

Open your Bibles to Exodus 5:1-21.

- We're continuing our study of the book of Exodus.
- This morning we're going to read of Moses' first encounter with Pharaoh and the immediate results of it.
- And we'll be considering the truth that obeying God will not always make your life easier.

Obeying God is a worthwhile endeavor.

- There are blessings in obeying God that you cannot put a price on.
- A clean conscience before Him is priceless.
- Knowing that He smiles upon you because you have been faithful to Him is invaluable.
- A feeling sense of peace, knowing that God says, "That was good and right. You just looked something like my beloved Son," is supremely precious.
- And that's not even to mention the fact that God is God and, therefore, simply ought to be obeyed always. It's simply our duty as His creatures and especially as those who have been bought with the blood of Christ.
- Again, obeying God is a worthwhile thing. And we are to busy ourselves with it for His glory and our good.

But obeying God does not guarantee an easy life.

- In fact, it is often obedience that results in hardship.

In this passage, we will see that Moses did as God commanded.

- And his obedience led to more suffering for his people, and for himself. (At least, for a time.)
- Obedience to God is worthwhile, but it can cost a lot.

What I hope to do today is remind you of that basic truth so that you're not surprised when trouble finds you because you're faithful to Christ.

•But I also hope to instruct and encourage you in what to do when those times comes.

•And, in summary, the instruction is this: Remember Jesus Christ.

•May God bless the preaching of His Word and make it a blessing to each one of us today.

If you would, and are able, please stand with me for the reading of the inspired, inerrant, and infallible Word of God.

Exodus 5:1-21

[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.'"

[2] But 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."

[3] Then 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 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.”

(PRAY)

Our Heavenly Father,

•Thank you for a sure and certain Word that speaks to us where we are and where we will be.

•Thank you for a Word that is not wrong, cannot be wrong, and proceeds from your holy mouth.

•Thank you for a Word that rebukes, encourages, wounds, heals, tears down, builds up, and instructs.

•Grant, Lord, that your Holy Spirit would make us understand your Word, and apply it to our hearts.

•Cause us to hear the voice of your Son speaking to us.

•And cause us to see Him who loved us, died for us, and was raised to save us.

•Sanctify us by your truth. Your Word is truth.

•We ask these things in Jesus' Name and for His sake.

•Amen.

1.) Moses and Aaron have arrived in Egypt.

- They've talked with the Elders of the Israelites and performed the signs that God gave them.
- And the People have believed God's message of salvation from Egypt and worshipped Him.
- Things are looking bright.

The stage is set for them to confront Pharaoh with God's demands.

- But the positive reception of the Israelites will not match how Pharaoh would receive Moses' message, as God had foretold.

Some time after Moses and Aaron spoke to the Elders, they went to Pharaoh and said,

•“Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness.’”

•This is the first time the prophetic, “Thus says the LORD,” is ever used.

•Aaron, speaking for Moses, issued the command of God. And he made it plain that they did not come in their own name and authority but rather in the place of God.

•So what they speak here is what God Himself says to Pharaoh.

And the basic demand of God is given: Let the Israelites go to the wilderness to worship Him.

•This is a good reminder that the whole purpose of freeing the Israelites was FOR WORSHIP. (That's why

anyone is saved by God.)

- This was not an unreasonable request, by the way.
- Ancient Egyptian documents tell of how even those who worked for the state were sometimes permitted time off to go and worship their gods.
- Moses is asking for the same treatment of God's People. Let them go and worship God.

But I want you to catch this, too: God is making a demand of Pharaoh.

- Pharaoh, the highest in the land of Egypt, the king, the sovereign, is being commanded by God.
- And that means that God is asserting sovereignty over Pharaoh.

But Pharaoh doesn't like this. Not at all.

• So he 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."

- I don't think this response is one of mere ignorance.
- Pharaoh might not have known the name of the LORD (Yahweh), but it had just been said, "Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel..."

• The name was probably new to Pharaoh. But it's just been said that the God of Israel spoke.

• So his response, "Who is the LORD, that I should obey His voice...?" is not about knowledge.

• Rather, he's saying that he has no regard for God. He does not care about Israel's God. He will not pay attention to Israel's God, because God is not his god.

