

You Call This Rescue?

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[0 : 00] Well, I wonder whether you've ever been let down before. No one responding? I'm pretty sure you have. When expectations have been raised only to be dashed.

When promises are made and not kept. I suppose at the most basic level, it happens all the time, doesn't it, with false advertising. Like when the picture on the box doesn't match what's inside. So I've got a couple of examples on the screen. First one. Look, kids. Look at the amazing slide that he just bought you. And the reality.

Wait, what? Slide is shorter than your arm. How about this other one? Hey, darling, let's have fun swimming like mermaids. Sorry.

Maybe wallowing like hippos. Oh, what about false advertising on hotel booking websites? We all book our hotels now on the website. So here's a look at a hotel in Poland.

[1 : 05] It's not quite five star, but it's pretty decent looking motel, right? Except when you zoom out and look where it's located. Right in the shadow of a nuclear power plant.

Of course, if you're a nuclear scientist, that might be exactly what you're looking for. So I suppose in the overall scheme of things, these dashed expectations aren't that bad. But at other times, they can be more serious.

Like when you accept a job based on high expectations, only to discover you have to work longer than they said they promised you.

Or the work is not as satisfying as they make out. Well, last week, God seemed to promise great things for Israel. After years of slavery, God had promised to free them.

So, for example, he promised in chapter 3 and verse 7 that he would, he has seen their misery, he has heard their cry, and he's come down to rescue them from the land and bring them into a good and spacious land.

[2 : 08] A land flowing with milk, honey, and according to Dana Yusuf, Vegemite. But this week, it seems God's letting them down, that he's not living up to his word.

And so, in our passage tonight, we're going to look firstly at three reactions to God's word. So you'll see in your outline, first we'll see the reaction of Pharaoh, then the Israelites, and finally Moses as God's messenger.

So let's begin in verse 1, where we read that Moses and Aaron had gone to Pharaoh and said, this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says. Let my people go, so that they may hold a festival to me in the wilderness.

Interestingly, if you look back at chapter 3 and verse 18, it's not exactly word for word what God had told them to say. They were also meant to bring the elders. But Moses does repeat this demand in verse 3, which is a bit more close to what God had said.

In verse 3, he says, the God of the Hebrews has met with us. Now let us take a three-day journey into the wilderness to offer sacrifices to the Lord our God. But then he goes on to embellish it with, or he, that is God, may strike us with plagues or with the sword.

[3 : 27] I'm not sure how big a deal this was, but on the other hand, Pharaoh's reaction is pretty clear. So look at verse 2. This is how he responds.

He says, Who is the Lord that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and I will not let Israel go.

Very defiant and arrogant, don't you think? Now Pharaoh is a real person, but he's also representative of an entire civilization of Egypt.

He represents government power. He's what you would call a principality of the age. And his reaction, I think, gives us an insight into how other worldly authorities behave when they don't acknowledge God.

Who is the Lord that I should submit to his word? And if you look around the world and society nowadays, that's what you will find.

[4 : 31] Try quoting the Bible and suggesting that we ought to order our society according to it. And these things don't carry much weight, do they? In fact, you might even be mocked for suggesting it.

Now governments and corporates and institutions, they're still big on values. In fact, I was visiting Deakin the other day, and they had a prominent banner in their cafe promoting the values of their food charter.

These are the values they use to source their food. And they were dead serious. They spent a lot of money designing the colorful banner. But of course, these are just values that are man-made, aren't they?

They're not aligned to the Bible. And as Christians who take God's word seriously, we may seem discouraged to find out that this is what it is.

But I want to suggest that we shouldn't be. We shouldn't be surprised or discouraged because that is just the way it is. Your company or the government isn't going to submit to God's word.

[5 : 37] Sometimes you may find a person of peace or a God-fearer as your boss. But by and large, that's not what we should expect.

And I say this even as, you know, we have a prime minister that may call himself a Christian, and I believe he's a Christian, but we mustn't have too high expectations then that the whole government, federal government, would then suddenly be submitting to God's word.

The real issue, however, is how we respond. Because, you see, as Pharaoh's actions also show, when powers don't submit to God's word, they are often not content to just simply leave it at that. God's word, you see, is never a take it or leave it proposition. When God speaks, he demands something of us. And so, if you don't submit to his demand, then your only choice really is to rebel, to resist.

You want to push back in order to exert your own authority. And so now we see that's what Pharaoh does. He tries to flex his own muscle. And we read in verse 4 that he accuses Moses of trying to take the people away from their work.

[6 : 54] They must have too much time on their hands wanting a three-day party in the desert. Lazy. That's what they are. But it's really cruel, I think, the way Pharaoh mocks them.

