



“O LORD, WHY?”

Exodus 5-6

© Fellowship Bible Church, Roswell, Georgia

Monty Watson

July 20, 2008

“O LORD, WHY?”
Exodus 5-6

If you could ask God one question, what would you ask? Everyone has thought about that before, that one question with the elusive answer which we would like to ask God. Some elementary school children were asked the same thing and given the assignment to write a letter asking God anything they wanted to ask. Here are the kids’ questions.

- Christopher – “Dear God, Are you really invisible or is it just a trick?”
- Kaitlyn – “Dear God, Did you mean for the giraffe to look like that or was it an accident?”
- Neil – “Dear God, I went to a wedding and they kissed in church. Is that OK?”
- Jake – “Dear God, Why did you make the rule that kids have to take out the trash?”
- Freddie – “Dear God, My grandpa said you were around when he was a little boy. How far back do you go?”
- Anna – “Dear God, Is it true my dad won’t go to heaven if he uses his golf words in the house?”
- Megan – “Dear God, I read your book and I like it. I would like to write a book some day. Where do you get your ideas?”
- Jocelyn – “Dear God, My cat got run over by a car. If you made it happen will you tell me why?”

Children aren’t the only ones with questions for God. All of us have questions we’d like to ask because life doesn’t always make sense for us either. And because life doesn’t always make sense, we find ourselves asking “Why Lord?”

- If you’ve prayed for the healing of a loved one and healing did not come, you’ve asked “Why Lord?”
- If you’ve prayed for God to salvage your marriage only to have things get worse, you’ve asked “Why Lord?”
- If you’ve tried to make a living and provide for your family and have ever been laid off, you’ve asked “Why Lord?”
- If your medical report has ever come back with the dreaded word cancer, you’ve asked “Why Lord?”
- We even ask “Why Lord?” when the AC goes out and when we get a bad haircut.

We ask “Why?” when life doesn’t make sense. We ask “Why?” when God doesn’t make sense. And we ask “Why?” when God doesn’t do what we expect. And that’s the issue. When God doesn’t make sense and when God doesn’t do what we expect, we are prone to doubt.

Doubt is more a part of the Christian life than any of us would like to admit. It’s there. We fear saying anything like that because we don’t want to sound disrespectful. But to be honest, God is hard to figure out sometimes. We know God can do anything, we’re just not sure what He’s going to. And when we add up all our questions and all our disappointments, we end up with a severe cause of doubt. After a while, we wonder if we can truly rely on God and our crippled faith says, “Not so fast this time.”

In this series *Moses: Made by God*, we are studying the events which shaped Moses’ life to learn how God wants to shape our lives. And one of things God is shaping in us is our faith, our ability and our willingness to trust Him even when we don’t understand.

For 430 years, the Hebrews suffered as slaves at the cruel hand of the Egyptians. The Lord saw their suffering and heard their cries. And the Lord chose to do something through Moses. Moses was 80 years old; 40 years removed from being a prince of Egypt with a room in Pharaoh's palace, and now he is just a shepherd in Midian. But he was about to become an instrument in the hand of God.

From Exodus 1-2 we learned that just as God sovereignly protected Moses as a baby in a basket, God has a sovereign plan for each of our lives. From Exodus 3-4 we learned that just as Moses was called by God at the burning bush, so each of us has been called by God as well. This morning we are going to look at Exodus 5-6. Just as Moses said, "O Lord, why?" there will be times when each of us will ask "Why?" and when we will not understand what God is doing.

Moses was made by God, shaped by God, and so are we. And the ongoing lesson God is trying to teach us is trust. Trust is the answer to all of our "Why?" questions. ***Trust is believing God when we cannot see and when we do not understand.***

UNMET EXPECTATIONS OF GOD

As we learn to trust God, ***nothing is more confusing than our unmet expectations of God.*** Nothing was more confusing to Moses than the day Pharaoh decreed that the Hebrews make bricks without straw. That was the day things moved from bad to worse for the Hebrews.

The ever reluctant Moses obeyed God and dared to confront Pharaoh. "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'Let my people go' " (Exodus 5:1, NLT). Moses expected Pharaoh to acquiesce and immediately release the Hebrews. But it didn't happen. Instead, Pharaoh scoffed at Moses. "Who is the Lord? Why should I listen to him and let Israel go? I don't know the Lord, and I will not let Israel go" (Exodus 5:2, NLT). Pharaoh was so annoyed with Moses that ...

