



BOTTOM'S UP – GOD'S RESPONSE WHEN WE HIT BOTTOM

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Exodus 6:1-7:7

Tenth Message

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If you were here for the previous message in this series, you'll recall that we posed the question: What do you do and how do you respond when you are walking with God and serving him faithfully, yet the bottom falls out of life?

We saw that Moses found himself in that very situation and discovered that God gives us the gift of freedom to pour our hearts out to him with all honesty. In addition, it is in the pain of life that heaven meets earth and we gain glimpses of and yearn for our eternity in heaven.

Today, I'd like to ask the question: What does God do? How does the Lord respond when his people are in the pit, at a rock-bottom place?

I shared with you last week two rock-bottom places in my life. Please indulge me briefly to share one more.

As a college sophomore at Stanford University, I was in a deep, dark valley of insecurity. In short, all that made up my identity to that point had been stripped away. My passion for baseball had died earlier as the result of a severely broken arm. My nationally ranked swimming success had been torn away by disease and overwork. My water polo career had vaporized in a cloud of fear and doubt. My fallback identity, super academic achievement, meant nothing in the face of a whole university of valedictorians and former high school class presidents. My high school sweetheart and I broke up. In short, everything that had defined me had been taken away. My insecurities ran so deep, I would continually analyze nearly every interaction, wondering what people thought of me, and concerned about everything I had said or done. It was painful. It was truly a rock-bottom place.

As I studied today's passage, I looked back on that time and found striking parallels with how God rescued me from that pit. Maybe you will find yourself in this story as well.

We pick it up in chapter 6 of Exodus, where last week, we briefly touched on verse one. That's where we'll start now as we look into what God does in response to Moses' rock-bottom place.

I. Yahweh's Reassurance (6:1-8)

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; (Exodus 6:1-2 NASB)

God begins his response to Moses' case against him with a calming reassurance. The narrator captures it in typically emphatic Hebrew fashion:

- a. You will see what I will do
 - b. Under compulsion he will let go
 - b' Under compulsion he will drive them out
- a' I am who I am

Yahweh responds to Moses' bold challenge with an assurance that he is up to what he is up to and he will not be waylaid in his plans. The narrator emphasizes God's assurance and determination through the inverse repetition. Not only will Pharaoh let the

people go, he will drive them out. In the end, this one who has pretensions of deity will be left with no choice, not even the option of saving face by claiming to have allowed Israel to go.

The emphasis on the name of God is so important here. Nahum Sarna says:

God's reply to Moses means that the [word for Yahweh] expresses the quality of Being...Being in the sense of the reality of God's active, dynamic Presence. Whether it means "I am that I am," Or "I Am Who I Am," or "I Will Be What I Will Be"—and it can mean any of these—...it can be truly characterized only in terms of itself, and not by analogy with something else...it is self-evident that God's name must proceed from Himself, and cannot be conferred by man.¹

Israel at this time lives in a world in which a multiplicity of gods are to be served, worshiped, cajoled and appeased. Most of all they are to be feared for their capricious tendencies to deny blessing and incite curse. Into this world comes Yahweh to rescue his people and reveal himself not just to Israel but to all the nations. His name then identifies him as one outside of the existing paradigm of understanding. This is the God of the whole cosmos, the whole world, not just of a portion or a distinct people. He is who he is and he is not limited in any way by kings and nations, cultures and languages, practices and traditions.

God gives Moses tremendous hope through this reminder in the midst of his devastation. Remember this the next time you feel trapped by the Pharaoh in your life, when you feel that there is no hope and no way out. Remember whom you serve: Yahweh, the one who was, who is and who is to come.

Now the Lord reviews a little history with Moses:

"and I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty, but by My name, LORD [Yahweh], 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. (6:3-5)

Yahweh now reaches way back into Israel's history to further assure Moses and reveal his plans and purpose. He goes to the roots: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God is saying, "This is a deep and longstanding plan, Moses. It has roots well before you and branches well beyond you. In addition, I have revealed my name uniquely to you so that you will know who I am and that I am staking my very name and reputation on what I am doing in Israel." Once God does this he then furthers his reassurance by restating the covenant. In reminding Moses he is reminding us as well.

