

Trust in God, not men

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[0 : 00] Just before we begin today, I just wanted to point out a few strange things that happen in the story. We always call it the burning bush, don't we? But burning is precisely the one thing it doesn't do.

Even in your Bible, it says the burning bush, but it doesn't actually burn. That's the whole point. That's quite a strange thing. The land of milk and honey. I can't prove this, but milk and honey are actually the two ingredients you need to make caramel, at least condensed milk and sugar. So I think the promised land of milk and honey is actually a promised land overflowing with luxurious desserts, caramel. What is God's favorite flavor of ice cream? It's not chocolate, it's caramel.

I can't prove that, but I'm pretty sure that's what he's meant. And thirdly, a really strange thing in our story, out of nowhere, verse 24 over the page, God tries to kill Moses.

Very strange in the story. We'll have a look at why that happens. Strange things in the passage this week. And last week, we started this series in Exodus. And what hangs over the whole book are God's promises to Abraham.

[1 : 04] He says, I promise to make your descendants more numerous than the stars in the sky, to give them a promised land flowing with caramel, milk and honey. But when Exodus opened last week, they were enslaved to a mad king called Pharaoh, who won't let them go.

But also last week, we met our main character, Moses. Moses is a Hebrew by birth from the tribe of Levi. But he was also raised in Pharaoh's house.

So he's the best of both worlds. Moses struck down an Egyptian. He rescued a Hebrew. He resolved a dispute between two Hebrews. He fled his way out of Egypt, all the way to safety in Midian.

It was like a mini exodus, a shadow of the bigger rescue that God is going to do for his people. You see, Moses is the right man for a job like this.

He has 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 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 today.

[2 : 22] But remember this, that Exodus is written for us. Romans 15 says the Old Testament 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 in Egypt, how 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 when it's all said and done by chapter 15, how much thanks and praise will you heap on Moses for all that he has done?

I wonder if you can see where I'm going with this. Because everything about Moses means we're tempted to trust in him for the rescue.

And so today is a lesson about where our confidence should lie. Instead of being God versus Pharaoh last week, today it's God versus Moses. Isn't that strange?

[3 : 27] God versus Moses? But because Exodus is written for us, the question is, who will you trust for rescue? God or Moses? So we're going to look at God first, and then Moses.

Please keep that passage open. You'll need it. And the handout will tell you where we're going. So looking at God, we pick up the story. Moses, he's shepherding his father-in-law Jethro's flock. It's a bit of a come down from life in the palace. But anyway, one day the sheep are grazing too close to Horeb, the mountain of God. And Moses sees a strange sight. Verse 2.

There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire, it did not burn up. See? It doesn't burn up. In verse 5, God warns him. He says, do not come any closer. Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing on is holy ground. And holiness will set the tone for their first introduction.

[4 : 29] Holiness means set apart. It means altogether different from everything else in your surroundings. The first thing that Moses learns about God on the mountain, he is a holy God.

Verse 6. I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Moses is meeting the Lord of history as well.

The very same God who made promises to Abraham all those years ago. And in verse 6, Moses hides his face. He is afraid to look. But in verse 7 to 10, notice that God is not afraid to look.

I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them. I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them. To bring them up into a land flowing with rich, luxurious desserts.

A land flowing of milk and honey. And so in verse 10, Moses gets his marching orders. Go now, I'm sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.

[5 : 34] Moses, he's got a few 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 say, what is his name?

What shall I tell them? And God says, I am who I am. This is what you are saying to the Israelites. I am has sent me to you. Now, sorry for turning this into a classroom, but just to help you.

God's name is I am, which is not there. God's name is I am. There you go, I am.

And in Hebrew, I am is those four consonants, Y-H-W-H. But in the Greek, there's no way to pronounce Y-H-W-H. So they put the word Lord, kurios for the Greeks, for the New Testament and the like.

But in English, we already have a word for Lord, house of Lords, Lords, Cricket Ground. And so some English translations in the green there, they put Lord in smaller capitals.

[6 : 35] Just so you know, we're talking about God's name. I am the Lord. Now, what some English translations do is they take Y-H-W-H and add a few vowels just to make it more pronounceable.

So some added E-O-A, which is where we get Jehovah. Do you see how that works? Other English translations added an A and an E, which is how we get Yahweh.

Do you see that? Is that okay? So every time you see Lord in capital letters, that is not a title or like the house of Lords in England. That is God's own name.

I am, for us in English, Lord. For us, for this sermon, I'm going to use Yahweh as his name. So that's it. So anyway, I guess in the Bible, the names that we read, the names sum up and tell us things about a person.

They remind them of important things. So Moses' own name, Moses means fished out because Moses will always be reminded that that is how he was saved, fished out of the River Nile.

[7 : 46] Moses' son, Gershom, means foreigner. So that little Gershom will always know that when he's outside of Israel, he's always going to be a foreigner. And I looked up some of your names on the Internet, and this is what I found.

So Glenn, there you are. Glenn, your name means valley. Did you know that? Yep, great. Paul, Paul is over there. Small and humble. I don't know, Linda, how you feel about that.

