

GOD IS KEEPING HIS PROMISES BY SOVEREIGN GRACE Exodus 4:1-17

Please review this week's catechism question.

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever been asked by another person to change your behavior? How did that feel? Did you change or not? Why or why not?

It is probably safe to say that the main reason we don't change is due to the fact that the benefits from change don't seem to outweigh the costs and trouble involved in changing. Yet, if we are going to join in the salvation life of God then we are going to have to do things that are going to cost us in a variety of ways. Whether it is at the beginning or throughout our Christian life, costly change is the order of the day. However, all of us resist change. Like Moses, we have a whole list of reasons as to why we can't change. Yet, amazingly, God doesn't just wash his hands of us and turn away. He continues to work with us and seek to overcome the obstacles between us and a life of faith. He is after our eternal and infinite happiness and he knows that the only way to be really happy is to live in obedience to him. Therefore, he pursues headstrong sinners like us. He puts up with our excuses and doesn't turn away from us in our rebellious insubordination. Contrary to all expectation God saves (changes) reluctant sinners like us.

STUDY

1. Review chapter 3. What are the two reasons Moses has already given as to why he isn't the one to go and lead Israel out of Egypt? How has God dealt with these objections?

He has asked, "who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?" and he has asked, "Who are you that you should tell me to go to Pharaoh?"

God answers both his questions. To the first question he says, "it doesn't matter who you are because I will be with you. It doesn't matter who you are. It only matters who I am." To his second question, he declares his name, which reveals that he is the eternal, all-powerful, self-sufficient creator and sustainer of the universe. He then tells Moses everything that is going to happen and how he is going to deliver Israel through him. He declares that he knows all things and rules over all things, even human choices.

2. Compare 3:18 to 4:1. What is Moses really saying in 4:1?

What Moses does in v. 1 is call God a liar. God said in 3:18 that the Israelites would listen to him. He promised that they would believe his claim that the Lord appeared to him and had sent him to deliver them from their slavery in Egypt. Moses ignores what God has said and claims that Israel is not going to listen to him. He essentially says that God is not strong enough to make sure they listen. He is asserting that Israel is not interested in God's salvation and won't listen to him. "You don't know these people very well, Lord. These are hard-hearted people who have no interest in God. They aren't going to listen to me. They are a bunch of skeptics. They're not interested in you and so it will do no good to talk with them." He charges them with being his and God's enemies.

3. What doesn't God do and what does he do in response to Moses' "problem"?

The first thing to notice is that God keeps talking to him and doesn't just strike him dead. The real miracle in this story isn't that the bush is not burned up but that Moses is not burned up. Then, look at how graciously he deals with Moses. He gives him power to perform three signs before the Israelites and guarantees three times that these signs will be effective. According to v. 5, the Israelites will believe that the Lord appeared to him and that he, Moses, is his spokesperson. So God promises Moses that he will overcome Moses' "adversaries" the Israelites. He doesn't need to be afraid of their not believing him. He doesn't have to worry about wasting his time talking with them. God, by the power of these miracles will

overcome their unbelief and cause them to accept Moses as his prophet.

4. Verse 8 literally says, “It will happen, if they do not believe in you and they do not listen to the voice of the first sign, they will believe in the voice of the subsequent sign.” The three signs are not only evidence that Moses is God’s prophet but also each one says something about God’s saving work. What is it that each of the signs is saying about God’s salvation? How does each sign point to the work of Christ?

- Staff to snake and back again by Moses’ hand (cf. Gen 3:1-5, 14-15, Heb. 2:24-25, 1 John 3:8, 5:18):

The staff turning into a snake points us back to the great deceiver, Satan, who appears as a snake back in Genesis 3. If you’ll remember, in Genesis 3:15 God curses Satan and says this, “I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head and you will strike his heel.” In Egypt, the offspring of the serpent is attacking the offspring of the woman, the people of God. Moses’ casting down of his staff and its becoming a snake points to the fact that Satan’s power in this world is due to God’s curse upon this world in response to human sin. Satan afflicts the people of God under the restraining hand of God. God will deliver Israel from the power of Satan by the hand of Moses. In the same way God delivers Christians from the power of Satan by the hand of Jesus in the cross.

