

Intro – Series: Questions God Asks

Overheard an office conversation this week – which question do you think God asks most often today?

- One response: Do you love me? [We'll say more on this in a few weeks]
- Other response: Why don't you care for one another better?
 - o Obvious we aren't caring well for one another
 - Ever increasing tension in Middle East, Netanyahu here this week
 - ISIS kidnapping and killing Christians in Syria
 - Here in US, we commemorated the 50 year anniversary of Bloody Sunday in Selma just days after Justice Dept report on Ferguson showed us we still have a long way to march toward racial righteousness
- Jesus says the greatest commandments are Love God, love neighbor.
 - o These two questions are restating those commandments
 - o Do you love me? Why don't you care for one another better?

But before we can answer those questions, first need to answer more basic one

- Before we can love God and neighbor, need to know: Who is God?

Today's text from Exodus 5, the question not one God asks but one Pharaoh asks – Who is the Lord?

Scripture Processional – stand and sing

Exodus 5:1 Afterward Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, "Let my people go, so that they may celebrate a festival to me in the wilderness.' "

2 But Pharaoh said, "Who is the Lord, that I should heed him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and I will not let Israel go."

3 Then they said, "The God of the Hebrews has revealed himself to us; let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness to sacrifice to the Lord our God, or he will fall upon us with pestilence or sword."

4 But the king of Egypt said to them, "Moses and Aaron, why are you taking the people away from their work? Get to your labors!"

Who is the Lord? If you had to answer that question in one word, what would you say?

How does God answer it?

- Moses: who do I tell them sent me?
- God says I AM
 - o I am who I am
 - o I will be who I will be
 - o Who is the Lord? The Lord... is. Not very helpful!

Tough to describe who God is without describing what God does¹

- God hears
- God rules
- God saves

¹ On screen: 1. God hears 2. God rules 3. God saves

God hears

- Exodus intro – At end of Genesis, Joseph and God’s people are thriving in Egypt. Joseph 2nd in command, his family prospering. But then along comes a new Pharaoh who didn’t know Joseph.
- Hebrews were growing in number, Egyptians became afraid – enslaved them
- Terrible conditions, people oppressed and suffering
- **Exodus 1:13-14**² The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites, 14 and made their lives bitter with hard service in mortar and brick and in every kind of field labor. They were ruthless in all the tasks they imposed on them.
- Israel cries out, God hears
- **Exodus 3:7-8**³ God said to Moses, “I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I **have heard their cry**... Indeed, I know their sufferings, 8 and **I have come down to deliver them.**”
- God says to tell Pharaoh, “Let my people go”
 - o Pharaoh says – Who is the Lord? Why should I listen to him? Get back to work!
- Who is the Lord? One who hears

God rules

- Pharaoh – Who is the Lord? Never heard of him.
 - o Can’t really blame Pharaoh. Egyptians had lots of gods. For everything. Even Pharaoh himself was considered a god.
- This text is a prelude to the plagues – it’s a contest about who’s in control
- Through plagues God demonstrates power over all creation – animals, weather, even death
 - o But they were even more personal to the Egyptians. (From Disciple 2 book, p73)
 - Frogs – Egyptian god, symbol of regeneration
 - Gnats/flyies – seen as agents of Egyptian gods – Yet YAWEH commands them
 - Cattle – sacred animals, affront to Egyptian religion
 - Hail – confronted Egyptian god of sky
 - Darkness – challenged Ra, Egyptian sun god
 - Death of first born – YAHWEH has power over life itself
 - o God is in control. Not Pharaoh. God rules.
- Good reminder for us that no matter how bleak our circumstances, God in control. We’re not.
- Who is the Lord? One who rules.

God saves

- We know the end of the story – God delivers his people from oppression
 - o After all plagues, Pharaoh listens and lets them go. Then changes mind and pursues.
 - o But God, with a mighty hand and outstretched arm
 - Made a way out of no way
 - parted Red Sea, led Israel to safety
 - o Pharaoh and entire army swallowed up by sea
 - o God’s ultimate power on display for all to see
 - o Triumph over oppression, defeat of Pharaoh, God all powerful
 - o Defining moment of the bible up to this point
 - focal point of entire Jewish tradition – everything hinges on Exodus

² On screen Exodus 1:13-14

³ Ex 3:7-8 on screen please

- Who is the Lord?
 - o One who sets oppressed people free.
 - o One who saves.

