

"O Lord, Why?"

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[0 : 00] As you see in the title of the sermon, O Lord, why the words that Moses cried out to God in his bewilderment? As we're going to see in the passage, three points, God denied, Pharaoh denying God.

Anguish increased, the anguish of the people increased because of their perception that God was not with them. And then perplexity revealed the perplexity of Moses in his bewilderment. The events that were happening and yet happening under God's control. O Lord, why? And as we read there in the passage, Moses is troubled.

This is Moses. This is Moses who later will be called the hero of the faith. This is the man of God's choice, the man who's been chosen to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt.

But this same Moses, he's perplexed. He's disturbed at the way that God has led him thus far, only for what it seems to be.

[1 : 10] Moses coming up against a brick wall, we would say. Coming up against an unexpected turn of events. I mean, having been called by God to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt.

And despite many of Moses' objections that you read off in the earlier chapters, objections to Moses being the one whom God had chosen to go into Egypt and take the Israelites out of Egypt.

Despite God assuring Moses that Aaron would do the speaking before Pharaoh and all things would be well with God with them, Moses is bewildered.

Moses has met with his brother. He's met his brother after many, many years. He's met with his brother Aaron in the desert and they returned together to Egypt. And instead of an immediate escape, deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt, as we read, Pharaoh resists.

Pharaoh refuses to allow the people out of Egypt. And instead increases the burdens on the Israelites and they're making bricks without straw and making the vast constructions in Egypt.

[2 : 30] And the people are angry. The people consider that Moses is at fault. And as we read there, Moses turns to God.

Moses asks in sheer bewilderment, Lord, why have you done evil to this people? Why did you ever send me? And that response, that response, the response of why, that response is echoed through the ages when God sends his people to work for him, when God promises his blessings and presence.

Then discouragement happens. God's purposes don't happen in the way that we expect them to turn out. And often we cry out, why?

Why, Lord, have you allowed such and such a thing to happen? Why, Lord, when did you send me when all I see is failure and opposition and heartache and heartbreak?

Oh, Lord, why? And we'll return to that question to see that it's not for us to be bewildered or perplexed, not for us to call upon God even with the question why, but to continue to trust in him at all times, even in the dark times, but to continue to believe in him.

[3 : 52] But let's turn to what we read, particularly at the start of chapter 5, where we read of God being denied, God denied by Pharaoh.

And just picture the scene that we read there. There's two elderly men in their 80s, Moses and Aaron, and they've been with the elders of Israel themselves, no doubt elderly men, men who will have the appearance of grief and hardship even visible in their faces.

And Moses and Aaron, they have that assurance that God is with them. God's promised to be with them. And so Moses and Aaron have met with the elders, and now they've met with Pharaoh.

Thus says the Lord God of Israel, says Aaron to Pharaoh, let my people go. And even these very words, thus says the Lord, shows that it's by God's authority that Moses and Aaron are there before Pharaoh.

And it's Pharaoh who has to listen, not so much to the voice of a man, but the voice of God. You see, the authority of Pharaoh has been challenged by the authority of God, that greater authority. [5 : 11] In these days, Pharaohs were considered divine deities. They were considered God kings, as it were. But this so-called God king has been challenged challenged by the one true God, the king of kings.

And there in that palace in Egypt, there's that cameo, that event being played out between those who are under God's authority and those who challenge that authority.

And at first, anyway, as we read there in the passage, it seems it appeared that those, or the Pharaoh who was challenging God's authority, it seemed that Pharaoh had the upper hand.

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. Surely what we're seeing here is the arrogance of the person, the one who will not acknowledge God as Lord.

That expression of ignorance in Pharaoh's part, that has been repeated generation after generation. It's been seen and heard in every land.

[6 : 28] That hostility of all who will not obey God, who will not acknowledge God, who will not submit before the one true God. And who will quite blatantly say, who is the Lord, that I should obey him.

Because you see, any rejection of God's word presupposes the question, who is the Lord, that I should obey him. And any hostility that's shown to God's people, again, indicates that same question.

I do not know the Lord. In other words, what we're seeing here in Pharaoh's words, echoed through the ages, that rejection of God by those who have no relationship with God, who don't know God as Lord, as Savior.

Why? Because self is God. All done for self, for the glory of self and not the glory of God. And it was John Calvin who said something like this.