When God entered into covenant with Abraham he promised two things. The first was offspring. The text has been clear to let us know that Israel has grown into a great people whom God will now birth out of this pagan nation. Now, it is time for land. Canaan, that land in which they sojourned so many generations ago, will indeed be the land of promise. It is this land that speaks to the deepest desires of this enslaved people.

So God is promising to Moses and to Israel that their deepest longings will be fulfilled, and he seals the encouragement with

assurance that he has heard the groanings of the people.

Standing in the way of course is the problem of Pharaoh. The demands made by God through Moses and Aaron have served to bring out his true character. Pharaoh is angry, brutal, conniving and heartless. Sounds like more than one Silicon Valley boss! Keep in mind, an Israel which has experienced his true character is more likely to strike out to the wilderness than one which is lulled into perceiving false benevolence. We cannot neglect how frightening this would be in spite of the hardships of life in Egypt. Egypt is all they have ever known, and it is human nature to fear the unknown more than present hardship.

Next, Yahweh gives Moses another set of instructions. Again the narrator uses his craft and a reverse parallel structure to give us a beautifully constructed promise from God:

Exodus 6:6-8:

“Say, therefore, to the sons of Israel,

a. **I am the LORD,**

b. and I will **bring you out** from under the burdens of the Egyptians,

c. and **I will deliver you** from their bondage.

d. I will also **redeem you** with an outstretched arm and with great judgments.

e. **Then I will take you** for My people,

x. and I will be your God;

e’ and **you shall know that I am** the LORD your God,

d’ who **brought you out** from under the burdens of the Egyptians.

c’ **I will bring you to the land** which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,

b’ and **I will give it to you** for a possession;

a’ **I am the LORD.**” (6:6-8)

Yahweh gives Moses very specific instructions as to what to say to Israel. They both know full well that the people will not listen. Nevertheless, in spite of their lack of faith, God gives Israel this promise reflecting his character and his plans for his people. Though it has no apparent immediate impact on them it stands as a memorial stone to God’s faithfulness—a place of comfort and assurance in time of trouble that God is faithful and will surely do what he has promised.

Bookended by the core essence of God’s identity—“I am who I am” forever, unchanging, unwavering—the instructions and promises tumble out like a cold, refreshing river over dry rock:

b and b’ Israel will be brought out from under its burdens which will be replaced by possession of the land;

c and c’ Yahweh promises deliverance from oppression and then to complete the act, deliverance of the people to the land;

d and d’ he promises redemption—a buy back from slavery and the resulting relief from the burdens they carry;

e and e’ Yahweh tenderly promises to take them to be his OWN—he desires to have them as his very own possession, and completes the promise with the assurance that they will fully know him—I AM, the very one, will be the Lord their God.

The center-line is truly the heart of the matter: “and I will be your God.” If they know nothing else, this is the core truth onto which to hold and in which to rest. It’s like a beautiful tapestry: God’s promises woven together to form a picture of his love and promises with his core commitment at the center. When you find yourself in the dark pit, wrap yourself in this tapestry of promise and comfort.

God hears our cries, he notes our oppression, he remembers

his covenant, he adopts us as sons and daughters. If this does not give us the hope and future for which we so deeply long, then we must ask: what will?

Now that Moses has been so deeply reassured, what happens next?

So Moses spoke thus to the sons of Israel, but they did not listen to Moses on account of their despondency and cruel bondage. (6:9)

I think God has a great sense of humor. Here is this grand and beautiful promise from Yahweh to his people that takes up seven verses in the story. Then, we get a one-verse result: “they did not listen.”

Why didn’t they listen? Because of despondency and bondage. It’s understandable, isn’t it? More importantly, God completely understands. He doesn’t quit on his people, he does not condemn them. He remains faithful, showing not a hint of hesitation in continuing on with his plans for this people, *and* for all of humanity.

God moves to fulfill his plans and promises even when we are incapacitated and unable to respond.

Yahweh now directs Moses to return to Pharaoh:

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. (6:10-13)

Moses, just as understandably as Israel, protests: “Israel hasn’t listened, and if they won’t listen, how can we expect Pharaoh to listen?”

