

Exodus 6:1-13

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[0 : 00] But today we're looking at this next instalment of God's great dealing with his people in chapter 6 of Exodus. What do you give a people who are tired, who are discouraged, who are disappointed with God?

! If you remember the last time we looked at this book, Moses we saw, didn't we, in chapter 4, finally drums up the confidence to go to Pharaoh and to make his plea on behalf of God for liberation for the Hebrews in slavery in Egypt.

But apart from achieving its goal in chapter 5, Pharaoh turns up the heat on the suffering, doesn't he? And at the end of chapter 5, if you look there, Moses complains to God, O Lord, why have you done evil to this people? Why did you ever send me?

Since I came to Pharaoh, all he has done is evil to the people and you've not delivered them at all. Why did I bother obeying in the first place, Lord?

He's disappointed with God, if I can put it that way. What do you give somebody like that? If things go wrong and there is pain and there is hurt, everybody is looking for something that will get them through it, aren't they?

[1 : 27] People are looking for something that won't let them down. If you make an investment in life, you want something reliable, something substantial you want to try before you buy.

In love, in your career, in life. You go down to the marketing suite down there, at the Apex Towers, then you can see, can't you, that the house that you are about to buy is hopefully going to be staying there for the next 20 or 30 years.

You can see the models and the plans of the foundations and if you go in there, you can see some of those flats look amazing. They are going to be incredible. They really are something else.

And that is the sort of place you'd want to live in. You need something sturdy when things are hard. Something that will last. Just imagine if you could afford something like that.

Well, I'd like us to see in this passage that God answers this need of his servants with the most concrete assurance that he can give.

[2 : 33] The most reliable thing that he can give is his covenant. It's his covenant. So twice he talks about his covenant in this passage.

Verse 4, I've established my covenant. Verse 5, I remembered my covenant. Covenant. Now, the word covenant, if I'm honest, is not a word I usually use in conversation and it probably isn't one you would usually use.

It's a kind of Bible word, isn't it, that we hear from time to time. One helpful writer calls it the wrapping in which are all of God's promises.

And I think that's helpful. It's a title for God's solemn declaration of his promises. So his covenant often comes with an announcement of his name.

Just look at verse 2. I am the Lord, El Shaddai, or God the Almighty. Now, he says his name there, not because Moses has sort of forgotten God's name.

[3 : 42] It's not a kind of reminder in that sense. No, it's a solemn declaration of his promises. So if you're at a wedding, a bride and groom say in the vows, don't they, I, Christopher John Roberts, take you, Emma Jane Louise, to be my lawful wedded wife.

Everyone in the congregation knows the names of the couple, don't they? That's not the thing. It's not to remember who they are. But it's a solemn vow. It gives weight to the promises, to the covenant.

So God, you see, makes these promises. He makes his covenant, not in a light way. It's a solemn thing. He makes solemn promises to his servants.

So I'd like us to see three things about this covenant, about these solemn promises that God makes to his people today. So firstly, it is a spoken covenant.

Spoken covenant. When you're perplexed and disappointed with God, maybe that's how you feel, what is it that you think you most need, I wonder, in that moment?

[4 : 57] Moses says the thing that he most need is deliverance. Look at the end of verse 23 of chapter 5. Lord, you have not delivered your people at all.

That's his agenda, isn't it? He says what we most need when we're disappointed, when we're perplexed, is for God to do something. The most important thing is relief, Lord.

Lord, get me out of this jam. Get me out of this mess, Lord. Deliver me. But isn't it interesting that the first thing that God does for Moses, look at chapter 6, verse 1.

The first thing the Lord said to Moses. Look at verse 2. God spoke to Moses. Verse 13.

The Lord spoke to Moses. The most important thing in God's mind is that we hear his voice. We hear his word.

[6 : 05] First of all, he speaks before he does. So it seems that God thinks the most important thing is that we know him and his mind before we get relief.

