

GOD IS KEEPING HIS PROMISES WITHOUT OUR HELP

Exodus 2: 11-25

Please review this week's catechism question.

INTRODUCTION

The Bible is full of paradoxes. One paradox revolves around the relationship between our work and God's work. On one hand the Scriptures say things like this: "Lazy hands make a man poor, but diligent hands bring wealth. He who gathers crops in summer is a wise son, but he who sleeps during harvest is a disgraceful son." (Proverbs 10:4-5) In the NT Paul says, "In everything I did I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak." (Acts 20:34) "...we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. We did this... in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow... If a man will not work, he shall not eat."

Yet, the Scriptures also teach that our work is not what ultimately determines our condition. Paul in his sermon to the Athenians says, "God gives all men life and breath and everything else." In his first letter to the Corinthians he asks, "What do you have that you did not receive? If you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?" In Romans he says, "Who has given to God that God should repay him? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever." Jesus says this, "I am the vine, you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit. Apart from me, you can do nothing." Ultimately, it is God's work that matters, not our work. Our work, without God's work, is "chasing after the wind."

Our passage today shows why it is that God's work is ultimate, not human work. God has made promises and he is going to keep them and he doesn't need anybody's help to do it. God is the hero in the Bible, not men.

STUDY

1. We are not given any details in Exodus about Moses' life situation on the day he goes out to see his fellow Hebrews. How would you describe his condition based on the fact he was adopted by Pharaoh's daughter and what is said in Acts 7:22 and Hebrews 11:24-26?

His was a life blessed with all the benefits that wealth and power can accumulate. He received the best education. He never went hungry. He lived in the finest, most opulent accommodations available on the earth at that time. He had plenty of friends. He was secure and safe and could expect to remain so until the day he died.

2. According to Acts 7:23-29 and Hebrews 11:24-26, why did Moses go out to "see" his brothers?

First, in Acts 7 we are told that Moses' coming out to see his people and his murder of the Egyptian were due to his ambition to deliver the Hebrew people from their slavery. In fact, he viewed himself as God's agent of salvation for the nation Israel. Then in Hebrews we are told that he was motivated by faith or trust in the promises of God. In short, Moses believes that this nation of slaves is God's chosen people and the vehicle of blessing to the whole world. He believes that God is going to deliver them from their captivity and take them into the land of Canaan. He also believes that he is the one God will use to bring about this deliverance. He believes the promises God made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He also believes that being treated like a slave, as a member of God's people, is better than all the pleasures of wealth and power that he could have as Pharaoh's daughter's son. His confidence is not simply that God is going to save Israel through him but that being part of that salvation, in spite of the enormous suffering that must be endured to obtain it, is infinitely more valuable than the pleasures of living as royalty. He knows that in order to obtain the salvation he must suffer with the people of God but the end, the reward of salvation is so great that losing the pleasures of wealth and enduring the suffering of slavery are nothing compared to it.

3. What are some ways you have left behind the passing pleasures of sin because you believe suffering disgrace for the sake of Christ is of

greater value than the treasures of this world? What does it mean if you cannot identify any ways you have suffered disgrace for the sake of Christ?

4. What does Moses do when he goes out to “see” his fellow Hebrews and what results from his work? What conclusions can we draw from these results?

There is no other place in the Bible where Moses’ murder of the Egyptian is discussed. However, it seems to me that his furtive, secret murder, with no warning and his burial of the corpse in the sand point to the fact that this was not a divinely sanctioned act. What was he planning on doing, killing one Egyptian at a time? It was the act of a man who believes that his work is what matters. He was unwilling to wait for God and determined to take matters into his own hands. He is the one who will set God’s people free. He is full of self-confidence. After all he is a prince of Egypt. He has been instructed in all the ways of Egypt. These people will be glad to have a Savior like him. When Pharaoh discovers what he did, Moses, the man of faith, turns tail and runs, leaving behind the people of Israel to endure another 40 years of slavery. His actions prove that he is a treacherous man and that he is an impotent man. He cannot, regardless of his connections, save God’s people. His work is not what matters. He has no ability to do God’s work in his own power, something he has yet to learn. He does not yet understand that he is powerless and that only God is powerful.

