

Exodus 5:1-7:7

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[0 : 0 0] Well, good morning and pleased to have a seat. If you have a Bible, please turn to Exodus chapter 5. What I love about the first song that we sang this morning is it's got the word I in it.

Did everyone notice that? I, Lord, we adore thee. It's almost like it was written for Scottish people. But it just means, yes, Lord, we adore thee. And I pray that that is our heart's cries when we look at this passage together.

So let's pray and let's dedicate this time to God. Father, we come before you this morning acknowledging your greatness, your goodness, and your abundant grace to us.

Father, thank you that you are not a God who has remained silent. God, you are not a God who is silent, but you speak today as your word is preached. And so it's our prayer now, gracious God, that you would come and you would change us.

You would mold us. And, Father, that we would hear your voice. And so we pray for your Holy Spirit to come and to do his work in our lives, we pray. Amen.

[1 : 1 1] So what do you do in life when things don't quite turn out the way that you thought they would? I've been looking this week at the story of Adoniram Judson, a young man who leaves Bible college with a clear sense of God's call in his life to be a missionary overseas.

So he and his wife, they head for India. And as I was reading his story this week, it struck me that it isn't a story of glitz and glam. It's a story of real suffering and tragedy.

Economic hardship. Visa problems mean they are forced to leave India and go and settle in Burma, where they spend 12 hours a day for three years learning the local language so they can communicate the gospel, only to be met with relative indifference and hostility from the locals.

Constantly battling sickness and disease. Treated with suspicion by the government, so much so that he is locked up for 17 months and tortured because they think he's a spy.

And then only a few months after leaving prison, his wife, Anne, she dies. And over a spell of about 40 years, 24, 24 of his relatives and close associates die, including several of his children.

[2 : 3 4] What do you do in life when things don't turn out the way that you thought they would? You know, we left a story in Exodus chapter 4 last week on a real high.

We left Moses having left Midian heading back to Egypt because God in his grace has grabbed him, has revealed himself to him, and he sent him back to Egypt.

And not only is God on Moses' side, but the Hebrew people, Moses gets back to Egypt, he tells them about what has happened in the desert, and they too worship God.

Moses at this point is a man brimming with confidence. He's a man on a mission, and he gets back to Egypt, and he makes a beeline for Pharaoh's course.

Now, you can picture him mounting the steps of the palace and so bravely demanding an audience with the king. The king will hear him. How's this one going to go?

- [3 : 35] Well, let's read verses 1 to 9 of chapter 5 together. 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 they may hold a festival to me in the wilderness. 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. 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- [4 : 51] 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 gods.
- Make the work harder for the people, so that they keep working and pay no attention to lies. So it doesn't go well for Moses.
- Which, if we're honest, isn't massively surprising, given the size of the task that he's asking from Pharaoh. I mean, he's asking Pharaoh to let an entire workforce go.
- And it's not just the request that's outrageous to Pharaoh. The reasoning is absolutely ridiculous. See, verse 2. Who is the Lord?
- And because you've had the brass neck to ask Moses, your people consider their workload heavier. Now, I remember I had this rugby teacher at school.
- [5 : 56] He was absolutely notorious for his warm-ups. And his rule was that if you couldn't get yourself out to the pitch on time, then it was extra laps of the pitch for you.
- And not just extra laps of the pitch for you, but for the entire team. And there was always that one boy. And you saw the teacher eyeing up his watch, whistle getting closer to his mouth.
- You knew it was coming. Hated that boy for the rest of the session. Expletives aimed at him with every extra burpee and setup that was being demanded.
- And that is what's going on here in Egypt. The whole group are suffering for the failing of one. Because of Moses' audacity, Pharaoh's work taskmasters are told to up the workload.
- No straw. Same amount of bricks. That is a pretty much impossible task. And so the people of Israel go to Pharaoh and they ask him, why are you doing this?
- [6 : 59] To which Pharaoh replies, blame Moses and Aaron. Now we have to understand there that they have gone to public enemy number one in the sight of everybody who's in Egypt here.
- So do you see how that's working there? In the space of 20 verses, Moses has gone from hero to absolute zero. Now how is he feeling at this point?
- Dejected. Disillusioned. Despairing. And all of these things are encapsulated in that word, why? See verse 22.
- What does he say? 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. So why, God, did you call me to do something? Why did you call me back here and then allow Pharaoh and the people to turn against me?

