

Discouragement with God

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[0 : 00] Good morning.

Will you bow your heads with me as we pray together? Lord, as we come to your word, Lord, we are reminded of what a good God you are.

Lord, that you have made yourself known to us, that we are not left to grasp, to seek you, Lord, in our own strength or to find you with our own imagination or thoughts.

But God, you are a God who has revealed yourself to us so that we might know you. And you have made us that we might know you. Lord, we pray this morning that as we look at your word, Lord, that we would, as we have sung earlier, behold you as you truly are and adore you and worship you.

Lord, I pray for your help this morning that my words, Lord, would be instruments in your hands.

Lord, that you would speak to us through your word for your glory and for our good.

[1 : 22] Lord, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Have you ever felt like you've been set up for disappointment?

When I lived in Asia for two years, I had a particular experience of planning vacation that set me up for disappointment pretty often. And that was finding hotels.

When I would go on a website, I would see these beautiful pictures of manicured lawns and spotless rooms and opulent breakfast buffets.

And we would try to find the right place and then we'd make the reservation and then we would show up. And those pictures never matched the reality.

There were carpets peeling in the corner. There was paint peeling from the walls, et cetera, et cetera. It was, the reality was distinctly poorer than the image.

[2 : 29] And set us up for disappointment such that we became used to it. And then we got over it and were able to process it. You know, it's not a big deal when you're set up for disappointment on something as small as where you go for vacation.

You can roll with that. You know, life can still be good. But it's a much bigger deal when it comes to the most significant things of life, isn't it? It's a much bigger deal when we face something unexpected and hard.

She gave back the ring and said, I'm sorry. The funding that was promised suddenly disappears. Your friend in school, you find out suddenly spoken ill of you so that they can be a part of the in crowd.

The doctor who had promised so much comes back and says, sorry, the treatment isn't working.

When we face disappointment at the deeper levels of things, it's significant, isn't it?

And often the disappointment is greatest when we think it's about to get better, when we're looking forward to something good, when we think there's a great thing on the horizon.

[3 : 50] And then suddenly, not only is that thing taken away, but what we get instead is even harder. Now, this, of course, is something that is true of our human condition.

This is something that we all suffer from and struggle with. But in fact, it is when we gather as a church and profess to believe in a God who is good and loving and sovereign and powerful.

It in fact makes it harder sometimes, doesn't it? Really, God? Where were you?

Where are you? Where are you? Where are you? Where are you? In these things? Maybe you've been there. Maybe you haven't gotten there yet.

But when God seems to have failed you, it's one of the hardest things for us to face. How do we respond when it feels like God has failed us?

[4 : 57] Well, friends, this is where our text leads us this morning. We're continuing in our study in the book of Exodus.

And so if you want to turn with me in your pew Bibles to Exodus chapter 5, we're going to be looking at chapter 5 and the beginning of chapter 6. And we're going to be trying to answer that question. How do we respond when it seems like God has failed us? I don't have the page number. It's in the bulletin. It's pretty... Exodus is the second book of the Bible.

Genesis, Exodus. So you can find it pretty quickly. Exodus chapter 5. And as you look there, remember what we've talked about. The big picture of the storyline of the Bible up to this point. Right? In Genesis chapter 12, God came to a man, Abraham, and said, I will make you the father of a great nation. And I will make your descendants as many as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore.

[6 : 00] And I will make you a blessing. And I will bless you. And then through the rest of Genesis is the slow growth of this man's family from 2 to, at the end of Genesis, 70, who then go down to Egypt because of a famine.

And in Egypt, over the next ensuing 400 years between Genesis and Exodus, these people multiply into a great nation. But as they multiply into a great nation, their situation gets harder.

They, in fact, end up becoming enslaved. And the people are suffering. But what we've seen in the first couple of chapters of Exodus is that God has come to his people and he has said, I have heard your cries.

And I know your suffering. And he's begun to raise up a man, Moses, through which he will do this promised great work of delivering his people.

And as we've looked over the last couple of weeks, Pastor Nick, three weeks ago, preached on God appearing to Moses in the wilderness and saying, I am the God who is for you, the God of your forefathers.

[7 : 15] I am the one who will do this great work so that you will know that I am your God, the God who is able to deliver you and save you. And then as we saw in Pastor Greg preached last week about the movement then of God getting Moses to actually return to Egypt.

