

An Unwilling Saviour?

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[0 : 00] Exodus, I wonder, are you beginning to recognize the tune?! In that book, Echoes of Exodus, the authors write this, The Bible has a clear storyline, a melody, a tune, and it can be summarized or sung by a small child.

It also has a range of individual stories that run together, sometimes taking center stage, sometimes fading into the background, providing harmony and counterpoint, treble and bass, height and depth in such a way that no single writer can possibly represent it all.

Reading the Bible is like listening to a symphony, they say, like a masterful symphony, there's lots going on. But also like a masterful symphony, there is a shape and a unity to it, and we hear the same ideas coming round again and again.

I hope that helps you this morning if you're new to the Bible and it's a little bit unfamiliar to you.

There is a lot going on, but keep listening and you'll begin to hear how it all fits together.

Stick with it. Lean in. Enjoy it. One of the major themes of the Bible symphony that gets repeated, it comes round through the whole Bible, is the Exodus itself.

[1 : 27] That's one of the reasons it's great that we're in this book together. God's awesome rescue of his people from slavery to true freedom. Of course, that theme reaches its great climax in Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection to free us from slavery to sin, to spiritual freedom before God.

So I wonder, have you picked up that melody line in Exodus yet? Well, you say, well, we haven't even got to the Exodus bit. But haven't we?

Has Exodus actually found us already? What have we seen so far in this book? A baby boy sentenced to death by a serpent king, but the boy is saved through water.

Remember, Moses' mother hides him in the reeds, but who should find him in the river in his little ark but the serpent king's daughter. He has pity on him and draws him out of the water.

Much later, Moses saves a Hebrew slave, one of his people. But he quickly has to escape Egypt, because when the serpent king hears about it, he wanted to kill him.

[2 : 40] Moses is sentenced to death again and escapes again. But far away in the wilderness, Moses sees something unusual at the mountain of God, at Horeb or Sinai, a bush that seems to be burning, but wasn't being burnt up.

It turns out that fire was no other than the one true God revealing himself to Moses. Moses, and there the Lord tells Moses his rescue plan, that he'll send Moses back to Egypt to bring God's people back to this same mountain with him.

So where's the Exodus? Well, Moses has gone through his own Exodus in miniature, hasn't he?

That's exactly what is going to happen later to all God's people as they flee the serpent king.

They will be rescued through the Red Sea, into the wilderness, to Mount Sinai, where they will behold God in fire and tremble at his voice. Now, that might be new to us.

We might not have spotted that connection before, but it's actually vital for understanding the significance of this conversation the Lord has with Moses in our passage today.

[4 : 13] So stick with me. Understandably, I think we're quick to read ourselves into this scene, because Moses is so relatable here, isn't he?

Lord, I would go and speak to people about you, but no one's going to listen. I would go and tell people, but I'm not that good at explaining things.

Lord, actually, if I'm honest, I would rather not go. And I think Moses really does invite us to do that, because remember who wrote it? Moses. He's saying, look what I was like.

I treated God no differently than any of you would have treated him. So listen up to God's answers, because he was faithful to me, and he will be faithful to you too.

It's a wonderful truth. But is that the main thing for us to take away from this? You know, you can speak for God as well. It would seem a bit of an anticlimax, I think, after God reveals his plan for the greatest rescue the world has ever seen.

[5 : 21] The big thing that is going on here is, will God's deliverer deliver? The Lord did not hang around the bush waiting for someone to happen to pass by and say, he'll do.

Though the Lord has cast Moses in this role from his birth, Moses has been living the Exodus his whole life. And now God is sending Moses to pull his people through the pattern of his own life to the Lord.

I don't think it's going too far to say, even, that God's people were saved by being united to Moses in his death and resurrection. They too will flee from death through water to the mountain of God to be resurrected, given new life as God's people by God himself.

But they can only do that because Moses has gone before them. Only by joining themselves to Moses, by trusting in him and believing his message, will they be saved.

In so many ways, Moses is like us. But in a really, really big way, he is not like us, is he?

