

Exodus: What We Mean When We Say God

Part One – Keeping His Promises

By Pastor David Fields

I. Everyone's a Theologian

After-Christendom: In the West (i.e., Europe, North America, Australia), we still live with a hangover from Christendom – this situation where the Christian story was well known, even if not everyone was a Christian. There was something of a shared understanding that when we say “God” we mean at least something about the God we read of in the Bible. But that time is long gone.

“Today when I say “God”, you might think any number of things, depending on your country of birth, language, religion, church experience, background – and, of course, whether or not you have cable.” – John Mark Comer

Everyone's a theologian.

We all have some ‘view of God.’ Like, is God kind or cruel? Is God near to me and my life or distant, far-off?

“Is God...strict and uptight like a fundamentalist preacher, of free and easygoing like a good, educated progressive?” Or “What if God and religion are just an endless source of violence and hatred and bigotry and hypocrisy and really bad music?” – John Mark Comer

See, it matters what you think of God because the way we answer the question “Who is God?” will define you. It will set the trajectory of your life.

“God created man in his own image, and being the gentleman that he is, man returned the favour.” – Jean-Jacque Rosseau (maybe)

We have a tendency to have our vision of God defined by, well, by our own standards. A great way to check your vision is to ask: “Does God ever disagree with me?” Like, “does he like the things I like, and hate the things I hate? Does he never challenge me?”

The most quoted and referred to passage by the rest of the Bible is from Exodus 34, where God reveals himself by “proclaiming his Name.”

“The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; – Exodus 34:6-7a

This is the most quoted, repeated, re-tweeted, “shared and liked” part of the Bible by the other Biblical authors. Since “name” in the Bible is the “who-ness” of a person, the Biblical authors draw us back, over and over, to this moment where God “draws back the curtains” for Moses, and all of us.

II. Reading the Old Testament

Some possible objects, or at least questions. Isn't the Old Testament, well, the part of the Bible that is "over"? So, don't we just focus on Jesus now?

1) Exodus will teach us about life with God

When Paul writes: "All Scripture is God breathed and useful for teaching, correcting, rebuking and training in righteousness so that the person of God can be fully equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16-17) he's talking about the Old Testament.

The "New Testament" as we know it didn't even exist at that point. The early church and the New Testament tell us to read and study the Old Testament so that we learn how to live faithfully before God.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10, that Christian communities needs to focus on the story of the Exodus in particular, saying these things were "written down as warnings for us on whom the culmination of the ages has come." – 1 Cor 10:11

2) Exodus will inform our view of God

The church, wisely, rejected the view of Marcion of Sinope (2nd C) and hung onto the fact that the Old Testament was Jesus' Bible, that we need the whole witness of Scripture to know and love and follow God, and that in the face of Jesus we meet *this God*.

The Bible is telling one, unified story, that comes to its climax in the person and work of Jesus – who is God himself come to be "with us" and to save us. But to really understand who Jesus is, we need to read, and know, and appreciate the whole story. Jesus most perfectly reveals the God whom we meet in Exodus and the rest of the Bible.

3) Exodus prepares us to experience God's presence with us in his Son Jesus

As we work through the text of Exodus, we'll keep bumping up against the fact that this book reveals who God is and prepares us to experience the presence of God "with us" in his final and fullest revelation – in God the Son – in Jesus (see John 1:14-18).

III. Exodus in Context

The first verse from our reading:

"And these are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob..." – Exodus 1:1a

The last verses from our reading:

“*And* God heard their groaning, and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. So, God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them.” – Exodus 2:24-25

Exodus is carrying forward – more – is drastically deepening, the story God is telling that begins with, well, “In the beginning...” – Genesis 1:1a

- God creates humanity in his own “image.” (Gen 1:26)
- God blesses humans: “God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.” – Genesis 1:28
- The peace we were made to enjoy is disrupted by human rebellion against God and God’s ways. (Gen 3)
- God calls Abram and begins his rescue mission through his family. God makes a promise that they will have a son – their own son, in their old age – and he calls this old man outside: “Look up at the sky and count the stars – if indeed you can count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” – Genesis 15:5

Exodus is the Central Story of the Old Testament

Exodus is to the Old Testament what “The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe” is to the Chronicles of Narnia series. It is the central story of God’s salvation prior to Jesus’ coming. And Genesis is, well, more like “The Magician’s Nephew.” The first volume – Genesis – prepares us for the big action in the second volume – Exodus.

