

The God Who Will Not Let Us Down

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[0 : 00] It's a joy to be with you and to be able to open God's word and look together at Exodus this morning. My kids were excited, at least a little bit, when I said, they said, where's the church this morning?

I said, well, it's right up by the castle. And they were a little disappointed when they realized it wasn't actually inside the castle. They were thinking maybe we were going to fire off the cannon or something, but this is the closest I've ever been to a castle on a Sunday morning.

So thank you for having me. And we've had a wonderful time in the UK, and we've been in Scotland here in Edinburgh for the last week, and have enjoyed seeing things. And even more than that, just enjoyed the fellowship with brothers and sisters in Christ.

It is really a remarkable thing, and I'm sure many of you have traveled in many different places, but to go to different lands and different cultures. And yet when you come to a church and you come to Bible people, to gospel people, and you can sense that however different we may be and where we come from and the accent with which we speak, there is a real sense of unity and camaraderie because of the fellowship that we have in Christ.

So thank you for having me here. As we look together at our text, I encourage you to have your Bibles open or have your Bibles swiped on as we look together at Exodus chapter 6.

[1 : 29] Before we come to chapter 6, let me remind you of the context. Exodus of course is the story of God's divine deliverance of His people who were slaves in Egypt for more than 400 years.

And in chapter 5, Moses, who was raised in Pharaoh's home and then fled to Midian and then received the call in the burning bush and came back.

In chapter 5, he makes his approach to Pharaoh, he and Aaron. And of course, things do not go well. Pharaoh refuses his request, his demand to let the people go, and things go from bad to worse, and Pharaoh says, not only must you make the daily quota of bricks as a part of your slave labor, but now you must make bricks without straw.

Go find your own straw. And so Moses begins to wonder, he's probably already wondered, if this is really going to work, if this is really a good idea.

And he finishes chapter 5 with two questions and one complaint. Look at verse 22, then Moses turned to the Lord and said, here's the first question.

[2 : 47] Oh Lord, why have you done evil to this people? And the second question, why did you ever send me?

And then he makes a complaint, for since I came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has done evil to this people and you have not delivered your people at all.

I wonder if you have ever come to the Lord with questions like that, with a complaint like that.

Perhaps you feel in your spirit that you shouldn't verbalize them, mention them to others, but yet in your heart you have come to the Lord with this sort of question and complaint.

Lord, why would you do what you're doing in my life? Lord, why can't I sleep?

There are people who can't sleep at night. They're called parents, but then other people too can't sleep. And I remember, and I can't take really any credit, my wife has done all the work, but I remember all those times hearing kids, little babies screaming, waking up on the hour and some of those times walking and pacing, trying to get them to go back to sleep and thinking to myself, though I'm a good Calvinist and believe in God's sovereignty, thinking, Lord, what possible purpose could there be in your good providence to have this child crying yet again?

[4 : 30] Some of you have it far worse. Some of you maybe have come to the Lord. I don't understand God. Why am I still single? God, why did this relationship break up?

Why can't I get pregnant? Why do I have such problems with my children? They're so disobedient or they're wandering from the Lord.

Why have I been sick for so long without any end in sight? Why do I continue, Lord, to struggle with these temptations, to sexual sin, to drink, to drugs?

Lord, I don't want this and I still struggle with it. Lord, I don't know if I can keep doing this. I don't know why you are doing what you're doing. That's what Moses is asking.

Why, Lord, are you continuing to do this when I'm trying to serve you? Why?

[5 : 31] I don't know if I can go on. Years ago, when I first started out in ministry, I was a very young man and one of the deacons in the church came to me.

Maybe 10, 15 years older than me. Big man, strong man, intense, successful. And he came in and he told me about his family and about his two kids who were flourishing and doing very well.

And then his youngest daughter who had very serious special needs, physical, mental, to the point where her bed almost had to be a sort of cage because of the violent fits that she would have.

And the mom was unable to really physically wrestle her into place anymore. And as this man told me about his struggle, this strong man began to choke up and cry, weeping over his little girl.

And I wondered why he was coming to see me and I didn't know what to say or what he was expecting the pastor to do. But then he told me how they were thinking seriously about putting her, at least for a time, into some kind of home, some kind of institution where she could have specialized care.

