

EXODUS

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Faith Challenged
Exodus 5:22-6:14

We are going to start in Exodus 5 today.

So far in the story, God has called Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. He has equipped him with his brother Aaron to do some talking for him and some miracles to prove his authenticity as a chosen leader.

So Moses goes to the Jews, he does the signs in front of them. And they worship. They now have faith, they are on board with the plans Yahweh is carrying out through Moses. So Moses, with the wind at his back, goes in and tells Pharaoh to let the people go because God says so.

And Pharaoh says, "Who is God? I don't know this Yahweh! No, I'm not letting you go, you're just lazy." So Pharaoh made their work harder by taking away the straw, the raw materials needed to make bricks, but not lowering their quota.

So now Moses has made their lives, which were already terrible, significantly worse, by leading them on what now looks like an ill-conceived mission from Yahweh that did not work.

And the people who were worshipping, who were on board, are now out on Moses.

In 5:21, the Jewish foremen said **"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" (Exodus 5:21)**. Thanks, Moses, you just made our enemies hate us and you gave them ammo to use against us.

Moses was told Pharaoh wouldn't listen at first, but this has gone worse than he thought. He has lost the buy-in from the Jewish people, their lives got

worse, and apparently this has been going on for awhile - it wasn't just a rough week, but months or years of harsh slavery turned up a couple of notches to teach those people who their boss is and to teach them not to be lazy.

God's way of carrying out this plan is strange, and while at one time Moses looked at that moment at the burning bush as a real turning point for the better, now he looks at the fruit of all of his labors and things have only gotten worse for him and for the Hebrew slaves. Following Yahweh's call has not panned out.

So what's he going to do now, and what is God going to do?

And this is a question we'll inevitably have to ask for ourselves - what will we do when following God seems to make life worse, when God doesn't make any sense to us in the way he governs the world, and it even feels like He's doing it all wrong. And what could He be doing in those times?

Because this will happen - there will be times when we look at God's rule over our lives and it seems like He has done us wrong or not come through on something.

Isaiah 45:15 Truly, you are a God who hides himself, O God of Israel, the Savior.

He is a God who saves His people, but in the process, He sometimes hides. Following Him doesn't always go as expected. And that problem is compounded by our expectation that our story, in this life, will somehow be a glory story. That in this life, we are guaranteed to have some kind of triumphant narrative.

Martin Luther distinguished between a theologian of glory and a theologian of the cross.

A theologian of glory expects glory *here, in this life, eventually* as a result of following Jesus.

So we expect to eventually have an amazing paycheck someday - we're broke now but it won't always be that way.

We expect that Christianity will always make a difficult marriage better.

We expect that raising kids will always turn out great in the end.

We expect that if I tithe I'll be made rich eventually.

We expect that God will heal a loved one.

We expect that if God's governing of our lives seems strange, eventually it will make sense in this life.

We have this expected glory story, and if our actual story falls short of it we are tempted to leave the faith, tempted toward anger and brooding and unrelenting cynicism, tempted toward numbing ourselves with alcohol or sinful pleasures, tempted to check out mentally and emotionally and just coast, never to get our hearts wrapped up in Christianity or church life again. (I'm done with people! I'm done with trying to follow Jesus! I'm done with doing the hard work of living in community with others! Because it didn't produce the expected utopian glory, and I won't be deceived again.)

I talked to a guy a few years ago who was one of the most devoted members of his church, volunteered for everything, gave himself fully to their work. And then some of his leaders were exposed as frauds and predators. And he said "I'll never let my heart get that wound up in a church again."

He's done. He was a fool, and he won't be a fool again.

There are a lot of jaded people out there who have "tried" Christianity and it hasn't gone as planned. And they say "I'll never go all in like that again." Because we don't want to be burned.

Mark Twain said that a cat that sits on a hot stovetop will never sit on a hot stovetop again. BUT - he won't sit on a cool one either.

We believed that God was at work before, and we got burned. So now when we hear about someone coming to faith or being transformed, we roll our eyes.

We believed in church before and saw sin, so now when one seems to be healthy we just don't trust it. We won't even sit on a cold stovetop

And after being burned, you might be very hesitant to sit fully down into a life of faith in Jesus again. You're jaded and self-protective. And even if that stovetop looks cool - no way you're sitting down again.

A theologian of the cross knows that glory is coming, but expects it at the resurrection, and expects that this life is filled with significant trial, confusion, and even situations that don't get better.

God can give better jobs, better paychecks, better marriages, better health, and sometimes He does and we thank Him for His gifts. But God doesn't have to do that to be considered true to His promises. A theologian of the cross expects difficulty and suffering, and doesn't feel a need to spin it all and call a bad thing good.