The answer of Pharaoh drips with defiance.

- He is arrogant and hostile against the God of Heaven.
- In effect, Pharaoh is saying, “The God of Israel has no authority over me or claim over anything in my kingdom. So I will not listen to His voice or do what He has said.”
- Do you see what’s going on? This is a battle of sovereignty: Pharaoh VS The LORD.
- Pharaoh believes himself to be sovereign over God. And so, he can ignore God as he pleases.
- But, funny enough, God had already foretold that Pharaoh would not listen. He had said it more than once.
- God had even said that HE would harden Pharaoh’s heart so that he would not free Israel.
- So Pharaoh’s refusal ACTUALLY PROVED that the LORD is the sovereign One.

And Pharaoh’s response in v2 actually highlights a great theme of Exodus: Who is the LORD?

- Pharaoh said it as a mock. He said it as an insult both to God and Moses.
- But the rest of the Exodus, all the plagues that follow, all the horrors, all the miracles, everything is actually an answer to Pharaoh’s arrogant words here.
- He said, “Who is the LORD that I should obey His voice...?”
- And the answer is this: You’ll find out, Pharaoh. You’ll find out in a hard and horrible way just who this God is.
- Many times God says that the plagues are for the purpose of His own revelation.
- In particular, they are His revelation to Egypt and the surrounding nations.
- In 7:5 God says, “The Egyptians shall know that I am

the LORD, when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring out the people of Israel from among them.”

- Pharaoh and all Egypt would find out who Yahweh is. That He alone is God over all creation.

In v3, Moses and Aaron then humbly and piously answer Pharaoh’s defiant words:

- “Then 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 the LORD our God, lest He fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword.’”

- They’re trying to reason with Pharaoh on God’s behalf.

- The God who calls the Hebrews His own People has commanded them to go and worship. So they must go. He has rights over them. Can’t Pharaoh accept that?

- And they’re wanting to go a three days’ long journey into the wilderness. They’re not asking to perform their religious duties in the town square and offend their Egyptian overlords.

- Furthermore, their disobedience could result in God striking them down. And if that happens, Pharaoh would lose his workforce.

- There is also probably an implied threat: If God might strike Israel for not going to worship, what might He do to the nation and king who wouldn’t let them go?

Again, see this: Moses and Aaron are following God’s instructions.

- They’re speaking to Pharaoh the words of God.
- They’re even reasoning with him and showing him how obeying God’s command is good for him.

- These two men are walking in obedience to God's call.

But Pharaoh would not be reasoned with.

- He didn't care. He didn't fear or respect God. He didn't recognize anybody's authority but his own.

- So he dismissed them arrogantly and with scorn:

- “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!’”

- Pharaoh says that they're just trying to get the Israelites out of work. And that they've caused enough stoppage of production for the day.

- And it seems that Pharaoh may have even here consigned the aged Moses and Aaron to join them in their work. (“Get back to YOUR burdens.”)

But that wasn't enough for Pharaoh. Mocking and refusing wasn't nearly enough for the tyrant.

- So in vv6-9, Pharaoh gives orders to make things much, much harder on the Israelites.

- He tells the taskmasters and foremen that the slaves were to no longer be given straw to make bricks, but would have to go and gather straw themselves.

- BUT the daily quota of bricks they had to make each day was TO REMAIN THE SAME.

Egypt had provided the straw needed to make bricks. But no more.

- You see, these bricks were made with mud from the

Nile mixed with straw to reinforce them. The mix was then poured in molds and baked in the sun.

- Straw was very important in this process as a binding agent and a form of rebar.

- Gathering straw would've been a job. It would've taken much time. It would've taken people away from mixing and setting the molds.

- But the number of bricks was not to decrease AT ALL.

- Pharaoh knew he was commanding something impossible. But he didn't care.

- The Israelites were destined to fail and suffer for it.

And what was his motive?

- Pharaoh tells us in v9: "Let heavier work be laid on the men that they may labor at it and pay no regard to LYING WORDS."

- Pharaoh decided that if the Israelites were worked beyond reality, they would no longer listen to Moses.

- And catch this: He calls Moses a liar. Which, really, is calling God a liar!

