

Exodus | The Rise of a Liberator

Bricks Without Straw

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11.2.14

Exodus 5.1-21

And afterward Moses and Aaron came and said to Pharaoh, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Let My people go that they may celebrate a feast to Me in the wilderness.'" ² But Pharaoh said, "Who is the LORD that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and besides, I will not let Israel go." ³ Then they said, "The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Please, let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God, otherwise He will fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword." ⁴ But the king of Egypt said to them, "Moses and Aaron, why do you draw the people away from their work? Get back to your labors!" ⁵ Again Pharaoh said, "Look, the people of the land are now many, and you would have them cease from their labors!" ⁶ So the same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters over the people and their foremen, saying, ⁷ "You are no longer to give the people straw to make brick as previously; let them go and gather straw for themselves. ⁸ "But the quota of bricks which they were making previously, you shall impose on them; you are not to reduce any of it. Because they are lazy, therefore they cry out, 'Let us go and sacrifice to our God.' ⁹ "Let the labor be heavier on the men, and let them work at it so that they will pay no attention to false words."

¹⁰ *So the taskmasters of the people and their foremen went out and spoke to the people, saying, "Thus says Pharaoh, 'I am not going to give you any straw. ¹¹ 'You go and get straw for yourselves wherever you can find it, but none of your labor will be reduced.'" ¹² So the people scattered through all the land of Egypt to gather stubble for straw. ¹³ The taskmasters pressed them, saying, "Complete your work quota, your daily amount, just as when you had straw." ¹⁴ Moreover, the foremen of the sons of Israel, whom Pharaoh's taskmasters had set over them, were beaten and were asked, "Why have you not completed your required amount either yesterday or today in making brick as previously?"*

¹⁵ *Then the foremen of the sons of Israel came and cried out to Pharaoh, saying, "Why do you deal this way with your servants? ¹⁶ "There is no straw given to your servants, yet they keep saying to us, 'Make bricks!' And behold, your servants are being beaten; but it is the fault of your own people." ¹⁷ But he said, "You are lazy, very lazy; therefore you say, 'Let us go and sacrifice to the LORD.' ¹⁸ "So go now and work; for you will be given no straw, yet you must deliver the quota of bricks." ¹⁹ The foremen of the sons of Israel saw that they were in trouble because they were told, "You must not reduce your daily amount of bricks." ²⁰ When they left Pharaoh's presence, they met Moses and Aaron as they were waiting for them. ²¹ They said to them, "May the LORD look upon you and judge you, for you have made us odious in Pharaoh's sight and in the sight of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to kill us."*

We're working through the second book of the Bible, the Book of Exodus and, at this point, Moses and his brother Aaron, two old men, have their initial confrontation with the King of

Egypt. And speaking for God they command this great Pharaoh to (famous words), “Let My people go!”

We mentioned earlier that this book of the Bible is used by the rest of the Bible as source material for so many of the Bible’s main teachings. And the ideas that will be developed right through to the Book of Revelation are depicted here and IN VERY arresting and stunning images. And especially the big ideas of salvation, of rescue by God or liberation from God, of redemption and deliverance and being saved – the whole Bible looks to Exodus to illustrate those ideas.

And THAT makes it even more urgent that we look at Exodus in OUR day... b e c a u s e ... the modern church isn’t all that CLEAR on what these ideas mean.

A recent survey of about 3000 American Christians showed that an alarmingly high number (quote) “hold views condemned as heretical by some of the most important councils of the early church.” And even people who regularly attend churches that are more Bible-based and committed to a more Biblical and orthodox form of Christianity demonstrate a widespread uncertainty, confusion, ignorance about some of the very basic truths Christians have always counted important and essential (see THESTATEOFTHEOLOGY.com)

So today we see three Big Ideas played out – sin, unbelief and salvation. And if you’re NOT yet a Christian, just trying to see what it’s about and whether it’s believable, THIS IS FOR YOU.

