

What is Jesus doing now?

Part 5 – Jesus rescues us from our empty gods

For the first time ever, in **Exodus 3:14**, Christ calls himself “**I AM.**” Why that name? To show the Israelites there really is a “Being” out there who is literally and eternally “being.” He’s never stopped “being” in the past, never stops “being” in the present, and will never stop “being” in the future. He’s an eternal Being who’s eternally being.

And who doesn’t dream of such a Being in existence, who says to us, like he said to the Israelites, “I’ve always been there for you, every second of your life. I know all about you, what you’ve been through, and I’ve watched you as you struggled through life thinking you were all on your own. But you weren’t on your own, because I was there with you. I’m here with you right now too, ready and willing to help you with more power than you can imagine, and certainly more power than anything the world has to offer. And if you’re worrying about what the future holds - don’t - because I’ll be there with you in whatever happens in your future as well.”

Wouldn’t it be great to know that such a Being exists who has been, is and will be present with us in the same way he was with Israel? But that’s exactly how David understood God to be, **Psalm 118:6**, when he wrote, “**The Lord IS with me.**” The Lord, the great eternal “I AM,” was always with him. But that’s what Jesus told Moses too, in **Exodus 3:15** (last part of the verse), “**This is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation.**” Jesus would always be “I AM” to them, “**the same yesterday, today and forever,**” as **Hebrews 13:8** says.

He was certainly with them “yesterday,” as Christ himself said back in **Exodus 3:16** (last part of the verse), “**I have watched over you and have seen what has been done to you in Egypt.**” Never in the past were his eyes off them. He was certainly with them “today” as well, **verse 17** - “**And I have promised to bring you up out of your misery in Egypt.**” He was right there in the moment with them ready and willing to help. And he’d be with them in the future too, **verse 20** - “**So I will stretch out my hand and strike the Egyptians with all the wonders that I will perform among them. After that, he will let you go.**” Past, present and future, Jesus was, is and would always be there for them.

Which is all very nice to hear, but Moses was quick to realize a problem, **Exodus 4:1**, because he comes back with, YES, BUT, “**What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, ‘The Lord did not appear to you?’**” Moses has a pretty good inkling how the Israelites are going to react if he tells them, “Me and the Lord were talking together recently and the Lord himself told me to tell you what I’m about to say.” Oh, really?

But this is precisely what the Lord wants Moses to do, **Exodus 3:15** - "Say to the Israelites, 'The Lord, the God of your fathers (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) has **sent me to you,**" and in **verse 16**, "The Lord ... **appeared to me and said.**"

And talk about Jesus Christ being the same yesterday, today and forever, because he says the same thing to Paul in **Acts 26:16**. First he talks to Paul personally, just as he did with Moses, and then he tells Paul to "get up and stand on your feet. **I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and a witness for what you have seen of me and what I will show you (of me).**"

So, first of all, Christ confronts Paul and Moses personally - through a burning bush with Moses and a blinding light with Paul. He introduces himself by name, as "I AM" to Moses and "I am Jesus" to Paul in **verse 15**. He then informs each of them that he's appointed them to go to a group of people - the Israelites in Moses' case and the Gentiles in Paul's case - and say that the Lord Jesus himself appeared to them (Moses and Paul), and it's he who's now sending them to the people. Christ makes it very clear, then, what he's doing.

But WHY is Jesus sending Moses and Paul? It's to pass on a message. Through Moses the message was "to bring you up out of your misery in Egypt" (Exodus 3:17), and through Paul the message was **Acts 26:18**, "to open (people's) eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me."

It's a wonderful message. The great Lord Jesus himself is telling people he's going to rescue them from their misery. Moses, however, has his doubts about this working, because who's going to believe any of it from someone like himself who says the Lord appeared to him in person?

Not a problem, Christ replies in **Exodus 4**, because he's got all kinds of tricks up his sleeve for getting people's attention and enabling them to believe, like the "staff into a snake" trick in verses 2-4, Moses' hand turning leprous in verses 6-7, and turning Nile River water into blood in verse 9. And it all worked perfectly, **verse 31**, because when the Israelites saw the miracles "they **believed,**" and when they "heard that the Lord was concerned about them and had seen their misery, they **bowed down and worshipped.**"

The same thing happened to Paul in Iconium in **Acts 14:3**, when he and Barnabas were "speaking boldly for the Lord." The Lord then "confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders," which were so impressive that the people in Lystra, **verse 11**, thought "The gods have come down to us in human form!" So Jesus has a way of getting people's attention and belief, but that's because, **Acts 26:18** (as we read above), it's only "by faith in me (Christ)" that escape from the misery of Egypt and Satan is possible.