He said, whenever men reject God and refuse to obey him, they make themselves God's. Because whenever you decide to live without God, well, you're really saying, I'm doing what I'm doing for my glory and not God's glory.

[7 : 47] I'm not going to bow down to the one who is and who declares himself God. I'm going to bow down to self. And it's that mindset, you see, that brings chaos to society when self takes the place of God, when God's standards of holiness and righteousness are excluded in the name of self.

And it's that mindset that says, I'll define how I will regard life. I'll define how I see myself and my gender and my way rather than follow God's way.

It's the mindset that says, I am the master of my fate. I am the captain of my soul. It's the mindset that says, I'll have nothing to do with this God, this Lord.

I'll have nothing to do with him to allow him to rule over my life. And it's that mindset that's captured here in Pharaoh's, well, his attitude when he hears the name of the Lord and he says, I don't know who this Lord is.

He didn't know God because Pharaoh's God was himself. And Moses certainly are not going to back down. They persist and they're pleading before Pharaoh to let the Israelites leave Egypt.

[9 : 10] But still, Pharaoh remains hardened in his heart. That's exactly what God said would happen as we read in the earlier chapter before this chapter. But you know, there are lessons.

There are lessons for each one of us, even in this first encounter between Moses and Aaron and Pharaoh. And surely the first is this, that when you who are of the Lord, when you confront the world with God's message, when you give the message of the gospel to the world, don't think that the world somehow is going to receive that message gladly or willingly or indeed receive it at all.

God's prophets, God's apostles, Lord's prophets were rejected. Jesus himself, Jesus was despised and rejected of men. As we saw a few Sunday evenings ago, remember when Jesus, when he began his ministry, even in his hometown of Nazareth, he was rejected by his own home people, his own people from Nazareth.

They rejected him. They would not believe he was the Lord's chosen one. And you who seek to be Christ's ambassadors, you have a message to proclaim before others.

But don't always expect to be given a favorable hearing. What did Jesus say? All men will hate you because of me. So don't be surprised. when the message that God gives you is thrown back in your

face.

[10:47] Pharaoh here, he resisted the word of the Lord. He resisted it with arrogance. And there will be many another arrogant rejection of the word of the Lord when you proclaim the truth of salvation in Christ alone.

But when that happens, again, that's with Moses and Aaron here, don't give up, don't lose your nerve when there is that stubborn resistance to the gospel, but continue and persist before a world, before a society that continually rejects the name of the Lord.

One of the great reasons for studying church history is to see the witness of those who've gone before us and the persistence in that witness that we see in so many of the Lord's people as God sent and used them to proclaim before others the truth of salvation in Christ alone.

Think of Jan Hus, the Czech believer who was watered for his faith in Prague. Think of Martin Luther, the German reformer who stood against the emperors and popes and those who rejected the word of God.

He was persistent. He would not back down. Think of John Calvin, the French reformer, through all his many illnesses, through all his many setbacks, and yet he wouldn't back down in the face of so much opposition to the gospel of truth.

[12:24] Those who have gone before, they show us, they tell us, remain strong, remain strong in faith, and follow the Lord Jesus, follow the one who wouldn't yield to the false accusations of his enemies when Jesus was put in trial.

Just as Isaiah the prophet prophesied, he was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth like a lamb that's lent to the slaughter and like a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.

It's for you to stay strong and to stay firm. That was Jesus' words to his disciples. Remember, after, as we've seen Jesus declaring that all men will hate you because of me.

Remember what Jesus said next. He's saying, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. So stand firm. Stand steadfast in the knowledge that God is with you at all times, even the times when you've been rejected for your testifying to the truth of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Even when you're in the midst of the heat of battle, even when it appears that you're on the losing side, you're not. You're on the winning side. You're on the Lord's side.

[13:47] So don't lose your nerve. Even when those who you're speaking to, preaching to, praying for, loving in your heart, and that love isn't returned in following the Lord Jesus, your Savior, the one true Savior.

Even when far from seeing sinners turn to Christ, you see rejection, but continue and remain steadfast. But then, what do we see next in the passage?

We see anguish increase. The anguish of the Israelites increased. We read a large section of chapter 5 that really tells us of that anguish.