- Hand made leprous and then healed (Lev. 13:45-46, 14:1-8, Eph 5:25-27, Titus 3:4-7)

The second sign points to the power of sin and death over God’s people. The leprosy that afflicts Moses’ hand is a fatal disease that makes a person unclean in God’s sight. Leprosy, throughout the OT makes a person unclean and unable to enter into the presence of God. Again, we are afflicted with this fatal disease due to God’s curse upon the world due to sin. Yet, the God who curses his world is also the God who redeems his world through Christ. He cleanses

us of our sins so that rather than dying we are made new and raised into eternal, resurrection life. The disease of our sin is removed and the curse due to our sin, through Christ. God takes away the sins of his people and gives them new life, free from the power and penalty of sin.

- Water from the Nile River turned to blood when poured on the ground (Exodus 1:22, Gen. 4:8-11, Psalm 9:12, 10:1-18, 2 Thess. 1:5-9):

The pouring out of water from the Nile River and its becoming blood upon the ground points to God’s delivering his people from their persecutors. The Nile River is full of the blood of Hebrew babies. This sign shows that God remembers the unjust suffering of his people and he will pay back the Egyptians for their murder of the Hebrew babies. The Nile is not only the place where the babies were killed but also the source of Egypt’s power and so God is going to destroy Egypt and all its power because of their persecution of God’s people. God is going to vindicate his people. Their unjust suffering will be paid for by the destruction of Egypt. This is the exact same thing that we are told that Jesus is going to do when he returns.

5. How does the “voice” of these three signs help you to be willing to take risks?

You need to know that through Christ, all the powers of hell and of this world that are opposed to God’s work will not be able to harm you. You are safe. You cannot be harmed. You may lose your life. You may lose earthly comfort. You may lose friends. You may miss your favorite TV show. You may not be able to buy a new car. But you cannot be ultimately harmed. Satan cannot touch you, death cannot hold you, sin cannot condemn you and people cannot separate you from the great love of God. You don’t have to keep making excuses for not obeying. You can trust God to care for you, he has proven his faithfulness through the life, miracles, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Contrary to what we deserve and against all expectation God saves sinners by delivering us from all our enemies.

6. What is Moses' next reason for why he can't obey God? Why does he use this excuse? What does this continue to reveal about his view of God's salvation?

Throughout vv. 1-9 God has said that the Israelites will listen to Moses' voice due to the signs God will work through him. Moses seizes on this primary qualification for his job: he must be able to speak. God says he will have to speak and so he can show that he is disqualified from the job by telling God that he is "not a man of words," or as the NIV has it, "not eloquent". Moses has once again returned to the favorite excuse we humans have for not joining in the salvation life God offers to us. He again shows that he believes salvation depends upon his efforts, his work. The plan to have him go to Pharaoh and lead out the people of Israel cannot work because he is not a man of words. No one will listen to him because he is not a good speaker. He is not able to do what is required.

7. How does God respond to this excuse? How would you characterize the "tone" of God's response?

God essentially says to him that his inability is irrelevant. God's response is firm. His patience is growing thin. He responds to Moses' excuse by asking him a couple of rhetorical questions and then giving him a command. God rebukes Moses for his hard-hearted unbelief and preoccupation with himself. Whether or not he is able to speak well is a matter of no consequence to the success of God's salvation. The God who makes man's mouth and who determines the verbal ability of every human being will be with his mouth. The God who determines who can see and who cannot see will be at work giving sight to the Israelites and, eventually, to Pharaoh. Human inability is meaningless when the great and sovereign God decides to act. Salvation is not a human work.

8. What are some ways you have seen God's sovereign power overcome your weakness? (See Romans 8:6-8 and Ephesians 2: 1-3 for starters)

Living the Christian life is not a human work. There is not a person in this room who is able to be a Christian or live like a Christian by their own native ability. None of us is able to love God or love people in ourselves. None of us has the courage it takes to stand for Christ in a culture that is heading in the opposite direction. None of us has the discipline it takes to get free of our enslavement to the pleasures of sin and of this world and to pursue a holy life. None of us has the love it requires to forgive and forsake bitterness and pursue reconciled relationships. Every person in your group ought to be able to bear witness to the miracle of their own conversion and love for God and desire to fight sin and live a holy life as God's overcoming their weakness.

9. When have you used your inability or lack of resources (time, money, etc.) as an excuse for not doing God's will? What should we do when we feel inadequate to do what God asks us to do?

Contrary to what we deserve and against all expectation God saves sinners by overcoming our weaknesses.