And at the end of chapter 4, we saw Moses and Aaron had come to Egypt and had told them, God is now ready. He is on the move. He is ready to deliver you. And the people heard this and they believed God and they bowed down and they worshipped him.

And we come to the beginning of chapter 5 and we think, Finally, this is it. Finally, God is going to act and redeem and save his people.

And this brings us to Exodus chapter 5 verse 1. Let's read this together. We're going to read our passage this morning in two sections. We're going to read chapter 5 and talk about it for a little while.

And then we're going to read the beginning of chapter 6. So Exodus chapter 5 verse 1.

[8 : 53] met with us. Please let us go a three days journey into the wilderness that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God, lest he fall upon us with pestilence, with the sword. 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.

And Pharaoh said, behold, the people of the land are now many, and you make them rest from their burdens. In the same day, Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people and their foremen, you shall no longer give the people straw to make bricks as in the past. Let them go and gather straw for themselves. But the number of bricks that they have made in the past, you shall impose upon them. You shall by no means reduce it, for they are idle. Therefore they cry, let us go and offer sacrifice to our God. Let heavier work be laid on the men that they may labor at it and pay no regard to lying words. 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. Go and get your straw yourselves wherever you can find it.

But your work will not be reduced in the least. And so the people were scattered throughout all the land of Egypt to gather stubble for straw. The taskmasters were urgent, saying, complete your work, your daily task. 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?

Then the foremen of the people of Israel came and cried to Pharaoh, why do you treat your servants like this? 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. But he said, you are idle. You are idle. That is why you say, let us go and sacrifice to the Lord. Go now and work. No straw will be given to

you, but you must still deliver the same number of bricks. 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.

They met Moses and Aaron who were waiting for them as they came out from Pharaoh. 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. Then Moses turned to the Lord and said, oh 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.

[12:13] On the brink of what they think will be the greatest victory, the hope of release and freedom, of deliverance, it goes exactly the wrong way, doesn't it? They come in and they say, thus says the Lord, let his people go. And Pharaoh says, I don't know this God and your people are really useful and I need them to work.

I'm not going to let your people go. There's some question about why Moses asked for three days to go off into the wilderness. Was this a subterfuge? Was this some sort of way of trying to deceive Pharaoh upon, about his intentions? But I think that the easiest way to read it is that everyone knew what Moses was asking. This is a cultural understated ask for Pharaoh to let these people go three days into the wilderness was tantamount to saying, I no longer have control over them. They are free to do as they will.

So he wasn't, he wasn't trying to deceive anyone, but he comes in and Moses gives this ask and he says, the God of the Hebrews has appeared to me. Please do this. He appeals to Pharaoh. Pharaoh dismisses their God. You may not worship him. You may not go. I do not know him. And interestingly, if you look at verse nine, he even accuses them of lying about the promised deliverance. Do you see that?

[14:08] Pharaoh says, let their work be laid on the men so that they may labor at it and pay no regard to lying words. Pharaoh is basically saying, there is no way that I will let you worship your God.

And I think he's deceiving you. I am not going to surrender my power to him. I have the one who has power in this situation. I have control and I am going to exert it.

He unleashes new suffering on the Israelites. Straw back then was like rebar in construction today. You put straw in the middle of clay and you could bake it in the sun rather than in a kiln.

And that would make for strong bricks that you could build buildings with in a land of Egypt that at this time was known to be fairly deforested and wood was precious and therefore not able to be used for kiln.

And so this was an important economic process to create building materials for there to be straw mixed in with the clay that then could create sun-baked bricks.

[15:16] And this had been provided, it seems, from the crops that the Egyptians had raised for the building of bricks.

And Pharaoh says, no more. You'll have to go find it yourself. And in fact, they don't get to go find good, well-cut straw that's been bundled and gathered together.

Do you notice what they have to go find? They have to go find stubble. That means they're going into the fields after the harvest, after it's been cut. And they have to find the little shoots at the bottom where the scythe wouldn't have cut it off.

And they're pulling that up, separating the roots and using that little bit. Pharaoh increased their work without lessening the demand.

And then beat them when they did not succeed. It is, in fact, a totalitarian blueprint that has been followed throughout the years.

[16:26] There were foremen who were Israelites who oversaw the workers. And they were held accountable to the Egyptian taskmasters who oversaw them.