Moses also replies with doubts about his ability to communicate persuasively with Pharaoh, saying, literally, “I am uncircumcised of lips.” Perhaps he means he is poor with the language. Perhaps it is a physical impediment or a debilitating lack of confidence. Maybe he fears that Aaron’s role is finished. In any case, he harbors doubts, in spite of his encouraged state. But God in his tenderness addresses them with a re-commissioning. They will lead the sons of Israel, they will challenge Pharaoh and they will bring Israel out of Egypt.

Now that Moses and Aaron have been broken and emotionally stripped bare they have received God’s great promises and reminders and are truly ready to be tools in the hands of the great deliverer.

But now the story takes an abrupt and seemingly incongruous turn, with a large portion of the text given over to a genealogy.

II. The People of Yahweh (6:14-30)

These are the heads of their fathers’ households. The sons of Reuben, Israel’s firstborn: Hanoch and Pallu, Hezron and Carmi; these are the families of Reuben. The sons of Simeon: Jemuel and Jamin and Ohad and Jachin and Zohar and Shaul the son of a Canaanite woman; these are the families of Simeon. These are the names of the sons of Levi according to their generations: Gershon and Kohath and Merari; and the length of Levi’s life was one hundred and thirty-seven years. The sons of Gershon: Libni and Shimei, according to their families. The sons of Kohath: Amram and Izhar and Hebron and Uzziel; and the length of Kohath’s life was one hundred and thirty-three years. The sons of Merari: Mahli and Mushi. These are the families of the Levites according to their generations. Amram married his father’s sister Jochebed, and she bore him Aaron and Moses; and the length of Amram’s life. The sons of Izhar: Korah and Nepheg and Zichri. The sons of Uzziel: Mishael and Elzaphan and Sithri.

Aaron married Elisheba, the daughter of Amminadab, the sister of Nahshon, and she bore him Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. The sons of Korah: Assir and Elkanah and Abiasaph; these are the families of the Korahites. Aaron's son Eleazar married one of the daughters of Putiel, and she bore him Phinehas. These are the heads of the fathers' households of the Levites according to their families. It was the same Aaron and Moses to whom the LORD said, "Bring out the sons of Israel from the land of Egypt according to their hosts." They were the ones who spoke to Pharaoh king of Egypt about bringing out the sons of Israel from Egypt; it was the same Moses and Aaron. (6:14-27)

I'm persuaded that there are three points to note from this genealogy and the fact that it is inserted in the middle of this narrative.

1) Note that the genealogy starts with three sons of Jacob, three out of the twelve tribes, then quickly detours and drills down into the sons of Levi. From the line of Levi, those who were set aside to lead Israel as priests, come, you guessed it, Aaron and Moses. They are from the priestly line and are authentic Israelites.²

2) The fact that the genealogy is inserted here helps to drive home the point that God is building something great, something with the deepest of roots and with the most promising of futures. He has invested in this people through the generations—and he is not about to stop. The genealogy is of utmost importance: it is the identity of the people, their history, their heritage and their roots. And as we are the continuation of a people called out by God, this becomes part of our genealogy as well.

3) The purpose of genealogies is to establish identity and status.³ Through their lineage, as well as their commission, God has bestowed on Moses and Aaron the trust and authority to carry out his mission with the people of Israel. Yahweh gives them the title to go with the task.

The narrator then takes us from the genealogy back into dialogue between God and Moses, where we might expect a triumphant crescendo to the interaction:

Now it came about on the day when the LORD spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt, that the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "I am the LORD; speak to Pharaoh king of Egypt all that I speak to you." But Moses said before the LORD, "Behold, I am unskilled in speech; how then will Pharaoh listen to me?" (6:28-30)

Isn't this great? I don't know about you, but I take tremendous encouragement from Moses. After all this, the history, the covenant, the commission, the authority, Moses stops: "But God, wait a minute. You don't understand here. I've got this issue with speaking, Lord."

I love Moses! In the face of great encouragement and promise, he again expresses his fear and doubts. So what does God do now? Has Moses finally pushed him too far?

