

Battling Discouragement with God's Promises

Exodus 5:1-6:30

Justin Deeter – May 31, 2015



Introduction

The scene has been set and we are ready for some action. God has heard the cries of his people and he has called Moses to be the deliverer. Moses obeyed the Lord's call and is now at Egypt. Now we are ready for God to liberate the people! Everything seems to be in place for a decisive and immediate victory. There is only one problem though. It doesn't happen like that. Instead of Moses helping the people from their oppression, Pharaoh makes it worse.

We tend to think that if I obey God and follow his call than I am guaranteed immediate success. Yet, what we fail to see is that obedience to God is often costly. It is a sacrifice and many times it may lead to greater suffering in our life. Yet, this is the sort of Americanized and marketable Christianity that gets presented to us in many so called Christian books and by many televised preachers. This prosperity gospel teaches us that if you would only follow God things are going to go well with you and things will be easy. You will be rich, successful, powerful, and liked by all! Even though many people in our country rattle off such foolishness, we know it isn't true. Not because the Bible teaches it's foolishness, but from our personal experience. Obedience to God can be discouraging.

Have you every suffered because you obeyed God? Maybe you are a teenager who goes to Fike High School and you get mocked by your peers for not using vulgar language or for not attending the weekend parties filled with alcohol and sex. You get called a "holly roller" or accused of being "better than everyone" for trying to be obedient on God's call on you in Christ to be holy.

Have you ever known someone who was accused of being a “snitch” for reporting fraudulent accounting practices at the company? They are hated by others for doing what was morally right and honest.

Or how about as a single lady looking for a husband? You have been unable to find one because you refuse to compromise in finding a man who loves the Lord, so you are single for refusing to settle. As a result, you are discouraged because sadly, finding such a man can be hard to find.

Or you obey God in taking a new position at work, only to find that it is incredibly difficult and challenging. Or the many number of pastors I’ve met who seek to shepherd churches faithfully in accordance with the Scripture only to be met with grumbling resistance and an absence of spiritual or numerical growth in their ministry. Don’t they like Moses call out to the Lord and say, “Why did you ever send me here?”

You see, sometimes obedience to God leads to great discouragement. As Moses returns to Egypt and confronts Pharaoh, it actually makes things worse. As we study Exodus 5 and 6 this morning, my prayer for us that we would trust in God’s promises though our obedience might make things worse. Though we may become discouraged or heartbroken, we can trust in the promises God gives us in Christ to make it through the difficulty and pain of obedience. First, we are going to see that sometimes, obedience to God leads to discouragement.

Sometimes Obedience to God Leads to Discouragement (5:1-22)

So Moses is ready to confront Pharaoh. He and Aaron go up to him and request that the people go on a three day journey into the wilderness to make a sacrifice to the Lord. They come to Pharaoh with that mighty and authoritative statement, “Thus says the Lord”. Pharaoh responds in ignorance, “Who is this Yahweh and why would I obey him?” Its a valid question, but its brimming with arrogance. Pharaoh has never heard of this

Yahweh before, and Pharaoh is certainly not going to let the people go because this Yahweh tells him too. After all, he is Pharaoh! He is in charge! So the King of Egypt is offended by Moses and Aaron's request. Why do they wish to take the people away from their work? There is too much to do! In anger to the request, Pharaoh increases the work on the shoulders of the people. He tells them that they will have to collect their own straw to make bricks, yet they will still have the same quota of bricks required. Pharaoh thinks they are being lazy and idle seeking to get out of work. He accuses Moses and Aaron of being liars, making up this Yahweh God as some sort of practical and manipulative joke.

So the taskmasters begin to force Israel to make bricks without the straw. The people simply cannot do it. Finding the straw demanded took too much time and resulted in the quota of bricks not being fulfilled. So the taskmasters take the foremen and beat and chastise them for not making enough bricks. The physical oppression of their slavery was getting worse. Not only did their workload increase, but the physical abuse and scourging was increasing as well.

The foremen go to Pharaoh and beg him to stop the unfair, unjust, and harsh new rules. Pharaoh isn't swayed. He accuses them of idleness and that is why they seek to go to the wilderness and make a sacrifice. Pharaoh refuses to adjust the number of bricks per day they were required to make.

The foremen, on their way out from Pharaoh, run into Moses and Aaron who were waiting for them. They are discouraged and the wounds from their beating are still oozing. Things have gone from bad to worse. The excitement they had at first when Moses and Aaron came to liberate the people on behalf of Yahweh is all but gone. The discouraged men turn to Moses in frustration. It is Moses' fault that things have gotten so bad. Now, because of him Pharaoh is angry at them and is literally killing them with the work load. Looking for someone to blame, they point the finger at Moses.

Moses then turns and ask the Lord that perplexing question. Why Lord? Why have you done this to your people and why did you even send me here? Since Moses has gone to speak to Pharaoh the oppression has only gotten worse. God doesn't seem to be delivering his people at all. Moses cries out to God in discouragement and in doubt. The grand promises of deliverance Moses was told at the burning bush seem so distant now.

