

## Who's the Boss? Exodus 5-6:1

When my grandson, Ben was a toddler, he struggled like most toddlers do, with submission to authority. The concept of “boss” was important to him, as in, he wanted to be the boss. When he was around 3 years old, someone in my son’s church asked Ben what he wanted to be when he grew up and he said, “I want to be a pastor like my daddy, because he’s the boss of the church.” Another time, when he was slightly younger, he was staying at our house and we were on the living room floor playing with one of those trains that hook together and have the little round columns and you slide blocks down the columns to construct the engine and the cars. And Ben was frustrated because he was trying to put the blocks on in the wrong order. I tried to help him, but he resisted my help several times because he just knew that he was right and I was wrong. So finally, I gave up and said, “Ok. You’re the boss.” And he looked up at me, and his eyes got this big around, and he said, “YES! I AM the boss!” Only, I may not remember this event exactly as it happened, because in my mind, he said it like this--(in low spooky voice) I AM the boss!--while his head swiveled around 360 degrees. I had to immediately share this by text with my son, who fired back, “Oh my. What have you done?”

In Exodus 5, we’re going to see the continuation of a long, drawn out war to determine who is the boss. This battle is not between the Egyptians and the Israelites. It is not a battle between Moses and Pharaoh. This battle has in one corner, Yahweh, the Covenant God of Israel, the Creator of all the earth, the one true living God, the undefeated sovereign Lord of all the universe. And in the other corner is Pharaoh, the king and false god of Egypt. But in one sense, this historical showdown is representative of the age-old war between the Living God and pantheon of all of the false gods, the idols, the carved images, the evil spirits and Satan himself. It is a war that began in Genesis 3 and will not reach its fulfillment until Revelation 20, although the result is sure.

When we arrive at Exodus 5, Moses has received his commission from God to rescue His people from slavery in Egypt. He has voiced his objections, been bolstered by the promises of God and the presence of Aaron, and rejoiced to see the people of Israel believe his message and worship Yahweh.

And now, in chapter 5, he marches to the palace and into the presence of Pharaoh. And as the ambassador of God, he presents Yahweh's demands to Pharaoh. **"Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel. Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness."** To which Pharaoh responds, **"Who is Yahweh, that I should obey his voice and let Israel go? I do not know Yahweh, and moreover, I will not let Israel go."**

There are at least 3 components to these demands.

- First Yahweh claims to be the God of Israel. Look at verse 1. Moses says, "This is what Yahweh, the God of Israel says." He says let My people go that they may worship ME. In verse 3 they call Yahweh the God of the Hebrews and ask permission to go make sacrifice to Him. This is a direct challenge to Pharaoh. Pharaoh is not just the king of Egypt, he is the god of Egypt. He is considered a deity. And so, Pharaoh responds, "Who is this Yahweh? Never heard of him." How dare some foreign god come into his kingdom and challenge his deity! How powerful could this Yahweh be, anyway? What kind of God would claim a group of hapless slaves as His people?
- Second, Yahweh claims kingship over Israel. They are HIS people. Again, this is a direct challenge to Pharaoh. The Hebrews have lived in Egypt for 400 years. There were only 75 of them when they first came to Egypt. If anyone should be considered Israel's king, Pharaoh reasons, it would be him. Pharaoh is the sovereign king of Egypt. The descendants of Jacob are his slaves. Indeed, he considers them his property. How dare this foreign god send his messengers to declare his ownership of these slaves!

- Third, Yahweh claims ultimate authority over the destiny of Israel by demanding that Pharaoh let His people go. The previous Pharaoh had been vexed about what to do with this huge population of foreigners inhabiting the northeastern part of Egypt. So he enslaved them. This new Pharaoh doesn't want Israel to go anywhere. He has a good thing going. He is getting rich off the sweat of the backs of the Hebrews. Pharaoh will determine their fate and future. This Yahweh wants him to just let these people go? Never! Pharaoh believes he has sovereign control over the Hebrews and he will not allow his control to be challenged.

Notice that this first demand in verse 1 is not a clear-cut "let my people go". Instead it was "let them go that they may worship me in the wilderness" which Moses then attempts to soften in verse 3 by asking permission to go three days journey into the wilderness to make sacrifices to their God. This is a typical Middle Eastern bargaining session. You never begin bargaining by asking for what you really want. Moses has been told all along by God that the ultimate purpose is for Israel to escape from Egypt. So the demand to let the Hebrews go into the wilderness to worship Yahweh is just the opening salvo of negotiations. Pharaoh knows what is at stake and he knows what will eventually happen if he does let Israel go into the wilderness to worship Yahweh.

And Pharaoh, demonstrating how hardened his heart was against God, not only rebuffs Moses and Aaron, but he doubles down by intensifying the burden of the Israelites. He intends to teach them a lesson about sending people to him to negotiate their release. No longer will they be provided with straw to mix with the mud in the making of bricks. Now they would be scattered all over Egypt to gather straw for themselves. Worse than that, we are told in verse 12 that the people had to gather stubble for straw. The stubble was the base of the stalk that was left after the good straw had been cut. It would take much more time to gather this stubble, and then the stubble would be much harder to mix with the mud. But, the quota for bricks

will remain the same. Pharaoh is making impossible demands on Israel. Let's see their God get them out of this mess!

As I said, what we are seeing in this passage is the classic showdown between the Living, Sovereign, Creator God of all the universe and a false god. I think Moses wrote this passage in part to cause us to make a choice. That's the first application for this passage.

1. We must choose whom we will serve?

It is the choice that has faced every human being since Adam and Eve. It is the choice that faces each one of you. There is plenty of evidence in the universe to convince us of the existence and the character of God. Romans 1:18-20 says:

**18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. 19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.**

God created mankind with an inherent desire to worship Him. But because of the fall, we are born spiritually dead. And so our desire to worship is warped and we wind up worshiping other things. Continuing in Romans 1, Paul says:

**21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.**

And first and foremost, it seems, the idol we worship above all others is ourselves. We seek to gratify the desires of the mind and the body. We want to be our own gods. We want to determine for ourselves what is right

and wrong. That's how I was. I was spiritually dead and without hope in this world or hope for the next one. But God. But God, because of the great love with which He loved me, made me alive together with Christ. He saved me by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, who although He was the eternal Son of God, was born as a human so that He could die as my substitute on the cross, atoning for my sin and absorbing the wrath that God had for me because of my sin. And then God raised Him from the dead, to vindicate Him, to declare Him as the Son of God and the mediator of a new covenant that is a covenant of faith. Have you placed your faith in Jesus Christ? If not, will you do that today? Will you turn away from your sin and your life lived selfishly for your own desires and receive his gift of reconciliation with God through faith in Jesus Christ? I plead with you on behalf of Christ to be reconciled to God.

But you know, there's still a battle for me to fight. I was saved so that I could be obedient to God. But I still have sinful desires that so easily entangle me. I tend to be like Pharaoh. Too often I still want to be my own god. Every battle to put sin to death is like mortal combat. My flesh will battle tooth and nail to maintain its illusion of control over certain parts of my life. Like my grandson, Ben, I want to be the boss! How dare God try to tell me what food I should eat and how much and when! I can't give up that control! Food gives me too much pleasure! Food gives me too much comfort! How could I ever find the satisfaction and comfort in God that I find in eating? And you can take your own vices and your own weaknesses and substitute them in there. We all struggle with sin.

Brothers and sisters, sin will tell us bold faced lies to distract us from putting it to death. