and large is for us now? We shall enter fully into it when Christ comes, and we go into eternity. "Thou in Thy mercy hast led forth the people."

It is a reality that there is a redeemed people on the earth. "Forasmuch as ye know...ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold ... but with the precious blood of Christ." There is a certain people here that are God's redeemed people and they know it: "Forasmuch as ye know."

I wonder if there is a reader who does not know himself as one of the redeemed of the Lord—who has never known what it is to sing to the Lord the song of redemption for the first time. That song begins here on earth. It is continued in heaven in all its fulness, blessedness and joy, but it is begun here on earth. "Thou in Thy mercy hast led forth the people which Thou hast redeemed." What a note that is, and its source is "Thou in Thy mercy." "But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us." Ephesians 2:4. What has brought the mercy of God into play?. I do not say into existence; it was always there. But what brought it into play? into action? Your need and mine as sinners brought Him down to deliver—to make Himself known in a new and most glorious character as Redeemer-God. It is this that God proclaims in the gospel. Blessed be His Name!

There are thousands in lands far and near, in tongues so different, in circumstances so varied, who have this day joined in the song of redemption. Have you? How do you know God? What is your relationship to Him? Is it the relationship of a sinner separated from Him by your sins—far from Him—or is it the relationship of one who knows Him as the One come down to deliver, to save and to bless? That word in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world" is the compassionate love of God.

"Thou hast guided them in Thy strength unto Thy holy habitation." How different are the circumstances of those people in Exodus 15 from those we read about in Exodus 3. "Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord, and spake, saying, I will sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and song, and He is become my salvation." No song like this had ever gone to heaven before. He had broken the power and delivered them from the bondage of the taskmaster, from Egypt.

God has deep, deep joy when a soul in the knowledge of Himself in redemption makes Himself his song. "The Lord is my strength and song, and He is become my salvation." How very simple, full and blessed that is! "My father's God, and I will exalt Him." That is what redemption does. It makes God Himself the portion of the soul, and the soul finds its strength and its joy in exalting Him.

One has to fear for the very fundamentals of the gospel. The fundamentals of our soul's relationship to God are being fast given up. The joy and power of them, where not given up, are lost, but it is the song of redemption that God has put into our lips. The God that came down to deliver, the God that has delivered, is a God that is comparatively little known even in these Christian lands because of the adulteration of the Word of God, of the truth of God.

But thank God! While one sees and feels that the blessed and essential truth of redemption is being forgotten and the song of redemption is being raised to God less and less, by His grace there are those who do cleave to it. May the truth of it become more and more precious to us: redemption by the blood of Christ.

"Thou in Thy mercy hast led forth the people." God's people are no longer in the land of bondage. I refer now to the state of their souls; they are redeemed; His power and love redeemed them and led them forth. On the journey none of us is at a standstill point; all are on the move,

and the end draws near. What a bright and glorious end for the redeemed people of God, but what an awful end for the unredeemed one. If one passes away unredeemed, who is at fault? Is there not a voice that says today, "Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom"? Who says that? Who is it that escapes that pit? What is the ransom? "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold . . . but with the precious blood of Christ." How many have passed this day, and pass each day from time into eternity? In passing from time into eternity they are either redeemed or unredeemed. There are just two classes. Were you and I to pass away tonight, would it be to pass away redeemed or unredeemed? We're getting very personal, but it would be either one or the other, and we know how suddenly, constantly these changes take place. One and another are swept away in death—gone never to return. It all depends on whether one knows God as the One who in mercy came down to deliver—God known as the Deliverer.

Redemption makes God Himself the boast of the soul. "He is become My salvation . . . my father's God, and I will exalt Him."

Redemption ends in glory. That is why we read a little from chapter 40. In the third chapter we saw God come down, moved by His mercy for a certain purpose—to deliver them out and to bring them in. I have put together the opening and the closing of Exodus to the joy of my own soul. God has surrounded Himself with His redeemed people! He told them to build Him a tabernacle that He might dwell among them. In the end of the book we find that that dwelling place has been completed. Think of the joy of that, the blessed God surrounding Himself with His redeemed people!

