

Known By Name

Exodus: Revelation and Redemption

Exodus 5:1-7:7

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Out of the Frying Pan into the Fire

I just finished re-reading *The Hobbit* this week. Two of my kids are reading it at school, so I thought I'd read it again. There's a great chapter title in it which relates to our text this morning—"Out of the Frying Pan into the Fire."

The chapter describes how Bilbo Baggins and his companions, the thirteen dwarves and Gandalf, escaped from extreme peril only to find themselves in an even worse predicament. They had just escaped a bloody battle with goblins in the tunnels under the Misty Mountains. But then they were besieged in the forest. They were surrounded by a hungry pack of wolves. They retreated to the trees, but soon the goblins found them and set fires at the feet of the trees. Out of the frying pan, into the fire.¹

The same could be said of the Israelites in Exodus 5. At the end of chapter 4, Moses and Aaron announced that God was going to deliver them out of the hand of Pharaoh. But by the end of chapter 5, we see that Pharaoh hadn't yet let them go. Instead, he'd tightened his grip. Before, they had to make a daily quota of bricks. Now, after Moses and Aaron go to Pharaoh to ask him to let them go, he required Israel to make the same amount of bricks without providing them straw. Out of the frying pan, into the fire!

And under this fire of oppression, Israel begins to have second thoughts about God's plan of deliverance. And they attack Moses and Aaron. Their devotion to God and his promises are on the line. Will they listen to God's promise of redemption? Or will they yield to Pharaoh's power of oppression? Will they serve God or Pharaoh? As we'll see, these are the questions that are facing us as well.

My text this morning is 5:1-7:7. But I'm not going to cover all of that. I'm going to cover chapter 5 and the first few verses of chapter 6. To get things started I want to read the conclusion to chapter 4 and the first 21 verses of chapter 5.

Exodus 4:29-5:21²

²⁹Then Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the people of Israel. ³⁰Aaron spoke all the words that the LORD had spoken to Moses and did the signs in the sight of the people. ³¹And the people believed; and when they heard that the LORD had visited the people of Israel and that he had seen their affliction, they bowed their heads and worshiped.

^{5:1}Afterward Moses and Aaron went and said to Pharaoh, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness.'" ²But Pharaoh said, "Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and moreover, I will not let Israel go." ³Then they said, "The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Please let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness that we may sacrifice to

¹ This illustration comes from Philip Graham Ryken and R. Kent Hughes, *Exodus: Saved for God's Glory*, Preaching the Word.

² Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® unless otherwise noted.

the LORD our God, lest he fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword.”⁴ But the king of Egypt said to them, “Moses and Aaron, why do you take the people away from their work? Get back to your burdens.”⁵ And Pharaoh said, “Behold, the people of the land are now many, and you make them rest from their burdens!”⁶ The same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people and their foremen,⁷ “You shall no longer give the people straw to make bricks, as in the past; let them go and gather straw for themselves.”⁸ But the number of bricks that they made in the past you shall impose on them, you shall by no means reduce it, for they are idle. Therefore they cry, “Let us go and offer sacrifice to our God.”⁹ Let heavier work be laid on the men that they may labor at it and pay no regard to lying words.”

¹⁰ So the taskmasters and the foremen of the people went out and said to the people, “Thus says Pharaoh, ‘I will not give you straw.’”¹¹ Go and get your straw yourselves wherever you can find it, but your work will not be reduced in the least.”¹² So the people were scattered throughout all the land of Egypt to gather stubble for straw.¹³ The taskmasters were urgent, saying, “Complete your work, your daily task each day, as when there was straw.”¹⁴ And the foremen of the people of Israel, whom Pharaoh’s taskmasters had set over them, were beaten and were asked, “Why have you not done all your task of making bricks today and yesterday, as in the past?”

