

God's Best . . . When Things Couldn't Be Worse!

Exodus 4:27-7:7

Introduction

We find our place today, in Exodus, chapter 4. I have entitled this sermon, "God's Best . . . When Things Couldn't Be Worse."

One of the things I have enjoyed about studying the life of Moses thus far, is I can so easily identify with him. That is especially true today, as things seem to cave in on him and the bottom seems to drop out.

We began our study of Exodus, chapter 4, in our last discussion, which led us to the conclusion that God wanted Moses to be independent of his own abilities and very dependent upon who God is. God will, in a sense, stress that very same lesson in the next few verses.

Things Couldn't Be Better!

We will pick up the story where we left off last time, in verse 27 of Exodus, chapter 4.

A reunion

God tells Aaron, in verse 27,

*. . . "Go to meet Moses in the wilderness."
So he went and met him at the mountain of God, and he kissed him.*

This is a beautiful reunion. Understand that, at this point in time, Moses and Aaron have been separated for forty years.

Aaron is Moses' older brother. He is three years older than Moses. We also know that Moses' sister Miriam, is perhaps, seven to nine years older than Moses. They will meet again soon, as well.

We are told that Moses and Aaron embrace in the wilderness. Continue to verse 28.

Moses told Aaron all the words of the Lord with which He had sent him, and all the signs that He had commanded him to do.

I imagine, if Moses was like me, he said, "Hey, big brother, look at this trick."

He probably threw the stick on the ground and they both were amazed. Then Moses would say, "That's no problem," and he would reach down and grab it by the tail.

A reception

After Moses showed Aaron the other sign of leprosy and perhaps, told him about the sign of Nile water turning to blood, then according to verse 29, there was a great reception.

Then Moses and Aaron went and assembled all the elders of the sons of Israel;

Continue to verse 30. Aaron is now the voice for Moses.

and Aaron spoke all the words which the Lord had spoken to Moses. He [Moses] then performed the signs in the sight of the people.

Note the people's reaction, in verse 31a.

So the people believed; . . .

Do you remember that there were five reasons why Moses did not want to serve God? At the heart of most of them was the thought, "The people may not believe me; they may not follow me. I'm really too insignificant and unqualified and ignorant and all of those things. Do you really want me to do that?"

God would answer, "Yes, I do."

I love the thought that Moses, perhaps with sweaty palms, performed the signs.

A revival

The text tells us, in verse 31,

So the people believed; and when they heard that the Lord was concerned about the sons of Israel and that He had seen their affliction, . . .

Now, there was not a great meeting. Somehow this had probably gone from slave hut to slave hut and the news had been whispered abroad until finally, all the people heard what God was going to do for Israel. Note the result, according to the last phrase of verse 31,

. . . then they bowed low and worshiped.

I think that there was a revival. For nearly four hundred years the Israelites had been impressed by all of the gods of the Egyptian pantheon. They had seen the marvelous things that supposedly, the gods of the Egyptians had done. Perhaps their faith was at its lowest ebb.

Now, Moses comes in, performs the signs, and says, "God, Yahweh, is concerned about you."

The response is worship. Their faith now reaches new heights.

Things Couldn't Be Worse!

I think, coming in on the crest of that conference and the resulting revival, Moses is now confident that God is going to do great things with him.

A request

Chapter 5, verse 1, tells us what happens.

And afterward Moses and Aaron came and said to Pharaoh, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'Let My people go that they

may celebrate a feast to Me in the wilderness.'"

This is a declaration, not a request. Moses, with the confidence that God is on his side, expects results.

This is like you and me, when we go, knowing that God wants us to speak a word to our neighbor or to our friend or to our relative; to do something that we know would honor Him. We go with confidence, expecting results. We think, "If I obey God, God will make everything work out just fine."

Look at verse 2.

But Pharaoh said, "Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and besides, I will not let Israel go."

These words struck the heart of Moses. So he does some quick thinking and restates this as a request. Continue to verse 3.

. . . "The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Please, let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God, otherwise He will fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword."

