

“When God Is in It and It Still Fails” // Exodus 4:18–6:12 // *Rescue: The Book of Exodus #4*¹

Exodus Bumper

Announcement

Hey, real quick before we get going, I wanna tell you about something we’re starting in a few weeks called “**Serve Saturdays.**” It’ll be on the third Saturday of every month, starting this February. On the third Saturday of the month, each campus will be offering a number of opportunities to serve our local communities.

We believe serving our city is a central part of our calling as a church. In Acts, it tells us that when the Apostles did ministry in a city, there was (Acts 8) “much joy” in the city as a result of both the message they preached AND the good works they did. We always say we want our community to say, “We may not believe what those crazy people over at Summit believe, but thank God they’re here because if not, we’d have to raise our taxes.” That’s the kind of relationship we want to have with our community.

¹ Sources consulted: L. Michael Morales, *Exodus Old and New: A Biblical Theology of Redemption* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Press, 2020); Tyler Staton, “The Plagues and Pharaoh’s Hard Heart,” July 2, 2023, Bridgetown Church; Jen Wilkin, “Sent Back to Egypt,” Session 4 of God of Deliverance Bible Study, February 28, 2022; Jen Wilkin, “Opposition and Unbelief,” Session 5 of God of Deliverance Bible Study, February 28, 2022; Mike Wilkerson, *Redemption: Freed by Jesus from the Idols We Worship and the Wounds We Carry*.

Our hope is that these Serve Saturdays will provide an easy first step for anyone wanting to join in the work God is already doing in our city—through a lot of our excellent ministry partners. Visit our website (www.summitchurch.com) to learn more and sign up for the first Serve Saturday on Feb. 15.

Intro

OK, if you have a Bible, and I hope that you do, meet me in Exodus 4. (Everybody turn ...)

Today’s message is for anyone who has ever felt like God called you to something and you started doing it, only to find that everything got a lot harder once you started obeying God. And you were like, “God, what’s going on? It feels like things are going the opposite of what I expected! I expected you to bless me when I started to obey you, and it almost feels like you’re resisting me!”

I’m thinking of a guy in his 40s at our church who, a few years ago, felt like God was calling him to resign his high-paying corporate job and move overseas with one of our church planting teams, and right after he did that, his teenage son got diagnosed with a genetic disorder that was going to require really expensive medical care and he was like “*Really, God? Now—right **after** I resigned my comfortable corporate job?*”

Or a **pastor friend in our Summit Collaborative** that I spent some time with this week who started leading his church into some bold new phases of ministry, and then in the space of one week, got diagnosed with an autoimmune disease, some irregularities in his eyes, and a neuropathy in his brain stem. All of them are serious, but the neuropathy issue was causing this stabbing pain to shoot through his head whenever his blood pressure rose. The doctor told him, “Look, for the next several months, I need you to cut out any and all stress from your life.” And my friend was like, “Uhhh, our church just

took on these faith commitments and stress is part of the package. Plus, I have a son just entering middle school and going through puberty. Saying ‘Don’t get stressed’ is like telling someone who’s about to jump in the ocean ‘not to get wet.’” But it left this pastor asking, “God, seriously? Why *now*?”

Have you ever felt like that? You started to obey God. But instead of things getting easier, instead of the path opening up before you, it gets much, much harder. Moses feels your pain.

Pick me up in verse 21 (of chapter 4). Moses has agreed to go back to Egypt and confront Pharaoh, and he’s making preparations for the journey: **21 And the Lord said to Moses, “When you get back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles that I have put in your power. *But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go.*”**

“Wait, what? The point here God, is that I need you to *soften* his heart, not harden it. Do the softening thing, not the hardening thing.”

Vs. **24 At a lodging place on the way the Lord met him and sought to put him to death. (I bet that’s a part of the story you didn’t see coming!) 25 Then Zipporah (Moses’ wife) took a flint and cut off her son’s foreskin and touched Moses’ feet with it and said, “Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me!” 26 So God let Moses live. It was then that Zipporah said of Moses, “You are a bridegroom of blood,” because of the circumcision.** And all God’s people said, *WHAT!!!!????!!!* You’re like, “I’m pretty sure I’ve never heard the word ‘foreskin’ used in public.” Ladies and gentlemen, the Word of God. How many of you have ever read this in the story and thought, *What in the world?* I was tempted to skip these verses and not even read them—most Bible teachers I consulted skip them, but I know how you guys are, and I didn’t want to deal with all the accusations that I’m a wimpy pastor who skips all the hard stuff in the Bible. Plus, this little scene illustrates something I explained to you about Exodus the first week of

this series. **So give me three minutes for a quick detour, OK?** Do you remember how I said that Exodus establishes the melody line of salvation, a melody you’re gonna hear played over and over again throughout the rest of Exodus, and then the rest of the Bible?

Well, that happens here. In this story Moses starts to follow God, but he fails to obey the Lord’s instructions about circumcision. You see, in Genesis 17, God had established circumcision as the sign of his covenant with Abraham, and he commanded every male descendant of Abraham from that day forward to be circumcised on the eighth day after birth. It was serious: God had said, “Any uncircumcised male will be cut off from my people.”

Up until this moment in Moses’ life, he hadn’t really been obeying God, but that all changed at the burning bush, and God had given him space to obey him, and Moses had ignored him. And obedience is a really big deal to God, so God is coming, literally, to destroy Moses. Then Zipporah, his wife, steps in, obeys in Moses’ place, and then touches Moses’ feet with the bloody foreskin.

We’ll see that melody line repeated again in the actual Passover. As they leave Egypt to follow God, they have to smear the blood of a sacrificed lamb on the doorpost of the houses so that the death angel who was coming to strike Egypt’s firstborn sons won’t come into their houses and strike their firstborns, because Israel was guilty of the same sins as the Egyptians. Only by putting the blood of a sacrificed lamb on the doorposts of their houses could they be saved.

Interestingly, the word “touched” used there in **4:25** (where it says Zipporah “*touched*” Moses’ feet with her son’s foreskin) is the same word used in Exodus 12 for how they applied the blood on the doorposts during the Passover. It says they “touched” the doorposts with the blood of the lamb. The author is drawing a direct parallel between these two things.²

² Nahum Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary*.

Now, you say, “I’m so confused about circumcision.” And this all feels gross. I get it. I equipped your campus pastors with the information necessary to answer all your questions, and they wanted me to tell you that they’d be delighted to talk with you after the service to answer any and all of your circumcision curiosities. They won’t mince words; they’ll cut right to the chase. I mean it, they’re sharp. A cut above.

But I share this because there is a melody being established. God’s people try to obey and they can’t, so someone intercedes for them with a blood offering. The ultimate version of this melody line will be Jesus, who touches our hearts with his blood, since none of us obeys God sufficiently.

Jesus is the truer and better Zipporah, obeying for us and then interceding on our behalf so we could escape the curse of death. And what happens when you get to the New Testament is that you have all these pictures—dozens, even hundreds of them—that Jesus steps into and fulfills perfectly. As you encounter Jesus’ life, you say, “That’s it! That’s the melody that’s been played in all these stories!”

OK, *let’s keep reading so we can get back to the main point for today:* 5:1 Afterward Moses and Aaron went and said to Pharaoh, “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness.’” 2 But Pharaoh said, “*Who is the Lord,* that I should obey his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and moreover, I will not let Israel go.”

This question is the thesis for the next six chapters. “*Who is the Lord, and why should we obey him?*”

Now, watch this: 6 The same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people and their foremen (some of you just got nervous and thought I was going to use that word again; this is

fore-men), 7 “You shall no longer give the people straw to make bricks, as in the past; let them go and gather straw for themselves. 8 But the number of bricks that they made in the past you shall [continue to] impose [that quota] on them ...”

The Israelites had been given a specific quota of bricks to make every day. So when Moses made his request, Pharaoh was like, “Oh, you want to go out to the wilderness to worship God? You must have a lot of extra time on your hands, so from now on, I’m not going to give you straw to make bricks; you’re gonna have to go gather that yourselves, but still keep up the same quota of bricks.” Israel’s job was already excruciating; Moses just made it a lot harder. This is going the opposite way of deliverance.

So, vs. 20: [The Israelite leaders] met Moses and Aaron, who were waiting for them, as they came out from Pharaoh; 21 and they said to them, “The Lord look on you and judge, because you have made us stink in the sight of Pharaoh and his servants, and have put a sword in their hand to kill us.”

22 Then Moses turned to the Lord and said, “O Lord, why have you done evil to this people? Why did you ever send me? 23 For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has done evil to this people, and you have not delivered your people *at all!*” There’s that feeling I was talking about at the beginning! “God, I said yes to obeying you, and instead of getting easier, you made things harder. I’m doing what you asked me to do, and it seems like you’re doing the opposite of what I’m asking you to do.”

What do you do when you start obeying God and instead of succeeding, you start failing? Instead of thriving, you start struggling? I talk to lots of people who feel this way. They don’t know what to do with that feeling, and they definitely don’t think they can talk about it in church.

Something else happened in these initial encounters that made no sense. In Exodus 4, God had told Moses that if Pharaoh asked Moses to prove he was from God, he should take the staff and throw it down, and God would miraculously transform it into a snake, and when he picked it up, it would turn back into a staff.

So sure enough, Exodus 7, Moses says to Pharaoh, “Let my people go!” And Pharaoh says, “No way!” and Moses says “YAHweh!” and throws his staff on the ground and it turns into a snake.

BUT ... instead of being impressed by this, Pharaoh yawns and summons one of his magicians, who does THE SAME THING! Scholars say it was likely a magic trick—snake charming was a big deal in Egypt, and they could charm these snakes to make them become rigid so they looked like a stick, and then when they threw it down, it broke the charm and the snake would slither off.

So Pharaoh yawns and says, “What else you got, Moses?” And Moses was like, “Uhh ... God, did I just get played? I did exactly what you told me! The plan was simple, God. I throw down my staff; it becomes a snake; Pharaoh is impressed and a little terrified and lets us go free. Very simple. And I did my part, and then it failed. And not just failed; it backfired. Instead of Pharaoh letting us go, he’s making things harder for us. *God. What. Are. You. Doing?*”

Again, have you been there? You start trying to obey God, and things with your kids get hard. Or in your marriage. Or with your health. Or you just meet obstacle after obstacle!

6:1 But the Lord said to Moses, “Now you shall SEE what I will do to Pharaoh; for with a strong hand he will send them out, and with a strong hand he will drive them out of his land.”

Vs. 6 “Say therefore to the people of Israel, ‘I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will

deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. 7 I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall KNOW that I am the Lord your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.”

Here’s the big idea of these chapters: God set up this whole rescue operation in a way that would enable Moses AND Pharaoh AND the children of Israel AND the rest of the world to SEE who God really was. The whole deal is not just about getting Israel out of slavery; it is about people seeing and knowing who God really is. That’s the point of God’s work in the world.

What was it about God that he specifically wanted them to know? I’m only going to touch this part briefly because this is what Pastor Bryan will walk us through next week. But let me give you an overview.

Yahweh wants them to know that **he is ...**

1. The Only God Who Can Rescue

In order for them to really understand that God is the only Savior, he had to let Moses and Aaron fail a few times so that when it’s all said and done, no one would be in doubt who pulled this off. He doesn’t want Moses or Aaron taking any of the glory that belongs to him, or anyone talking about how awesome they were, how brave they were, how amazing their speeches were, so he lets their first few attempts fail.

Here’s how Paul said it in **2 Corinthians**: “We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt we

had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us”(1:8–10).

Look at those phrases! It was only when we experienced *great pressure, FAR beyond our ability to endure*, to the point *that we despaired of life itself* ... like we had *“received the sentence of death”* that we learned to rely on a God who raises the dead, and only then could we testify to a God who raises the dead. Before we could demonstrate that the power to rescue and heal and save was in God alone, we had to demonstrate that that power was NOT in us.

No flesh will glory in his presence. Not mine. Not yours. Not Billy Graham’s. Nobody. So he will let J.D. Greear fail so that your hope won’t be in him, but in God. Does that make sense? Because Moses will let you down, and J.D. Greear will let you down, and your dad and your coach and your spouse and your friends will all let you down, but God never will. God will allow us to experience hardship and failure because he’s trying to show you that he alone is the God who can save. He alone is the God with the power of resurrection.

Number 2. *Yahweh wants them to know he is ...*

2. The God of True Freedom

Again, I’m not really going to get into this because Pastor Bryan will be walking us through this in more detail next week (He actually looked at my transcript and said, “You need to cut this. You’re stealing my thunder.”), but the plagues that Moses brings on Egypt were designed to show the kind of rescue that God alone could pull off.

See, the plagues were not just glorified magic tricks that God did to get Pharaoh’s attention. Moses didn’t just walk into Pharaoh’s court and turn his soldiers into tiny green men and squash a few of them,

and then say to Pharaoh, “You’re next,” and then put him in a **Darth Vader chokehold** until he relented. That would have made the point that God has power!

But these plagues are designed to teach a lesson. Bryan will show you this next week, but the plagues progress systematically—the Nile turns to blood; frogs come out of the Nile; then come the gnats. They represent an unraveling of creation—they are like the opposite of Genesis 1. In Genesis 1, God brings order out of chaos; in the plagues, order descends back into chaos, and what God is demonstrating is that he’s the kind of God where obedience to him brings life and freedom.

Well, here’s the thing: **God couldn’t teach us that lesson unless he had the opportunity. So** Pharaoh’s resistance to Moses provided that opportunity. And God was able to glorify himself in ways he couldn’t without Pharaoh’s resistance.

One more thing, number three. *Yahweh wants them to know he is ...*

3. The God Greater Than All Other Gods

Exodus 9:14, God tells Pharaoh: *“For this time I will send all my plagues on you yourself ... so that you may know that there is none like me in all the earth.”*

Again, Bryan will show you this next week, but these plagues are also a systematic attack on Egypt’s gods. You can just go through and tick them off—Egypt worshiped the Nile, God attacked it. Egypt worshiped the frog, God attacked it. Egypt worshiped the cow. God kills it. They worship the sun. God darkens it. The plagues come to a climax in the

final plague, with the killing of Pharaoh's son, because the Egyptian Pharaoh thought he was god. God eviscerated that claim and said, "No, you are not."

And God couldn't have shown that unless Pharaoh had given him the opportunity.

In fact, there's this little scene tucked into Moses and Pharaoh's first encounter that is so next-level savage that I have to point it out, because it's easy to read right over. When Pharaoh's magicians mimicked Moses' miracle of his staff becoming a snake with their little charming trick, chapter 7 verse 12 says that Moses' and Aaron's snake went over and literally swallowed up Pharaoh's snakes ... which is next-level savage God-flex, but nobody noticed because they were all focused on Moses and the controversy.³ Also, Pharaoh's headdress had a little snake on the front of it, which denoted the goddess Wadjet, another one of their deities. Moses' snake eating Pharaoh's snake was a pretty clear symbol: You're not really the King Python here; I am. In order to show that, God had to have the opportunity.

Which brings us back to that statement in chapter 4 that I highlighted for you that was so confusing: **4:21**, God said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles that I

³ Gregory of Nyssa said this about the serpent scene and Jesus: "This figure [i.e., the staff] therefore is rightly applied to the Lord. For if sin is a serpent and the Lord became sin, the logical conclusion should be evident to all: By becoming sin he became also a serpent, which is nothing other than sin. For our sake he became a serpent that he might devour and consume the Egyptian serpents produced by the sorcerers." Gregory, at least, sees this as a scene depicting "God made him who knew no sin to become sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God."

have put in your power. *But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go.*"

"And I'm doing this," God said, "so that I have the opportunity to show off some things about me."

Now, I know this raises a couple of questions for you.

First, you might say, "How is that fair to Pharaoh? If God hardened Pharaoh's heart, why would he punish Pharaoh for that, since God is the one who made his heart hard?"

Great question! BUT if you read the story carefully, you'll see that God hardening Pharaoh's heart was merely a calcification of a decision Pharaoh had already made.

The first time this story tells us Pharaoh's heart was hardened was **Exodus 8:13**, after plague 5, and here's what it says: "But Pharaoh hardened his heart and would not listen to him."⁴ See that? *Who hardened his heart?* Who hardened it? *Pharaoh* hardened his own heart.

It's only after Pharaoh hardened his own heart multiple times that God hardened it. In other words, God simply solidified him in a choice he's already made. It's like what Romans 1 says: "God gave [a sinful generation] over to its sinful desires." These desires were already theirs; God just solidified them in that decision.

