

## EXODUS 5

### THINGS USUALLY GET WORSE BEFORE THEY GET BETTER

When God gave Moses His plan for delivering His people, it basically had two different phases. The first phase was to meet with the elders and the people to get everyone on the same page. That went well. In fact it came off without a hitch. The second phase of the plan was to approach Pharaoh and let him know that the Hebrews needed a few days off work in order to go into the desert and worship God. As we are about to see, that didn't come off nearly as well.

And so it is in many of the things in our lives, even the things in which we are sure God has ordained. Resistance in this life is as sure as death and taxes. So how do we deal with it? Let's answer that by looking at how Moses dealt with it and how God dealt with Moses as well as Israel.

***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. '"***

***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."***

So chapter five starts out with Moses approaching Pharaoh and telling him that the Lord God of Israel says, "Let my people go!"

We really need to appreciate the gravity of what is happening here. Moses just went into the King's residence, obtained an audience with the king and then told this king that thinks of himself as a god, that his (Moses') God said (that is an order) "Let my people go!" In a sense, the testosterone was so thick you could cut it with a knife.

You can see the pride welling up in Pharaoh. No one is going to come into his place and tell him to let his free labor force leave – especially not one of the slaves. On top of that, this guy Moses had the nerve to threaten with words of a God in which he doesn't acknowledge. Pharaoh had heard of Yhwh,

but his pride wouldn't let him cow down to the God of a bunch of slaves; especially when he considered himself to be a god. That dog just wasn't going to hunt.

But besides the issue of pride, there is another principle at work. Can we really expect this pagan king to understand what the Hebrews wanted or why they were asking?

### **Romans 8:5-8**

**5 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. 6 For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. 7 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. 8 So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.**

Pharaoh walked according to the flesh. He wasn't subject to the Law of God. I understand that the Law had yet to be given, but the principle is that he wasn't following the will of God for he didn't know God. He will know the God of the Hebrews

eventually, but they have yet to be formally introduced.

This request was foreign to Pharaoh in a number of ways.

And the Word of God that we are to be carrying with us as well as the lifestyles we are to live as witnesses to others is foreign to those around us that walk in the flesh. If our lifestyles aren't foreign or different to them, then we may want to ask why.

Israel is being moved out of Egypt and set up as a nation in order that the things that make them different can stand out to the other nations. As individuals, we are to stand out to others. Not necessarily because we look weird but because we are modest in our dress and speech. We can carry on a conversation without using curse words. We stand out because we WANT to go to church to worship. We would rather worship than find other things to do on Sundays. These things, among others set us apart. We can't make a statement to others regarding how God has changed our lives by blending in with aspects of

our culture that don't honor God.

**Pharaoh is just doing what comes naturally to the natural man, but we have been born again and to whom much is given, much is required.**

***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."***

***4 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." 5 And Pharaoh said, "Look, the people of the land are many now, and you make them rest from their labor!"***

***6 So the same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people and their officers, saying, 7 "You shall no longer give the people straw to make brick as before. Let them go and gather straw for themselves. 8 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.' 9 Let more work be laid on***

*the men, that they may labor in it, and let them not regard false words.”*

*10 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. 11 Go, get yourselves straw where you can find it; yet none of your work will be reduced. ’” 12 So the people were scattered abroad throughout all the land of Egypt to gather stubble instead of straw. 13 And the taskmasters forced them to hurry, saying, “Fulfill your work, your daily quota, as when there was straw.” 14 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?” 15 Then the officers of the children of Israel came and cried out to Pharaoh, saying, “Why are you dealing thus with your servants? 16 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.”*

*17 But he said, “You are idle! Idle! Therefore you say, ‘Let us go and sacrifice to the Lord. ’ 18*

***Therefore go now and work; for no straw shall be given you, yet you shall deliver the quota of bricks.” 19 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.”***

Every Pharaoh had a list of public works projects he wanted to accomplish before he died. Each one tried to out-do his predecessors in conquest, buildings or both. This was just another way in which they felt their names could live forever.

Egypt was built on a combination of slave labor and conscripted labor from the poorer fringes of the empire. Egypt was in a great decline at this time making it even more dependent on slave labor than conscripts. Paying laborers was expensive and much of the tax base was no longer capable of paying. The golden years of Joseph were gone.

In verse three Moses stated that God commanded that they go 3 days into the wilderness to worship. This was 3 days out into the wilderness with a day to worship and then 3 days on the return trip.

That was a whole week of lost labor. The kingdom couldn't run for a week without its slaves – especially as they now outnumbered the Egyptians. Just think about that. The majority of the population of the kingdom would have been gone for a week and that was contingent upon them coming back. What if they decided not to come back? What would Pharaoh do then? He had to say no.

Pharaoh felt the Hebrews must have had too much time on their hands if they had the gall to ask for a week's vacation so his response was to keep up the pace of the labor while taking away the supply of building materials. The straw would have been gathered by some slaves or conscripts and then cut into shorter lengths. The clay was then mixed with the straw, formed into bricks and then left to harden in the sun. As the bricks got hot in the desert sun, the straw would begin to decay and ferment producing an acid making the bricks even stronger. In fact, bricks made with straw were able to sustain three times as much weight as those made out of mud alone.

By taking away the supply of straw and forcing



the slaves to go and look for it themselves, Pharaoh put them in an impossible position.