If we are honest, we have all had seasons of our life where we can identify with the Israelites here. We pray for the cancer to be removed from our husband only to receive the latest test results that the cancer has spread even further. We pray that things might improve at work, only to find that the conflict escalates. We pray for our wayward children only to find them continuing to choose to disobey the Lord. In those moments we have questions, and it is right for us to bring to God those questions. As we read the Psalms we see time and time again, the psalmist bring to God their concerns and struggles. Although God doesn't guarantee he will give us answers to each question, he does hear our cry and comfort us with his presence.

Exodus 5 presents to us a bleak picture. It is a reality in which we all live. Life is messy, hard, and painful. It is filled with difficulty, suffering and oppression. Even though Moses was obeying God's will for his life, things got worse. Following the Lord isn't easy and it doesn't necessarily win you many friends. Here Moses is incredibly discouraged by the end of the chapter. Not only is Pharaoh furious at him, but his own people are doubting his competence as a leader and as a prophet sent from God. He is being blamed by them for their hardship.

How do we get through dark times like these? How can we live our life to the glory of God in the midst of such adversity? What gets us through those trials and tribulations? Well, we must cling to and trust in the promises of God.

Trust in the Promises of God (6:1-30)

It is in chapter 6 that the Lord responds to the lament of Moses. Though Pharaoh has no idea who this Yahweh is, the Lord reminds Moses that he is

the I am. There is no one greater. He is the covenant keeping God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. These patriarchs did not know him as Moses does. God has revealed himself more to Moses than Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob. God is the covenant keeping God who has heard the cries. He is the God who remembers his covenant that he has made. He does not forget and he does not back out of his promises.

God gives Moses careful instructions of what to speak to the people of Israel. It is a series of wonderful promises that God makes to them. Lets read them again starting in 6:6-8,

“Say therefore to the people of Israel, ‘I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. I will give it to you for a possession. I am the Lord.’ ” (Exodus 6:6-8, ESV)

Within these verses is a series of promises God makes to Israel and also to us. In moments of great adversity we must cling to them and hold them firm.

Promise 1 - I will Deliver you from your Burdens and Slavery

God tell his people he will bring them out of their oppression. The burden and weight of slavery will be removed. God is going to deliver them from their bondage. Though the scourge of the whip might have increased in the moment, in God’s time he will deliver them out from slavery.

This is a promise we cling to isn’t it? Though we may not be slaves in Egypt, we are slaves to a much crueller and much more wicked task master. We are slaves to sin. It rules us, entices us, and forces us to do its wicked work. Our will is in bondage by fleshly and worldly desires. Even though we may long to do good, we find that the pull of our taskmaster sin beats us into submission. We like to think that our wills are truly free, yet we are slaves. We cannot help

but sin. We cannot choose righteousness and goodness. We are naturally born selfish, prideful, arrogant, and greedy. Our lust for pleasure, sex, fame, popularity, or alcohol consumes us. You may think you live in the land of the free, but apart from Christ you are enslaved to sin. You are slave to the one you obey, and all of us by choice (because of the bondage of our wills) choose to be enslaved to sin. Yet, God by his grace liberates us from this bondage through the Lord Jesus. Listen to Paul's words from Romans 6:16-18

"Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness." (Romans 6:16-18, ESV)

So God by his grace liberates us from our sin and our oppression. God purchases us as his own and breaks the shackle that sin has over our lives. For the Christian sin no longer dominates you, but in Christ you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of righteousness. The first promise we must remember is that the oppression and enslaving power of sin in our life will be removed by the grace and mercy of God!

Promise 2 - I will Redeem you with an Outstretched Arm

The second promise God gives the people is that he will redeem them with an outstretched arm. Redeem is one of those words we throw around as Christians a lot, but what does it really mean? Well redeem means to pay a price in order to secure the release of someone, particularly from enemies. So God tells the people of Israel, that he will redeem them from the hand of the Egyptians. He will do so by his outstretched arm. By God's own power he is going to redeem the people. By the great judgement of the plagues that will befall Egypt, God will purchase his people's freedom.

This promise applies to us as well. God is the redeemer. He pays the price to have us as his own and he does so by his own might and power. Yet our

redemption from our sin and from death comes at a high cost. God paid the ultimate price in order to redeem us. In love, he sent his son Jesus into this world to die in the place of sinners like you and me. By the grace of God Jesus absorbs the penalty for your sin on the cross. Jesus pays the ransom price for your redemption. It was one in which only God's own son could pay. God's promise to you is that in the midst of your slavery, he provides a way to be redeemed. God has done this by his own hand and he has done this single handedly. By his own outstretched arm he has redeemed you. All we must do now is simply turn from our sins and put our faith in Jesus as our redeemer. If we would call out in faith for him to save us, the redemption God has purchased will cover your trespasses and sins and free you from the captivity of sin.

Promise 3 - I will take you as my people and be your God

The third promise is incredibly joyful. Not only will God free his people from Pharaoh's hand, but he will make them his own people. This loving God is going to enter into a relationship with his people Israel. He is going to be their God and to love them and care for them. He is going to make a covenant with them and enter into a personal and living relationship with them. Israel will know the security of His care and the protection of his love. God will be fiercely dedicated to accomplishing his covenant promises to his people.