⁴ E.g. Exodus 8:15; 8:32; 9:34.

<https://thebibleproject.com/blog/pharaohs-heart-grew-harder/>

Listen, that's a scary thing—that you can get to a point where God says, "You wanna reject me, again and again and again? As you wish!" It's like C.S. Lewis says, hell is simply God answering our prayers to get out of the way and let us be in charge of our own lives. Hell is a door, he says, first locked from the inside.

But that leads to a second question. You say, "*But I think God should have shown Pharaoh compassion and changed his heart.*" And God could have done that. But he didn't, because God sovereignly chose to use Pharaoh's rejection of him as a chance to display his glory. And the Apostle Paul, in Romans 9, referencing this very story of Moses and Pharaoh in Exodus 4, says, "**So then God has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.**" It's not unfair because when God hardens someone, he's simply solidifying you in a decision you have already made. There's no way we can say God is unfair when he's simply giving us what we asked for.

The old Presbyterian pastor D. James Kennedy, down in Florida, had a great illustration for this. He said, "*Say you have five people planning to hold up a bank. They are friends of mine. Well, I find out about it and I plead with them not to do it. I beg them. Finally, they push me out of the way and head out. I tackle the weakest looking one and wrestle him to the ground. The others go ahead and rob the bank, in the process killing a guard and two civilians. They are then **captured, convicted, and sentenced** to life in prison. But the one man who was not involved in the robbery—the one I tackled—goes free.*

Now I ask you this question: Whose fault was it that the other men were arrested and sentenced? Can they blame you for not stopping them?

And this other man who is walking around free—can he say, 'It was because my heart was so good and resisted the temptation that I am free?' No, the only reason that he is free is because of me. I restrained him."

*Dr. Kennedy says, "So it is that those who go to hell have no one to blame but themselves. Those who go to heaven have no one to praise but Jesus Christ. Thus we see that salvation is all of grace from its beginning to its end."*⁵

All of us—our hearts are bent against God. We are the robbers who want to do our own thing. And if God has arrested your heart and opened your eyes to see how foolish that is, and to see and appreciate the mercy of Christ, and if you love Jesus, that's mercy. Pure undeserved mercy. God didn't owe it to you—just receive it when he offers it and thank him for it.

You say, "But I think God should show mercy to everybody. If I were God, that's what I would do." Paul anticipated your question and said this next in **Romans 9**:

20 But who are you, a mere man, to talk back to God? Will what is formed say to the one who formed it, "Why did you make me like this?" **21** Or has the potter no right over the clay, to make from the same lump one piece of pottery for honor and another for dishonor?

OK, watch this: **22** What if God, wanting to display his wrath and to make his power known, endured with much patience objects of wrath [Pharaoh, or those who reject him today] prepared for destruction? **23** And what if he did this to make known the riches of his glory on objects of mercy that he prepared beforehand for glory?

⁵ D. James Kennedy, *Truths That Transform*, 39–40.

We've already established that it's not *unfair* what God did, because Pharaoh's original choice was to reject him, and God just hardened him in that choice.

And then he explains what God is doing in salvation—and it's one of the hardest, but most important truths in the Bible to understand.

The ultimate end that God pursues in all things, including salvation, is his glory. His glory means the truth about who he actually is. That's what he's doing all of this rescue thing for. It's why he set things up the way that he did. It's why he caused obstacles and difficulties along the way. He's showing that he's the only God who can save and the only God who brings freedom. The ultimate end that God pursues in all things, including salvation, is his glory.

And maybe you resent that because you think, "Well, that sounds self-centered. I mean, we don't like it when somebody else is self-centered like that, always directing the attention back to them."

But think of it like this: On a Delta cross-country flight, a man suddenly clutches his chest and starts to hyperventilate and passes out. And everybody starts freaking out, trying to figure out what to do. Well, a man identifies himself as an emergency room trauma surgeon, and he puts himself at the center of all the activity, and he has the audacity to start directing people and demanding they do what he says and stay out of his way. He's not doing that out of arrogance; he's doing that out of love.