[8 : 05] I trusted what you said. Now, if you hear a few weeks ago, we said the question of chapters one and two is, where is God? The question of chapter five is, why God?

Why God? It's an identity question. Now, do you see that Moses is subtly beginning to ask the question that Pharaoh's asked? Who is this God?

I remember what Pharaoh said about what God had said, that it was lies. That's what Moses is questioning in his head. So what do you do in your life when things don't turn out the way that you thought they would?

I had my first classes back at uni this week. My church history lecture comes out with this line. He said, when it comes to church history, great accent, some of us are terribly guilty of hagiography.

Now, we all turned and looked at each other. Hagiography, are you kidding me? I had to Google it under the table. Hagiography, do you know what it means? It means you present somebody as if they had no faults.

[9 : 15] This is the thing that I love about the Bible that convinces me of its truthfulness. One of the things that convinced me of its truthfulness, that these writers are not into hagiography.

You know, we are so tempted to big up Moses, aren't we? The Hollywood Moses. Like, William Wallace meets Winston Churchill. You know, that kind of Moses. And if anything, as we've got to know this guy over the past few weeks, he is a moaning wimp.

And here he is, as a man who is so easily rattled, because he's a man with a very small view of God. And I find that immensely comforting and yet challenging.

Because I know my own heart. And I know how puny my faith is at times. How easily stuff comes up that rattles me, that shakes me. And here he is, Is Moses a man just like us?

And in passing, I think that's the reason why that genealogy that comes up in these verses, that's why that's here. Just to show us that Moses and Aaron, they're just ordinary guys. With an ordinary family tree.

[10 : 28] They're nothing special. Moses asks, Why God? Now, have you ever been there in your life? Well, notice in passing, where Moses takes his why.

Moses takes his frustrations and his pain to God, not away from God. He takes it all to God in prayer. Moses takes his why.

To the sky. How often, brothers and sisters, when we ask why, we never bother to take it to God in prayer.

We complain about God instead of taking it to God. You know, Tim Keller writes this. He says, To pray is to accept that we are and always will be wholly dependent on God for everything.

If you want to see how that works, just read some of the Psalms. Full of questions. Why God? How long, O Lord? And I think the conclusion we're meant to draw is that God wants us to pour out our hearts to him.

[11 : 42] I mean, this pain is real. But what we must do is allow God's voice, his words, to speak into our questioning. And allow him to declare into our despair.

Because here is the other thing to see here. The question that Moses is asking is, Why is this happening, God? The question we'd always expect God to reply back to Moses is, Why are you surprised?

Because the reality is that what's happening here is something that God's already told him about. Chapter 3, 19. The king of Egypt will not let you go.

Chapter 4, 21. I will harden his heart so that he will not let my people go. Why are you surprised Moses? Again, how true, friends, is that for us?

How often do we buy into the lie that because we put faith in Jesus that somehow this means we're immune from suffering? You know, that stand that you made for Jesus at work, the values that you stood for, that actually in the end got you in a lot more trouble and cost you a lot more than you thought it would?

[12 : 57] You know, God says in his word that through many trials we will inherit the kingdom of God. That friend or colleague who you took that bold stand for Jesus, you told them the gospel, expecting a hug and a high five, what did you get?

You got anger and resentment. You got mocking. Again, the Bible will tell us that the gospel is foolishness to those who are perishing. Nowhere in this is God saying that life is going to be easy.

Why are you surprised Moses? What I love about this section is that's not how God responds to Moses. He is gracious and he is patient with his stumbling servant.

What wonderful truths about God that we see in here. You know, Moses was on a massive high as we entered chapter four. Now he's on a massive low note as we end chapter five.

What do you do in your life when God's called you to something and it doesn't turn out the way that you thought it would? Well, the really important thing for us to see in this section isn't Moses' questioning.

[14 : 12] It's how God answers Moses. So let's just read some verses. Verses one to eight of chapter six that help us see this. 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. 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. 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. Therefore, say to the Israelites, I am the Lord.

And I will bring them 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.

