

first contact

exodus 5

Exodus 5 this morning.

Here we see the first encounter with Pharaoh and his first response to Moses and Aaron. Things do not go well. And, despite the fact that the Lord had prepped them for this, Moses and the people get the wind knocked out of them for a minute.

The perspective we want to take this morning is that of a man doing what God has asked him to do. Moses is on board, he's walking in obedience, and because of that some things happen around him. The same will be true of us, so we want to see this as a briefing of what our obedience might be like today in our service to the Lord, especially since we might encounter some serious opposition.

So, let's look at our text and see what we see.

Exodus 5.1 - Afterward Moses and Aaron went in and told Pharaoh, "Thus says the Lord God of Israel: 'Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness.' "

Moses had made it across the desert, he'd met with Aaron, then the people of Israel. They had unified and rallied together and now it was time to go to the palace and confront Pharaoh with the message of God.

Right from the beginning God challenged Pharaoh. He said, "These are *MY* people and I'm taking them out of here."

The process of the Exodus was not quick or simple, partially because the Lord's plan was to win a contest against the many false gods of Egypt. Commentators point out that each of the plagues are a direct affront to different deities that the Egyptians worshiped.

So the Lord sends in Moses and gets right to the point. Let *MY* people go.

Now, if I'm Moses, I'm thinking, "This isn't going to work." A.W. Pink looks at this scene and rightfully says that they were bearding the lion in his own den.

But, ministry is meant to be done boldly in the open. Christianity is about magnification and proclamation. And though there are times and places where the Church has been driven underground, we're always called to take the Gospel to the streets. We're sent as sheep out to the wolves. I'm sure that's how Moses felt at this moment.

Exodus 5.2 - And Pharaoh said, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, nor will I let Israel go."

Pharaoh's answer was, "No," and, "Who is the Lord?"

That's a very great question. As J. Vernon McGee points out, "It is the best question of all...because you have to know Him before there can be any deliverance for you."

When we're ministering to unbelievers, we're often upset or angry or brokenhearted about their behavior and choices, but the first thing they need is not reform, it's knowledge of God. They need to know *who* God is before we can expect them to obey His commands.

Exodus 5.3 - So they said, "The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Please, let us go three days' journey into the desert and sacrifice to the Lord our God, lest He fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword."

Let's camp here for just a minute.

Pharaoh wants to know who this God is and in this answer they give us a lot of insight into how we can present the Lord to unbelievers.

First of all, they highlight the fact that this God comes and meets with people. He does not hide or spirit Himself away from our reach. Instead, He comes down to us.

And when He reaches out to us He expresses a desire to interact. They said, "Let us go and sacrifice." God comes and meets us but not just to display Himself. He desires interaction and relationship.

But, as Moses and Aaron point out at the end of that verse, those who reject that kinship with the Lord are subject to His judgment.

This is a very simple but very profound summary of how we reveal God to people who don't know Him. It's simply that He exists. He is real. He is reaching out to the people of the earth and desires a personal interaction with them, but if we reject that relationship He has no choice but to judge us for our sin.

Now, there's one other layer to their answer to Pharaoh that ministered to me. Sometimes the question is raised of why Moses said they just were going 3 days into the wilderness when the ultimate plan was complete emancipation and relocation to Canaan.

Moses and Aaron weren't being deceptive. Instead, Pharaoh was being given a reasonable request here at his introduction to Jehovah. A 3 day journey would've barely put the people outside of Egypt's borders. And, the Egyptians were no strangers to religious rituals and festivals. They had lots of them. So, on one hand, Moses and Aaron were storming the castle, but what God was asking of Pharaoh here in this first encounter was reasonable and easy.

It reminded me of what Jesus said to Zacchaeus when they first met. Jesus knew all that Zacchaeus had done, all that was in his heart, all the changes that needed to be made. But Jesus said, "I'd like to come to dinner if that's alright." It was something simple and reasonable and would reveal the heart.

As we share with people and minister to them, especially people who aren't Christians, it's easier to be like Peter when Jesus was being arrested, grabbing a sword and hacking away at

people, rather than it is to be like Jesus. And sometimes God is going to direct us to be very bold and very blunt, like John the Baptist's ministry. But often times the Lord will direct us to start smaller and give simple, reasonable opportunities to see the state of the heart.

Let's move on to verse 4.

Exodus 5.4-5 - Then the king of Egypt said to them, "Moses and Aaron, why do you take the people from their work? Get back to your labor." And Pharaoh said, "Look, the people of the land are many now, and you make them rest from their labor!"

People who don't know the Lord are bound to assume that you have an angle for the things your doing, because that's how *they* live. They're thinking, "I live for me, so you doing what you're doing...what's in it for you?" Which is all the more reason that we should live holy and blameless so that it becomes quickly evident that we're not going through life like a person who doesn't know the Lord. They should wonder why we're doing the things we're doing and our actions should highlight the contrast between our lives and theirs. It should put a spotlight on their greed and their bitterness and their dissatisfaction and their prejudice while we project love and compassion and mercy. That gets peoples' attention, which is what God wants.

Exodus 5.6-14 - So the same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people and their officers, saying, "You shall no longer give the people straw to make brick as before. Let them go and gather straw for themselves. And you shall lay on them the quota of bricks which they made before. You shall not reduce it. For they are idle; therefore they cry out, saying, 'Let us go and sacrifice to our God.' Let more work be laid on the men, that they may labor in it, and let them not regard false words." And the taskmasters of the people and their officers went out and spoke to the people, saying, "Thus says Pharaoh: 'I will not give you straw. Go, get yourselves straw where you can find it; yet none of your work will be reduced.' " So the people were scattered abroad throughout all the land of Egypt to gather stubble instead of straw. And the taskmasters forced them to hurry, saying, "Fulfill your work, your daily quota, as when there was straw." Also the officers of the children of Israel, whom Pharaoh's taskmasters had set over them, were beaten and were asked, "Why have you not fulfilled your task in making brick both yesterday and today, as before?"