¹⁵ Then the foremen of the people of Israel came and cried to Pharaoh, “Why do you treat your servants like this? ¹⁶ No straw is given to your servants, yet they say to us, ‘Make bricks!’ And behold, your servants are beaten; but the fault is in your own people.”¹⁷ But he said, “You are idle, you are idle; that is why you say, ‘Let us go and sacrifice to the LORD.’”¹⁸ Go now and work. No straw will be given you, but you must still deliver the same number of bricks.”

¹⁹ The foremen of the people of Israel saw that they were in trouble when they said, “You shall by no means reduce your number of bricks, your daily task each day.”²⁰ They met Moses and Aaron, who were waiting for them, as they came out from Pharaoh;²¹ and they said to them, “The LORD look on you and judge, because you have made us stink in the sight of Pharaoh and his servants, and have put a sword in their hand to kill us.”

This is the Word of the Lord.

SETTING THE STAGE

I will eventually have some points to make this morning, but before I get there, I’m going to take a few minutes to set the stage. And this set up is longer than normal.

The Rocky Soil

I want you to notice the flow of the narrative in these verses we just read. At the end of chapter 4, Israel believes God’s word and they worship God. Or they listen to God and they serve him. But then Pharaoh tightens his grip on them. Now they have to make bricks without straw. And so, by the end of chapter 5, there’s been a change. Now they align themselves with Pharaoh’s word and they double down on their service to him.

They were like the people in the parable of the soils. The seed of the gospel was sown on rocky ground. When they hear the word of Moses and Aaron they receive it with joy. But they have no root. They endure for a while (not a very long while!); then when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away (Mk. 4:16-17).³

But why did they fall away when they faced persecution? Were they surprised? We know that Aaron spoke all the words that the LORD had spoken to Moses (4:30). That would’ve included the prediction that God would harden Pharaoh’s heart and he would not let the people go (4:21). As one

³ Alec Motyer, *The Message of Exodus: The Days of Our Pilgrimage*, The Bible Speaks Today

commentator says, “What did they think harder would do to them?”⁴ They had no promise of a trouble-free deliverance. If anything, they had a promise of persecution.

We face something very similar in our lives as Christians. We’ve heard the gospel. And most of you have received it with joy. But how often does our life as Christians actually get worse before it gets better? The Christian life is a better life than our life before Christ, but it isn’t an easier life. We have no promise of a trouble-free existence. No, Paul tells us that all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted (2 Tim. 3:12). Peter says the trials we face test the genuineness of our faith (1 Pt. 1:6-7).

So here’s the question. When the fire is put to our feet, how will we respond? When our peers say that we’re missing a whole world of fun living the Christian life? When Satan tempts us to give into the flesh? When our financial well-being is on the line? When our reputation is on the line? In that moment, who will we serve? It’s one thing to worship God on Sunday morning. But it’s another thing to turn away from false gods in the marketplace on Monday morning. It’s one thing to affirm our faith in God the Father Almighty in our creeds. But the genuineness of that faith will be proven in our deeds.

War of Words and Worship

In Exodus 5 there’s a great conflict introduced that won’t be resolved until chapter 14. It’s the conflict between Yahweh (the LORD) and Pharaoh.⁵ Whose word will prevail? God’s or Pharaoh’s? And whom will Israel serve? God or Pharaoh? In verse 1, Moses says, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘Let my people go...’” In verse 2, Pharaoh says, “Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and moreover, I will not let Israel go.” It’s not that Pharaoh is *ignorant* of the LORD. It’s that he doesn’t *regard* the LORD.⁶ *He’s* not going to listen to his word. And he doesn’t intend for *Israel* to listen to God’s word either. Pharaoh intends for Israel to listen to *his* word. That’s why in verse 10, when the taskmasters deliver Pharaoh’s message to the foremen, they say, “Thus says Pharaoh...” The word of the Lord and the word of Pharaoh are at war. He will not let God’s people go worship God. But he will let them go and gather their own straw! In verse 18, Pharaoh says, “Go now and work” That word “work” there is the same root word for serve or worship.⁷ God says, “Let my people go that they may worship me.” Pharaoh says, “Go work for me.” There’s a war of words. There’s a war of service. Will Israel serve the Pharaoh who enslaves? Or will they worship the God who saves? And who’s word will they listen to? God’s or Pharaoh’s?⁸

That same choice confronts us this morning. Bob Dylan said it well. “You’re gonna have to serve somebody. It may be the devil and it may be the Lord, but you’re gonna have to serve somebody.”

