

EXODUS

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God's We are going to Exodus 7 today.

In Matthew 13:44, Jesus said, **"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field."**

Which encapsulates the Christian life - it is a life of sacrifice, but sacrifice to have something better. A life of joyful sacrifice, because anything we give up to follow Christ pales in comparison to the treasure.

And the treasure is Christ Himself.

But when we try to answer the question, "What is a Christian?", we often answer with things a Christian doesn't do - or isn't supposed to do. Someone who isn't supposed to get drunk, who isn't supposed to sleep with someone they're not married to, someone who doesn't keep all of their money for themselves.

And those things are true - those are things we strive not to do as followers of Jesus.

But if the main thing that comes to mind when we think what it means to be a Christian is that we don't get to do things, we are missing the most important thing.

Jesus didn't say "the kingdom of heaven is like a man who sells all that he has." That is nowhere near the whole story.

The kingdom of heaven is like a man who finds a treasure of unspeakable worth, and instantly knows that whatever it costs him to have that treasure, it will pay off a thousand-fold. So he skips away, adrenaline rushing, eager to sell everything he has to buy the field where the treasure is.

A Christian is someone who has had his or her eyes open to the beauty, and glory, and majesty, and superiority, and wisdom of God. And who knows that whatever must be sacrificed to know Him is worth it, because of His superior worth.

And yes, to know that God means we submit to His commands. God only commands us for our good but that sometimes means not doing what we might like to do. But we don't sacrifice anything without getting something vastly superior. He is better. He is worthy.

And in the scriptures, God has revealed Himself to us. And in Exodus 7, as God continues to reveal Himself to and through Moses, we get another reminder of the superior worth of God.

This is something we have to gaze into again and again. Because with social media, we spend a lot of time gazing into what we don't have: we don't have the same lives we see portrayed on our friend's accounts, we don't have the experiences sometimes, the physical beauty, the wealth, the great job, the same relationships. We spend a lot of time looking into what we don't have, what we want, what we long for.

But we need to gaze at the treasure we do have. We are people who possess a Treasure, and with Thanksgiving week upon us it is so necessary to remind ourselves of what we have to be thankful for, and there is nothing we have that compares to the gift of God himself. So knowing who He is, gazing into His beauty and glory and wisdom will feed our contentment and our joy.

And we want to know more about this God that we have because, as A.W. Tozer writes, "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us."¹

Who our God is, who or what we worship, is the most defining and shaping part of our lives. Whatever is ultimate to us shapes us and changes us throughout the course of our lives.

We get shaped around the things we focus on - you see this with smart phone use. There are studies that say our posture is changing (our shoulders

¹ Tozer, A.W., *The Knowledge of the Holy* (New York: HarperCollins, 1978). 1.

are more rounded) and our breathing is being affected by looking down into our phones all day - daily gazing is shaping our posture.²

And we will be shaped by whatever we spend time looking at.

So the main goal today is to look again at God, see a couple more facets of His character, so we can be shaped and molded accordingly.

In this chapter, the stage is being set for the plagues in Egypt. Moses has been chosen by God to lead the Jews out of Egypt where they are slaves. He has gone to Pharaoh and asked him to let the people go, but Pharaoh has refused. Pharaoh made conditions worse for the Jews because of their request, and now even the Jews are not backing Moses. So Moses and Aaron are all alone, they've been weakened, but God is still commanding Moses and his brother Aaron to just keep going back to Pharaoh to oppose the most powerful man in the world.

So the stage is being set - there is a showdown beginning between God and his power and Pharaoh and his power. God is out to keep a covenant with his people that He made long ago to Abraham, and Pharaoh is out to keep the Jewish people under his thumb to keep them from leaving, joining up with some enemies, and going to war against him (which was his biggest fear in all of this.)

And God is going to be showing who He is in this showdown which will continue until his people are on the other side of the Red Sea and out of Pharaoh's hand. There are two people claiming to be ultimate here: God and Pharaoh. And God, in the chapters ahead, will be proving His superior worth.