Now, the Egyptians had been building things like this for centuries. They were well aware of the logistics needed to build on a grand scale and they were well aware of how much you could expect to get out each man. They had it down to a science. So Pharaoh had no inclination that they would be able to pull off this feat. **He was simply sowing discord. He wanted to divide and conquer.** He couldn't turn Moses into a martyr. He needed the Hebrews to turn on Moses in order to put an end to this whole fiasco.

Look at verse 20.

***20 Then, as they came out from Pharaoh, they met Moses and Aaron who stood there to meet them. 21 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 Hebrews turned on Moses and Aaron. All the

worship and all the words of support they had given to Moses and Aaron in their initial meeting had gone by the wayside. As soon as things got tough they began to question whether or not Moses had really heard from God.

Unfortunately this is not an uncommon occurrence. We are all on God's side when things are going well. We go to church, carry our Bibles, encourage others and give our tithes and offerings. But when things get tough and we find ourselves in the place where we need God and our church family the most; that is the time we tend to cut and run. Why is that?

In this case it is because of the pain and suffering placed on the people. It wasn't good before but it wasn't this hard either.

**Things almost always get worse before they get better.** If every oppressed person throughout history had simply kept on with the status quo, there never would have been an American revolution. There never would have been a civil rights movement. Are all revolutions good? I don't think the Russians or the Chinese would say so.

But the point is that much of the time when you make major moves you are going to upset the apple cart and someone is going to try to make things hard on you.

Another mistake the Hebrews made was they jumped the chain of command so to speak. They should have come to Moses and Aaron with their concerns. Prayer and encouragement were in order. This is what we all need when things get harder before they get better; especially when we are doing God's will. Moses knew this part of the plan wasn't going to be easy. God had already told him that. I don't know if he relayed that to his people, but he should have at least known it himself.

At any rate, I can see Pharaoh peeping through his palace window as the Hebrew management took Moses to task. I'm sure he was smiling. He had successfully sown discord among the brothers. The strategy of divide and conquer was working at this point.

***22 So Moses returned to the Lord and said,  
"Lord, why have You brought trouble on this***

***people? Why is it You have sent me? 23 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."***

It is at this point that Moses' humanity shows through once again. Like most of us, Moses does the right thing and then the wrong thing in quick succession.

**Moses did right in speaking his heart to God.**

**"Happy is the man who when he cannot understand the divine movement and, indeed, doubts it has yet faith enough in God Himself to tell Him all his doubt. Those who face men, having the right to say to them, 'Thus saith Jehovah' have also the right to return to Jehovah and state the difficulties, and expose openly their own doubts and fears."**

**G.**

**Campbell Morgan**

None of us can track our decisions and actions in an easy manner. What I mean is that we tend to

grade our decisions and actions. Then it seems that we round the score up or down at the end of the day based on our overall feelings of how the day went. We tend to weight the good against the bad and then grade on the curve. That is not accurate at all.

The truth is that we are constantly doing a good thing and then doing a bad thing. We think good thoughts and then think on something bad. We are in a constant state of flux. We can see it here with Moses.

When the people confronted Moses he turned to God. That was a good thing. But then when he began to talk to God he blamed God as if he hadn't been in on the plan from the beginning. God had told Moses that Pharaoh wasn't going to let them go without a fight. Moses must have known that Pharaoh wouldn't take this lying down. He had to expect some repercussions. Moses folded like a cheap chair at the first sign of resistance. Maybe he wasn't expecting it from his own people – I don't know.

But the point is that he should have expected it

because he had been warned. I think we all have short memories when it comes to God's promises. Our memories tend to be selective and nostalgic. That is, we remember the good things and tend to forget the bad.

This resistance from within the camp brought back the feelings of inadequacy Moses thought he had left in Midian. He probably thought he had out-grown those feeling by now but there was still a remnant. It takes time to put all those things behind you.

David Guzik puts it this way: **Moses probably thought that the dying to himself was finished after 40 years of tending sheep in Midian, but it wasn't. It never is. God still will use adversity to train us to trust in Him until the day we go to be with Him in heaven.**

Biting the hand that feeds us come rather naturally.

***23 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."***

**Moses is hurt and scared. He is reacting instead of acting in faith. Now everything is God's fault.** "These people are suffering and it is because you have failed to deliver them." Moses followed his orders, but he forgot that this plan unfolds in waves.

How many of us have been in this situation? How many of us have found ourselves in the line of fire from others and felt that God has let us down? Most of us have at one time or another. But the truth is that we are critiquing an unfinished product. This plan is still in its early stages.

When dealing with people, especially as a leader, you have to constantly remind yourself that you are dealing with people. These people are for the most part, just like you. They get stressed and angry. They fall down on the job and get distracted. Once again, "All things are common among men." We are no different than the people we are trying to lead, teach, supervise or the children we are trying to raise.

Things almost always get worse before they get

better. In order to remodel your house you have to tear things out of it. In order to have a successful surgery you have to go through the pain and recovery process, but the end justifies the pain and inconvenience.

If you are walking according to the will of God - the plan He has for you, then things are going to get bumpy every now and then. However, you can go to Him and talk about it. It won't automatically get easier that instant, but it will get better eventually.

God was teaching a lesson to all parties involved. Pharaoh, Moses and ALL the children of Israel were going to school. School comes with tests, but it is easier if the teacher is your dad.

And that is what we must remember. Our Father is running this show. And as a good parent, He is preparing us for the road, not preparing the road for us. Once again His grace is shining through.

Close:



***14 For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15 from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, 16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, 17 that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height— 19 to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.***

***20 Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, 21 to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.***