

Meetings, Meetings, Meetings

Exodus 4:18 – 7:13

Introduction

Meetings, meetings, meetings. The section in Exodus we are going to consider this morning is all about meetings. How many of you spend some time every week in meetings?

I pulled out of my file this week an email I received many years ago from an Air Force officer in the Pentagon. It was titled: *How To Attend A Meeting*.

How To Attend a Meeting

To really succeed in a business or organization, it is sometimes helpful to know what your job is, and whether it involves any duties. Ask among your co-workers: “Hi,” you should say. “I am a new employee. What is the name of my job?” If they answer “long-range planner” or “lieutenant governor,” you are pretty much free to lounge around and do crossword puzzles until retirement. Most jobs, however, will require some work.

There are two major kinds of work in modern organizations:

- 1) Taking phone messages for people who are in meetings, and
- 2) Going to meetings.

Your ultimate career strategy will be to get a job involving primarily Number 2, going to meetings, as soon as possible, because that’s where the real prestige is. It is all very well and good to be able to take phone messages, but you are never going to get to a position of power, a position where you can cost thousands of people their jobs with a single bonehead decision, unless you learn how to attend meetings.

The first meeting ever was held back in the Mezzanine Era. In those days, man’s job was to slay his prey and bring it home for woman, who had to figure out how to cook it. The problem was: man was slow and basically naked, whereas the prey had warm fur and could run like an antelope. In fact, it was an antelope, only nobody knew this.

At last someone said, “Maybe if we just sat down and did some brainstorming we could come up with a better way to hunt our prey! It went extremely well, plus it was much warmer sitting in a circle, so they agreed to meet again the next day....and the next.

But the women pointed out that, prey-wise, the men had not produced anything, and the human race was pretty much starving. The men agreed that this was serious and said they would put it right near the top of their agenda. At this point, the women, who were primitive but not stupid, started eating plants, and thus modern agriculture was born. It never would have happened without meetings.

The modern business meeting, however, might better be compared with a funeral in the sense that you have a gathering of people who are wearing uncomfortable clothing and would rather be somewhere else. The major difference is that most funerals have a definite purpose. Also, nothing is really ever buried in a meeting.

An idea may look dead, but it will always reappear at another meeting later on. If you have ever seen the movie *Night of the Living Dead*, you have a rough idea of how modern meetings operate, with projects and proposals that everyone thought were killed rising up constantly from their graves to stagger back into meetings and eat the brains of the living.

Moses must have felt he was in these kinds of meetings because the agenda seldom seemed to change.

Last week we examined the meeting he had with God in which God commissioned Moses to be his instrument before Pharaoh in securing the release of the Israelites from their Egyptian slavery. After a series of objections, Moses gives in to God's way and now he sets out to do the task God gave him to do.

I. Meeting with God (Part 1) – Exodus 4:18-23

Moses leaves Midian to return to Egypt with his staff in hand. It is this staff which will be a visible sign of God's power – a power to deliver, to save, his people. For New Testament believers, this visible sign of God's saving power is the Cross – a sign of God's love, his mercy, his grace.

In First Corinthians, chapter one, the Apostle Paul talks about how the “Jews demand miraculous signs... but we,” Paul says, “preach Christ crucified... Christ the power of God.”

A couple other things of note here. Moses is told that even though he will perform miracles by the power of God, the Pharaoh still will not let the Israelites go. How's that for marching orders? “Moses, you will do everything I have told you to do, but the heart of Pharaoh will be hardened. In fact, I will harden Pharaoh's heart.”

How motivating is that?? But what is God calling Moses to do? Obey. The outcome was God's work, his responsibility, not Moses'.

This hardening of Pharaoh's heart is a significant part of the Exodus story. It speaks of God's sovereignty over everything and everyone. Pharaoh hardens his heart; God hardens Pharaoh's heart. This is that whole mystery of divine sovereignty and human responsibility.

