

Title: Not Missing the Forest
Date: August 14, 2022
Subject: God reveals himself through his Name, character and activity.
Scripture: Exodus 3:6, 13-15; 6:1-3; 33:18-23; 34:5-7

Familiar sayings have historical origins. To “butter someone up” means trying to flatter a person, get on their good side. The saying stems from ancient India where worshippers would throw butter balls at the statues of their gods to seek favor and forgiveness. “Turning a blind eye” refers to ignoring a situation, fact or reality. During a naval battle between Britain and Denmark, a superior British Naval officer signaled Horatio Nelson to withdraw. Nelson, who was blind in one eye, purportedly lifted his telescope to that eye and casually announced, “I really do not see the signal” and sailed on to victory.

Another saying is “can't see the forest for the trees.” Its roots trace back to the 1500s. One source was Sir Thomas More who wrote about a man he considered to be a heretic, saying he could see the stones but not the church and wouldn't be able to see the wood (forest) for the trees. It means not being able to see the big picture.

This can be done when we look at our text for today which is Exodus. We could know in order the 10 plagues that impacted Egypt, recall the 10 Commandments in their proper order, recall from our Sunday school study “The Bible Express” that this time era was named Confinement, the symbol was a pyramid and the movement to remember was a hand put down, remember what took place by using the idea of needing maps to find the way with MAPS as an anagram for Moses, Aaron, plagues and Sea, remember in birth order the names of the children of Jacob who went down to Egypt, know that the English name for Exodus comes from the exit of the people of Israel from Egypt and the Hebrew name for the book comes from the opening words of the book: “these are the names of” or more simply “names.”

We can know details, facts, even interesting facts, facts that would amaze and amuse others at parties and yet it could be possible to miss what the book is about. It's a good thing to keep in mind as we go through the other three books of Moses. The book of Exodus is essentially about seeing God, seeing who he is and what he's come to do.

Exodus picks up where Genesis ended so that the two form a seamless unit. Exodus begins with the names of the sons of Jacob who migrated down to Egypt to be saved by their brother Joseph from famine. The book proceeds to describe the story of the Israelites' exit from Egypt and the beginning of their journey to the Promised Land.

All that occurred because of God. In Genesis we discovered that we can trust God and his promises. This morning is a deeper dive into the nature and working of God.

I. The nature and working of God

We start in Exodus 34:5 - 7. READ.

We'll come back here but we need to backtrack to see the build up to this moment. Go to chapter 3. Moses, the ex-Prince of Egypt, turned shepherd, encounters something he can't explain – a bush is on fire but it doesn't burn up. He's intrigued and approaches. God calls to him from the bush to tell him he should take off his sandals for he's standing on holy ground. READ Exodus 3:6.

God puts himself in historical context. He proclaims himself to be the God of the revered ancestors, the patriarchs. He does this two other times in the conversation with Moses. He goes on to reveal he is the God who sees all, is aware of the cries of his people and is the rescuer. It's the same way he revealed himself to Hagar. This time many more people are involved.

To accomplish the rescue, he chose to send Moses as his spokesman to talk with Pharaoh. Moses is incredulous and begins making excuses. He proclaims he has all sorts of disqualifying weaknesses. Quite a different story from the apostle Paul who said he gloried in his weaknesses because it enabled God to show himself strong. Moses just didn't want to be part of what God was doing.

There may be some Christ followers who say that if they had been Moses, they wouldn't have acted the way he did. Maybe. Maybe not. I think the comment better demonstrates the human propensity of projecting ourselves onto the way other people should or shouldn't act. The others should be just like me. That's not what God has in store for his people.

Moses raises a valid question. Read Exodus 3:13. It wasn't an everyday happening -- two guys suddenly show up from the desert and proclaim incredible news about deliverance. People will naturally want to know: "Where did you get this information? Why should we believe you?"

God responds to inquiry. Read Exodus 3:14, 15.

God had previously revealed himself as the "I AM" to Abraham. Here he adds to the name – "I Am Who I Am." It indicates he is the Almighty God, the One who is superior to all – all powers, all authorities, all rulers, all. Everything there is about God is wrapped up in this name. He says it is his chosen name. Linked with the promise that he would be with them, it communicates he is dependable and faithful.

