

The God who is sufficient

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[0 : 0 0] So, one of my favorite series of films in recent years is the most recent Batman trilogy with Christian Bale. I think all three of them are great.

And one of the big questions that kind of keeps coming up through these three films is, who is Batman? Who is the man behind the mask? Is he good? Is he someone we should be supporting? Or does he have something to hide? What's wrong with him? Why has he got this mask?

And there's this great scene near the end of Batman Begins, the first one in the trilogy. He's just about to kind of jump off a building into all sorts of carnage below and save Gotham City.

But he turns and he says, it's not who I am underneath, but what I do that defines me. It's not who I am underneath, but what I do that defines me.

It's what I do that defines me. It's a great line, and it really fits a lot with what we're looking at this morning and what we're going to see time and time again as we look through the book of Exodus.

[1 : 0 1] We mentioned last week that Exodus is hopefully going to help us get to know God better. And of course, we could say that of all books of the Bible. And yet that's a particular focus of Exodus.

We get to know God by seeing what he does. And in this section, we see God reveal himself to Moses. He literally tells Moses his name. And then that name is in some ways kind of filled up with meaning as actually God describes what he's going to do.

And the big idea of this passage, as God reveals himself, as God moves from, I suppose, working in the background, we might have said in chapters 1 and 2 last week, to very much bringing himself kind of front and center, very much making himself visible to Moses.

The big idea here is that he's a God who is sufficient. He's a God who is able to do what he's promised to do. And we're going to see that theme kind of time and time again as we look through these couple of chapters.

As always, it's quite helpful to have them open in front of you if you've got your Bible with you. We're covering quite a lot of ground. There'll be some bits that we can't speak about. If there's any bits you read that you have kind of questions on, feel free to grab me afterwards.

[2 : 1 1] I suppose I'm just going to try and make a way through what I think is the main point of these chapters. And they start off with a pretty well-known bit of the Exodus story.

God meeting Moses from this burning bush. Chapter 3, verse 2, the bush which was a flame but which isn't being consumed by the fire.

It's kind of an intriguing sight that draws Moses over to see it. And it's the first time really throughout the book of Exodus that we see this idea of fire. And this idea of fire is quite frequently going to be a sign of God's presence.

So the idea is that God is here. God is very visibly kind of arriving into the drama, onto the stage. And he speaks to Moses. He introduces himself to Moses.

Verses 6, 7, 8, and 9. He tells Moses kind of face-to-face almost a lot of the things that we saw behind the scenes last week. So he tells Moses that he is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who's made these promises in the past.

[3 : 16] Remember we said that. We look back at the book of Genesis, the first book in the Bible. We saw how God had promised to bless this people. God had promised to give this people a land.

God had promised that ultimately these people were going to be so many that no one could even count them. And yet at the beginning of the book that they're enslaved in Egypt. He also tells Moses he's the God who's heard the cries of his people and is going to keep those promises.

Verse 8, he's come to deliver his people from Egypt and take them to this land that he's promised them. And so it's really, it is what we saw last week, chapters 1 and 2, that he's the God who keeps these amazing promises that he's made.

And as you can imagine, imagine just being Moses, hearing all this, he's delighted. It's this rescue that the people have needed. It's this future they've looked forward to. God is going to pull through and do what he said.

It's all good, isn't it? And it's all good, I think, until it gets to verse 10. God says to Moses, come, I'll send you to Pharaoh, that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.

[4 : 27] I wonder if you can kind of picture Moses' face there. Whoa, whoa, whoa, he says. Sorry, who was it? Who was it you're going to send? And from this incredible meeting with God at the burning bush, this incredible introduction that God gives about who he is and what he's going to do, well, certainly, I think Moses is kind of feeling the pressure here a little bit, that actually God has a place for him in all of this.

And actually, the bulk of this passage is then kind of five questions, five arguments, really, which Moses then puts to God, really trying to convince God that this is not a good plan, really trying to convince God not to send him.

And yet each time God responds, and in each response we see that God is saying that God himself is sufficient for this. And so this morning, that's what we're going to do.

We're going to look through these five questions, and more importantly, look through these five answers that God gives to Moses. And you'll see question one there straight away. As soon as God has taught him this plan, I'm going to send you.

