

Trust in God, not men

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[0 : 00] Thanks also to Jennifer and to Mavis for a really long reading. We don't normally do a really long reading, but sometimes these Old Testament stories are too good to cut short. I just want to tell you a couple of strange things I found in the Exodus passage before we began just some strange things I saw in my study this week.

We always call it the burning bush, don't we? That is precisely the thing it doesn't do. It doesn't actually burn. But we call it, even in the Bible, it says the burning bush, but it's not a burning bush. That's the whole point. We always say the land of milk and honey, don't we? I realised this week they are the two ingredients you need to make caramel. Obviously, condensed milk and sugar. But the promised land is a land overflowing with luxurious rich desserts. I think that's actually what it should be. Don't quote me on that. I just think that that's what it should be.

God's favourite flavour of ice cream? Caramel, if anyone asks you. The third really strange thing in our passage is that seemingly out of nowhere, God tries to kill Moses.

[1 : 07] Did you notice that in the passage? Very odd. No one picks up on it. God tries to kill Moses. Some strange things in our passage this week. Last week, when we started the series in Exodus, we said that the thing that hangs over the whole book are God's promises to Abraham.

He promised that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky, that they would have a promised land. But when Exodus opened last week, we met them.

They were enslaved to a mad king called Pharaoh. They were anything but blessed. And last week, however, we also met our main character, Moses.

Moses was a Hebrew by birth from the famous tribe of Levi. He was also raised in Pharaoh's house, the best of both worlds. Moses struck down an Egyptian who was beating up a Hebrew.

He mediated a dispute between two Hebrews. He delivered some women from some naughty shepherds. He even fled his way out of Egypt into safety to Midian.

[2 : 15] All of that was like a mini exodus, a shadow of the bigger rescue that God's people need. You see, Moses is perfectly suited for the job at hand.

He's got the perfect credentials to rescue God's people from slavery for a promised land. It's easy to see why Moses is one of the great heroes of the Bible, why he's revered in the New Testament, and why three and a half thousand years later, we're still talking about him.

But remember this. Exodus was written for us. The Romans passage we looked at last week, it says that the old stories are written for our endurance in the scriptures, for our encouragement and for our hope.

And so, if you were one of the Israelites enslaved in Egypt, how much more confident would you be seeing Moses from chapter 1 and 2?

Would you be able to endure the slavery of Pharaoh, knowing that Moses had entered the story?

And by chapter 14, when it's all said and done and you're out of Egypt, how much thanks and praise would you shower on Moses for all that he has done?

[3 : 31] I wonder if you can tell where I'm going with this. Because everything about Moses means we're tempted to trust in him. And so, this is a lesson today about where our confidence lies.

Instead of being God versus Pharaoh last week, today it's God versus Moses. Isn't that strange? God versus Moses. And because Exodus is written for us, the question is, who do you trust for rescue?

God or Moses? We're going to look at God first, then we'll look at Moses. And just to say as well, because it's a massive reading, the Bible passage is there, but the inside, if I can pick it up, the inside of your service sheet has the outline of the sermon as well.

It's just because it was a massive passage. So, we're going to look at God versus Moses. Look at God first. So, we pick up the story and Moses is shepherding for his father-in-law, Jethro. I think it's a definite come down from life in the palace with Pharaoh. But anyway, one day, he and the sheep are grazing near Horeb, the mountain of God, when Moses sees a strange sight.

[4 : 45] Chapter 3, verse 2. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a burning bush. Moses saw that the bush, that though the bush was on fire, it did not burn up. See? It doesn't burn. In verse 5, God warns him. He says, Do not come any closer. Take off your sandals, for the place where you're standing on is holy ground. And holiness will set the tone for the entire first meeting. Holiness means set apart. It means altogether different from your surroundings.

The first thing Moses learns about God up on the mountain, he is a holy God. Verse 6, he says, I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. He's also the Lord of history. The very same God who made promises to Abraham is the same person Moses is speaking to on the mountain. Verse 6, Moses hides his face.