⁶That same day Pharaoh sent this order to the Egyptian slave drivers and the Israelite foremen: ⁷"Do not supply any more straw for making bricks. Make the people get it themselves! ⁸But still require them to make the same number of bricks as before. Don't reduce the quota. They are lazy. That's why they are crying out, 'Let us go and offer sacrifices to our God.' ⁹Load them down with more work. Make them sweat!" ... ¹²So the people scattered throughout the land of Egypt in search of stubble to use as straw. (Exodus 5:6-9, 12, NLT).

When the Hebrews were forced to gather straw from the fields it doubled their work. And when they complained, their taskmasters whipped them and demanded they meet the daily quota. So, thanks to Moses, life for the Hebrews went from bad to worse. The Egyptians ridiculed him and his own people blamed him.

Then Moses complained to the Lord, "***O Lord, why*** have you done evil to this people? Why did you ever send me? 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" (Exodus 5:22-23, ESV).

God did not do what Moses expected, and nothing is more confusing than our unmet expectations of God. Moses "was surprised, almost traumatized, by his failure."¹

The Hebrews blamed Moses, but Moses blamed God. “Why have *you done evil* to this people?” The word “evil” means to harm, to afflict, to break into pieces, to bruise. Moses accused God of abusing His own children!

And “Why did you ever send me?” “If You knew I’d fail, then why did you ever send me?” “I came to Pharaoh to speak *in your name*.” To invoke God’s name is to invoke God’s presence. Moses used God’s name, but God did not show up, at least not the way Moses expected. Moses went out on a limb for God, and God let Pharaoh cut the limb down. “I represented You Lord. I did what You told me to do. I did it in Your name. I thought we had a deal.” Moses was so confused. “O Lord, why?”

But the Lord had a lesson for Moses to learn. What Moses needed to learn at that moment is the same thing we need to learn during our moments of confusion and doubt. Trust is believing God when we cannot see and when we do not understand. Trust is believing God when the circumstances don’t make sense and when God doesn’t make sense. Trust is believing when we don’t understand what God is doing.

THE QUESTION “WHY?”

“O Lord, why?” As we learn to trust, there is *nothing is more revealing than the question “Why?”* Asking “Why?” reveals our feelings, it reveals our theology, it reveals our faith or lack thereof, it reveals our values and our priorities. It reveals when we think we’ve been treated unfairly by God. Asking “Why?” is “instinctive to us when trouble comes and when things do not turn out as expected.”² When we demand that God explain Himself to us, it exposes our truest selves.

Instead of judging anyone for feeling this way, I want to validate the reality of frustrated faith. It’s a very real part of the Christian life.

James Dobson writes about it and may describe what you’re going through. “A thousand unanswered questions have been recycling in your mind—most of them beginning with ‘*Why?*’ You want desperately to trust the Father and believe in his grace and goodness. But deep inside, you’re held captive by a sense of betrayal and abandonment.”³

Gordon MacDonald writes about it and validates our state of confusion. “Rather than feel blessed, (we) feel let down, disappointed, and deflated.”⁴

Philip Yancey writes about it and summarizes the sentiments of many Christians. “I have no trouble believing God is good. My question is more, What good is he? . . . I cry out to God for help, and it’s hard to know just how he answers. Really, what can we count on God for?”⁵

Larry Crabb writes about it and dares to say aloud what many are thinking. “When we need (God) the most, when we scream the loudest for Him to reveal Himself, He seems to pull away. When we most long to sense His presence, we instead feel His absence.”⁶

And Moses wrote about it because he lived it. In Moses’ “O Lord, why?” you can hear him complaining to God. “I did my part God, why didn’t You do Your part? . . . I did the right thing. I did

what You said. Why didn't You back me up? ... I thought you promised.... I thought you cared about me?"

When life goes from bad to worse, the soul cries out "O Lord, why?" Such a cry has a tone of desperation. It also has the tone of accusation. Asking "Why?" reveals our surprise and our disappointment, our sense of betrayal and even anger with God. When we ask "Why?" it's usually because we feel like we've been treated unfairly by God or when God did not do what we expected.

