

Mission Possible

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[0 : 00] Have your Bibles open at Exodus 3, and we'll dig in there today. I wonder what you feel about South Africa when you think of South Africa. Gosh. Super highs, on the one hand, recently. Ooh, the rugby. Okay, the most recent game, not so great, but the previous game. And the singing, when we're together. Doesn't it make you feel so, oh, it's such a lack of feeling to have us all singing together.

When you go to the soccer or you go to a big event in Cape Town, it's so nice. The beauty of our country. And then you've got the other side of our country.

The stuff that grates us. The potholes. The taxis. The taxes. And so, we've got this weird feeling about our country.

But if you were president for a day in South Africa, what would you want to change about our country? If you were given the power. Boom. President for a day. Assuming that you can get everything done that you wanted to get done.

[1 : 05] What are some of the things that you want to change so that the stuff that we see that drags us down is minimized? Or gone? Or made opposite?

What is it? Okay, you can change some things. You can abolish the taxes. The road tax. The petrol tax. We pay, gosh, nearly five rand, maybe more.

Probably about seven rand in petrol taxes. You know that. Stamp out corruption. Fix education. You could do some things. What about the problem of drinking?

Would that be easy to stop? Oof. What about the problem of dads not in their homes? Would that be easy to stop? What about husband and wife relationships?

Getting rid of pain. Letting people see their full potential. How do you do that? But our country is in trouble. It needs help.

[2 : 07] Like many countries in the world. But South Africa particularly at this time. And so when people are in trouble. And they're crying out for help. What's the solution?

What is the best way that they can be helped? So as we start our story today. We find God's people, Israel, in deep trouble.

Much more trouble than we've got in our country. They're held captives. They're held enslaved by the most powerful and most evil force. And oppressive force in the world at that time.

And there's no way that they can escape this situation by their own power or ability. And so the big question they're asking is, is God going to do something?

That's the question the text poses for us today. The whole story of Exodus. As we've looked at chapter 1, 2, and 3 is, what is God going to do in response to the cries of his people saying, please help us?

[3 : 07] It's a huge, big situation that God has got to resolve. And so it looks like you would think that the only solution is for God himself to come down and sort it out.

Certainly his people can't do it. That's a point about being enslaved. You're not actually able to rise up against your slave master. Certainly not against the Egyptians.

They're the strongest force that there is on planet Earth. And in our passage, it looks like God will do just that. That he's going to take the initiative and that he is going to come down and sort their problems out.

Because surely this task of saving his people is too big and too important to leave up to a human to do. Or, or is it?

Have a look at verse 7 and 8. And we see God deciding that he's going to come and sort this problem out. So verse 7 and 8. The Lord says, I've surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt.

[4 : 05] And I've heard their cry because of their taskmaster. Their taskmasters, I know their sufferings. I know their sufferings. And I've come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians.

And to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land. A land flowing with milk and honey. So God himself is going to come down and save his people. But then, a surprising twist. God says that his rescue plan actually is going to include humans. He's going to partner with his creation to bring salvation to it.

Moses is going to be part of God's rescue plan. And so, the first thing we're going to see today is that when God moves to rescue, he often supplies a surprising rescuer.

A surprising rescuer. Yes, God himself does it, but he does it through a person. And the person taken most by surprise is Moses himself. Have you seen Moses' response to what God says when he says he's going to use him?

[5 : 14] Well, let's just have a look at verse 10. Where God changes from, I'm going to do the saving, to Moses, you're going to do the saving. Have a look at verse 10. By the way, that's why we need our Bibles, because we dig around sort of in depth in the texts often.

Let's start at verse 9. God is speaking, and he says, Look, the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I've seen the way the Egyptians are pressing them.

Here's my solution. Here's God's solution. So now, talking to Moses, so now you go. I'm sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.

I wonder what, if you didn't know the next verse, what would you expect Moses to say at that point? He knows he's been raised as a Jew.

He's taken action before to sort a problem out where the Jews are being oppressed. He's seen this burning bush. He knows the God of the Bible. Answer, you go and save my people?

[6 : 22] Yes, Lord. Yes, Lord. Moses' answer, Who, me? What? Verse 11, Moses says to God, Who am I?

He may have said it in a squeaky, Me! Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt? Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt? You've got the wrong guy, God. I can't do that. I'm Moses. You want me to go face Pharaoh? Before we look into the inadequacies of Moses, we just need to establish a truth that the Bible is teaching us here.