Strange, isn't it? He wants us to hear him firstly. We turn that the other way round, don't we? We just say, get me out of this situation first and then I'll listen, Lord.

If you just sort this problem out, Lord, then maybe I'll read the Bible or whatever it is you want me to do. But the Bible's view is that it's more assuring to know God first before we get things from him.

The solid foundation for Jesus in his parable about the man who builds his house upon the sand, that famous parable, is to say the man who builds his house on the rock who has a solid foundation for life, Matthew chapter 7, hears these words of mine and does them.

It's God's spoken promises, his spoken covenant that he claims will keep us secure. In John chapter 10, Jesus talks about himself as a shepherd, doesn't he?

[7 : 24] Caring for his sheep. And he says, my sheep will listen to my voice. It's his spoken covenant. But then, secondly, it's an historic covenant.

An historic covenant. Just look again at verse 2. So God spoke to Moses and said, I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty.

Verse 4, I established my covenant, my promises, with them. Now, you may want to pause there for a moment because you might think that is slightly problematic.

You can hear yourself perhaps thinking, well, yes, that is all very nice, but that was over 400 years ago. That was over 400 years before Moses.

That was then, and this is now. What about today? What about this afternoon? We want contemporary promises, don't we?

[8 : 30] We want up-to-date promises for me, for Tom, Dick or Harry in 2013. Not promises that were made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob thousands of years ago.

But God gives Moses an historic promise. He gives him an old promise. The promise that he would bless Abraham and his descendants and make them into a great nation, a nation that would be blessed and be a blessing to the world.

Some friends of ours have just moved house and they decided to try and cut a few costs in the whole process. So instead of hiring one of these really expensive removal companies, they hired a man with a van to travel down from Manchester to pick up some of their stuff.

Some of which was some really expensive books and a few pieces of expensive furniture. But when the van arrived, just imagine the old transit van with the inscription on the side, Mick and Dave's removals, established 2010.

Now that would not inspire a great deal of confidence, would it? If you're going to say when the company was established, it should be at least 30 years old, shouldn't it? You're far more confident with a company that's been around since 1910 rather than 2010.

[9 : 59] We like things, don't we, that have stood the test of time, that have a bit of solidarity to them, like a Rolls Royce rather than a transit.

Then those things give us assurance today. When you're handing over your family possessions, they give us assurance now, right up to date in the contemporary moment.

So you see, Moses gets this promise which is established long ago. The promises that have stood the test of time, that kept Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.

And even the promises that continue into the future. Joshua, much later than Moses, can look back over all of these promises and say, not one word of the good promises that the Lord had made to the house of Israel had failed.

All came to pass, Joshua says. So don't be tempted to listen to the gurus of today when they say they have a new word or a new promise from the Lord.

[11 : 12] Because the last historic word has been spoken. The writer to the Hebrew says in these last days the Lord has spoken to us through his son, the Lord Jesus.

And it's through Christ's death and resurrection that the God of the covenant underlines and assures us that his promises are trustworthy.

That he definitely will bless those who trust in him. And the barriers of death and our own sinfulness, our own rebellion are dealt with by Christ Jesus.

But isn't it so often the case that as the church loses confidence in the promises established in history in the Bible for today, there will be others who will fill those gaps with their own ideas or claims of direct revelation from God.

But without being rude, the Bible says that they are bootleggers of God's message. They are the man in the van of God's message. His revelation has ended with his last word, the Lord Jesus Christ, where his promises are fulfilled and rubber-stamped.

[12 : 36] So it's an historic covenant, one that has stood the test of time. But then thirdly, and probably most importantly, it's a relational covenant.

It's a relational covenant. Just have a look at verse 6 again. So the Lord says, Say therefore to the people of Israel, I am the Lord. Hang on, verse 6, I've lost my place.

And just look at the three things that he promises. I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you.

Now they are three things that the Lord promises to do, so he will do something eventually. But it doesn't stop there, does it? Look at verse 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.

So you see, God's promises, his covenant, aren't just about our redemption and our deliverance, they're about a relationship with him, to be taken to be his people.