Gene Edward Veith writes this:

"A theology of glory expects total success, finding all the answers, winning all the battles, and living happily ever after. The theology of glory is all about my strength, my power, and my works. ..If a theologian of glory gets sick, he expects God to heal him.

And if he experiences failure and weakness...then he is often utterly confused, questioning the sufficiency of his faith and sometimes questioning the very existence of God.

But... when God chose to save us, He did not follow the way of glory. He did not come as a great hero-king, defeating his enemies and establishing a mighty kingdom on earth. Rather, He came as a baby laid in an animal trough, a man of sorrows with no place to lay His head. And He saved us by the weakness and shame of dying on a cross. Those who follow Him will have crosses of their own:

Matthew 16:24 "Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow

me.”

A ‘theologian of the cross’ doesn’t assume that following Christ is the means to glory here. Crowns are coming, glory is coming, but in the resurrection.

We certainly expect God to hear our prayers, we are not at all shocked when God blesses us or heals us or finally relieves suffering, He does that all the time. But a theologian of the cross doesn’t think something has gone wrong with our faith when life is hard or bitter or when God seems to hide.

Moses, however, seems to be thinking a bit like a theologian of glory. Because look what he does:

5:22 Then Moses turned to the LORD and said, "O Lord, why have you done evil to this people? Why did you ever send me? 23 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 thinks God got it wrong.

Why? No glory yet. God hasn’t acted on Moses’ timeframe, He hasn’t done what Moses thought would be good, the rescue hasn’t come, Moses has lost the following and the momentum, God has not allowed Moses’ life to go how Moses thought a powerful God would make His life go.

So Moses accuses God of doing evil, of making bad decisions, and of not following through on his promises.

So Moses is in a dark place here.

Is this right? Is it right to have accusatory thoughts like this toward God? Is it OK to be angry at God?

No, it’s not. **“Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?” (Genesis 18:25)**

God always does what is right and just. So when we are angry with God, when we have disagreements with God, He’s right and we’re wrong. It’s not like when you get in an argument with your spouse and they’re a little wrong and you’re a little wrong, truth is somewhere in the middle. When we

get in an argument with God, He's always right, His motives are pure, His plan is perfect, He keeps every promise.

So our bitterness with God, our anger with God is our problem.

But, Moses does something really right here with something that's really wrong. He prays these things to God.

He doesn't pretend he isn't thinking these things. He doesn't allow these thoughts to drive a wedge of distrust between him and God. He doesn't feed the bitterness and cynicism. He prays those horrible thoughts to God. He takes them to God, He doesn't run away from God because of them, He hasn't given up on God here. He prays these things, maybe even as a little bit of a confession of what he thinks and feels about God.

This should encourage us to bring our jadedness, our bitterness, our skepticism, our doubts - bring them to Jesus. And no, they're not good - but Jesus can handle it, and again and again in the scriptures He invites us to pray things like this.

You can take anything to the Lord in prayer.

In the Robert Duvall movie "the apostle", there's a scene where Robert Duvall's character is yelling at God in prayer, not understanding how God would allow him to be where he is in life. And it's so loud in the middle of the night that a neighbor calls his mother. And she says - "sometimes he talks to the lord and sometimes he yells at the lord. Tonight, he just happens to be yellin' at him."

You read, in the Bible, people praying prayers where they weep at him, even maybe yell at him, and it seems so wrong. You don't question God, you don't express doubt to God, you don't accuse God or yell at God. You don't do those things to God. He doesn't deserve that.

You also don't crucify Him, He doesn't deserve that either. But He proved in Christ that He is a God that takes what He doesn't deserve.

He is a God who took all the garbage of humanity on himself at the cross. He can handle anything you pour at Him.

The kind of anger and frustration with God that causes Christians to fizzle out in their faith is the kind that's kept inside and fed. But when those thoughts are confessed to God, expressed to God, when we wrestle with God, when we pray whatever we're thinking however wrong we know we are, God seems to meet with His people there.

John Newton, who wrote Amazing Grace, said, "If we seem to get no good by attempting to draw near to Him, we may be sure we will get none by keeping away from Him."

And we are promised by scripture that if we seek Him, we will find Him. There's never been a person who truly sought God in a trial, cast their cares on Him, brought their questions to Him, and really looked for Him that didn't find Him.

So look how God responds:

Exodus 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." 2 God spoke to Moses and said to him, "I am the LORD. 3 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.

So the first thing God does is remind Moses of his name. This may sound familiar, because God did this same thing when He first showed up to Moses at the burning bush. He told Him his name and told him his plan, and here he does the same thing.

