

Our God Who Can Be Trusted

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[0 : 0 0] thanks Joe very much for reading please keep your Bibles open at that passage and as you do let me pray for us heavenly father we thank you that you have made yourself known in our world and we pray please that as we read your words about how you are going to make yourself known you will help us to trust you this we ask in Jesus name Amen I wonder how desperate your life has ever got to this stage the first church I worked in some time ago let it be said was pretty youthful actually quite like this one and the big human problems though sometimes significant were relatively few in that group now that was a while ago and times have changed over the last 30 years and youthful people do definitely have more to deal with now than they did back then but back then the massive problems were relatively few the second church the church

I worked in was significantly more normally age spread people were more established in life more settled it was quite a well to do area one of the things that surprised me most about that congregation was that the level of hurt in life and the level of difficulty associated with that was very much greater than in that younger congregation it looked like a much more sorted out group of people much more life experience but it turned out that a lot of people in their 40s and 50s were dealing with things so much harder than they'd imagined that anything than they'd ever have to deal with in life when they were in their 20s it turns out that the more of life you do in this fallen world the more hits you take the more scars you pick up the more disappointments you have to endure

I wonder how desperate your circumstances have got in life or will get sometimes things go badly and life becomes unexpectedly painful there is a particular painfulness I think associated with things going bad as a result of you doing good things I mean if you've done the wrong thing and things go badly well it's bad but it's kind of expected if you've been an innocent bystander in some disaster suffered collateral damage that's kind of worse isn't it but there's a particular painfulness when you suffer for doing the right thing the whistleblower who suffers massive career impairment for telling the truth the person who gets it in the neck for trying to right some sort of injustice and perhaps at the most extreme end of the spectrum when you suffer as a direct consequence of doing what you know

God wants you to do maybe some of you have experienced the distancing of old friends when you became a Christian or difficult relations with family members because of your faith or unexpected calamity when you embarked on some particular act of service and things went badly when you do right and things go bad as they do in life sometimes it's very easy to descend into fear or prayerlessness or cynicism I trusted God I had great hopes look what happened can I trust him next time I joyfully committed this thing to him in prayer and I know other people prayed as well and look what came of it can I face the possibility of another disappointment can I keep praying about things that really matter to me or will

I only pray for things that are a bit distant from me so that I won't have to endure disappointment if disaster comes on that slightly gloomy note the part of the Bible we're in this evening is one of the biggest moments in the Bible and it's one of those doing the right thing and things going very badly as a result moments it's a very difficult moment Exodus chapter five but at the same time it is a very wonderful moment and the two of those are intimately connected the difficulty and the wonder this talk is in two parts first the difficulty secondly the wonder let's look at the difficulty the difficulty is that at this point in the story hope turns to despair now the first few chapters of the book of Exodus chart the difficult situation faced by

[5 : 38] Jacob's descendants in Egypt once they were welcome guests in Egypt because Joseph Jacob's son rescued the nation from famine however they became so prosperous and so numerous that they began to be viewed as a threat by the pharaohs and by the time this book opens they are a big group brutally enslaved but God has not forgotten them just keep your finger in chapter five and flip back to the end of chapter two please look at chapter two verse twenty three God has not forgotten the Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God and God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham with Isaac and with Jacob so God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them generations before this

God had made a great promise to Abraham that his descendants would indeed be enslaved and then rescued and taken to the land that God had promised to Abraham and the next few chapters of Exodus chart how hope in that promise is kindled in the lives of these enslaved people and the high point of that growing confidence is at the end of chapter four so just flip on to the end of chapter four here verse 29 Moses and Aaron go to the leaders of the people of Israel and tell them all about what God is just about to do for them verse 29 Moses and Aaron brought together all the elders of the Israelites and Aaron told them everything the Lord had said to Moses he also performed the signs before the people he's been given miraculous signs to do they're very convincing and they believed and when they heard that the

