

EXODUS CHAPTER 5

INTRODUCTION

As Christians we expect life to be difficult but there are times when life is even more difficult than we thought was possible. That's what it must have been like for Moses, he faced many disappointments in his life but I am sure that the disappointment that he faces in this chapter is way beyond his own expectation. God had appeared to him and called him to the work. The Lord had given him authority to speak on God's behalf before the people and before Pharaoh.

He had given him signs to convince the people that the Lord had sent him. Now that the leaders of Israel were convinced of Moses' authority, Moses can go with Aaron and approach Pharaoh. He had been told by the Lord that Pharaoh would not let the people go but he could not have imagined that things would get even worse for God's people.

1. MOSES ENCOUNTER WITH PHARAOH (vs. 1-5)

It must have been a frightening experience going into Pharaoh's presence especially for Aaron as he had spent his life in very humble surroundings but now he is before Pharaoh the god of Egypt. It seems that the elders of Israel had disobeyed the Lord in failing to accompany Moses and Aaron into Pharaoh's presence. In 3:18 we are told that they were to go with Moses but their failure to do so is blatant disobedience to the word of God. Perhaps the thought of facing Pharaoh was just too much for them. Now that they are face to face with Pharaoh Moses and Aaron deliver God's message to him (v 1). They could speak with great boldness for they knew that this was God's message.

Pharaoh responds angrily showing the hardness of his heart (v 2) What Pharaoh is saying is how dare anyone else claim to be a greater god than I am. Why should I obey someone whose power and authority I do not even recognise? Who is the Lord that I should obey him? It is sheer arrogance on the part of Pharaoh and the answer is clear; No I will not listen to the Lord.

So the gauntlet has been thrown down who is sovereign, who is in control of Egypt and these Hebrew slaves. Is it Pharaoh or the Lord? The next few chapters give us a very clear answer as to who is in control.

Now we have our first application here. The attitude of Pharaoh is seen in many people today within our own society. It is an attitude that says I am in control of my life; I am the god of my own life I am in control of my own destiny. So what happens when the church brings God's word to such people and says to them "the Lord says." The response even if ever so polite is who is the Lord, who does he think He is to demand my repentance. Who does the Lord think He is to call me a sinner, to say I need to be saved, to even say I am going to hell? If there is even a hint of that attitude in your heart then you are just like Pharaoh and you think that you know better than the Lord.

It is a very dangerous attitude, for you know what happens to Pharaoh because of his hardness of heart, He is judged. If you resent the Lord telling you that you need to be saved because you are a sinner then you had better be careful of God's judgement. God is patient with you and he has been gracious to you, he is giving you an opportunity to repent and to submit to the authority of his word. But his patience does not last forever and like Pharaoh you will face God judgement unless you repent.

Even if you are a Christian there can be times in our lives when we rebel against the word of the Lord and when we do so we are showing the same pride and arrogance that Pharaoh did. We are saying that we know better than the Lord that we are in control of our lives and the lord has no

right to interfere. When we see such an attitude in our own hearts we need to repent of it and humbly submit and obey.

The second application concerns our need to obey God's word and proclaim his message. God was going to fulfil his purposes through Pharaoh's rebellion and we must realise that when we proclaim his word and people's hearts are hard that God still fulfils his purposes even through people's rebellion. That's why we should continue to take God's word to people whether they want to hear or not. It can be discouraging to continue to present God's word to people whether through our publicity or through tracts or personal conversation or preaching.

When we see no response we can be tempted to give up and wonder what the point is. But remember the Lord sent Moses and Aaron to bring his word to someone whose heart was hard. God was going to prove that He is God through his judgement upon Pharaoh and Egypt. So keep speaking God's word to people and God will bring about the fulfilment of his purposes through that word; whether those purposes are one of salvation or judgment.

On hearing this response it seems (v 3) that Moses and Aaron back down a little or at least try to explain a little further why Pharaoh should let the people go. The three-day journey was a way of asking for temporary time off to fulfil their religious duty. We know from excavations done in Egypt that work parties had days off for a variety of reasons including making a sacrificial offering to one's god.

Therefore Moses and Aaron request was not that remarkable but it seems that they are now throwing themselves onto the mercy of Pharaoh (in Hebrew the term "please" is used as a plea) instead of relying upon the Lord's grace. But Pharaoh will not listen; you can almost hear him say stop wasting my time and stop holding back my slaves from their work.

2. PHARAOH RESPONSE (vs.6-14)

Pharaoh responds in a way that must have been heart breaking for Moses and Aaron. Instead of things getting better for the Israelites they got worse. Pharaoh accused the slaves of laziness; they must have too much time on their hands if they are thinking about going to worship their God, so Pharaoh tells his slave drivers to withdraw the straw that was provided for brick making. From now on they are to gather their own straw but they must also maintain the same quota of bricks in a day.

Pharaoh believes that if the slaves have to work harder they won't have time to listen to the lies being spread by Moses and Aaron (v 9). The Hebrew verb to pay attention means to 'gaze at something with great interest, trust and devotion.' Pharaoh seems to have understood that the Hebrew's believed the message of Moses about salvation and redemption. They were placing great hope in it and so Pharaoh wants to dispel any such notion from their heads. The slave drivers put pressure on the Hebrews to finish their quota of bricks (v 14) but when they did not do so the Israelite foremen were beaten.

