

What's in a Name?

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[0 : 00] And I'll lead us in prayer. Lord God, we confess to you now that you are sovereign, you are all-powerful, that you are a God that cannot be stopped and that you love to bring glory to yourself by achieving the impossible.

We ask that, Father, we might live as your people, remembering who you are, never forgetting. So, Father, we just beg that by your Spirit right now you would remind us of your greatness and of your power for us who believe in you.

In Jesus' name, amen. Well, friends, we begin now a new series on the book of Exodus. I love this book because I love A Good Fight, and it's a book of a great fight, a great conflict between the living God and a wicked pharaoh.

We know the result of the book, but we kind of need to try and read it, realizing just the amazing impossibilities that God expected of his people in that time.

I think it's very easy for us to think that they sort of had it somewhat straightforward, but our life is really hard, and if only they had to do what we did and we could have been back then.

[1 : 27] I'd like to see them in our shoes, but actually they had a hard call from God. Moses had a hard call from God to do the impossible. So I might like to just invite you as we read and study Exodus over the coming weeks.

We're not going to do it chapter by chapter. We're going to kind of do the sort of highlights from the book, so it may be good for you to read Exodus as we go along on your own or with people that you share a house or home with.

This truly is, friends, a book where God will do the impossible and God will ask his people to trust him to do the impossible.

Four times in our reading today, God was called by a special title. He is called the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

That itself is supposed to evoke for us here is a God who actually does do the impossible, that the story of salvation from the very beginning with Abraham began with an impossibility that this 100-year-old man and his wife would be the father of many nations and that their descendants would fill the earth like sands on the seashore and they would bring a blessing to the world and they would have their own land.

[2 : 50] All those things were impossible promises that God gave his people, that God gave in the covenant to Abraham. Abraham. He is a God who calls into existence things that do not exist.

It's not just that God's plan was unlikely, it is that it was impossible. It was a great act of God. And the promises are unfulfilled.

So we hear Abraham has Isaac, Isaac has Jacob, Jacob has 12 sons, one of which is Joseph, who is as good as dead. In fact, his father thinks he is dead.

Another impossibility that God has actually protected Joseph and blessed him and raised him up in Egypt so that he can rescue God's people from the seven-year famine.

And that's what brings God's people into Egypt to survive the famine through Joseph. And over hundreds of years, over 400 years, they multiply another impossibility.

[3 : 52] They do become a great nation in Egypt. But unfortunately, they are no longer guests. They are now very clearly second-class citizens, a nation of slaves within Egypt, an oppressed nation.

Now, I'm not really enough of a buff on the archaeology or whatever to know this for sure, but I'm pretty sceptical about some of the...

I saw this documentary recently on TV. There's been a few of these saying that Egypt didn't actually have slaves as much as having really well-treated employees.

But I think that's more of a... To me, that just sort of smells of kind of reading back from our culture into their culture that, you know, in the ancient world, slaves were treated harshly.

They were oppressed. Yes, they may have been kept in somewhat good health if only to preserve their strength to serve, but they were...

[4 : 59] You know, life and death of a slave didn't matter. You know, you just wouldn't care about a slave. And here is over a million people acting as slaves. So Moses writes, After a long time, the king of Egypt died.

That is the one who favoured them. The Israelites groaned under their slavery and cried out. Out of the slavery, their cry for help rose to God. God heard their groaning and remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

God looked upon the Israelites and he took notice of them. God has made a great promise to Abraham, an impossible one, that is only partially fulfilled and now he acts to fulfil it.

And in his action, he claims an agent. He calls Moses. And from this, we have the beginning of the Exodus. It begins right now with the call of Moses.

Now, at this point in time, Moses is an outlaw. He is a failed leader of Israel. He has had a crack at rescuing and helping them and arbitrating and leading them.

[6 : 07] And they have rejected him. Or a couple of people have anyway. And so he is on the run. He is in the country. He has married a foreign woman. And he has become a shepherd. And it is stunning, I think, to think of the pattern in scripture of shepherd leaders of God's people, Moses and David and, of course, eventually Jesus, the good shepherd.

