

"Who Is the Lord?"

Exodus 5

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“1 And afterward Moses and Aaron went in, and told Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness. 2 And Pharaoh said, Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go.

3 And they said, The God of the Hebrews hath met with us: let us go, we pray thee, three days' journey into the desert, and sacrifice unto the LORD our God; lest he fall upon us with pestilence, or with the sword. 4 And the king of Egypt said unto them, Wherefore do ye, Moses and Aaron, let the people from their works? get you unto your burdens. 5 And Pharaoh said, Behold, the people of the land now are many, and ye make them rest from their burdens.

6 And Pharaoh commanded the same day the taskmasters of the people, and their officers, saying, 7 Ye shall no more give the people straw to make brick, as heretofore: let them go and gather straw for themselves. 8 And the tale of the bricks, which they did make heretofore, ye shall lay upon them; ye shall not diminish ought thereof: for they be idle; therefore they cry, saying, Let us go and sacrifice to our God. 9 Let there more work be laid upon the men, that they may labor therein; and let them not regard vain words. 10 And the taskmasters of the people went out, and their officers, and they spoke to the people, saying, Thus saith Pharaoh, I will not give you straw. 11 Go ye, get you straw where ye can find it: yet not ought of your work shall be diminished. 12 So the people were scattered abroad throughout all the land of Egypt to gather stubble instead of straw. 13 And the taskmasters hastened them, saying, Fulfill your works, your daily tasks, as when there was straw. 14 And the officers of the children of Israel, which Pharaoh's taskmasters had set over them, were beaten, and demanded, Wherefore have ye not fulfilled your task in making brick both yesterday and to day, as heretofore?

15 Then the officers of the children of Israel came and cried unto Pharaoh, saying, Wherefore dealest thou thus with thy servants? 16 There is no straw given unto thy servants, and they say to us, Make brick: and, behold, thy servants are beaten; but the fault is in thine own people. 17 But he said, Ye are idle, ye are idle: therefore ye say, Let us go and do sacrifice to the LORD. 18 Go therefore now, and work; for there shall no straw be given you, yet shall ye deliver the tale of bricks. 19 And the officers of the

children of Israel did see that they were in evil case, after it was said, Ye shall not diminish ought from your bricks of your daily task.

20 And they met Moses and Aaron, who stood in the way, as they came forth from Pharaoh: 21 And they said unto them, The LORD look upon you, and judge; because ye have made our savor to be abhorred in the eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to slay us. 22 And Moses returned unto the LORD, and said, Lord, wherefore hast thou so evil entreated this people? why is it that thou hast sent me? 23 For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in thy name, he hath done evil to this people; neither hast thou delivered thy people at all.” (Ex 5:1-23 AV)

There are several things, now that must be said about the passage before us. The time of preparation has passed, and Moses and Aaron are Sent to deliver their message to Pharaoh. The Bible does not record how they got an audience with Pharaoh, but no doubt it was through the elders of the Israelites, for there must have been some arrangement whereby so numerous a people as Israel could have access to Pharaoh to make their petitions known to him.

I. First of all, we must note the nature of the response of Pharaoh to the request of Moses and Aaron.

A. The request of Moses and Aaron was respectful, modest, and reasonable. They did not say everything that they wanted, but only that they be permitted to go out into the wilderness to worship their God. Why did God do all these things in Egypt; couldn't he have prevailed upon Pharaoh immediately? Isn't the heart of the king in the hand of the Lord? We will not indulge in the fiction of free will, for God had already told Moses that Pharaoh would not let the people go, but that God would harden his heart.

1. We must remember that these things are written for our admonition, and that God seeks his glory in all things. Paul writes that God raised up Pharaoh in order to teach us that God will prevail even over the hardest of hearts, for the meanest, orneriest old cuss that they ever was would be no match for the power of the LORD God.

2. Calvin lists several reasons for the method that God chose to demonstrate His power and glory:

a) God more clearly to lay open His power; for God prepared Pharaoh to be the most worthy human possible for this encounter: God himself hardened Pharaoh's heart—He was no shrinking violet. Hence, God's victory would be that much more glorious.

b) God would show that he had a particular love for His people, proving his special love for His people, no matter how downtrodden and unworthy they are.

c) God wished to teach all of His servants patience and endurance in the midst of trials—that they persevere unto final victory.

d) God wished to show that, against all the strivings and devices of Satan, against the madness of the ungodly, and all worldly hinderances, His hand must always prevail; and to leave us no room to doubt, but that whatever we see opposing us will at length be overcome by him.

e) By detecting the illusions of Satan and the magicians that He would render His Church more wary, that she might carefully watch against such devices, and that her faith might continue invincible against all the machinations of error.

f) Finally, He would convince Pharaoh and the Egyptians, that their folly was not to be excused by any pretense of ignorance; and, at the same time, by this example, He would shew us how horrible a darkness possesses the minds of the reprobate, when He has deprived them of the light of his Spirit.

B. There are several parts to Pharaoh's reply.

1. He professed not to know the Lord, that there was no valid evidence that there was even such as God who was called Jehovah Elohim, the words that Moses and Aaron used. "Who is Jehovah?" is the word that Pharaoh used in his sneer. The ungodly still use this pretense.