A rejection

Look at verse 4 for the Pharaoh's response. Moses and Aaron receive a rejection.

But the king of Egypt said to them, "Moses and Aaron, why do you draw the people [literally translated, "the peasants"] away from their work? Get back to your labors!"

Now, we need to go back in time and understand that this Pharaoh was considered the embodiment of deity. It was tremendously offensive, and perhaps Moses forgot that, to go up to a Pharaoh and say, "God, *our* God, is telling *you*, an embodiment of deity; a god, what to do."

Pharaoh is automatically going to be incensed. "You are telling me, the king of this great land; the conqueror of other lands, that your God, whom I have never met and could care less about, who must not care much for you because you are slaves, is telling *me* what to do? I don't know this God."

It is interesting that most archaeologists and biblical chronologists believe that this was Ramses II. The time frame seems to match that well. We have found, by way of the spade of the archaeologist, some interesting insights into the ego of this very man that

Moses stood before. There is a mortuary temple that was built in western Thebes in this man's honor. Let me quote the inscription that was discovered of Ramses II, "King of kings am I. If anyone would know how great I am, let him surpass one of my works."

This Pharaoh was not a very humble man. Moses goes in and confronts him with the demands of Yahweh that he could not care less about. Moses is, I think, shocked at his response, so he rephrases.

It gets worse, however, because Pharaoh will add to their labors. Look at verses 6 and 7, which occurs on the same day that Moses and Aaron come to Pharaoh.

So the same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters over the people and their foremen, saying, "You are no longer to give the people straw to make brick as previously; let them go and gather straw for themselves."

To make brick, it was the custom in this day, to mix water and mud, put it in a wooden mold, and allow the sun to dry it. In fact, the Egyptian word for "brick," is the word from which we get our English word "adobe". They would also always use straw or grass to mix in with that mortar to give it firmness and tenacity. Without that, the bricks would crumble; without that, they would have to carefully, gingerly create the bricks because they did not have the straw to keep them together.

Pharaoh says, "Without the straw, you keep up your quota. And, if you want straw, you go get it for yourself."

Continue to verse 8.

But the quota of bricks which they were making previously, you shall impose on them; you are not to reduce any of it. Because they are lazy, therefore they cry out, "Let us go and sacrifice to our God."

In other words, "They have time to think about going and worshiping this God, this insignificant God that I've never heard of. They must not have enough work. We will crush the spirit of their worship."

Look at verses 10 through 13. The people were like frightened animals.

So the taskmasters of the people and their foremen went out and spoke to the people, saying, "Thus says Pharaoh, 'I am not going to give you any straw. You go and get straw

for yourselves wherever you can find it, but none of your labor will be reduced.'" So the people scattered through all the land of Egypt to gather stubble for straw. The taskmasters pressed them, saying, "Complete your work quota, your daily amount, just as when you had straw."

That is the result of, what Moses would think would lead to the deliverance of the Israelites.

Have you ever had your hopes completely dashed? Perhaps it was something like a financial investment that you knew would work out, but instead, you lost every penny. Perhaps it was something much smaller and yet, at that moment, it was big. You may have planned a picnic for the family and on that day, it rained. You have felt that feeling of your hopes being dashed.

Perhaps you are in a situation right now, in which you are having difficulty keeping your hopes up. In your heart, questions come up. We have all had our hopes and our expectations changed at times.

My wife and I laugh about the day I proposed to her. I had it planned to the smallest detail. I had practiced my proposal many times in front of a mirror. Like most men who are married, probably, I had it all mapped out. I was going to ask her to marry me on Thanksgiving Day.

As a college student, I would work odd jobs. I was saving money because I wanted to put that ring on Marsha's finger and not have any debt on it. So that fall, I was feverishly working. The last amount of money I needed to raise would be raised by raking a man's yard. The only problem was, we were leaving for Marsha's home the next day and that particular day, it was pouring down rain. So, I was raking leaves in a downpour! I can still remember the man coming and looking out the window. He would laugh, "Ha, ha, ha," and say something to his wife. It was probably something like, "Look at that lunatic out there raking leaves."