My argument this morning is simple. We should serve the Lord because his promises are heavier than Satan’s lies. Pharaoh put a heavy burden on the people and called God’s word a lie. But God’s word is truth and it’s heavier than lies.

⁴ Motyer

⁵ W. Ross Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known: The Missionary Heart of the Book of Exodus*, New Studies in Biblical Theology

⁶ John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology: Israel’s Gospel*, Vol. 1

⁷ Peter Enns, *Exodus*, The NIV Application Commentary

⁸ This has been a question for God’s people since the garden of Eden. Adam and Eve were presented with a choice. Would they listen to the voice of God and obey him? Or would they listen to the voice of Satan and obey him? See Goldingay; Enns

What I want to do with the second half of this sermon is to look at the nature of Israel's slavery in chapter 5. Then God's promises in chapter 6, verses 1-8. In other words, we'll contrast life under the god who enslaves and life under God who saves.

THE GOD WHO ENSLAVES. (5:1-21)

Let's begin with life under the god who enslaves in chapter 5. When I say the god who enslaves, I'm referring to Pharaoh in Exodus who set himself up as a god. And Satan whom Paul calls the god of this world (2 Cor. 4:4).

Labor Day

Tomorrow is Labor Day. For many, it has simply become the day that marks the time between summer and school. But originally, it was established as a token of the progress made by labor unions of the late nineteenth century, trying to stand up to the harsh, oppressive work conditions.⁹

Moses went to Pharaoh like the labor unions and asked for deliverance. But it was an oppression far worse than the working conditions in the nineteenth century. It's hard for us to imagine just how bad the life of a slave was. They worked in the hot Egyptian sun all day, every day. Seven days a week. They had no hats to protect their heads, no gloves to protect their hands. They barely had any clothes at all. Nothing but a skimpy apron around their bodies. And they certainly didn't have Camelback water bottles. Many died of kidney failure, dehydration, heat strokes, and the like. And that doesn't even touch upon the emotional suffering they experienced under the whips of their taskmasters.¹⁰ It's no wonder they cried out to God for deliverance. They needed a Labor Day like nobody's business!

Slaves to Sin

But did you know that all people, regardless of their circumstances, live under the tyranny of an even worse slave master? Paul says that we are slaves to sin (Rom. 6:16). Before Christ, we are slaves to impurity and wickedness (6:19). We are enslaved to various passions and pleasures (Titus 3:13). Captive to Satan to do his will (2 Tim. 2:26). Peter says that we're slaves to whatever masters us (2 Pet. 2:19).

Think about it. Phil Ryken says if you are a slave to anger, then when someone makes you mad, you can't control your temper (Prov. 16:32). If you're a slave to lust, when temptations present themselves, you're led like an animal to slaughter (Prov. 7:22). If you're a slave to greed, then you can't stop accumulating more (Prov. 30:15).

And sin is insidious. Satan uses sin to tell us all kinds of lies. He wants us to believe life is better in his service. Lies like Pharaoh told the Egyptians. Satan makes us believe that if we don't give in to sin that we'll go without. Worshiping God isn't worth it. Work is more important than worship if you want to get ahead in life. Productivity is the priority. Like Pharaoh, Satan keeps us down by putting us down. We're led to believe that the desire to serve God is simply a desire to be lazy! God helps those who help themselves. And like Pharaoh, when we show any sign of resistance, Satan tightens his grip on us. He demands more, but gives us less. Isn't that how all addiction works? You

⁹ During that time the standard work week included twelve-hour days, six days a week, not only for adults, but also children. Congress passed laws to lift the burden of oppressive labor. And Labor Day was instituted by Grover Cleveland in 1894 as a line in the sand against such oppression.

