

Our remarkable God uses unremarkable people

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[0 : 00] After the Sabbath at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

There was a violent earthquake, but an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning and his clothes were white as snow.

The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. The angel said to the woman, Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified.

He is not here, he has risen. Just as he said, come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee.

There you will see him, now I have told you. So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

[1 : 05] Suddenly Jesus said to them, Greetings, he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshipped him. Then Jesus said to them, Do not be afraid, go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there you will see me.

I am now going to sing a song. While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened.

When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, telling them, You are to say his disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.

If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble. So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed.

And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day. Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go.

[2 : 17] When they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age. Amen. May the Lord add his blessing to this reading from his word.

Now, can you turn with me in your Bible this time to the book of Exodus? And we're going to continue in our study in this wonderful book.

We are going to be reading Exodus chapter 5 from verse 22 to the end of chapter 6. So let's hear God's word once again.

[3 : 26] Moses returned to the Lord and said, Why, Lord? Why have you brought trouble on this people? Is this why you sent me? Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has brought trouble on this people and you have not rescued your people at all.

Then the Lord said to Moses, Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh. Because of my mighty hand, he will let them go. Because of my mighty hand, he will drive them out of this country.

God also said to Moses, I am the Lord. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name, the Lord, I did not make myself known to them.

I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan where they resided as foreigners. Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the Israelites whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and I have remembered my covenant.

Therefore say to the Israelites, I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm

and with mighty acts of judgment.

[4 : 43] I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hands to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

I will give it to you as a possession. I am the Lord. Moses reported this to the Israelites, but they did not listen to him because of their discouragement and harsh labor.

Then the Lord said to Moses, Go tell Pharaoh, king of Egypt, to let the Israelites go out of his country. But Moses said to the Lord, if the Israelites will not listen to me, why would Pharaoh listen to me, since I speak with faltering lips?

Now the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron about the Israelites and Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and he commanded them to bring the Israelites out of Egypt. These were the heads of their families. The son of Reuben, the firstborn son of Israel, were Hanok and Palu, Hezron and Carmi.

These were the clans of Reuben. The sons of Simeon were Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jachin, Zohar, and Shaul, the son of a Canaanite woman. These were the clans of Simeon. These were the names of the sons of Levi, according to their records, Gershon, Kohath, and Merari.

[5 : 57] Levi lived 137 years. The sons of Gershon, by clans, were Libni and Shimei. The sons of Kohath were Amram, Ishar, Hebron, and Uziel.

Kohath lived 133 years. The sons of Merari were Machli and Mushi. These were the clans of Levi, according to their records. Amram married his father's sister, Jochebed, who bore him Aaron and Moses.

Amram lived 137 years. The sons of Ishar were Korah, Nepheg, and Zichri. The sons of Uziel were Mishael, Elzavan, and Sithri. Aaron married Elisheba, the daughter of Amminadab, and sister of Nashon, and she bore him Nadab, and Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar.

The sons of Korah were Aser, Elkanah, and Abiasath. These were the Korahite clans. Eliezer, son of Aaron, married one of the daughters of Putiel, and she bore him Phinehas.

These were the heads of the Levite families, clan by clan. It was this Aaron and Moses to whom the Lord said, bring the Israelites out of Egypt by their divisions. They were the ones who spoke to Pharaoh, king of Egypt, about bringing the Israelites out of Egypt, this same Moses and Aaron.

[7 : 11] Now when the Lord spoke to Moses in Egypt, he said to him, I am the Lord. Tell Pharaoh, king of Egypt, everything I tell you. But Moses said to the Lord, since I speak with faltering lips, why would Pharaoh listen to me?

Amen. So today, what we're going to think about, what we're going to see from our text, is that our remarkable God, the one who declares himself to be, I am the Lord, uses unremarkable people for his purposes.

We've said it before, and I'm sure we will say it again, that the Bible is history's most honest book.

That cover to cover, we are invited to recognize that God's people are not very impressive.

So often, rather than trust, we see doubt. So often, rather than love, we see hate. Rather than obedience, we see sinful disobedience. And we are being reminded in so many ways that God saves by grace.

And that's something we celebrate in the gospel. This comes to us as good news, that Jesus, the God-man, entered into human history. And that it's through his sinless obedience, and through his sacrificial death, and through his resurrection life, that we can be saved and enter into relationship with God.

[8 : 43] That's good news for unremarkable, unimpressive, sinful people like us. The question for today is this, do we believe that this same remarkable God who saves by grace can use those unremarkable people on his mission, in building his kingdom for his glory?

The text that we just read shows God, by his spirit, leading Moses to highlight this point, to highlight Moses' own weakness, to highlight the glory of God as the next part of the drama in Egypt is about to take place.

What's interesting about this text is that there are different frames that we can find here? How do we think about frames?