What Moses says to God, well, who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt? That's the first thing Moses says.

[5 : 37] It's basically saying, look, I can't do that. Who am I to do that? It's perhaps easy for us to read that and say, oh, Moses, don't be such a wuss. Get, you know, get going. He's sending you.

But actually, Moses is totally right here. It's kind of like someone saying to you, look, I'm sending you to Westminster to sort out this Brexit thing. You know, what would you say, Amelia?

Whatever you think of Theresa May, she's kind of less likely to chop your head off than Pharaoh was. You'd say, look, I can't do that. I don't have the knowledge or the strength or the connections or the respect.

Surely there's someone better. Well, it's the same for Moses. He's been a shepherd in the middle of nowhere for about 40 years now. Of course he can't do this.

So actually his question, who am I, Lord? It's a good question. But really that is just the point. And that's God's answer to Moses. Look, verse 12, God says, but I'll be with you.

[6 : 32] But I'll be with you, God says. It is God who is going to rescue his people. And we said this again last week, and it's really important to remember it. Exodus is not a book all about Moses and what a great guy he was.

Exodus is a book about God. If we still have any kind of illusions that Moses is the hero of the story, well, they're going to be well and truly shattered by the end of this passage. And what will be left will be God who is able to do all this.

God who rescues his people. God who is sufficient. And so I think that's one of the reasons why this is such a great passage for us. It's a great passage for us as a church. It's a great passage for us as individuals.

Because so often we look around, don't we, and say, look, who am I? I can't do that. Who am I to do this? We look around and we see so many people who are struggling. And we see so many people who are lost.

We see such a mess in our world, both kind of locally and also internationally. So often we think, we can't do anything about that. So often even we look at our own lives and we see kind of the mess inside.

[7 : 39] And we think, well, I can't do anything about this. I can't change myself. It seems like an impossible task. It seems like we're completely ill-equipped for that. What we see here is actually God's message is to take our focus off ourselves.

And instead, remember that it is God that we rely on. It is God who, just like Moses, has promised that he will always be there with us. It's God who's going to do all this.

And so that's question one, who am I? And God's answer is, well, it's not who you are that matters, but it's who I am. Because I'll be with you. It's me who's going to do this. And that then leads us naturally onto question two, where Moses says, well, in that case, who are you?

Verse 13, then Moses said to God, if I come to the people of Israel and say to them, the God of your fathers has sent me to them, and they ask, what's his name? Well, what am I to say to them?

Who are you, God? Moses says. And this is kind of one of the key moments, actually, in the Bible of God revealing himself to his people. It's probably the kind of central focus of this section here.

[8 : 47] And God gives his name to Moses. Verse 14, God said to Moses, I am who I am. And if you see it in your Bible, that's in kind of little capitals.

That's because it means it's the name that he gives. And then he goes on. He says, say this to the people of Israel. I am has sent you. It does sound like a bit of an kind of evasive answer, doesn't it?

Well, you know, I am who I am. Is God just trying to dodge the question? Or does this actually have some meaning? Well, it does have meaning. And the ultimate thing that it means is that kind of God is separate from everything else.

He's the kind of ultimate reality, as it were. As we talked earlier, that he's the creator and everything else is the creation. So often when we're asked to kind of explain who we are, we probably do it relative to other things.

I'm so-and-so's dad. I'm so-and-so's daughter. Or I work here. Or I live here. We explain ourselves. We kind of reveal who we are, dependent on other things.

[9 : 52] And even the gods at the time, the gods of Egypt would have been like that. It would have been the god of the sun, the god of the sea, the god of the wall, the god of war. And yet in this name that God gives himself, I am who I am, it shows that God is completely incomparable.

That he is completely other. That he doesn't fit into our kind of neat categories. That the only thing that is great enough to define himself is himself.

I am who I am. It's showing the kind of the supremacy of God. And yet if still that's perhaps a little bit vague for us, if still we'd like a bit more detail, well, we get that here.

God helps Moses, helps the people, helps us understand who he is by putting meaning kind of into this name through his actions. And like we said at the beginning, we see who he is by what he's done, by what he will do.

And so what is that? Well, again, if you look down at verse 16, really down to the end of chapter 3, you can follow God's description of himself. Excuse me. And he repeats a lot of what he's already said.