The second observation is God's view of his people. He calls Israel his "Son." Hosea the prophet, writing some 700 years later, talks about God's faithfulness to his son Israel:

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. The more they were called, the more they went away; they kept sacrificing to the Baals and burning offerings to idols. Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk; I took them up by their arms, but they did not know that I healed them. I led them with cords of kindness, with the bands of love, and I became to them as one who eases the yoke on their jaws, and I bent down to them and fed them. – *Hosea 11:1-4*

It is most interesting that Matthew, in his gospel account, quotes this same passage. Remember that after the birth of Jesus an angel of the Lord warned Joseph in a dream to flee to Egypt to protect his son from Herod. Matthew writes:

And he (Joseph) rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt I called my son." – *Matthew 2:14-15*

Here, Israel is linked to God's Son – Jesus Christ. What was applied to Israel prophetically is fulfilled in Christ the Son. There is so much Christology in the book of Exodus – images and types of the Christ to come – God's Son, a deliverer.

In Exodus, God is calling his people, the people of the covenant, back to himself – restoring the relationship of Father and son.

We have a somewhat baffling incident in **Verses 24-26**. God is reminding Moses of the seriousness of his covenant. The covenant with Abraham required that all male children be circumcised as a sign of the covenant. Either Moses was careless about obeying God in this regard. Some writers think it might have been Zipporah's objections to do so.

Moses and Zipporah are going to get a lesson in God's judgment against disobedience. The people of Israel were to be set aside, to be different, to be holy unto the Lord. This theme will run all through this book as they depart from Egypt and camp at Mount Horeb.

God wants Moses to get this straight right from the get-go – before he becomes the leader of the exile nation.

Verses 27-28 – Aaron meets up with Moses.

II. Meeting with the Elders of the People – Exodus 4:29-31

A. Message: Moses tells them everything that God had told him. Can you imagine how exciting that was for the leaders of the Israelites? They have been crying out to God that he would take notice of their suffering and that he would deliver them out of the hands of the Egyptians. And now, here is Moses, telling that that this is just what God is saying he is about to do.

B. Object lessons: To back up what he is saying, Moses gives some authenticating signs. He shows them the miracles that God did with Moses on the mountain when God overcame Moses' objections about being God's servant: his staff becoming a serpent, his hand becoming leprous, water turned into blood – pretty impressive stuff!

C. Response: The people believe Moses; and they worship God. Oh, wouldn't it be wonderful if the story went right from this scene to the Red Sea and Mount Horeb? But faith is always tested, and tested their faith will be.

III. First Meeting with Pharaoh – Exodus 5:1-18

A. Message – **Exodus 5:1** Pretty simple message: "Let my people go." How Aaron and Moses got in to see the Pharaoh we are not told. That's not important in the telling of the story. But they get an audience and get right to the point. I wonder what they thought would be Pharaoh's response?

B. Response – Exodus 5:2-18

1) "No way, Jose!"

2) Increase the production number requirements upon the Hebrews: "More bricks; no straw!"

IV. Meeting with the Hebrew Foremen – Exodus 5:19-21

IV. Meeting with God (Part 2) – Exodus 5:22 – 7:9

A. Moses' complaint – **Exodus 5:22-23** “I told you it wouldn't work!” The Hebrew foremen blamed Moses; Moses blames God. He blames God for the people's woes and, what he believes, is God's own inaction. How quickly when things go wrong we begin to blame other people or other things. I do that very well, thank you! It's like the bumper sticker I once saw: “Humpty Dumpty was pushed!”

Moses is calling into question God's character. How easy that is to do when we just don't have understanding. Moses is going to have to learn that even when he doesn't understand, he can yet trust God. He is to rely upon what he does know about God – God's character and God's promises.

Moses really shouldn't have been surprised. Back on the mountain of Horeb when God called Moses to be his instrument, he told him:

But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand. – *Exodus 3:19*

In chapter four, verse 21, God told Moses:

When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles that I have put in your power. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go.

Moses is exasperated with God – “You haven't even begun to rescue the people.” Oh, what a shallow understanding Moses had of God. What really did he know of God's work in preparing the people of Israel, the Pharaoh, even Moses for what was to come. Exodus 6:1

God never tries to justify himself or his work to Moses. He simply repeats that promise that he made to deliver the Israelites out of their slavery.