- Pharaoh is devilishly smart with this: He intends to drive a wedge between Israel and Moses, God's messenger. Which is to say, he intended to drive a wedge between Israel and God.

- By making things worse on the Israelites, Pharaoh is trying to cause them to resent and ignore Moses.

Then in vv10-14, we read of Pharaoh's plan enacted.

- It starts with the taskmasters and foremen saying to the People, "Thus says Pharaoh..." and then proceeding to tell them that they will no longer be given straw.

- Did you catch that? “Thus says Pharaoh.” Just like Aaron said, “Thus says the LORD.”

- Pharaoh is asserting that his authority is greater than God’s. God may say something. But Pharaoh’s word is greater, according to Pharaoh.

And so, the Israelites are worked to the bone.

- But they could not meet their quota, as Pharaoh knew would happen.

- And in v14, we read that the Israelite foremen were beaten by the Egyptians because the amount of bricks was lacking.

- The text then goes on to tell us that the foremen went and appealed to Pharaoh.

- They asked why there was no straw given and why they were beaten for not meeting an impossible quota.

Pharaoh’s response to the appeal is in vv17-18:

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

- Pharaoh accused the overworked and beaten Israelites of being lazy!

- And he said that it’s their laziness that made them ask to be able to go and sacrifice to God.

- He showed nothing but cruelty to their cries. He was an absolute tyrant.

- The Israelites then knew they were in trouble, because nothing was going to change.

Then we read in vv20-21:

•“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.’”

•Moses and Aaron were waiting outside for the foremen to see how Pharaoh had responded to them.

•And not only did they get bad news, but they were cursed: The foremen asked for God to judge them.

•Why? Because, according to the foremen, those two were responsible for all their problems.

•Instead of blaming Pharaoh for being a cruel king, they blamed Moses and Aaron.

•In effect, they said, “This is all your fault! We’re as good as dead. You’ve made the Egyptians hate us even more by your words! May God judge you for this!”

•It seems that Pharaoh’s plan had worked: Moses and Aaron were rejected and hated by their own people.

The situation had gone from bad to worse.

•Why? Because Moses and Aaron had went to Pharaoh and spoke to him.

•Before they went, things were bad but tolerable to some degree. At least, they had gotten used to slavery.

•But now things were absolutely miserable and impossible.

•And the prophets were blamed and hated for it.

I want you to take a step back and see something very simple here:

•Doing the right thing, obeying God, made things worse.

- It made things worse on the Israelites.
- And it made things worse on Moses and Aaron.

The two of them did NOTHING WRONG.

- They did exactly what God told them to do.
- And the result was that they were mocked, called liars, life got harder for everyone, they had to watch their people suffer, they themselves might've been set to labor, and they were hated by many of their own brothers.
- Their obedience to God did not make things easier. It made life harder.

2.) Brothers and sisters, we need to remember this.

- In the course of obeying the Lord, you can expect opposition and suffering.
- This text reminds us that the world will oppose us. (Pharaoh used his power to make things harder.)
- And even our own brothers, our fellow Christians, might oppose us at times. (The Israelites hated and cursed Moses and Aaron.)

My dear friends, it is a fact that doing the right things might cost you. And it often does.

- Consider some examples with me.
- I thought for a while about them. And I tried to make them relevant for some of your situations.

1. You stand for righteousness at work, you refuse to go along and do something unethical and instead bring it to light.

- And you get labeled as a troublemaker.
- Or, you refuse to do something sinful that one of your superiors asked you to do.
- And though they can't fire you for it, you later get passed over for a promotion.

2. You have a hard conversation about Christ and repentance with your apostate or wayward children.

- And now they don't want to come around for the holidays.
- Or, even worse, they don't want you around your own grandchildren anymore.

3. You lovingly and gently rebuke a brother in the Lord and call him to repentance.

- And now he doesn't much talk to you.
- Or, next thing you know, a rumor is going around that you're a busybody who doesn't know how to mind his own business.

4. You make a godly decision for the good of your family.

- And then your extended family misrepresents you for it, mischaracterizes you for it, and is furious with you.

5. You refuse to indulge the sin of your spouse.

- And now you're getting the cold shoulder.
- Maybe you're even mocked for your faith, if you're married to an unbeliever.

