

Exodus 5

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[0 : 00] Well, just when you think things are on the up, when things are going well, there are setbacks, aren't there? There are real disappointments in life.

There's another terrible blow for Moses and God's people in this chapter, Exodus chapter 5. I hear that the events of Exodus 5 are pretty well documented in non-biblical texts, in the history books. So non-Jewish accounts in the periods around about 1200, between 1200 and 1500 BC, correlate with the events in this chapter.

So records in ancient Egypt show a sharp increase in brick production quotas, for example, which were rarely ever met, interestingly enough. If you go on the internet, or actually if you go to the very place, you can see a wall painting from the period of Toot Moses III, showing an image of an Egyptian taskmaster with the caption underneath, The rod is in my hand, do not be idle.

The famous lament of Memphis in the 13th century BC went something like this, There are no men to make brick, and no straw in the neighbourhood.

[1 : 20] I bet that sounds better in the Egyptian than the English, but you get the gist. You see, when you read this dark, dark chapter, Exodus chapter 5, it isn't just a script, It isn't just a dark twist in a story, it's a real history that we're reading, about real people with real experiences and real suffering.

I think it's probably the darkest chapter since chapter 1, And it comes as a particular shock, doesn't it? To read so much pain and suffering in the life of God's people, after the end of chapter 4, where Moses finally obeys the Lord.

He goes to Pharaoh, and if you look at the end of chapter 4, there's this great scene of worship, isn't there? In verse 31, where the people bow down to worship God, they realise that he has visited Moses, and he is their saviour.

Things are looking up. Things are hopeful. And then in chapter 5, verse 1, he's got this newfound confidence to go to Pharaoh, and make the appeal on behalf of God.

Let the people go. But then look at verse 2 of chapter 5. Those heart-sinking words come, don't they? But Pharaoh said, But Pharaoh said, Who is the Lord that I should obey his voice and let the people go?

[2 : 54] I don't know the Lord, and moreover I'll not let Israel go. You see, it's a chapter about when obedience to God seems to lead to immediate failure.

That's what's happened, isn't it? The question Moses asks at the end, Why did you send me in the first place? If all this was going to happen. It's when the going is good, and then suddenly setbacks come.

And suffering intensifies as a result. Just look at verse 10 to 11. The taskmasters and the foremen of the people went out and said to the people, Thus says Pharaoh, I'll not give you straw.

Go and get your straw yourselves, wherever you can find it. But your work, well, that won't be reduced in the very least. Maybe that sounds like your boss at the moment.

The work is increased. The suffering worsened. It's uncomfortable reading, isn't it? The injustice is palpable. It's sickeningly unfair, the way these people are treated.

[3 : 58] It's the worst time of slavery, all because Moses obeyed God. That's the sting in the tail, isn't it? What is God doing here?

So confusing. The darkness thickens over the people of God. It's when obedience seems to lead to real failure.

It's when God's people face the big setbacks and disappointments. And the suffering intensifies in the Christian life.

Now what I'd like us to see is that this chapter, while it is historical, it's also a revelatory chapter. It reveals to us deeper things, a deeper reality.

It's here to teach us a lesson about what God is like and about what we are like living in this world.

Now, Moses writes Exodus at a time in history of imperialism and empire.

[5 : 02] It's a time where kings and emperors jostled for power and most importantly they fought for the allegiance of the population, didn't they? They wanted people to serve them and bring them wealth.

Moses speaks into that context. So what we have in this chapter is the clash between two kings to be ruler over a people.

Have a look at verse 1 again. Moses says, Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, let my people go. But then look at verse 10.

Pharaoh retorts. Thus says Pharaoh. Exact same phrase, I'll not give you straw, I won't let the people go. You see what's happening, isn't it?

Pharaoh sets himself up in opposition to God. It's the two kings battling for the people. Pharaoh sets himself up, Who is the Lord that I should obey his voice?

[6 : 04] I don't know the Lord. And moreover, I won't let his people go. They're mine. I want the people. It's the clash of two kings for the allegiance and service of the people.

So at this point, just note that Exodus, the story of Exodus, is not just about releasing the Israelites from slavery, full stop, although it is that. No, it's to bring them from the service of one king to the service of another, isn't it?

Verse 1, God says, Let them go so that they may hold a fast to me. I want them, God says. Verse 3, Let us go so we can sacrifice to the Lord from the service of one king to another.

And Pharaoh, you see, he knows what is going on, doesn't he? Verse 8, They're idle, therefore they cry, Let us go and sacrifice to our God. And in verse 17, You're idle, you're idle.

That's why you say, Let us go and sacrifice to the Lord. You see, Pharaoh knows what this chapter is about. He knows that this is the battle for the service of the people. And you see, they will either serve Pharaoh or they will serve God.

[7 : 20] So the darkness of this chapter, it cries out to us about this battle this afternoon. That actually each one of us is torn between two masters.

You've got two masters to serve, in the words of Bob Dylan. You've got to serve somebody. So the first thing that we see in this passage is that Pharaoh would have you as his servant.

Pharaoh would have you as his servant. Now he's the one who sets himself up, isn't he, as God's enemy. He wants to take God's people for himself and he wants you.