And so Moses is a shepherd. He has lost his sheep. He comes to Horeb, the mountain of God, also known as Mount Sinai, where in due time he will bring the people to this mountain.

He will bring a new flock. He will bring the flock of God's people out of Egypt to this mountain to meet with God. But right now he meets with God in the burning bush. And his experience of God is this.

He is afraid. He is afraid, it says, to even look at God. Moses hid his face, verse 6, for he was afraid to look at God.

He is told to take off his sandals, but he knows that's not good enough for God. He's a sinner before a holy God and therefore he deserves judgment, deserves punishment.

[7 : 23] And this really is one of the great tensions of the book of Exodus. How can these people, well, one, how can they get out of Egypt? When they get out of Egypt, how can they worship God face to face when they are sinful people?

And how can we, a sinful people, meet a holy God? Before the end of the book, we'll have something of a solution to that problem. Now one of the things I love about the book is that God is so active.

He is on every page working hard for his people, for his purposes. Sometimes he works through an agent like Moses.

Sometimes he works in Exodus through miracles and through amazing acts of nature turned on its head. Sometimes he works through the slow obedience of his people, through the reluctant obedience of his people.

Sometimes he works through softening someone's heart. Sometimes he works through hardening someone's heart. But he's always working. And often in Exodus, he actually works directly.

[8 : 32] He fights for his people. Now here in verse 7 and 8, Moses names four great actions of God.

So as I read it, try and pick up what are the four actions of God. Then the Lord said, I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt. I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters.

Indeed, I know their suffering and I have come down to deliver them from Egypt and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land. God has seen, he's heard, he knows, and he comes down.

The four great acts of God. He observes, he hears, he knows, he comes down. Their cry has come to him.

And so now Moses will go to them to help them. Moses is being commissioned to be an agent of salvation, to be a saviour of sorts on God's behalf.

[9 : 40] And if you read chapters 3 and 4, you will know that Moses is very reluctant to take this role. He's very scared, he's very fearful.

He doesn't want to stick out his neck for God. He's afraid to do that. I mean, in a sense, you could say he is a failed leader already. He doesn't have confidence as a leader.

His ministry has been a disaster so far. But of course, friends, we know that it's not really an issue of whether Moses can do it. It's not an issue of Moses' self-confidence.

It's an issue about his God confidence. Here's what God says to, or here's what he tries to say to God. This is the line he tries. And just think about whether you've actually ever tried this on God.

But Moses said to God, verse 11, Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt? Who am I? The power of Christian faith is being able to bypass that question and just say, I will trust God and stick my neck out for his kingdom even though every bone in my body says, this is stupid, this won't work.

[10 : 56] Friends, think about the faith that God calls of us. Think about the faith required to tell someone that you're a Christian or to attempt to talk to them about the gospel, to evangelize someone.

You know, that's a crazy thing to do. When I want to do that, I think, this is impossible. I'm not going to say it right. They're not going to listen. This is stupid.

But that's exactly what God calls us to do. It's the impossible. Think of the confidence we need to say, just give someone a Christian book. Say, you know, I know you're thinking about this.

Here's a book you can read. Or to lead a small group, those who have led small groups. Or to go on a camp for the first time when you don't know many people.

These things are amazingly difficult. Offering with someone who's not a Christian to pray for them, even with them. You know, every bone in your body will be saying, that's stupid.

[11 : 57] That's impossible. You know, but that's exactly what God calls us to do. Exactly what God loves to bless. Anything we do for Jesus that is public for him, there is always that feeling in our gut, this is impossible.

You know, to be a Christian leader, to be involved in a new ministry or to persevere in a difficult ministry for him, always feels impossible to the very depth of our being.

Moses is being asked to go to a world leader and to ask for the release of a million slaves or more.

The backbone of the Egyptian economy, no doubt. You know, this is his free labor and you want me to go and say, just give that away?