Faith anticipates that. When Christians meet together in a Scriptural way, they find themselves "Where two or three are gathered together in My Name." He is in their midst—they surround Him. That is just where God at the present has led us. He is guiding us in His strength to His holy habitation; He will "bring them in and plant them in the mountain of their inheritance," (Ex. 15:17) but already He has a dwelling place in the midst of His people, and it is joy to find Himself surrounded by His people.

So we find in the third passage we read that Moses rears up this tabernacle as the Lord commanded, and now it is not God come to deliver but the blessed fruit of His having come down to deliver. He has come down to dwell in the midst of His people. Such are the blessed effects of redemption. All is in anticipation of that great day which draws near, when God once and forever will surround Himself with His redeemed people, from every land, from every tongue and condition. What delight God will have as His eyes survey that vast innumerable company of redeemed ones, each individual of that vast company knowing himself to be a redeemed one. Each one individually will have his own personal joy in God as the God of his salvation.

The dwelling place is set up, and there He is in the midst. He is not come down now as moved by sorrows, but come down as it were in relationship with a redeemed people surrounding the blessed God Himself. It is in this way that the book of Exodus has its own special charm! God is known in redemption and it is in redemption that God rejoices rather than in creation because redemption tells out what He is in His own nature—in His moral nature, in light, in love, in holiness, in goodness, in truth. Creation tells what He is in power. Redemption tells what He is as rich in mercy, great in His love.

Gathering Up the Fragments, Chapter 1

God Came Down to DeliverExodus 3:1-8

The compassionate love of God is one thing brought before us in Exodus 3. We find Him coming down and what has brought Him down. Oh, He has heard some sighs, some groans; He has looked upon some burdened ones, and He has been moved with pity and has come down to deliver. We know how fully that is seen in God coming down to this poor world—sin-stricken and under the burden and bondage of corruption where there is a continual groaning. We know what led Him to come down: it was the compassion of His love—"God so loved."

In what way did He come down? In what way did He appear to that servant to whom He came to communicate the great truth that He had come down to deliver, and deliver in love? Where was that servant? He was in an out-of-the-way place in this world—in the backside of the desert. And, dear friends, the secrets of God are learned, in principle, outside of this world.

We know from His Word that we must be in a state spiritually to receive His communications; that is, our spirituality not deadened by unholy and unnecessary intercourse with this world. In a way we must have intercourse with this world, and that is why I say "unholy and unnecessary intercourse." We have our callings to attend to, and those callings are to be attended to in communion with God; but Satan is ever ready to deceive.

One naturally connects Exodus 3 with Luke 2. Perhaps we wonder why. In Exodus 3 Moses is in the back side of the desert where he had led the flock. In Luke 2, wonderful things had taken place—an event that brought even the angel of the Lord down from heaven, "and the glory of the Lord shone round about," and it brought a multitude of the heavenly host, who praised God. That angel of the Lord appeared to shepherds keeping watch over their flocks by night. What did Jerusalem and the great ones of this world know of what was going on out there on the plains of Judea? Nothing! I believe we can find a certain principle there of the ways of God: in order to be in communion, there must be the spirit of separation from the world.

Here we get a blessed picture of the nature of God— He came down from heaven! He had been looking down on the earth. He had been seeing, and He had been hearing something that moved Him and moved Him with compassion. Has that a word for us? Ah, yes; for God looks down on the whole world, as He did then over His people in Egypt, and this poor world is, in God's eyes, an Egypt. One phase of the world in the eyes of God is that it is one vast Egypt.

There are several country names that bring the world before us as God sees it; Egypt, for instance, is a type of the world in its power and independence of God, not depending upon Him for its power. In our chapter here we see Egypt acting independent of God and oppressing God's people.

Babylon represents the world in its glory—Babylon was a glorious kingdom. Tyre is a type of the world of commerce.

Dear friends, how thankful we should be to God for His letting us know what this world is in its various aspects before Him. We should thank Him for showing us that the place of His people, and the place of intercourse with Him, is outside of it; that is, outside of it in spirit.

