

It's a pleasure to continue our series in Exodus, looking at Moses' life. I want to ask you, have you ever had one of those days where things just went from bad to worse? We can all relate to that.

I remember a ski trip many years ago in college that I and a group of friends had been looking forward to. We were going to drive from Southern California to Mount Hood. We were going to detour to Yosemite to pick up a friend and then on up to Portland to Mount Hood to ski. I had my dad's Ford Courier pickup truck, which was a four-speed, manual transmission, and my friend's old Celica. There were six of us who left early one morning. We're all excited about this trip.

My friend added oil before the trip and in his excitement, forgot to put the cap back on. So his engine froze up on the side of the road, but that wasn't going to stop us. So we all piled into my pickup. It had one of those shells on the back, and there were no seats, and no seatbelt rules back in that day. So we put everybody in the back with all the ski equipment. I was in the front driving, and we were off! It's cold with no heat in the back, and they're huddled under blankets. We get there and pick up another friend. We were making our way up and saw that it was going to be snowing and raining all the way up.

We get across the border and realize, right before the pass that we need to put chains on. So we thought we would save some money and put the chains on ourselves. We're down putting them on my dad's pickup. I didn't know how to do it, and sure enough, one broke loose and damaged the fender. I was trying to figure out what I was going to tell him about the damage when I got back home. So we got up to Mount Hood and skied for a couple of days.

It got really cold, and back in those days, you actually had to open your car door with a real key. I stuck my key in while everyone was impatiently waiting to get in the truck and out of the cold, but then the key broke off in the lock. The lock was frozen. So, we called a locksmith, and he came out and fixed it. Then, I thought we were ready to go. I went back to the lodge to get my skis, which I had left by the lift. They were gone. Somebody stole my skis.

We head back, but the pass is closed. So we had to go west to Hwy 1 in Oregon and start driving down. There are seven of us in this pickup. We're heading down the very winding Hwy 1. We're winding our way all night, and the next day and there's mudslides with all the rain. We make our way down to where

we could cut in on SR 140 to head back to Yosemite to drop our friend off. I'm thinking, "What else could go wrong now? I just have to figure out my story to tell my dad."

So we're winding toward Yosemite. Then, this rock about the size of a bowling ball decides to leave the cliffside as we're driving by. It rolled down and smashed into the side of the truck. It's like it was timed perfectly. Now, what was I going to tell my dad? I arrived back at my dad's house at 6 am, and they were awake. I walked in and began to tell them my story. My dad was so cool. I think he knew that until you hit age 25, the brain is not fully formed. I think he was just glad we were safe. He said that pickup trucks could be fixed.

It's about 40 years later and I'm laughing about it now, but at the time it definitely wasn't funny. I hope for you that when you think about some of those things in your past that when they went from bad to worse, you're able to chuckle about it now. And maybe there was some real good life lessons.

As we move into Exodus 5 and 6, we are going to start out in a day that's bad for Moses. It'll start out bad, and it will get worse over a short period of time. I wonder, 40 years later, when he is looking out across the Jordan River into the promised land and sees that land of Canaan, if even though he knows he's not going in, he chuckled at that moment, thinking back on what we're going to look at today.

Our big idea is God cares about our discouraged hearts and offers us timeless truths to apply. When we are deeply discouraged, God cares about our discouraged hearts. *"Afterward Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, 'This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'Let my people go, so that we may hold a festival to me in the wilderness'" (Exodus 5:1).* So Moses and Aaron go before Pharaoh, not with a request, but a command from the Lord. "The Lord says, 'Let my people go.'"

In other words, God is saying to Pharaoh that these are his people. They belong to him. Let them go. Let them go so that they can worship him away from Egypt, out in the wilderness. I don't want us to skip over this, but when we're discouraged, we need to remember how God sees us today. He sees us as his people. We belong to God. We don't belong to anyone else. We can only be free of whatever bondage when we belong to Jesus.

I hope we appreciate Moses' courage here. It's hard for us to enter into the moment with him and imagine being the one to go before Pharaoh with God's message. We have to remember

that Pharaoh was a powerful presence. He was a powerful personality, and he was considered a god in his land. He was worshipped. They built buildings and towers and pyramids with his name on them. A person's life was in his hands; he could snap his fingers, and somebody would be executed. Or he could snap his fingers, and somebody would live.