God goes on to reveal himself as "the LORD." LORD and I AM are connected as the Hebrew for Lord sounds like it could have been drawn from "I AM."

The English word LORD comes from the Hebrew Yahweh which is sometimes transliterated as Jehovah. The primary idea is of God being absolute, eternal, and existing independently from any other being. God declares he not only exists but is self-existent. He is the one and only God. This declaration of the Name of God stood in stark contrast against the polytheism of the world of that time into which the nation of Israel had sunk.

Let's move ahead to Chapter 6. Moses had arrived in Egypt with his brother and sidekick Aaron. They'd begun proclaiming what God wanted to do. Initially the people and leaders "believed. And when they heard that the Lord was concerned about them and had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshipped" (Exodus 4:31).

However, things quickly went from bad to worse as Pharaoh increased the workload of the Israelite slaves and made life even more miserable for them. The Israelite leaders changed their attitude, wishing Moses had never showed up. Moses turns to the Lord and wants to know why this is taking place.

Read Exodus 6:1 - 3.

Matthew Henry comments on God's intended purpose and how it impacts us: "Moses had been expecting what God would do; but now he shall see what he will do. God would now be known by his name Jehovah, that is, a God performing what he had promised, and finishing his own work. God intended their happiness: I will take you to me for a people, a peculiar people, and I will be to you a God. More than this we need not ask, we cannot have, to make us happy. He intended his own glory: You shall know that I am the Lord. These good words, and comfortable words, should have revived the drooping Israelites, and have made them forget their misery; but they were so taken up with their troubles, that they did not heed God's promises. By indulging discontent and fretfulness, we deprive ourselves of the comfort we might have, both from God's word and from his providence, and go comfortless. (Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary Exodus 6:1 - 9).

God again says he had revealed himself to the patriarchs as the God Almighty which in Hebrew is El-Shaddai. It means he possesses all power and strength. Because of this, he was able to fulfill his promises.

Now, things were different. God was revealing himself by his name the Lord, Yahweh, Jehovah. In the thousands of years God had interacted with people, beginning in the Garden, through the patriarchs and confinement in Egypt, He comes to the point where he reveals himself in his special way. Perhaps one of the things we could learn from this is there is always more of God to be revealed to people, more for people, more for us, to understand about who God is and what he does.

The Lord God says he is in the process of fulfilling the promises he had been made to Abraham. "I will bring out, free, take as my own people, bring to the land." This all points to going to Canaan, the promised land. The upshot is they would know God in a way that Abraham and the patriarchs didn't.

We come back to chapter 34. Moses previously had been up on the mountain to receive the 10 commandments. He broke them when he saw that the Israelites had turned to worshipping the golden calf as their gods. God calls him to come up on the mountain to receive the commandments a second time.

By this point in Israel's journey, Moses had developed the habit of spending time with God. He would go the tent of meeting, a special place outside the camp of the Israelites where he and God would talk face to face. This time the Lord and Moses had been discussing the journey to the promised land. It seems like Moses is balking, again, as he tells the Lord he doesn't know who's going to go with him. He wants the Lord. The Lord assures him "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest" (Exodus 33:14).

This leads Moses to make an unusual request.

READ Exodus 33:18 - 23.

The man has gotten much bolder since his time on the backside of the desert at the burning bush. He'd experienced the plagues sent upon Egypt as judgment, the miraculous deliverance of people through the Red

Sea, the destruction of Pharaoh's army, the pillar of fire by night, the pillar of cloud by day, bread from heaven falling to the ground, the provision of meat, and water from a rock to quench the thirst of the millions.

Moses tells God he's seen just a portion and wants to see the totality. The Lord says he will show more of him and proclaim his name, but Moses will not be able to see his face as no one could see it and live. The Lord reveals his sovereign choice as he chooses those upon whom he will show his mercy and compassion. It isn't that people choose God so he will give them compassion. People are merely responders to God.