[11 : 02] He's the god of their fathers. He's the god who's made these promises. He's the god who's seen what's going on. He's the god who, again, repeats that promise that he will keep his promises. He will bring them out of the land.

He's a god who makes and keeps promises. We talked about that last week. We saw that already, really, in verses 6 down to 9. But actually, here there's something new. How is he going to do that?

Well, if you look at verses 19 and 20, he's going to keep this promise by defeating the king of Egypt. He's going to keep this promise, he says, by compelling Pharaoh with a mighty hand.

He's going to keep this promise by basically overpowering the most powerful nation on the planet, overpowering the greatest superpower that up until this point the world had ever known.

So question one, who am I, Moses had said. Well, God's answer is, it doesn't matter who you are. I'll be with you. Question two, well, who are you? And here's God's answer. I'm the God who is powerful. I'm the God who is able.

[12 : 08] I'm the God who is sufficient to do all of this. Not just a God who makes his promises and would like to keep his promises, but a God who can keep his promises.

And really, we see that kind of displayed. We see that power in action, really, in God's answer to question three. So let's keep cracking on and let's look at that at the start of chapter four.

But they won't believe me, Moses says. And how does God answer this objection or this question? Well, we see he gives Moses three signs. First, his staff, which is changed into a snake and then back again.

Second, his hand, which becomes leprous. It's like a really serious skin disease. But then God heals that. And then thirdly, this water from the Nile, which will turn to blood.

These are quite impressive. These are quite dramatic signs. But again, look what they're signs of. Verse five, these are signs that they may believe the Lord, the God of their fathers, has appeared to you.

[13 : 12] And so these aren't signs saying how great Moses is. They're signs showing the important thing, how great God is, that this is his work. This is his plan. And actually, there's probably an even deeper significance to these signs.

They're not just things where we'd say, wow, that's pretty cool. God must be with you. They're actually kind of specific to this situation. So the snake was the symbol of Egyptian royalty.

If you think of kind of Tutankhamun or any of those kind of Egyptian pharaohs, you see they often had a little kind of cobra on their headdress. Well, here's God showing his authority over that.

Leprosy was apparently a disease that was rife throughout Egypt. It was something that they could do nothing about. They thought it was incurable. Well, here's God's authority over that. In fact, the river Nile, the third of the signs, this was kind of the central source of life and wealth in Egypt.

It's what made the country so fertile. It's what made it such a successful place. Really, the whole of the nation was based around the Nile. It was so important. It was considered to be a god.

[14 : 20] And yet here is God's authority over that. And so time and time and time again, these signs emphasize God's sufficiency, his ability to do what he's promised.

And notice again here that at the moment, these aren't signs for the king. These aren't signs for Pharaoh. These are signs for the Israelite people. So these aren't supposed to be threats.

These are encouragements. These are signs not only that God is with Moses, but that he's able to keep these promises and deliver the people from their current struggles.

That nothing that is set up over and against them is greater than the God who's coming to rescue them. And so again, it's this repeated pattern. Moses says, I can't do it. God says, I'm with you and I can do it.

Moses says, but the people won't believe me. God says, well, here's the proof for them that I'm with you and I can do it. And the idea here in this bit is that God wants his people to have confidence.

[15 : 22] God wants his people to know that he's able to do what he's promised. God doesn't want it to be a kind of a secret that his people are worried, well, is God going to pull through or not? He wants to make it really clear to them that there is no power greater than him.

That there is nothing out there which is too big for him to deal with. And again, although this is written thousands of years ago, I hope we can see the kind of relevance of this to our day-to-day lives.

So often we forget how big God is. So often the situations in our lives seem bigger than God. They seem more real than God. So often the issues that we face are kind of patterns of behavior that we want to get away from that seem to have perhaps their claws so deep into us.

They seem bigger than God. Like God can't do anything about that. So often the difficulties we see other people going through, the situations that we'd love to see change out in the world, they seem too big for us.

Or that God can't do anything about that, out of God's reach. It's easy for us to despair. And yet God wants his people. God wants people to be encouraged. God wants people to know that he is sufficient.