[5 : 48] But in verse 7 to 10, notice how God doesn't hide. I've indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I've heard them. I'm concerned about their suffering. I've come down to rescue them, to bring them up to a land flowing with rich, luxurious desserts, caramel, milk and honey. He says, verse 10, go now, I'm sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.

They are his marching orders. But Moses has some doubts. Verse 13, suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, the God of your fathers has sent me to you. And they ask me, what is his name? What should I tell them? Verse 14, God says, I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites. I am has sent me to you. And so God says that his name is I am. And so on the screen there in purple. Sorry to make this a little bit of a classroom, but just for a second.

[6 : 51] So I am, there you go. In Hebrew, I am, the sound of I am is represented by Y-H-W-H. But in Greek, you can't say Y-X-W-H.

And so in Greek, they use the word Lord for them, which is kurios. But in English, we already have a word Lord, don't we? House of Lords, Lords Cricket Ground, that sort of stuff. And so in English, some of the English Bibles, they change it to capitals. So L-O-R-D in capitals. When you see that in your Bible, usually in the Old Testament, that is not Lord like, oh, my Lord. That is God's name. That is I am in his name, Lord. Now, some of the English Bibles also didn't want to do Lord.

And so they took Y-H-W-H and added a few vowels. And that's how we get Jehovah. Do you see that? Other English Bibles took the Y-H-W-H and added different vowels, A-E.

[7 : 51] I don't know why. They just did. And that's how we get Yahweh. Do you see how that works? Okay. Sorry to turn that into a classroom, but that should really help you.

Good. So when God says, I am, that is his name. I am. And in the Bible, a name sums up the person. It tells you meaningful things about them. Remember Moses? Moses' own name. It means fished out. So it always reminds him that he was fished out of the river when he was a baby. Moses calls his son Gershom, which means foreigner. So little Gershom will always know that when he's outside of Israel, he's a foreigner. I looked up some of your names and here's what I found.

Rosie. I don't know if Rosie Leong's here. Rosie. Rosie's name means famous. She is famous. Andrew. Is there an Andrews here? There are. Andrew Beattie, I saw.

[8 : 51] Manly or masculine. What do you think, Phyllis? Andrew Beattie. Manly or masculine. Annette. Your name means favor or grace. Isn't that nice? John.

Your name means God is gracious. Jennifer. Your name is from Guinevere. I don't know if this is true. Does it mean white phantom? This is the internet, so it's probably wrong. It said Jennifer. It's from Arthurian times, so maybe. Who knows? Vijay. That means very handsome. But, that's, sorry. That's shameless. That's shameless, isn't it? Sorry, I apologize. My name means victory. You see, I guess that our names are things that our parents hoped we would grow into, aren't they? But Bible names, they sum up who a person really is. When Moses asks God his name, he says, I am who I am. The only thing that rightly sums up God, that tells you meaningful things about him, is

himself.

[9 : 56] I am who I am. He is who he is. He is like himself. You see, Yahweh is not sort of like manliness. He's not like favor or grace.

We don't have to hope that he grows up one day to have some victories in his life, like my name. He is unlike everything else. He's altogether different from his surroundings.

He is holy. Do you see how that works? Moses says, what is your name? God says, I am who I am.

I am only like myself. The only thing in the universe that will tell you what I'm like is me.

I'm altogether different. I'm holy. Verse 15. This is my name forever. The name shall call me from generation to generation. And if you were enslaved in Egypt, would you trust Yahweh for rescue? Does the fact that he's the Lord of history, the same God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, does that give you more confidence? Perhaps it's because he is in heaven and that our prayers go up to him and that he sees and cares and knows about his people.

[11 : 11] Maybe for you, it's that Yahweh is the Lord of creation. He can talk through a burning bush while it's on fire at the same time as protecting its leaves from the flames.

You see, I am who I am means Yahweh is on one side of the ledger and everything in existence is on the other. We said that holiness sets the tone for the meeting.

And that is right. Yahweh is by himself on one side, altogether holy. No wonder the very ground he walks on is holy.

And if you were enslaved in Egypt, the question is, who would you trust for rescue? Your first option is Yahweh. Your second option is no slouch either.