[13 : 54] I don't know if you've ever been surprised by somebody that you thought you knew really well, and then they show a different side of their personality and their character. I remember our old headmaster at secondary school, he put the fear of God into you.

He was quite a large man, literally, with a deep voice and a commanding presence, and you certainly did not mess with him. But then, I remember this occasion where I saw him kneeling down next to a first year child who was upset about something, and I said to my friends, wow, that's a new side to Mr.

Fletcher. That's a new side to him. We've not seen that before. And you see, that's the Lord's point in verse three, isn't it? It's a slightly confusing verse.

Have a look there. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, that's El Shaddai, but by my name, the Lord, I did not make myself known.

Now, he's not saying that they back then didn't know my proper name, and I've got a different name. No, it's more to do with that they didn't know that part of my character. Yahweh, I will be with you to be what I will be, to fulfil my promises.

[15 : 18] Eugene Peterson puts it like this, I appeared to them as the strong God, El Shaddai, but by my name, I am present. I was not known to them.

That's a new side to the Lord, that you're now seeing Moses. So the Lord doesn't just rescue us from shame and slavery, to then leave us alone to our own devices.

This side of him, tells us that his redemption goes far further than that. His redemption is relational. His covenant promises are for that purpose.

for much more than just salvation by itself. Now just turn with me a second to John chapter 10. John chapter 10 if you can. On page 1080.

So page 1080. It's that passage again where Jesus speaks of himself as the good shepherd who looks after his sheep.

[16 : 30] John chapter 10 and verse 9. And he slightly changes the metaphor doesn't he? He says I am the door, I am the way for salvation, for redemption.

He goes on. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved. Full stop, that's the end of it. No, it's not is it? He goes on. And will go in and out and find pasture.

You see, Jesus saves and redeems for a relationship with the shepherd. To go in and out and find pasture to be cared for by him.

Now at a wedding you don't have the vows for the couple to then go their separate ways. That's the whole point, isn't it? So do you see, he's saying to Moses, I am making this vow to you.

I, the Lord, take you, Israelites, to be mine. To have and to hold, for richer, for poorer, for better, for worse, to love you and to cherish you, to be my people.

[17:37] To bring you to the land, back in Exodus chapter 6, in verse 8. God's promises are about solid things. So heaven is not going to be what God's people floating around with disembodied spirits, sort of in this ethereal world.

No, God's covenant promises are for his people to have a land to possess. What does Jesus say? Blessed are the meek, those who rely on my salvation, for they shall inherit the earth.

And he will remake the heavens and the earth as an inheritance. Something solid to rely on. It was C.S.

Lewis who said, if I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.

It's good, isn't it? There was a preacher in Scotland, I heard this story, preparing this talk. In 1745, Ebenezer Erskine.

[18:49] And during the last few days of his life, he was on his deathbed and he'd got all of these visitors coming up to his room. And the first visitor said to him, Sir, you have given us much advice over the years, but pray, what are you now doing with your own soul?

And he replied, I'm now doing with it what I did 40 years ago. I'm resting on that word, I am the Lord, your God. God. And on that word, I will die.

He went on, the covenant is my charter. And had it not been for that blessed word, I am the Lord, your God, my strength and hope would have long ago perished.

And with that word, he took his finger and his thumb and he closed his eyes, and with his hand resting on his cheek, he quietly died. God, you can do that when you have a God who has said to you, I am Yahweh, I am the Lord, your God.

So what does God give a disappointed people, perplexed and downcast? Well he gives his covenant, his spoken word, established in history at the cross of Christ Jesus, because knowing him is more important, he gives a covenant of relationship.

[20:18] I, the Lord, Yahweh, take you, Moses, to be mine, to have and to hold, for richer, for poorer, for better, for worse, to love and to cherish. Why not put your name in the place of Moses there?

I, the Lord, take you, to love and to cherish, to be mine. let's pray as we close. Let's pray as we close.