10. What do we finally find out about Moses in v.13?

Moses finally reveals his true colors. He begs God to send someone else. He doesn't want to be involved in God's salvation. He is happy being a shepherd and he doesn't want to change. The cost of going to Pharaoh and leading out Israel is bigger than any benefits he can see. "Leave me alone and let me live my life the way I want to live it. I don't care that you are in the business of saving your people. I want nothing to do with your salvation. I am happy where I am at and don't need the trouble that being involved with you will bring to me." Moses knows that following God into salvation means giving up the pleasures of this life. He knows that what Jesus said is true, "If anyone would come after me he must deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow after me. For whoever wants to save his

life will lose it but whoever loses his life for me will save it.” So he begs God to leave him alone and go find someone else.

11. How does God feel about Moses’ rejection? Why does he feel this way?

He burns with anger against Moses. God’s anger is because he is the God who made Moses and he is offering Moses infinite joy and Moses is treating his offer as if it is nothing and God as if he is a nobody. Let me see if I can use an illustration to help us understand what Moses’ refusal is like. Imagine that you are the advisor to a great and powerful king. Your king is a fair and benevolent king. He is generous with his servants. He has always appreciated you and treated you with respect. You have wanted for nothing and have lived a secure and happy life. However, you have no appreciation for his kindness. You regularly throw parties in the palace, using the king’s servants to do all the work and the king’s food and drink to feed your guests. Your guests are all members of the king’s enemy’s family. During these parties, you regularly talk about what a fool the king is and how unreasonable his rules are. You praise the enemy of your king. When he asks you to stop having these parties you get mad at him for wanting to take away your only pleasure in life. When he asks you to do something to assist in the administration of his kingdom you complain and tell him to go find somebody else to do his dirty work. You’re too busy planning the next party. Would it not be right for this king to burn with anger towards you? Would it be just for him to permit you to continue living like this and keep you as his advisor? Moses would rather use all that God has given him to pursue a life without God and apart from his salvation. He thinks that herding sheep is a better life than living in the company of this great and mighty God who has given him everything. Therefore, God’s anger justly burns against Moses.

12. What happens in each of these passages when God “burns with anger against” other people? Numbers 11:1-10 & 31-34, 12:1-2 & 9-12, Numbers 25:1-9.

God kills all who craved other food and complained to the Lord. He rebukes Aaron and Miriam and gives Miriam leprosy for a week. He killed 24,000 with a plague due to their immorality. Normally, when God’s anger burns against someone he immediately does something really bad to them.

13. How does this justly angry God respond to Moses? Why does he do this?

Not only does God not burn Moses up but he gives him his request. He treats Moses as if he were a faithful servant, not a rebellious one. God has in fact already made arrangements to meet Moses’ claim to not be a man of words. He has already moved Aaron to leave Egypt to come find Moses after 40 years of separation. Aaron will be glad when he sees Moses and he will speak for Moses to Pharaoh. God not only does not punish Moses for his insubordination but he gives him what he asks for. God does this to make it clear that salvation is entirely his work from the beginning to the end. God does not choose Moses because he is holy or zealous or for anything in Moses. He doesn’t make Moses a prophet because of his faith, for he has none. He chooses Moses based upon his own pleasure and will. He acts according to his own purposes not out of any obligation to Moses for what he has done. God’s grace is magnified in the salvation of Israel beginning with Moses. Anything that happens from this point out cannot be attributed to Moses’ ability or goodness or zeal or faith.

14. How is it just for God to treat Moses this way? See Romans 3:25.

What this verse says is that the reason that God killed Jesus on the cross is so that he could show that it was not unjust for him to forgive Moses and appoint him as his prophet. This point comes up all the time in the OT. How is it right for God to forgive and bless these sinful people in the OT? Why does he not punish these criminals? The answer is that God punishes their sins in Christ. God does not burn up Moses because his anger burned against and consumed his Son, Jesus Christ upon the cross.

15. Why are you not consumed by God's just wrath against you for your excuses and rebellion? How is it just for God to forgive you and treat you as if you are righteous? See Romans 3:26.

All of us have done and do what Moses is doing here. We give God excuses for not obeying him. We plead with him to not ask us to do what we know we ought to do. We rebel and we are not consumed, not because we don't deserve to be consumed but because Jesus Christ was consumed by the fire of God's wrath in our place. God goes beyond all that we could ever ask or imagine and supplies all that we need in Christ in order that we can join in the life of salvation. We can obey him because he provides everything we need to obey. We are not consumed by God's wrath because Jesus was consumed in our place.

16. How does knowing this affect how you relate to God's will for you?

Contrary to what we deserve and against all expectation God saves sinners by restraining his just anger.