And that is Moses. Remember, Moses is perfectly suited for rescue. He's chosen by God himself.

He's a hero of the Bible, revered in the New Testament. His credentials are perfect to rescue.

[12 : 13] Perhaps he is a good choice too. And let's see Moses. Verse 10. Verse 10. God gives him his marching orders. Go now. I'm sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, Israelites, out of Egypt.

What do you think he does with it? Verse 11. Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt? Not a bad question. The last time Pharaoh and Moses met, Pharaoh tried to kill him.

He had to run away. Yahweh says, verse 12. Don't worry. I'll be with you. Moses still has some doubts. Verse 13. Suppose I go to the Israelites and I say to them, the God of your fathers has sent me to you.

And they ask me, what is his name? What shall I tell them? God says, I am who I am. I'm the incomparable God. God. And just to show how incomparable he is, in verse 18 to 22 of your Bibles, Yahweh shows Moses the future.

He shows and spells out exactly how this exodus will go to give him more confidence. But over the page, poor old Moses still isn't convinced.

[13 : 17] What if they don't believe me or listen to me? What if they say the Lord did not appear to you? And God said, what is in your hand? He says, a staff. Right.

Throw it on the ground. He turns it into a snake. And then it turns back into a staff. He gives him two other signs to validate his authority. But in verse 10, Moses is still scratching his head.

Pardon your servant, Lord. I've never been eloquent. I'm not a good speaker. I'm slow with speech and tongue. In verse 11, God says, you idiot. I created eyes and ears and mouth and nose.

Go. I will help you speak and teach you what to say. Finally, Moses says, verse 13. Pardon your servant, Lord. Please send someone else. The Lord's anger, verse 14, burns against Moses.

What about your brother? Take him, Aaron, instead. And you see, when Moses met God, let me summarize quickly how that conversation went. God says, go to Pharaoh. Bring my people out of Egypt.

[14 : 15] Moses says, who am I to deliver these people? Don't worry. I'll be with you. But who are you? Don't worry. I am who I am. But what if the people don't believe me? Don't worry. Here are three signs to validate your authority. But I'm not a good speaker.

I'll teach you what to say. Please send someone else. Right. Take your brother, Aaron, instead.

When you read it like that, it is shocking how hopeless Moses is, isn't it?

He is a million miles away from the great hero of the Bible that we all know him to be. In fact, in verse 24, God tries to kill Moses at a lodging place.

And it's kind of now understandable why. Verse 25, with some blood of foreskin, he's saved from God's judgment.

And the idea is that even Moses needs a rescue. Last week, we're tempted to trust him for rescue. But today, even Moses needs a rescue.

[15:12] You see, everything about his credentials shows how perfect he is for the job. But now we lose all confidence in his ability. We said today it was God versus Moses.

But really, it's God compared to Moses. Moses, the author has been driving a wedge between the two since they met up on the mountain. You see, if Yahweh is on one side of the ledger, Moses is certainly on the other.

He is a failure. He's hopeless. He needs rescue himself, just like everyone else in existence. And the question is, who are you going to trust for rescue?

The answer is much more obvious now. You see, last week, the lesson was trusting God. Trusting God. And if you're about to pull off the biggest rescue in the Bible until Jesus, trusting God, that is the right lesson.

And so today, the Bible underlines the same point from a different angle. This week, don't trust in men. So chapter two last week, chapter one and two, trusting God.

[16:21] Chapter three and four, don't trust in men. They're two sides of the same coin. Do you see that? But today, I think we need to be more nuanced because despite Moses failings, he does have a role to play.

As the story goes on, he does get better and better. But before his really famous stuff, his hero moments, we're not to be confused by his ability.

We're not to be confused as to where the power comes from in the beginning. That way, after the Exodus, Israel won't be tempted to give even 1% of God's glory over to him.

Peter Adam, who spoke at our summer Bible studies here. Peter trains young preachers, as some of you might know. And one day, he was doing a preaching practice class.

And a young minister got up and gave a really good sermon. And Peter said, yep, thank you. And the young preacher said, no worries. You're welcome. And Peter said, no, no, no, no. I'm thanking God, not thanking you.

