

Exodus: What We Mean When We Say God

Part 4: "Can God Be Trusted?"

Text: Exodus 5

Pastor Ben Froese, March 5, 2023

At the end of Exodus 5, we find that Moses is deeply discouraged. He's deeply discouraged because to him, it seemed like God hadn't exactly shown up in the way he had hoped for.

"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." (Exodus 5:22b-23)

Moses wonders, and we sometimes wonder too, Can God be trusted?

I. God Calls His People to Do Hard Stuff

The LORD tells Moses that he was to approach Pharaoh, the world's superpower.

God called Moses to do something hard. Something terrifying. He calls us to do hard things too.

"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.'" (Exodus 5:1)

Sometimes we might assume that if we do the right thing, if we do the obedient thing, then things will go well for us and our lives will get easier. But that isn't always the case.

II. It Doesn't Always Go So Well

"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.'" (Exodus 5:2)

Pharaoh is defiant against the LORD. He won't listen to this request at all. But more than that, he's going to now make life "hell on earth" for the Israelite people after this.

In verses 7-8 we read Pharaoh say to the slave drivers and overseers of the people:

"You are no longer to supply the people with straw for making bricks; let them go and gather their own straw. But require them to make the same number of bricks as before; don't reduce the quota." (Exodus 5:7-8a)

And to jump ahead to verses 10-11:

“Then the slave drivers and the overseers went out and said to the people, ‘This is what Pharaoh says: ‘I will not give you any more straw. Go and get your own straw wherever you can find it, but your work will not be reduced at all.’” (Exodus 5:10-11)

Making bricks in that world – and it seems that this was a big part of what the Israelites were forced to do as slaves – making bricks in that world involved essentially working with two substances: mud and straw.

And straw was the thing that held the brick together. The straw was the binding agent, the glue, the thing that gave the brick strength and made it functional.

Pharaoh says, “I’m not giving you guys straw anymore. Go find it yourself. Figure it out. And yes, you’ll still make just as many bricks as you did before.”

So, will things always go well for us when we step out in faith? When we do that bold thing God has asked us to do?

Apparently not. Or at least not at first.

I think of examples throughout history like Martin Luther King Jr. and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Sometimes taking a bold stance against injustice means you’ll lose your life.

In our own lives, each of us have likely experienced disappointments too.

III. Trusting God with the “When”

In Exodus 12 we see that God does eventually deliver his people. God is the deliverer. God does show up. But not always on our timing, but on his.

Sometimes, like Moses, we want God to do something and to do something NOW.

But sometimes we need to be patient. Sometimes we need to trust the process. Sometimes we need to see that God is at work even in the middle of the waiting. And we need to learn to trust God with the “when”.

See, God cannot be controlled or manipulated. God doesn’t just do things on our watch or on our schedule.

God is the Sovereign LORD. The Sovereign LORD who has a good plan that He is fulfilling. But it’s his plan, not our plan. And he works on His timing, not ours.

Some of those longings of our hearts, well, they might never find fulfillment in this earthly life. But they do find fulfillment. See, the promise of the Bible is that one day Jesus will return and get rid of all evil and injustice. He will wipe away every tear from every eye. He will give us new, glorified bodies. But again, that’s in HIS timing, not ours.

IV. Is Moses a Hero?

No doubt this act of Moses, approaching Pharaoh, would have taken great courage and boldness.

But if we look a little closer at the text... well... Moses' act here is an act of obedience... but only sort of. Compare Exodus 3:18 with 5:1:

"The elders of Israel will listen to you. Then you and the elders are to go to the king of Egypt and say to him, 'The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us. Let us take a three-day journey into the wilderness to offer sacrifices to the Lord our God.'" (Exodus 3:18)

"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.'" (Exodus 5:1)

"The Lord commanded a corporate approach, couched in understandable terminology, making a moderate and limited request in courteous terms. Moses adopted an authoritarian approach, alienating pharaoh with incomprehensible talk, and laying down an absolute demand." (J. A. Motyer)

So, is Moses a hero? Well, perhaps he wants to be one. But in trying to be one, he fails to trust God to be the Hero.

V. Trusting God with the "How"

Moses has a concern for justice, a concern for truth, a concern for what is right. But in the middle of that, he tries to be the hero rather than letting God be the Hero.

For some of us, perhaps we just love being the person who is "right". We think that by being bold and brash and standing up for truth, we are fighting for God and his kingdom in a world that needs people like us. But the problem is that in that, sometimes we don't exactly model the humility of Christ. Sometimes we become the arrogant person, maybe even the bully.

1 Peter 3:15 tells us that "gentleness and respect" is to be our posture.

When I think about the ways that sometimes we fail as Christians to act with gentleness and respect, part of where my mind goes is toward some of the ways we respond to some of the challenging cultural issues in this moment, especially related to sexuality and gender.

John 1:14 tells us that Jesus was full of grace and truth. As his followers, we too are to be people who are full of grace and truth.

VI. Trusting in the Trustworthy One

The Exodus story tells us that God is worthy of our trust. He doesn't always act on our timing, but He's the Sovereign LORD who is good, and who has a good plan that he is carrying out.

He doesn't always show up in the way we might hope he would, but he does show up. As a matter of fact, He is the Hero who will heroically, with a mighty hand, deliver his people out of Egypt.

As we move to the Table, we remember the ultimate act of God showing himself to be trustworthy.

"For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ." (2 Corinthians 1:20)

And the Apostle Paul says that no matter how many promises God has made – and he makes promises that He is faithful to fulfill all throughout the story of the Bible – but these promises ultimately find their fulfillment, ultimately find their "yes" in the person of Christ.

In the person of Jesus, God himself shows up. And he shows us that he's true to his word. He shows us he's a loving and trustworthy God. And he shows us that he cares for us so deeply that he would give up his life for us. He proves his trustworthiness at the cross.

Life Group Discussion and Reflection Questions

Open Up

Talk about something daring or bold that you have done in your life. What enabled you to do that thing?

Dig In

1. Read through the text, Exodus 5:1-23. What are some things that first stand out to you or raise questions for you?
2. In this text, one thing we see is that the oppression of the Israelites goes from bad to worse after Moses and Aaron confront Pharaoh. Have you ever experienced a situation get "worse" after you tried to do the right thing? How did you respond to that?
3. Moses and Aaron wanted deliverance *now*, and often we do too. In what area of life do you need to trust God with the "when"? What might God be trying to teach you even now? How can we encourage each other to trust in God's timing?

4. Compare Exodus 3:18 and 5:1. What are some points of contrast you see? How does Moses' route differ from what God initially asked of him?
5. What are examples today of ways in which Christians fail to act with gentleness and respect in their desire to fight for what is "right" and uphold the truth? Why do you think we sometimes slip into that tendency? How can we be people who are "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14)?

Prayer

Share prayer requests. In particular, take some time to pray for each other in those areas where it might be hard to trust God. Also take some time to thank God that He is the Sovereign LORD and the Hero who shows up in our lives – in His timing.