[6 : 41] Who is he like? Well, we're going to see this morning in our passage who he is both at the same time like and not like today. Last time, Moses had two questions for God about the rescue plan.

Who am I? And who are you? This time, we hear the second half of that same conversation where Moses doubles down not two questions this time, but two objections and one rejection.

And so we'll look at those in turn, beginning with Moses' first objection, they won't believe me and God's longest reply and therefore, be warned, our longest point.

So see that in verse one. Then Moses answered, but behold, they will not believe me or listen to my voice for they will say, the Lord did not appear to ye. So the Lord told Moses, go and get Israel's elders together, tell them the rescue plan.

If you glance up at chapter three, verse 18, God also said, and they will listen to your voice. But what does Moses say to God?

[7 : 50] No, they won't. They will not listen to me or believe me. Now Moses had experienced rejection in the past, hadn't he?

Back in Egypt, he tried to break up a fight between two Hebrew slaves only for one of them to say, who made you a prince or a judge of us? But even so, telling God he's wrong isn't very clever, is it? God has just introduced himself to Moses as, I am who I am. The eternal, transcendent, unchanging one who depends on no one or nothing to be exactly who he is at all times, in all places.

He's also the God of three of the most difficult people in history, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But you don't know these people like I know them, Lord.

So simple, so naive, Lord, to think that they would believe me. They will not listen. Two quick things to say before we hear God's answer.

[8 : 58] Firstly, it's really easy for us to point the finger at Moses, but do we not ever let our experiences talk back to God? God, I've taken away your sins as far as the east is from the west, but I still sin, Lord.

So, have you? Make disciples of all nations and I will be with you. But I tried speaking to my friend once about being a Christian and she told me, that's fine for you but don't push it on anyone else. I am with you always. I'll never leave you or forsake you. But I'm really struggling, Lord. Life is crushing me. Where are you? Are you here? We have our own ways of telling God he doesn't really know what he's talking about, don't we?

Brothers and sisters, we need to learn to read our lives through the lens of God's word and his promises and not the other way around. We need to be able to live by his promises even when we do not see them in our day to day.

God said his people would listen to Moses and in fact, later on we see they do. So despite what Moses had been through, God was right. They will listen. The other quick thing is, how amazing is it that the Lord replies to that at all?

[10 : 19] At such length and not to correct him but to comfort him? How incredibly patient is God with Moses?

How incredibly patient and gracious is he with us? Brothers and sisters, we shouldn't talk back to God, but friends, he has ever such a long fuse.

We should believe him implicitly, but he is a God who can cope with our doubts and continue to work with us and in us. How great is our God?

So what is his reply then? The Lord equips Moses with three signs to do, so that, verse five, they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers, has appeared to you.

So pretty much like every miracle in the Bible, the purpose of these miracles is to authenticate the messenger, God's signature, on his servant.

[11:18] And in fact, they're even called signs here because like a signpost, they point past themselves to a bigger truth. I trust that if you've ever gone to visit somewhere like Glencoe, you've gone on a long drive to get there, see wonderful landscape, you've passed lots of signs on the way that tell you, Glencoe, three miles, Glencoe, two miles.

I trust that when the signs ran out, you didn't just turn around and go back, but you actually saw Glencoe and didn't just go home with loads of pictures of brown signs that say Glencoe.

Okay, that would be silly, wouldn't it? And just like that, these signs point to the reality that the people are meant to see, that God has sent Moses to carry out this great rescue, so listen to him, believe in him.

We're not just meant to look at the signs, but what they point to. But why these signs in particular?

Well, the signs themselves are a preview of how God is going to do the rescuing.

So as you hear them, just think, how comforting, how reassuring would it be to see these signs played out by Moses as he told you, God has come down to rescue you.

[12:32] The serpent was a symbol of Egyptian power. If you visit the British Museum or anything like that, you'll see in all the kind of Pharaoh's headgear, the staff, the serpent, often poised to strike.

And of course, the power behind the Egyptian throne too, the serpent, the devil. But what did God and Moses do with snakes?

Well, first, Moses' staff becomes a snake when he throws it on the ground. That's reminiscent of when God created the entire animal kingdom out of the ground.