5. Have you ever sought to do “God’s work” and the result was sin and fruitlessness?

God is keeping his promises without the help of human beings because even believing humans are treacherous and impotent.

6. What do we discover about how the people of Israel are living in their slavery during the long decades of oppression from v. 13? Compare to Genesis 27:41, 34:25-29 & 37:12-28.

We find out they are acting just like their fathers did in the book of Genesis. Jacob deceives his father and steals the rights of the

firstborn from Esau and so Esau hates Jacobs and plans to murder him when his father dies. The sons of Jacob murder the men of Shechem and take all their property and make slaves of the women and children. The sons of Israel beat, betray, and sell into slavery their younger brother Joseph. They treat Joseph just as this man treats his fellow Hebrew. The brothers of Joseph were shown to be violent men and here we discover their descendants have not changed. Even though these men are slaves and are mistreated daily by their slave masters, yet they mistreat one another. It’s not bad enough that they are being beat up by foreigners, they also beat each other up. This fighting shows that the character of the nation of Israel has not changed.

7. How does the man who is beating up his fellow Hebrew respond to Moses’ attempt to reconcile the two men? What does this tell us about the Israelites? Compare this to Numbers 12:1-2 & 16:1-3.

When Moses tries to intervene and to reconcile these two men the one who has the upper hand asks Moses who he thinks he is. Who gave him the right to tell him what to do? Who appointed him judge over the people of Israel? Then he uses Moses’ murder of the Egyptian against him. While Moses’ murder was wrong, foolish, and futile, yet it was motivated by a desire to help his people. He has left behind the pleasures of the Egyptian court and has exposed himself to the wrath of Pharaoh. At the minimum, the guy ought to have understood that Moses was doing something he didn’t have to do. He had exposed himself to danger by murdering the Egyptian and shown he was on the side of Israel, though he had been raised in the Egyptian court. His refusal to accept Moses’ help and his using his crime to resist him shows the hardness of their hearts to the grace of God. Moses clearly means to use his position and power to help his people, yet they don’t want his help. Moses is the Savior but nobody is interested in the salvation he offers.

8. How is this rejection of Moses a foreshadowing of the rejection of Jesus? See John 1:10-11, 2:18 & Matt. 21:23.

We see here, in the rejection of Moses by the Hebrew people, the rejection of Jesus Christ by the world he made and the people he

chose, the Jewish nation. The question this violent Hebrew asked Moses is the same question that is asked of Jesus on numerous occasions, “who made you judge over us?” “Who gave you authority to cleanse the temple, to cast out demons, to teach about the kingdom of God?” The Jewish people reject Moses in the same way the world rejects Christ and his Father.

9. What are some ways you have rejected (are rejecting) God’s gracious help because you believe your plans and power are adequate?

God is keeping his promises without the help of human beings because humans don’t really want God’s help.

10. Summarize what happens to Moses when he flees from Egypt out of his fear of Pharaoh.

Moses’ attempt to free the people of God by killing one Egyptian at a time ends in complete failure. The king of Egypt discovers his sympathies for the slaves and seeks to kill him and so Moses the Savior is forced to flee from Egypt to the land of Midian. He comes to a well out in the arid plains of Midian and sits down by it. Soon, a flock of sheep appears over the distant hills being shepherded by seven women, all sisters of the same man, a priest who lives in Midian. These women do the difficult work of pulling up pail after pail of water to fill the troughs to water their sheep. However, no sooner do they fill the troughs with water but another group of shepherds, men, come along and drive the sisters and their sheep away from the troughs and water their own sheep. You can just imagine the boisterous and mocking crowd of men driving off the frightened and intimidated sisters. Moses has been watching this happen and like a hero out of one of our westerns, he rises up from his seat and forces the belligerent shepherds to take their sheep and go. He then draws up the water and refills the troughs for the sister’s sheep.

The girls thank the Egyptian man for his help and return to their father, leaving Moses to sit by the well. Their dad is surprised that they have returned from watering the sheep so quickly and so we discover that these sisters are oppressed every day by this same group of shepherds. When they inform him of how Moses has helped them

the father rebukes them for their lack of hospitality and sends to fetch the man who rescued his daughters. Moses agrees to live with this man and his family and is given one of the daughters as his wife. So Moses settles down in the land of Midian with his wife and they have a son whom he names Gershom.