A very important truth. And the truth is this. When God acts to save people, he chooses to do so through human agency. When God acts to save people, he chooses to do so through human agency.

God uses people to carry out his mission of saving people. To put it even more simply, God uses people to get stuff done on planet Earth. To put it more simply, God uses us to get stuff done on planet Earth.

[7 : 39] Now, it seems counterintuitive for God to work this way. I mean, he's God. Why does he need us? We're going to read in the text, he's the great I am.

The one who is. The self-existent one. The eternal self-existent one who never had a beginning. And it's impossible to get your head around that. Who causes all things to be.

And on whom all things depend for their existence. And now he's going to use those things that are so frail and easily breakable to go fix the things that are broken.

Why would he do that? Why would he need us humans? Surely he can do it himself. Well, God can do it himself. But he chooses to partner with people to bring about his purpose for creation.

God can do it all by himself. But he chooses to work with humans, to partner with people, to bring about his purpose for creation. We shouldn't really be surprised by that.

[8 : 48] How did God work in creation? Who did he create? Who did he make to take his plan of establishing blessing and life on planet Earth? Did he do it himself? Well, yes, he created everything.

But what's the pinnacle of his creation? Adam and Eve. And then what is his task to them? Okay, boys, off you go.

Get the job done. Boys and girls. Adam and Eve in partnership with each other and in partnership with God. Do you see how God uses people to get stuff done?

He's right from the beginning of creation. God uses people to get stuff done when he establishes his covenant with Abraham. We've looked at Genesis 12. We've looked at the call of Abraham.

Abraham, through your family, your family, I'm going to bless you and then your family is going to do what?

Do the same thing Adam and Eve did, which is bless the earth. It hasn't changed. It's thousands of years later. God has called us in Jesus Christ. He's blessed us.

[9 : 52] Now it's our task to take that same mission, task of blessing to the world. That's why it's not a surprise when you get to the New Testament, God is still sending people to get to bring salvation into the world.

The person he sends in the New Testament is Jesus Christ. Yes, Jesus is God himself, but he comes down as a human. That's the point of the incarnation.

He gets stuff done as a man, as one of us. In a sense, Jesus has been sent. In fact, we'll look at that in a second, that New Testament reading from John 20.

But God sends Jesus into the world as the unique savior, the ultimate rescuer. Because what you see God doing in Exodus is rescue. This is a rescue plan.

In a world that's enthralled by evil powers, held captive, you need whatever else you're going to do, if you want to call it salvation, it's got to be a rescue.

[11 : 02] You're tracking on that. So that's why the Bible uses rescue, deliverance, language. In fact, when we think of salvation, we need to put into the salvation box sort of the connotation, not the meaning behind it, but what it means is, part of it is rescue and deliverance.

Does that make sense? However else we see Jesus, we must see him as a man on a mission, sent by God, to defeat the enemies of humanity that kept us enslaved to sin.

In one sense, Jesus is the ultimate spiritual freedom fighter. I know it's got, in our context, it's got connotations, freedom fighters.

We never know if they're, if they're good or bad, I guess depending which side you're on. But certainly, it's the right thing to do to help people who are oppressed by others to be free.

And that's exactly what Jesus has come to do for us. But the important thing is that once he does that work, once Jesus has done the work of freeing us from our sins, once he's set the captives free, and by the way, that's exactly what Jesus himself claims to be doing.

[12 : 17] Luke chapter 3, the first sermon that he preaches is a quote from Isaiah to exactly do that, set the captives free. Jesus then in turn sends the freed captives on a mission.

Just like Yahweh did in the Old Testament by sending Moses to partner with him, Jesus does the same thing in the New Testament to his church, to his people, in other words, to us. That's that passage in John chapter 20.

If you can turn there if you'd like to, Jesus has died in that section, John 19, he's come back from the dead, he's resurrected, he's the...

And the resurrection is the thing that starts this new chapter in world history, this massive rescue plan that puts the exodus in...

It pales in comparison to what Jesus has done. And he's standing there in his new... in his body, in his resurrected body, and he says this to his people.

[13 : 19] The first thing he says, they all gather around, they want to know what's going on. Peace be with you, Jesus says. John 20, verse 21. As the Father has sent me, and they all know what's happened now, they all know what's happened.