The world without God at the center is chaos. It's the plagues! So God demands he be at the center of our worship and our affections because that's how we'll thrive. His demand to be at the center is not from arrogance, but love.

And so we see, time and time again in Scripture, that God's objective in what he does on earth is displaying his glory.⁶ Letting people see the truth about him. It's why God made it hard for Moses and put obstacles in his way. Because it was all about giving God glory, letting people get a clearer picture of who he actually is. **It's** why your Christian life often feels hard and you're confused, because you are trying to obey him and things just keep getting more difficult.

It's because his work in your life is not just about making things easier for you; it's about helping you know him more and trust him more. It's about God glorifying himself through you in your eyes and the eyes of others.

Have you gotten your mind around this yet? That the ultimate end of everything God is doing is to glorify himself?

Walk with me for a minute through Scripture.

Why did God create us?

Isaiah 43:6–7, "Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth ... whom I created for my glory."

Why did God create the universe?

Psalm 19:1, "The heavens declare the glory of God ..."

The whole universe declares the size and awesomeness of our God. One of the things that fascinates me is how fascinated we are with the idea of extraterrestrial life, aliens out there somewhere. And part of our reasoning for why they are out there is that this universe is just too big to be a habitation for little old us. But what if the reason the

⁶ From John Piper: "Is God for Us or for Himself?" Wheaton College chapel address. October 23, 1984. See also my summary [here](#).

universe exists is not for us; it exists to proclaim God's glory! And if THAT'S its purpose; well ... then it's just about the right size, I think. I look up at the sky and I see, "He's not a little bitty god. He's an ALL CAPS L-O-R-D."

Why did God rescue Israel from bondage in Egypt?

Psalm 106:7–8, "Our fathers rebelled against the Most High at the Red Sea. Yet he saved them for his name's sake, that he might make known his mighty power." Why did God save them? "*For his name's sake.*"

Why did God spare Israel again and again in the wilderness?

Ezekiel 20:14, "I acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations in whose sight I had brought them out."

Why did God bring back his people from exile?

Ezekiel 36:22: "Thus says the Lord God, 'It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name...' [Can you let that sink in for a minute? "I'm not even doing this for you."] I will vindicate the holiness of my great name and the nations will know that I am the Lord."

Why did God save you and me?

Ephesians 1:11, "In him we have obtained an inheritance ... that we might be to the praise of his glory."

What do we come together to do in worship?

Psalm 96:7 "Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name ... 9 Worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness; 10 Say among the nations, 'The Lord reigns!'"

You know what's supposed to be happening when we come together on the weekend? We ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name so the nations will know how glorious he is, so they will see his value from our worship, because knowledge of God's glory—seeing the truth about him—is the most valuable thing in the universe and what this whole ordeal is all about. People say to me, "Well, I didn't really like the worship in church today." And I always say, "Well, it wasn't FOR you." When we worship, I'm less concerned with whether I like the music and more concerned with if my worship is giving others a proper picture of the majesty of God. And when you stand there not singing with a bored look on your face, I'm not sure what you're telling others about God.

What is our agenda in every second of our lives?

1 Corinthians 10:31, "Whether therefore you eat or drink, or whatsoever you do, do all for the glory of God."

What will we be doing for eternity?

Revelation 7:11, "And the angels and all the elders fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying, 'Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.'"

Are you getting the point? God does it all for his glory. And the sooner you know that, the sooner you'll grasp what life is all about, and it will start to make a little more sense to you.

It's also where your joy is found. Ultimate joy is not found in a problem-free life. You think it is. But ultimate joy, real joy, is found in

seeing and knowing God clearly. That's the greatest joy in the universe, and it's worth the paths of pain to get us there.

When your soul sees God in his glory, it will have a fullness it's never known in any other context! **John Piper says:**

“Open your eyes! Do you see this? Don't you love it? You were made for THIS. THIS is why [we] exist: to see THAT: his glory in the heavens. His glory in salvation. His glory in his mighty works.

*He shouts at us through the billowing clouds. He shouts at us through the endless blue breadth of the summer sky. He shouts at us with gold on the horizon in the morning and through the brehtaking expanse of galaxies and stars at night. **In all these things, he is shouting 'I AM GLORIOUS!'***

*Everything is pointing to **THAT**. This [world] is all husks and ashes. Any glory that we thought was so attractive here simply existed to point us **THERE**.”⁷*

He, God, is where the real glory is! He, God, is the one we long to see and know and behold.