6. You don't engage in the behavior of your unsaved friends.

- And now you find yourself estranged from them and uninvited.

7. You tell the Gospel to a friend, and they don't believe.

- And now they don't talk to you anymore.

8. You strive earnestly for holiness in your life.

- And you get labeled "extreme" and are mocked by your fellow Christians.

9. You refuse to romantically engage with an unbeliever. And you are keeping yourself sexually pure.

- But the months and years go by and you are still alone.

10. You take a public stand for Christ and His Law.

- And you end up labeled as "hateful" and "mean-spirited" and "the reason why people won't go to church."

- And the loudest voices are other professing Christians.

These things happen. AND THEY HURT.

- Some more than others, for sure.

- But they all really do hurt in different ways. Especially from your fellow Christians and family members. (Most especially if your family members are Christians.)

Like Moses, you've done as God commanded.

- You're walking in His ways, trying to honor Him as one of His People.

- But everything has went sideways.
- And again, YOU DIDN'T DO ANYTHING WRONG!
- More than that, you actually positively did what He told you to do in His Word!
- But it's all blown up in your face. And now you're suffering the consequences of obeying God.

Friends, this is a really hard thing to deal with.

- Anyone who has had this happen to them knows how incredibly discouraging it can be.
- It makes you cry out, "God, I don't understand this! I did what you said. I'm trying to be holy. I'm trying to honor you. Why did it go this way?!"

NOTE: If this hasn't happened to you yet, it will. It's basically inevitable.

- Even in the days when Christianity was the norm, you can read biographies of godly people who were mocked, criticized, ostracized, lost work, were not hired, were estranged from family, made poor, ran out of towns and all the rest because of their faithfulness to Christ.
- And that was THEN!
- That was when at least the outward show of Christianity was fashionable and normal.
- But even then, true godliness cost something.

Christian, your faith will be tested.

- It's God's design to put us through the fire in order to purify and grow us through suffering for His sake.

Hear me: If this hasn't ever happened to you in some measure, maybe ask yourself "Why?".

- If this is the basic experience of God's People, if obedience costs something, but it's not cost you anything, ask yourself, "Why?".
- It could be that God has been incredibly kind to you.
- It could be that you've not been a believer very long.
- Or it could be that your life doesn't challenge the world as it should.
- Or, even worse, it could be that your life doesn't challenge the world at all because you are still "of the world" and have never truly come to Christ in faith.
- Think on these things, friends. Examine yourselves.

3.) Moses did as God commanded. And things got harder for him.

- The same will often happen to us.
- So what do we need to do in those times?
- What do we need to keep in mind when we're suffering for obedience to God?

First, we ought to pray when we're discouraged.

- That's what Moses did in vv22-23.
- God willing, I'll talk some more about that next week.
- But for today, I want to drive you somewhere else in your thinking.

The great temptation when you suffer for obeying God is to STOP OBEYING GOD.

- That's just plain, worldly logic, isn't it?
- If obeying God made my life harder, and I don't like pain, then the way to make the pain go away is to stop obeying Him.
- It's a deadly and Satanic logic. But you see the logic.

- And so, there lies the temptation.
- We don't like to suffer. Nobody does. So we're tempted to give in, give up, go with the flow, and go back on our faithfulness to the Lord.

But we can't do that, lest we be damned.

- Some might say, "Now, hold on! I thought we believe that a Christian can't lose his salvation?"
- That's right. Amen.
- But listen closely: It is only those who PERSEVERE TO THE END who were ever actually born again to begin with.
- As one old preacher said, "The faith that fizzles before the finish, was flawed from the first."
- Those who do not persevere to the end in faith and repentance, but instead turn their back on God and go their own way, prove that their faith was a temporary, false, and non-saving faith.
- So, if you give up and turn your back on obedience to God without repentance until death, you will be eternally lost and damned.
- BELIEVE THAT! That's what God's Word says.

So we cannot do that.

- We must not fall away from our confession.
- Rather, we must "hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering..." (Hebrews 10:23)

But how will we do that?

- In a word, we must REMEMBER CHRIST.

1. We need to remember His words in Matthew

10:24-25:

•“A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household.”

