

# PART OF SOMETHING BIGGER

## SERIES: EXODUS - JOURNEY TO FREEDOM



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Exodus 6:1-30  
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*Exodus 6:1-30*

How many of you have seen the ocean?

How many of you have been in the ocean and floated along on a wave?

I want you to call that experience to mind. Close your eyes if you would like, and imagine yourself floating on the wave of an ocean. The power of that wave. The rhythm of it. The majesty and simple glory of almost infinite water carrying you up and down.

I like the ocean because it reminds me that something much bigger than me is going on in this world. With all the details and concerns and victories and failures of my life, I can sometimes be tempted to think that the story I am living in is about me. The ocean reminds me of the truth. Those waves have been crashing over and over long before I was around. And unless Christ returns—and maybe even if he does, they will keep crashing long after I am gone.

Whatever is going on around, there are much larger forces at work in this world.

We are in the middle of a study in the book of Exodus. This morning we pick up the story in Exodus 6. It is another look at our main character Moses. Over the last several weeks, we have seen God call Moses to an impossible task, and Moses has resisted in various ways. The story last week ended with one more complaint from Moses. Our chapter this morning features one more reassurance from God.

Does it seem like we have heard the same sermon repeatedly? God tells Moses to do something. Moses explains why he cannot, and God works to address his concerns. The same pattern repeats over and over again. But this time, God will use a different strategy. Instead of addressing Moses' concerns directly, he will zoom out and take a broader view of history. He will remind Moses that he is part of something bigger.

Remember where we are in the story. The Israelites are slaves in Egypt. God asked Moses to go to Pharaoh

and ask that they be permitted to travel into the wilderness to make a sacrifice. Moses did that with help from his brother Aaron, and things got worse instead of better. Because of that, Moses complains to God.

**Exodus 5:22-23:**

**Then Moses turned to the Lord and said, “O Lord, why have you done evil to this people? Why did you ever send me? 23 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.”**

Moses is upset for two reasons. First of all, things have gotten worse. Pharaoh has “done evil” to this people. Second, God has not kept his promise. Moses says, “you have not delivered your people at all.” Moses is frustrated. This simply isn't working. God told him to do something, and Moses did it, but it wasn't working.

If you are like me, you get to this same place fairly often. All the details of life. Every decision. The responsibilities and relationships. The complexity of all of it. It just feels like things aren't clicking. This isn't the way life is supposed to go.

This morning we're going to see God, one more time, address Moses with compassion and patience. He doesn't correct or rebuke him. Instead, he addresses Moses directly. Listen to how he begins.

**Exodus 6:1:**

**But the Lord said to Moses, “Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh; for with a strong hand he will send them out, and with a strong hand he will drive them out of his land.”**

Notice that God is dealing with Moses. God doesn't begin by talking about the people. He doesn't start by talking about Pharaoh. He says, “now you shall see.” God is directly speaking to Moses, assuring him that something incredible will happen and that Moses will see it. As we have seen several times already, this assurance is for Moses.

The way that God addresses Moses is to remind him of his part in a larger story. Here is how Eugene Peterson puts it,

*When we submit our lives to what we read in Scripture, we find that we are not being led to see God in our stories but our stories in God's. God is the larger context and plot in which our stories find themselves.*<sup>1</sup>

God will do this for Moses. He will remind him of how the story began before him. God will explain how the story is playing out in Moses' day. Then he will make it abundantly clear that Moses has a part in the story. God tells Moses, "now you shall see."

My prayer for us this morning is that we shall see how we are part of something bigger too. Our lives are not all there is. There is a grand epic story being told in the world, and each of us has a part if we pay attention.

## The beginning of the story

God begins his response to Moses by pointing Moses back to the past. He reminds him that the story started long before Moses was caught up in it. God does that by using the biblical language of covenant. We will examine that as we go. For now, pay attention to how God references the covenant.

### Exodus 6:2-5:

**God spoke to Moses and said to him, "I am the Lord. 3 I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by my name the Lord I did not make myself known to them. 4 I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they lived as sojourners. 5 Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the people of Israel whom the Egyptians hold as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant."**

You may have noticed the repetition of the phrase "I am the Lord". That is the standard way to begin a covenant. It opens with the named parties. As God's speech proceeds, he explicitly mentions the idea of a covenant twice. First, he points back in time to when the covenant was established: "I also established my covenant to give them the land of Canaan." This is the promise that God gave hundreds of years ago. It hasn't been fulfilled yet. Then God brings it into the present time and says, "I have remembered my covenant." Now is the time. Something is happening right now.

God is trying to help Moses understand where he is in the timeline of this covenant being fulfilled. God began a covenant with Abram. He remembered it with Moses. And he will fulfill that promise when Joshua leads the people into the land.

God reassures Moses by reminding him of his place in the covenant story.

Do you know the story that you are a part of? Do you know how God's plan has been carried out over the course of history? Or are you so focused on the minute details of your daily life that you think your story began with you? Have you forgotten that you are part of something much bigger than yourself? If so, then you need to know your story.