We live in a pretty diplomatic society. Most of us don't enjoy conflict and confrontation. But when we minister to people and start sharing the Gospel, our enemy is going to hit back. And he knows how to hit where it hurts. He's not interested in coming to the table with you and figuring out a diplomatic compromise. He just wants you knocked out of the ring.

Other than the brutality and suffering, there was another tactic being used against God's people here. Pharaoh wanted to capture their focus and energy and get it off of this God that they were talking about and onto busy work. His thinking was, "If I can steal their focus, if I can steal their time, then this pursuit of God will go away." So, the Egyptians put some intense pressure on the Hebrews to busy themselves with world work.

The things we spend our time and our focus on are the seeds that we're sowing in our lives. And we *will* reap what we sow. So, if the energies and endeavors of our lives are spent on world-work and world focus, then spiritual fruit is going to shrivel.

Now, we're not under the kind of slavery and bondage that is seen here. But there is an immense pressure from the world to gather and build. You're an idle sucker if you're not headed for that corner office or building yourself that beach house. Whatever treasure city that's being advertised to you, it's just like the one that Pharaoh forced the Hebrews to build.

Exodus 5.15-16 - Then the officers of the children of Israel came and cried out to Pharaoh, saying, "Why are you dealing thus with your servants? There is no straw given to your servants, and they say to us, 'Make brick!' And indeed your servants are beaten, but the fault is in your own people."

They asked Pharaoh why. Certainly we wonder why our ministry or our Christianity isn't always warmly welcomed. And the reason is because to some we are the savor of life, to others the savor of death. People generally have a strong reaction to the smell of garlic. You either love it or you hate it and people respond strongly to the smell.

Depending on the condition of a person's heart, the Gospel is going to smell like life or like death to them. And when someone like Pharaoh gets that savor of death and his sinful heart feels threatened by God's revelation, then they're going to lash out. Good thing the Lord warned us that would happen! It's not a surprise.

Exodus 5.17-18 - But he said, "You are idle! Idle! Therefore you say, 'Let us go and sacrifice to the Lord.' Therefore go now and work; for no straw shall be given you, yet you shall deliver the quota of bricks."

God is gracious. The reason He didn't just rain down fire on Egypt and thereby emancipate the Hebrews is because He had a larger plan to manifest Himself and prove Himself and give Egyptians opportunities to be saved. Same as His plan today.

In that effort He brings people to moments of decisions. He knocks on their doors and says, "Will you let Me in?" And here, Pharaoh willfully resolved to harden himself against the Lord and His people.

Exodus 5.19-21 - And the officers of the children of Israel saw that they were in trouble after it was said, "You shall not reduce any bricks from your daily quota." Then, as they came out from Pharaoh, they met Moses and Aaron who stood there to meet them. And they said to them, "Let the Lord look on you and judge, because you have made us abhorrent in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to kill us."

The situation was serious. They were being fired upon. But this was not the end of the world. These same people who just a few verses ago saw God's miraculous power and believed Him and worshiped Him had completely lost hope and resigned themselves to their slavery. In fact, they were already trying to talk themselves into *staying* enslaved so as to avoid more friction.

Getting beaten up is no fun, but perpetual slavery generation after generation isn't the answer. Especially when God had said up front, "I'm going to deliver you. Pharaoh is going to resist Me and I will bring you out with a mighty hand."

But as humans it's very hard for us to overcome emotions and fear when we encounter opposition or suffering in our lives. Which is why it's essential that we moor our hearts to what God has said in His word. That is the constant. Our feelings are not. And, often times, our feelings aren't honest or rational. They're reactionary. But God is sovereign and secure and He is working to accomplish what He's said He would accomplish. We don't always understand His moves or His timing, but He is faithful and true and good.

These same Hebrews had been crying out to God year after year, begging for deliverance and it's simply naive for them to think that their deliverance would come without any opposition or friction.

Now, for our own lives, the Bible says that the nature of our walk with Christ is that we will have tribulation and struggle, but to be of good cheer, because we have already been set free.

The Hebrews were just wrong and they were letting their emotions dictate their decisions, when it's God who should be setting the course.

Moses got tripped up too.

Exodus 5.22-23 - So Moses returned to the Lord and said, "Lord, why have You brought trouble on this people? Why is it You have sent me? For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has done evil to this people; neither have You delivered Your people at all."

Now, the Lord is going to open chapter 6 with assurance and comfort, but remember, He had already detailed to Moses how this was going down.

But Moses said, "You have not delivered Your people at all." This is quite an accusation. In the mean time, we know that the Lord was preparing frogs and flies and darkness. The Angel of Death was preparing to ride down from heaven. God was literally bending the laws of physics in order to accomplish His deliverance of the people in a way that would be remembered and retold for thousands of years in thousands of languages. And, rather than vaporize every Egyptian, He was working a plan that would end with some of those Egyptians being saved and the Hebrews moved to the Land that was promised to them.

If God had just burned up all the Egyptians, do you think for a minute that the Israelites would've left that land? Why would they? But God was working a greater, deeper, better plan for the long term.

As we live and minister, we need to cling to the big picture and move in that direction, not losing hope, but serving God and representing Him according to His purposes. Situations may be challenging, but they don't have to be surprising when we focus on what the Lord has told us up front. Hang in there, obey and watch the Lord move in your life and through your life.