[7 : 06] And I think he was coming to talk to his pastor, though he never asked the question explicitly. I think he was coming because he wanted to know if he was a bad father for thinking of doing this.

And of course, I knew how much he loved his kids and knew that he wouldn't be doing this if he didn't think it was the only choice and the best choice, the best way to love his daughter and fast forward to my own congregation now and we have a family going through something quite similar, absolutely heartbreaking.

And I'm sure though they have been strong in faith, they have asked the question, why? Why would you do that?

Lord. And you see his second question. Why did you send me? God, I didn't go looking for this. You grabbed me. You spoke to me from a burning bush and you sent me here. This was your idea. You ever wondered, God, why'd you bring me here to this school, this country, this assignment, this profession, this marriage, these kids?

[8 : 24] And you wonder what God is doing. And perhaps even in some dark moments, you've uttered a complaint in your heart much like Moses has.

You've wanted to say to God, I'm trying to do the right thing and I don't feel like you're doing your part. That's what Moses is really saying. This was your idea.

You sent me here. I'm doing all that I know how to do and I don't think that you are interested.

So what does God have to say to Moses? That's what chapter six is about. The big idea in chapter six is really the big idea in the whole book of Exodus.

One book that I've been studying, we've been preaching through looking at Exodus in our own congregation. And one of the books that I've been using has a very helpful title, The God Who Makes Himself Known.

[9 : 27] We think of Exodus as the book of deliverance from Egypt and it is. But really underneath that and above that is this bigger theme that Exodus is about the God who makes himself known.

He wants to be known to Moses, known to Pharaoh, known to the people of Israel and known to the Egyptians and known to the world. So everything he's doing to save the people, to bring the plagues, to harden Pharaoh's heart is toward that end that they might know who this God is.

And so we see in the passage that was read three times. He mentions, I am the Lord. You see it in verse two. And of course in your Bibles, when you see the Lord written in those small capital letters, it is the tetragrammaton.

It is Yahweh, Jehovah, the divine covenant name. I am the Lord. Again look down in verse six.

Say therefore to the people of Israel, I am the Lord. Verse eight, I will bring you into the land. I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. I will give it to you for a possession.

[10 : 41] Why? How? I am the Lord. This is the most important part of his reply.

That Moses, in the midst of his questions, in the midst of his complaint, most of all needs to know to whom he is speaking.

I am the Lord. Isn't that what you try to say to kids or grandkids when you have to discipline them? Or when they just, they don't understand why this is happening, why they have these rules, why they're struggling so.

And when you can't explain it or they can't understand it, what you want them to get more than anything is you want to look them in the eye and you want to say, son, daughter, I'm your dad.

[11 : 49] I'm your mom. Look at me. This is who I am. I love you. I know you. I've always been with you.

Would you trust me? And if you would simply know who I am, there's a commercial for Pepsi.

I don't know if you've seen it. You can Google it if you want to try to find it. Don't do it right now. But it's just Google Uncle Drew.

And it's this funny commercial where they have this basketball star who dresses up like an old man. So he puts on a, you know, just a gray sweatsuit and he gets all this makeup, professional makeup done and he has this, this big white beard and he sort of puts on a, you know, a little pillow or something here.

So he has a little bit of a, a punch and they show these undercover cameras going out into some inner city park late at night where all these big strapping guys are playing basketball.

[13 : 01] And here they have this old guy and his, you know, friend says, this is my uncle Drew. And so he comes out there to play and they don't know that he's, you know, an all star in playing professional basketball in the States.

And so he goes and at first he seems sort of feeble and frail. And then before you know it, he's dunking over people and he's draining shots and everyone's just a marvel.

Where did this old man come from? And of course the secret is they don't really know who he is. They don't understand his real identity.

And so it is when we come to God with our complaints and the Psalms are full of laments. There's a biblical place for a, a hope filled honest lament.

What Moses needs to know is the God to whom he is speaking. I am the Lord.

[14 : 04] That's the fundamental issue in Exodus. And it is your fundamental need and mine. You need to know the Lord, not just casually, not just a few things about him.

You need to know him, not just to go to church, but to know him. You see in the Bible, no one ever comes away from an encounter with the living God unaffected, unaffected.

