

# Faithfulness

## *Easter-Powered Lives:*

Ephesians 1:18-23; Exodus 3:7-10

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Tony Campolo is professor of sociology of Eastern College and a popular conference speaker. He tells of the time when riding to work on a commuter train he mistakenly bent down to pick up his umbrella and found it belonged to the woman riding near him. He apologized. Later that day, Tony's wife called him and wanted him to return the collection of umbrellas he had forgotten at work. He discovered that he had left a bunch, so he boarded the evening commuter train with a bunch of umbrellas. Wouldn't you know the lady on the morning train got back on and again filled the spot near him! She spotted all of his umbrellas. She eyed him and finally spoke: "You've had a good day of it!"

Given her experience, would you see Tony as a clever thief or an absent-minded traveler? It is not what you see, but what you think about what you see that determines your attitudes and actions. It is not what you experience, but what you tell yourself (and come to believe) about your experience that determines your course.

The Apostle Paul writes in Ephesians 1 of our hope, inheritance and Easter-power. He prays that the eyes of our hearts will be enlightened. He does not merely pray about what we see, but about what we believe about what we see. He prays about what we tell ourselves and come to believe about what we experience. That is the eyes of our hearts. He wants us to see with our hearts, and not just our eyes, the presence of Christ and the power of Easter, in our midst.

When I was discouraged one day, God opened up the eyes of my heart to the presence and power of the Spirit of Christ. I was reading Moses' encounter with God through the burning bush. Do you remember how Moses, a refined and educated leader, had utterly failed at delivering his people from Egypt and spent the next four decades tending sheep in the desert? Do you recall how God used a bush that burned, but was not consumed to get his attention?

What struck me were these words of God:

***I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey...*** (Exodus 3:7-8, NIV)

Listen! God has seen the misery. God has heard the crying. God is concerned about their suffering. So God has come down to rescue and bring the people out of oppression into a new and wonderful land. Happy days are here again! It is time to celebrate. Prayers are being answered. God is rescuing and bringing his people to the Promised Land, a land of abundance. However, these words of God follow:

***So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.*** (Exodus 3:10, NIV)

What? I thought God is rescuing the people and bringing them out. What's Moses got to do with it? What do we have to do if God is rescuing?

Now think about it. God was responding to the people's hurt and need, he was rescuing them and bringing them to a beautiful land when Moses arrived in Egypt and Pharaoh hardened his heart, whipped and beat Jewish leaders and increased their oppression (Exodus 5). God was rescuing his people when he made them wander in the desert so that the Egyptians would pursue them to the Red Sea. God was rescuing his people when they ended up stuck and vulnerable

with their backs to the sea and their fronts to an overwhelming army (Exodus 14). God was rescuing his people when they advanced into the desert three days without water and finally when they found some, it was bitter (Exodus 15). God was rescuing them after they left an oasis of water, feared starvation with no bread and received manna from heaven (Exodus 16). God was rescuing them when once again they found no water and God gave water from a rock (Exodus 17, Numbers 20). God was rescuing Israel when the Amalekites attacked them, Joshua fought them and Moses needed Aaron and Hur to hold up his arms in prayer so they could prevail (Exodus 17). God was rescuing his people when they approached Mount Sinai and the people became frightened of God. Aaron and the people later thought Moses died on Mount Sinai and turned their confidence elsewhere, and 3,000 died from the swords of the Levites who executed their brothers, friends and neighbors in defense of God's honor (Exodus 32). God was rescuing them when brother Aaron and sister Miriam, a godly woman, opposed Moses because of his Cushite wife, and Miriam's skin became white like a leper (Numbers 12). God was rescuing his people through Moses when the people refused to enter the Promised Land and spent the next 40 years in the desert (Numbers 13 & 14). God was rescuing his people when Moses' first cousin Korah led a rebellion against him, when in his rebellion 250 community leaders were burned up, two extended families swallowed up, and 14,700 Israelites died from plague (Numbers 16). God was rescuing them when a powerful Edomite army blocked their way to the Promised Land and they had to take a lengthy detour (Numbers 20). God was rescuing them when on that detour, they were attacked by Canaanites and some Israelites were captured (Numbers 21). God was rescuing them when the people complained bitterly about the lack of bread and water and venomous snakes attacked them, and when Moses had to fashion a bronze snake for them to look at to be healed (Numbers 21). God was rescuing them when many

engaged in sexual immorality and idolatry with Moabite women and 24,000 more died in a plague (Numbers 25). God was rescuing them.

However, God was not just rescuing them physically. The oppression was not just back in Egypt, in the desert or from their enemies. The oppression was in their hearts. They walked without the sense of God's love and presence. They lost faith because of what they told themselves about their circumstances and what they came to believe. The eyes of their hearts saw human frailty, dangerous difficulties, formidable enemies and reasonable desires; rather than God's promise, purpose and presence with them. They would tell themselves and one another the wrong thing. They would point at one another or at their circumstance, but not at God. However, God was directing their steps and truly rescuing their hearts as much as he was rescuing their lives. In this testing, he was rescuing Moses and the people. Don't look at Moses as a poor, mistreated leader! He was being rescued from that oppression too.

God never recanted his decision to put us human beings in charge of this world. That is why his rescue came with a human leader. However, God rescues what needs rescuing which includes our hearts. That is why Paul writes about Easter power that works within us:

***Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.***  
(Ephesians 3:20-21, NIV)

God works through our faith. The very power that raised Jesus from the dead is released when we act in faith rather than fear. The Israelites suffered so much more because of their God-forsaken vision in a God-filled world. Christ fills this world with his Spirit. He fills our circumstance with his Spirit. Do we believe he is working his rescue plan in our circumstance? In every situation, God is faithful! Will we be? Our faith makes all the difference!