And this is the great lesson that Israel is about to learn. It's the same great lesson **we** learn as Christians too, because in **1 Corinthians 10:6**, all these things that happened to Israel "occurred as examples, to keep US from setting OUR hearts on evil things as they did." Evil can take us captive just as easily as it did the Israelites, but Christ has given us the key in the story of Israel as to how we escape it. And what is that key? **Verse 13**, that "God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, HE will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."

The one great lesson that all humanity needs to learn from the story of Israel is that God can be trusted. But **the reason** we need to know that is because it's ONLY by trusting him that our hearts are not sucked in by evil. And it's only by believing he's the great "I AM" - meaning he's always with us no matter what situation we find ourselves in - that our hearts won't be "hardened by sin's deceitfulness."

But HOW does Christ go about getting that lesson across? Well, so far in the story of Israel, it's by Christ appearing to Moses, telling Moses who he is and what he's going to do for the Israelites because he's concerned for them. And to kickstart their belief in him, he does a few miracles through Moses - and the Israelite elders are convinced.

So far, so good; lots of belief and worship from the Israelites. But the story doesn't end there, does it? Christ now wants Moses and Aaron to go to Pharaoh, **Exodus 5:1**, and tell him, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'Let my people go, so that they may hold a festival to me in the desert.'" At which point, evil, in the form of Pharaoh, replies in **verse 2**, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord and I will not let Israel go."

There is a terrible lesson we all have to learn about evil: It has no respect for God, and it has no interest in us. All it cares about is controlling people, and once it's got a hold of us it has no intention of letting us go. Any attempt at dislodging it always ends up in a fight. It "wages war in our minds," as Paul phrased it, to make us "prisoners of the law of sin" (Romans 7:21-23). No way would evil let the Israelites free, therefore, to "hold a festival" to God.

It was an awful shock for the Israelites, then, when instead of Christ immediately rescuing them from their misery, things got worse. But there was another lesson they had to learn, this time about themselves, because when Pharaoh increased their suffering, the reaction from the Israelites to Moses was swift and brutal, **verse 21** - "May the Lord took upon you and judge you! You have made us a stench to Pharaoh and his servants and have put a sword in their hand to kill us."

How revealing. As soon as things took a turn for the worse, out the window went all that lovely belief and worship they had back in chapter 4, and in came fear and accusation instead.

And what did that do to them? It hardened their hearts to the point they even called upon the Lord to condemn the very people he'd sent to rescue them. But this is what evil does. It uses circumstances to get us focused on ourselves, and from there it creates a feeling of dissatisfaction that festers and grows into outright condemnation. Was this what happened to Lucifer, one wonders, where he too focused on himself - comparing himself to God perhaps - which also led to feelings of dissatisfaction with his own position and circumstances, which in turn gave him reason to find fault with God and branch out on his own?

Whatever happened, we know from the story of Israel that evil is like a lion and we are like gazelles. Like a lion, evil creeps through the undergrowth seeking whom it may devour (or crouches at the door desiring to have us, Genesis 4:7), and we are easy prey. And when evil pounces, it goes for the kill - the "kill" being the death of our relationship with God. And it doesn't take much for that to happen. Threaten us with circumstances where things don't look good for us in the future and we're into panic mode and holding God responsible.

So was Moses, because he too was having trouble understanding what Christ was up to, **Exodus 5:22**. "O Lord," he cries - or "For God's sake" as we might say today - "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 upon this people, and you have not rescued your people at all."

There's an edge to Moses' voice here, because God's supposed to have solved the problem and eased the pain, but he hasn't done it. It's like the person who says, "I prayed for help but nothing happened." In other words, God, "Where were you? We spoke in your name (or prayed in Jesus' name) but all we got was **more** trouble, not less." And how many people's hearts harden at that point, when God doesn't come through with the goods?

But what Moses didn't see at this point in time was the two lessons we need to learn for our stony cold hearts to soften into belief and worship - the first lesson being the extent of evil and the damage it has done. Moses has no clue yet as to what it takes to rescue people from the wreckage of sin's deceitfulness that's held all humanity captive to the law of sin and hardened our hearts against God. He has no idea, therefore, that Christ's ultimate aim in all that he's doing with Israel is to crush the power of evil in their lives so that their hearts are **never** hardened by evil again.

And Moses doesn't yet realize the *other* lesson we humans need to learn either, as to how quickly we turn against God when things don't turn out as we expected. It doesn't take much to sever our relationship with God. We give up on him ever so easily. We are horribly weak when it comes to trust.