I had to have that money, however, for the final payment. I made it. I got that ring, stuck it in my pocket, and we headed to Atlanta to spend Thanksgiving with Marsha's parents. Everything was working right on schedule. I even imagined her response.

Did you guys imagine the response of that gal you asked to marry you? I love to hear the stories from those of you who have told me.

I imagined her throwing her arms around my neck and jumping up and down with glee and saying, “Yes,” a hundred times. I would just eat it all up.

Finally, I got her alone. I got that proposal out and it came out just perfectly and ended with the words, “Will you marry me?”

Marsha’s face turned pale and she got this look in her eyes, and she said, “I don’t know!” There was no hug.

To this day, I am convinced I talked her into marrying me because I said, “You’re wearing this, put it on.”

We have so many illustrations in our lives where we think we have everything mapped out and then, someone does not respond as we had hoped or expected.

I can imagine Moses walking into the courtroom with his chest full of confidence. He looks up at that Pharaoh and says, “Let My people go, God says.”

Then Pharaoh says, “Who is your God?” and makes their bondage even worse.

A reaction

Notice the reaction of the people.

To Pharaoh

First, notice the reaction to Pharaoh. Look at verses 15 through 18.

Then the foremen of the sons of Israel came and cried out to Pharaoh, saying, “Why do you deal this way with your servants? There is no straw given to your servants, yet they keep saying to us, ‘Make bricks!’ And behold, your servants are being beaten; but it is the fault of your own people.” But he said, “You are lazy, very lazy; therefore you say, ‘Let us go and sacrifice to the Lord.’ So go now and work; for you shall be given no straw, yet you must deliver the quota of bricks.”

Pharaoh was offended that they would worship someone other than him. That was the whole problem.

To Moses

Now, notice the reaction of the people to Moses. Look at verse 20.

When they left Pharaoh’s presence, they met Moses and Aaron as they were waiting for them.

Can you imagine this? The text indicates that Moses and Aaron were stationed somewhere – perhaps they were down a corridor in the palace, waiting to hear the response of Pharaoh. The people come storming down this hallway, turn the corner, and walk right into Moses and Aaron. They proceed to unleash incredibly painful words on them. Look at verse 21.

They said to them, “May the Lord look upon you and judge you, for you have made us odious [literally, “stink”] in Pharaoh’s sight and in the sight of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to kill us.”

In other words, “Moses and Aaron, you have made our bondage worse. May God judge you.”

Moses Reacts Before God – God Responds To Moses

Put yourself in Moses’ shoes. Here he is, doing what God has told him to do. There you are, living in a way that God has commanded you to live. What do you get? The dashing of expectations; the pain of rejection; misfortune. You would say to God exactly what Moses is about to say.

Two basic questions

Moses is, in fact, going to ask two questions. Each is basically one word.

The first question, “Why?”

The first question is, “Why?” Look at verse 22.

Then Moses returned to the Lord and said, “O Lord, why have You brought harm to this people? Why did You ever send me?”

He is going back to the burning bush. In effect, he is saying, “God, why did You ever send me? I told You, at the burning bush, that I was not the man for the job. Why did You ever force me? Why did You ever talk me into it? Why did You ever send me? Why me?”

I do not believe that there is a question posed to the throne of God any more than the question, “Why?”

Two important answers

God will answer Moses' questions. His answers for Moses are the same as His answers for you and me.

The first answer, "I am."

If you are at a point where you are asking God, "Why?" His answer is incredibly profound. Look at verse 1a of chapter 6.

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh . . ."

Did you catch that? "Moses, I have brought you to an end of yourself and to an end of *your* ministry so you will see what *I* will do."

This issue is not going to be won by a trick with the staff. Pouring Nile water out to turn into blood will not really accomplish what needs to be accomplished. "It will be done by *Me*," says Yahweh.

Now, I want to give Moses the benefit of one thing. In fact, I think you should underline this in your text. Look back at verse 22 of chapter 5. I passed over this point, but I want to go back. The first phrase of that verse says,

Then Moses returned to the Lord . . .

