



DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

EXODUS 32–34; EZEKIEL 36

OCTOBER 2017

What Moves God?

While surveying the current landscape of voices telling us what we can do to move God in our direction, I was confused and appalled. I wasn't sure if I should send money to the speaker, fast more, pray harder (whatever that means), denounce my citizenship, lobby for Israel, or go to the mission field.

One thing was evident: the subject of interest was about moving God to act in our behalf. Individuals want God to act in liberating them from debt, depression, sickness, and poverty. As a nation, we want God to move in our behalf and save us from foreign enemies, internal decay, and certain judgment. The answer to what it takes to move God is certainly not a consensus among Christian voices.

It might be helpful to see a word-picture of the name of God. In Exodus 32 through 34, Moses asked to see God's glory—his name. This was after he had gone into the mountain to meet with God and get the Decalogue. While he was away, the people had made a golden calf and called it God,

giving it credit for delivering them from Egypt. Moses wanted to see the true and full nature of God, but God told him that he couldn't handle it. Too much goodness! But God stood by him and proclaimed the nature of his name.

The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and fourth generation.

Exodus 34:6–7 (ESV)

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This word picture was made flesh when Jesus came. He is the image of the invisible God and the full revelation of his name (Hebrews 1:1–4).

We might be surprised to take a quick survey of what moved God to act in history. It is captured succinctly in Ezekiel's prophecy.

Therefore say to the house of Israel, "Thus says the Lord God: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came . . . And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be our God . . ."

Ezekiel 36:22, 26–28 (ESV)

God has always acted out of jealousy for his name. In the beginning, God created out of love. He didn't especially need creation to be happy. It is his nature to give, share, bless, and delight. His gracious name is revealed in creation. After the human tragedy of sin, God acted out of his own initiative to call

Abram to walk in covenant. He promised him a seed that would reverse the curse of Eden's sinful tragedy. When Abraham's descendants went to Egypt, God used their captivity there to preserve the seed he had promised. Then he acted to deliver his people of promise and miraculously established them as a nation—all because his name includes faithfulness to his promise. When the people broke their covenant with God, he acted to spew them out of the land. However, consistent with who he is, he raised up Cyrus to liberate them to go back to Jerusalem. He was unwilling for that partial return to reflect his glory, so after 400 years, he sent his Son as Adam's representative and Israel's Messiah to finally and fully display his name.

It is his name that satisfies the **longings of the human heart.**

God acts out of jealousy for his name. Of course, we understand that his name is his nature. If his name is besmirched, we are hopeless. It is the constancy and majesty of his name that differentiates reality from deception. It is his name that satisfies the longings of the human heart. We are designed to reflect his name. To do anything less is to miss our destiny.

We can never be satisfied by identifying with and boasting in anything less than his name. All who boast in anything less reveal that they haven't clearly seen the true reflection of his name, for we tend to boast in the greatest name we have seen. (For most, it is our own.) Jealousy for his name is an accurate expression of God's name. He loves us so completely, he doesn't want us exalting that which is less than him. To do that would be to our own detriment. If God weren't jealous of his name, he would be denying his own name.

This is offensive to some. They project their own jealousy and can't see how God could be so petty. They then create an alternative image of God to fit their own comfort. They miss the name and therefore miss the joy of fulfilling their design. It is never a good idea to remake the nature of God. It is nothing less than idolatry, though many idol worshippers will describe their approach as progress. They claim that they are escaping the trappings of primitive views of God.

The context for the prophecy of Ezekiel is that Israel had profaned God's name among the nations in their idolatry. As a result, God, being consistent to his name, cast them out of the land and into captivity. But, consistent with his name, he has not forgotten them and will restore them simply

because he wants to. Ezekiel is proclaiming the future for God's covenant people, which we now know was fulfilled in the New Covenant ratified by Jesus. It was this covenant that the early Church enjoyed. They were the first of a new creation where God not only gives instructions but gives us his Spirit to enable us to live beyond our limited and flawed capacities.

The church is the **primary name-reflector in the world.**

How does it work out in daily living? A snapshot from the life of Peter will give us some understanding. The setting: It is the last supper. Jesus and his disciples are gathered to celebrate the Passover meal. Jesus told them that he was going away but that everything would be ok. Peter wants to know where he is going and declares that he wants to go. He also says that it doesn't matter how tough it might get, he will even die for Jesus. Jesus declared that before breakfast Peter would deny him. The very next thing Jesus said is a bit surprising. *"Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me."* (John 14:1) He goes on to describe the relationship with the Father that he is making possible for them and how the Spirit will come to them and

enable them to be the name reflectors they were designed to be.

God is acting to reveal his name to Peter. He knows that Peter wants to obey him, and is as committed as he can be. He also knows that Peter is not ready to shepherd Jesus' sheep. He needs to be more enamored with Jesus's commitment to him than his commitment to Jesus. So, we see the episode of Peter's failure while Jesus intercedes for him. Then, there is the encounter by the shore after Peter and others have gone fishing. Jesus confronts Peter in such a way that Peter understands that it's not about how much he loves Jesus, but how much Jesus loves him. His focus changes from his own faithfulness to Jesus's faithfulness. He sees the majesty of his name. He is not bothered by the words of Jesus describing his martyrdom. He is consumed with being loved by the one who is faithful and full of unconditional love. I think if one should ask Peter if he'd like to go back to a time before his colossal failure, he would not. For him it was no longer about his successes or failures, but of enjoying and reflecting the name.

The gospel of Jesus is attractive to those who have nothing with which to bargain. When God acts to vindicate his name, it includes showing us we have no bargaining leverage. It means we will become

unimpressed with what we offer, and overcome with what he gives. This kind of failure is the prelude to seeing the name that is above every name.

As we pray for personal and national revival, it is beneficial to know that God is acting to vindicate his name. The church is the primary name-reflector in the world. Where the church has profaned his name, there will be correction. Consistent with his name, he will expose our false conceptions of him and replace them with perspectives of his true nature. Where failures are necessary, we will have them. God is jealous of his name. He loves us too much to permit it to be profaned.



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