So God, why, when I was trying to obey you, why did you make it hard? “Because I was trying to teach you something about my glory. I was letting you experience the despair of death so you would hope in the God of resurrection. I was letting you taste the bitterness of ‘I am not’ so you could know me as the ‘I AM.’ I’m letting you wander so you know I’m the way; I’m letting you suffer so that you know I’m the life.”

⁷ From sermon on “The Glory of God” given at Passion. Quoted by Matt Papa in “The Glory of God,” on This Changes Everything (2011).

“And sometimes it wasn't even about you; it was about OTHERS seeing me through you. I let you suffer so that through your joy in suffering, you could show them that I was a God better than health. Or better than riches or better than success!”

You see, when you have joy in suffering, you demonstrate to people the glory of God! I always use John Wesley's illustration here of the guy who is informed that a rich relative he never even knew about left him an estate worth millions of dollars. And on the way to collect this inheritance, just a mile or so from his reward, his wagon breaks down. He doesn't get out and bemoan his broken wagon; he skips with joy the rest of the way because what he's lost doesn't compare to the treasure he's gained. The fact that he's so joyful even when his wagon broke down makes everyone wonder, “Why is he so happy, even when his wagon broke down?” And it directs your attention to this treasure he's just inherited.

When we have joy even when things are hard, when things are going wrong, it directs people's attention to the treasure we have in God. “Why are you so happy when all these things are going wrong in your life?” **Because I have HIM and he's BETTER than all these empty husks and ashes.**

“Or maybe,” God says, **“I let you struggle or even fail so that others would see the power wasn't in you. So their hope wouldn't be in you.** I wanted them to see you struggle so you could testify, like Paul did: ‘My hope is in God! He let me experience the curse of death so he could demonstrate through me the power of resurrection!’”

Summit, this builds on where we left off last week. I can't give you my success or strengths or talents. There's not that many of them, anyway. But what I can give you is my hope in God when I've struggled. What I can give you is his faithfulness when I've failed. His strength when I've felt weak.

So here is my question for you:

Where are you struggling, or failing, and how might God be trying to glorify himself through this? Can you let him? Can you trust him?

And, will you trust what God is doing in your life right now, even when you can't understand it?

Christian counselor Mike Wilkerson says, "It doesn't take much faith to say, 'God, rescue me, help me, save me like this.' What takes faith is when God saves you in a completely different way than you were expecting. That's what takes faith. So, can you say, 'God, I know you're good, so save me like you want to.'"⁸

Back to my pastor friend I told you about at the beginning with the four health problems diagnosed in one week, just as he embarked on a new assignment. He told me earlier this week: "God is using this to make me a better leader. To force me to lean more on him." He said, "When I found out about these health challenges, I immediately prayed for healing, believing God would give it. What I wanted was the 'zap.' (You know, "Zap! You're healed!") But God is giving me something better than a ZAP healing, and that is a season where I have to depend on him. A season where I'm literally forced to let him carry the stress, and during which I can prove that he is faithful. I wanted a zap of healing, and God took me through the process of healing, and the process is proving to be much more healing than the zap would have been. I'm a better pastor, better preacher, better counselor, husband, father, and son of God for going through this."

Can you trust God to do that in YOUR trials?

Bow your heads ... Do you need to tell God you trust him like this? Let's open up the altars again. PRAYER TEAM MEMBERS and pastors, get in place ... Grab a friend and come down here and say, "God, I trust you. Do your work in me."

One other question: It's a scary thing to think that you reject God long enough and he just hardens you in your rebellion. I wonder how many are here that God has been calling you and you have been resisting. Saying no. Refusing to obey. Avoiding church. Refusing to surrender. Avoiding contact with Christian people because it makes you know something is wrong.

Today you need to STOP hardening your heart. Right now, you need to walk down here and say, "God, I'm done running. I'm done resisting. I'm done hardening. I'm ready to do things your way." I want you to come down, take the hand of one of our prayer team members or pastors and tell them that, and you can pray together and get this settled with God.

⁸ Wilkerson, *Redemption*.