B. God's response – Exodus 6:2-13

There are three things in God's response that are critical here for Moses to understand. He says:

- 1) “I am Yahweh.” He reminds Moses of his identity. This is the covenant-keeping God.
- 2) “I am the God of your forefathers – Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.” God connects himself back to the patriarchs of Israel, God's chosen people. He connects himself to the covenant that he swore to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

- 3) “I have heard the groaning, the cries, of my people.” God is reminding Moses that he was not unaware of the people’s situation; he was not uncaring about the people’s suffering.

It is so easy when we overcome with difficulties, with suffering, that we make a wrong assessment of the character of God – that we reach a conclusion that God does not see; he does not care. Moses needs to be reminded that this is not the case with God.

Chapter six, verses 14-25 is a genealogy. Almost seems out of place here. But it is probably here to solidify the understanding of Aaron’s standing and place within Israel. He will be the mouthpiece for Moses. He will also be at the forefront of the priestly Levites as the people reconnect with God in a very real, tangible way at Mount Horeb after their departure from Egypt.

Exodus 6:26-27

The last verses of chapter six are a repeat of verses 10-12. Then God continues: **Exodus 7:1** – “I have made you (or I will make you) like God to Pharaoh.” The Hebrew reading is much stronger than this. It is, “I will make you God to Pharaoh.” Peter Enns writes:

It may be helpful here to understand this through Pharaoh’s eyes. In Egyptian royal ideology, the pharaoh was considered to be a divine being. So by calling Moses God, Yahweh is beating Pharaoh at his own game. It is not the king of Egypt who is god; rather, it is this shepherd and leader of slaves who is God. And this Moses-God defeats Pharaoh in a manner that leaves no doubt as to the true nature and source of his power: He controls the elements, bugs, livestock, fire from heaven, and the water of the sea; he even has authority over life and death. Moses is not simply like God to Pharaoh. He truly is God to Pharaoh in that God is acting through Moses.

Moses, obviously isn’t the true God; he is not divine. But he is God to Pharaoh in that he represents God. This is the divine mystery of God using people to accomplish his work.

When you think about it, this is what God is doing through his children today. In many respects, as God the Holy Spirit lives within us as believers, we are God to others. We may be the first “God” that they see. We are like the glove into which the hand – God, himself – is put to work his works through us.

V. Second Meeting with Pharaoh – Exodus 7:9-13

Concluding Thoughts

God’s character is always central / always in focus—God’s faithfulness. We, like Moses,

must never assume that God does not see or does not care about our problems, our difficulties, our suffering. The challenge is when we just don't understand; we cannot see God at work.

Os Guinness, in his book *In Two Minds: The Dilemma of Doubt & How To Resolve it*, writes about this predicament. He talks about the principle of suspended judgment:

When a Christian comes to faith his understanding and his trust go hand in hand, but as he continues in faith his trust may sometimes be called to go on by itself without his understanding. This is where the principle of suspended judgment applies. At such times if the Christian's faith is to be itself and let God be God, it must suspend judgment and say, "Father I do not understand you, but I trust you."

Notice what this means. A Christian does not say, "I do not understand you at all, but I trust you anyway." Rather he says, "I do not understand you *in this situation*, but *I understand why I trust you anyway*. Therefore I can trust that you understand even though I don't."

He writes: "As believers we cannot always know why, but we can always know why we trust God who knows why, and this makes all the difference."

This is what God wants Moses to understand and accept. God is going to do what he is going to do, and when he is going to do it – all in his perfect time and all for his ultimate glory. God promised his presence to Moses even though things didn't happen the way or in the time that he (Moses) expected or anticipated.

Nowhere is this more critical than in those times of mystery when divine sovereignty intersects with human responsibility. God asks for our trust even when we don't understand.

This is key: never lose sight of his promises secured by and guaranteed by his character. God is faithful. That theme runs throughout the book of Exodus as well as the entire Old and New Testaments.

In the book of Lamentations, the prophet Jeremiah is lamenting the situation of Israel as she suffered the consequences of her disobedience to God and the judgment that was coming upon the nation. Writing of this judgment, he says:

My soul continually remembers it and is bowed down within me. But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. – *Lamentations 3:20-23*