Your story begins with a God who created the world. Shortly after that, he watched it fall into sin and rebellion. So he devised a plan to restore his creation and began with an insignificant people group thousands of years ago. God charged them with becoming a light to the nations and representing him to the world. Through kings and queens and revolutions and exile and return, he worked with them. But eventually, God sent his son, his only son, to bring deliverance to his precious creation. The death and resurrection of his son atoned for the failures of his people and proclaimed victory over the forces which held them back. Having begun their deliverance, God sent his Spirit to establish a new people who would represent him to the world. They would proclaim the truth of God's deliverance to the broken and work towards freedom, justice, and spiritual flourishing on the earth.

We find ourselves in a very similar place to Moses. Moses found himself right in the middle of that period of history when God's covenant promises were being fulfilled. You and I are in the same situation but part of a new covenant.

In Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36, the prophets speak of a new covenant from God that will replace the old one. That covenant is deeper and richer than anything that came before it. When Jesus comes to earth, he begins to fulfill it. If you have placed your faith in Jesus, you are part of that new covenant. It is your story. But it is an ongoing story. It will not be completely fulfilled until Jesus returns and restores heaven and earth.

Sitting here in Palo Alto, your story is not just about your personal walk with God. That is the way it often starts for us. Most of us start, using Peterson's words, by

finding God in our stories. But over time, we become aware of something much deeper. We see that God is not part of our story. We are part of his.

A few years ago, my extended family went on a Caribbean vacation. We stayed at an all-inclusive resort with all sorts of activities. One of them was a lazy river. It is a circular stretch of water with built-in water circulators that you can float in. As you float, you get carried along with the stream.

So you could sit in a tube and float along the stream. Or you could sit on the lounge chairs along the side of the lazy river. You could order a Mai Tai and watch the other people float by in the stream.

Some of you are sitting on the side of this story and watching the stream carry others along. You have your lounge chair. Your drink is in hand. You are enjoying the view as others immerse themselves in the story of God, Christ, the Spirit, and his church.

Maybe it is time you jump in. Grab an inflatable tube. Hold it close to you and just jump. It might be a little wobbly at first when you hit the water. You might not even quite make it right and fall into the water. Maybe there are a few minutes where you are getting adjusted. But once you get settled, you will be carried along by the story of what God is doing in the world. Let me tell you: the stream of God's story is way more exciting than an artificial lazy river in a Caribbean resort.

God wants this for Moses. To remind him of the story he is a part of.

## **The story is now**

In the first section, we see God reminding Moses of the covenant. Immediately following that, God sends Moses to remind the Israelites of the covenant. Not only does God tell Moses he is part of the covenant being played out, he gets him involved. Listen to what Moses is told to say.

### **Exodus 6:6-8:**

**Say therefore to the people of Israel, 'I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. 7 I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has**

**brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. 8 I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. I will give it to you for a possession. I am the Lord.'"**

Notice that this speech begins with "I am the Lord" and ends with "I am the Lord." In the middle are seven promises, all pointing back to the covenant God has made. I will bring you out. I will deliver you. I will redeem you. I will take you. I will be your God. I will bring you. I will give you the land.

This is God telling Moses to remind the people about the covenant they are a part of. He is reiterating the promises of the covenant to this new generation. They had probably grown up hearing these promises. But they felt like myths. Moses is reminding them that this isn't just a story. It is their story because they are part of God's story.

A few years ago, I was running at Rancho San Antonio Open Space Preserve, and as I passed someone, they called out, "Hey Paul!" I stopped and turned around to find out who it was. It turned out to be one of my closest friends from middle school in Connecticut. I moved to Texas in high school and hadn't seen this friend in over 25 years. He recognized me because we were friends on Facebook.

Seeing this old friend had an interesting effect on me. Somehow it made me feel more whole. Talking to someone from middle school, even just for a few minutes, drew that part of my life into the present. It wasn't a long ago chapter that didn't matter anymore. It was still part of who I was. The past was drawn into the present. The middle school me is still with me now.

It was helpful to me that my friend had not forgotten me. He still knew me. But how much more powerful is the reminder that God has not forgotten us?

The story that you are a part of is still being lived out. It is not something of the past. It is not something that only makes sense on Sunday mornings for two hours while you are at church. God is writing your story in every part of your life.

Maybe you haven't jumped into God's story because it just doesn't feel like it used to. It used to make sense, but it feels like things have changed. God sent Moses to remind his people that God would do amazing things. God still does that. Maybe he has sent me to tell you that. Perhaps one of your friends or family.

That is the message Moses brings to the Israelites. But they cannot hear it.

**Exodus 6:9:**

**Moses spoke thus to the people of Israel, but they did not listen to Moses, because of their broken spirit and harsh slavery.**

You may remember from last week that Pharaoh's strategy was to make their work so difficult that they wouldn't believe the words of God. Pharaoh wanted the work of God to seem like "lying words." And it worked.

Moses brought the Israelites words of truth and freedom, but they did not listen. They were so engrossed in the story of making bricks and finding straw and the injustice of their lives that they could not see the real story they were a part of.

**The promise isn't for me**

The reaction of the people of Israel kicked off a new crisis for Moses. It is a bit different from previous ones. Nonetheless, Moses is thrown off his game and falters in his mission.