He had this level of cruelty in him, and one could think that they would only see satanic forces within him. They were going up against that. Moses must've thought, Lord, I did what you said. Can I leave this palace? Can I go home now? So, let's look at Pharaoh's response.

*"Pharaoh said, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord and I will not let Israel go" (Exodus 5:2). So actually, his response had some logic to it. He's saying, "Well, Moses, I know 30 gods, and if you count me, 31, and I've never heard of this god you speak of. What did you call him??" Moses and Aaron stood their ground with the Pharaoh, and they said exactly what God had told them to say.*

**Then they said, "The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Now let us take a three-day journey into the wilderness to offer sacrifices to the Lord our God, or he may strike us with plagues or with the sword." Hebrews 5:3**

Please, Pharaoh, if you won't release us forever, just let us go on a three-day journey out into the desert. We want to have a worship event.

I'm wondering if they're thinking that if they get out there for three days, maybe they could just keep going and get out of there. But then you look at the last part of verse 3, and it's very interesting. Moses says that the Israelites need to go; otherwise, they might be stricken with plagues or die by the sword. Now, why did Moses add that in? Perhaps Moses was hinting that Pharaoh's stubbornness might cost Pharaoh his slaves. He's better off giving the Israelites a week off in the desert and keeping his cheap labor alive. But I think indirectly, Moses is telling Pharaoh the God of the Hebrews is a powerful God who can kill Egyptians just as well as he can kill Jews.

Pharaoh needed to understand that the demands Moses and Aaron are making, were not to be taken lightly. It was a matter of life and death. Pharaoh needed to hear this message. So look where Pharaoh's head goes.

**But the king of Egypt said, "Moses and Aaron, why are you taking the people away from their labor? Get back to your work!" Then Pharaoh said, "Look, the people of the land are now numerous, and you are stopping them from working." vv. 4-5**

When God wants to set people free from bondage, and when we agree with God that we want to be set free, there's pushback. Here's where things go from bad to worse. The pushback that's coming his way is the devil. The pushback is their flesh in the

sense that they're afraid and lack courage. They don't want to stand up. They're thinking maybe what we have now is better than being out in the desert, and the world around us won't surrender easily to what God wants to do.

**That same day Pharaoh gave this order to the slave drivers and overseers in charge of the people: "You are no longer to supply the people with straw for making bricks; let them go and gather their own straw. But require them to make the same number of bricks as before; don't reduce the quota. They are lazy; that is why they are crying out, 'Let us go and sacrifice to our God.' Make the work harder for the people so that they keep working and pay no attention to lies." vv. 6-9**

Now, the slave drivers were Egyptians who cracked the whip. Typically, they would crack the whip on the overseers, who were Hebrews and serving the Egyptians in a slightly higher role. They were like the foremen of construction. So, imagine if you were an overseer. You had to walk up to a fellow Hebrew who's a slave knee-deep in mud making bricks. And the slave looks up at that overseer and smiles because he's thinking, "This morning Moses and Aaron talked to Pharaoh. They're probably bringing good news." Imagine if you heard what Pharaoh said.

As we step back, knowing the arc of the story of Exodus, all of Israel was going to share in the benefit of freedom. It's going to happen eventually. So what they're learning is that they are also going to share in the struggle. For us as Christians, it's the same thing. Occasionally, freedom from bondage comes easily, but usually it's a struggle, it's a process, it's a path of discipleship to experience the freedom that God has for us, full of lessons on faith and trust along the way.

Pharaoh makes the work harder for the people; it's actually impossible. I'm going to summarize the next few verses because we're going to move on to chapter 6 in a moment. They were told that they could no longer get the straw to make the bricks and straw when mixed with the mud, makes the bricks strong. So they were going to have to gather their own. In another place in scripture, they call it stubble, which is actually the leftover after the grain harvest in a field, and they would gather that up. They had to do that themselves. So they had to make a full quota of bricks and gather their own stubble. It's going from bad to worse.

The overseers realized that the slaves couldn't meet the quotas. So they go to Pharaoh. Pharaoh tells them that they're just lazy. After the four overseers left Pharaoh, they ran into Moses and Aaron. They connect in their minds that all of the bad things that happened came after Moses and Aaron had met with Pharaoh earlier. So they confronted Moses. They tell Moses that he is the reason they are suffering. "May the Lord judge you now for what you did to bring more suffering on your people."