It's an impossible task. It's bigger than Wilberforce and more impossible. Friends, when you feel that God is calling you to do something hard or God's word is convicting you to do something public for Jesus, don't say, who am I?

It's the wrong question. God doesn't even answer it, actually. This is what God says. God said, verse 12, I will be with you and this shall be the sign for you that is I who sent you.

[13 : 16] When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain. God actually gives away the divine name there that's mentioned in the next couple of verses, I am.

He says, I am, will be with you. It matters not who is Moses, it matters who is with Moses. It matters not who Moses is, but who God is.

It's the same for us. It matters not who you are, it matters who is with you. It doesn't matter who you are, it matters who God is, who your God is. And the sign that God gives is crazy in a way.

It's not even a real sign. God says, this is the sign that it will happen. When it's happened, you will worship me here. So when the job is done, the job will be done.

That's the sign he gets. You see, it's not really a sign ahead of time to say, you know, God is guaranteeing this or something like that. God can definitely do it. God is saying to him, just do it and it will happen.

[14 : 18] That's the sign that he is God and he will achieve what he sets out to achieve. through his servants. What matters most is not what you are or what your abilities are but who your God is and that your God is with you.

And God goes on. Moses wants to know then, who are you God? What's your name? Moses says, if I go to the Israelites and say to them, the God of your ancestors has sent me to you and they ask me, well, what's his name?

What shall I say to them? God says to Moses, I am who I am. He said further, thus you shall say to the Israelites, I am has sent me to you.

God also said to Moses, thus you shall say to the Israelites, the Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob has sent me to you. This is my name forever and my title for all generations.

Again, God gave Moses a sign that wasn't a sign. Now he gives him a name. It's actually not really a name. He gives him, first his track record and in the second half he says, I'm the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

[15:38] That's good enough. I have a track record of saving my people, of delivering on my promise, of being faithful to my covenants with my people.

I am defined, says God. I am known. I am named by my track record. After the book of Exodus, God gets a new name and the name is the God who brought you up out of Egypt, out of slavery. Later on, he becomes the God who gave David his kingdom and the God who gave wisdom to Solomon and he becomes the God who returned Israel from exile and eventually and ultimately he becomes the God who raised our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, the Father of our Lord Jesus. God says, you want a name? Just look at my record. Look at my CV. That is how I am known. By my faithfulness, by my glory in achieving the impossible each time and every time.

But God does actually give something of a name. In verse 14, God said to Moses, and it's in quotes, I am who I am.

[16:56] Or as the footnotes say, I will be who I will be. I'll be what I will be. Go and tell the Israelites, I am has sent me to you.

Now again, this is not really a name because it's sort of, how can Moses go to Israel and just say, I am is with you. It's really just another way of saying, the living God is with you.

It's an assertion of God's authority to be God, of the reality of God. I am who I am. I will be who I will be. There's no trick to it.

There's no kind of trick that Moses can take to the Israelites. He just takes God to them. I am who I am. He takes the God who is eternal, who is transcendent, uncreated, forever powerful.

I am who I am. I will be who I will be. This God fears no man. He submits to no man. He trembles before no one and no thing.

[18:02] He is and he will always be. I am the one who always is. So go and tell Israel, I am sending you the true and the living and the eternal God.

See, part of the irony here is that we'll see next week this more, but Pharaoh is worshipped as a God. Pharaoh is treated as divine and yet part of the enslavement of the Israelites is to build for Pharaoh among other things his future tomb and God comes and says, I am.

I will be who I will be. Unlike Pharaoh who will die, you can even see what they're preparing for him to be buried in. But I'm the God who is. I never die.

I've always been and always will be forever God. So, it's not like Moses has a name in a nutshell to take all he has is to take to Israel.

He's the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. He's a God who is known for faithfulness and he's the God who is unmovable, unchangeable, unstoppable. That's who he is.

[19:23] And then, lastly, friends, in order to vindicate God, God actually now spells out for Moses exactly what will happen.

So, it's not even like Moses is stepping into the unknown. God gives Moses the words to say and he says exactly what the response will be and then what will happen after that.