Lord was concerned about them and had seen their misery they bowed down and worshipped this is the best news in 400 years who wouldn't rejoice the Lord is concerned about them he's going to rescue them now just to note that word L-O-R-D in capitals that is not a status that's not a job description it's a name the Hebrew word is Yahweh it's the word God uses for his personal identity Yahweh is concerned about them and they're very happy about this but in chapter 5 it all comes crashing down as God's promises and his encouraging words and the impressive signs collide with the reality of a very powerful human emperor Moses and Aaron go to Pharaoh they make a brave announcement chapter 5 verse 1 this is what Yahweh the God of Israel says let my people go so that they may hold a festival to me in the wilderness it's big and bold and brave and Pharaoh says don't be ridiculous

I've never heard of Yahweh and if you think I'm going to let you go you must be absolutely mad now in the next couple of weeks let me say we're going to meet quite a lot of Pharaoh and his behavior and his attitude and various phrases are used to describe him sometimes we're told he hardened his heart sometimes we're told his heart was hard sometimes we're told God hardened his heart and that of course raises all kinds of questions about whether Pharaoh is a person who's just a puppet does he make real decisions or not as you meet those questions it's really important to bear in mind that Pharaoh does exactly what you'd expect someone in his position to do now I don't know if you've ever thought about the problems inherent of being an emperor in the ancient world my guess is probably not but one of the big problems of being a really big emperor in the ancient world is that you know only too well there is somebody else in close proximity to you who wants to be emperor instead of you and the very worst thing you could possibly do in such circumstances is to do something as pathetically weak looking as letting your slave labor force go because you've been told that a

God whose name you've never heard has told them to tell you to let them go the visuals of that are really not good nobody in his circumstances would let them go and so he says who is Yahweh that I should obey his voice and let Israel go I don't know him and I'm not going to do that and instead of that he puts on a show of strength and everything gets worse for the Israelites the Egyptian slave drivers and the Israelite overseers are given instructions same output of bricks you'll have to gather your own raw materials that message verse 10 is passed on to the people unsurprisingly they cannot keep the production rate up the foremen get beaten for it they cry out to Pharaoh that word appealed in verse 15 is exactly the same word used at the end of chapter 2 when Israel cry out for help to God and he hears them but Pharaoh is not listening to cries for help and verse 19 look at verse 19 please all that the Israelite overseers have to look forward to is more beatings and they go to

[11 : 54] Moses and Aaron verse 21 and say may Yahweh look on you and judge you you have made us stink to Pharaoh and his officials and have put a sword in their hand to kill us do you see how hope has turned very quickly to despair and despair spreads look what Moses says to God verse 22 why Yahweh why have you brought trouble on this people is this why you sent me ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in your name he has brought trouble on this people and you have not rescued your people at all you told me to do it look what's happened what about your promise I did what you told me it was scary to do it actually there's just a little hint earlier on in the chapter that it was very scary to do that because the words that Moses and Aaron speak to Pharaoh are not quite the same words they were told to speak perhaps they've slightly softened the bluntness of the demand on Pharaoh but they did make the demand it was a scary thing to do what a disappointment this is it was looking so good at the end of chapter four we did what we were told and now look what's happened now folks there is a uniqueness about this particular situation which almost demands that hope should have disappeared we'll come on to that in a moment for now let me say that from time to time if you are a person who trusts

Jesus you will meet situations in your life or the lives of others you care for or your church life or just in the world around you you will meet situations in which the gap between what you know God has promised and what is actually happening is so wide that it is quite beyond you to see anything hopeful in the circumstances at some points you may wonder whether the thing you've bought into in being a Christian has any substance to it at all is this why you sent me is this what you were planning all along this difficulty have you been leading me up the garden path was I sensible to trust you is it safe to trust you again real believers are not immune from such thoughts if you're dealing with such thoughts at the moment well it might be helpful you might find it helpful to find someone who's also been through difficulty and talk to them about how they managed it but I think the most important thing you can do for reassurance is to see that circumstances like that are not alien to the Bible the Bible is reassuringly unembarrassed about the presence of episodes where people who trust