If you look at verse 8, Pharaoh says that they are crying out to let them go and sacrifice to their God. But as we've heard over the last two or three weeks, over the last four chapters, that's not really what they're crying out about, is it?

They were crying out for help in their misery. They're not crying out to go for a party or festival. But Pharaoh doesn't care, does he?

Only God does. And so Pharaoh drives them harder. He tells the slave drivers, make them work harder, tell them that they have to find their own straw and still have to maintain their quotas. You see, what Pharaoh is trying to do is impose his authority and his own version of reality on Israel. You think that this Yahweh is your God?

[8 : 03] Well, think again. I'm your real master, he's saying. And here's how I'm going to prove it. I'm going to work you harder and you're going to submit to me.

And friends, that's how it often is with us as well, isn't it? It may be that other authorities in our life will seek to lay claim on us, to impose their will on us.

And they will force us essentially to choose whether we're going to serve God wholeheartedly or submit to them and compromise our faith in Jesus.

They'll want us either to do what they say or affirm their worldview or conform to their reality, which, if their reality is not God's reality, is actually just a lie.

And of course, behind all this stands the devil. He's the one who is cunningly using sin and the powers of this world to bring, if possible, God's people under his sway.

[9 : 09] As we now move to the next few verses, we'll see that happen to God's people. So I'll get Gillian to come up around and we'll read from verse 15 to chapter 6 and verse 12.

Exodus chapter 5, reading from verse 15. Then the Israelite overseers went and appealed to Pharaoh, Why have you treated your servants this way?

Your servants are given no straw, yet we are told, Make bricks. Your servants are being beaten, but the fault is with your own people. Pharaoh said, Lazy.

That is what you are, lazy. That is why you keep saying, Let us go and sacrifice to the Lord. Now get to work. You will not be given any straw, yet you must produce your full quota of bricks. The Israelite overseers realized they were in trouble when they were told, You are not to reduce the number of bricks required of you for each day.

[10:22] When they left Pharaoh, they found Moses and Aaron waiting to meet them, and they said, May the Lord look on you and judge you.

You have made us obnoxious to Pharaoh and his officials and have put a sword in their hand to kill us. 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 said to Moses, I am the Lord.

[11:27] I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name, the Lord, I did not make myself fully 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.

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 hand 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.

[12:59] 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?

If you are following along on the outline, we are on the second reaction now, Israel's reaction. And you can see, can't you, that they've been spooked by Pharaoh's actions.

They've heard God's word, and then Pharaoh challenges God's word, and they appear to fall for Pharaoh's words instead. They think his words are more powerful than God's.

You see, they could have cried out to God again, but instead, they appeal to Pharaoh, their oppressor. And it's amazing what they call themselves, verse 16. They call themselves Pharaoh's servants.

Your servants are given no straw. Your servants are being beaten. Can you see what's happened? They have submitted to his authority, haven't they? They have given in to his version of reality.

[14:13] But their appeal to Pharaoh falls on deaf ears. Pharaoh doesn't care. His motto is, treat them mean and keep them keen.

And so what the Israelites do is they come out of it and they blame God's messengers instead.

They say to Aaron and Moses, may the Lord look on you and judge you. You have made us obnoxious to Pharaoh and his officials and have put a sword in their hand to kill us.

That's a pretty big U-turn, isn't it, from the end of last week. Then Moses had said, this is what the Lord will do, rescue you, and they had believed. And now, they have actually turned against Moses. So for them, it's not Pharaoh or his officials' fault. No, it's Moses and Aaron's. If they had only kept their mouth shut, Pharaoh wouldn't have been given any reason to kill them.

But if you think about it, that doesn't make sense, does it? I mean, if Pharaoh is not going to let them go on a three-day journey, why would he let them go for good? How is God going to ever rescue them if he doesn't demand that Pharaoh let them go?

[15:28] But again, that's often how it is with us as well, isn't it? Just like Israel, we can hear God's word and yet the moment there's a little trouble, things are not what we expect, then we begin to doubt God and blame him even sometimes.

But there's a difference, isn't there, between what God actually promises and our often mistaken expectations of him. Let me give you an example.

Just take this verse, Philippians 4, verse 13. I'm sure many times your friends have probably written that in the card to encourage you. I can do all this through him, God, who gives me strength.

And that's a great verse, isn't it? That's good. It's good that your friends are encouraging you. But what then do we then do with the verse? We're tempted, aren't we, to conjure up expectations of what God will do.

We think that, oh, if he said this, then perhaps he'll rescue us from our predicament. He'll give us the power to be all-conquering or be, you know, materially blessed.

[16:31] Something falls into our lap, some big inheritance all of a sudden or something. Or maybe he'll expect that our pain and suffering would just disappear. And then when it doesn't happen, we get disappointed, don't we?