Here God is about to call Moses into the place of service. He takes him out to the back side of the desert for a lesson—a lesson that He has to teach all of His servants. Moses sees a burning bush there, and he watches it a little while. He expects to see it consumed, but it burns and burns and is not burned. He says, "I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt." And as he turns aside there is a voice which calls him by name, "Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I." What is the burning bush to that one whom He is now calling into His service? "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground."

God is ever trying, in some way or other, to remind us of what is due to His presence. The presence of God made that ground holy in the back side of the desert, and quite at the beginning of Moses' history as a servant of God. It is a good thing to learn that at the outset, though God may have to remind us of the truth of it repeatedly. That truth goes a long, long way and grows more and more into our daily lives.

We may ask why God appeared in that burning bush? I believe the scriptural interpretation of the burning bush to be in the prophet Isaiah. Now let us connect Isaiah 63:9 with the burning bush in Exodus 3. It says, "In all their affliction He was afflicted." v. 9. Ah, that's what the burning bush is. God has come down from His dwelling place after having long looked upon the afflictions of His people and hearing their groans and cries.

Oh the beautiful compassion of that—the mercy of it—"come down to deliver." It does not say, "I am come down to judge their enemies," but "I am come down to deliver." That is very comforting to one's heart. We read in the 7th verse, "I . . . have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows." Is there not One now in the glory who knows the sorrows and afflictions of His people here on earth? Yes, there is. There is One who hears every sigh and groan and sees every burden, and more than that, He is One who shares all with them. "The place whereon thou standest is holy ground." God's presence made it holy.

Now I would address a word to those who by grace are gathered to the Lord's name and rejoice in that word, "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I." Just think of the grace of that! Who is it that says, "There am I in the midst of them"? It is the Son of God; it is the Lord Jesus. And I have often thought that if the Lord were there in bodily presence, how we should be mindful of what becomes His presence. He is not there in bodily presence, but though the sight and sense are not affected in that way, He is surely as really there—"There am I." That presence claims holy and loving reverence. Don't we very, very often lose the sense as to the presence of the Lord in the midst and what is due to that presence? And we suffer the consequences.

God encourages and delights in the intimacy of His people, but He never allows familiarity. There is a difference between intimacy and familiarity. With this thought before us, let us see the third verse: "And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt." Now let us mark a point of great importance. "And when the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, GOD"—it is not the Lord now, but God—"God called unto him out of the midst of the bush." Why is there a change from "LORD" to "GOD" there? God never forgets what is due to His presence, however precious and great the grace through which He makes Himself known to us. I believe that is a very valuable lesson. He is God—that is what He is in Himself. The Lord Jehovah is what He is in relationship. It is solemnly beautiful when we see Him as He comes down to deliver. But He never forgets, He is God. That little change there from "Jehovah" to "Elohim" is full of instruction: "God called unto him out of the midst of the bush." The first thing for a servant to learn is what is due to the presence of God Himself.

There is an important verse in Psalm 89:7. It is not to sinners, but to saints. "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about Him." This is a word in season. It is a word to the heart and conscience of all those that love the blessed Lord.

This is a day of lawlessness, and increasing lawlessness—a day of disregard of all authority and all source of authority. It is just the forerunner of what is coming, and coming in a dreadful form, when a vast part of this world will be under the dominion of a man who knows no will but his own. He will do according to his will; he will exalt himself above all that is called God—that is what is developing. In spite of all this sad failure of the world, God will be God; we learn from His Word that those conditions shall not be in full until He allows them and that lawless one is revealed. And these conditions are developing. In a certain place recently I witnessed an incident that reminded me of the way these things will be fulfilled—the wife had prepared in a stove everything for a fire so that when a fire was wanted, she had but to put a match to it. Ah, God is preparing the fire; but He will never put a match to it while His beloved people are here. "Because thou hast kept the word of My patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth."

The love of God is a compassionate love, but when we realize whose love it is—the holiness of that One who loved us—the more should we drink in its true character. But what is especially on my mind is that we must ever remember the reverence that becomes us in the presence of God. Suppose I take up the Word of God and read it. If I am going to get profit from it, I must have, in some measure, the unshod foot. There is no other book like the Bible in the world, for the Bible is God's Word. If we would have Him communicate His thoughts to us from that Word (and unless He does communicate His thoughts to us from it, we will never get them—vain is human learning as to getting the mind of God from His Word), we must have the unshod foot. Do you know anything of dependence upon Him in reading His Word; that is, in its character and nature of the unshod foot?