God express their total dismay at what's going on the difficulty of this moment is that hope has completely collapsed into despair this is the lowest point in the book of Exodus however there are good things going on here as well and let me turn to the wonder of this passage and the wonder here is not that God immediately changes things but that the human despair clears the way for God to demonstrate that he is the only hope for his people's security now I don't know if you're quite the same as me hopefully not but my problem is that in difficult situations while there's still a hope that I might be able to do something about the situation my focus is all on me and what

I might do to make things better and there are certain points in the Bible story where it is absolutely crucial for everyone to understand that the situation here is so unsortable that if it gets sorted out the only person who could possibly have sorted it out is nobody human but God on his own there are certain points where it's very important to know that humanly speaking hope has disappeared this is one of those moments now that everyone even Moses is despairing look what God says beginning of chapter 6 then the Lord said to Moses now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh because of my mighty hand he will let them go because of my mighty hand he will drive them out of his country now do you get the feel of this folks now that everybody's despairing now you've seen just how powerful

Pharaoh is just wait and see what I'm going to do now instead of locking you in he is going to throw you out and do you notice that just as in chapter 2 where we get a reminder of God's promises to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob exactly the same thing is done here look at verse 2 I am Yahweh I appeared to Abraham to Isaac and Jacob as God Almighty but by my name Yahweh I did not make myself fully known to them I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan where they resided as foreigners God made promises to Abraham and he is going to keep them despite the fact that things look totally hopeless more than that do you notice how prominent God's name Yahweh is right here in the story by my name

[18 : 23] Yahweh I did not make myself fully known to them and I don't think the point is that God's name was entirely unknown before this I think the point is that now something big and new is going to be revealed that had not been revealed in quite the same way before God tells Moses to make an announcement to the Israelites look at verse 6 this is where it starts therefore say to the Israelites I am Yahweh and I'm going to do things and then look right at the end of the announcement verse 8 it ends with I am Yahweh starts I am Yahweh it ends I am Yahweh and in between this is what the significance of that name is this is the being with that name and then look right at the middle of the announcement in verse 7 then you will know that I am

Yahweh your God when I do what I'm going to do see God is saying not merely I'm going to show you who I am but I'm going to show you who I your God am so what is God going to do well seven statements are made the first three are about liberation I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians I will free you from being slaves to them I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and mighty acts of judgment I am going to rescue you from slavery three times the next two are about relationship verse seven I will take you as my own people and I will be your God then you will know that I am Yahweh your God who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians God is going to make them his people who know who he is and the final two are about the future verse eight and I will bring you to the land

I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham to Isaac and to Jacob I'll give it to you as a possession I am Yahweh I'm going to take you to the promised land just as I promised way back to Abraham liberation relationship future possession of all that God's promised in doing these things God is going to show them who he is so the emotional turning point of this story is in 6 1 now now that everyone is despairing watch and learn who Yahweh is watch and learn who your God is now let me pull out a couple of reflections about the significance of this massively significant episode number one let me say something about knowing God then you will know says

Yahweh God has not left us to speculate about who he is I mentioned earlier on that there's a uniqueness about this event that almost demands that human hope should have disappeared to nothing and what that does is to clear the way for God to do something entirely unexpected completely unimaginable really something that marks him out as being beyond anything that any Israelite could ever dream of or hope for could you imagine at the end of chapter five that a few chapters on we'd be free impossible to imagine isn't it as human hopes and dreams turn to dust God steps onto the stage remember Pharaoh's comment in chapter five verse two who is

Yahweh that I should obey his voice I don't know him I won't let them go Pharaoh is going to find out exactly who Yahweh is so much so that he'll not just let these people go he will throw them out so folks can I say if you want to get a better understanding of who the real God is come back next week because the events that are just about to happen are going to demonstrate in massive detail who God is for everyone to know Yahweh is about to step out on the stage of history to make himself known for now for this week let me say that God has not left us to speculate about who he is I wonder if you've ever played hide and seek with small children if you haven't here's how it goes you hide your eyes