Jennifer, any Jennifers here? Jennifer, this is a good one. Jennifer means white phantom. That's not bad, is it? Jessica, she's out of the room. Jessica means to behold. That's not bad, is it?

Vijay means very handsome. That's shocking. That's shameless. Sorry. Sorry.

I apologise for that. My dad's in the back. My dad named me. Victory, right? Yeah, anyway, just Victory. You see, I guess that our names, our names mean things that our parents hope that we grow into.

[8 : 50] But Bible names sum up the person. They tell you really important things about them.

When Moses meets God and God says, I am who I am, the only thing that rightly sums up God that tells us meaningful things about him is himself.

I am who I am. The only thing like God is himself. You see, God is not like a Glen or something to behold.

He's not like love or we don't hope that God grows up one day to have some victories like my name. There's nothing like God. He's altogether different.

The only thing like God is himself. I am like me. I am who I am. Moses says, what is your name? I am myself.

I am the only God. I'm altogether different. I'm unlike my surroundings. I am holy. Verse 15. This is my name forever.

[9 : 53] The name you shall call me from generation to generation. And if you were enslaved in Egypt, would you trust in Yahweh to rescue you? Does the fact that he's the Lord of history, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, does that give you more confidence?

Perhaps it's because he's from heaven and that our prayers go up to him, that he sees and knows and cares. Maybe for you, it's that Yahweh is the Lord of creation, that he can speak through a burning bush and protect its leaves from the flames.

You see, I am who I am means Yahweh is on one side of the ledger and everything in all existence is on the other. We said that holiness sets the tone for their meeting and that is right, isn't it?

God is completely unlike everything else. The only thing like him is himself. No wonder the very ground he walks on is holy.

If you were in Egypt, who would you trust for rescue? Your first option is Yahweh. Your second option is no slouch either.

[11 : 05] And that is Moses. Remember we said Moses, he's perfectly suited to rescue God's people. He's already performed a mini exodus. He says he has the right credentials to do the job.

Perhaps he is a good choice too. And so let's have a look. Verse 10. Moses, he gets his marching orders. Go now to Pharaoh. Bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.

Moses has some doubts. Verse 11. Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh? Not a bad question. Last time Moses and Pharaoh met, Pharaoh tried to kill him. So a pretty fair objection. Yahweh says, don't worry.

Verse 12. Don't worry. I'll be with you. Moses still scratching his head. Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, the God of your fathers has sent me to you. And they ask, what is his name?

What should I tell them? Verse 14. God says, I am the incomparable God. I am who I am. Tell them that the incomparable God has sent me to you.

[12 : 02] And just to show how incomparable he is, in verse 18 to 22, Yahweh shows Moses the future. He spells out exactly how this exodus will happen so that Moses has complete confidence.

But instead, poor old Moses over the page. What if they don't believe me or listen to me? What if they say, the Lord did not appear to you? And then he says, what's in your hand?

Well, a staff. And he proceeds to do a few signs and wonders to validate his authority. And in verse 10, Moses still scratches his head. He says, pardon your servant.

I've never been eloquent in speech. Neither in the past or since you've spoken to your servant. I'm slow with speech and tongue. And in verse 11, God says, you idiot. He says, I created eyes and ears and mouth and nose.

I'll teach you what to say. And verse 13, Moses says, pardon your servant. Please send someone else. And then the Lord's anger burned against Moses.

[13 : 05] And he said, what about your brother, Aaron, the Levite? I know he can speak well. Let me summarize. If I've lost you there, let me summarize how the introduction went. God, Yahweh, said to Moses, go to Pharaoh and rescue my people.

Moses says, who am I to deliver this people? Don't worry. I'll be with you. But who are you? Don't worry. I'm the incomparable God. But what if they don't believe me? Here are three signs to validate your authority. I'm not a good speaker.

Don't worry. I'll teach you what to say. Please send someone else. Do you see how that works? It's quite shocking how hopeless Moses is. He is a million miles away from one of the heroes of the Bible that we think he is.

In fact, look at verse 24. At a lodging place along the way, the Lord met Moses and was about to kill him. We said it's strange, isn't it, that God tries to kill Moses.

But at least now you might have an understanding of where that's coming from. What hope do Israel have if Yahweh is angry at their rescuer? Verse 25.

[14 : 13] Zipporah takes a flint knife, circumcises her son and touches Moses' feet with the blood. The idea is that Moses is saved from God's judgment by blood.

You see, after last week, we're tempted to trust in Moses for rescue. But in verse 25, even Moses needs a rescue. See, everything about his credentials showed how he was the perfect man for the

job.

But now we're supposed to lose all confidence in his abilities. We said today it was God versus Moses. But really, it's God compared to Moses. The author has been driving a wedge between the two since they met.

You see, if Yahweh is on one side of the ledger, then Moses is definitely on the other. A failure, reluctant, someone who needs rescue, just like everyone else.

And the question is, which one of these two men, people, are you going to trust for rescue? Last week, the lesson was trusting God. Trusting God.

