

JANUARY 28

Exodus 5:22-7:24

Exodus 5:22-23

If you think about it, Moses was getting a crash course on who God is and how He works. Most of us have far more information about God than Moses did. We have the entire record in the Bible of who He is and what He does. And even so, if we had been in Moses' sandals, we'd have been freaking out worse than he was.

One of the challenges we have as disciples is telling and showing people from God's Word, what they are to do, and then listening to them and watching them endure hardship for their actions. We encourage them from the Word to tell the truth. So, they don't lie at work and get fired. We tell them to pray, but it seems like things get worse. We tell them to live for Christ, and they get laughed at by their spouses or friends. Learning through patience and hardship is not the exception; it is the rule. This is why many people give up as disciples. Jesus did not say the way was easy. He said being yoked to Him made it easier. Following Jesus is the key. His love being poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit is what gives us hope to endure and persevere.

Moses has over a million people mad at him and this turn of events is killing him. This was supposed to lead to an easy victory with no stops in between. In Moses' thinking, every play would be a touchdown or at least a first down. He never thought they'd lose yards or get hit at the line of scrimmage.

Moses was learning, as all true disciples must, that when you are following, there has to be absolute, strong, patient confidence in the Lord. You never assume you know the path He will take. You just follow. You learn that God uses all the malfunctions of men and of happenstance to accomplish His will. You learn that sometimes the blown play or the "sack" is setting you up for the touchdown. As the bumper sticker says, "With Christ, the only way to fail is to quit." And even here, He might let you get to the place of quitting, to lift you up and renew your heart in a way that makes you stronger in Christ than you ever would have been if you hadn't been defeated.

Here, Israel has doubted God and Moses. Pharaoh has grown super arrogant, and Moses has grown humbler than ever. The stage is set.

Exodus 6

Vs. 1-9 This is part of the educational process for Moses and the people.

V. 1 Notice that God says, *Now*. It seems that Pharaoh's actions and the peoples' response were a part of God's plan.

Vs. 2-8 Take time to look through what God says here. This is a great declaration by the Lord. Notice how often He says *I*, and what is attached to it.

V. 3 God is doing something new and special here that He has never done with any who have followed Him. This was not to be taken lightly.

God confirmed the promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, pointed to the land promised, and the absolute certainty of redeeming the people out of slavery. These promises were not *contingent* on their faith but would have been the *content* of their faith in God. Within that coming year God would give them the sacrificial system to show them the reality of sin and their need for forgiveness, but the prime object of faith would always be the covenant-keeping God. Salvation would be through faith in His promises. These people had the account of history, even as Moses is writing it here, which goes back to the promise of redemption at the Fall, the saving of Noah and the promise to Abraham. Since they had this history, the person of faith would understand

that the God of the covenant had a greater plan than just giving a couple million people a homestead.

I say all of this because the unfolding of the plan of redemption was progressive. They didn't know about Jesus, but there was Yahweh who chose them and made promises of redemption. Here and there, there is a hint at the future, for example, the dying words Jacob spoke to Judah; but it would take faith to see beyond those vague references to the redemption God was working for all of mankind. What kind of faith was necessary? Faith focused on Yahweh, who promises and keeps covenants. With that faith they would sense the scope of God's work. The heart of flesh would only understand their needs as immediate, and the promises as nationalistic.

V. 9 I'm sure Moses was encouraged as he spoke to the people, but this heartbroken people rejected him and his message. Maybe God gave Moses that strong encouragement to help him withstand the rejection of this bitter people. For a disciple, God's encouragement doesn't always signal success, but perhaps rather, that God is preparing us to endure what's coming. Encouraging thought, huh?

Vs. 10-13 God is now telling the discouraged Moses what to do in command form. Moses' words in v. 12 are explained by what happened in v. 9. God charges, commands and orders Moses and Aaron to "just do it."

Vs. 14-27 This partial genealogy begins with Reuben in order to show the tribe of Levi in its proper place in the sons of Jacob. The genealogy of Levi is the only real focus here and therefore doesn't go beyond Levi. The purpose is to show where Moses and Aaron came from. This is like a formal introduction, I suppose.

In this list there is a cast of characters who will have the stage for bad and for good in the next two books. The greatest of these is Phinehas, who is referred to as a hero throughout all of Israel's history and is alluded to in the last OT book, Malachi. Cool dude.

By the way, this last thought about Phinehas comes from reading the Bible every year and making little connections year after year until, like doing a puzzle, you slowly see the picture. For me, this is another thing that makes it fun to read through the Bible every year.