Think about an art gallery, think about the walls of our houses and family photos, or framed portraits that hang in a gallery.

What's the point of a frame? It's to draw attention to what is inside. Well, there are two frames in this section, and one, inside that frame, is a reminder of just how unremarkable and how weak the

people of God often are, and one frame that shows this wonderful portrait of who our God really, truly is.

[10:17] One frame, we're going to see Moses, the discouraged believer. One frame is going to show us Moses, the unimpressive believer, but inside we're going to see a wonderful portrait of God.

I am the Lord, and it's this Lord who is able for his glory and to build his kingdom, he is able to use people like Moses, with doubts and fears, people like us, with our doubts and fears too. Remember, this is Moses telling his story. This is Moses telling his story to a generation of Israelites in the wilderness, and if we use our imagination, perhaps we can see Moses, in effect, telling the people, I am just like you, I experienced doubts, I am someone who lacked patience in God's timing, hard times made me question God, I often felt too weak for the task that God had given me to do.

And as we've already noticed, God doesn't correct Moses, God doesn't massage Moses' ego and says, no of course Moses, you're wonderful, rather, what Moses is going to tell the Israelites is that God revealed himself time and time again, in patience and a mercy, here revealing more of what it means that God is the I am Lord.

And bear in mind that Moses tells this story once they've been released from slavery. It's this Lord who has kept his promise to save us. It's this Lord who's kept his promise to be with us.

[12:00] It's this Lord who's keeping his promise to bring us home. So Moses could stand before the nation of Israel and say, our success is not about me, it's not my wonderful leadership, it's all about the Lord and his faithfulness and his saving grace.

And by God's design that's how this text is supposed to fall on our ears. So let's think about this first frame. So boys and girls on your sheet, this is the first point that we're thinking about.

There is a frame that we can see that shows us Moses as the discouraged believer. So you'll see one side of the frame, chapter 5, verse 22 and 23, and the other side of it in chapter 6, verse 9 to 12.

So chapter 5, verse 22, we read, Moses returned to the Lord and said, why Lord, why have you brought trouble on this people? So he returned to the Lord. So he's coming to God in prayer and he's bringing lament.

Why, Lord? You made promises. Within the covenant we have expectations that life will work itself out in a certain way. Things are not getting better.

[13:13] Why do we not see what we are hoping for and what you have promised? Instead, what are they seeing? They're seeing more trouble. trouble. Pharaoh has brought more trouble.

And Moses says, Pharaoh has brought trouble because of the Lord's words. In response to the Lord's plan, Pharaoh has only made things more difficult for the people.

And so Moses and Israel, they're discouraged. Why have things got harder? Moses is discouraged. You have not rescued your people at all, he says. So that's one side of the frame.

And we're going to come back to verses 1 to 8 and we're going to see the Lord revealing more of himself and his character and more of his glorious plans. But let's leave that to one side and let's move to the other side of the frame to verse 9 to 12.

So Moses came and reports to the Israelites what God has said about himself, but the people don't listen because of their discouragement, because of their circumstances, their hard labor.

[14:22] And in verse 12 we see Moses' discouragement coming out. If the Israelites won't listen, why in the world would Pharaoh listen?

So he feels discouraged about the task that God has given him to do. No one's going to listen.

There is no use in my being there. So the circumstances facing Moses are ones where all he sees is apparent failure.

failure. And so he has these questions about his own ability. This is the frame through which Moses is viewing his life and his mission. And again, it would be very easy for us to point the finger of blame at Moses and say, well, you should know better.

You should have more faith. God has been speaking to you, but doesn't he remind us of ourselves when we're being honest? We hear God say to us in his word, do not fear, for I am with you.

But there are circumstances and there are people and there are times where we are fearful, where we are anxious and where we are paralyzed and we fail to respond in faith.

[15:31] You know, we believe that Jesus says to us, as he did in Matthew 28, go and make disciples and surely I am with you to the end of the age. But when we get no response or we face rejection, we become discouraged.

Perhaps we decide to even stop bothering because we don't see any point. How could we make any difference? God leads Moses to write down his story, to make sure that God's people would always understand that when it comes to our salvation and when it comes to our mission, we would recognize that all glory belongs to God and that we would place our hope in God and not in ourselves.

We would place our hope in the one who says, I am the Lord. So we've said that there's this frame and we've seen Moses as a discouraged believer, but in the middle we have a beautiful portrait where God reveals, I am the Lord.

So boys and girls, this is the second thing on your sheet, chapter 6 verses 1 to 8. Look at how chapter 6 begins, Then the Lord said to Moses, Now you'll see what I will do to Pharaoh, because of my mighty hand he will let them go.

Moses in his discouragement stands in need of reassurance, and the Lord again is very patient and merciful and makes a fresh promise to Moses. Now you'll see what I will do.