Let the earth bring forth living creatures, including snakes. But then the Lord tells Moses to pick it up by the tail, and when he does, it turns back into his same old staff.

Snakes may be dangerous, but they are nonetheless under God's power to create and destroy, just like every creature on the face of the earth. Egypt, Pharaoh, Satan are no different.

[13:38] They are dangerous. But in God's power, God's rescuer can throw them down and take them in hand without being hurt, without being bitten.

The next sign is leprosy on Moses' hand. Leprosy and other skin diseases like it were associated in that time and actually in the law with death because they looked so much like a living death.

Flesh would rot, body parts would fall off. Interestingly, later in the story, in the book of Numbers, Moses' sister Miriam gets leprosy because she didn't listen to or believe Moses as God's messenger.

So here God is showing again he has the power of life and death and particularly to inflict death on those who do not listen to his message through Moses and to give life to those who do.

And finally, Nile water into blood. The Nile was not like the Don and the D. There's been plenty of water, hasn't there, recently? But the Nile was the lifeblood of Egypt.

[14:50] So much so, there were idols that people sacrificed to in fear that the Nile would dry up and leave them dead. So for Moses to take Nile water, spill it on the ground and have it turn to blood would be an incredibly ominous sign of God's power over their entire civilization.

Indeed, when the whole Nile turned to blood later, we read that it stank. The taps that God turns to sustain life, he can just as easily turn off and make death flow instead.

God gives Moses these three signs to show God's people, convince them, assure them that he had really come down to save them from the enemy's power.

That this really is for them a matter of life and death. Their lives are at stake and God has come to the rescue. They're a preview of how God will do the rescue.

We're actually going to see two of them played out again when the blows start landing. And crucially, they also make clear that God is going to save his people through Moses.

[16:07] Nine times in these verses we read about Moses' hand. He grabs the snake with his hand. He puts his hand in his cloak. That's significant because the Lord has said in verse 3, verse 19, and 20, that he would stretch out his mighty hand and strike Egypt with wonders to free his

people.

So it's a little bit like if you imagine, or maybe you've done this, if you've tried to help a child to maybe write their name or draw something or blow bubbles or something like that, and you might put your hands around the child's hands so that they are doing what you are doing.

It would be easier actually for you to write their name yourself or blow the bubbles, but you want to enable the child to do something that they could not of their own power do.

So with Moses and God, Moses' staff was not a magic staff. No, the Lord stretched out his hands through Moses' hands.

God's people will be saved by the hand of God through the hand of Moses. Now this is where it's really important, isn't it, that we don't read ourselves directly into the story.

[17:29] You might not think that people will listen to you when you tell them about God, but is God going to cause you to turn sticks into snakes? Evidently not. Let me know if you have.

I will be interested. What's the point then? The point is that we will recognize God's authentic rescuer by the signs that he comes to do.

Listen again to John's gospel, chapter 20, verse 30, and see if this sounds familiar. Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book, but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in his name.

Jesus did signs, miracles, which John wrote down that we might believe that he was sent by God to save us. Interestingly, just before that, Jesus shows his people the ultimate sign of his power over what?

Life and death. He showed them his hands at his side. Put your finger here. See my hands. Put out your hand.

[18:48] Put it in my side. Look at my resurrected body, he says. And do not disbelieve, but believe. Friends, our big problem is not that we won't be listened to.

It's that we don't listen. We are not Moses in this story. We're the Israelites who struggle time and time again to believe God's word and his promises.

We're the disciples who got it wrong over and over, who doubted Jesus' resurrection. Brothers and sisters, we're not the ones doing the signs, we're the ones who need to see the signs.

Our problem is not not being believed. It's not believing. God didn't have to go to such lengths to convince us that he sent a savior.

He has a right to be listened to and believed. But in the time of Moses and then in the time of Jesus and the apostles, he gave countless, countless signs that this is the savior come to save.

[19:53] Listen to him. Believe him. Trust in him. Moses' miracles show us that God has power over life and death, but Jesus' resurrection proves that life and death are firmly under his sovereign control.

He can die and rise again and he can bring eternal judgment and death on his enemies and give eternal life to his people.