As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you. You're going to partner with me in this new task, this new thing that's happened, this new event, this new way of living that's happened with Jesus' resurrection.

But you're not going to be alone. You're not on your own. He breathes on them. Receive the Holy Spirit. Because you can't do this task by yourself, on your own.

You need the power of God, and that's what the Holy Spirit is there to do, to help us with this task. And then he gives them this incredible authority. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven. In other words, the church, God's people, is to take the task of forgiveness to the world and tell people about how Jesus can forgive their sins.

[14 : 32] But here's a challenge for us to get our heads around, a challenge for us to live up to, a challenge for us as the church at St. Mark's. Do we see ourselves, do we see our Christianity in this kind of light, in this rescue plan kind of vibe?

Rescued? Do you see yourself as rescued, as delivered, as set free, as redeemed? Do you see yourself as having been set free, gathered together, that we belong to each other?

We've all received this mark of membership, baptism, the Lord's Supper, the Holy Spirit, which means we're a band of brothers and sisters, that we're the new people of God, that we've been commissioned and given an order, our marching orders, by the God of the universe to go and save others.

Do we see ourselves like that? Now, however, that looks for us, because it's going to look sort of different for each one of us, whatever your particular role is in that task, that's okay, but we've all got the same role, the same overarching goal to free others by telling them about Jesus.

But I hope you can see that by being a Christian, we are called to join with God in his great task of freeing the world from its bondage to sin. Maybe, you can think of being a Christian like being freed from a prisoner of war camp in World War II.

[16:03] You've been held captive, you're finally released. I wonder what the first thing is that you're going to want to do. Run home, that's an option, get the heck out of enemy territory, or, hmm, let me join these boys and free the other guys that are still captive.

Modern Christianity wants you to focus on going home to the UK or the US or just staying there. Modern Christianity tells you, yes, your sins are forgiven and the reason for that is so that you can have a personal, deep, intimate relationship with God so that when you die you can go to be with him in heaven.

In a very short way, that's often what we hear modern Christianity saying. Biblical Christianity says you've been freed from captivity, now get stuck into the fight so that others can be freed.

We've got stuff to do here on planet Earth before we die because there's a purpose for God calling us. Are you with me on that? Does that make sense? We are to join the church or joining the church is joining God's freedom fighter movement.

Joining the church is joining God's freedom fighter movement. Now that's both exciting, let's be honest, a little bit daunting. You know, the world is overrun by evil, our foes are strong and many, but God doesn't put us into the fight without equipping us and the God who rescues us is also the God that goes with us into battle.

[17:32] So, the next thing we're going to look at, we've looked at how God sends a surprising Savior but then he doesn't leave us alone, he is with us in the battle.

So Yahweh is the God who is with his people to help them in the battle. Moses was just as daunted when the Lord called him, Lord, how can I go?

I'm a lowly shepherd. Moses was 80 years old when God called him, well, older than 80. He was 40 years in the wilderness and 40 years working for his father-in-law.

He was 80 and he was still working for his dad and God says, no, you're the one that's going to free this people from Pharaoh. Moses looks at that, Pharaoh, the strongest person on planet earth and I have a, I don't even own my own sheep.

I'm helping someone else with their sheep and I'm 80. How can I possibly do this? Or we're going to dig more into Moses' reasons for not going and partnering with God.

[18:38] He gives two excuses here. He's got a few more in his sleeve. We'll dig in that next week. But we can be like Moses.

We could just as well utter that cry, Lord, how can you send me? Are you sure about that? We're hardly up for the tasks ourselves, the task of going to the world.

But God gives Moses two life-changing truths to take with him into his mission to free God's people. You see, every time Moses asks a question, God gives him just the most amazing answers.

I wonder if you saw it in the text as we read through it. Now have a look at verse 12, God's answer to Moses when he says, who am I to go to Pharaoh?

God says this, I will be with you and this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you. When you've brought the people out of Egypt, you, not just Moses, that's you, plural, the whole of, my whole nation is going to come out with you and worship me on this mountain.

[19:52] Moses thinks the task is too big, God's answer, I'm going to be with you. That's going to be enough for you, Moses. You need to start trusting me, God. And then he gives him another answer.