¹⁰ Ryken

have to have more to drink, more money, more graphic images to watch. But the more we add to our enslavement, the less pleasure we produce.

This is what it looks like to live under Pharaoh who enslaves. This is what it looks like to be slaves to sin. But who can save us from our slavery? To whom should we turn?

Israel should've turned to God. They should've done what they did in the beginning and cried out to God. But instead they turn back to Pharaoh. Look at verses 15-17. The foremen of the people of Israel cry out to Pharaoh. And they say to him, "Why do you treat your servants like this?" Seven times they call themselves Pharaoh's servants!¹¹ Remember, they're supposed to be listening to God and serving God. But they're listening to lies and threats of Pharaoh and calling themselves his servants.

How stupid! You don't turn to your slave master to be delivered from slavery. You don't turn to Satan to be delivered from sin. They have no motivation to save you. They want to keep you in bondage. They want you living in fear! Abusers want you to believe that life is safer under a slavery you know than under a salvation you haven't seen yet.

Easier to Believe in the Dragon

This reminds me of another line in *The Hobbit*. If you're not familiar with *The Hobbit* let me give you the basic gist real quick. There's a group of dwarves led by Thorin. Thorin's grandfather used to be the king of the Lonely Mountain in the north of Middle Earth and had great wealth. But the dragon Smaug came in and wrecked everything. Now Thorin's grandfather and father are dead and Smaug is guarding the treasure in the Lonely Mountain.

Below the mountain and beyond the long lake sits the town of Dale. The men who live there have been living under what Tolkien calls the desolation of Smaug for generations. But they've heard of prophecies in songs that one day the king will return to the mountain and things will be put right.

So when Thorin and company arrive in Dale, the town is full of excitement. A group of men agree to take the hobbit and the dwarves to the foot of the mountain. But they won't stay with them. "Not at any rate until the songs have come true!" they said. Why is that? Tolkien tells us. "It was easier to believe in the Dragon and less easy to believe in Thorin in these wild parts."

Under the tyranny of Smaug, it was easier to believe in the dragon and what he *would* do to them than it was to believe in what Thorin *might* do for them. That's what was going on with Israel. They would rather serve the Pharaoh they *knew* than the God they *didn't* know. They *knew* how Pharaoh would act. They *didn't* know how God would act.

And so they turn to Pharaoh and cry out to him. But they should have cried out to God. Thankfully Moses did cry out to God.

GOD WHO SAVES (5:22-6:8)

Let's now turn and see how Moses responded to all of this. And as we do, we'll see that God does promise to act. And his promises to save are heavier than Pharaoh's power to enslave.

¹¹ Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus*, Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching

Look at verse 22. “Then Moses turned to the LORD and said, ‘O Lord, why have you done evil to this people? Why did you ever send me? For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has done evil to this people, and you have not delivered your people at all.’”

Moses is back to questioning his call. And he’s now also questioning the Lord. But at least he turned to the Lord. And that’s a lesson we all need to learn in our relationship with God. When we fail, we’re prone to turn away from God. But we need to learn to turn toward God. When turn to God, he gives us perspective. He helps us to see that his grace is bigger than our problems.

And that’s what happens when Moses turns to God. God gives him a powerful paradigm shift. The Lord doesn’t rebuke Moses for whining. He could have, but he didn’t. Instead he gives Moses reassurance. He says, “Now you shall see!” I’ll show you in due course. My words will be proven in my actions. You’ll no longer have to go on a prophecy. You’ll see the God who works in history. And that will be enough.