This is verse 16 onwards. Go, assemble the elders of Israel and say to them, the Lord, the God of your ancestors. So, here again, take this God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob has appeared to me saying, I have given heed to you and to what has been done to you in Egypt.

I will declare that I will bring you up out of the misery of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey.

So, here's the kindness of God working through an agent. He gives Moses the speech. He gives him the exact words. Moses takes God's words to the people.

[20:25] It couldn't be much easier than that. And then God tells Moses what will happen. They will listen to your voice so you'll get a good response from them but then you will go to the king of Egypt and say to him another speech given, the Lord, the God of the Hebrews has met with us.

Let us now go on a three days journey into the wilderness so that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God. And then God tells him after that speech exactly what will happen. It's like a summary of the whole book.

I know, however, that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand. So I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all my wonders that I will perform in it.

After that, he will let you go. I will bring this people into such favor that with the Egyptians that when you go, you will not go empty handed. And here comes another impossibility that these slaves, that each woman shall ask her neighbor and any woman living in the neighbor's house for their jewelry of silver and gold and clothing.

And you shall put them on your sons and on your daughters and you shall plunder the Egyptians. Do you see what God does for his glory? He equips his people with everything they need and promises to do it for them.

[21 : 46] So that's sort of easy in that level, but the actual task is impossible. For them to leave Egypt is impossible. For them to be freed from slavery is impossible. I mean, for them to be able to plunder the Egyptians is impossible.

Next time you're moving house, go to your neighbors and find the women, neighbors, and say, by the way, we're moving house, I've come to say goodbye and to take what I like from your jewelry box and your closet.

See what response you get. No woman I know would allow that. It's impossible. But you see, God loves to set up the difficulty level up to 10 so that his glory is known, so that it is known that only he could do it, only he could save.

So friends, let me ask you, what more do you need knowing this God? This God who even raises the dead. What more do you need to stick out your neck for him?

I'd like to ask you, and you'll need to work this out with God, to do something hard for him. I want you to stick out your neck for Jesus, to take a risk in following Jesus Christ.

[22 : 59] I'm not going to tell you what to do, but I want you to ask God to show you what he wants you to do. Maybe there's something new he wants you to do, or there's someone that he wants you to talk to, or there's a command of scripture that he wants you to obey in a new and more full-on way.

Maybe God is sending someone who's asking you to help them with a job or a task that you feel inadequate for. Do something hard for Jesus. Because friends, God is always able to deliver on his promises.

God is never removed from our suffering. He always hears our cry. He sees our pain. He knows what we go through. And he promises to go with us and to deliver us.

It matters not who you are, but who God is. It matters not being afraid of what people will think, but being afraid of God. Friends, do something hard for God.

Do something difficult for him. Let the difficulty drive you to your knees in desperate prayer. Let God prove to you his capability to bless and sustain.

[24 : 15] If you are in a difficult ministry for him, don't give it up. A parent of a sick child, a very sick child, came to Jesus and said, quite rudely really, if you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us.

And hear the indignation of Jesus Christ. He said, if you are able, quoting the man, all things are possible for him who believes.

All things are possible for him who believes. All things are possible for the God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead. So friends, never, ever say no to God merely because you feel inadequate. The God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead is with us today by his spirit. That father repented to Jesus and he said to Jesus, I believe help my unbelief.

I believe, help my unbelief. So why don't we pray that now for our own lives that we would, God would help us. Heavenly Father, we pray that you may increase our confidence in you.

[25 : 37] even when our own confidence is low or even because it is low, increase our confidence in you, in your power to act, in your power to go with us, in your power to fight for your own name, and in your power to sustain us in suffering.

Lord God, we pray that you would show each one of us, whether through another person or through reading of scripture or by some other means, one new hard thing that you are calling us to do.

We believe in you, Father. Help our unbelief. We believe in you, Lord Jesus Christ. Help our unbelief. We believe in you, Holy Spirit.

Help our unbelief. Amen.