But truly, really what we're seeing here is a false anguish, if you like. An anguish misplaced. Let's look at the details. There's Pharaoh.

He's behaving like a tyrant. He's persecuted the Lord's people. He's increased their labor. The Israelites are going to have to forage now all over the country for the straw to make bricks.

[14:59] They're not going to get it supplied to them any longer. Pharaoh's acting unreasonably and he's acting with cruelty. He's trying to crush the Israelites.

He's trying to make them so burdened to think that the God whom they profess is no God of power, that Pharaoh has the upper hand, that Pharaoh has all power and that the people will have to realize that the God who is in control is not the Lord whom they profess, but the Pharaoh, the God King.

And you see, that mindset, that attitude of Pharaoh, we see even in present times, even through the times that we live through, the ways of many who are stubborn and remain stubborn in their desire not to know God and to cause anguish to the Lord's people.

We see it in our own land. The atheist who becomes even more militant in his desire to crush the Lord's people, to bring in more and more legislation to counter the Word of God.

The anti-Christian lobby becomes more and more determined to destroy every vestige of Christianity in our land. Maybe friends, maybe even of your family whom you've prayed for for their conversion and they become more resistant.

[16 : 33] And maybe even saying things and doing things that are deeply hurtful. Well, that was Pharaoh's tactics. And that's going to be the tactics of all who refuse to acknowledge the authority of God unless, of course, by God's grace the work of grace enters the hearts of those who at one time were so resistant to the gospel but now through the drawing power of the Holy Spirit turn to your Savior, the one true Savior, and call upon his name.

But you know, what's, we might even say, more bewildering is when the people of God turn on fellow believers and do so in unfounded opposition.

That's exactly what we saw there in the passage. The Israelites turning on Moses and Aaron. The Israelites and the foremen of the Israelites turning on God's spokesmen, blaming them for their hardship.

and we see it in unfounded opposition even today. Yes, we expect the world's hostility but when brother despises brother, when believer can't abide another believer, even to the extent that the use of venomous words, face-to-face confrontation, then surely that's a rupture in the unity that God's church has to exercise and practice.

It's much, much more than the occasional falling out between believers. It's much, much more than the times when there are differences of opinion between believers because what we see there in the reaction of the foremen of Israelites against Moses, that sickening rebuke against Moses and Aaron, that rebuke actually went way beyond the rebuke of the Egyptians.

[18 : 31] Let's just remind ourselves again of the detail. The foremen there, they've met with Pharaoh. Pharaoh's just ordered them back to work to oversee the production of bricks without the straw beside them.

And as these foremen leave the palace, who do they meet? They meet Moses and Aaron. Moses and Aaron have waited outside to hear what Pharaoh has said to the foremen. And little did Moses and Aaron expect the rebuke that they were given.

The rebuke in these venomous words, the Lord look on you and judge because you've made a stink in the sight of Pharaoh and his servants and have put a sword in their hand to kill us.

Moses and Aaron are blamed for the increased workload. They're blamed for making things worse. They're blamed. even though Moses and Aaron had met with the Israelites to elders beforehand and assured them that yes, the Lord was concerned for his people, but it was the Lord who'd sent them.

Moses and Aaron had been obedient to the call of God to go to Pharaoh. It wasn't their fault that Pharaoh had refused to accede to the demand, the request of Moses and Aaron to let the Israelites leave Egypt.

[19 : 52] It was Pharaoh himself and of course Pharaoh under the sovereign control of God because it was God's timing and God's timing alone that was key.

All that the Israelite foreman could see was the immediate circumstances of the situation, circumstances that appear to contradict all that they'd first believed concerning God's compassion for them.

So what do they do? They lash out. They lash out to God's spokesmen. They use wild accusations about what's going to happen to them because they've listened to Moses and Aaron.

And you know for God's people today, for all who are of the Lord, be very, very weary, weary of conflict within the church of God.

Why? Because the world's watching, the world's seeing. The world will see the language that the Lord's people use against one another, the way we talk against one another, the way we communicate against one another, the way that so often Christians are depicted at just being at one another's throats.

[21 : 11] And you know, Satan must laugh every time a Christian slanders a fellow brother in Christ. Christ. And yes, there have been so many sad occasions when Christians have slandered fellow believers and when those who have been slandered have been faithful and true to God's word, causing no offense, only to receive offense.