III. Yahweh's Plan (7:1-7)

Then the LORD said to Moses, "See, I make you as God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet. You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall speak to Pharaoh that he let the sons of Israel go out of his land. But I will harden Pharaoh's heart that I may multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt. When Pharaoh does not listen to you, then I will lay My hand on Egypt and bring out My hosts, My people the sons of Israel, from the land of Egypt by great judgments. The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the sons of Israel from their midst." (7:1-5)

Instead of anger or even exasperation, Yahweh restates and

expands on his plan for Israel. And in the midst of doing so, he expands and redefines Moses' and Aaron's roles.

Now that Moses and Aaron are broken and laid bare, God gives them the mantle of even greater roles: Moses will be as God, Aaron as a prophet. Houtman says, "Not only ought Moses not to worry about his lack of rhetorical prowess but he should in addition be aware that he will stand before Pharaoh arrayed with divine authority. In short, he has no reason whatsoever to be afraid to appear before Pharaoh."⁴ Yahweh meets Moses' right where he is and supplies all that he needs.

Finally, God reveals another level of what he intends to do and why. He reiterates that he will harden Pharaoh's heart, and then adds his rationale: that signs and wonders may be multiplied. God is in the process of revealing himself to Israel and the world, and he is doing so in the midst of a most powerful and pagan nation.

God then goes on to explain the climax of his signs and wonders: the people of Israel will be delivered. This enslaved, disillusioned and bitter people will walk right out of Egypt.

He not only wants Israel to know, he wants Egypt to know: God's judgement and grace stretch to all nations. While Egypt will suffer greatly, their trial will be redemptive to those who would believe in the one true Lord. Says Houtman, "what is meant is that the Egyptians will finally reach the conclusion that superiority belongs to the side of YHWH."⁵

This act of the story winds down with a brief epilogue in verses 6-7:

So Moses and Aaron did it; as the LORD commanded them, thus they did. Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three, when they spoke to Pharaoh. (6:6-7)

Terence Fretheim says: "The notice about the ages of Moses and Aaron seems innocuous, but it serves to mark that point in their lives where their role as servants of God in this momentous endeavor can go forward without further ado. When this is tied to the genealogy a note is sounded that we have 'the right people in the right place at the right time.'"⁶

I would also add that this seemingly throwaway line further emphasizes God's great activity. He does all of this and he uses two old guys as his primary tools in accomplishing his plans. Marvelous stuff!

IV. Reflections From the Rock Bottom Place

Moses found himself in the deep pit. The Lord God, Yahweh, encounters his man and begins the rebuilding process.

That sophomore year in college, I remember feeling like an engine torn apart and scattered about the garage. I hit bottom and God moved in, gently and lovingly picking up the pieces. One by one he cleaned and polished each one and began to put them back together.

I believe that God is doing that here with Moses. And in this story we find much about how our heavenly Father does the same for us.

A. The promises of God are our anchors in time of trouble

Look at what God does for Moses in that rock bottom place. He starts by reminding him that he will do what he says he will do. God says, "Let's dig into history a little, Moses. I committed to your father Abraham and his son Isaac and his son Jacob. I have made them a great people just as I promised. Now, it's time for land. You can bank on it, Moses." And so can we.

God's promise to make Israel a great nation was not limited to an ancient people. That promise extends through all generations and reaches right into this very room. Look at Abraham and God in Genesis 15:5:

And he took him outside and said, "Now look toward the

heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them." And he said to him, "So shall you descendents be."

Now let's fast forward to Genesis 22:17-18:

"indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. And in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice."

Did you know that there is a star in heaven with your name on it? You don't even need to send \$55 to the International Star Registry for that gift that mom will never forget! If you did, get your money back! It's already done.

Even in the darkest of pits, you can look up to the heavens.

Hanging up there is a star that represents you. When Jesus walked the earth, went to the cross and was resurrected, all of history came crashing into that one person. When you embraced Christ, you entered into this promise. There is no pit deep enough, no Pharaoh harsh enough, no labor devastating enough to separate you from his love and from his covenant. You belong to him, you are in his family. The heavenly Father loves you and WILL NOT LET YOU GO.

The promises of God are our anchors in time of trouble.

