

The God Who Hears – Exodus 1-6 (Part 7 of 7)

“Now You Shall See What I Do to Pharaoh”

Exodus 6

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Faithful followers need to take the long view. That is what we talked about last week as we looked at Moses’ first few steps in embracing God’s calling on his life. Exodus 5 showed us that even though Moses had a “burning bush” moment and even though the people of Israel responded very favorably to Moses’ report, his early days of doing what God had told him didn’t work very well. Pharaoh was dismissive and punitive. And when things become difficult, the people of Israel were angry with Moses and Aaron. Their fearful rage sounded like this:

²¹ and they said to them, “The LORD look on you and judge, because you have made us stink in the sight of Pharaoh and his servants, and have put a sword in their hand to kill us” (Exodus 5:21).

And that led Moses to say the following honest words:

²² Then Moses turned to the LORD and said, “O Lord, why have you done evil to this people? Why did you ever send me? ²³ 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” (Exodus 5:22–23).

Now I’m sure that you relate to Moses’ feelings. In fact, a number of you emailed me your stories of the how much you resonate with Moses; it is hard to take the long view sometimes. It is very easy to wonder “God, what in the world are You doing?”

Next Steps in the Long View

Today we are going to take our final step in this first section of our study of Moses called “The God Who Hears.” We’ll pick Exodus up again in January, after spending some time looking at a number of Old Testament texts that will prepare and guide us through the Advent Season. The next series will be called “They Testify of Me,” and in the middle of that, our Worship Arts Ministry is going to bless us with a great weekend of music and a clear presentation of the gospel on December 9. These next six weeks are some of the best church family times we’ll have all year.

Our final text in this mini-series is Exodus 6, and it is a text with a great message but with a strange flow. If you look at the entire chapter in one glance, you will see that it contains God’s answer to Moses’ questioning (vv 1-13), a genealogy (vv 14-25), and a summary (vv 26-28). I think that part of the reason this chapter is like this is because it is the prelude to the Ten Plagues and God’s redemption of His people in chapters 7-12. Moses is setting the context for what is coming; he is helping us understand how bad the situation was with the people of God.

I can only imagine that as Moses thought back on this moment in his life, he could see more clearly that while he knew he needed to take the “long view,” there was something really significant

happening in the heart of the people (and I think in the heart of Moses too) which was preventing them from hearing “Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh” with hopeful, enthusiastic hearts. Even when they heard more messages from Moses, they struggled.

Some of you can probably relate. Perhaps you heard the message last week and thought: “Yeah, I need to take the long view. I want to take the long view. But . . .” Well, I want to try and help you with that. I’ve been there, and I think Moses and the people of Israel were there too.

Last Sunday I said that **faithful followers take the long view**. And this week I want to add something to that statement. Moses is setting us up for the greatest deliverance in the Old Testament, but before it comes, he highlights how bad things really were. This text mingles people, promises, and pain. And I want to show you what needs to be added to the long view philosophy.

People

I want to start by jumping ahead to verses 14-27, because this is probably a passage of Scripture that you would be tempted to skip over. Yet there are some important things to notice and learn here.

You need to know that the insertion of a genealogy at this point in the story may seem odd to us, but for a person in the ancient Near East, this would not seem out of place. We tend to think of genealogies like credits in a movie or like those disclaimers at the end of prescription medication commercial – a tedious recitation of information that you tolerate. But this genealogy, like all genealogies, is intended to communicate some important messages. Perhaps you will remember our study of Matthew’s gospel and the way in which the genealogy on the first chapter traces the line of Christ back through David to Abraham, a clear message that Jesus is the promised King.¹

So what are the messages communicated through this genealogy? Doug Stuart, in his commentary on Exodus, identifies the following:

1. It begins with Reuben and Simeon, Jacob’s first and second born sons, thus linking the family history of Moses and Aaron back to the very beginnings of the nation of Israel, even though Moses and Aaron are descendants of Levi.
2. The list ends with Aaron’s grandson, bringing the genealogy into the time of the Judges and linking future generations to this story.
3. It highlights the true priesthood of Aaron, something which is a major theme later in the book.
4. It gives some background to Korah and his rebellion when he claimed equal authority with Moses and Aaron (see Num. 16:1-49).
5. It shows the reader that Moses was from a priestly family – something that will be important later as he mediates on behalf of God’s people.²

¹ See <http://www.yourchurch.com/sermon/a-genealogy-of-glorious-grace/> (April 19, 2009 – A Genealogy of Glorious Grace)

² Doug Stuart, *Exodus – The New American Commentary*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2006).