And that's the message of this chapter and the chapters after it: God is more glorious, more true, more beautiful, more powerful than any alternative. And there are alternatives that look glorious and strong and true in the moment, but in the end pale in comparison to His beauty and glory.

So let's jump in to Exodus 7:1 to let God show *us* His superior worth.

God's Words Are Superior

² <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4756000/>

Exodus 7: And the LORD said to Moses, "See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet. 2 You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall tell Pharaoh to let the people of Israel go out of his land.

So God speaks to Moses, and tells Moses and Aaron to speak all that He commands to Pharaoh. Moses has a duty here to be a messenger, and to faithfully tell Pharaoh all the words of God.

Moses is not being asked to be persuasive with his speech. He is not being asked to give Pharaoh a clever sales pitch. He isn't being asked to be a magnificent orator and a powerful public speaker, so he can emotionally move Pharaoh to let his entire labor force go free.

He is commanded to just speak the words of God and do what God tells Him before Pharaoh. That will be enough.

God's words are going to prove to be powerful in this story - again and again God sends Moses to Pharaoh with His words, and they all end up being true.

Pharaoh has a lot to say against God, but he is powerless to make his plan come to pass. His words don't hold water, while the words of God are perfect, and, as Jesus said,

"For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished" (Matthew 5:18).

God is a God who speaks a superior word. From the beginning of the Bible God speaks and His words are powerful - He says let there be light, and there is light. For God to say it is to make it so.

And as Christians, part of the treasure of knowing God is that we have a God who speaks to us.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in

righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

All scripture is God-breathed, or “inspired.” Which doesn’t mean the Bible just magically showed up from heaven as a Divine book that isn’t a human book. It means God breathed his words into the original authors, used their personalities, and produced His perfect word. The Bible is a human book, but also a perfect and Divine one, and inspiration is the work that “joins the two authors or agents”³ so that the scriptures are perfect and divine, but spoken “in a human manner through a human being”⁴

This is the powerful word of God. There is nothing more relevant for us than hearing from God.

This matters so much because a personal relationship with God is at stake in what we do with the Bible.

Sometimes we get afraid that we can be too bible-centered and that can take us away from real personal relationship with Christ. We can get too bookish. That if we care too much about the Bible, we will care little for the words of the Holy Spirit that is with us.

And if God is with us by His Spirit, so doesn’t reading this book in some sense take us away from intimacy with Him?

We want Christianity to be about a relationship with Jesus, not about a book.

But the scriptures are God-breathed. They are the sword of the spirit (Ephesians 6:17). The primary way God speaks to us, and the only authoritative and infallible way, is through scripture. It is here that God speaks.

And if we don’t have a Jesus who speaks, or if we can’t know for sure what he says (because the Bible is somehow unreliable), we lose a relationship, and all we have is a guess at who He is.

³ Blocher, Henri A. G. “God and the Scripture Writers,” *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*. Edited by D.A. Carson. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016. 500.

⁴ Ibid.

Until someone speaks or verbally communicates to you, you don't know them.

I get to meet 100 or 200 grace readers every year. And I've been so surprised at times - a person looks ordinary, but then they speak and they're so insightful or wise or they know the Lord and his word so well. Other times I'll get together with a couple and I see the pictures on social media, but then they speak and tell me what their marriage is really like. And it wasn't what I had thought.

Until someone speaks, you don't know them.

You can make some guesses about a person based on appearance, but you can be seriously wrong. You are ultimately just judging a book by its cover and constructing that person into who you would like them to be, instead of who they actually are.

We can know some things about God by looking at what he has made and the way things in his creation work. We can know he's wise, we can know he's powerful, we can know he values beauty, we can know he's the ultimate artist and the ultimate engineer. But if all we know about God is what we can see that he has made, we have many very unsure guesses about Who He is.

We have many "god might be" statements that we can make. And ultimately, we could just be making God whatever we want Him to be. And in our human arrogance, we usually make him just like us: so God hates the people I hate, he loves people who are just like me. My habits and patterns are godliness, and those of others are from the devil. God is made in our image - we replace the true God with an idol. All because he doesn't speak and tell us who He is.

