

SUNDAY WORD

MAR. 19, 2023



Exodus 5 describes a serious confrontation in Egypt. One man stood between the Jews and their freedom. And that's Pharaoh. Only he could let the Israelites go. But, he wasn't an easy man to deal with. This scenario highlights a profound realization that when God is working, things often get worse before they get better. God's way is often a challenging one. God sometimes places us in impossible situations so that we will realize that we can't do it, but God can.

J. Hudson Taylor, a missionary to China, said: "There are three stages in any great work attempted for God: impossible, difficult, done." Impossible, difficult, done. God, Himself declares it this way, "My ways are not your ways." This idea also applies to our spiritual journey. We may have hope, visions, or goals we want to achieve for God, but they must first die before it comes back to life. If not, we will wrongly assume that "We did this on our own."

Moses is in the "impossible" stage of doing great work for God. And as we read Exodus 5, three words show us how the story unfolds.

1. ABUSE

Exodus 5:1-2 "1 Afterward Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'Let my people go, so that they may hold a festival to me in the wilderness.'"2 Pharaoh said, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord and I will not let Israel go." (NIV)

When Moses and Aaron went to see Pharaoh, it was the first time Moses had been in the king's palace after forty years. He and Aaron went with some fear, but it was exactly what God told them to do. Yet, it didn't work. Exodus 5:2 - "Pharaoh said, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord and I will not let Israel go." (NIV)

LIFE GROUP DISCUSSION

- 1 What is your takeaway lesson from the sermon?
- 2 What kinds of difficulties or setbacks have you faced in serving the Lord? How did you deal with them? What did you learn?
- 3 Have you ever been that honest with God about your disappointment in Him or your discouragement or your desire to blame Him for your hard situation, thinking that He had not come through for you as He should have?

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www.facebook.com/wwcfcebu



CONTACT US

(032) 254 8934
0916 276 1067
0942 174 4296

wwcfcebu.org
cebuwwcf@gmail.com

ADDRESS

369-L Juana Osmena Ext.,
Camputhaw, Cebu City 6000

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In this case, Egypt represents the world, spiritually speaking. Isn't this response typical of what we hear today? "Who is the Lord?! And why should I obey someone else? I am independent and don't need a cane, called God, to lean on."

When Pharaoh said, "I don't know the Lord," he was right. He did not know the Lord, so he would not obey Him. The ultimate issue is the same for us as it was for Pharaoh: Who has control? Pharaoh will soon find out the answer the hard way. He accused the Jews of trying to trick him into letting them go. So, he ordered the foremen to stop supplying straw for the bricks they were making. Now the Jews had to find straw to meet their quota.

The situation has gone from bad to worse, prompting a crucial question: What do you do when even if you do it the right way, things still get worse? Moses did exactly what God told him to do. He and Aaron talked to Pharaoh, and it backfired. Now, they are suffering, resulting in very bad consequences for all Jews.

2. DISAPPOINTMENT

Exodus 5:17-18 - "17 Pharaoh said, "Lazy, that's what you are—lazy! That is why you keep saying, 'Let us go and sacrifice to the Lord.' 18 Now get to work. You will not be given any straw, yet you must produce your full quota of bricks." (NIV)

This is what happens when you blame people for the problems you caused. Pharaoh does it by accusing the Israelites of laziness. What happens next shouldn't surprise us: Exodus 5:20-21 - "20 When they left Pharaoh, they found Moses and Aaron waiting to meet them, 21 and they said, "May the Lord look on you and judge you! You have made us obnoxious to Pharaoh and his officials and have put a sword in their hand to kill us." Who did the people of Israel blame? Moses was an easy target for the people's blame when things went wrong.

It's understandable that they were angry and that Moses was frustrated and disappointed on this bad day. However, it's important to remember that in order to do great things for God, we must first die to our own plans, dreams, and ambitions. Jesus talked about this in John 12:24, "Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds."