The book that begins with “*And...*” is the book that God gives us to see who he is, and how he’s fulfilling his rescue mission.

IV. Implications from Exodus 1&2

1) God makes good on his promises

“But the Israelites were exceedingly fruitful; they multiplied greatly, increasing in numbers and becoming so numerous that the land was full of them.” – Exodus 1:7

The language of God’s blessing from Genesis shows up here in two ways. God’s creational blessing, and the promise to make Abraham’s family into a great nation.

2) Read the Bible - a sense of our own social location

Jesus warns his followers against what he calls “the yeast of Herod and the Pharisees” (Mark 8:15). What does that mean? Herod, in Jesus’ day, was an awful ruler, happy to ignore the plight of his people, and simply live comfortably off the backs of his people. The Pharisees loaded up God’s people with crushing demands and a legalism to boot.

Herod is a Pharaoh “type” in Jesus’ time. But Jesus is clear: his followers need to be aware of how we can function like Herod...or Pharaoh.

- We ask if there are any areas of our lives where we function, like Pharaoh, out of fear, and end up trying to control others or control situations?
- Do we participate in systems that oppress others?

3) Shiphrah and Puah become models of what it means to fear God

These midwives chose God’s ways over Pharaoh’s. Your boss might ask you to do things you know are not lined up with God’s ways. What do we do? I think, with God’s help, we follow Shiphrah and Puah. We fear God. And that means we love and honour and respect God and his ways, even if it’s costly.

4) The God we meet hears the cries of the oppressed

“God *heard* their groaning, and he *remembered* his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob so God *looked* on the Israelites and *was concerned* about them.” – Exodus 2:24-25

The original Hebrew word translated here as “...concerned about them,” might be better translated as simply, “...God knew.”

God can be trusted to keep his promises. All of them. We might not know the timing. We certainly might not like it. There may be cries into what seems like the dark. But God...knows. God remembers us.

The Gospel of Jesus as the Promise Fulfilled

This promise would be kept by God most perfectly as a descendant of Abraham, a part of this family, would be born to a young woman named Mary. Like Moses, he would miraculously be kept safe from another tyrant – from King Herod, who also murdered baby Hebrew boys.

And like Moses, he would be committed to justice. But unlike Moses, he wouldn’t seek justice through force or violence. He would stand on the side of what is just, but in the end, he would extinguish the power of evil by letting evil do its worst to him on the cross. And would be raised to life on the other side of death with the greatest promise of all – that he has defeated more than Pharaoh or Herod – he had defeated death and evil itself.

Life Group Discussion

Open Up

In the message we heard a quote from a book by John Mark Comer: “Today when I say “God”, you might think any number of things, depending on your country of birth, language, religion, church experience, background – and, of course, whether or not you have cable.”

What do you think has had the most impact on how you understand God? What do you think or how do you feel about that?

Dig In

1. In the message we talked about how Exodus 34:6-7 is the most quoted passage by the rest of the Biblical authors. Read it together:

“The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished;” – Exodus 34:6-7a

How does this depiction of God’s “Name” (which is a shorthand way in the Bible to talk about the essence of you as a person) compared to the ideas you typically carry with you about God? (Note: Ex 34:7 goes into more detail, but those details need much more explaining that we cover in this message/study – so put that to the side just for the time being).

2. In the message we heard the following:

“The Bible is telling one, unified story, that comes to its climax in the person and work of Jesus – who is God himself come to be “with us” and to save us. But to really understand who Jesus is, we need read, and know, and appreciate the whole story. Jesus most perfectly reveals the God whom we meet in Exodus and the rest of the Bible.”

Do you typically value the Old Testament as a necessary part of knowing the story that leads to Jesus, and that helps us know or follow Jesus better? Why or why not?

3. Read Exodus 2:23-25. Have you had an experience where you came to know how God “heard” and “saw” and “remembered” and was “concerned” for you or your situation? Share it with others as a way of encouraging them, and glorifying God.
4. In what ways do you need to patiently wait for God as you cry out to him? Share it with your group as a way to receive their prayers.

Prayer: Take some time to share any requests with your Life Group and pray for them. Take time to ask God to reveal more and more of his character to you, and to help you live in a way that lines up with him.