He doesn't instantly fix the situation, He reminds Moses of who He is and what He's doing.

Good theologians of the cross know that when we wrestle with God, we aren't guaranteed resolution to our situation. The real reward is not fixing our problems, but finding Him. God is the reward.

You see this as the answer again and again when people question God in the Bible.

Job questions God as to why everything in his life was destroyed. And God answers, not by explaining why He does what He does, but by reminding Job of who He is.

Job 38-41 is one of the most beautiful passages of scripture - it's the place where Job has accused God, and now God answers out of a whirlwind to remind Job of who Job is and who God is.

Job 40:6-14 "6Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said:7 "Dress for action like a man;I will question you, and you make it known to me.8 Will you even put me in the wrong?Will you condemn me that you may be in the right?9 Have you an arm like God,and can you thunder with a voice like his?10 "Adorn yourself with majesty and dignity;clothe yourself with glory and splendor.11 Pour out the overflowings of your anger,and look on everyone who is proud and abase him.12 Look on everyone who is proud and bring him low and tread down the wicked where they stand.13 Hide them all in the dust together;bind their faces in the world below.14 Then will I also acknowledge to you that your own right hand can save you.

We can bring our questions and our anger and frustration to God. And He is absolutely faithful to put us in our place, and to remind us of his strong arm, and his powerful voice, and his glory, and his splendor.

Which is what he does to Moses here.

And he tells Moses that now he is going to be known by a new name, Yahweh. (verse 3) "**but by my name the LORD I did not make myself known to them.**"

Now this is strange because people called Him Yahweh in Genesis. Moses' mom's name was Jochebed, which meant "Yahweh's glory." So what does God mean that by this name He didn't make Himself known?

It's not that he never called himself Yahweh before. It's that that name didn't carry the reputation it was about to carry.

It's like if a football player were to come along and we were to say, "He's the next Tom Brady," you would know that means he seems like he could be a great quarterback. He's such a great quarterback that now his name means "great quarterback."

Now if you had said, 25 years ago, "he is the next Tom Brady," nobody would know what that means. Because Brady hadn't made himself known yet.

(I tried to come up with the name of a great Bills quarterback in recent memory, but could not come up with one. "There arose a generation that knew not Jim Kelly...")

God is saying, "Yahweh is about to mean something. It's going to become synonymous with a big glorious rescue from Egypt."

"Yahweh" will mean, "The God who brings us out from slavery for relationship with himself."

God continues to tell Moses what He just told him in chapter 3:

4 I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they lived as sojourners. 5 Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the people of Israel whom the Egyptians hold as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant. 6 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. 7 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. 8 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.'"

So God reminds Moses of what Moses already knows and reengages Moses on the exact same mission He gave him before.

So Moses goes and does what God tells him. But, again, the glory isn't instant:

9 Moses spoke thus to the people of Israel, but they did not listen to Moses, because of their broken spirit and harsh slavery.

So the people don't listen.

Moses is the boy who cried wolf at this point. Following Moses makes things worse. Their spirits are broken: they were all excited before, and now they're just numb. They had hope that God would deliver them, and it has been dashed. They can't bring themselves to listen to Moses.

They're hopeless.

And now Moses wants out:

10 So the LORD said to Moses, 11 "Go in, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the people of Israel go out of his land." 12 But Moses said to the LORD, "Behold, the people of Israel have not listened to me. How then shall Pharaoh listen to me, for I am of uncircumcised lips?" 13 But the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron and gave them a charge about the people of Israel and about Pharaoh king of Egypt: to bring the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt.

The people aren't listening. Before, I went to Pharaoh with the support of the whole jewish community. Now its just me because they've all backed out on me.

And he says, "I have uncircumcised lips." This probably means that the jewish people didn't think he was fit to be their leader, because he didn't talk like a jew. He grew up in Pharaoh's house so he was far more Egyptian seeming. Maybe he was a fraud sent by Pharaoh to get more work out of them. He looked like an egyptian, he talked like an egyptian, he probably walked like an Egyptian. He doesn't seem legit! (This is probably why this section is followed up by a genealogy of Moses and Aaron, to show that they were legitimately jewish.)

He has no following, at least before Pharaoh would have been afraid of a Jewish uprising. But not now.

Moses has nothing going for him.

And he probably uses this phrase uncircumcised lips to say, "I'm not a fit Jewish leader. God, remember when you wanted to kill me because I didn't circumcise my son back in chapter 4? Now the problem is my own lips, there is nothing Jewish about me, nothing qualified about me. I am not the guy.