As you can see, the genealogy is more than a list of names; it is a validation of the ministry of Moses and Aaron. It serves to provide their credentials. Verses 26-27 carry this tone with them:

26 These are the Aaron and Moses to whom the LORD said: "Bring out the people of Israel from the land of Egypt by their hosts." 27 It was they who spoke to Pharaoh king of Egypt about bringing out the people of Israel from Egypt, this Moses and this Aaron (Exodus 6:26–27).

So this genealogy serves many purposes, but it serves to highlight the personal nature of God's work. God is working out His plan *through* the lives of people, especially Moses and Aaron. Why do I make this point? Because it shows us that following God's leading and the challenges connected to this are deeply personal. Every name has a story. God's plan is not theoretical; it involves real people, and when those plans become difficult, people's lives become difficult.

Promises

Now let's turn our attention to verses 1-8. Don't forget that Moses has just voiced his frustration that God has "not delivered his people at all" (5:23). Notice how God responds to him and how unbelievably God-centered his answer is.

¹ But the LORD said to Moses, "Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh; for with a strong hand he will send them out, and with a strong hand he will drive them out of his land." ² God spoke to Moses and said to him, "I am the LORD. ³ I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by my name the LORD I did not make myself known to them. ⁴ I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they lived as sojourners. ⁵ Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the people of Israel whom the Egyptians hold as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant. ⁶ Say therefore to the people of Israel, 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. ⁷ I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. ⁸ I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. I will give it to you for a possession. I am the LORD'" (Exodus 6:1–8).

What did you hear and see as we read that text? Well, the first thing that should stand out very clearly is the number of times that God says "I." I count eighteen times that my translation says "I." The message is pretty clear isn't it? God is changing the conversation and focusing Moses away from the circumstances of his life to the promises of God, which are rooted in the character of God. In other words, the hope of this situation is the fact that God is still the one making these promises. And because He is God, this kind of talk should be encouraging.

It is not encouraging when someone other than God talks this way. Have you ever encountered this? Imagine a person who uses "I" eighteen times in about one minute of conversation. Or imagine a person who constantly talks about himself in the third person, "Mark would like to talk to you. Mark needs to know some information." Talking about yourself in third person or eighteen times in one minute doesn't help others; it makes them want to get you help! Seriously!

But when God talks like this, it should be supremely comforting. When the promises of God are rooted in God's ability to be God, it should give you hope. Look at the comfort of this truth in Hebrews 6:13-18, and its connection to hope and patience:

¹³ For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, ¹⁴ saying, "Surely I will bless you and multiply you." ¹⁵ And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise. ¹⁶ For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation. ¹⁷ So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, ¹⁸ so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us (Hebrews 6:13–18).

The promises of God are hopeful because they are rooted in who God is.

But I also want you to notice the beauty of what God promises here. This is an amazing list of past, present, and future promises. Notice the following highlights:

- vs 1 – God is the one who is going to take action against Pharaoh and deliver His people. This is about God. This is a promise given to Moses about what is really going to happen.
- vs 3-4 – The present promises are a continuation of what God has promised in the past. He was known as God Almighty (El Shaddai – The God of Refuge), and now He is known as Yahweh.
- vs 5 – God is very aware of their pain, and He has not forgotten about his covenant. He knows. He has seen. He has heard.

These promises were given as reassurance to Moses that what God had promised would really happen. Then God gives Moses promises that He is to take to the people of Israel:

- vs 6 – God is going to completely deliver them: 1) no more Egyptian burdens, 2) no more slavery, and 3) no more delayed judgment. Notice God is going to change their lives, their position, and their injustice.
- vs 7 – God affirms his ownership and his love for his people – “You will be my people and I will be your God.”
- vs 8 – They have a glorious future in front of them. God is going to fulfill His promise to Abraham and bring them to their own land.