Vs. 28-29 This is one of those places where they put the chapter break in the wrong place. In the original Hebrew and Greek there are no chapter designations or verse designations. That was all done years later, and the chapter / verse divisions we have are from Stephen Langton, the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1220.

It is interesting to see that Moses is still objecting to God using him for this. Once Moses gets his mojo going, Aaron never speaks for him again.

Exodus 7:1-24

Vs. 1-7 Notice that God reaffirms what is going to happen. It won't be easy, but they will win.

Notice the ages given for Moses and Aaron. Most people wouldn't go back and re-read the story of Moses, but with his age in mind, you will begin reading next year and see what he does when he is 40 and you'll read the next sections, understanding that Moses was prepared by God for 40 years in the wilderness. This will help you understand Moses and God in a deeper way.

One note of trivia here is the three-year difference between Aaron and Moses. It gives you the idea that the policy of having the baby boys killed might have been instituted between the births of Aaron and Moses.

I don't want to say much about the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. We've seen that Pharaoh already had a hard heart without God's help. As you read, make a note in your Bible when Pharaoh hardens his own heart and when it says God hardens Pharaoh's heart. There might be a lesson in that. Also, since we know the Lord would never reject a sincere, seeking heart, I doubt that

Pharaoh ever had that. It might be that there was a time when Pharaoh would have given in through bitterness and compliance, but not through faith. At the end we'll see this happen, and in bitterness Pharaoh releases the people; but since it wasn't done willingly or in faith, Pharaoh "repents" of his decision and goes out to kill the people. God would not have kept Pharaoh from true faith and repentance.

Vs. 8-13 The battle begins.

Note that Pharaoh's boys were good at magic...tapping into Satan's power. This should blow your mind, but not scare you. For all the power of the unseen spiritual forces, God doesn't draw our attention to them that often, meaning that God thinks we know enough. If we know they're there and we follow Christ in the Spirit and in the Word, we'll be OK. The effect was that these signs by his magicians hardened Pharaoh's heart, even though the magicians had to go out and get new sticks. God did not harden Pharaoh's heart.

Vs. 14-24 This is the first official plague. Your observations are better than anything I have to say. Just a couple of notes. The "ministry" of Moses and Aaron here is what the "ministry" of the two witnesses in Revelation 11:3 will look like. When they declare a judgment on earth, a seal is broken in heaven, and all "hell" breaks loose on the hard of heart.

The Nile was thought to be a god. That Moses and Aaron had power to do this should have shown something to Pharaoh. But again, the magicians duplicated this plague, maybe by turning a bowl of water into blood. Who knows? But notice, God didn't harden Pharaoh's heart. I think the real reason God turned the Nile into blood was Pharaoh's command (Ex. 1:22) to throw the male Hebrew boys into the Nile. Again, look at Revelation 16:3-7.

V. 23 Pharaoh didn't take this to heart, but some of the people did. Pharaoh wasn't the guy who had to go and fish or find drinkable water. The people were beginning to suffer for Pharaoh's stubborn heart.

Also, since it is mentioned later that those plagues didn't affect Goshen, where the Israelites lived, I assume that some of the delta area of the Nile was also turned to blood. This wouldn't have been to punish Israel, but to encourage them by showing them what God was doing down yonder at Casa de Pharaoh.

Matthew 18:23-19:12

Matthew 18:23-35

This story is an answer to Peter's question from yesterday regarding forgiveness.

For the disciple, true biblical forgiveness rests in, and is empowered by, our own forgiveness from God. The ability to forgive others springs from a heart that has received mercy. It is a heart that is grounded in a biblical/spiritual perspective of reality. We all are dead; we all are hopeless debtors. This is the reality of our salvation and the context of the grace given to us on this planet. It allows a disciple to live an "other worldly" life, full of understanding of what is happening on earth and in heaven. Why Matthew 5:39-48 seems so unreachable to people is because we are grasping a view of life that is false. Life on earth is not good. We are all sinners. We are all in trouble.

As disciples we are commanded to forgive others, based on the forgiveness we have received from God. Life is complicated. This doesn't say we need to trust others, or accept their version of reality, or go on vacation with them. Forgiveness in this context means showing mercy as we've received mercy. It is placing the right to demand justice or payment in God's hands.

In my experience, any person and even a disciple, who arrogantly withholds forgiveness of this kind and cannot do good for an enemy, will not be released from the penalty and punishment for his own *ongoing* sins. God takes even his disciples to task in those areas of failure we walk

through on a daily basis, until we learn to forgive from the heart as He forgives us. This kind of situation always has more to do with God and us, than some other person and us. Christ loves us too much, to let us get away with this misunderstanding of His sacrifice and grace.