•Remember that whatever they do to you, they did it to Jesus first.

•We are His disciples and servants. He is our Teacher and Master. So we can expect to be treated like He was.

•He did no wrong. He only ever perfectly obeyed God.

•And His life was not made easier because of His obedience.

•So it is not a strange thing that is happening to us.

•In fact, Jesus told us ahead of time to expect it, if indeed we belong to Him.

So when you suffer for Christ, say this to yourself:

•“Jesus said there would be days like this.

•They did it to Him, too. And worse!

•I’m not better than Him. So what did I expect?”

•There is strange comfort in this. Because then you know that you really are a disciple of your Lord.

2. We need to remember Him in His suffering, as Hebrews 12:3 says:

•“Consider Him who endured from sinners such hostility against Himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.”

•Christ endured the hostility of evil men.

•He endured, never ceasing to do right, no matter what happened to Him.

- His suffering was greater than ours, even unto the death of the Cross. But He continued on.
- He has left us an encouraging example of faithfulness.
- Like a war hero inspires courage in his fellow soldiers, so also our Lord's faithful endurance emboldens us to follow in His footsteps and do likewise.

But even more than that, when we consider His suffering, we are reminded that He suffered FOR US!

- He suffered to save us from our sins!
- He suffered at the hands of hateful sinners and, in doing so, offered Himself up to God at the Cross as a sacrifice to take away our sins.
- His suffering was not a mere example. But it was for us and for our salvation.

To consider that He suffered so much at the hands of sinners, and that He did so to save us, will inflame our love for Him.

- To know that He endured so much abuse, scorn, and pain in order to purchase our redemption, will bind us to Him ever more closely in bonds of love.
- To ponder that He gave Himself for us, will inspire greater devotion to Him.
- Friends, to know that Christ suffered and died in our place will make us love Him too much to give up following Him.
- We love Him because He first loved us. And we suffer for Him because He first suffered for us.

3. We need to remember what Christ has promised us:

•“For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the Gospel’s will save it.” (Mark 8:35)

- Christ has promised us eternal life!
- Those who lose their lives in this world, suffering for Christ’s sake, will gain life in the world to come.
- Those who lose their lives one day at a time, one trial at a time, one instance of suffering at time, will save their lives eternally.
- Those who are faithful to Him will be saved!

As one missionary, who died for doing what was right, said, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain that which he cannot lose.”

- Though things get harder for you now, when everything is said and done, when your life comes to its end and you step into eternity, when you’ve been in God’s presence for ten-thousand years, did you really lose anything?
- No. Far from it.
- You will forever have only one word to say when you look back on all your suffering for Christ: GAIN!
- Not loss, but eternal gain!

The cost of obedience may be great.

- But the reward is greater than you could ever imagine!
- So when the world, the flesh, and the Devil tell you to give up, do as Christian did in the Pilgrim’s Progress and put your fingers in your ears and run on, crying, **“Life! Life! Eternal life!”**

4. Lastly, we need to remember the words of Christ that

we long the most to hear:

•“Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your Master.” (Matthew 25:21)

•Weary Christian, these are the words that will fall from Christ’s lips to your ears if you persevere to the end.

You are not living for worldly ease.

- You are not living for worldly applause.
- You are living so that one day you will hear the blessed words, “WELL DONE!”
- You’re living to hear your loving Lord and Savior say to you, “You were faithful! Enter into the joy of your Master!”
- And if you persevere, YOU WILL HEAR THEM AT LAST!
- And you will find pleasures at His right hand forevermore!

4.) My dear brothers and sisters, persevere!

- Turn your eyes upon Jesus Christ. Fix them there. Refuse to look away.
- See how He suffered to save you. And further bind yourself to Him.
- See how He endured. And be inspired to be like Him.
- See how He was treated. And know that you are His when you suffer the same.
- See how He promises eternal life to you. How He promises to make even your greatest losses into eternal gains.
- And see how He promises an end to your suffering and your entrance into eternal joy with Him forever!

LOOK TO HIM!

- Fix your eyes upon Him and do not look away for a moment!
- Do this and, by His grace, you will endure.

May God grant us to see His Son through our pain, so that we might all one day hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant...”

- Amen.