And then God seals the deal with yet another statement of who He is: “I am the LORD” (6:8).

It is a glorious list, isn't it? In the midst of dark and hard circumstances, God reaffirms who He is and the promises He has made. He establishes the promises by virtue of who He is as God; He links the promises to the historical covenantal promise; He tells them about their future; He reminds them about His love for them; and He guarantees it all on the very essence of His being. “Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh!”

The promises are amazing, sweeping, and powerful. This should be encouraging and hopeful news to the people of God. But look what happens.

Pain

Moses delivers this great news about God's promises, rooted in the character of God, to the people of Israel. And look at their response in verse nine:

⁹ Moses spoke thus to the people of Israel, but they did not listen to Moses, because of their broken spirit and harsh slavery (Exodus 6:9).

Now there is something new and very important here. We knew about the harsh slavery from before. We knew about the 400 years of bondage, and we also knew about the bricks-but-no-straw punishment from Pharaoh. But the text says that they did not listen to Moses because something else had been added to their slavery – a broken spirit.

The Hebrew word here is significant and loaded. The NIV renders this as “discouragement,” the NASB uses the word “despondency,” and the KJV uses the phrase “anguish of spirit.” Now if you think back on a time in your life where you had faith in God only to have it go very poorly, you know why there are so many different words. The reason is because there is a swirl of painful emotions that you feel about the situation or about particular people. Discouragement, despondency, and a broken spirit all capture a deep personal pain that comes from being spiritually disappointed with God's providence.

Remember I said at the beginning of my message that I wanted to add something to what I said last week. Here it is. The meaning of the Hebrew word for a broken spirit is “shortness,” and it comes from another Hebrew word that means “to be short” in the emotional sense. So the idea is impatient, unable to bear something, or limited. To have a broken spirit means that you take the short view!

It looks like this. You saw some spiritual truth, and you attempted to live it out with a right heart, but it blew up in your face. Perhaps it was a person who acted in a very un-Christian manner, or maybe it was a church situation that was toxic, or maybe it was a God-honoring situation for which you've prayed for years and it just isn't happening. Listen, that is really painful and tough.

But it can affect what happens in your soul when you hear other promises of God. And even when the promise of God is glorious, sweeping, and magnificent, you feel “burned out” on believing the promises of God. You want to have faith. You want to believe, but the reality is that you have a broken spirit. You want to believe in God's promises, but you know that sometimes – a lot of times – it doesn't work out.

You thought you'd found your soul-mate and marriage was in the picture. Now you have a broken spirit. You know what it's like to lose a job, so any rumor in the office makes you really, really fearful. You have a broken spirit. You've prayed for a baby for years, and every 28 days you have to fight for joy. You have a broken spirit. You watched an adoption completely go south, and you live in constant fear of it happening again. You have broken spirit. Your spouse “cheated” on you,

and the smallest things make you afraid. You have a broken spirit. You've prayed for your wayward child to come back home, but it's been so long. You have a broken spirit.

Life is hard, and it's no wonder we have a broken spirit at times. It's no wonder that Israel has a broken spirit. They believed, but everything went badly. And to believe again would require them to risk being disappointed again. Who could blame them? It doesn't seem to me that this is in the text as a judgment of Israel but as more of a statement of fact.

Moses is right there with the people. Notice what his broken spirit sounds like:

¹⁰ So the LORD said to Moses, ¹¹ "Go in, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the people of Israel go out of his land." ¹² But Moses said to the LORD, "Behold, the people of Israel have not listened to me. How then shall Pharaoh listen to me, for I am of uncircumcised lips?" (Exodus 6:10–12).

The circumstances of a painful life tempt us to take the short view, and it manifests itself with a broken spirit – a heart that is scared to believe the promises of God **again**. You know you should believe, but your broken spirit makes it really hard, really risky, and really deeply personal. And even though God has continually proved Himself faithful in other areas of your life, there are some topics, some issues, some scenarios where it is hard to believe the promises of God.

You know you need to take the long view but . . .

And that leads us to our final point and the addition that I want to make to what I said last week.