Or Moses puts another question up. Moses says to God, suppose I go to the Israelites. Suppose I go. Alright, let's work on this little theory for a little bit. I'm not saying I will do it, but hey, if I do go, and I say to them, the God of your fathers has sent me to you, and they ask me, what is his name? Then what am I going to tell them? God must have been thinking, what a rude question.

But look at his gracious answer. Look at his incredible answer. God said to Moses, I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites.

I am has sent me to you. So God gives Moses two things to help him in the task. I will be with you, and I'll give you my name.

[21 : 02] Now these are the two of the most precious and powerful things that God gives to his people to help them in the fight against evil. They don't seem like that. You think, okay, God is with us and he's given us his name.

What's going on here? But just think about how the presence of God works. Let's say you've gone for a hike up Table Mountain, and you've got yourself stuck, and you can't get down.

If you do, you're going to die. You're on a ledge. You don't know how to get off. Make a phone call. You get hold of the rescue team. They call you back, and now there's two ways that they can rescue you.

They can either talk you down over the phone. Okay, we think we know, can you tell us where you are? There's a bunch of rocks. Okay, can you be more specific? There's a big drop.

Okay, well, don't go down the big drop, but go along the rocks, but how, they're not there. How can they see where must you place your foot? How far can you go? So that's one way of doing it, calling you up from base camp and helping you.

[22 : 02] The other way, of course, is to send an expert in the mountain and rescue, hook himself onto you, and then walk with you down the mountain to safety. That's what it's like with God being with his people.

He's with us every step of the way, guiding us so that we don't fall to our doom and death and break ourselves in this task of saving the world and blessing the world.

Being part of God's rescue team doesn't mean that it will be plain sailing. Just think of the life of David, all those ups and downs that David went through. Moses is going to go through some huge ups and downs.

Paul does the same. Jesus, of course. But God's presence means there's a sufficiency and a strength to get the task done.

That's what being with us means. He knows what's needed. He knows what's going to happen. He knows who he's chosen. He knows his people.

[23 : 07] He's called us for a reason. It's not a mistake that he calls Moses. Moses, as insufficient as Moses is, God says, my presence, I'm sufficient. Just trust me and we'll get the job done together.

Like Moses, we can feel inadequate. God says, I'm with you. We feel the enemy is too big and strong. God says, I am with you.

We feel we are too small for the task. God says, you're not in this alone. I'm with you. God's people in the Old Testament that gets this promise.

Jesus repeats the exact same thing in the New Testament. Matthew 18. Jesus is talking about how he will help his people. He says to them what their task is.

He says this, Matthew 18, verse 19. Truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my father in heaven. Because, here's the reason that will happen, where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am with them.

[24 : 18] So when two or more people pray about something, God will respond. So we've said some prayers today. There's more than two of us here. Here's the truth of the reality.

Jesus, the risen Lord of heaven and earth, is here. With us. Many of us come here today with problems in our life.

Not many of us. All of us come here today with problems in our life. Unresolved problems. Problems we don't know how to solve. Problems too big for us.

Many are dealing with broken past, present pain, or future uncertainty. Jesus is here. He's with us. So there's a comfort there, knowing that he's here to help us and to work through these things with us.

But it's not just for comfort that Jesus is with us. By being with us as a collective body, he also trains us for the task ahead. And he also changes us so that we can be the people that he can use.

[25 : 28] He trains and changes us for the mission of changing the world. That's why it's important for us to actually be together as the church. That's why you'll hear Nick and myself and the leaders say, listen, it's good for us to meet together because that's exactly what happens when we're

together.

Jesus is with us and he changes and trains us to get the task done. Church, then, isn't just coming together and singing a few songs and something you do on a Sunday because you've got nothing else to do.

The church is a training ground for our character, for our thinking, for our words, for our hearts, for our being to be sharpened and pruned and focused on what God wants us to be focused on.

Here in Exodus 3, being God's presence in the world. When we do that, when we take God with us into the world, we then challenge and overcome evil and oppression and we rescue the lost.

the noted reformed theologian, Leslie Newbigin, says this about being the church. She says this, the church is the bearer to all nations of a gospel that announces the kingdom, the reign, and the sovereignty of God.

[26 : 43] It's not meant to call men and women out of the world into a safe religious enclave, a little holy huddle waiting to go to heaven, waiting to be raptured away from this world.