So there was this hierarchy. And the foremen were beaten because the workers did not complete what was required of them. And in fact, when you see down in verse 15 and following, says, the foremen knew we are in trouble.

Pharaoh had, in fact, created a situation where there was no way that they would be able to do this. And all it would do would be to create an inhumane slave labor situation that we could only, only maybe try to relate it to some of the ways in which Japanese POWs were used during World War II.

Where they were used as slave labor until they died. And that was the point. It seems that this is what Pharaoh has done in response. Now put yourself, put yourself in the shoes of an Israelite in Egypt.

How would you respond? Your deliverers have showed up and instead of it getting better, it's now gotten far worse. They respond initially by appealing to Pharaoh.

[17 : 56] Pharaoh, this isn't fair. Why are you doing this? But when Pharaoh doubles down, he says, you are idle.

In other translations, it just says, lazy, lazy. Pharaoh is accusing them of being lazy. And that's why he's pressing them down.

They know that their task is impossible. And they come out to Moses and Aaron who seem to be standing outside of the Pharaoh's court. And they say, look with me in this because this is important.

Verse 20 and following. Verse 21. That's not a nice statement. Nor is it a question of like, hey, maybe you guys are doing the right thing.

Maybe you aren't. But, you know, I'm just sort of wondering. Maybe the Lord, you know, are you sure that this is what God? That is not what that means. What that means is, Moses, Aaron, you have wronged us.

[19 : 07] You have made our plight worse. You have promised deliverance. And you have made our life worse.

And in fact, it is an indictment of their role as a deliverer. And it is an implicit indictment of God himself. May God judge between us means this is not right.

And Moses receives this word and he turns to the Lord. And he bears a similar faithless despair to them as he turns to the Lord.

He hears their cry. He feels their burden. He sees the situation. Why did you send me, God, if all I'm going to do is make it worse?

Why did you send me if suffering is the outcome of this? This wasn't the plan. The plan was for deliverance and victory and freedom. He says more than that, doesn't he?

[20 : 15] Why have you done evil to your people? That's a strong charge, isn't it? That's a strong charge. Following you has provoked Pharaoh and made our suffering worse.

And this worsening, Lord, is your fault. And he ends it with you have not delivered your people at all. Moses brings to God the charge.

You have failed us. You have failed us. Have you ever hit that point? When you've looked at your circumstances and you know that God is able to change them and improve them and make them better, and yet he hasn't, you have failed us.

And you wonder, why, God? You cry out to him. And out of the depth of your pain and suffering and despair, you say, God, why have you failed me?

Why have you abandoned me? Why haven't you delivered me? Moses was being obedient to God when he did what he did.

[21 : 41] And the result was a greater darkness and a deeper suffering. Reminds me of the words of the psalmist in Psalm 88.

Oh, Lord, God of my salvation, I cry out to you. I cry out day and night before you. Let my prayer come before you. Incline your ear to hear my cry, for my soul is full of trouble, and my life draws near to Sheol.

I am counted among those who go down to the pit. I am a man who has no strength, like one set loose among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, like those whom you remember no more, for they are cut off from your hand.

And then further on, do you work wonders for the dead? Do the departed rise up to praise you? Is your steadfast love declared in the grave and your faithfulness in Abaddon?

Are your wonders known in the darkness? Are your righteousness in the land of forgetfulness? And at the end, you have caused my beloved and my friend to shun me, and darkness has become my only companion.

[22 : 58] Moses, like the psalmist, knew that God was in charge. But was confused and despairing.

Because following the Lord had made it harder, not easier. Where do we go?

What do we do? How do we respond when that lands in our life? Some of you are young. Hasn't happened yet.

I wish I could tell you it won't. Not sure it does in every life to the same degree and in the same way. But I will warn you, it is likely to happen.

You will face the day when you think, God, why have you failed me? But our passage does not leave us there.

[24 : 06] Because when it feels like God has failed you, he comes to remind you. Look with me at chapter 6. We are just going to look at verses 1 through 10 this morning.

In response to God's complaint that God has failed him, the Lord speaks. Let's read this together. Exodus 6, 1 through 10.

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 deliver them out of his land.

God spoke to Moses and said to him, I am the Lord. I 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.

I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they lived as sojourners. Moreover, I have heard the groanings of the people of Israel, whom the Egyptians hold as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant.