Take the Long View while Broken

Do you know what is even more challenging than taking the long view? It is taking the long view even though you have a broken spirit. **Faithful followers of God take the long view by believing while broken.** They take the long view by choosing to believe.

Look at verse 13 - *¹³ But the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron and gave them a charge about the people of Israel and about Pharaoh king of Egypt: to bring the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt (Exodus 6:13).*

God gave them a charge! Even while the people were broken full of doubt, God still charged them. And the deciding point here was going to be whether or not God could be trusted even if it turned out differently than what they thought.

This reminds me of the story of Daniel's three friends who refused to bow the knee to the king's idol, and they faced the death penalty. After being taken captive, after living godly lives, now they were about to be killed. Here is what they said:

¹⁷ If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. ¹⁸ But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up" (Daniel 3:17–18).

In effect they said, "Regardless of what happens, we are trusting in God." Or to put it in the context of this message: "Even though I have a broken spirit, I'm still going to trust you." Followers of God take the long view by believing even in their brokenness.

How to Believe When Broken

I sense that I probably need to give you some additional handles on this issue because I am sure it is one that many of us (myself included) have to or will have to deal with. Let me give you three phrases:

1. "Look Back"

Throughout the Bible, taking the long view means we have to look back and rehearse the mighty works of God. The Old Testament is filled with examples of this. However, the greatest event upon which we need to look is the cross. By looking back we see the unbelievable way in which God kept His promise to redeem His people. By looking back we see the extent to which God will go to keep His word. By looking at the cross we can know that if God kept His promise then, He will surely keep it now.

When Paul was talking about hard things that were happening, he used this very language.

³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? (Romans 8:31–32).

That is why receiving Christ is the starting point! Inviting Christ to be your Lord is the first time of a million times that you believe in the promises of God while broken. And when you find yourself broken in different ways, don't be surprised – this is what Christianity is all about.

2. "Look Through"

Painful circumstances and wicked people can create a level of cynicism in us as shocking situations or appalling behavior make us jaded. I'm sure many of you know what I'm talking about. You've been burned really badly, and it has actually affected how you view the church, people in general, and maybe even God. In Israel's case Pharaoh's actions were causing them to doubt God's promises. And the essence of their challenge was to look through Pharaoh and believe the promises of God. Some of you have allowed earthly people and earthly circumstances to cloud your vision of God. You need to look through them!

I stumbled on a great Psalm this week which was a great comfort to my soul, and it fits perfectly with what we are talking about.

¹ Hear my prayer, O LORD; give ear to my pleas for mercy! In your faithfulness answer me, in your righteousness! ² Enter not into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you. ³ For the enemy has pursued my soul; he has crushed my life to the ground; he has made me sit in darkness like those long dead. ⁴ Therefore my spirit faints within me; my heart within me is appalled. ⁵ I remember the days of old; I meditate on all that you have done; I ponder the work of your hands. ⁶ I stretch out my hands to you; my soul thirsts for you like a parched land. Selah ⁷ Answer me quickly, O LORD! My spirit fails! Hide not your face from me, lest I be like those who go down to the pit. ⁸ Let me hear in the morning of your steadfast love, for in you I trust. Make me know the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul. ⁹ Deliver me from my enemies, O LORD! I have fled to you for refuge. ¹⁰ Teach me to do your will, for you are my God! Let your good Spirit lead me on level ground! (Psalm 143:1–10).

You have to look through the pain.

3. “Look Up”

Finally, I would tell you that some of you need to pray Psalm 143 today. You need to make the conscious decision to choose to trust today by talking to the Lord and telling Him that you want to believe. You need to pray the simple prayer of a father in Mark 9:24 who wants his daughter to be healed: “I believe, help my unbelief.”

You believe when broken by telling the Lord by faith that you believe – even though you and God know you still need help believing. You come to Him with your brokenness, and you do not allow the pain of the past to prevent you from believing in His promises again.

It means that you come to church in faith. You sing in faith. You read the Bible in faith. And you risk trusting Him again even though you’ve been burned.

It means that you read the story of Exodus, you see Israel’s struggles, and you see yourself.

It means that know that the mingling of people, promises, and pain can lead to brokenness. But that you refuse to stay in unbelief. It means that you believe while broken.

You take the long view by believing even while broken.

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