And if you are already a Christian... but maybe not always sure you GET these truths and words we so often use around here... THIS IS ALSO FOR YOU!

And hopefully we’ll all see that it’s not SIMPLY a matter of knowing the info (as if education were the answer) but hopefully we come away with a sense, an impression, a picture emblazoned on our hearts AND minds and a taste, eye-opening, an encounter with TRUTH HIMSELF that changes our desires/motives.

3 ideas vividly depicted: 1) Evil as a Desired Dictator 2) Unbelief as a Beloved Blindness 3) Salvation as an Frightening Freedom

1st – Evil as a Desired Dictator – Moses and his brother, Aaron really have been changed. And if he was a kind of Woody Allen character, there’s more to him... there’s a Presence overshadowing Moses. So he walk – not “struts”; no swagger – he’s been humbled by personal moral failure (4.24-26); he walks with humble confidence and they somehow gain

access to the Pharaoh... maybe Moses still has some friends around the palace. The whole passage tells the story relying almost completely on dialogue.

It begins with the simple words, "Thus says YHWH, the God of Israel, "Let My people go that they may celebrate a feast to me in the wilderness". (BTW – I think, and writers disagree, I think the three-days is NOT a promise to return but that the feast will begin after a three days journey AWAY from Egypt...I think.)

And the dialogue continues with these stark words from the Pharaoh, the Dictator, their Master: "Who is YHWH that I should obey His voice?" And that brazen question IS...in a real sense...THE question that the Book of Exodus answers. Who is the Lord? This book will make Him known, answer Pharaoh's question.

Moses and Aaron speak for YHWH and they say like God's prophets say, "Thus says the LORD" but very significant, in verse 10, the task-masters speak for Pharaoh and use that very same formula, "Thus saith the Pharaoh".

In other words, the writer wants us to see, this dictator is putting himself in the place of God, and speaks as if DIVINE. He uses a word, "Get back to your LABORS" that was previously used (4.23) of the worship of God, "Let the people come and serve Me" said God and now the taskmasters say (same word), "Let the people serve the Pharaoh".

Now the reason all this is important is that evil and sin and false gods are presented in the Bible as MASTERS. Evil is a dictator, a slave-driver, a kidnapper that takes control of the sinner's will and makes him think, say and do things that are self-destructive. Picking up on this theme introduced in Exodus, St. Paul will write (some 1500 years later) Romans chapter 6: "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its desires...For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace."

See, sin is a power...it's a dictator, a master that wants to reign and control. And one of the great benefits that Jesus Christ gives is liberation (more on that in a moment) but one of the weird qualities about this power (evil, sin) is that LIKE Pharaoh... there's something IN the sinner that...wants to be under the cruel control of this master...it's a Desired Dictator.

Maybe you've heard of the "Stockholm Syndrome": it's a bizarre phenomenon in the psyche of kidnapping victims. Some victims actually fall in love with their captors and become their defenders. And when the police show up, the captive/the slave will sometimes fight to protect the abuser.

It's why Paul asked those questions in Romans ch. 7 20-24: "Why am I doing the very thing I

do not want? I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me...waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin...Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?"

The Israelites are crying out to God because slavery STINKS! But... in some twisted way... like we see in addiction... and obsession... and in life-controlling vice (where it's more obvious) but in EVERY sin and evil to a less-noticeable degree, the sinner...wants to serve the sin.

It's a desired dictator...it's a master...it's a God-substitute. And this is the first of a number of times they turn on Moses for depriving them of the comforts of their old ingrained slavery.

A second concept that really is foundational to the whole Bible and to Christianity is the idea of unbelief as a kind of beloved blindness. You see a vivid portrayal of unbelief here in Pharaoh.

Pharaoh is the embodiment of unbelief. With a glare in his eye he says, "Who IS the LORD?... I do not know the LORD!" Just like that Pharaoh who knew not Joseph...i.e. had no respect/regard for Joseph, so THIS Pharaoh has no regard for YHWH (God of Israel). " I do NOT KNOW YHWH!"