But Christianity says that God speaks in His word. And he tells us who He is, and who he isn't. He doesn't tell us everything - we'll never know him fully. There are many mysteries. But even though we can't know him fully, we can know him truly.

To really have a relationship with the True God, and not just have an idol that we designed, we must have a God who speaks to us authoritatively in

the Bible.

For centuries, the way Christians approached the Bible was: This is God's word, and there are many hard things to understand and believe in it, but I need to figure out what it says, and live accordingly. So Biblical scholarship was all about studying hard to find the original meanings of these words, because they are the words of God. We said : "God said this, I need to find out what He said, what He means, and adjust my life accordingly."

But then we changed the way we read the Bible. We read it with the words of the serpent in the garden in our mind, "Did God really say this?" And we started reading the Bible not as the authoritative words of God who is speaking, but as words that I need to sort through to find what I think God is saying and what he is not saying. And we immediately got back to making God in our image.

We read the bible in an attempt to "fix" God. But the Gospel says that God is not a fixer-upper, I am the fixer-upper. It is not He who needs to be adjusted, but me.

And if we read the Bible to judge it, we will just have Thomas Jefferson Bibles.

Jefferson, who was not a Christian, literally took a razor to the Gospels, took the stories that he thought were real, put them in chronological order, and called it the Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth. He took out all of the parts that he didn't like and made Jesus in his image - a Jesus who wasn't God, didn't do miracles, just taught and lived morally. Not God, but an idol of his creation.

I'm not saying there are no parts I wouldn't like to take a razor to sometimes. I would like to not have to teach some of what the Bible says, I have a hard time believing other parts. But as a Christian, I believe God speaks. And when I read the Bible, I need to do so in humble submission, not with a razor in my hand. This book judges me, I don't judge it.

If we don't have an authoritative Bible, we no longer have a relationship with God. We have just a philosophical conception of Him, because he doesn't speak, we just guess.

But God has called his servants to know His word and to herald his word.

So let's rekindle a love for the scriptures. Let's read them in our devotions as the breath of God. Let's treasure their wisdom. Let's treasure their power to shape our lives. Let's treasure how true they are as they tell us about Jesus, and as they describe us and our condition perfectly well. Let's let them be the wisdom through which we filter all other wisdom.

In Christ, we have God who has gives us a superior word to anyone else's word. We treasure it, and when we speak it to others, we don't do so apologizing for it hoping that will make it strong. It is strong without our help.

Charles Spurgeon, a 19th century preacher wrote:

A great many learned men are defending the gospel; no doubt it is a very proper and right thing to do, yet I always notice that, when there are most books of that kind, it is because the gospel itself is not being preached. Suppose a number of persons were to take it into their heads that they had to defend a lion, a full-grown king of beasts! There he is in the cage, and here come all the soldiers of the army to fight for him. Well, I should suggest to them... that they should kindly stand back, and open the door, and let the lion out! I believe that would be the best way of defending him, for he would take care of himself; and the best "apology" for the gospel is to let the gospel out. Never mind about defending Deuteronomy or the whole of the Pentateuch; preach Jesus Christ and him crucified. Let the Lion out, and see who will dare to approach him. The Lion of the tribe of Judah will soon drive away all his adversaries.

Moses was sent to Pharaoh to tell him what God said. Because the word of God, let out of its cage, is powerful.

Isaiah 55:11 "so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

And even when we are doubting it, the best thing we can do is just read it and let it prove its power as it works on us.

Romans 10:17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

Let it out of its cage to build faith. God's word is superior to all other wisdom, it is the sword of the spirit, it is true, it is powerful, and best of all it shows us Jesus. The Bible is not the ultimate treasure, but it is the field where the treasure of the Gospel is and is worth giving our lives to its study.

3 But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and though I multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, 4 Pharaoh will not listen to you. Then I will lay my hand on Egypt and bring my hosts, my people the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great acts of judgment. 5 The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring out the people of Israel from among them."

