

Moses and the Power of God

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Preacher: James Ross

[0 : 0 0] since I speak with faltering lips. So, we're thinking this evening about Moses and the power of God, but I think this text reveals a common Christian struggle. In many ways, probably what we're thinking about tonight parallels what we were thinking about, or Derek was leading us into, in Mark chapter 6. That Christian experience when we are faced with trials and suffering and setbacks, when we find faith can so easily give way to doubt and fear, when our focus shifts from God, His power, His goodness, His glory, to me, to my weakness, my inability, my failings, to go to a different story of Jesus on the water. Remember that time when Jesus comes to the disciples walking on the water, and Peter asks to come and also walk on the water, and he's invited to do that. And he's walking by faith, but then fear comes when his gaze shifts from Jesus to the stormy water. Perhaps we've had that experience either on a boat or on a plane. We pass through stormy water, or we go through turbulence, and we can find ourselves panicking. What's going to happen? What am I going to do? And in that moment, the best thing to do, of course, is to trust to the skill of the pilot, to look to them to guide us. Well, just like us, what we see in this passage, and we're going to focus especially on chapter 5, verse 22, to chapter 6, verse 12, we see Moses, and we see Israel wrestling with doubts and fears of a whole range of different kinds. And we see as well that those doubts and fears can be really hard to shake off. So, they're discouraged, and yet God reveals wonderful truths about Himself. And we might expect, and then Moses and Israel were full of faith, and they were courageous, but no, they're still discouraged. It can be really hard to shake that off. But the answer, when we find ourselves shaken, when our faith is struggling, the hope that God gives remains the same. I am the Lord. We're called to trust in this God, the God of powerful acts, the God of the mighty hand, the God of powerful love, the God of covenant loyalty. And what we need to know and to rest in are these realities of God's power and love for His people, especially as we see them demonstrated in the gospel and in Jesus. So, our theme tonight is this. When God's people feel weak, we need to know and trust our powerful and loving Lord. So, let's begin here when God's people feel weak.

So, Moses wrote the book of Exodus a number of years after this event. So, what we have is a really honest reflection. Here is Moses talking about his own personal struggles. Here is Moses revealing the size of the people of God. Slavery and oppression that doesn't seem to change is squeezing out hope. The section then provides a very helpful diagnosis for ourselves. What causes doubts and fears to rise in the hearts of God's people then? There's a good chance we're going to recognize the same in ourselves, the challenges to faith. The first one that we can identify is all about delay. So, you go back to Exodus 5, verse 22 and 23. We have Moses asking, why have you brought trouble on this people? Is this why you sent me? Pharaoh's bringing trouble.

You've not rescued your people at all. What's the problem here? Moses' timing doesn't match God's timing. In chapter 5, we read it, the beginning, he's sent with that message, let my people go. Here is the God of the universe promising salvation. But what happens is that that's met with a negative response.

Pharaoh says, I don't know who God is. I'm not interested in listening to the Lord. And in fact, he says to the people, you are lazy. This desire to worship is because of laziness. So, he makes their life much, much harder. God promises salvation, but things don't get better. They get worse.

Remember how the people spoke to Moses, verse 21, may the Lord look on you and judge you. We're obnoxious to Pharaoh. He's put a sword in our hand. He wants to kill us. And so, Moses asked, why there's trouble? Why has there not been a rescue? Now, we know, the end of the story, God will demonstrate his glory, and this delay will serve that purpose.

[5 : 13] We're going to see all those mighty acts of judgment and salvation. Israel and Egypt are going to see who the true God is. They're going to discover his glory. We know that freedom will come.

But for them, they were stuck in the grind and in the misery, and God's delay, all it does is add pain. Now, I imagine some of us recognize this. God doesn't change our circumstances, or they seem to get worse.

God doesn't change a heart. Resistance to Jesus continues. God doesn't change a heart. God doesn't change a heart. God doesn't seem to be hearing and answering our prayers. God's delay can cause grief.

It tests our faith when we come to a point like Moses where we have to recognize that God's ways are not the same as our ways. It tests our faith when we find ourselves living in the waiting place.

It tests our faith when we understand that God could change things, but he doesn't. Delay can cause doubt and can cause fear.

[6 : 31] Here's a second thing we see. This is in chapter 6, verse 9. We see a people who are discouraged. God's given wonderful words through Moses.

Moses reported these words to the Israelites, but they did not listen to him because of their discouragement. Why are they discouraged? They're discouraged because God seems absent.