They had the responsibility for pushing the slaves to get the work done but the Hebrew people no longer could physically meet the demand and so the foremen were severely beaten. So by the end of verse 14 we see the sorry and pitiful condition of the God's people. They are working extremely hard but are unable to meet their quota as a consequence they have to face the punishment from the slave drivers. Instead of things getting better Moses and Aaron appear to have made things worst.

That, my dear friend, is how it so often is in the Christian life. It might be that God has brought us low in order that we might trust him for salvation. Then by God's grace we are brought to salvation

and we think in our minds that surely things will now get better. But sadly things get worst and it seems as if we would have been better off as an unbeliever.

It might be that as Christians we have stood up for the Lord at work or in the home and we think that surely God will now bless us because we have taken our stand for him. But what happens, things get worst and your stand for the Lord seems to have agitated the situation and seems to have polarised it so that people's attitude towards you has increasingly become more hostile not less.

The great lesson from this is that when we serve the Lord, when we are obedient to God's call upon our lives, when we are determined to speak God's word no matter what, then we might well find that life will become increasingly more difficult for us. It might seem that speaking God's word to people makes our situation worst and makes our lives more difficult to live. There was a missionary who wrestled with God's call to go to India to proclaim God's word. His wife and little child were convinced that they should go.

He went and within the first 6 months his 7-year-old child died and within two years his wife died. He was left alone in India and all because he answered God's call upon his life. He must have asked was it worth it, had he made a mistake, he must have felt like these Israelites felt. The doubts must have come flooding into the minds of these Hebrew people, Moses must have been mistaken after all, he fooled us with those signs and this talk of salvation is all nonsense look at us since Moses and Aaron opened their mouths.

Ever tempted to think like that? Well when we are let us remember the full story of the book of Exodus, God does deliver his people and Pharaoh and the Egyptians are crushed. Our problem in life is that we can only see the present we cannot see the full picture we can only make our assessment on what we see happening we do not know what is going on behind the scenes. We often have no idea what God's purpose is in our desperate situations but in faith we can have confidence that when things get worst instead of better because of our stand for God then our situation is all part of God's will and purpose for us and for those that we confront with the gospel.

3. THE ISRAELITE FOREMEN TURN ON MOSES (vs. 14-21)

Things became so bad for the people that the foremen went to see Pharaoh themselves and in doing so they are completely casting Moses aside as their leader, they are saying in effect Moses is not our leader he does not speak for us any longer we will have to sort this one out ourselves. But when they met Pharaoh they got the same response as Moses got, they were told they were lazy and they were told that they would have to continue to meet their quota without being given straw. When the foremen heard this they realised they were in trouble (v 19). They had no trouble knowing who was to blame for their situation.

Moses and Aaron were anxiously waiting outside for them to emerge. Before they could say anything to the foremen, they were bombarded with angry words (v 21). They not only rejected Moses and Aaron but also they complained that they had dishonoured the name of the Israelites by making their name stink before Pharaoh. They accuse Moses and Aaron of giving Pharaoh a good reason to kill them. Put yourself in Moses shoes how must he have felt at this stage.

He had obeyed God and carried out his instructions but his actions had only succeeded in making things worse for the Israelites. Walking in obedience with God is never easy. It will bring us into confrontation with those who are unbelievers as we proclaim the word of God. It will also bring us into confrontation with those who are God's people because they fail to understand our stand for God.

Some Christians have been criticized by other believers because of their stand on ecumenical issues. Their claim is that we are making the gospel seem hard and unloving because we will not meet with others who believe in God. Often missionaries have been criticised by other missionaries because the gospel has changed a complete society and there are those who believe that it has westernised them. We can take criticism from unbelievers, that is what we expect but it is hard to take it from other believers even ones who have not been well taught or who completely misunderstand our stance.

Christians can criticise fellow Christians because of their stance in worship. We can be accused of outdated our Christianity and of not appealing to the modern world. We cannot be criticised by other believers because of our stance on the role of women in the church or a host of other things. Those things are hard to take and we do get hurt by such criticism but those things will happen when we are standing firm on God's word and God's principles. What should we do in those situations? We should do what Moses did.

4. MOSES TURNS TO THE LORD (VS. 22-23)

His prayer is a very honest one. He pours out his heart to the Lord. He had no one else to turn too. His prayer is one of why? Why have you brought trouble upon this people? Why have you sent me why have you not kept your promise to rescue these people? We might want to criticise Moses for his questioning attitude before the Lord but we cannot doubt that he is being honest. I often wonder if our praying is a little too nice. We say the right things and use the right words but our hearts are not always engaged in the process. We lack the passion that is burning within our hearts. Moses cannot be accused of not being honest and not pouring out his heart to the Lord. He is laying it on the line and telling God what he thinks. We will see next time that the Lord graciously answers Moses but the lesson to learn is that when everything is going against us and when everyone is against us even those who are God's people, then the place to go is to the Lord and pour out our hearts to him. I do wish I would learn this lesson, but I suspect we all need to learn this lesson.

We should not keep our hurts and disappointments to ourselves but take them to the Lord in prayer. Be honest with him he knows what we are feeling and thinking so verbalise those feelings and ask God to do something about the situation remind the Lord that his reputation is on the line. Who knows what we might see the Lord do (6:1) as a result of our prayer before Him if we do that.

Amen