[16 : 34] God wants us to know that there is no situation that he can't deal with. Now remember what we saw last week. This isn't a promise of kind of plain sailing and an easy life. But it does mean that if we trust in God, that ultimately nothing will prevent him from carrying out his promises.

That it's all about him and not about us. And we see that in these signs here that God gives to Moses. And ultimately as people standing kind of in 2019, that we see the greatest demonstration of this, not in Moses' signs, but in the greatest sign of all, in the resurrection.

We see that even the unavoidable, seemingly undefeatable enemy of death itself, it is no match for this God. That he is sufficient in every area.

If he has that control, that power over death itself, if he can see us through death, then surely everything else is under his hand as well. That encouragement that he is sufficient.

And yet don't we so easily forget that. And we see again here, Moses continually forgetting that. And that's question four, verse 10. Moses says, but I'm not eloquent. I'm not a good speaker.

[17 : 51] I never have been. And can you see what's happening again? Where's Moses' focus? It's not on God. It's on himself. It's on his abilities or on his limitations.

And God's answer here is pretty brief. He says to him, well look, who made your mouth? Stop thinking about who you are and what you can do. Remember who I am. Remember that I'm sufficient.

Have you noticed one answer which God has never given Moses for all of these questions? He's never said, Moses, of course you can do it. Moses, you're being too hard on yourself. Moses, you know, go for it.

If this whole thing was Moses kind of fishing for compliments from God, he's going to be left sort of sorely disappointed by God's responses. Each time God comes back and he says, you know what? You can't do it.

But I can. And it is God that counts, not what you can do. And that's the same answer here in question four, isn't it? God doesn't say, well, I'm sure you'll think of something to say when the chips are down.

[18 : 52] Or, oh no, I heard you, you know, speaking to that shepherd before. You're not as bad as you think. No, verse 12, I will be your mouth and teach you what you shall speak. Is God at work?

Is God who's going to do this? Is God carrying out this rescue? I feel like I've said that now a thousand times this morning, but throughout this passage, that is what has been kind of forced home to us, that God is sufficient.

And that is the message that we want to hold on to as a church. The message that we share as a church, the message of the gospel, isn't something that's there to kind of massage people's egos, just to make people feel really good about themselves.

So we don't kind of come together each week or throughout the week as a self-help group, telling people how amazing we are, telling people how, you know, you can go out and you can do anything. This room is not like an elite squad of super people.

This is not like the X-Men Academy or something like that where we're all kind of in here and we can do anything. But we gather week by week and we read the Bible, we pray to remind ourselves that it is God who's sufficient.

[20 : 00] To remind ourselves that when we walk out that door this morning, that there is nothing that we will face this week that God cannot deal with. And there is nothing that is going on in our lives which is beyond his reach or beyond his power.

That God is sufficient. This passage is here to encourage us in that. We're supposed to look at this description of God. He gives us this name and he fills it with meaning by showing us his power.

That's supposed to kind of build us up and make us feel good, not because we're great, but because God is great and he's with us. It's encouraging. And yet, when we get to the end of the passage, we get to question five, the final question, and it kind of finishes on a bit of a downer.

But I love how real this is. After all these questions, after all this reasoning, after Moses having this incredible discussion, essentially kind of face-to-face with God, we get to chapter 4, verse 13, and Moses says, oh my Lord, please send someone else.

It's like, you know, I've run out of excuses. I can't think of anything. I've answered all my questions. I just don't want to do it. And actually, this is the first time we read that, you know, God is angry with Moses.

[21 : 09] Actually, this is, you know, it's an outright kind of failure to trust, a failure to obey. And yet even here, God provides an answer. He says, well, I'll send Moses as a helper.

And so ultimately, sorry, I'll send Aaron as a helper. And so ultimately, Moses does go, and if we'd read on the next few verses, we'd see he asks his kind of father-in-law and boss for permission to go back to Egypt.

He does go. He does eventually kind of give in, as it were. He kind of acquiesces and he does what God has set out for him. And yet, as we kind of read his kind of reluctance to do that, even at the end of this great conversation, we're left in no doubt that this is all going to be done.

If this is going to work, if the book of Exodus is going to have a happy ending, it's all going to be because of God's strength. It's all going to be because God has carried out this rescue.

It's not going to be because of this superhero, Moses, who actually is a very ordinary person, who actually has struggles and fears and worries just like we do.