[17:10] Pharaoh has brought trouble, he has brought difficulty, but my power, my mighty hand will bring freedom. In fact, so great is God's strength that he will turn the mind of Pharaoh so that Pharaoh himself will drive the people of God out of his country.

Moses needs to be reassured. It's not on you, Moses. It's all about the I am God. And Moses too is given a gracious reminder, a reminder of the God who never changes.

Verse 4, I also established my covenant with them, with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them the land of Canaan. Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the Israelites whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and I have remembered my covenant.

When God remembers something, it's not like it was previously forgotten, it means he's about to act. So the Lord graciously and patiently makes himself known to Moses, reminding him of his power, reminding him of his promises, saying to Moses, at every point, you can trust me.

And then we get that fascinating statement in verses 2 and 3. Perhaps you noticed it as we read.

[18:34] God also said to Moses, I am the Lord. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name, the Lord, I did not make myself known to them. So here's another gift from God to Moses.

Moses is given a new revelation, an ongoing revelation of who God is and what God is going to do, of what it means for God to be the Lord, the personal covenant-making God.

So God says to Moses that the story of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was one of them knowingly as God Almighty. And that's a wonderful thing. In Genesis 17, we discover that this Almighty God can come to Abraham at the age of 99 and can call him the father of nations and can promise him that he will bring his family into the land.

In Genesis 28, we hear this wonderful word that God Almighty can make Jacob into a community and bring them to the land of Canaan. But now what's going to happen with Moses and this generation is that they are going to see those covenant promises come to life.

Promise is about to become reality. They're going to see I am the Lord in a whole new way as he begins to work out these promises.

[19:57] And we see that and we're going to focus on verses 6 to 8. And notice as well, so we're thinking about frames, notice that verses 6 to 8 when God speaks, he begins with, I am the Lord, and he closes with, I am the Lord, and everything in between is intended to help us to know more about who is the Lord, what is his character like.

And there are three truths in these verses. First truth, I am the Lord, and I will redeem you. Verse 6, I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment.

Who is the Lord? The Lord is the Redeemer. the present reality of the people of Israel, they are under the yoke of slavery. That is their experience, the misery of being slaves.

But God is going to act. He says, I will bring you out, I will free you, I will redeem you. Here is God saying, I will act as your kinsman Redeemer.

That close family relative who would pay the price to relieve a debt, to buy a person out of slavery. God says, I will do that for you.

[21 : 22] God is in covenant relationship with his people. He is going to pay the price. He is going to bear the debt to secure the freedom for his own. That's the promise that they receive as slaves.

And it's the promise of the gospel that we receive. as Fergus was praying. Jesus says, anyone who sins is a slave to sin. Well, what's the good news of the gospel?

That God has sent his son Jesus to free us from that greater slavery than political slavery. That Jesus comes as the one declaring, I am the Lord.

And he comes because he loves his bride. And he's going to bear the debt and pay the price to remove the chains from his bride, to make his bride righteous and holy so that we, the people of God, by faith in him, would know freedom in Christ.

So the Lord is the great redeemer of his people. A discouraged believer like Moses needs to be reminded of that.

[22 : 35] Discouraged believers in 21st century Edinburgh need to be reminded of that. The second truth in this portrait of what it means that God is the Lord, I am the Lord and I will take you as my own.

Verse 7, I will take you as my own people and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians.

I am the Lord, I am the Lord your God, I will be your God. What is this? This is an invitation for the people of God to say this is my God, I belong to him, I know him personally, I am the Lord might seem distant, I am your Lord and your God reminds us of just how personal God's love becomes.

God will save his people for relationship as Moses and Israel will soon enough discover God's people are redeemed, not so they can enjoy political freedom but they can have freedom for relationship with the God who made them and who acts in grace to save them.

And that's why the journey doesn't go from Egypt straight to the promised land, rather it goes from Egypt to Mount Sinai because there God will meet with his people as he promised, there he will renew a covenant with them and they will enjoy the Lord's presence there at Mount Sinai.

[24 : 11] They will become the Lord's own people. Remember the promise of Jesus at the end of Matthew 28, that he would always be with his people to the very end of the age.

It's a wonderful gospel reality. What's the joy of the new heaven and the new earth? for the believer in the Lord Jesus, that Christ and his bride, the church, will be together forever, having been made righteous and washed, and there'll be a wedding feast, and there will be joy when Jesus and his church are together forever.

There is wonderful hope for discouraged believers when we remember that the Lord loves his own and seeks relationship and fellowship and sent his son Jesus to pay the price that we might enjoy that.

Truth number three in this portrait of what it means that God says, I am a Lord, I am a Lord, verse 8, and I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. Now think about the people of God's experience in Egypt. They had no land of their own by this stage, no rights, no freedom, no freedom to worship.