[23 : 49] I'm counting to 20 you might as well not bother counting because as they go and hide you can hear absolutely everything about what they're doing and where they are they're so noisy and you get to 20 and you stop counting and you say here I come where could they be could they be behind the curtains squeaks of delight from behind the sofa could they be under the table near explosion of joy from behind the sofa could they be I know behind the door no here we are they jump out from behind the sofa what one doesn't realize when one embarks on that game of so called hide and seek is that one isn't really playing hide and seek at all one is playing a subtly different game which if it had a name would be something like let's see how many times we can get dad to find us in the next 20 minutes before he's had enough of this game you would think sometimes the way people talk about

God that God was hiding that he needs to be searched for but God is not hiding he's really there and you don't have to look hard to find him in particular two great events both of them in history both of them recorded in the Bible tell us especially clearly what God is like one of them is the exodus that we are in now the great rescue of the Old Testament the other is in the coming of Jesus into the world the great rescuer of the New Testament two great events where God steps right out onto the stage of human history in front of everyone in unmistakable ways so that people cannot just know things about him but come to know him look at the way it's put in verse seven as the

Lord their God the Lord their God who rescues people to belong to him folks God is beyond what you could possibly imagine and he wants people to know him so he's acted in history to demonstrate exactly who he is you do not have to remain in doubt about him if you're just looking in from the Christian message from the outside this evening great to have you here keep coming and looking God is not hard to find first thing then about God making himself known and knowing him secondly about desperate situations we started off this evening talking about desperate situations and this is a desperate situation but this event was not recorded for the people in the story it's not a kind of diary entry looking back on something no this event was recorded for people later on and almost certainly the first people to hear this story read to them or to read it themselves were people in the next generation the children of those who had been rescued from

Egypt people who were on the brink of entering that promised land that God promised to Abraham people who faced themselves big challenges looking ahead great enemies fortified cities how are we ever going to possess this promised land how would this story this story have helped people like them a bit later on well I think in this way you see for them some of what was promised in chapter six has already happened God had already rescued them from Egypt they were now no longer in Egypt Pharaoh had already thrown the people out of his land as was promised here what is a story like this meant to do for people like that well this I think if God has already done this bit of what he promised what on earth is there to stop him doing all the rest do you see that if

God has already done this bit he could do all the things couldn't he with that in mind I'd like you to turn on to a New Testament example Luke chapter 24 we too can look back on things that God has already done turn to Luke chapter 24 page 1061 in your Bibles here we meet another situation where human hope has completely disappeared Jesus has just been crucified the tomb has been found empty no one really knows what's going on two blokes are wandering down the road in the countryside outside Jerusalem we meet them in verse 13 they are joined by a stranger who at first they do not recognize he asks them verse 17 what are you talking about their faces are downcast you mean you don't know no tell me verse 19 things concerning

[29 : 43] Jesus of Nazareth a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death and crucified him but we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel we had hoped we had such great hopes but you see at this point in the story hope is gone and yet that afternoon these two men discover something more amazing than anything they could possibly have imagined that the one they once hoped in has in fact already defeated death and is alive again all of us without exception are going to meet hopeless looking situations in life some of them may bring us very close to despair so here's a question for those despairing moments

Jesus has promised amazing things to those who follow him forgiveness of sins now resurrection from death and the end perfection of our characters renewal of the whole created order life as it's meant to be with him forever that is what he has promised so here's the question for those despairing moments can the one who has already defeated death just as he said he would can he be trusted to deliver all the things he's promised to those who trust him even if these present circumstances look hopeless can that one be trusted let's pray together just a moment to reflect on what we've heard and then

I'll lead us in prayer to do worker and to to thank you gracious God that you have not hidden yourself but made yourself known repeatedly in history and sometimes most strikingly in situations where hope had disappeared in the minds of your people and so we pray heavenly father that you will help us to pay attention to what you revealed about yourself so that we will know you and we pray also that those things we know about you will sustain us through life even at times of great disappointment we thank you that you've given us great evidences of your power to do what you've promised and as we wait for all that you have promised to be fulfilled please help us to keep trusting you we ask these things in Jesus name

Amen