

Midweek Meditation for October 27, 2021

Exodus 5

You may remember from last week, Moses was in the land of Midian, sort of minding his own business, as he had been doing for the last 40 years or so. You also may remember that back then, he tried to help the Hebrew people who were enslaved in Egypt. Since he tried to do it on his own, without God's help, he ended up killing an Egyptian slave driver, alienating the Hebrew people, and getting himself chased out of Egypt by Pharaoh by the threat of death. He settled in the land of Midian, and there is where he met his wife.

This was the reason that he spent the next 40 years or so tending the herd of his father-in-law, Jethro. It was while he was tending Jethro's herd that he ended up on the very western end of Midian, and encountered God in the form of a burning bush. To make a long story short, God told Moses that the time had come for him to fulfill his life's purpose, to go to Pharaoh and to tell Pharaoh to let the Hebrew people go.

You will remember that Moses tried to tell God, "I think you have got the wrong guy; who am I that I should tell Pharaoh anything? The last time that I had any contact with the Egyptian Pharaoh, Pharaoh wanted to see me put to death. Why should I believe that my reception by Pharaoh would be any different now?" We know that God's response was to show Moses three miracles that he could perform in order to give himself credibility in the eyes Pharaoh and to the Hebrew people. And God gave Moses permission to use Aaron as a spokes person since Moses was inarticulate.

Even after all of this, Moses begged God to find someone else to liberate the Hebrew people. But God sent Moses to Pharaoh, and that is where the lesson for today picks up. Moses and Aaron are reluctantly going to tell Pharaoh the message they were given by God to deliver to Pharaoh. Verse one for Exodus 5 says that afterward Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, "this is what the Lord, the God of the Israel says: Let my people go so that they may hold a festival to me in the dessert."

Now, I want you to notice, Moses and Aaron do not, at this point ask for a complete and total liberation of the Hebrew people, they just asked for a three-

day pass – three days for the Hebrew people to go God’s holy mountain and pray and worship their God. And Pharaoh, not only says no, but he attaches a brutal punishment to all of the enslaved people simply for suggesting the idea of letting the Hebrew people have the opportunity to worship their God.

Pharaoh’s response to the God of the Israelites is interesting. He doesn’t just say, “I have no affection for the God of the Hebrew people.” He doesn’t just say, “I have no desire to honor the Hebrew God.” Rather, he basically says “your God is not God in Egypt, I am God in Egypt, and the God of the Hebrew people bows down to Pharaoh.”

This, of course, is an assertion that Pharaoh will live to regret in the months and years to come. But for now, He says, “Who is the Lord of Israel that I should obey him and let Israel have any freedom at all? So, we get the picture of complete and utter defiance of Pharaoh to God. As a response to Pharaoh’s defiance, Moses and Aaron repeat God’s request so as to give Pharaoh one last chance. Moses even mentions that the cost of disobedience might well be a mighty plague upon the Egyptian people. And of course, just like God had predicted, the answer was a defiant “no.”

But Pharaoh even went one step further, or maybe even several steps further. Here is my response to your suggestion that the Hebrew people take 3 days to interface with their God. He asks Moses and Aaron why in the world are you wanting to take the people away from their work. When the people are not working, I am losing money. So, he gave an order to all of his slave drivers and foremen in charge of the people that they should not give the slaves any more straw for the process of making bricks. Let the slaves gather their own straw. That will show them who is in charge. Not their God, but I, Pharaoh, am in charge and have control of every part of their journeys. And not only are you to force them to gather their own straw, but demand from them the same productivity as required when we were providing all of the materials. Pharaoh says, “they are lazy, and that is why they are crying out, let us go and sacrifice to our God. Make them work harder so that they will remember the I am their God. They shall pay homage to me.”