Here's Moses going from bad to worse—disappointed and discouraged. I'm sure Moses was saying to God that he did everything right. He did as God asked: right words, right time, right place. Why is this all happening? The people that he was called to help were now cursing him. How many of us have felt the discouragement that comes along with being misunderstood? No matter what you do to try to explain it, you can't fix it. It's that dark moment at the end of a terrible day.

What did Moses do? What a perfect example for us. The only thing he could do was to return to the Lord. It reminds me of the words of Peter in John 6, when the crowds of disciples, at this point in Jesus's ministry, were deserting. Jesus asked the 12, "Are you going to desert me too?" And Peter said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God." So, for Moses and for all of us here today, when we are discouraged, remember Jesus has the words of life. Where else are we going to go?

**Moses returned to the Lord and said, "Why, Lord, why have you brought trouble on this people? Is this why you sent me? Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has brought trouble on this people, and you have not rescued your people at all." Exodus 5:22-23**

So his first word to the Lord is why. Has that ever been your first word going into a prayer? Moses might have thought, "Why? I told you back in the bush that I wasn't your man, but you kept saying you were the man."

I found a quote from a woman who had really enjoyed the Cecil B DeMille movie on Moses over the years, which was called The Ten Commandments with Charlton Heston. She wrote, "After I read Exodus 5, I'm beginning to know Moses so well that he no longer looks like Charlton Heston." I hope we're seeing that, too. Moses no longer looks like a rugged movie star. He looks like us. I love the example Moses is to us in his times of discouragement. It's a great model. We're to bring our questions. We're to bring our doubts. We're to bring our feelings to the Lord. It is healing to unburden ourselves and unburden our hearts before the Lord.

Where else are we going to go? God has the word of life. There are many stories in this church. I love being in the role I'm in. I get to know a lot of these stories where God has raised up the most discouraged person and encouraged them. God heard their cries. He heard their confusion about his plans. They were set free from their discouragement when they reached the place where they said something like this. This is just my paraphrase of what I hear. "Lord, I don't understand your ways, but what I do understand is that you are wise and you are good." CPCers, people in our midst are set free from bondages of all kinds through surrendering their situation to God for God's glory.

Another lesson I see here in Moses is he's having a pure, unadulterated confrontation with evil. Have you ever had that in your ministry? Has it ever led you down that path? We see that evil bites back, and any great confrontation against the kingdoms of this world, against the enemy, costs something. If we step back and look at the larger picture, the greatest confrontation with evil came at the cross of Christ. It cost God everything. Why would we be surprised when we confront evil, and it cost us something? We will be challenged, but we don't have to be discouraged.

So, let's turn the page to Exodus 6 and look at how God's words encouraged Moses. My hope is they encourage us this morning, too. God doesn't criticize Moses for asking why; he just says to wait. "Moses, wait, and you will see I am totally in control."

**Then the Lord said to Moses, "Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh: Because of my mighty hand he will let them go; because of my mighty hand he will drive them out of his country." Exodus 6:1**

So God told Moses that he was discouraged right now only because Moses could not see God's plan, but it was working perfectly. Pharaoh thinks he's a God, but there's only one true God, and he will soon find that out.

I love that God gives us some attitude here. Notice this time he doesn't say that Pharaoh will let you go. He's saying that he will push Israel out the door with his mighty hand. He is asking Moses to hang in there with him. He's saying, "I am the one, Moses, who called to you from that bush. Be patient; there's something more for you to learn things that you will need later." So, not only is God offering Moses these words of encouragement, which are beautiful and just what he needed to hear, but he also reaffirms his covenant with his people.

*God also said to Moses, "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 fully known to them. (vv. 2-3).* What is God telling Moses when he goes by the name, I am the Lord. The Lord is in an English translation from the Hebrew word *Yahweh*, which is the name of God that the writer is talking about when he's describing God as having a personal relationship with his people.

*Yahweh* is the God, the Lord here, who draws near to us and desires a personal relationship with us. *Yahweh* fulfills the covenant with his people. The verse in the first part says that God appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob by another name, God Almighty. That comes from the Hebrew words *El Shaddai*.

*El Shaddai* refers to God's power and God's capacity to provide more than what we need. But to Moses, he's saying, I'm not only *El Shaddai*, I'm *Yahweh*. Moses was going to know God more intimately than Abraham ever did. "I will keep my covenant, and I will never be distant from you. I will never be aloof from you."