It's not meant to call men and women out of the world into a safe religious enclave, but to call them out in order to send them back as agents of God's kingship.

I don't know about you, but that's an exciting place to be. That sounds like worth coming to church for. God is with him.

God is with him. He gives them his name. The God who is who he is. Not only is God with Moses, but he also gives him his own personal name.

I am who I am. Now, this is a deep and profound reality that God is sharing with Moses. Much ink has been spilt in trying to understand what it truly means.

[27 : 47] I'm not sure we'll ever truly understand what God is saying there. Maybe a way to get a handle on it is to use it in the context of chapter three about what God is communicating to Moses.

When you do that, when you place it in its context, you see that God's name is deeply connected to his covenant. If you read that chapter three, you'll see God again and again.

He's the God of Abraham. Isaac and Jacob. That's a shorthand word for saying he's a God of his covenant, of these promises that he's made.

So God's name is deeply connected to his covenant. God's name is deeply connected to his covenant people. He sees their affliction. He hears their cries.

He knows them. He loves them. And because of that, because his name is connected to his covenant, covenant, he's connected to his covenant people. And because of that, he's deeply committed to taking action to save them.

[28 : 55] And we can draw on that same truth as we live our lives. But remember, God isn't there to solve your problems for you. He's there to solve your problems so that you can go out and solve other people's problems.

problems. At least that's what this passage is telling us. Of course God saves your problems for you as well because he loves you. But there's a purpose to it all.

Yahweh's name means that something, so if we take that together, Yahweh is connected to his covenant, his covenant people, and to covenant action. So in the Bible where you see, he says, I am who I am.

It's obviously a translation of the Hebrew. It's a very strange sort of verbal construct. I am who I am, or I will be who I will be. We think, okay, God means he is.

Okay, that's great, but the way that the Hebrew Bible works, the Hebrew mindset works, is they're not so much interested in just being, the essence of everything. They want to know what is this thing doing.

[29 : 57] So to be is to do something. It's an active thing. So Yahweh's name, God's name then, means something like his active presence with his people, his active presence with his people.

He's not a passive presence. He's not with us and not doing anything. When he's with us, he does stuff. He's ever present.

Not just present sometimes, he's always present. He's not active sometimes, he's always active. And what he's doing is he's bringing about his good plan to bring good to the world through his people, through us.

The presence of God is not a bare existence, but rather a living and vital force, doing things in time and place, active in history, doing stuff on planet earth, making things happen, willing us, shaping us, moving us, encouraging us, spurring us to do good works for him and for other people, stopping

evil and bringing goodness and blessing to life.

And one thing is for sure. When you've got this eternal God on your side, who is eternally present, who always was and never had a beginning, who always is in the present and who always will be in the future, one thing is for sure, if you've got that God on your side and you're going into the world to face evil, you're going to win.

[31 : 22] Evil can't and won't win against this God or against his people. we will surely have the victory. And how do we know this? Well, we know the story in Exodus. We actually know what's going to happen to Pharaoh and his people, but join us for the story because there's some very important lessons to learn along the way.

But there's a much greater victory, the victory of Jesus Christ in the New Testament, over what? Over death. He had victory over death and over the devil that causes death and over sin that causes death.

So he's got victory over everything. And because of that, Jesus is the name above all names that is powerful to help us in our time of need and powerful to win the victory over all the forces of evil in the world.

Yes, life is full of trouble, life is hard, but if Yahweh is on our side, we are guaranteed successful outcomes. Not fully here in this life, but certainly it starts here.

Yes, the journey is fought with danger. God is there with you, fighting in your corner the whole way. You're not alone. God is with you and his name is the one who is eternally present and mightily active to save and to make his mission a success.

[32 : 39] To us, it looks like mission impossible when we look at the world, but to God or with God on our side, it becomes mission possible. Well, let's pray to God to ask him to help us to do these things well for him.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, Lord God Almighty, we are puny, weak human beings and we are so full of doubt and frailty, we wonder why you've called us to your service, Lord, but of course, you don't make a mistake in calling people who you want.

You've got a purpose for each of us, here at St. Mark's, because you're with us and you've given us your name.

Lord, bind us together in this mission, your mission, of saving the world from evil and rescuing those from bondage to sin and slavery and pain and regret.

Empower us, Lord, by your spirit. extend your kingdom through us. For Jesus' sake and glory. Amen.