Now some may hate him, some may bow down and worship him, but no one comes face to face with the living God and is unaffected. So I will say sometimes to the people in my congregation, look, you may be bored with the sermon because you have a boring preacher that happens sometimes.

You may find your life boring, but we must be very careful if we've come to find our Lord boring.

If we've come to find the gospel boring, because to know this God transcendent overall should not leave us unaffected.

[15 : 16] That's the main point in chapter six. The Lord's response to Moses in the midst of his complaint and his questions is to reassert his own identity.

But let's look at it in more detail. There are basically two things that God says to Moses. First he has something to say directly to Moses, and then he has something to say to the Israelites through Moses.

Those will be our two big headings for our remaining minutes. First, God has something to say to Moses.

Four things in particular. He reminds Moses, four things he has done in the past. Verse three, I appeared, verse four, I established, verse five, I have heard, and the end of verse five, I have remembered.

He says, okay, Moses, you're doubting whether I know what I'm doing. You're not sure that this plan is going to work, but let me remind you, Moses, of what I have done for you in the past.

[16 : 31] Four things. I established my covenant, I heard your groaning, I appeared to your fathers and to you, and I have remembered my covenant.

He says in verse three, I appeared, that is, I knew your fathers. I was their God too. He says, I did not make myself known by the name the Lord.

You see that in verse three, which has stumped many scholars because the divine name Yahweh appears beginning in Genesis chapter four, and it occurs more than a hundred times in Genesis. And so it seems strange. What does the Lord mean that he was not known by his divine name? The best explanation is that while the people of Israel knew it and had heard of it, they had not yet become aware of its full meaning and identity.

They knew God as God Almighty, El Shaddai, one of the mountain, the Panto Crator in the Greek, meaning the Lord over all.

[17 : 44] But they did not yet know him as their redeemer. They had knowledge of the name itself, but they did not understand all that the name signified.

So what is new in verse three is not the letters themselves, but the revelation of God as Savior, that the Lord, the mighty one, sees and hears the plight of his people and purposes to deliver them.

And I just wonder if even here, some of us, we know God, the Lord, divine, strong, sovereign.

But perhaps we've forgotten or perhaps we haven't really learned this God who is Savior,

Redeemer, this God who sees, who hears, who's mighty to save.

He tells Moses, look, I know you're doubting me, but I appeared to you and to your fathers. And I have revealed myself to you.

[18 : 49] Then he says, I established that as I established my promises, I put a plan in place. Then he says, third, I have heard.

I'm listening. I'm not ignoring you. Isn't it often in the midst of difficulty that this is what we need even more than somebody to come and think here, I got all the answers.

I got the Bible verse that's going to fix your problems. We need somebody to listen, somebody to hear us. Why?

Isn't that what you want your husband to do? Maybe put the phone away for a few minutes. Maybe do more than just, uh-huh, uh-huh, uh-huh, uh-huh, uh-huh.

And listen and engage and hear. There's power in simply the ministry of presence to be there and in the quiet whisper to a friend.

[19 : 53] I'm sorry. I know. I hear. I remember when I was a young man and my grandmother died, I was maybe 13 or 14.

Uh, the first person close to me that had passed away and I remember being overcome with just sadness and confusion and, and crying.

And I remember my dad coming to me. I can remember the spot in our family room and coming and not saying anything, but just giving me a great big hug.

We like to hug in, in, in America. It's okay. You can try it and just, just giving me a big hug. He didn't say anything. He didn't have to.

I knew that he knew. I knew that he, he was hearing. It was listening. Even if he didn't say anything, the Lord says to Moses, I appeared, I established, I heard, and I have remembered.

[21 : 06] I've remembered my covenant. The end of verse five, I've not forgotten all that I've promised. If you go to chapter two, there's a striking parallel at the end of chapter two.

We read that God has heard Israel's groaning. Verse 23, during those many days, the king of Egypt died and the people of Israel grown because of their slavery and cried out for help.

Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God and God heard their groaning and God remembered his covenant. God saw the people of Israel and God knew.

Again, four beautiful verbs. He heard, he remembered, he saw, he knew. And if you know the story, at that point in Exodus chapter two, God's people know nothing of this.