I like that because Moses was giving God an opportunity to answer him.

Men and women, without a doubt, Christianity is filled with the ruins of very bitter people who have difficult things land on their doorstep and they chuck it all. They never go back to the Lord and even ask, "Why?" They simply respond with, "Well, God, if that's what's going to happen when I give You the reigns of my life; when I do what I think You want me to do, then forget it; I'm gone."

Moses, however, did go back to God. God's answer comes to him in the form of six, "I am's." Underline these. Six times, God will say, "I am . . .". In other words, "You want to know the answer to the question, 'Why?' it is the answer of, 'Who.' Just know that I am a sovereign God. I am Yahweh."

God answers in:

- Chapter 6, verse 2,

God spoke further to Moses and said to him, "I am the Lord;"

- Chapter 6, verse 6,

"Say, therefore, to the sons of Israel, 'I am the Lord, . . .'"

- Chapter 6, verse 7,

". . . and you shall know that I am the Lord your God; . . ."

- Chapter 6, verse 8,

". . . I am the Lord."

- Chapter 6, verse 29,

. . . "I am the Lord; . . ."

- Chapter 7, verse 5,

". . . I am the Lord, . . ."

I believe that answer is fundamental in our theology. In our lifestyles, it is an understanding of who God is.

If you went out on the street today, and asked ten people, "Do you believe in God?" eight out of ten would say, "Yes." But, if you went out on the street and asked ten people, "Who is God?" you would get ten different answers.

I really believe that the crack in the foundation; the thing that makes the church stumble; the thing that creates confusion and ineffectiveness is, at its very basic root, a lack of understanding of who God is.

A. W. Tozer wrote that the first step downward in any church, is when it surrenders its high opinion of God.

Is God a God of justice? Then He would demand lives of honesty and integrity in us.

Is God a God of grace? If that is who God is, then He demands lives of love motivated by grace.

If God is a God of holiness, then He would demand that His children to be holy and pure.

That is why I go back to the thought that the problem in our lives, ladies and gentlemen, is that we really have surrendered our high opinion of who God is. He is a compromising, half-deaf, half-blind God who compromises with our lives.

No. He is Yahweh.

Because we have surrendered our high opinion of God in our Christian world, we not only as individuals struggle with the day to day trials, but as a church, we are losing ground.

Warren Wiersbe writes in his book, *The Integrity Crises*, these sharp and painful words:

For nineteen centuries the church has been telling the world to admit and confess its sins. Today, in the twilight of the twentieth century, the world is telling the church to face up to its sins and to begin living what it preaches.

For nineteen centuries the message has been questioned, but now the messenger is suspect. Why? It goes back to our view of who God is. We have a light view of Him. As a result, when we hear of Him and hear His word, we are convicted, but we are not changed; we are challenged, but we are really not converted.

When we have a low opinion of God, we have a low opinion of God's word. So in our society today, the Bible is being questioned and debated and dissected and disobeyed. Why? Ultimately, because we do not know who God is.

You would think that God would give to Moses a better program; a more effective plan, but He does not. The church has for too long, been impressed with growth rather than truth; with programs rather than purity. Why? Because we have reaped a generation that knows very little about God. We should be concerned, men and women, that we, like Peter, become the bastion for the truth. We, as a church, should present to our young; to the next generation, a pure truth; a pure theology of who God really is in His character.

God, in His answer to Moses, is giving a lesson in theology proper. He is saying, "I am Yahweh."

The second question, "How?"

Moses asks a second question. This is also a typical question and one that we ask as well. The question is, "How?"

Look at verses 10 and 11 of chapter 6.

Now the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Go, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the sons of Israel go out of his land."

I think Moses is probably wondering, "Now, Lord, were You there the last time I was in the courtroom? Did You forget what Pharaoh said? Do You want me to say the very same thing again?"

Continue to verse 12.

But Moses spoke before the Lord, saying, "Behold, the sons of Israel have not listened to me; how then will Pharaoh listen to me, for I am unskilled in speech?"

There is the second question of, "How?"