[15 : 32] 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. So what is God's answer to Moses' question? Do you notice here that God doesn't offer explanation?

God offers revelation. Moses doesn't need therapy. He needs theology. God steps forward in grace, and he declares himself into Moses' despair.

Now, my old lecturer at Cornhill, he always used to tell this story. I've told it in here before, but preacher's prerogative and all that. A story about a small Quaker hall down in Birmingham.

[16 : 36] And the land next door to them had just been bought over and developed by John Lewis. And John Lewis, they wanted to expand. And so they wrote a letter to this tiny little Quaker congregation, and it said this.

It said, Dear sirs, As part of our ongoing expansion work, we would be grateful if you could allow us to purchase your land. Let us know what you decide.

You're sincerely, John Lewis. A few days later, a response arrived in the John Lewis boardroom that read, Dear sirs, thank you for your letter.

Subsequent to your offer, we would in fact like to purchase your land. Please let us know what you decide. Now you can imagine the mocking and the laughter as that was read out in the boardroom until they saw the signature at the bottom.

It read, Yours sincerely, John Cadbury. John Cadbury, the founder of the Cadbury's chocolate empire and a member of this tiny Quaker congregation.

[17 : 42] Sometimes we need to be reminded of where the power really lies. That is exactly what Moses needs reminded of here.

In preparing on this passage this week, I'm convinced that this is why God allows him to experience this low moment, to get him to see his utter hopelessness, and to get him to see his utter dependence on this God.

God is saying to Moses here that his identity, it shouldn't be in the way that he perceives things going on around him, nor in the people who are walking alongside him, nor in his own capabilities.

Moses' complete confidence needs to be in what this God has said is true about himself. You know, these opening verses at chapter 6 that we read, it's just God reaffirming his absolute dedication and determination to do what he said he would do and to be who he has revealed himself to be.

And he does this through wedding language. I tried to stress it as we went through. Maybe you picked up on it. Now, any groom will tell you that there's really only one line that you need to remember on your wedding day.

[19 : 02] I will. I practiced it several times in the mirror before mine. I will. I will. I will. You want to get it right? Because it is the language of commitment.

It's the language of love. It's the language of intention. And see that God here, he makes seven I will statements from verses 6 to 8. Just scan your eyes over them.

See if you can see them. I will. I will. I will. I will. I will. I will. I will. I will. Bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. I will.

Deliver you. I will. Redeem you. I will. Take you to be my people. I will. Be your God. I will.

Bring you to the land. I will. I will. Give it to you. As a possession. Bookended by. I am the Lord. This is who I am.

[20 : 00] Says God. God. A covenant keeping God. And this is what I am about to show you. Moses you don't need explanation. You need revelation.

That the power lies with God. Not with man. This is who God is. And the question is. How do you respond to this God?

You'll notice that there's three responses to him in this passage. Firstly. Who is this God? Who is this God?

Defiance and ignorance. Now maybe you're here this morning. And if truth be told. If I pressed you on that question. Pharaoh's answer is actually your answer.

You know. You might have seen it in the news this week. Stephen Fry. Coming out. Nailing his colors to the mast. And what he believes about God. A man who finds the goodness of God.

[21 : 03] A ridiculous statement. Who is this God? Well if that's you this morning. Then can I encourage you. Not to see yourself in this passage.

As almighty Pharaoh. Actually. You are like Moses and the Egyptians in this story. You are helpless to save yourself. You know the Bible would say that we are slaves to our sin.

Our sin against this God. But not only is God the offended party. But praise him that he is the gracious rescuer.

True to his rescuing promise. God sent Jesus. To die for your sin on the cross. He died so that you could be forgiven. He died so that you could be set free.

And you need to see that it is this God. Who is speaking to you this morning from the Bible. It is he alone that can save you. Secondly see how the people of Israel respond at verse 9.

[22 : 10] So God at this point has specifically told Moses. To go and tell the people of Israel. What he's seen and what he's heard. Because God knows what is on the minds of his people.

He knows that they are doubting. So go and tell them Moses. Go and tell them who I am. Go and tell them that you have met with me. Go and tell them that I know intimately their suffering.

So what does Moses do? He goes and tells them. And how did they respond? Verse 9. Moses reported this to the Israelites. So here's a group of people who cannot get beyond the why.