This is all behind the scenes. What they see in the audience on the stage is all barren and empty and dark and silent. And we get to peer back and see that even in the midst of their anguish and slavery, God heard, he remembered, he saw, and he knew.

[22 : 22] No one else knew, but God knew. And so we come now to chapter six, and this is almost the same four verbs. God now letting Moses in on this little secret.

Moses, you may not have understood this, but even before I called you, I heard, I saw, I remembered, I know.

God is making plans even now in your life that you know nothing about. He's not helpless. He's not too busy.

He's not too small. He's not indifferent. He's not surprised. He's not rolling his eyes. He is the Lord. So the Lord starts by reminding Moses, let me tell you what I've done for you in the past.

Okay, remember your past. Here's the second big heading. Now he directs Moses attention to the people of Israel. Okay, Moses, here's what I've done in the past.

[23 : 32] Now here is what I will do in the future. Here's my word for you. Now here's my word through you to the people of Israel. One of the things I said yesterday, almost the last thing I said in my last talk of the day, as I said, I simply want to remind the dear saints in Scotland, what you already know, just to hear it perhaps from a different voice, you have a great history.

You have a wonderful past. I'm spending several years of my life studying it. You have a wonderful past. Do you believe that you have a good future?

It's one thing to say, oh yes, wasn't that good? Yes, oh that's very good of the Lord to tell Moses and remind him, oh God has done great things. We've had great revivals in this land. There's been great preachers in our land, great theologians in our land.

That's one thing to remind them of the past. And now the Lord transitions to say, not just that Moses, I want you to know what I will do for you in the future.

You see he makes seven promises. Verse six, he says, I am the Lord. And number one, I will bring you out from your burdens of the Egyptians.

[25 : 04] Number two, I will deliver you from slavery to them. Number three, I will redeem you with an outstretched arm. Number four, I will take you to be my people.

Number five, I will be your God. Number six, I will bring you into the land I swore to give to you. Number seven, I will give it to you for a possession.

Just love what the Lord does here. Moses is saying, God, you don't know what you're doing. You sent me. You got the wrong guy, the wrong time, the wrong place.

I'm doing my part. You're not doing your part. And the Lord says, let me make some promises to you, Moses, and I want you to tell them to the people because I've not forgotten.

I've not grown hard of hearing. My word will not fall empty. This is the liberating, freeing, rescuing, adopting, loving, lavishing good news.

[26 : 07] God is going to give them a better possession and an abiding one. And you say, well, that's wonderful. I bet that was real encouraging to Moses and the Israelites.

What about me? Think of all that Christ has promised to you. He promised to the Israelites, I will bring you out from the burden of the Egyptians.

He promises to you, I will make your yoke easy and your burden light. He promised to the Israelites, I will deliver you from slavery. He promises to you, I will deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

To Israel, I will redeem you with an outstretched arm. To us, I will redeem you from the power and penalty of sin and give my life as a ransom for many.

To Israel, I will take you to be my people. And to us in Ephesians two, I will bring you near to me.

You who are far from me, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

[27 : 21] To the Israelites, he promised I will be your God. Revelation 21, I will dwell with you and you will be my people and I will be with you as your God.

To Israel, he promised to bring them into the land. To us, Jesus says, I will go and prepare a place for you and come again and take you to myself that where I am, you may be also.

And to Israel, he says, I will give it to you for a possession. To us, he says, I will give you your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you from before the foundation of the world.

Your God loves to make promises. And God's people often struggle to believe those promises.

Do you see how this section ends in verse nine? I find this to be an exceptionally sad and amazingly tender verse.

[28 : 27] Moses spoke thus to the people of Israel. Okay, he came to Israel and he said, look, I know you're doing bricks without straw. I've been talking to God.

Here's what he says to you. He's making seven promises. I will save you. I will be with you. I will redeem you. I will give you a land promise after promise. But they did not listen to Moses because of their broken spirit and harsh slavery.

As one commentator says, the eye wills of salvation lead to an eye won't from God's people. They could not hear the promises of God because of their pain.

They could not see through their suffering. You could translate it because of their shortness of wind. Broken spirit, their lack of breath. One commentator says demoralization brought on by exhaustion.