God's liberation of slaves has been source of hope for many years.

- Prophet Isaiah used Exodus to preach "Second Exodus" 700 years later
 - o God will bring you out of Babylonian oppression.
- Protestant Reformers used this to oppose Rome.
- Puritans escaping from England to New England preached Exodus.
- Latin American priests have long preached this in poor communities.
- United States – addressing racial conflicts in 1960s. MLK preached on Exodus as paradigm for not just delivering people out of slavery but bringing them to freedom of Promised Land

God's salvation is for a purpose

- God's salvation is all grace, but God accomplishes it for a reason and expects a response from us
- Refrain throughout Exodus⁴ - this is why God saves:
 - o So that you will know the Lord
 - o So that you may worship me
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- God delivers Israel out of slavery – but not done with them
 - o Forms and shapes in desert for 40 years
 - o Provides manna, water, protection, victory over enemies
 - o Gives law to show how to live as God's people
 - o Delivers into Promised Land – place of human flourishing

God goes one step further – establishes covenant

- I will be your God and you will be my people
- Here's the kind of God I will be:
 - o Exodus 34 – Gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love
 - o No matter what you do, I will not leave you, I will always love and pursue you

Goes ok for a time but we're humans, sinners

- Israel falls away, forgets the Lord, breaks covenant
- Parents might relate to God's response – have you ever said, "Don't make me come down there!"
- God says forget the cloud and pillar of smoke, I'm going down myself – sends Jesus

Jesus hears – comes down to save

- From last of prophets, God's people cry out how long?
- 400 years between last of the prophets and appearance of Jesus
 - o In the fullness of time God sent his son
- Jesus leaves glory of heaven for misery of earth
- Jesus hears his people and comes down

⁴ On screen: 1. So you will know the Lord 2. So you may worship the Lord

Jesus rules – God’s kingdom inaugurated through Jesus

- Kingdom where poor are rich, weak made strong, captives set free, blind given sight, sick healed
- Jesus, Word of God, present in beginning, then made flesh on earth
- Jesus demonstrated power over all creation (that he made)
 - o over chemistry – water to wine
 - o over physics – walking on water, commanding wind and waves
 - o over matter – bread and fish multiplied
 - o over physiology – blindness, sickness and disease, even death
- Jesus Rules
 - o not with destructive plagues but with life giving signs of a new kingdom, new way of living, new creation

Jesus saves – through the cross, power even over death

- Our hope is built on resurrection
- Because he lives we will too, even though we die

Jesus hears, rules, saves

For same purpose as in Exodus

- That you may know the Lord
- That you may worship
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- God takes covenant relationship one step closer in Jesus
 - o God does everything in God’s power to make us know him

Who is the Lord? God’s answers:

- OT:
 - o I AM
 - o Gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love
- NT: Jesus’ I AM statements
 - o For hungry – I AM the bread of life
 - o For lost – I AM the way, truth, life
 - o For heartbroken with grief, those mourning death – I AM resurrection and life

Questions for us:

Knowing that Jesus hears

- When find yourself in trouble, need of guidance, seeking help/answers
 - o To whom are you crying out?

Knowing that Jesus rules

- When things feel out of control, when feel overwhelmed/burdened
 - o To whom do you give control of your life?

Knowing that Jesus saves

- When you’re feeling unsettled, insecure, or even enslaved/oppressed
 - o In whom do you trust?

Who is the Lord?

- Chris Tomlin wrote a song based on scripture that answers this question beautifully
- I’ll read it and you respond with me

Chris Tomlin: This is Our God

A refuge for the poor
A shelter from the storm
This is our God

He will wipe away your tears
And return your wasted years
This is our God

So call upon His name, He is mighty to save, This is our God.

A father to the orphan
A healer to the broken [say this next line with me]
This is our God

He brings peace to our madness
And comfort in our sadness
This is our God

A fountain for the thirsty
A lover for the lonely
This is our God

He brings glory to the humble
And crowns for the faithful
This is our God

So call upon His name, He is mighty to save, **This is our God.**

Who is the Lord? This is our God. Worship him! Amen.