Fix. Fixated with how things look in front of their eyes. Even though God is speaking to them. The God who later would call them his children.

They won't listen to him. They cannot get beyond the why. And maybe that's a description of where you're at this morning. You're stuck at why.

[23 : 26] Actually you're harboring bitterness towards God. Because things didn't turn out the way that you thought they would. Well if that's you this morning. Then see the third response.

What do you do in life. When God's called you to do something. And it doesn't turn out the way that you thought it would. How is Moses going to respond to God.

Given everything that's happened. Is he going to take God at his words. Or is he going to get stuck at the why. Is he going to live by faith. And what God has told him is true about himself.

Or is he going to live by sight. You know Moses has been on an absolute roller coaster of emotions. Started on a real high at the end of chapter 4.

Hits the real low of chapter 5. And having encountered God once again. He obeys. I trust you God.

[24 : 23] See verse 6 of chapter 7. Moses and Aaron did just as the Lord commanded them. You know given everything that we've just read previously.

All the commotion. All the anger. All the accusations. All the questions. There's a deliberate shortness. And stillness. To that sentence.

There's been a total transformation. In Moses. Hasn't there? He's moved from being a quivering wreck. To an obedient servant. Now we have to ask.

What's caused that change in Moses? Because his circumstances haven't changed. Pharaoh's still saying no at this point. The people. They're still very much against him.

And he's still the same Moses. Failings and all. So what's changed? Well he's changed. Because he's encountered this God.

[25 : 26] The speaking God. The all powerful God. And you see how the word of God has molded his mind. Because remember he hasn't yet experienced God as deliverer or rescuer.

But he's trusting and he's walking in what God has said. That God is who he says he is. And that the power lies with God.

Not with man. He trusts and he walks. And if you're a Christian here this morning. What a wonderful example of what it means to live by faith and not by sight. And how much more should we be people who live by faith and not by sight.

Because not only do we know how this Exodus story ends up. But we're privy to the great and greater rescue that God won for his people through Christ.

Jesus we have him as our perfect example of what it means to entrust himself. He entrusted himself to God who judges justly says Peter. You know Moses didn't know that God would deliver his people.

[26 : 29] But we do know as we look at Christ and what he accomplished for us on the cross. We can trust this God. That he is sovereign and that he is in control.

That he is who he says he is. And we can take him at his words. And we need to allow this truth to define our reality. To shape our lives.

To get us beyond the whys of life. That the power lies with God and not with us. And we have to allow God to declare himself into our despair.

Let's finish with Mr. Judson again. I loved reading about him this week. You know despite everything that went on in his life that we looked at at the beginning. He keeps telling the Burmese people about Jesus.

And he keeps translating the Bible into their language. And when he died. Finished his translation. A hundred churches had been planted.

[27 : 35] Eight thousand Burmese people had given their lives to Jesus Christ. His translation of the Bible is still used in what is Myanmar today. And his spiritual legacy continues to bear fruit.

This is what the head of the Myanmar Evangelical Fellowship said. He said today there are six million Christians in Myanmar. Incredible.

Six million Christians. And every single one of us trace our heritage to one man. Mr. Judson. What do you do in life when God calls you to do something.

And it doesn't turn out the way that you thought it was going to turn out. Said these words. Oh slow of heart to believe and trust in the constant presence and overruling agency of our almighty Savior.

What a wonderful quote. Here is a man who has suffered greatly. Yet he flourished because he had an overwhelmingly massive view of who God is.

[28 : 41] A man who allowed God to declare into his despair. And a man with a testimony that the power doesn't lie with us. It doesn't lie with how it looks on the outside.

But the power lies with God. We will leave this morning with Moses back on his feet. Next week we'll see how round one proper of this royal battle between him and Pharaoh is going to pan out.

Let's pray. Lord God we are so incredibly grateful for this time that we've had together this morning.

Gazing at your grandeur. And Father I pray that you would help us this week to be people who listen to your voice. And who allow you to transform us.

To mold us. To lead us. To define us. So Lord I help us. I pray that you would help us this week to be people who live by faith and not by sight.

[29 : 43] Father that we would see Jesus high and lifted up in our own lives. And so it's in his worthy and conquering name we pray. Amen. John.