This is another wonderful promise from God we can claim in the name of Jesus. Jesus not only brings us out of the captivity of our sin, but into a relationship with God. Though our sin and captivity created a barrier between us and God, Jesus shatters the wall. The curtain is now torn. Now, through Jesus we can know and be known by God.

J.I. Packer in his classic book called *Knowing God* had this to say about the beautiful promise of knowing God and being in relationship with him.

What matters supremely, therefore, is not, in the last analysis, the fact that I know God, but the larger fact which underlie is – the fact that he knows me. I am graven on the palms of his hands. I am never out of his

mind. All of my knowledge of him depends on his sustained initiative in knowing me. I know him because he first knew me, and continues to know me. He knows me as a friend, one who loves me; and there is no moment when his eye is off me, or his attention distracted from me, and no moment, therefore when his care falters.”¹

You see, the beauty of this promise is that God knows every filthy and vile thing about you. He sees the corruption in your life and the hidden twisted thoughts. He knows you better than you know yourself. Yet, by the sheer grace of God and for some unfathomable reason God wants to be in a relationship with you. It is his desire to save you. He wants to be your God. He wants to be your King. He wants to be your Father. He wants to be your friend.

Promise 4 - I will bring you into the land of promise.

The fourth promise he gives to the people for their comfort. The promise is that they will enter into the land of promise. God promised Abraham a land flowing with milk and honey, the land of Canaan. God hasn't forgotten that promise, and tells Israel that as he brings them out from the harsh slavery of Egypt, he will bring them into the land of rest. Even though life may be difficult now as the whips crack their backs and as their body aches looking for straw to make bricks, rest is coming. They will enter into the land of promise.

God promises us the same thing. No one ever said the Christian life is easy. Sometimes being obedient to God means you are persecuted, outcasted, and oppressed. God doesn't guarantee us an easy life, but he does promise us a land of rest for those who have placed their faith in the redemption of Jesus. You see this world is not our home. You don't belong here Christian, you were made for another world and another land. The day is coming when this world will be burned away and God will restore this world under his kingship and rule. He will defeat all oppression and he will abolish sin and death. King Jesus will return and bring you into the New Jerusalem in the New Heavens and New Earth. Then and only then will we find our home, which is not in

¹ Packer, J. I. Knowing God. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1973. 41-42

Wilson, NC, but found in the very presence of God. Then and only then will our wandering and restless hearts find the satisfaction we long for. Then our tears will be wiped away as we gaze upon the satisfying beauty of the face of God.

It is this hope that gives us great joy. Though we still feel the weight of sin all around us as we live in such a corrupt and evil world, God promises us he will bring us into the land of rest. And this is not some pie in the sky dream, but a promise that has already begun in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

Though the affliction and sorrow and suffering you face today might not be lifted in this life, you have the promise of God this morning in Jesus that he will bring you to true rest in his presence.

The pain and sorrow is momentary. The afflictions we face are light. Compared to the timelessness of eternity, your life on earth will one day seem to you but a blink of an eye. Yet, the joys that await us in that eternal rest will be gloriously satisfying as we live as the people of God under his rule together.

You might be thinking, "How do I know these promises are true? They almost seem too good to be true!" Well the Lord, grounds these promises within the authority of who he is. Notice that God wraps these promises in v. 6 and at the end of v. 8 with a declarative and authoritative statement. "I am the Lord". It is by the very power of God these things will come to pass. The great I am will bring these promises into being. He will deliver his people. He will redeem them. He will take them as his own, and He will bring them into the land of promise and rest. It is a sure thing, because it is promised to us not by any mere man, but by the divine creator, the one true God who reigns in omnipotent power. He is trustworthy and true, and thus we can stand unshakable upon his promises.

Yet, as Moses goes back to the people and speaks to them these promises, they did not listen. Their broken and hurting hearts closed off their ears. They

could not believe in these promises. You may think this morning that your whole life is too broken to believe in Jesus. Your world is too rocked. You have dug a well of sin too deep. You think there is no way out. Yet, do not be like Israel this morning but in faith believe the promises of God. Trust in the promise. Trust in Jesus. He can deliver you. He can redeem you. He can take you as His own. He can give you the rest you long for.

Moses, frustrated by the people's lack of belief, recoils when God tells him to go to Pharaoh and ask that the people be set free. If Moses' own people won't believe, how then will Pharaoh listen? Yet Moses is commanded to God. God will bring the people of Israel out of Egypt. God will follow through on his promises.

Final Thoughts

I'm not sure what sort of discouragement you are facing. Perhaps you are a Christian and have tried to obey God in your life, but life keeps getting harder. Maybe you are thinking about just giving up and abandoning God's call on your life. It's too difficult and too hard. You are discouraged.

Maybe you are not a Christian. You are lost and stuck in your sin. The whirlpool of sin of your own making seems too much to be saved from. You feel hopeless. You feel like you are sinking without solid ground beneath your feet.

Yet God confronts both the Christian in affliction and the non-Christian enslaved to sin with the same challenge this morning. Will you believe in the promises of God? Will you trust him?

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