He wants you. It's like that poster of Uncle Sam, isn't it? I want you for the US Army. Who is the Lord that I should listen to him? Well, eventually we'll see that he'll regret saying that, Pharaoh. But he's determined to take the people who want to worship God and captivate them into serving him. Now he'll do it in various ways, won't he?

[8 : 28] He'll do it, first of all, with propaganda. Have a look at verse 9. Let heavier work be laid on the men that they may labour at it and pay no regard to lying words.

That's trick number one, isn't it, up Pharaoh's sleeve. He calls God a liar. It's poppycock leaving me to serve this God of the Hebrews. I don't even know him.

It's a big fat lie that you're listening to. There is nothing out there for you with him. If you leave me, you will have nothing.

This is where you belong. Serving me, Pharaoh says. So he does it with propaganda, you see, but he does it with suffering as well, doesn't he? He increases the load and the work.

He increases the trouble. He increases the persecution. It's that combination of sweet and sour that he uses, doesn't he? I think C.S. Lewis depicts that so well in the character of the White Witch in the Chronicles of Narnia.

[9 : 33] It's that combination of Turkish delight to tempt, the propaganda don't go with God. Stay here. But it's the whips as well, isn't it?

To beat down and oppress. That's Pharaoh through and through. Now as the Bible unfolds, we see that Pharaoh, this particular king of Egypt, is a picture of the person Satan.

Now if you want to chat with me about that afterwards, I'd be glad to. The Bible says that Satan is real and as the Bible unfolds, Pharaoh is a picture of Satan, God's great enemy.

And if you think about it, Pharaoh's tactics are just the same as Satan's, aren't they? So he was the first one to call God a liar in Genesis 3. He calls God's word to question, doesn't he?

Did he really say, don't eat from any of the trees in the garden? Well he misquotes God anyway. Don't eat of the apple. You won't surely die, Eve.

[10:41] There's nothing for you with him. Go on. Do life your way. You're the boss. Jesus calls him the father of lies.

It's propaganda, isn't it? But he's also the one that Jesus says prowls around like a lion waiting to devour. He wants to destroy. He wants to oppress the people.

You see, it's a battle of two kings for the service of the people. And Pharaoh, he wants you. Dark times aren't just arbitrary things.

There is a battle going on and it's a battle to captivate your heart and your service. Setbacks and failures, disappointments, huge suffering, can be experienced for the church, for God's people because Pharaoh is still out there.

He is defeated, isn't he, at the cross. But in these last days, Satan desires to have you, Jesus says to Peter, to sift you like wheat.

[11:52] You see, he masquerades around as God, thus says Pharaoh, he says, but he battles for the service of the people. He battles for you.

Pharaoh would have you as his servant. But secondly, in the darkness, and I hate to do this, but this is even worse than the first point, secondly, in the darkness, we terrifyingly see that we would have Pharaoh as our master.

He wants us as his servants, but we would even have him as our master. Now the big question, of course, of this chapter is, why would God allow all of this to happen?

Why give Pharaoh room to operate at all? Why not just get the people out of Egypt before we get to chapter 5? Why all of this disappointment and suffering?

Why allow Satan to operate? Read Job chapter 1. You can see that does happen. That's the burning question, isn't it, that so many people have. Why allow suffering God?

[13:04] The situation, it becomes so unbearable for the people, doesn't it? So much so that the foremen of the people go to the Israelite Egyptian masters to complain.

Now these foremen would have been Israelites themselves. And in verse 15 they say, why do you treat your servants like this? No straw is given to your servants, yet they say to us, make us bricks. The fault is with your people. Verse 21, they make the complaint to Moses and Aaron as well, don't they? May the Lord look on you and judge because you've made us a stink, literally a stink, in the sight of Pharaoh and his servants and have put a sword in their hands to kill us.

Enough is enough, Moses and Aaron. Now it's important to know that these foremen, even though they were Israelites, probably would have had positions of relative authority over the Israelite people.

So their lives more than likely would have been better than the labourers that they managed. It would have been a great deal better. So it would have taken a lot, it would have taken a great deal for them to stand up and protest to these Egyptian bosses.

[14:22] Now notice how they have not said a word, have they, until this point in the story, even though there's been plenty of suffering already. Now it's as if, isn't it, there is a sense in which, until now, these foremen, these Israelite foremen, were content with the status quo, however unpleasant it may have been.

They would have had Pharaoh as their master, perhaps. And what about the rest of the people? Well as Exodus goes on, you'll see that the people, after they escape, they look back on their time in slavery.

And one example of what they thought of it, they remember it with rose-tinted spectacles, to be honest, because in chapter 16 verse 3 they complain, would they have died by the hand of the Lord in Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots, do you remember, and ate the bread to the full, that's what it was like, wasn't it, was it?

No, they hated the slavery. But you see, there was another side to them, wasn't there, that would have had Pharaoh as their master again. It was the sweet and sour, you see, the bittersweet symphony of life in Egypt.

So you see, as one writer puts it, the Exodus wasn't so much about getting the people out of Egypt, it was about getting Egypt out of the people. It was Robert E.