[29 : 35] And maybe that's where you are. Maybe that's what you're feeling. Too hurt to hear. Too burdened to believe. Even here you're thinking, OK, this guy is going on and promises and promises and Bible verses.

That's fine. It's not for me. You lack even the spirit to listen, let alone to believe.

When we find ourselves turning God's eye will into our human eye won't, we need to step back and get a clearer picture of who we're dealing with.

That's what the Lord is trying to do for Moses. I am the Lord. I am the Lord three times. I am the Lord. If you knew me, if you just could understand who you're talking to.

Maybe some of us are like the Israelites. We know God. We know something about God. We know true things about God. We even have some kind of relationship with God, but it's incomplete.

[30 : 42] We know him as strong and powerful, but we don't know him as strong and powerful for us. We don't know him as our maker, defender, redeemer and friend.

We only relate to God as a judge, not as a loving heavenly father. Do you know or have you forgotten all that God has promised us in Christ?

Abraham knew the Lord as a promise maker. Moses knew him as a promise keeper, but we know the one in whom all the promises are yes and amen.

Just think of all that God has promised you in Romans eight. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

In Christ, although the body is dead because of sin, the spirit is life in you because of righteousness. In Christ, we did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but a spirit of adoption by which we cry out, Abba Father, yes and amen in Christ.

[31 : 52] The sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us in Christ. He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all, will he not also graciously with him freely give us all things?

That's a promise. Do you believe this good news that nothing in all creation, either death or life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord, not governments, not families, not secularism, nothing.

All the promises of God, yes and amen in Christ. We need to take the long view. You have good news coming.

Do you believe that? When we go through these familiar stories in the Bible, it's easy to think, oh, well, this is great. We love the low parts because we know that the high parts are coming. Bricks without straw, this is great.

This is just going to make it even better when the plagues come and they leave Egypt because we know the ending. If you're watching football, you know, real football, you're football, or you're watching rugby and you record it and then you go back and you watch it and somebody's told you the ending and your team won.

[33 : 29] Oh, you don't care if they get down by however many scores because, you know, this is just setting us up for a greater victory. I know how the story ends.

You are meant as Christians to live your life knowing how the story ends. We read Moses, we know how it ends, but you read your Bibles, you know how it ends for you.

These promises will all be true. Think of all the prophecies of the Old Testament that find their yes in Christ for millennia waiting, waiting and all of them true.

He was born of the seed of the woman. He crushed the head of the serpent. He was Abraham's offspring descended from the tribe of Judah, heir to the throne of David, born of a virgin, born in Bethlehem, preceded by the messenger of the covenant, a prophet like Moses, a priest like Melchizedek, a king like David.

He entered Jerusalem on a donkey. He was betrayed by a friend, sold for 30 pieces of silver, accused by false witnesses, stricken, smitten and afflicted, hated without cause, crucified with transgressors, buried with the rich in his death.

[34 : 52] He was wounded for our iniquities. Not one of his bones was broken and he rose from the dead according to the scriptures.

So much of being a Christian is about understanding what God remembers and what God forgets. And the devil comes to us with lies and he says, you know what God forgets?

He forgets his promises, but you know what he always remembers? Your sin. He remembers your sin. He knows what you've done. He knows what you're like.

That's what the devil tells us. And to be a Christian is to get those lines straight and understand that God does not remember the sins of his people and he never forgets his covenant promises.

He remembered his covenant in Exodus. He remembered his covenant on that silent night, holy night. He remembered his covenant on the resurrection morning.

[35 : 53] Every eye will of divine promise has ended up as an eye did of gospel deliverance. And so he will do for us.

God has not forgotten who you are. Do not forget who he is. Let's pray.

Father in the midst of the descending cold in this room, would you warm our hearts once again with the good news of the gospel, this old, old story, this greatest story ever told.

And some of it, some perhaps here wander from it. Maybe some need to hear it for the first time per se, perhaps many just to be reminded that our love would not grow cold.

Give us confidence, Lord, in the midst of hardship, doubt, struggle and difficulty to know you as you are and to trust that all of these promises, great and glorious promises are yes and amen in Christ.

[37 : 15] How great you are and how good we pray in Jesus name who makes all of this possible and has won this great salvation for us. Amen.