In their story, there's this movement that's happening all the time. There was a great spiritual high. Just before the passage we read in chapter 4, verse 29, we find Moses bringing all the people of God together, reporting God's plan to save them.

And the people believed. And when they heard that the Lord was concerned about them and had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshipped. Here's a high point for them. God has seen and God has heard and God's going to answer.

But now there's this great low as they're faced with discouraging reality. How to keep going when the gap between promise and reality to them seems as wide as the River Nile?

[7 : 44] Isn't it easy sometimes to become like another character from the Old Testament, Naomi in the story of Ruth. She came back to her hometown. Don't call me Naomi.

That name means pleasant. God hasn't dealt pleasantly with me. Call me Mara. Because God has dealt bitterly with me. Living in the gap can be so tough.

We know the promises of God. God has promised peace. But my heart and my life feels like chaos. God promises to be present with us always. Sometimes we don't feel it.

He promises His power. But often we're so conscious of how fragile we are. Faced with a whole range of different challenges in our lives. Challenges in our relationships, in our work, in our studies, with our health, with our finance, even in the church.

These can all dominate our view. These can all dominate our view, and they can be profoundly discouraging to faith, as Israel discovered. Here's a third reason why God's people can struggle and hold on to faith.

[8 : 57] And it's to do with distress. Again, it's there in verse 9. They weren't able to listen to God's word through Moses because of their discouragement and their harsh labor.

They were facing distress. There's an organization called the International Justice Mission, set up by a group of Christian lawyers to look to rescue people from modern-day slavery, to advocate for them.

There was a story they published recently from Rajasthan in India of 33 slaves rescued from a brick. It wasn't even a factory.

That Israel as a nation was feeling. Back-breaking work driven on by slave drivers in the intense heat of the Egyptian sun with no rest, with no provisions, and with no hope.

Physical distress and spiritual distress. Distress. God said He would come. He would set us free. But still, there's the whip, and still, there's the grind.

[10 : 37] Distress. Like the prophet Elijah. Remember, after his spiritual high of showing up there on the mountain who the one true God was.

Well, after coming down the mountain, hears the threat of the wicked queen Jezebel. Jezebel wants to kill Elijah. And all of a sudden, he feels so exhausted, and he feels all alone.

Am I the only worshiper of God in this place? And he says to God, take my life. It's too much for me. This side of eternal rest, of glory with Jesus, circumstances can feel like a crushing burden.

Wave after wave can crash in, and faith can be a struggle. We see it even with Moses. Even after all that Moses has heard God save himself.

Look at verse 12, and we sense something of despair in Moses. 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?

[11 : 47] God, I did what you asked, and look how it's turning out. Your people are beginning to give up. How will Pharaoh listen? Nothing's going to change. Why would anyone listen to me? Feeling so small.

Years later, after God had delivered his people, secured their freedom, met with them on Mount Sinai, took them towards the promised land.

There was that moment where some spies were sent into the land. This was the land of promise. They came back. Oh, it's a wonderful land. You should see the fruit and the vegetables, but there's giants.

And they made us feel like grasshoppers. And that's how we look to them. There's a classic story, Pilgrim's Progress. And the main character, Christian, has this long journey.

And one of the characters he encounters is a man called Giant Despair, who imprisons Christian. He's gone off his path, and he gets locked in Doubting Castle.

[12 : 56] And he finds himself there imprisoned with no way out and no hope. Capturing a sense that we can have as believers those times when the future can look hopeless.

Or when the present can seem unbearable. And when we doubt anything will ever change. Isn't it wonderful that Moses is honest enough to show us his heart and his feelings in this text?

Because they probably speak to our own, at least in some points. The Bible's an honest book. Jesus was an honest teacher and Savior.

In this world, you will have troubles. There will be storms that would shake our faith. And as the Israelites would discover, these troubles can be varied.

For us, they're varied. Moses and Israel, in that sense, they're right to understand their sense of their own weakness and their personal inability.

[14 : 02] But what they are failing to do and need to learn, as do we, is to trust in our powerful, loving God when we are weak. God is strong.

He's the God who has promised to go before us and to be with us. John Bunyan, as he tells the story of Christian locked in Doubting Castle.

And despair moves to hope when Christian is moved to look to God and to pray. And then to remember that he's been given a key.

And that key is the promises of God. And it's the promises of God that unlocked the door and gave way to hope. That's what I want us to think about next, is that when God's people feel weak, we need to trust in the power and the promises of God.