If you've ever felt this way you're in good company. David knew all too well about frustrated faith. "O Lord, why do you stand so far away? Why do you hide when I am in trouble?" (Psalm 10:1, NLT). "O Lord, how long will you forget me? Forever? How long will you look the other way?" (Psalm 13:1, NLT). David prayed to the Lord, "Save me, O God, for the waters have threatened my life ... a flood overflows me. I am weary with my crying; my throat is parched; my eyes fail while I wait for my God" (Psalm 69:1-3). Do you hear that? "My throat is parched." David is saying, "Lord, I'm hoarse from praying. I can't even speak anymore. Where are You?"

David was not pointing his finger in God's face, but rather looking up into his father's eyes like a little boy. "Why do you hold back your hand, your right hand? Take it from the folds of your garment" (Psalm 74:11, NIV). Do you hear David's confusion? "God, why are You standing there with Your hands in Your pockets?"

I cite David so that we'll know we're not alone in this, to know that it's okay to ask God questions. It's okay to be honest with God and even complain to God. Along with David, the Bible is filled with the questions, complaints, and cries of God's people. But here is the lesson. When we are confused and ask "Why?" trust is believing God when we cannot see and when we do not understand.

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

As we learn to trust, we will come to see that ***nothing is more perplexing and reassuring than the sovereignty of God.*** It's been true since the beginning of time, "God moves in mysterious ways." How and when God acts is mysterious and perplexing, but knowing that He will act is so comforting and reassuring.

What did God say when Moses' said, "O Lord, why"?

"I am the Lord" (Exodus 6:2, ESV). He said the same thing He said at the burning bush. "I AM." "I am the Lord." The Lord was saying, "I am sovereign and I have a purpose." "I AM will be with you and I AM will be enough."

(2) The Lord restated the covenant He had made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. "I established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan" (Exodus 6:4, ESV). The Lord reminded Moses, "I made a covenant and I will keep my promise." Years after Israel took possession of the Promised Land, Joshua praised his Lord. "Not one of the good promises which the Lord had made to the house of Israel failed; all came to pass" (Joshua 21:45).

(3) When Moses said, “O Lord, why?” the Lord said, “I have heard the groaning of the people of Israel” (Exodus 6:5, ESV). The Lord wanted to reassure Moses. “I have heard their cries and I know their pain.”

At the burning bush, the Lord said, “I Am Who I Am.” With Moses’ drowning in confusion and doubt, the Lord repeats that first person pronoun sixteen times in chapter 6.

“I am the Lord ... I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob ... I reaffirmed my covenant ... I have heard ... I am well aware ... I am the Lord ... I will free you ... I will rescue you ... I will redeem you ... I will claim you ... I will be your God ... I am the Lord ... I will bring you into the land ... I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob ... I will give it to you ... I am the Lord!” (Exodus 6:2-8, NLT).

Trust is based upon the character of God. If we believe God to be good, to be just, and to be able, then we can trust Him. “I AM will be with you and I AM will be enough.” That is God’s answer to our “Why?” questions.

THE DECISION TO TRUST

Nothing is more crucial than the decision to trust God. And it’s not just a one-time decision, it’s a daily decision, a decision we’ve got to stick to even if things move from bad to worse.

The Lord said to Moses, “I know that in your eyes things have gone from bad to worse. But I still want you to trust Me.” The Lord said, “Go back to Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, and tell him to let the people of Israel leave his country.” “But Lord!” Moses objected. “My own people won’t listen to me anymore. How can I expect Pharaoh to listen?” (Exodus 6:11-12, NLT).⁷

Moses was wrestling with God and struggling so much with doubt. We’re going to wrestle and struggle too. That’s why nothing is more crucial than the decision to trust God; to make up our minds, to resolve in our hearts, and to choose to trust when we cannot see and when we do not understand.

When a father begged Jesus to heal his daughter he admitted, “I do believe” – “I want to believe” – “help my unbelief” (Mark 9:24, NAS). Of course our faith is incomplete. We progress in faith just like an toddler learning to walk, one step at a time. We take a step and fall down. We take two steps and fall down. We take three steps and fall down. And so on until we learn to walk confidently with God.

Paul was right about our present experience. “For now we see in a mirror dimly” and only “know in part” (1 Corinthians 13:12, NAS). And because we do, “we walk by faith” and “not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7, NAS). And as Jesus said to His disciples, He says to us. “You don’t understand now what I am doing, but someday you will” (John 13:7, NLT).

Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers, accused of sexual misconduct by Potiphar’s wife, and forgotten in an Egyptian prison. But God had a plan. Joseph became an interpreter of Pharaoh’s dreams and second in power only to Pharaoh himself. During those years Joseph had learned how to trust God, so that when he encountered his brothers he was able to say, “You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good” (Genesis 50:20, NLT).

Job was blameless and upright before God. He was also very rich, with a large family and with many flocks. In one day, his entire family was killed and his entire fortune raided by warring tribes. But because Job had learned how to trust God in years past, he was able to say, “Though he slay me, I will hope in him” (Job 13:15, ESV).

Jeremiah is called the “weeping prophet” because nothing ever turned out like he hoped. Jeremiah preached faithfully for 40 years and no one listened. He was mocked, beaten, placed in stocks, and left for dead in a well. Jeremiah felt abandoned by God and wished he’d never been born. And yet, deeper inside of him he had learned to trust God and was able to say, “The Lord’s lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness” (Lamentations 3:20-23).

And then there’s Jesus. Humbly born in Bethlehem, God laying in a manger. So willing to do His Father’s will, but doing His Father’s will meant crucifixion. Upon a cross Jesus cried out in pain and confusion, “My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Matthew 27:46). When Jesus became sin for us His Father turned away refused to look at Him. And yet, even while feeling abandoned by His Father and while hanging on the cross, Jesus was able to say, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (Luke 23:46, NIV). In other words, “My life is in your hands.” That’s what trust says.

Joseph and Job and Jeremiah and Jesus all suffered. All four were obedient and they suffered greatly for it. Yet, all four had learned to trust God. That’s what Moses was learning and that’s what we’re learning.

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight” (Proverbs 3:5-6, NAS). Trust when you cannot see and when you do not understand!

Anne Graham Lotz has written a little book simply entitled *Why?* I urge you to read this book. If you don’t need it now, you will. Anne writes, “We can trust the One who holds all the answers to that jarring question *Why?*”⁸ She urges us ...

When there are no answers to your questions ...
Trust Him when you don’t understand.
Trust His heart.
Trust His purpose.
Trust Him when it is your heart that’s broken.
Trust His goodness.
Trust Him beyond the grave.
Trust Him to know best.
Trust His plan to be bigger than yours.
Trust Him to keep His Word.
Trust Him to be on time.
Trust Him to be enough.
Trust Him to set you free.
Trust Him—and Him alone!⁹

CONCLUSION

I cannot remove your pain, I cannot change your circumstances, and I cannot answer your questions. But I can take you to the cross, because the cross is the answer for all our “Why?” questions. I’m not being religious or flippant. The cross is the only relevant answer. When we lay our “Why?” questions at the cross, we realize that we do not need any other answer.¹⁰

How can I say that?

Because the cross reminds us that the Father knows pain too, and that He knows our pain. The cross reminds us that we live in a fallen world. Tragedies, accidents, crimes, and horrors of all kinds exist in our world and these things touch our lives. The cross was needed to reverse the corruption of this world. The cross reminds us how much God loves us, and just how far He was willing to go to make sure we spend eternity with Him. The cross reminds us that God has a purpose, even a purpose in suffering. The cross reminds us that all suffering is temporary, that victory will come, and that after death comes resurrection.

So, will you choose to trust? To believe God when you cannot see and when you do not understand.

NOTES

1. J. A. Motyer, *The Message of Exodus*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), page 99.
2. *Ibid.*, page 101.
3. James Dobson, *When God Doesn't Make Sense* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1993), page 232.
4. Gordon MacDonald, *The Life God Blesses* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1994), page xiv.
5. Philip Yancey, *Reaching for the Invisible God*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), page 21.
6. Larry Crabb, *Shattered Dreams: God's Unexpected Pathway to Joy* (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press, 2001), page 99.
7. Moses repeats his reluctance in Exodus 6:30.
8. Anne Graham Lotz, *Why? Trusting God When You Don't Understand* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2004), page xi.
9. *Ibid.*, pages 16-17.
10. *Ibid.*, page xvii. Anne's mother Ruth Bell Graham made this resolution with all her “whys.”

I lay my “whys?”
before Your cross
in worship kneeling,
my mind beyond all hope,
my heart beyond all feeling;
and worshiping,
realize that I
in knowing You,
don't need a “why?”