[22 : 13] And yet, also we need to remember that throughout Exodus, Moses does have this special role. He is drawn out from his people. He is sent by God to carry out this rescue.

And we talked about this last week. As that rescuer sent by God, Moses is here to point us toward the ultimate rescuer that God has sent. to point us towards Jesus.

And so as we read Exodus, we want to be careful that we don't slip into this kind of temptation to think that we're Moses, that we have some kind of burning bush experience.

The point is, actually, we can learn from Moses. We can learn from how he should and shouldn't act. We can learn about God, from how God interacts with Moses like he's just been doing in these chapters. But ultimately, we want to see what Moses teaches us about that great rescuer, the ultimate rescuer, Jesus Christ.

Remember, Exodus is kind of the pattern, it is the model of the gospel where God sends a rescuer to his people. And in the gospel, God has sent Jesus Christ.

[23 : 22] So where are the similarities here? Well, actually, we don't really learn about Jesus through similarity here, but through contrast. Where Moses is reluctant throughout this passage, and especially we see that at the end in question five, but when we think of the perfect rescuer that we have in Jesus, that contrast, that where Moses is hesitant, Jesus is willing.

And we read it in the New Testament, in the Gospels about the life of Jesus, we see these kind of parallels, that Jesus faced this monumental task. Just like Moses, Jesus understood that the scale of the task, and yet, while Exodus leaves us here with this impression of Moses being kind of dragged, kicking and screaming by God to do his part, and when we read about Jesus, and we read that he set his face to Jerusalem, to the cross, he would not be deviated from that mission.

And we read about Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, the night before he would be killed on the cross, that night where he recognized the cost, the terror, the horror of what it was going to take for him to carry out that rescue, and yet, what does he pray?

Not send someone else. He prays to his Father God, not my will, but yours be done. In Jesus, we have the perfect rescuer who perfectly carried out God's plan, and how was he able to do that?

How does Jesus pass this test that Moses seems to fall short of? Well, the key thing here is that Jesus was and is this same promise-keeping God who alone is able to save.

[25 : 06] Jesus is the same I am who I am who sent Moses. And in fact, again, in the New Testament, in the Gospels, Jesus takes that name, I am, that name which God has given himself here, and Jesus applies it to himself.

He says, that's my name. And when he does that, people are shocked. Some people are outraged because they rightly recognize that he's claiming to be this same God who rescues.

He's claiming to be the same God who alone is able and sufficient. He's claiming to be the same God who is the hero of this story of Exodus. The hero that the rest of the Bible always looks back to.

And Jesus says, that's me. The amazing thing about the Gospel, and this actually, it fits in with what we were talking about the Trinity earlier on, is that both the one who sends and the one who are sent are God.

Are I am, are completely able to save. Are the God who is the hero of the Bible, of the big story of the Bible from start to finish.

[26 : 15] Moses' reluctance here reminds us of the love of Jesus Christ and his willingness to pay that ultimate price for us, to demonstrate that love that God has for us.

And so as we finish then, where do we fit in? Perhaps we're, you know, we're not Moses. Our role isn't to kind of save anyone, ourselves. But where do we fit in this story? Well, the point is that we are here if we're God's people to point to the one who does.

That our role here on earth is to help people know the name of God, not just know it as a swear word, not just know it as something that people in church read about, but to know that as a name that is filled with meaning by what God has done.

To help people understand that the promises that God has made and that he has kept, ultimately by that rescue that he's achieved for us through Jesus, through his death and resurrection.

God's people have this task to share Jesus with those around them and in some ways it's a joyful task. It's speaking about someone who we know and love.

[27 : 23] It's speaking about someone who is kind of the main thing in our lives and yet at the same time it can seem like a huge task. It can seem like a terrifying task. It can seem like a task that we're not sufficient for.

But again, this passage reminds us that we are sent by God to speak about him and we do that in his strength. That it is God who's at work and that God is completely sufficient for that task.

He gives us the words to say. He can draw alongside us the people we need. He can and he will do whatever is required to carry out his purpose. And like Moses, in the end, we simply need to keep our eyes on God and we need to go to put our trust in him and not ourselves because he is the God who keeps his promises, the God who rescues and he is sufficient.

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