I love the book of Exodus for so many reasons. One reason I think it's wonderful is because it represents the start of a relationship. Think about the start of any relationship, whether that's a new friendship, whether that's a romantic relationship.

[15 : 09] In a good relationship, when we're talking about a good relationship, we know that the more that we get to know this person, the more we get to trust them, as we see their character, their reliability, we recognize here is someone that we can rely upon.

Here is somebody that we can share life with, share our hopes with. Children, I think, are born with that instinct. We have needs.

I can and I should trust my parents to provide. Well, what we have in the book of Exodus is Moses and Israel people at the start of a relationship with their God.

They have lived through hundreds of years of slavery in Egypt, and with that has come a loss of knowledge about who God is. They have been unable to worship their God for decades and generations, and so what they need to learn, and we see it's a hard process, is that God is the one to trust.

He is the one who will never let his people down, that his power and his promises are for his people. So, so far what we've done in our text is we've studied the outer frame.

[16 : 28] So, we've seen the doubts and we've seen the weak faith. Now, what we need to do is to see the beautiful portrait that God draws right here in the center. I am the Lord.

Or to put it another way, we've heard the presenting symptoms of a spiritual sickness, a faith that is weak and full of doubts, and God, the great physician, the great spiritual doctor, prescribes the remedy.

Look to me. Trust in me. I am the Lord. Verse 1 of chapter 6 is wonderful. The Lord said to Moses, Now, now you'll see what I will do to Pharaoh.

Transformation will come. They will see God as he really is. God is wonderfully gracious and patient, of course, with his doubting people. Their weakness is met by his almighty strength.

The promise of his mighty hand. Because of my mighty hand, he will let them go. And he will do it because of his covenant love, to show covenant loyalty to his people and to his promise.

[17 : 45] And so, we're going to hear God speak, and speak of himself. And that's what we need most of all. We need to hear God speak of himself. And he's going to speak of himself both in the past and in the present and in their future.

And as we listen in, we're going to hear wonderful gospel connections. We're going to hear the timeless remedy for weak faith. We're going to have this glorious portrait to gaze upon that we too might like to trust and to find joy, even in the hardships of life.

What does God say about himself in the past? He says, In the past I reveal my power and my love. Look at verses 2 to 4. God said to Moses, I am a lord. I appear to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as God almighty.

But by my name, a lord, I did not make myself known to them. I also establish my covenant with them. Moses is being invited to take out the family photo album.

The photo album of the family of faith to flip through different scenes to recognize God almighty being with and for the family of Abraham.

[19 : 01] With the promise that in looking to this God, that is the one who makes up for weakness. The one who makes up for our inability.

The one who is the answer to our fears. Because think about the story of Abraham. Abraham was told, You be the father of many nations.

But if you know the story, you know that he was childless. Him and his wife were old and unable to have children. But wonderfully, there was no barrier to God.

God had made a promise. And God would act in power to make sure that promise was kept. And the fact that Israel is this great nation living in slavery, but a great nation is proof that God has kept his promise with his power.

The story of Jacob. The story of Jacob. A wonderful story of God's providence protecting that family.

[20 : 03] And even when the brothers of Joseph sinned and sold him into slavery. And even when Joseph suffered injustice and was thrown into prison. And even as the family faced famine.

And even as they journeyed to Egypt unsure of how things would turn out. We know. Moses knew that God did work all things for good.

He did show his power. He did keep his promise. He did demonstrate his love. God says to Moses, look back.

God says to us, look back. This is our family story as well. This is our family photo album. God is unchanging. We look back to Jesus as God's provision for us.

In our weakness and in our failure. Where we do not and cannot keep the law. Jesus perfectly kept the law. Jesus is God's complete answer to our sin.

[21 : 11] The complete and perfect substitute. Who takes on the role of being the sin bearer. Bearing our sin. From his birth all the way to his death on the cross.

And so we fix our eyes and we set our hope on Jesus. Resting in the promise that it is finished. His atoning work is done. Sin has been paid for by faith in Jesus.

We are justified. And so we can claim those promises of Romans 8. If God is for us. Who can be against us. That nothing can separate us from the love of God.

That is in Christ Jesus. As we look back to see God's faithful love. His power in action. It gives us strength for our faith today.

But think about how God spoke to Moses. Of what he was doing in the present. That he was giving a fuller revelation. Of his power and love.

[22 : 15] So remember there in verse 3. He said, I appeared to Abraham. Isaac and Jacob is God Almighty. But by my name the Lord. I did not make myself known to them. His point is, I am the same God.