B. It is in the pit where we find our true identity

Before we can truly understand who we are we have to be stripped clean of all the pretense, the facades and the worldly gods that consume us. We work so hard for the stock options, the big homes, fancy cars and elite college educations. But when you are in the pit, you don't care anymore. You just want to know who you are, why you are here, where this is all leading. You want to know: God, what are you up to? Jesus, why am I here?

That sophomore year in college, I was asking questions like these. At the end of that year I spent a quarter studying overseas. Upon returning to California I knew I needed something different. I had heard about a great Bible study called "Sem 70." I was desperate to find life and fellowship, a place where I could be accepted and at home. So I tried it out.

On my first visit I met a man. On my second visit he asked me if I'd like to study God's word together. He had never done that without knowing a person very well first. I accepted, and we met to study the book of Romans. We didn't get very far before God revolutionized my life: "Paul, bond-servant of Christ Jesus."

Brian Morgan looked at me and said, "That's who you are. That's your identity." He had no idea what I had been going through. But Jesus did. He used my dear friend, before we even had a clue about each other, to change my life.

God gave me identity. But I had to be stripped clean of all the false identities before I could hear it, receive it, then embrace it. Fireworks were going off in my head. I wanted to leap and yell and dance. I knew in that moment who I was intended to be.

It's in the pit where we find out who we really are.

Jesus, on the beach with Peter, asks him three times, "Do you love me, Peter? Feed my sheep." It's in Peter's pit of despair, having denied Jesus three times, that Jesus reaches into his broken heart, embraces him and says, "Peter, I love you so much. I am so committed to you. Here's your identity, Peter. You are a shepherd. Feed my sheep, my friend. I am going to use you to change the world."

Moses has all kinds of thoughts and plans and notions about how God should work and about how he really wasn't the right one to execute God's plans. But look what the Lord does for him.

Here's your identity, Moses. You'll be as God. You'll have my mantle and I'm going to change the world through you.

Are you in the pit today? Perhaps this is the moment, this is the time when your heavenly Father wants you to understand who you really are.

And finally:

C. The rock bottom place is where we find our true calling

It is in that rock bottom place where we come face to face with what is really important.

Yahweh called Moses and Aaron to go face to face with the most powerful man in the world at the time. "You will bring the sons of Israel out of the land of Egypt," he said to them. Not only that, God was using Moses and Aaron to bring Pharaoh face to face with his sin. Could there have been a greater calling in that time and place?

Now maybe God doesn't have a nation for you to release and save, but I bet he knows of a co-worker who desperately needs you. I bet there is at least one co-worker, one neighbor, one boss, one child who desperately desires truth and is just waiting for you to share the good news of Jesus Christ. Like Israel freed from slavery, so we have been redeemed. Will you share your story? Will you share how God redeemed your life?

The world is dying out there. Now there is nothing wrong with having a big house, a fancy car and a nice portfolio of stock options. But if these things and others like them define your calling and your purpose, you're not living. You're walking dead.

We need to stop defining ourselves as executives who follow Jesus Christ, engineers who happen to be Christians, teachers who love God, students who study the Bible.

We must start embracing the truth that we are servants of Messiah, first, foremost and only, and that he has sent us out to infiltrate every area of life, every profession, every school, every office with the great news of Jesus Christ.

There may even be a Pharaoh you need to confront. When the Pharaohs in our lives are acting unjustly, we must be willing to step up and confront them, knowing who is behind us and knowing who is backing us.

Servants, bond slaves of Jesus Messiah.

The very Son of God wants to be your anchor, your identity, your purpose. When you have these, you can truly live. When you sell out to Jesus, Savior of the world, you will thrive.

What's holding you back?

1. Nahum Sarna, *Exploring Exodus* (New York: Schocken, 1996), 52.
2. Cornelis Houtman, *Exodus*, vol. 1 (Kampen, The Netherlands: Kok, 1993), 509.
3. Brian Morgan, from notes titled *A Second Start in Life: Human Failure, Covenant Beginning – Two Perspectives Clash*, 4.
4. Houtman, *Exodus*, 524.
5. Houtman, *Exodus*, 528.
6. Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus* (Louisville: John Knox, 1991), 96.

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