So friends, the message is follow the signs to where they point. Don't stop at the signs. Don't do a U-turn back into here.

Look where they're going. Don't disbelieve, but believe that this is God's savior come to save. Jesus Christ, the new Moses, listen to him, trust in him, and he will save you from death to life, from darkness to light, from slavery to true freedom.

But that's still not enough for Moses. He's got another reason not to go before he flatly refuses.

[21:08] Our second and third points are much shorter, so let's have a look at verse 10. I'm not a good speaker, he says, in God's reply. But Moses said to God, verse 10, Oh, my Lord, I'm not eloquent, either in the past or since you've spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue.

Donald showed us really helpfully last time Moses' two questions, who am I and who are you? And we noticed that both times God's reply was about himself, but his second reply was much longer, wasn't it?

Who are you, God? I am that I am. Moses' two objections work in a similar way. First, he says, they won't believe you really appeared to me, so it's about God and God replies at length.

His second objection is very much about Moses, isn't it? I'm not eloquent. I'm slow of speech.

Notice that God's reply is much shorter this time, only two verses, and again, all about not Moses,

but God.

Verse 11, Then the Lord said to him, He was made man's mouth. He makes him mute or deaf or seeking or blind. Is it not I, the Lord? Again, we so naturally sympathize with Moses, don't we?

[22 : 28] Maybe it only takes someone to ask you what you did on Sunday, for your mouth to dry up and your tongue to stop working. Maybe the thought of telling someone about Jesus makes you feel a bit sick and a bit anxious.

I'm sure that Moses could have benefited from Rico Tice's advice about crossing the pain line. The first time might be really awkward, Moses, but push through it and next time it'll be easier.

He might even have been helped by some of the training in evangelism, like passion for life or a gospel outline, like two ways to live. But if we make this all about Moses and make Moses all about us, well, aren't we actually making the same mistake as Moses?

Moses constantly wants to bring it back to himself, doesn't he? And the Lord is constantly redirecting away from himself and to the Lord. We all in this room who are Christians, we all have various levels of ability in speaking.

Some of us are comfortable speaking in public, some of us don't like talking much at all, some of you speak multiple languages fluently. Some of us, as the Lord reminds us, are mute or deaf or blind.

[23 : 44] But the Lord's point is it's not about us. Who made man's mouth? Come on, Moses, do you think I've set you up to fail?

I made your slow mouth. I gave you your accent. I taught you to speak. Why are you obsessing over you, Moses, when you're talking to me, your maker? God gives Moses pretty short shrift, doesn't he?

Cut it out. It's a reminder to us, brothers and sisters, that our own perceived strengths and weaknesses, the ways we think we're gifted, the things we think we're not so good at, they don't count as excuses before God for not doing what he tells us to do.

We are experts at bringing it back to us, aren't we? We are expert self-justifiers. I know it looks like I didn't do or say the right thing, but if you knew the situation, if you knew how I felt about it, if you knew what had happened to me, well, then you would see it differently.

We're expert self-excusers. I know God wants us to live like that, but I'm an exception. For most people, that stands, and that would be wrong, but my situation, well, it's just more complicated than that.

[25 : 02] God says, go. Moses says, what about me? And God simply says, no, Moses, what about me? And in that, and a thousand other ways, we need to stop worrying so much about ourselves, don't we, and learn to trust him as our creator and so serve him as our Lord.

The God who made our mouths has given us a message. He has come down to rescue. We can all be better, clearer, more confident in saying that, but if God's given you a mouth, brothers and sisters, it's not up to you whether or not to use it to communicate the message of the gospel.

He knows what we're capable of. He made us, and he's taught us what to say, and he's called us to say it. Let not a sense of your own inadequacy stop you from saying the Lord's message.

He doesn't put words in our mouths or teach us in the moment what to say as with Moses, but he has given us a clear, simple message from the world that he has come down as a savior to save us. I wonder what comes to mind for you this morning. What excuses are you making? What reasons are you giving for not doing what the Lord's called you to do? But finally, we see Moses' real heart revealed in not an objection but a refusal.