[15:20] We said last week that he is laughably more powerful than Pharaoh. And trusting God, that is the right lesson you need to learn if you're about to pull off one of the greatest rescues in the Bible.

And so the author underlines trust God again by saying, don't trust in men. So chapter one and two last week, trusting God. Chapter three and four this week, don't trust in men.

Do you see how that works? They're two sides of the same sort of trust coin. Today, though, we need to be slightly more nuanced because Moses does have a role to play.

As the story goes on, he will get better and better. But before he does anything famous, before he does anything good, before we're tempted to praise him, we're not to be confused as to where the power comes from.

That it was always only God and Moses was weak. See, that way, after Exodus, Israel won't be tempted to give one percent of God's glory over to Moses and his abilities.

[16:27] It seems that Yahweh chooses to work through weak things. Actually, that is the consistent pattern in the Bible. In the New Testament reading, which David brought to us, God gives a powerful gospel to a weak and trembling Paul.

His mighty rescue from sin and judgment looks like a weak and foolish cross. Jesus' great commission to make disciples of all nations, he puts in our hands, weak and trembling as we are.

Now, you see, that way, we're not tempted to give anyone else one percent of God's glory. Peter Adam, who speaks at our Summer Bible Studies, I think a lot of you know Peter.

He's like the unofficial godfather of Melbourne. Peter has preaching practice groups. And he tells a story about how one day a young preacher got up to give a practice sermon and he did a really good job.

And Peter said, thank you, sit down. And the young preacher said, no worries, you're welcome. And Peter said, no, no, no, I'm not thanking you. I'm thanking God for you. Do you see the difference?

[17:39] Speaking of preaching in this church, do you look forward to one preacher over another? Do you either smile or sigh when you realize who is 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 grow this church as well.

Yahweh uses Andrew and I, though he doesn't need us. Yahweh uses the Vinicums to reach Groot Island. He doesn't need them. Yahweh uses Moses, but he doesn't need him either.

He chooses to work this way in the world so we won't be confused as to where the power lies. So we won't be tempted to give someone else just 1% of the glory that is due 100% to God.

We said that Yahweh is on one side of the ledger and everyone else is on the other. And I think that's quite a helpful way to think about this because that means anyone else, anything else we might be tempted to credit our success to, to credit our blessings to, to look to for help is just another thing on the weak side of the ledger.

[19:00] So are you more confident about peace and prosperity when your favorite politician gets elected? Or because Yahweh was seeing and hearing and caring all along?

Is it a manager at work? Is it the teacher at your kid's school? A better doctor? Some other person who you think holds your blessings, your future in their hands?

Is your future in your own hands? You know, if it is to be, it is up to me. That's that famous saying. My brain, my good decisions, my choice, my financial planning, my asset portfolio, politicians, priests, celebrities, lifestyle gurus, well-being people, people, they are all lined up behind the great Moses on the weak side of the ledger.

Do you see how this works? When I was ordained in 2018, as soon as the service was over, you know, sort of standing in that, that sort of angel outfit, you know, thing, as soon as the service was over and you get outside, this lady rushed up to me and said, will you pray for me?

Will you pray for me? And I was like, okay. Okay. And someone told me later on that what she thought was because the archbishop has just laid his hands on me in the commissioning, and that because I haven't done anything stupid just yet, that I've got, you know, like all of the archbishop's sort of juice, you know, flowing through me, you know, that sort of electricity business.

[20 : 31] And she thought that somehow my prayers, because of what he had done to me, you know, would be more or better heard by God. Are we trusting in the archbishop or priestly robes or these sorts of things, or in Yahweh who sees and knows, who is the Lord of history, the Lord of all creation, who cares about his people?

This passage, it helps us to trust only in God by sticking a pin in the bubble of anyone or anything else we might be tempted to trust for rescue, for help or credit with some sort of success in our lives.

This passage is a reality check of heroes. It encourages us that the Christian life is supposed to feel weak. That's how Yahweh has organized it.

So that we're totally on our knees, dependent on him. We're looking to him and the spirit for power. This passage changes how we pray, doesn't it?

It changes how you thank someone. One eye on them, but one eye on God. It changes how you ask someone for help. One eye on them, one eye on God. It changes how you approach doctors.

[21 : 46] One eye on them, one eye on God. It certainly helps us to see all the Moseses for who they really are. I'd love to talk to you more about the scandal of giving 1% of God's glory to someone else.

It would be as crazy as after this sermon is over to still looking to Moses rather than God for rescue. That's all we've got time for, so let me pray.

Amen. Lord Yahweh, we look only to you for help.

All the blessings in our lives, any peace and prosperity, money, family, anything good we have is all of you. You have worked through people because you have decided to bless us.

Not because we are great, but because you are good to us and kind and caring. Please readjust the way we see the world. Readjust the way we give thanks to people, the way we ask people for help.

[22 : 56] Please would we be more prayerful, more dependent on you. And we praise you, Yahweh. There is no one like you. All of us, we are just like Moseses.

Failures on the weak side of the ledger. Help us remember that you are the Holy One. And turn to you for help. In Jesus' name. Amen.