[25 : 15] Say therefore to the people of Israel, I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptian, 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.

And Moses spoke thus to the people of Israel, but they did not listen to Moses because of their broken spirit and harsh slavery. When it feels like God has failed us, God shows up, and he says, I want you to not focus on what you see, but on who you know.

When God shows up, he doesn't explain why he has done what he has done, for the most part.

[26 : 33] We'll get to that. There's a little hint in it. There's not a lot of explanation, but what there is is revelation. When you look at this speech from 2 to 8, do you see the repetition?

In verse 2, he starts with it, I am the Lord. Then in verse 6, when he says, now speak this to the people, he says, I am the Lord. And he ends it again in verse 8 at the end with, I am the Lord.

And again, if you weren't here a couple weeks ago, when you see Lord in that odd small caps thing, that's not a typo. That's a particular signification.

Of the way that God revealed himself to Moses in chapter 3. The God who is, I am who I am.

The self-sufficient one. The all-sufficient one. The God who is completely Lord over all things.

[27 : 40] The one who is completely the creator of all things. Go back and listen to Pastor Nick's sermon to get the richness of all that that means.

But there's a special name. And in fact, we see that part of what he's saying is, I am the covenant God. Just as I've made a covenant with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, now I have come to Moses and I've revealed myself in a special way.

And it's not, if you go back in Genesis, you'll see the name of the Lord. You'll see that it's used earlier on. But what God is reminding Moses is, I have now revealed myself to you in a further way. And in fact, what I'm about to do in my deliverance from Egypt, in all the things that I'm promising as I deliver you with a strong arm, will show you what kind of God I am.

What it means for me to be your God and for you to be my people. I am the covenant God who promised you to become a great nation and to be blessed by me and to be a blessing to the world.

[28 : 47] I promised you a land where you would flourish, where you'd experience provision and abundance. I promised you that I would make you to a place where I would dwell among you and display my glory among you.

This is what God had promised. He said, I am the Lord. And interestingly, just as a note, you go back to Genesis 15. And when God speaks to Abraham in Genesis 15, 13, he says, then the Lord said to Abraham, know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there.

And they will be afflicted for 400 years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve. And afterwards, they shall come out with great possessions. So even back at the beginning, as God is coming to Moses and saying, I am the God, the covenant God.

I am the Lord who is for you. There is a reminder. I told you this would happen. I promised you that this suffering would come.

And I promised you that it would not go on forever. I have not abandoned you. I have not failed you. I am not out of control. I have not failed you.

[30 : 08] I have not failed you. This is what verses 2 through 5, what God is saying to Moses. And then in verses 6 through 8, God says to Moses, this is what you shall tell to the people.

And did you hear it when I read it? How many times God says, I will, I will, I will, I will, I will. I will deliver you and bring you out.

I will redeem you, make you mine. I will be your God. And I will make you my people. And I will take you into an inheritance, to a promised land, to a future that you do not know yet and can't even conceive of after 400 years of slavery.

A land with freedom and peace and abundance. A land with everything you need to flourish and grow so that you may worship me and you may be the place where I display my glory.

God tells Moses to tell the people, tell them what kind of covenant God I am. I am not passive and I have not failed you.

[31 : 24] But I will fulfill my promises. I will do all of these things. If you look carefully in verse seven, there is a purpose statement in the midst of it.

The whole structure, literary structure is, I will do this, I will do this, I will do this, I will do this, I will do this. And then you get to the second half of verse seven. And you shall know that I am the Lord your God who has brought you out from under the burden of the Egyptians.

Everything that God is doing is so that people would know what kind of God he is. That they would see his character. That they would know his power and his authority.

And it's striking to notice that in this passage, passage, nobody else seems to know who the Lord actually is. Pharaoh begins his response by saying, I don't know this God.

The people say, may God judge between you and us. But it sure seems like his plan is pretty crappy for us. Moses comes and says, why have you done evil?

[32 : 47] And God comes and he says, I do all of these things so that you will know me. So that you will know what kind of God I am.

It reminds us. Reminds us of something very important. When things don't go as we expect. When we could imagine that God could have done this differently.

Let's pray.

Let's pray.

Let's pray. Let's pray.

[34 : 47] Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray.

Let's pray. Let's pray. so So, let's get started.

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[37 : 38] So, let's get started.

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[45 : 08] So, let's get started.

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