So still no glory. What is going on here? This story is so crazy - God calls Moses in chapter 3, but then chapters 4 through 6 have so many ups and downs, Moses is a leader, then he's afraid, the people are worshipping and ready to go, now they're hopeless and faithless. This isn't a neat clean road from the ground to glory here.

Because it never is.

And part of what God is doing here is driving home to Moses and Israel how utterly hopeless they are without Him. If they get out of Egypt it won't be because they were strong and confident, it won't be because they had skills, it won't be because they had a great motivational leader or any great leader at all. It will be because God saves them.

*Gerhard Forde, in his book On Being a Theologian of the Cross writes, "When all our human possibilities have been exhausted and we have been reduced to nothing, the one who creates out of nothing does his 'proper work.'"*¹

God doesn't save people who think they can help him save them.

He doesn't share his glory with another.

Forde writes, "we must 'utterly despair of our own ability' if we are to be properly prepared for grace."²

¹ Gerhard O. Forde. *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518 (Theology)* (Kindle Locations 316-317). Kindle Edition.

² *Ibid.* 805-806.

God saves people who recognize that they are hopeless and helpless without Him. God is preparing the people here in Exodus for salvation. And that is going to require an awareness of their utter inability to save themselves, and their total hopelessness without Him.

God doesn't help those that help themselves. He helps those who recognize their inability to do so.

Applications:

For our dark situations

The call is to bring our fear, our anger, our doubts, our pain, our frustration to God. Cast it on Him, confess it to Him, ask for what we would like Him to do. But understand that this life is not a life of glory, but it's a cross. It's the darkness before the dawn. The death before the resurrection. The resurrection doesn't happen in this life.

And while God is doing a thousand things we don't understand in any dark situation, one thing He is always cultivating there is dependence upon Him. Desperation that makes us eligible for His grace.

For our kids -

Today we'll be dedicating our kids. And sometimes our greatest hopes for our kids are glory hopes - a better job than we had, a better opportunity than we had, a great spouse, kids, and those are all good things to pray for and seek for them. But it all pales in comparison to their knowing Christ. And if that means a hard life so they can despair of pleasure here and know Him, that's ok. The greatest good is that they'd know Jesus. That's what parents who dedicate their kids to the Lord are saying. They're not dedicating them to cash, or to knowledge, or to a scholarship, or to athletic ability - they are dedicated first and foremost to the Lord.

And the greatest application is to our salvation.

We have a total inability to turn to God on our own. And it isn't that we really want to but we can't. It's that none really seeks Him - we can't listen

to Him because of our broken spirits and harsh slavery to sin. We just can't come to the Lord on our own.

It would be like if you said, "I just can't say anything nice about him." I could say "sure you can, just read these words off the paper." You'd say it's not that I can't, it's that I *can't*. I can't bring myself to do it." We hate the Lord's purposes for us.

Our condition, outside of Christ, is that we are repulsed by Christ. It is total spiritual death.

Ephesians 2 "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind"

The assessment of the human fallen condition couldn't be more bleak. We can't turn to God, because we are spiritually dead, because we hate Him.

We can choose Him anytime we want, but left to ourselves we would never ever want to.

We are spiritually dead, not spiritually sick.

We don't just need a leader and some motivation. We don't just need an emotional encounter with God. We don't need church to be more fun and then we'd respond.

Maybe some chicken soup for our souls? Your chicken soup doesn't help a corpse!

We're dead apart from Jesus.

And we'd like to downplay it. In recent years there have been a few re-writes of Amazing Grace to say things like "how sweet the sound, that came and strengthened me" in the place of "saved a wretch like me." In order to keep our self-esteem intact, we have downplayed this total depravity of man. But we have a bible that tells us the truth.

We can't save ourselves.

But there is a solution.

God saves.

Turn and trust Jesus today

Faith Challenged
Exodus 5:22-6:14

- I. The challenge to faith (Exodus 5:22)
- II. The response of God (Exodus 6:1-8)
- III. The hopeless situation (Exodus 6:9)
- IV. The response of God (Exodus 6:11-14)

For discussion in small groups:

- 1) What are the most significant challenges to your faith? What makes you doubt? What embitters you against God?
- 2) What is God's response to those challenges?
- 3) Do you ever pray as Moses does in Exodus 5:22?
- 4) Why does God repeatedly mention his covenant when he responds to Moses?
- 5) What is His covenant, and how can it help strengthen faith?

Scriptures Referenced Today:

Psalm 28:6-7
Exodus 5:21
Isaiah 45:15
Matthew 16:24
Exodus 5:22-23
Genesis 18:25b
Exodus 6:1-3
Job 40:6-14
Exodus 6:3
Exodus 6:4-8
Exodus 6:9
Exodus 6:10-13
Ephesians 2:1-3