But even when that does happen, yes, be reminded as we've been reminded before, that the Lord Jesus was hated without a cause. And it's real pain when that happens.

We continue to remain steadfast to the Lord God, even when you're hated, even when you're hated without a cause, even hated by those who profess the name of the Lord Jesus.

But instead, do, do as Paul advised Timothy to do, keep the head in all situations, be steadfast, keep the head in being steadfast in your faith, even when opposition arises, even when there are those times when God does hide his face, even when your brother in Christ turns against you. But know that those who are his, those who are obedient to his call, for you fulfill that call, serving the one who never leaves you, who never forsakes you.

[22 : 41] Yes, opposition from a brother in Christ will cause perplexity, and we see that in Moses' situation, when he calls upon God, when we see our third point, perplexity revealed.

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.

Back to what we said at the start, O Lord, why? You see, Moses can't reconcile the promises that God had made earlier to him about God coming down to deliver his people in order to raise them up in delivering them from their oppression.

God had promised Moses that, yes, Moses would be the one to lead the Israelites in that great exodus out of Egypt. But all that Moses can see in that immediate situation, that immediate context, is the more intense suffering of the Israelites, a greater inflicted hardship, and a Pharaoh who stubbornly refuses to accede to Moses' request.

Christ. Moses calls an evil on the people. So Moses is bewildered. He's perplexed. He's confused at what he thinks is God contradicting himself, God promising much but giving little.

[24 : 21] Now, what are we to make of all this? What are we to make of God's sovereign purposes and yet the believer complaining when God doesn't work to our schedule?

We always must remember that God is sovereign, that God is in control. Even when Moses was at his lowest point here, even when he was bewildered, he still recognizes the truth that God is sovereign.

He calls upon God in the special word that was used to tell of God's sovereignty. He uses the word Adonai, the word that means sovereign God, sovereign Lord.

He knows that God is sovereign but yet he can't reconcile that truth with the events that are happening at that moment in Egypt. But remember this, faith demands that you cling to the promises of Adonai, the promises of the sovereign Lord.

Even when circumstances might appear to go against that truth that God is sovereign because the sovereign Lord, God the sovereign Lord cannot contradict himself.

[25 : 37] What God promises, he fulfills and fulfills in his timing and for his glory as he does so in his way and not our way.

And so remember that truth. even when circumstances in your life and yes, the life of a loved one maybe appear to be out of control and you're crying out, oh Lord, why?

And there's silence. But that silence will not be permanent. God will answer you as God answered Moses in God's time as God willing we're going to see next week.

But even in these times of silence, God gives you, God gives his people that opportunity to increase your faith in him even when you cry out, I believe, help my unbelief.

And God will answer you and God fulfill his promises in his time and by his schedule. Now, Moses at this time, Moses in his bewilderment, he'd lost sight of God's promises.

[26 : 46] Moses had looked on the immediate circumstances. rather than exercising faith in the promise of God. Remember, he still calls on God as Adonai, a sovereign Lord.

But Moses hadn't applied that truth at that critical time. So what do we learn even from this? Surely we learn this, to trust him for his grace, to trust God even when God hides that smiling face behind his frowning providences.

And that trust, when God does hide that smiling face behind his frowning providences, that trust requires faith. It requires much faith.

But faith in the one true God, faith in the God whose word is utterly reliable, faith in the one whose word is true, whose love is true, because God is true.

God is too kind to be cruel. So rest, rest then in his promises. And learn that godly patience, yes, patience that's tested, patience that's tried, but patience in the one whose purposes are higher than our purposes, the one who does all for his glory and for the good of his people.

[28 : 14] And so we close then with these words, these thoughts. Amen. Let us pray. Our heavenly Father, as we consider your word, may we truly consider our faith and to trust in you the more, to

call upon you the more, to plead with you the more, to be in your presence and calling upon your name, to have mercy upon us, to speak to us by your word, that you are the one who does all things well and in your time, in your way, and for your glory.

Hear us, Lord, as we commit our lives to you, as we commit them before the God who knows the end from the beginning, whose ways are not our ways, but whose ways are true.

Hear us, Lord, as we continue in worship before you now, and we pray these things in Jesus' name.
Amen.