So, a question for us to ask ourselves is, do you know God? It's not just *El Shaddai*, this powerful God whom we know, this deity who is powerful over all others, but do we know him as *Yahweh*? We can know God, as Christians, as *El Shaddai*. We can know God as Christians as *Yahweh*, but we can also know God through Jesus Christ, the embodiment of God in the flesh. We can have an intimate relationship with him.

So consider when you're struggling with discouragement that you can experience the presence and power of God through your relationship with Christ. Something Moses never experienced. We can experience God more than Moses experienced God, which is the promise to us as Christians. So when we need encouragement, we need to remember the promises of God, and we need to remember that he keeps his promises, and he is intimate with us.

**I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, where they resided as foreigners. Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and I have remembered my covenant. vv. 4-5**

#### **Remember, he keeps the promises.**

**"Therefore, say to the Israelites: 'I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am the Lord.'" vv. 6-8**

So verses 6 through 8 is the climax of chapters 5 and 6. It's beautiful. God makes three I am statements. And remember what we learned about the English I am. It's translated, I am, and I will be. That's the literal translation. I am and I will be. I am *Yahweh* to you now and I will be *Yahweh* to you in your future. So along with these three I am statements, he adds seven amazing I will statements.

Every I will statement listed in these next three verses is in the Hebrew past tense and is translated as, I have, and I will. So remember, in your deepest times of discouragement, God says to you, I am, and I will be. I have, and I will.

To see God in this manner will help us put things into proper proportion. Nothing in our life is too big for God to handle. To see him with a proper perspective is to know that God has a perfect plan, and all the details of that plan will come together in the end. We just have to be patient, which builds the endurance that will be needed.

I love this quote from this old-time gospel preacher, G. Campbell Morgan. "The supreme need in every hour of difficulty and depression is a vision of God. To see him is to see all else in proper proportion and perspective." All of us try to figure out and solve our problems; figuring out our problems isn't wrong, but it starts here. I think what he's telling us is it starts with the real victory of knowing who God is and seeing our problems through his greatness. Trusting that he will move in our space of discouragement. So, we all have these internal struggles to trust God.

After hearing God's, I am and I will, Moses had to be encouraged. How could he not be? Now he wanted to pass on that encouragement. God wanted him to pass that encouragement to the Israelites. Don't you think that when he gives this message of verses 6 through 8, the I am and the I will statements that all the Israelites should be strengthened now in faith? They should be saying, "We say yes to the Lord, let it be according to his word."

*"Moses reported this to the Israelites, but they did not listen to him because of their discouragement and harsh labor" (v. 9).* They had been captives of slavery for so long that they could only see themselves as people of bondage, not as people of the covenant. They believed the lies. Pharaoh was bigger to them than the Lord. So all these beautiful statements poured out, but their heart's response was, "What about Pharaoh?"

Maybe you can relate. Maybe you hear these words of *Yahweh*, and it's hard for you to believe them for your life. Maybe they're right for the person sitting next to you, but it's hard for you to believe them. Maybe you have been keeping God at a distance. God isn't personal to you. You've never trusted him as *Yahweh*. You've never received Christ's invitation into a relationship, never thought of running into his arms for relief, and never trusted that if you call out to him, he will respond. Maybe you don't believe that lives can be transformed anymore. But if you don't believe these encouraging words here in chapter 6, you are believing a lie in your mind.

We spent a lot of time in Romans 12:2 over the last several months, where Paul said, *"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."* Renew your mind continually with truth to drive out the lies, changing what we believe about God in our moments of discouragement. The children of Israel needed it, and so do we.

So, back to Moses and Pharaoh. First, Pharaoh rejected him. Then, when he preached to his own people, they rejected him. And what does God tell Moses to do now?

*"Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Go, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the Israelites go out of his country'" (vv. 10-11).* God has got to be kidding. He wants him to go back again. *"But Moses said to the Lord,*



*'If the Israelites will not listen to me, why would Pharaoh listen to me, since I speak with faltering lips?'" (v. 12).*

This sounds to me a lot like the rerun from back at the burning bush where he asks God to find someone else. "I'm a lousy public speaker. I'm not the right guy." But this Hebrew word for faltering lips is a stronger word than getting tongue-tied. It literally means "I have imperfections." Moses is saying, "Yes, I'm tongue-tied, but my imperfections go beyond that."