The second answer, "I will."

God's answer will come back at least ten times. He will say the words, "I will." In other words, "I will . . . not you, Moses. The 'how' is not related to your strength; the answer is *My* strength." Underline these answers in your text.

God answers in:

- Chapter 6, verse 6,
" . . . I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians . . ."
- Chapter 6, verse 6,
" . . . I will deliver you from their bondage. . . ."
- Chapter 6, verse 6,
" . . . I will also redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments."
(The word "redeemed" in that verse, is the word "reclaim," that is used in the beautiful story of Boaz and Ruth, where Boaz reclaims or redeems his bride. God is saying, "I will reclaim My bride; My nation. I will do it because I am the Lord.")
- Chapter 6, verse 7,
" . . . I will take you for My people, . . ."
- Chapter 6, verse 7,
" . . . I will be your God . . ."
- Chapter 6, verse 8,
"I will bring you to the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, . . ."
- Chapter 6, verse 8,
" . . . I will give it to you for a possession; I am the Lord."
- Chapter 7, verse 3,
" . . . I will harden Pharaoh's heart . . ."
- Chapter 7, verse 3,
"I [will] multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt."
- Chapter 7, verse 4,

“When Pharaoh does not listen to you, . . . I will lay My hand on Egypt and bring out My hosts, My people the sons of Israel, from the land of Egypt by great judgments.”

- Chapter 7, verse 5,

The Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord [Yahweh], . . . I [will] stretch out My hand on Egypt . . .”

There is no better answer if you question, “Why? How?” God says, “I am who I am and because I am who I am, I can do what is best for you.”

Ladies and gentlemen, I do not want you to miss this. If you do not get anything else, get this. I believe this is at the root of the problem when we question God. God’s reputation is at stake. If He said He will, He will. If He does not do what He says He will do, He has far more to lose than you because He has broken His word.

God is telling Moses, “I will bring you out of Egypt. Bank on it. Trust Me. My word is true and I have the power and the strength to back it up. I’m going to do it.”

What a beautiful place to be as a minister of Christ; as a person who is trying to impact your community and your courtroom for God. You can bank on the fact that God will do what He wants and what He wills. He is powerful enough for the job.

“Moses, I am the Lord. And because I am Yahweh; because I am who I am, I can do what I say I will do.”

Application

Let me give you one point, by way of application. It is very simple.

Affliction produces wisdom

Affliction produces wisdom and in turn, wisdom then understands the value of affliction.

Wisdom recognizes the invisible hand of an all-powerful God and, in that afflicted state, when we return, like Moses, to God, He gives us a lesson of His character. In that lesson is the greatest wisdom.

Solomon said, in Proverbs, chapter 9, verse 10a,

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom . . .

The reverential trust and understanding of who God is will allow you and me to face the hardships of life without growing bitter. He lets us know, “Because of who I am, I will do what’s best for you.”

William Cowper became deeply despondent in a time of great discouragement. Let me tell the story of what occurred.

He tried to put an end to his life by drinking poison. God graciously led someone to find him and relieve him and he was delivered (evidently, his stomach was pumped).

As soon as he recovered and got back home, he ordered a coach to take him down to the Thames River where he planned to jump. The driver of the coach held him back.

Frustrated, that evening he went home and fell on a knife and the blade broke.

He could not even die. So he put up a rope in the basement, put his neck in the noose, and jumped. A friend came in before he strangled to death and took him down.

Finally, Cowper got out his Bible and flipped it open to Romans, chapter 8. In the depths of his sorrow, God met him there and he went to his knees.

Later, as a man of God, he wrote these words that you will probably recognize,

*God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.*

*Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never failing skill,
He treasures up His bright designs,
And works His sovereign will.*

In the storm; in the chaos; in the midst of your affliction when your heart is troubled, He is Yahweh; He is all-powerful. And, because He is all-powerful, He is bound and capable of carrying out His work, when He said He would do nothing for you other than that which would bring about spiritual good.

When you ask, “Why?” He introduces Himself.

When you ask, “How?” He introduces His power.

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