Now, before we go further we should ask, "Well, DID he? I mean do we expect this king to just roll-over and give up his entire work-force just because these two old-guys claim to represent a Deity the king has never even heard of?"

And it's true...there's a part of unbelief that comes from intellectual ignorance. How can they believe without someone to tell them (asks the Romans 10)? And we rightly feel for someone who just doesn't KNOW that there is a God and this God has entered in – He entered into the Exodus Story and later He entered in fully when He Himself BECAME One with His people's suffering and emptied Himself and became a Slave in order to win us... And some people either don't know that...or have never had it explained...or don't GET it or have certain intellectual questions... And like Pharaoh they can say, "I don't know the LORD?"

However, unbelief is never entirely innocent and Pharaoh's "god-complex" is found in all of us to one degree or another. He is NOT simply unknowing but also uncaring, unfeeling, defiant and mocking. He is deliberately dividing Moses and Aaron from their people. His unbelief IS fueled by ignorance ...but it's also deliberate: he will NOT believe because he will not let go of his desire to BE God! ("These are MY people!!...")

You may know the great English novelist Aldous Huxley (Brave New World...and many other

works and essays...brilliant man...gifted family) but in his memoir he gets honest about his own unbelief (at least in his younger years):

*I had motives for not wanting the world to have a meaning; and consequently assumed that it had none, and was able without any difficulty to find satisfying reasons for this assumption. The philosopher who finds no meaning in the world is not concerned exclusively with a problem in pure metaphysics. He is also concerned to prove that there is no valid reason why he personally should not do as he wants to do. For myself, as no doubt for most of my friends, the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation from a certain system of morality. We objected to the morality because it interfered with our sexual freedom. The supporters of this system claimed that it embodied the meaning - the Christian meaning, they insisted - of the world. There was one admirably simple method of confuting these people and justifying ourselves in our erotic revolt: we would deny that the world had any meaning whatever. (Aldous Huxley, *Ends and Means*, 1937)*

He's honest enough to admit – our unbelief though masked in philosophical sophistication had much more to do with our desire to be sexually unrestrained. “If we were unbelieving and blind it was because we didn't WANT to see.”

And that brings up the last point: 1) Evil as a Desired Dictator 2) Unbelief as a Beloved Blindness 3) Salvation as an Frightening Freedom

We go back to that OFT quoted illustration from C.S. Lewis sermon called, “The Weight of Glory”.

*“We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.” (C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*)*

And you see this so clearly in these Israelite foremen who had been beaten because the Israelites didn't make the brick-quota. They are making mud-pies (bricks without straw) it was unbearable but now it's even worse than unbearable... “So Moses...would ya' JUST leave us alone!”

“But don't you want salvation? Don't you want to be free? Don't you want the destiny God has for you? Don't you want to know God? Don't you want GLORY?”

“Look Moses... I know what I GOT...my life...my bricks ...my job...my marriage...my kids...I’m a few months away from the BONUS... JUST...don’t ...DON’T ROCK THE BOAT! We’ll end up losing our lives and NOTHING is worth losing your life!”

But Jesus Christ says, “Yes! This, that I have come to GIVE, this is worth losing even your very life! He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal. (John 12.25)

Oh Moses...You made Pharaoh hate us! May the LORD look upon you and judge you!

But Jesus Christ, our greater Moses says, “I am WILLING to actually be judged in YOUR place...in order to give you this...this salvation, this NEW LIFE...this GLORY... but YOU...you must trust ME...must rest in what I have done...must turn your back on the old dictator...and fall into My nail-scarred hands”

It’s a frightening freedom...we have to wager our mud-pies...we have to wager everything.

And yet...every other Master will misuse You... and the worst Master of all may be your own SELF... walk away from the bricks...the mud-pies in the slum... you can not picture the splendor of the sea, the shore, the waves and sun, the weight of glory I have for you...How vast the benefits you can not imagine... Just TRUST Me...it will be joy unspeakable and full of glory... trust me and come.”