What does it mean? You can do great things for God, but you must die first to yourself, your rights, your desires, and your wants. Most of the time, we desperately cling to our blessings and belongings, because we can't imagine surrendering them to the Lord. But slowly, in time, God will remove our fingers away from our most treasured possessions. When He gets down to the thumb, we start fighting back. It never works. There are many farewells and surrenders along the path of God's will.

3. SORROW

Exodus 5:22-23 - "Moses returned to the Lord and said, "Why, Lord, why have you brought trouble on this people? Is this why you sent me? Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has brought trouble on this people, and you have not rescued your people at all." Moses was saying, "I did my part. But why haven't you rescued your people at all?"

Despite facing a setback, the rescue operation of God is already in progress. Exodus 5 may seem like a hopeless chapter where nothing has gone according to plan, but it is important to remember that everything unfolded according to God's plan. Moses remained in God's favor, and in due time, he would lead the Israelites out of Egypt. God knows what He is doing; nothing happens by accident. Just because you can't see it doesn't mean God isn't at work. It just means He is working behind the scenes. God keeps time in His own way.

What can we learn from Moses?

God often reveals His will through early opposition

Because Pharaoh did not know God as the Deliverer, he would soon know Him as the Destroyer. The people of Egypt would pay a terrible price for the king's arrogance. Pharaoh hardened his own heart, then God hardened it some more. It was the only way that Israel would see the power of God delivering them from slavery.

This changes how we look at our enemies. It means God uses our enemies to perfect us, knock off the rough edges, and build our faith. I'm sure Moses didn't think of Pharaoh that way, but it was true anyway. There was no way the Jews could get free without Pharaoh's permission. But he would never give it freely. God must harden his heart to the breaking point because only then would he give in.

God's timetable differs from our own

Let's remember what Moses doesn't know at this point. He doesn't know about the ten plagues because those had not been revealed yet. He doesn't have a clue that soon he and the nation will be trapped by the Red Sea. He knows nothing about the golden calf at Mount Sinai or the unending complaints of the Jews who wished they were back in Egypt. All that is hidden in the future. You can't bypass that part of your journey.

You'll never get to Sinai without passing through the Red Sea. You'll never get to the Red Sea without the 10 plagues. You'll never get the 10 plagues without going back to Pharaoh. You'll never go back to Pharaoh unless you ignore your critics. Moses didn't know, but "He knows!"

Over the years I have come back again and again to Job 23:10, "He knows the way that I take. When he has tried me, I will come forth as gold (NIV)." As problems in life keep piling up, I used to focus on the last two words: "as gold." God is working through my difficulties to produce pure gold in my life. I still believe that.

But as I get older, the perspective changed. I focus on the first two words: "He knows." This is the consolation that I hold on to in times of trials. This is the promise that I hold on to in times of trial. When nothing in my life makes sense and I feel like giving up, I return to these two words: "He knows." As long as God knows, I don't have to know.

God's power works best in our weakness

First, Pharaoh refuses Moses. Then his own people attack him. Moses seems to be a failure. That's what we see. But God is not finished yet. It's easy to boast and to start thinking we're indispensable or irreplaceable. You know what? God doesn't need us to do anything. He spoke, and the whole universe came into being. God can work with us. He can work without us.

Life is not a straight line. God's plan for you and me includes a number of detours. The path of life goes up and down. For a while, you feel like you're going in circles, then one day the clouds lift, and you discover those endless circles were leading you to the top of the mountain.

What lessons do we learn from this period in Moses' life? God doesn't want us to withdraw or run away from doing His will. His desire is that we stand fast on His nature and His promises, looking to Him for strength and victory. Exodus 5 teaches us how the tough and bad times are designed by God for our good, not for our detriment, or not to harm us. I read this online: Situations that turn against us force us dependence. Situations that force dependence teach us patience. Situations that teach us patience make us wise.