**Exodus 6:12:**

**But Moses said to the Lord, "Behold, the people of Israel have not listened to me. How then shall Pharaoh listen to me, for I am of uncircumcised lips?"**

This is a strange thing to say. Moses has already said that he is not a great speaker. That's why God gave him Aaron. Now he makes a slightly different and awkward point about his mouth. Moses says that he cannot take part in this story because his lips are uncircumcised.

When God gave Abram the covenant, he made many promises to Abram. But he also made a request. Abram's part was to circumcise the males in his family. Circumcision was the sign—the outward indication—that the children of Abraham were part of the covenant.

For Moses to say that he is "of uncircumcised lips" is not just him saying that he cannot speak well. He is saying he isn't part of what God is doing. He is saying, "God you might be saving your people. Maybe you're going to fulfill the covenant. But it's not going to happen through me. I'm on the outside looking in. I better just sit on the side in a lounge chair and watch you do your

work. Because this covenant arrangement you have clearly doesn't include me."

This is where the narrator steps in. Moses is worried that he cannot be a part of this story. So the narrator does what any good Ancient Near Easterner would do when faced with a question of identity. He gives a genealogy. I will pick out a few verses from this passage so we can see what's going on.

**Exodus 6:14:**

**These are the heads of their fathers' houses: the sons of Reuben, the firstborn of Israel: Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi; these are the clans of Reuben.**

**Exodus 6:20:**

**Amram took as his wife Jochebed his father's sister, and she bore him Aaron and Moses, the years of the life of Amram being 137 years.**

**Exodus 6:25:**

**Eleazar, Aaron's son, took as his wife one of the daughters of Putiel, and she bore him Phinehas. These are the heads of the fathers' houses of the Levites by their clans.**

This genealogy starts with the oldest son. Then the next oldest son. Then the third oldest: Levi. At that point, it starts going deep rather than wide. The narrator travels down the branches of Levi's descendants until he gets to Amram. Amram turns out to be the father of Aaron and Moses.

This is proof that Moses and Aaron are part of the story that God is writing. There is no better proof in the ancient world than a rock-solid genealogy. These two men are descended from Levi—the line that will eventually form the priests of Israel. They are part of the story.

We also hear about Aaron's grandson. Phinehas is the son of Eleazar, Aaron's son. So the story does not just lead to Moses and Aaron. It flows out from them. The story doesn't end, but it keeps going.

Remember that these are not the words God speaks to Moses and Aaron. This genealogy is addressed to the readers. The best part comes after the genealogy. Listen to what the narrator says in Exodus 6:26 and 30.



## Exodus 6:26:

**These are the Aaron and Moses to whom the LORD said: “Bring out the people of Israel from the land of Egypt by their hosts.”**

## Exodus 6:30:

**But Moses said to the LORD, “Behold, I am of uncircumcised lips. How will Pharaoh listen to me?”**

The narrator is incredulous. He is dumbfounded. And he is inviting us as the readers into his amazement. These are the Aaron and Moses who said “I am of uncircumcised lips.” The sons of Amram, the son of Levi. Moses didn’t think that he was part of the story. Moses, a direct descendent of Levi. How could he not know that he was part of this story? How could he doubt his part in the covenant?

If you are like me, you are prone to comparison. You look at people around you and it is easy to see their part in God’s story. It is easy to see how God is using them. The spiritual genealogy of other people is obvious. But when we look ourselves, we wonder. God can use them as part of his story, but I’m not so sure God can use me.

Remember that we are part of a different covenant. Our membership in God’s covenant does not depend on our genealogy. Our membership in the new covenant depends on one thing: faith. It does not matter whose line you come from. It does not matter whether you are educated or not. It does not matter whether you know the Christian vocabulary. All that matters is faith.

So if you have faith—even the tiniest amount—you are part of God’s story. Find your part.

Do not be misled by the circumstances of your life to think that God’s story is happening without you. Moses thought he had uncircumcised lips. We saw how ridiculous an idea that was. Moses was the son of Amram, the son of Levi. That was the Moses who said his lips were uncircumcised.

I don’t know if you’ve ever doubted your part in the story. But if you have, that’s ridiculous. God has worked in your life. He has given you faith. God has called you

into his kingdom through faith in Christ. Don’t ever think you don’t have a part in God’s story.

You have a part in the story of God. You don’t have to watch the drama play out a lounge chair on the side. You can be a part of the action. Find your part in the story and jump right in.

## Conclusion

At the beginning of this message, I invited you to imagine yourself in the ocean, carried along by the power and rhythm of the waves. I wanted us to remember that feeling of being part of something so much bigger than ourselves.

Then I invited you to consider jumping into the lazy river and finding yourself floating along on the stream of God’s story. However, that image really doesn’t do it. A lazy river is artificial. It is powered by a water pump. The river goes around and around in a circle and doesn’t get you anywhere.

The real invitation is to be carried along by God’s story, which is far more like the ocean than an all-inclusive lazy river. It is unpredictable and powerful. Beautiful and dangerous. Exhilarating and peaceful.

## Endnotes

- 1 Eugene H Peterson, *Eat This Book* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2009).