Joshua is another servant who entered upon His service, and the Lord had to deal with him in the same way. In Moses we have the man of communication; but in Joshua we have the man of conflict coming to the "captain of the host of the LORD." He is, as it were, Just beginning the conflict. In Joshua 5 he comes to a man with a drawn sword and says to him, "Art Thou for us, or for our adversaries?"—a right question. "And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked," (there is not a burning bush here) "and, behold there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him and said unto him, Art thou for us or for our adversaries?"

What has that man with the drawn sword to say to him? Read the 14th and 15th verses of Joshua 5. What do we learn from that? Ah, friends, the unshod foot— not the energy of the flesh—is needed for service, for conflict. Is not that the lesson we should learn from what the Captain of the Lord's host said to Joshua? Joshua said, "What saith my lord unto his servant?" Oh, he said, You must have the unshod foot—"Loose thy shoe from off thy foot"—and Joshua did so. Are you prepared to receive the communications from God, to enter the path of warfare? Such, I

take it, is the lesson God had for us in telling of these remarkable servants, and His ways with them.

"Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet; for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." Ex. 3:5. God has now brought Moses into a condition or position where He can communicate to him; and now He gives him communications, but let us not forget the way He took to prepare His servant to receive the communications—those communications found in the 6th verse: "Moreover He said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."

How welcome that word would be to His servant— God appearing as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. That, as it were, puts him in the path of the presence of God for the unshod foot lesson has been learned. God tells His people and His servants to feel at home in His presence, but in the sense of what He is.

A good word comes to mind now: "He is not a man, as I am." The principle of that is very important. God is God—the gracious, blessed God, but He is God, and I am a man—and if I give Him His place in my thoughts and actions, I will get my true place before Him. Observe the 7th verse: "The LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of My people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows."

I think that shows us the nature of God: to deliver them, but delivering them is not all He does for them; that is where God begins but not where He ends. God did not deliver that people of old from their burdens and groanings and leave them where they were. The gospel not only delivers the believer from the burden of his sins, but it does something more—it delivers us from the very place where these burdens were made. "Bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey." Do we know anything of that deliverance, not only from the bondage of Egypt, but from Egypt; that is, the world? God's people are not only a forgiven and saved people, but they are a separated people.

In Numbers 23, what is the second thing that God speaks of in connection with His people? "Lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations." God's association with His people is in their separation from the world. "I have chosen you out of the world." That is what He has delivered us from and what He would keep us out of; but that is not all. How good it is to know not only what God has delivered us from but what He has brought us into. He goes on to bring us unto a good land and a large. That is what He has done for every believer in His Son: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ" (JND Trans.)—"a good land and a large"—"every spiritual blessing." That is the character of the Christian's blessings—they are not temporal; they are not physical. When God saved us, He left our purses and our bodies where they were—our blessings are spiritual. Israel's blessings were temporal and physical and will be again, but the Christian's blessings are spiritual. Israel's blessings were, and will be, on the earth; the Christian's are in heaven.

What is the measure of the blessing? To Christians, He has "blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ." The believer who enters into that with some little degree of comprehension knows that his place is in Christ, and in heaven—that is the measure—"a good land and a large."

How one feels his spiritual poverty when brought into the presence of the riches of God's grace! One great cause of spiritual poverty is a lack of the unshod foot—lack of the sense of having been with Him.

"Holy and reverend is His name"—"to be had in reverence of all them that are about Him." The blessed Lord is grieved when there is not the conduct that becomes His presence—the reverence—the holy, loving fear. This is the character of reverence He means when He says, "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about Him." That does not mean judicial fear—it is spiritual fear, a happy kind of fear. The Lord give us then, dear fellow-Christian, to cultivate it.

May the Lord bless these scriptures to our souls, and may the truth of His Word teach us to shun something that is increasing—that which men call "liberty." The children of God are brought into liberty; it is the Spirit of God's liberty, but the flesh would turn that liberty to its own account. With the lesson of the unshod foot, God would teach us that we may guard against this false liberty.

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