Matthew 19:1-12

Vs. 1-9 The test here involved two different rabbis teaching two very different views of divorce in Israel. One view was very liberal, allowing for divorce under any circumstances, and the other view was conservative, saying divorce was only allowed because of adultery. The attempt was to get Jesus to agree with one or the other rabbi. Jesus avoided this by summarizing God's intent in marriage and how God works with the hardness of man's sin in the meantime.

Vs. 4-6 are very clear teachings on marriage. It is a marital union first, and then a sexual *one flesh* union. It is between a man and his wife. *Male and female* is the only way to be *one flesh* in God's eyes. Man and wife is the only way to enter this union in a way that is pleasing to Him. It is how God created us and it is what God wants.

All other variations are wrong. God is not open to discussion, but will forgive the variations if people will agree to His way and repent. Sex outside of marriage is sin. Adultery is sin. Homosexuality is sin. And it is God who says so and He loves us and will forgive and restore us if there is agreement with Him and if we repent. He is not going to change this order of creation anymore than He'll change the direction of the rotation of the earth because we demand it of Him. He is the Creator. He knows what is best for us, and yet, He will forgive us.

V. 6 Jesus is teaching that God never intended people to divorce. God joins together and means it to be forever. That's a pretty heavy thought. It is a spiritual union whether we agree with Him or not.

Vs. 7-9 The Pharisees caught this. Jesus was saying something different than both of the conflicting views in Israel. Both allowed for divorce. Jesus' answer showed that God allowed divorce and remarriage because of our unwillingness to listen to Him, just like Pharaoh. He has built the need for completeness so deeply in us, as the essence of us, that it is irresistible to us. We may not understand it and just relegate it to hormones and sexual behavior, but "oneness" is a very deep spiritual need and will drive us whether we understand it or not.

In adultery the "covenant" is broken. This is inevitable in divorce and remarriage. Somehow, in all of this dysfunctional humanity, God allows for restoration and forgiveness and order and renewal, but it always has a price. Grace can overcome the effects.

Vs. 10-12 The disciples are shocked because marriages back then always had an escape clause, just like today. To think of marriage being "permanent" was scary to them.

Jesus says that for the sake of the kingdom, some people make the decision (and Paul calls it a gift) to live without marriage for the purpose of serving God. They are figurative, not literal, eunuchs. I have only met a couple of people in my life who have this gift. It is the exception, not the rule. It is the grace of God to them, either for a life-time or for a period of time, as they are totally focused on serving Christ as a disciple in the harvest, that the need for completion is satisfied, or held in check, without marriage and oneness. For most of us, a few hours is all we can stand. That is not the gift. In fact, some of us don't understand this "gift" as a "gift." Sorry, Paul.

Notice that this teaching is for the one who can receive it. Obviously then not everyone will "hear" or be able to do this. Of all the things certain groups have enforced on their clergy, abstinence from marriage has been one of the most damaging and the most unbiblical. And they've used these verses to enforce or prove their teaching. In 1 Timothy 4:1-3 Paul says that forbidding marriage comes from lies and the doctrines of demons. Satan knows we need marriage too, and saying we shouldn't do it is a good way to warp us.

Psalm 23

Enjoy!

Vs. 1-3 As a kid I understood v. 1 to declare how sinful we were. Here was Jesus, such a great Lord and wouldn't you know it - WE don't WANT Him. Now I finally get it.

Isn't it interesting that when the Lord leads us, He leads us to stillness and restoration. We still think complicated and stressful is better.

V. 4 Here it is again. Even in the harvest, in danger, following the Lord leads to being comforted by the Lord to maintain a still heart.

Vs. 5-6 Even in opposition there is joy without indigestion. Of course, David allowed his life to get busy and out of control and so did Solomon. And they lost that peace of being led by the Lord. Following the Lord leads us to peace even in the trials of working in the harvest. We need to remember to simply follow, simply abiding in Christ and His presence.

Proverbs 5:22-23

These verses conclude the warnings about sexual adventure and the command to be completely absorbed in passion for your spouse. Specific to this teaching is a studied obedience to keep our passions and relationships in control.

But generally speaking, in all areas, a lack of discipline will always catch us, as disciples, in the keester. God's warnings and instructions are given for us to heed and to follow. It means we need to marshal our energy and alertness and do what He says. That involves some discipline and effort.

Especially where sin is involved, we need discipline, and we need to allow God to use events and people and responsibilities to help us as He prunes us to make us fulfilled and fruitful in the harvest. Read Hebrews 12:1-13 for some motivation on this point.