So God is going to be acting in the Exodus story so that He is known as the Lord. That he is powerful, and will bring about great acts of judgment for His own glory. God is going after worship. In fact, all through the Bible God is pursuing His own worship and glory.

Now that can seem strange.

Can we really say God is superior to all else if He is constantly acting in a way to get worship from people?

Why does God want that? What motivates that? It makes almost no sense to us that a God who is fine on His own and totally secure would be asking for complements. That almost sounds like a God you wouldn't want to believe in, as opposed to a treasure worth giving all to have.

It seems throughout the Bible that what God wants most is for people to tell Him how awesome he is.

And we don't like people like that. Nobody likes people who are so egotistical and self-focused that they demand compliments and praise. We don't like them and we don't like the people around people like that who give them what they want. People who take lots of selfies are kind of annoying and self absorbed.

So is God a God who is always taking selfies? And begging for complements?

It's hard to want to worship a God like that.

This was one of many obstacles that kept CS Lewis from coming to faith. In his book, *Reflection on the Psalms*, he has a chapter called "A Word About Praising." And there he lays out how he didn't want to convert to Christianity because the God of Christianity demanded praise:

"When I first began to draw near to belief in God and even for some time after it had been given to me, I found a stumbling block in the demand so clamorously made by all religious people that we should "praise" God; still more in the suggestion that God Himself demanded it. We all despise the man who demands continued assurance of his own virtue, intelligence or delightfulness; we despise still more the crowd of people round every dictator, every millionaire, every celebrity, who gratify that demand. Thus a picture, at once ludicrous and horrible, both of God and of His worshippers, threatened to appear in my mind... It was hideously like saying, "What I most want is to be told that I am good and great."

So the God of the Bible seems like an insecure celebrity who wants us to be his mindless toadies to stroke his ego, which seems like it can never get enough.

Is that God? Is He so insecure about his virtues that He is constantly asking for praise?

Our easy answer is that "God actually deserves praise."

Which is true. In commanding us to praise Him, He is not asking us to do anything over the top or ridiculous. He does deserve our praise.

BUT - that doesn't really help. It seems like people who are the best at what they do should need praise the least. They're secure enough. They don't need it. Einstein probably didn't go around saying, "I'm pretty smart, huh?"

The people who are the best don't need anyone to tell them they're the best.

Yes, God is worthy of all the praise he demands. But why if he's not insecure would he ever demand it? Seems like he should be able to live without us telling him how awesome he is. Why the great displays of power so He can be known and praised? Isn't that just evidence of tremendous weakness in character?

His commanding us to praise is not because he's hungry for something. He's not insecure, he doesn't need compliments, he's not lonely and empty if we refuse to hang out with him.

Yes, he commands us to praise him because it's right. Yes he deserves it. Yes, he desires it. Yes it is right and only makes sense. But in calling us to worship Him, He is calling us to our highest good and highest joy.

Ordering our affections the right way, valuing what is supremely valuable, worshipping the only One worthy of worship is the best way to be human. It's the best way to live in the real world with right priorities. So it is for our good, and for our joy, not because of His need.

This was the realization that stopped this from being an obstacle to CS Lewis's conversion.

"I had never noticed that all enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise... The world rings with praise— lovers praising their mistresses, readers their favourite poet, walkers praising the countryside, players praising their favourite game— praise of weather, wines, dishes, actors, motors, horses, colleges, countries, historical personages, children, flowers, mountains, rare stamps, rare beetles , even sometimes politicians or scholars.

I had not noticed how the humblest, and at the same time most balanced and capacious, minds, praised most, while the cranks, misfits and malcontents praised least. The good critics found something to praise in many imperfect works ; the bad ones continually narrowed the list of books we might be allowed to read. "

"The Psalmists in telling everyone to praise God are doing what all men do when they speak of what they care about. .. we delight to praise what we

enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation. It is not out of compliment that lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are; the delight is incomplete till it is expressed. It is frustrating to have discovered a new author and not to be able to tell anyone how good he is"

So when we praise the ones or the things we love or admire, we are completing our joy in those things. And God, in calling us to worship, is calling us to life of our greatest good and greatest possible joy.