Moses's imperfections and our imperfections do not disqualify us from God's call to serve him. If that were true, there'd be no community group leaders. There'd be no ushers. There'd be no greeters. There'd be no children's workers. There'd be no pastors. There'd be no elders. We all have imperfections.

The problem here is not the sin problem because God addressed the sin problem at the cross. God dealt with our sin problem by allowing the perfect man, Jesus, who had no imperfections, to die in our place. He was crucified by evil people, and now we can stand before God wrapped in his righteousness. And God doesn't look at our imperfections. Jesus is our substitute. Jesus solved our sin problem. What I'm saying right now might sound odd, but if we are discouraged, it's not usually our sin that keeps us apart from God. It's our unbelief.

Well, maybe that's a sin; our sin of unbelief, all the forgiveness, all the empowering, all the encouragement we need in our lives now and our new lives in Christ are all being extended to us. And Moses is a great example. Even in our imperfections today, even when we can't trust God fully right now, God is saying, "I love you, even though you don't trust me fully." You have room to grow in that; in your discouragement, keep hanging in there, hang in there with God until he brings you to that place of trust.

I want to close with some checkpoints for when we're discouraged. When faced with discouragement, could our biggest problem be that we've forgotten who God is? This could be the reason we're giving up hope. This could be the reason we continue to live in bondage. For us, it's not a bondage to Egypt or to a king per se. It's bondage to our own sins and guilt, our bondage to our addictions, our bondage to holding on to unforgiveness, our bondage to holding on to bitterness in our lives.

It's just messing with all the relationships that are the most important to us. This could be the reason we're giving up hope. God's greatness and God's promises are not just grand ideas we sing about or talk about on Sunday morning. God's character and attributes are very practical because we're tempted to believe the lies that the devil whispers in our ears. He may say, "Your belief in God is really useless to bring about changed here in the 21st century. You're in bondage, and you always will be." When faced with discouragement, do we find ourselves too impressed with Pharaoh and not impressed enough with God?

Renew your mind with the word of God. A great place to renew your mind is Exodus 6:6-8, those I will and I am statements that we read earlier. Maybe there's one or two of those that you can connect with. Maybe all seven of those statements give you something. And if you focus on that, it should be some kind of soothing ointment to your heart for anyone who is hurting and discouraged.

The truth sets us free. Jesus says what our response should be. "Yes, Lord, you do want me free. You do want to rescue me. You do have a heritage for me. I receive your message." So whenever Pharaoh seems oversized in your life, remember Yahweh's power. Remember his sovereignty. Remember his personal care. Remember what Jesus our Lord says, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." And maybe just a word for any who serve in a ministry or are in a leadership role of some kind. You identify yourself as a leader, and you want help in that role. There are a couple of leadership lessons I want to bring out about Moses' life here.

### **Moses Depended on God**

First, when faced with a difficult circumstance, are we growing in our dependence on God? Moses had to depend on God. He ultimately chose not to run away from his trials but to depend on God through them. James talks about that in James 1, growing in patience, growing in perseverance.

Then what happens? James says, "They became wise." Moses was becoming wise, and it would be all the qualities he would need. He needed to go through all of this to have all the qualities he needed to be fit for God's kingdom work in leading a million-plus Israelites out of Egypt to the promised land. His discouraging circumstances made him fit for the kingdom work because he kept going back to God.

### **Moses Confronted Evil**

The second one, Moses confronted evil. So when faced with difficult circumstances that require us to confront evil, let's not be naive here. It costs us something. We need to keep our souls nurtured. We need to keep strong, positive, faithful people around us as we're doing ministry, as we're confronting evil in various forms.

When Jesus confronted evil, he did it to save us. And what did it do? It cost him everything. So, if you've been a believer in Christ for any length of time, you have heard these same words over and over again that I'm about to give you. That's okay because here they are again. This is where I want to close.

### **Fix Your Eyes on Jesus**

When you are discouraged, fix your eyes on Jesus. Fix your thoughts on Jesus. Hebrews 3:1. *"Therefore let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God."* Hebrews 12:2 *"fixing our eyes on Jesus,*

*the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."*

Until our thoughts and our eyes are fixed on Jesus, we will not be able to endure those days that go from bad to worse.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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