[26 : 30] Thirdly then, send someone else in God's reply. It's never a good idea to tell God no, but in this case, it's a bit worse than that.

We spotted before the word hand comes up nine times in this passage. It actually comes up ten times and this is the tenth time. Moses says, oh my Lord, please send someone else.

Literally, he says, please send another hand. We notice that the word hand stresses that God will save by Moses' hand.

So can we feel the gravity of what he's saying? It's not just send another person but send another savior. It would have been fair for God to be angry a good while ago, but it's now that we read then the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses.

Not because Moses has questions and doubts, that doesn't anger God, but because his savior won't be sent. Whatever you tell me, I'm not going through with this rescue, he says.

[27 : 45] We've noticed before how Moses is being set up in the book of Exodus to foreshadow Christ, but what a pale shadow he is here. Where others thought he shouldn't go, Jesus went.

Why does he eat with sinners? It's not the well who need a doctor, but the sick. I have come to call sinners to repentance. He told his disciples he had to go to the cross to suffer and to die there for our salvation.

Far be it from you, Lord, that will never happen to you. Get behind me, Satan. Peter, you're doing a Moses, you're setting your mind not on the things of God, but on the things of man.

I've been sent to die for sins. Hebrews 12 says wonderfully, wonderfully, it was for the joy that was set before him that he endured the cross, scorning its shame.

It is impossible for us to imagine, isn't it, Jesus refusing to be sent? We cannot think of him as an unwilling savior. He will not let us think of him like that.

[28 : 52] That's why the Lord is angry with Moses, because the Lord has fixed his love upon his people. He has pledged himself to save them, and the one to do the saving is so unlike the glad and willing savior, he will one day send to joyfully die for our sins.

Friends, that thought should make us all the more thankful for this table this morning. What does it say? Look how committed God has been to your salvation.

Look how willing the savior is to have done this for you, break his body, shed his blood. knowing that Jesus could have said, send another savior, I'm not going.

Aren't we all the more in awe of him that he said, here I am, Lord, send me, and that he did not say that begrudgingly, but joyfully, gladly. Moses is on a journey, we'll see that through Exodus, but it always takes more than one person to reflect Jesus well, and so the Lord gives Moses Aaron to help him.

Moses hasn't forced God onto plan B, he would always have needed Aaron, just now he shows that he does, and indeed providentially, verse 14, Aaron is already on his way to meet him.

[30 : 18] What do we learn? God will not leave his people without a savior, even if it has to be Moses plus Aaron. Together they will speak God's message, together they will perform God's signs, but even together, the rescue that they accomplish pales in comparison with the glorious rescue that our savior Jesus has accomplished single-handedly, willingly, eternally, on the cross where he ransomed us by his own blood, once slaves to sin, now free to love, serve, and worship God, our maker, as his beloved children.

Praise be to him. Let's worship and thank him as we pray and then as we come to the table together. Amen. Lord Jesus, how our hearts are filled with awe and thanks to you, our savior, who came gladly to be born into human nature, to take on our sin on yourself upon the cross, to die where we should have died and be raised for our salvation.

Lord, we praise you that where our own hearts doubt and fear that you wouldn't and that you couldn't have come for us, Lord, you tell us, you assure us that you have come for sinners to call us to yourself, to welcome us into your kingdom, to wash our sins away.

Lord, take away our doubts, we pray, take away our fears. Help us, Lord, we pray, not to fixate so much on us, but to fixate on you, Lord, to forget ourselves in the light of your glory and of your gospel.

Father, we pray that you would bless us now as you come to this table laid for us who are in Christ, and we pray, Lord, that these elements, the bread and wine, would do just that for us, that they would assure our hearts that you are for us, that we have peace with you through our Lord Jesus Christ, that his death is enough for us, and that it is finished.

[32 : 40] We can come to you cleansed and whole, and as your children, free from the power of sin, free from its guilt, and Lord, even though we live with its presence, we thank you that you accept and welcome us because we're clothed with Jesus and his righteousness.

So, Lord, we thank you and pray you bless us now as we come. In Jesus' name, Amen.