So God gives us His word so we can know Him, He pursues His own glory and praise among people so we can have the greatest possible joy.

We're not making a major sacrifice when we give up living by our own understanding as ultimate, or when we give up living for our own glory as ultimate. He is the treasure.

But the reason so many still don't embrace Him is there are so many counterfeits. Look what happens next.

God's who is counterfeited

6 Moses and Aaron did so; they did just as the LORD commanded them. 7 Now Moses was eighty years old, and Aaron eighty-three years old, when they spoke to Pharaoh. 8 Then the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, 9 "When Pharaoh says to you, 'Prove yourselves by working a miracle,' then you shall say to Aaron, 'Take your staff and cast it down before Pharaoh, that it may become a serpent.'" 10 So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did just as the LORD commanded. Aaron cast down his staff before Pharaoh and his servants, and it became a serpent. 11 Then Pharaoh summoned the wise men and the sorcerers, and they, the magicians of Egypt, also did the same by their secret arts. 12 For each man cast down his staff, and they became serpents. But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs. 13 Still Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the LORD had said.

So they go to Pharaoh, they do the miracle by throwing down the staff and making it turn into a snake.

But to discredit that, the enemy immediately comes up with a counterfeit. We're not sure how, but these magicians are able to reproduce a few of the signs in Exodus. Probably just through sleight of hand. You watch some of the magicians on America's Got Talent, and you know people can create incredible illusions with enough practice.

But the point is that the real thing is immediately met with a counterfeit.

And this theme is all throughout scripture:

Matthew 13 - Jesus sows good seeds, but the enemy sows weeds.

In Galatians 1, Paul preaches the true Gospel, but others preach "another Gospel, which is not another" - Galatians 1:6-7.

Christ appoints apostles, so does the devil - 2 Cor. 11:13.

Christ is the light of the world, satan masquerades as an angel of light - 2 Corinthians 11:14.

Christ does miracles. And:

2 Thessalonians 2:9-10 "The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, 10 and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved."

There's always a counterfeit glory available.

There's always an alternative offered.

And we tend to get very afraid of Satan's work when it comes to dark arts and ouija boards and seances. But his work is usually so much more subtle and day to day. It comes in providing a false version of the real thing.

Examples:

Christ, our treasure, offers us true, deep, everlasting joy. Psalm 16:11 "You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy;

at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”

We aren't lured away from that with sadness - wouldn't you rather be sad than that? We're lured away by false joy - just get drunk with everybody, they seem happy.

Christ gives us perfect love and intimacy. He gave Himself for us on the cross. He offers to walk with us, speak to us, serve us. He gives us life everlasting and peace with God. But how many get lured away by false love, by lust - that will make me happy.

Christ gives us perfect security that lasts forever. But money lures us with a false security.

Christ gives us the gospel - it is yours for free. But false Gospels come and say, "but surely we must have to do something to earn it." And the perfect thing, the gospel, is replaced by religion, a false form.

And deceived, we live for lesser glories.

But at the end of this story, the staff of Aaron swallowed up their staffs.

In the end, the lies will be destroyed and the truth will prevail. The true Gospel wins in the end.

God's mission of glory ran into a roadblock. Our sin.

God is true to His word, and had said that on the day you eat the fruit you will die. He had said the wages of sin is death. He had said that He is the judge of the earth who does right.

But that means that for God to fulfill his word and glorify His name, we would have to be punished. We would need to die. We would need hell.

So he came and was punished instead.

Exodus 7:1-13
Power and Glory

I. The power of God's words (Exodus 7:1-2)

II. The purpose of God's ways (Exodus 7:3-5)

III: The counterfeits of the world (Exodus 7:6-13)

For Discussion in Small Groups:

- 1) How do we demonstrate a trust in the power of God's words? A distrust?
- 2) Why does it seem strange that God is passionate for His own glory?
- 3) Why does God desire human worship?
- 4) What counterfeits for God exist in the world around us? How can we recognize them?