

The unfolding of your words gives light.

When the Gospel Does Not Work

Exodus 6:1-13

Introduction

We are living in a time when the churches that proclaim Jesus as man's only hope of salvation and the Bible as the ultimate revelation from God are materially prosperous. That by itself is not a bad thing, but since material prosperity in a church comes from having lots of people who give, many "ministries" and experts have arisen who do nothing but help churches find ways to stay prosperous.

The question too many are asking is not, "How can we most effectively communicate the gospel?" The questions being asked are, "What works?" or "How can we attract more people?"

When you take the time to see how the living God has chosen to reveal himself in this book we claim is our final authority for what we believe and how we behave, you may be ashamed at all the attempts you have made to dress Jesus up so more people will like him.

Moses' ministry in Egypt up to this point would be considered unsuccessful because people did not like what they heard or did not like what happened to them when they identified with the ministry.

Everyone professed faith when Moses came with the snake and the leprous hand (see the end of Exodus chapter five). The signs and wonders were a great way to work a crowd, but things changed when identifying with this message started to cost the congregation something. Pharaoh said they were lazy and increased their work load. The new church full of believers turned on Moses. The deliverance was not what they wanted. Moses was one discouraged pastor.

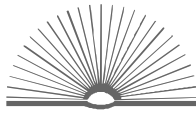
Moses told the Lord, "This isn't working." That is the sentiment of many in our day who have tried gospel ministry and found it to be something they did not expect. Does it not follow that when you preach the only message that saves, people will be saved? Does it not follow that when you do what God says, you will be blessed in what you do?

Things are not always what they seem. At this point Moses could have either turned back to Midian in despair or tried another method of deliverance like he did when he stabbed the Egyptian forty years earlier. The Lord had other plans.

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh; for under compulsion he will let them go, and under compulsion he will drive them out of his land." God spoke further to Moses and said to him, "I am the LORD; and I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty, but by My name, LORD, I did not make Myself known to them. I also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they sojourned. Furthermore I have heard the groaning of the sons of Israel, because the Egyptians are holding them in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant. Say, therefore, to the sons 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 their bondage. I will also redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. Then I will take you for My people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. I will bring you to the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you for a possession; I am the LORD.'" So Moses spoke thus to the sons of Israel, but they did not listen to Moses on account of their despondency and cruel bondage.

Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Go, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the sons of Israel go out of his land." 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?" Then the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, and gave them a charge to the sons of Israel and to Pharaoh king of Egypt, to bring the sons of Israel out of the land of Egypt. (Exodus 6:1-13)

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The Lord did not allow Moses to take either of the despairing options. He steps in at times like these. Matthew Henry paraphrased the Lord's thoughts from the content of verse one: "...now that the affair has come to a crisis, things are as bad as they can be, Pharaoh is in the height of pride and Israel in the depth of misery, now is my time to appear."

The Name

What did the Lord mean when he said, "...but by My name, LORD, I did not make Myself known to them"? Is this really the first time the special name of God was revealed? No. It is plain that the patriarchs knew the four-letter designation some pronounce "Yahweh" or "Jehovah" and others refuse to pronounce so as not to misuse it. Not only do the writings of Moses show that the patriarchs knew that name, some people in Israel, like Moses' own mother (Jochebed, "Yahweh is glory"), had been named after him.

Some would be quick to label this as evidence that the Bible is inconsistent and therefore not the unified book believers claim it is. But many years later the Lord spoke similar words to Israel through the prophet Jeremiah:

Therefore behold, I am going to make them know—This time I will make them know My power and My might; And they shall know that My name is the LORD." (Jeremiah 16:21).

It is his power and might that make his name known, not correctly pronouncing it. Likely what the Lord was saying to Moses was that he had not revealed to the patriarchs the full character his name embodied. Some religious groups place a great deal of emphasis on pronouncing the name Jesus or Jehovah any number of Hebrew designations like El Shaddai, but the issue here is not how to pronounce the name, but what the name makes the person do.

The Lord Jesus said to the Father just before the cross, "I have manifested Your name to the men You gave Me out of the world" (John 17:6). If the destruction of Pharaoh that brought about the rescue of Israel from bondage was an entirely new way for God to reveal his name, how much more the event that would bring about the destruction of sin and death! Jesus surely did not speak of some new name to pronounce. He spoke of the actions that mighty name revealed.

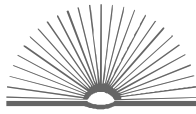
The name is not great because it is somehow magical to pronounce. It is great because it reveals the character of the self-existent One who does what he pleases. Take note that when The Lord says, "I am the LORD," he is about to do something to demonstrate just what that means.

The Action

We might be turned off by someone who talks about himself all the time, but this Holy One is no mere talker. He was about to show that his name is his character and his character is mighty to save. He told Moses, "This is who I am." Now he says, "Here is what I am going to do."

Notice the list of actions that follow the Lord's pronouncement to Israel, "I am the LORD" in verse six:

- I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians
- I will deliver you from their bondage
- I will also redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments
- I will take you for My people
- I will be your God



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- I will bring you to the land
- I will give it to you for a possession

None of this work is Moses' work. None of this work is Israel's work. None of this work has anything to do with Pharaoh's (or anyone else's) free will. God's deliverance is always *monergistic* (the work of one), never *synergistic* (a partnership).

God promised to bring Israel out of the land of slavery, to give them freedom from that slavery, to purchase them with a great judgment, to make them his own, to make himself their own, to take them to a destination and to make that destination theirs. This great work or series of works does not bring us to delight in how special these people must be but in how wonderful this God must be.

The Instrument

Without belittling Moses, it is important that you see this event properly. The deliverance God effected for Israel made effective use of human mouthpieces, but once you have seen the character of God revealed in the acts of God, you are left unimpressed by the beauty of the human instruments and their methods.

After seeing this God as he really is, are you concerned that Moses has a speech impediment? After hearing his promises—and knowing from history how he kept them—are you really interested in the methods that worked for Moses in getting lots of people to follow him out of Egypt? Does it matter how relevant his words seemed at the time?

How this knowledge changes the way we approach ministry:

1. We seek to make God known rather than to make him look good. There is nothing you can do to dress up the gospel to make it more appealing to depraved people. Our task is to carry a message, not attract a crowd.
2. We follow him to the ends of the earth even if we do not look good. Do not make your obedience contingent figuring out how God will work his plan. Can't figure out how he could use someone like you? That is the way it ought to be. God has chosen "the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong...so that no man may boast before God" (1 Corinthians 2:27, 29). His action is not bound by your limitations.

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