The Lord gave directions to Moses of where he was to go. The Lord would lovingly protect him until he passed by and then remove his hands so Moses could see his back. These depictions of God's face and back are given to help our human minds try to comprehend the person of God. It's putting human touches on God who can't be described in human terms.

The next morning Moses shows up at the appointed place with two replacement stone tablets he'd chiseled. Moses would wind up being with the Lord on the mountain for 40 days and 40 nights without eating bread or drinking water. He wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant and the 10 Commandments (Exodus 34:28).

Before the Lord told Moses what to write down, he spoke of himself. Verse 5 tells us he proclaimed his name - the Lord - and his character. REREAD Exodus 34:5 - 7.

We could summarize the first part with the word love. It's used twice - abounding in love, maintaining love. Synonyms are used - compassionate, gracious. The effects of love are given - slow to anger, forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.

The word "forgive" comes from the idea of lifting up. God lifts the burden of sin from people's shoulders so we no longer have to carry it or try to pay for it. Three words are used to describe what God forgives. Wickedness is error, straying from the path, trespassing, going into territory where the person doesn't belong. Rebellion is... rebellion or apostasy, refusing to continue to follow and obey, abandoning, turning away from God. Sin is missing the mark. God forgives all the actions, words, thoughts, etc. that fall in these categories.

The loving component of God's nature leads to the complementary aspect of dispensing justice. Because of his love, he has to be fair and deal harshly with those who don't come to him according to the way he prescribes.

Since he's God, he has the right to decide how people will approach him. He has determined it's through the sacrificial work on the cross done by his one and only Son Jesus Christ. People who lived before Jesus needed to trust the promises of God, to the day he'd fulfill his promise of deliverance.

The idea of the punishment of the guilty extending to the third and fourth generation doesn't hit us quite right. We need to be careful not to read into it what human judges would do. Human courts aren't allowed to punish the children or grandchildren or great grandchildren of a guy who stole tires off a car. However, God may allow the consequences of a person's sin to linger and be passed down from generation to generation.

Some behaviors, attitude problems and even sinful habits can be passed from one generation to the next. The context of the passing down of punishment in the first giving of the 10 Commandments is the ban on idolatry. There's a tendency of children to follow in the path of who or what their parents worship.

It's not about eternal consequences being passed down from one generation to generation. Other Scriptures teach that the person who sins is the one who will die for their sins and people won't die for the sins of someone else (Deuteronomy 24:16, Jeremiah 31:30, Ezekiel 18:20, Romans 2:6).

When the 10 Commandments were first given, these two aspects of God's nature and working were reversed (Exodus 20:6). Punishing people by holding sins against the ones who hate God came before showing love to those who love him and keep his commands.

There the reach of love was phrased as 1000 generations. The scope of the number of people emphasizes the difference between God's love and his justice. The magnitude of his love is far greater. The good news is: God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them (2 Corinthians 5:19).

Ellicott's Commentary "Forgiveness is the flow of God's love to all, and the welcoming back to His favour of all who come. Forgiveness likewise includes the escape from the extreme and uttermost consequences of sin in this life and in the next, the sense of God's displeasure here, and the final separation from Him, which is eternal death."

God is loving and provides salvation to people **only** because of who he is. He is: "majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders" (Exodus 15:11). There is no one like him. He is the God of history who remembers his people and acts.

Immediately after hearing the Lord proclaim his name and describe himself, "Moses bowed to the ground at once and worshipped" (Exodus 34:8). Moses knew who was who and knew of the two of them who should be worshipped.

A major portion of the book, 16 of 40 chapters, focuses on the way people who lived under the Mosaic covenant were to worship. In fact, 5% of the volume of the Bible describes the place of worship Moses was to construct, its function and how people were to worship. The most frequent thought about those instructions by people today? We're glad we don't have to follow that kind of process and procedures with its various sacrifices and offerings.

That's a valid point, but what could we learn? Worship stems from knowing God's name and his person. Worship means we should live lives that are indebted to God acknowledging the truth a cost is involved in the form of time, effort, financial gifts. Christ followers are implored: "in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship" (Romans 12:1).