[25 : 41] If that's your reality, imagine how amazing this promise sounds. It's the promise of home. It's a promise of freedom and security.

It's a promise of being with God in God's place as God's people and enjoying his blessing. poor, discouraged Israelites. It sounds too good to be true for them, but they will discover it is good and it is true.

And the Lord offers certainty. Notice in verse 8, I swore with uplifted hand. I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. God is offering certainty to his people.

I will save you and I will bring you home. It's the certainty of Jesus' promise to the thief on the cross. As that thief turned in faith to Jesus, today you will be with me in paradise.

And it's the same promise that leads us to have hope, that our ultimate hope, home for the people of God. Revelation 21 verse 3, God's dwelling place is now among the people.

[26 : 49] He will dwell with them. God's love for him. The Lord saves us for relationship and he saves us so that we might enjoy an eternal home with him.

It's good news for discouraged believers. We need this portrait. When people go to see a famous painting, you go to see the Mona Lisa, and you go to see any famous painting, you're not about the frame, are you?

You want to see the beautiful picture inside. Moses and Israel, in their discouragement, they need to learn to look away from themselves and to fix their eyes on the great I am and to trust his covenant promise.

That they will come to recognize that every step of the journey out of Egypt to Mount Sinai to the promised land, it is the Lord who will be with them. He is with them and he is for them.

And the same is true for us. Jesus is our Lord. He is the great I am. The new covenant promise is kept in him, that in him we have redemption, in him we have relationship with the living God, in him we have the promise of an eternal home.

[28 : 06] Robert Murray McShane, the famous preacher from Dundee, reminded his congregation more than once, for every one look itself, take ten looks to Christ.

Moses and Israel needed to stop looking at themselves and their inability to look to the God of all ability. And the same is true for us, we need to learn to look to Christ.

That's not the only frame in our story, there is a second one we need to see, boys and girls, this is the third point in your worksheet. Frame two draws attention to Moses the unimpressive believer. Let's read again verse 28 to 30. Now when the Lord spoke to Moses in Egypt, he said to him, I am a lord, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt everything I tell you.

But Moses said to the Lord, since I speak with faltering lips, why would Pharaoh listen to me? I don't know how many of you enjoy superhero movies, TV, comic books, I quite like them.

[29 : 23] We just started watching recently Superman and Lois on TV. Superman's an interesting character, Clark Kent's an interesting character, mild-mannered, regular guy, they're always selling it, he's just this normal, slightly clumsy sort of a guy, until he's really not.

He's a regular guy, until he's using his super strength, or his laser eyes, or his super hearing, and then we are reminded actually he's totally a superhero.

When we read the Bible, and remember how honest the Bible is, we recognize that the Bible is not presenting us with biblical superheroes. Moses is no biblical superhero.

He seems an awful lot like us, with his doubts, with his fears. In chapter 6, verses 10 to 12, and then those verses in 28 to 30, we have the same event recorded twice.

For emphasis, they frame what comes in the middle. The Lord says, go, I've told you to go, I've told you what's going to happen, and Moses says, I have a speech problem, I'm not a public speaker, the plan just won't work.

[30 : 41] Again, at no point does God correct him instead. And this is really interesting, so God who directs the writing of Scripture directs Moses at this stage to write down his family tree.

Seems quite an unusual thing to place at this stage of the story, but it's here, and we need to ask ourselves, why here and why now? And as we start to think about some of these characters, we don't have time to think about a lot of them, but what we discover we are getting here in this family tree, in a sense, is one of those, they talk about warts and all portraits, don't they?

It's not like the airbrushed, everything looks all glossy and wonderful, it's a warts and all picture of Moses and his family, and it's there by God's design. Again, he's not sort of looking to puff up Moses' pride, this emphasizes how unimpressive, unremarkable Moses and his family are to highlight that other portrait of God's glory and God's grace.

Where does Moses, led by the Spirit, begin in this selected family history? It begins with Reuben, and Reuben brought open shame on his family through sexual sin, Genesis 35.

We have a mention of verse 15, Shaul, the son of a Canaanite woman, an outsider.

[32 : 18] We have in verse 21, we have Korah. Korah leads an open rebellion against Moses, God's appointed leader. And of course we have Moses' brother Aaron, who by this stage, in the retelling of the story, has helped Israel to make the golden cat.

And there's Moses himself. And we saw a couple of weeks ago, Moses who killed an Egyptian and had to flee for his life. Perhaps it's no surprise that it says to us in verse 26, it was this Aaron and Moses.

Verse 27, it was this same Moses and Aaron from this family background, with this list of sin in their past, with all their doubts and all their failures.

What becomes absolutely clear to the people of Israel is Moses, although he grew up in the palace, he's absolutely one of them, one of them in terms of his genealogy, but also one of them in terms of his own sin and disobedience.