But not to worry because the story of Israel tells us how Christ is solving both problems (the power of evil and our lack of trust) in **Exodus 6:6-7** when he says to Moses: “Therefore, say to the Israelites: ‘I am the Lord and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. **I will free you** from being slaves to them and will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then **you will know that I am the Lord your God**, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians.’”

Two things Christ is going to do for them: First, he’s going to free them from evil’s grip. Second, he’s going to help them get to know him. Put the two together and the result will be trust, a lovely relationship with God that believes God is fully aware of what we’re going through and he’s concerned enough to be doing something about it. It’s a relationship that isn’t affected by circumstances turning sour, either. It doesn’t depend on everything going right. It doesn’t even care what happens. All it cares about is God is real and he is faithful.

But for Israel to get to that point, Christ has got some serious convincing to do first, because the Israelites are in sad shape. They’ve heard Christ himself telling them through Moses what he’s going to do for them but, **verse 9**, “they did not listen to him because of their discouragement and cruel bondage.”

And how many people aren’t the least bit interested in God today for exactly the same reasons? They look at life in this world, just as the Israelites looked at their lives in Egypt, and all they see is endless suffering that God isn’t doing anything about. Why isn’t he solving our problems? Why doesn’t he step in and crush evil dictators and stop all the horrible abuse going on? We expect better from God. He’s supposed to be concerned for us, and this is how he shows it?

So what does Christ do to get our eyes off our circumstances and onto him? Well, in Israel’s case he deliberately made their circumstances even worse, **Exodus 7:3-4** - “**But I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and though I multiply my miraculous signs and wonders in Egypt, he will not listen to you.**” Christ is going to make sure that Pharaoh resists to the bitter end. Now what on earth would be his purpose in doing that?

Skip five chapters and we find out, in **Exodus 12:12**, when Christ says, “**I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn - both men and animals - and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt; I am the Lord.**” In all ten plagues Christ takes a potshot at an Egyptian god - the Nile god, the frog god, the cow, flea, fly, locust and healing gods, the god of the weather, god of the sun and finally Pharaoh himself, who was also a god. Christ made a mockery of every one of the gods the Egyptians trusted in. And each time Christ hardened Pharaoh’s heart - **another** god took a hit, so that eventually there were no gods left in Egypt that had the power to protect them.

The next step Christ took in building the Israelites' trust in him, therefore, was to prove how powerless all other gods are. That takes some doing, though, because the gods look good, they make sense - like the money god today. Money brings security, happiness, prestige, and even love. It eases stress, anxiety and fears about the future. The money god works.

But Christ has his ways of mocking the gods we so revere and depend on for our happiness, safety, fulfillment and success. History, for instance, is littered with people who lived for money but their lives were miserable. And today the economy is lifted up as the great god we all worship, but up pops yet another nation crippled by debt and another recession fuelled by stupidity and greed. Natural disasters mock our gods too. They're just like the plagues in Egypt, where every god we hold dear and depend on gets swept away into oblivion when an earthquake, tsunami or tornado strikes.

The lesson being, that our gods are no gods at all. Our gods can't save us when the chips are down. Our gods don't care when our home, job and life savings are wiped out. Our gods can't control human greed and stupidity. Our gods have no power or concern for us at all. But that's how deceitful sin is; it gets us trusting in empty gods. To break through that wall of deceit, therefore, Christ destroys the credibility of the world's gods before our very eyes, just as he did in Egypt.

But that still isn't enough to free us from the grip of evil, as we learn from the story of Israel, because evil hangs on to the bitter end. So, **Exodus 13:15**, "[When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the Lord killed every firstborn in Egypt, both man and animal.](#)" And that's when evil finally released its grip. "[This is why,](#)" a parent tells his child in the last part of **verse 15**, "[I sacrifice to the Lord the first male offspring of every womb and redeem each of my firstborn sons,](#)" because it would always take them back to that first great step Christ took in building their trust in him, to the time when "[the Lord brought us out of Egypt with HIS mighty hand,](#)" **verse 16**.

There is a process, therefore, by which Christ convinces Israel to trust him. It begins with a couple of miracles through Moses, then the shaming of Egypt's gods, and finally the killing of the firstborn. Put them all together and a clear message appears, that Christ is the only REAL "god" who has the love and power to rescue humanity from evil.

And that's important for all humanity to know because evil is like Pharaoh - it won't let us go. It blinds us to the condition we're in, deceives us into depending on useless gods, fights like hell in our minds if we resist, and destroys our picture of God, to the point we accuse and condemn God when things don't go right for us.

But not to worry because the story of Israel tells of the great "I AM" who is fully aware of our condition and he's concerned enough, powerful enough, brilliant enough, and wise enough to rescue us from our empty gods.