But I am now going to show my power. And my love in a new way. You're going to see a revelation. You're going to discover something about God's salvation.

That the people in past generations didn't have. Same God. Same faithfulness to his people. But it's going to look different. Maybe one way to think about it.

It is the movement that happens. Say when a couple are dating. And then there is a proposal. And then there's a wedding.

It's the same couple. But there's these new demonstrations of commitment and love along the way. In the bended knee. In the marriage vows given and received.

[23 : 17] What's God doing here for Moses? For Israel? He's putting his covenant love on display. In a new way. Verse 5. I have heard the groaning of the Israelites.

And I have remembered my covenant. Whenever the Bible says God remembers something. He hasn't forgotten it. Like we forget and then we remember. It means now I'm going to act.

I've remembered my covenant. What's going to happen is going to be a response to the covenant I promised. And he's going to graciously respond to their need.

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.

This word redeem is a payment word. Somebody is sold into slavery. Someone has got themselves into debt.

[24 : 17] And there is a price that must be paid to secure freedom. And God says I will pay the necessary price to secure my people's freedom. And I will do it in a display of my power and my glory and my love.

And we turn to the cross. And we think about Jesus. Who describes himself as the bridegroom of his church. He loves his bride.

He loves his church. He gave himself for her to make her holy. Jesus pays the ultimate price to save us.

As his body is broken and his blood is shed. Jesus, the eternal son of God, becomes one of us. So that in human nature, he might take the punishment that humans deserve as sinners.

That's why Jesus became one of us. To die in our place. To take the punishment that we deserve. And in that sacrificial act, as the substitute, he changes our status.

[25 : 33] Where previously were slaves to sin, enemies to God, now we have freedom in Christ. Now we are children of God.

And as we discover and as we consider again and again God's redeeming love, it becomes for us the answer, the antidote to those doubts and fears.

When trouble comes. Does God know? Does God care? Does God love? We go to the foot of the cross and we find our wonderful answer.

Let's think now about how God speaks of what he will still do in the future. Because verses 7 and 8 are wonderful promises contained here.

Where we see something of the goal of God revealing his power and his love. There is this movement anticipated from slavery to freedom.

[26 : 36] I will take you as my own people and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am a Lord your God who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians.

So they would know God as Redeemer. They would enjoy that new relationship. And in verse 8, I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and Jacob.

I will give it to you as a possession. I am the Lord. So they are going to be brought out of slavery. So that they can enjoy life with God. So they can enjoy covenant with God.

And they can experience the goal of that promise. That they might live in God's promised land. And enjoying God's presence. And there is a really helpful book, Von Roberts' God's Big Picture.

Thinking about God's goal in the story of salvation. God's goal is that God's people would be in God's place, under God's rule, and knowing God's blessing.

[27 : 44] That's what we see in Eden. That's what the people were promised in the promised land. Ultimately, that's our hope. That's the gospel hope. It's what Jesus talks about in John 14.

As he's just about to go to the cross, he talks about going home. Don't let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God.

Believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, I would have told you. And he talks about going to prepare a place. He talks about going through the death of Jesus on the cross.

And then his resurrection. Return to heaven. That's his preparation. But now that he's gone and prepared, he says, I'll come back and I'll take you. So that you might also be where I am.

And so there's this preparation. So that we might enjoy our promised land. Eternal rest. With the Lord Jesus. And so Moses is hearing.

[28 : 49] And Israel is hearing. And we need to hear. And to keep hearing. That I am the Lord. Is the answer. For our weak faith. When we feel doubts.

And concerns. When things go wrong. When we feel discouraged. When there are delays that we didn't anticipate. Where there is despair and distress. What we don't do.

Is give in and give up. What we don't do. Is roll our sleeves up. And resolve that we're going to do better. And try harder. And our faith will be stronger next time. The answer. Is we look to our God.

We listen to Jesus. Who says, I am the Lord. Do not be afraid. Do not be afraid. What do we discover. About our Savior. Even in this passage.

He would say to us. Trust me. I keep my words. Trust me. I feel the distress of my people. Trust me.

[29 : 49] I have set you free. Trust me. I bring you new life with God. Trust me. I will lead you home.

In the end. Let's keep this portrait in view. Of our wonderful God. Let's keep this gospel remedy.

Close at hand. So that we'd come. And come. And come to Jesus. Let's pray. Lord. Lord.

Our God. We thank you. And once again. For the honesty.