So, the slave drivers enforced the Pharaoh’s orders forcing the Hebrew slaves to desperately search all over Egypt for the for the straw that they needed to

maintain their brick quotas. So, the Hebrew foremen go to Pharaoh and ask him why have you treated your servants this way. The servants are being beaten for not making their quota, but the reason for that failure has been imposed by your own slave drivers. Pharaoh did not acknowledge his part in their lack of productivity, he just called them lazy for wanting to take off for three days in order to worship a God who Pharaoh thought had no power to change their plight of the Hebrew people. Pharaoh simply told foremen to go and force the workers to work harder.

Well, upon hearing the Pharaoh's attitude about this whole situation, they realized that they and all of the Hebrew people were in trouble. What was being asked of them was impossible. They knew it, Pharaoh knew it and Moses and Aaron knew it. The message that God had given to Moses and Aaron to give to Pharaoh had now brought about much more suffering for the Hebrew nation. And who do you suppose that Hebrew foremen met on the way back from appealing to Pharaoh? You guessed it! Moses and Aaron, and we can only imagine that the Hebrew foreman had a few choice words for Aaron and Moses. Thanks to their interference, a terrible situation was now a horrible situation of oppression and hopelessness for God's chosen people. The Hebrew foremen basically said, "thanks a lot, Moses, messenger of our God thanks to you, Pharaoh view us as a terrible stench, and is going to impose an untold amount of punishment on our nation of people. The Hebrew people were already suffering greatly, and you have made it even worse. May the Lord look upon you in judgment! It was you who put the sword in Pharaoh's hand, and he is going to use it to kill us.

Moses did not disagree with the Hebrew's assessment of the situation. Moses was not feeling any better about this turn of events than the Hebrew leaders. He had to be terrified that this was going to turn out just like it did 40 years ago he tried to help the Hebrew nation and he was chased out of Egypt. Here he was trying to deliver the Hebrew people from their bondage, and he has ended up making their burden exponentially heavier. So, Moses returned to God and asked God, pretty point blank, why have you brought trouble to the Israel nation? Is this why you sent me? The message you told me to take to Pharaoh has placed a very heavy load on the very people you said you had compassion for. This is not

rescuing the Israelites. This is tightening the chains of their bondage. And that is where the chapter ends. And there is another cliff hanger for us.

But there is a lesson to be learned here for us. We have empathy for Moses. He didn't even want this Job. It was imposed upon him by God, and now Pharaoh is mad at him, and he is taking it out on the Israelites. The Hebrew foremen are mad at him, because they are being beaten for not making an impossible quota. And this is all because of Moses. Now we know how the story ends, but the people involved in this narrative don't. All they can see is today, and it seems pretty dark.

And you know what, that is all we can see. Some times when we are faithful to that call that God places before us, we encounter hard times just like Moses. Certainly, our burden will not be as heavy as the burden of these enslaved Israelites, but when we are called by God, we will have to carry a burden. We will no doubt encounter hard times from time to time. Think of the burden that Jesus carried to the cross before his final victory over the grave.

This story in Exodus 5 is definitely a lesson about patient endurance and rock-solid faith in the promise of deliverance even when things seem hopeless. Often in our lives we come to the place where we are only able to see today; where deliverance to a place of light is crowded out by the darkness of today. But the light always comes. The problem is that the light does not always come according to our timetable and according to our expectations.

One person who learned this lesson the hard way is Peter. He often thought he knew a better way, perhaps a shortcut to the place of light, but in the end, the only way to victory was the way of the Lord. And we learn that lesson in our lives over and over again. Here are a couple of more things for us to think about in this lesson. Moses had only asked for 3 days, and this is what happened. How will Pharaoh react to the request for a permanent liberation of the Hebrew people. Could it get worse? Another thing that we should remember is that God told Moses that Pharaoh would say no to Moses' request, but Moses seems to have forgotten the game plan and panicked. Another thing to take note of is that Moses did not use any of his magic tricks to convince Pharaoh or the Hebrew leaders about God's authority through the voice of Moses, to bring that message from God to Pharaoh. Unfortunately, this chapter brings about many more

questions than answers. But if you think about it, that is the shape of almost every single day of our lives. But in this case, perhaps the answers will come in the weeks ahead. We shall see. Let us pray.