2. He put the offense of them, not on him or the Egyptians: You are lazy and are not doing your work. The fact that they had been unjustly made slaves and made to endure a most horrid bondage and servitude is just passed over. Not for an instance would Pharaoh admit any blame for himself or for the Egyptians.

3. He also put blame upon their leaders, Moses and Aaron—"you make them rest from their burdens." There is not enough work for them to do, that is the reason they are idle. This is an old device of unbelief and ungodliness: to get new offense from the words or protest. The most gentle and inoffensive petition of Moses and Aaron is turned into a new ground for offense. Truly this was a hard-hearted and vicious man.

C. Cruelty then, was added to cruelty.

1. They must now make bricks without straw being supplied. They had to search in the fields for stubble to use instead of straw.

2. But they must make as many bricks as before.

3. Again the blame was placed on Israel: ye are lazy and idle, and physical beatings were added to the other distress of the people of God.

4. The protest of the officers simply added to the offense laid to the charge of Israel. Pharaoh would admit no wrong, and put all the blame on Israel.

II. The complaint of the people against Moses and Aaron. Vs. 20-23

A. They blamed Moses and Aaron: They had no taste for the conflict. They wanted comfort.

1. “Our savior to be abhorred in the eyes of Pharaoh” You can see how bad this stink is.

2. You have put a sword in their hands. It’s your fault Moses. They had believed the propaganda of the enemy.

B. Moses then blames God: I went to speak in thy name, and look what has happened? Nothing good has happened, and you have not delivered thy people at all.

III. Application:

A. Better is the end of a thing, than the beginning of a thing, said the wise Solomon. Many start out well, but at the first shot they run away, without a stomach for the fight or perseverance to continue on.

B. Pharaoh did not get to his place of power and authority without having mastered the arts of human government, lies, idolatry, bribing of friends and destruction of enemies, slander, blackmail, cheating, lying, extortion, intimidation, and generally bullying. All of these things are implied in his reply to these two holy men who stood before Him. The officers of Israel could see no way out of the trouble. They thought that there was no hope.

C. Pharaoh also saw how feeble they were and this just made his heart harder and strengthened his determination to have his own way. “Who is the Lord, that I should let the people go.

D. People like what little comfort they can have and resist change: Calvin says on this passage:

“And this cowardice is natural to almost all of us, that we prefer to be without God’s help rather than to suffer under the cross, whilst He leads us to salvation gradually, and sometimes by a circuitous path. Nothing indeed

is sweeter than to hear that our afflictions are regarded by God, and that He will come to our relief in tribulation; but if God's favor awakens the wrath of the ungodly against us, we shall be prepared to abandon all His promises rather than purchase the hopes they afford at so great a price." Calvin, Commentaries, *in.loc.*

E. Yet God did not abandon them, though they abandoned hope. When people abandon faith, they abandon hope, and when they abandon hope, they will not suffer inconvenience or trouble. God will be faithful, though every man is a liar. Don't get mad at Moses because the word of God stretches you...it is God who is stretching you, not Moses.

F. This shows how futile it is to put your hope and expectation in men. If Moses' faith had been in Israel, he would have gone back to Midian and the flocks of his father-in-law. G. There are two sins that are on the extremes when we read the promises of God:

1. The First is unbelief: simply to not trust the Lord and/or seek His counsel. Every promise in the Bible will be fulfilled. Israel knew the promise and they had the bones of Joseph as a kind of seal of the promise. They carried the sign of circumcision in their flesh, and to them was committed the tradition of the creation of the world and history of the patriarch that Moses would later write into the first five books of the Bible. But many of them did not believe, even after God brought them out of Egypt. Their unbelief led to their carcasses falling in the wilderness. Why should they believe that God's firstborn Son was in them and with them? Many of them just did not believe.

2. The second is presumption, or tempting God. Just because it is in the Bible doesn't mean that it is a promise to you. Only one was sent to fight Goliath, and he was the one ordained of God to slay Goliath and become king of Israel. All of his brothers had been rejected by God when Samuel went to anoint the next king of Israel and God did not give the other brothers the kind of faith that He gave David. Only Moses was given the task of leading Israel out of Egypt, and though God had promised that they would be delivered, it only came in God's time and according to His purpose. Just because you think that something needs to be done doesn't mean that you are ordained of God to do it.

3. We will see these two sins—both are a tempting of God—manifest in Israel many times as we follow them through the wilderness. How horrible is this history when we observe the failures of men; how wonderful is this history when we see the triumph of God over all things.

H. We have a hint here of the reason for the presence of evil in the world. Just as God raised up a human opponent and clothed him with all the excellences of

human nature, education, state power and magnificence, wealth and determination and character, in order to show his power in him—a worthy opponent to reveal God power and glory in human things; then why should we think it strange that God would create such a magnificent being as Lucifer, that old dragon, Satan, the Destroyed, that in the apostasy of the angels God would show his power in heavenly things. Thus all things serve the glory of God and we are amazed at His wisdom, power, honor, glory and majesty, and we fear before Him. No one needs to be sorry for Pharaoh—nothing happened to him that He did not richly deserve. Let us learn how weak we are before God. If we have been humbled of our pride and arrogance, let us be thankful and pray that God would do with us as He wills. If our heart is hardened and willfully seek our own way, let us fear, for who are we to stand before God. As the wise man said: “He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.” (Pr 29:1 AV)

Amen and Amen
God bless you.