We think, oh, God's word's not reliable. But if we flick back to just a few verses before, look what Paul says just beforehand.

So on the next slide. He says, I'm not saying this because I'm in need for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need and I know what it is to have plenty.

I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well-fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. So what if God's promise isn't to take away our sickness but to help us endure patiently and joyfully?

What if God's expectation is that He's not going to get rid of that annoying person in your life but to help you love and care for that person?

[17:38] What if He doesn't promise to make you rich so as to ease all your financial worries but instead He promises to give you a deep faith and dependence on Him for our daily lives?

It makes a world of difference, doesn't it? What this strength that we think God is going to give us is. It may not be to conquer but to endure.

It may not be freedom from suffering so much as joy in suffering. And that was the thing with the Israelites. They had the wrong expectation of God's promises.

They expected immediate relief and freedom but God had other plans. He's still going to rescue them just not how they expected. But you know what the wonderful thing is?

God still does it doesn't He? Even when Israel doubts Him. So weak is Israel's faith that even after God reassures them in verse 9 of chapter 6 they are still too discouraged by their hard labor to believe.

[18:44] But it doesn't matter. God still rescues them. Why? Because God is committed to His word. He always does what He's promised.

Well, let's now turn finally to Moses. Poor Moses. He's already told God last week he didn't want to do this. And then when he finally relents, look what it's got him into. No gratitude from the people.

No results to show for it. I don't know about the rest of you, but if I were Moses, I'd be very tempted to say to God, I told you so. In fact, I think as we read verse 22, that's what Moses sort of says.

He says, Why Lord, why have you brought trouble on His people? Is this why you sent me? Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in your name, He has brought me trouble.

He has brought trouble on this people, and you have not rescued your people at all. In other words, God, you haven't lived up to your word. You haven't rescued your people.

[19:47] But that's not true, is it? And God replies in verse 1 of chapter 6. He says that Moses will see the Lord do to Pharaoh what he's promised.

God will rescue his people. And I'm going to come back to verses 2 to 8 in the next section, but I want to just skip on a bit and say that even after God reassures Moses, and he reports this to the Israelites, and the Israelites fail to listen, as I said before.

In verse 10, the Lord says again to Moses, don't give up. Yes, go to Pharaoh again and tell him to let my people go. But verse 12, Moses' reaction is this, if the Israelites will not listen to me, why would Pharaoh listen to me, since I speak with faltering lips?

Moses is saying, not only have you not lived up to your word, God, but you have chosen the wrong person. Did I not say I speak with faltering lips? I've proven it now.

No one listens to me, not Pharaoh, not even your people. And again, for those of us who may be teachers of God's word, or maybe even if you're not, maybe you're just a parent or grandparent or

you've been trying to speak to your family and friends about Jesus, often we feel like that, don't we?
[21 : 10] Nobody seems to be listening to us. Maybe you're a young Christian or a teenager and you think, who would listen to someone like me? How can I be a spokesperson for God?

God's word? And yet, at the same time, as we've read God's word, we may not have seen the burning bush like Moses, but yet, like him, we've heard his word and we believe.

And so, we're sort of stuck, aren't we? We believe that this is God's word, and yet, why can't I testify boldly for him? Why does not people seem to respond positively when I speak?

Well, if you look at verses 13 to 27, I think that's an encouragement for us. It seems odd for me to say that, because all it is, is a genealogy at the moment, and seems an odd place to put a genealogy right in the middle of narrative.

But if you look closely, I'll explain why. The genealogy, I think, is focused on Moses and Aaron. It's placed there to show their place in the family tree of Israel.

[22 : 15] So that's why it starts with the firstborn, Reuben, and his sons, then Simeon, and then when you get to Levi, that's where it stops, because we've got to Aaron and Moses, so you don't have to keep going. It's just an excerpt, as it were.

But also, we get the later generations of Levi. But again, only the ages of Aaron and Moses' direct ancestors are shown.

So Levi, direct ancestor, 137 years he lived in verse 16. Then verse 18, his son, Kohath, lived 133 years. And then Amran, who is Kohath's son, lived 137 years.

And we know that Amran is Aaron and Moses' father. And then the rest of the genealogy are just details of Aaron's descendants. Why? Because they become the priests and the high priests, some of them, in Israel.

Similarly, in verse 24, we get the sons of Korah. Some of you will know, sons of Korah are people who are the tribe or the clan that becomes the singers in God's temple.

[23 : 19] And if you look through your psalm, some of them have even written a few of them. So I think the point of this genealogy is this, is to show what becomes of these two men with faltering lips.

That God actually uses them to become the founding fathers of the official spokespeople to Israel, the priests and the Levites and the temple singers.