11. What is shocking about this story in light of the promises to Israel in Genesis and the miraculous birth of Moses and his determination to be the Savior of Israel?

What happens here in Midian is truly shocking in view of the story we have been following. We know that the nation Israel is God’s chosen people. It is God’s will that they leave Egypt and go the land of Canaan. It also appears, through the miraculous way that Moses is born, his life preserved and then his faith to leave behind Pharaoh’s courts to join with the people of God that he is to be the agent of salvation. However, his attempt to help Israel is futile and the people of Israel reject him. Yet, when he comes to this foreign people he is an agent of salvation for them and they act to save him.

12. Why is it that Moses succeeds here in Midian when he failed in Egypt? Why is he accepted by a foreign people but rejected by his own people?

Moses and the Midianite sisters are both in trouble in this story. Moses is homeless and the shepherds are oppressing the sisters. We see in Moses delivering them that he also is delivered. God rescues both Moses and the sisters. Both are helpless and so we discover that God helps the helpless. In the previous story, Moses wasn’t helpless, he was a prince of Egypt and was acting from a position of power. In addition, it was apparent that the Hebrew people as represented by the slave who was beating his fellow slave, did not view themselves as helpless either. Therefore, God doesn’t act to save people who don’t need his help. Here he saves those who need his help.

13. What do we learn about Moses from his naming of his son?

Moses knows this is not the end of the story. His naming his son as he does shows that he knows God is still planning to save his people.

Moses believes the promises yet and is now in the position of waiting for God's timing. We find that Moses is learning to wait for God to act rather than acting as if his work is what matters. Forty more years are going to pass before anything happens. We discover, as does Moses that even when it doesn't look like anything is happening, God is at work preparing everything for the day of salvation.

14. During Moses' living in Midian what happens to the Israelites in Egypt?

Notice that after a long time the cruel king of Egypt dies, yet the slavery doesn't end with his death. Israel groans in his slavery as before but now, unlike any other time, they cry out to God for help. We find out that Israel has not cried out to God during the long decades of his slavery. It took decades of suffering before Israel turned to God. God could not deliver Israel because Israel did not want God to save before this. Israel finally believes the promises and cries out to the God who made the promises. Later in the OT, we find out that during those long years of suffering, Israel had been crying out to the gods of the Egyptians, not to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It took decades of suffering before they stopped crying out to false gods and sought the true God. Notice that God now hears their groaning. He did not hear it before in the sense that he was moved to act because their groaning did not result in their crying out to him.

15. What is the relationship in vv. 24-25 between God's hearing their cries, looking on them and being concerned for them and his remembering his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? What is the ultimate reason God hears and sees and is concerned? See Genesis 15:9-21.

God looks upon Israel and is concerned for them because of the promise he made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He made promises and he will keep his promises because he is a promise keeping God. He hears and is concerned for these afflicted people because he has entered into a covenant with them. He does not look upon Israel and have a concern for them simply because they are in trouble but because he has chosen them by grace. The covenant he entered into was a covenant of grace. In other words it was not conditioned upon

the obedience of the people but upon his faithfulness to his promises. He doesn't make promises to us because we are strong and good but because of his grace in response to our weakness and sin.

16. According to Titus 3:3-7 and Hebrews 4:14-16, why does God save us and care for us in our trouble?

God remembers the promises he has made to us in Christ. He acts to save us because Christ has died for our sins and now intercedes for us before God's throne. Our prayers of desperation are heard because of Christ. He saves us because we are helpless to save ourselves and we are waiting upon him for his salvation in Christ. God's people are weak and helpless. God's people know that he alone is our refuge and our strength. We do not seek salvation in anyone or anything else. In our misery, we cry out to him and he remembers the promise he has sealed with the blood of Christ and he comes to save us. We must wait for him and his salvation, not seek to take matters into our own hands. We are helpless like Moses, like the sisters, and like the people of Israel in slavery. Our life with God is a continual crying out to him to save us. It is a continual turning away from our own strength and a relying on his strength.

17. What are some ways you are learning to trust in Christ, instead of in your own strength or goodness? What are some ways you are learning how weak and needy you truly are?

God is keeping his promises without the help of human beings because God does not help the strong and good but only the weak and sinful.