[17:30] I'm not thanking you. I'm thanking God for your abilities. Do you see that? There's a temptation to give 1% of the glory that's due 100% to God to other people.

Speaking of preaching, in this church, do you look forward to one preacher over another? Do you either smile or sigh when you find out who's speaking on the day?

If Yahweh can use a weak and cowardly Moses to pull off one of the greatest rescues in the Bible, he can certainly use your least favorite preacher to help build this church as well.

Yahweh uses Andrew and I, but he doesn't need us. Yahweh uses Moses, but he doesn't need him. Yahweh uses Israel. But Jesus says, I tell you, from these stones, God can raise up better children of Abraham.

And that is the pattern throughout the Bible. In the New Testament reading, which Jennifer brought to us, God gives his powerful gospel to weak and trembling poor.

[18:39] His mighty rescue from sin and judgment. Through a weak looking cross. Jesus' great commission. Make disciples of all nations. He puts in our hands.

Weak and trembling though we are. And this is Yahweh's pattern in the world. So we won't be confused as to where the power comes from.

We won't be tempted to give even 1% of the glory that is due 100% to God to someone else. We said that Yahweh is on one side of the ledger and everyone else is on the other.

And I reckon that's helpful because it means anyone else, anything else, we might credit with our success, or we might be tempted to look to for help, is just another weak thing on the other side of the ledger.

So, are you more confident about peace and prosperity when your favorite politician gets elected? Or does your confidence come because Yahweh in heaven sees and cares and knows about his people?

[19:49] Is it a manager at work? A teacher, the principal perhaps of your children or grandchildren's school? Is it a doctor, a specialist doctor? Another person who you think holds your future blessings in their hands?

Do you think your future is in your own hands? If it is to be, it is up to me. You know that saying? My brain, my good decisions, my financial planning, my asset portfolio, politicians, priests, celebrities, lifestyle gurus, they are all lined up behind the great Moses.

On the weak side of the ledger. See how that works? When I was being ordained in 2018, and I was wearing all that sort of angel outfit that my son says, as soon as the service is over, this lady rushed at me.

This is like a minute after. She rushed at me, and she knelt down before me and asked if I would pray for her. And I just thought, please just get up and let me, please let me be somewhere else. It was quite awkward.

And someone told me, the lady thinks that because the archbishop had just laid his hands on me during the service, that some, and because it's a minute after and I haven't done anything stupid yet, somehow I've got, you know, some of the archbishops sort of, you know, his juice or his electricity.

[21 : 08] And that if I pray for her, it's, you know, I'm going to have a better connection to God or something ridiculous like that. Are we trusting in the archbishop or in the robes or the man or these sorts of things, or in the incomparable holy God, the one who is unlike anyone else?

Do you see how this works? This passage, it further helps us to trust in only God by sticking a pin in the bubble of all heroes, all other things we're tempted to trust or credit with our success and blessings.

It's a reality check of heroes. It encourages us that the Christian life is supposed to feel weak. That way we're dependent on God and the spirit for power.

God has organized things this way so that we're always on our knees looking to him, the one who's actually able to do something about our situation, the one who has given us politicians and doctors and teachers and each other, the one who's responsible for it all.

It certainly drives us to pray more. It certainly lifts our eyes to heaven, to the one who's able to do something. And it certainly helps us to see all other Moseses for who they really are.

[22 : 32] I'd love to talk to you more about the scandal of giving 1% of God's glory to someone else. That would be as crazy after this sermon as still choosing Moses for rescue rather than Yahweh.

And so let's pray that we'd always choose Yahweh. Amen. Lord Yahweh, we give you thanks and praise.

We look to you, you alone. You are responsible for all the blessings, for all the success we've had in our lives, all the peace and prosperity we enjoy.

It's all because of you. Our salvation is all by grace alone because what you have done in Jesus for us. And please, would we never look to other people?

Would we never give them 1% of your glory? Thank you that you choose to use weak people like us. And please, would that make us more prayerful, more dependent on you who's able to do things in this world.

[23 : 45] And we pray these things in your name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.