That's why if you read verse 26, we're told, it was this Aaron and Moses to whom the Lord said, bring the Israelites out of Egypt by their divisions. And then at the very end, this same Moses and Aaron.

It's almost as if later generations of Israel and us, as we look back and we look at all these prominent priests and Levites of the temple, they say, whoa, to think that they actually came from Moses and Aaron, these two men with faltering lips.

And so it should encourage us, shouldn't it, that even though we may feel inadequate like Moses, that God can still use us. And we will see in the rest of Exodus and right up to Deuteronomy that God does use Moses.

[24 : 28] Just be faithful to my word, God says, and I will do the rest. And that's exactly what God says now to Moses in verses 2 to 8, which I'll come back to now as we finish off.

So, God tells Moses again and then he tells Moses to tell the Israelites. So, here again, God shows his total commitment to his word.

Why? Because he is the Lord. Last week, we came across the phrase, I am who I am. God revealed himself and said, I am Yahweh, I am who I am.

And so, here again, at three key points in the passage, God declares, I am Yahweh, I am the Lord. At the start, at the end, verse 8, and then right in the middle.

And if you look at my outline, God's entire speech, I think, zeroes in on verse 5. It zooms in there, and then it zooms back out. Everything before is what he's promised, and everything after is what he's going to do.

[25 : 32] So, in verse 2, God said to Moses, I am the Lord, and because that's my character, my gracious character, I've appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I chose them and made myself known to them.

Because he's made himself known to them, he's also established a covenant with them. And this forms the basis for everything God does with them. It's got nothing to do with how good Israel is going to be, or how faithful Moses is.

No, everything depends on what God has already promised. And so, we get to verse 5. Moreover, I've heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are enslaving.

And here's the key phrase, I have remembered my covenant. Same as at the end of chapter 2. God is acting in response to his covenant. So, having heard the groaning, he responds in verse 6, I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians.

I will free you. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. And because he's established his covenant with the forefathers, their forefathers, verse 7, I will take you as my people and I will be your God.

[26 : 45] Then you will know that I am the Lord, your God, in a fuller way than when I revealed myself to Abraham, just as I did to the forefathers. And I will bring you to the land I saw with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

I will give it to you as a possession, I am the Lord. All this God says to reassure Moses and the Israelites.

But do you realize something very interesting? There's absolutely nothing new in what God says in these verses. God has said all this before.

God said all and you might think, that's not very useful. Your word has just been challenged by Pharaoh and your people and your messenger are beginning to doubt. Surely you've got to say a bit more, don't you?

But God doesn't. And that tells us something, doesn't it? It tells us that his original word and promise was sufficient and complete.

[27 : 51] God doesn't need to add to it. It's like, for example, when perhaps one of my daughters might ask me every 60 days, Dad, my mobile phone plan is expiring in a week.

Can you recharge it for me? And I say, yes, I will. A few days later, Dad, have you recharged my phone?

And I say, yes, I will. And I do. On the day it expires as promise, I recharge it.

But I didn't need to say any more or do any more, did I? Why? Because my original promise was good enough. And that's the same way with God.

I am the Lord. I've made a covenant with your forefathers. I've heard your suffering and I will rescue you. And when Israel doubts, the Lord says, I am the Lord.

[28 : 54] I've made a covenant with your forefathers. I've heard your suffering and I will rescue you. And it's the same with us. God has appeared to us in his son, Jesus.

He's made himself known to us in him. In him, he's established his covenant with us. In his son's death, he's rescued us from slavery and the punishment of sin.

By his spirit, he's now rescuing us from the power of sin. So that we can live like Jesus. And one day he will rescue us from the presence of sin. From the suffering and death which sin brings.

And sometimes when we struggle in life and we're tempted, you know, we sort of go, God, if only I could get that extra word from you. Some promise into this very situation. And you know, God in his kindness, he might do that.

But really, God's word to us in the Bible is enough. All we need to do is come back to it again and again to find God's promises, to find God's reminders, to find God's reassurance.

[30 : 01] And time and time again, if you do that, the wisdom is already there. God's word is enough. even when we don't know exactly how things will happen, we can trust that God does promise to rescue us, that he hears us, that he will act out of love and care for us.

So we don't have to be spooked when people reject God's word. We don't have to doubt God despite suffering. We don't even have to be despondent when no one seems to listen to our testimony of his word.

No, we can trust fully in God because he has already shown that he is totally committed to his word. Let's pray. Father, thank you that you keep every promise that you make.

Thank you that in the death of your son, we have a secure and unshakable covenant with you. Help us to trust in his death, help us to remember your word and to trust fully in it.

In his name we pray. Amen.