Exodus 5:22-6:8

²²Then Moses turned to the LORD and said, “O Lord, why have you done evil to this people? Why did you ever send me? ²³For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has done evil to this people, and you have not delivered your people at all.”

^{6:1}But the LORD said to Moses, “Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh; for with a strong hand he will send them out, and with a strong hand he will drive them out of his land.”

²God spoke to Moses and said to him, “I am the LORD. ³I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by my name the LORD I did not make myself known to them. ⁴I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they lived as sojourners. ⁵Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the people of Israel whom the Egyptians hold as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant. ⁶Say 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. ⁷I 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. ⁸I 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.’”

God begins and ends this word to Moses by saying, “I am the LORD.” That’s God’s name. And at the center of this passage, God tells us what he wants for his people. He wants them *to know* that he is the LORD (v. 7). God wants his people to know him by name. And it’s only when they know him by name that they’ll serve him as their God!

What’s in a name? More specifically, what’s in God’s name? What does it mean when God says, “I am the LORD?” In verse 3 God says, “I appeared to [the patriarchs] as God Almighty, but by my name the LORD I did not make myself known to them.” That doesn’t mean that the patriarchs didn’t actually know the title of Yahweh, or the LORD. They knew those words. But they didn’t yet know what they meant. You see God’s name, Yahweh or the LORD, is not just a title. It’s bound up in God’s actions. It’s bound up in what God does to save his people. The rest of Exodus will teach us what it means when God says, “I am the LORD.” But for now, there are two things that are critical to learn about God’s name.

Past, Present, Future

First, God is at work in the past, the present, and the future.

God appeared to the patriarchs and provided for them. God established a covenant with them too—to give them the land of Canaan. He’s the LORD of past action. But he’s also the God of present action. He heard the groaning of the people. And in their present groaning, he remembered his past covenant with Abraham. He’s a God who keeps his promises even when it seems like he’s taking a nap! And that promise-keeping God will work in the future. Seven times in this passage, God tells us what he *will* do: I will bring you out. I will deliver you from slavery. I will redeem you. I will take you. I will be your God. I will bring you into the land. I will give it to you. I am the LORD.

God is the Alpha and the Omega. The beginning and the end. Pharaoh is just a blip on the radar of history. God is the God who makes promises and keeps them. His word is solid. He’s faithful. That’s why we can be faithful to him. That’s why we can serve him.

Great Redeemer

The second thing important about God’s name is that he’s our great redeemer. God had promised Abraham that he would bring his children out of Egypt, but he hadn’t said how (Gen. 15). Here for the first time we learn. God will redeem his people!¹²

God had promised them the land of Canaan. But they were driven from the land of Canaan and now were in slavery in Egypt. But God paid the price for them. He *sought* them in Egypt and *bought* them with blood. Then he *brought them* back into the Promised Land. Our God not only makes promises. He takes the initiative to ensure they are kept. He’s our great redeemer!

In Christ we have an even greater redeemer. And he’s delivered us from an even greater form of slavery, slavery to sin and Satan. Hebrews tells us that Jesus took on flesh and blood and then died to redeem us. “That through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery” (Heb. 2:14-15). Paul tells us that in Christ “we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses” (Eph. 1:7). And that now in Christ we have obtained an inheritance having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will (Eph. 1:11).

If we want to be freed from the tyranny of sin, we have to come to know God by name. We have to come to know the ways that he has acted in history repeatedly to redeem his people, *supremely* in the person of Christ. He is a God who makes promises and keeps promises. So, we can be sure that his promise to deliver us completely from this world of sin and the oppression of Satan will be fulfilled when Christ returns.

These promises of salvation are heavier than the lies of Satan. The weight of glory is heavier than the light and momentary afflictions in this life, as Paul says.

I know it may seem easier to believe in the dragon than the promise of God if we’re just looking at our present problems. But in the balance of God’s word, the scales have been crushed! There’s no comparison. God’s word will prevail. So we must serve him in this our exile.

¹² Blackburn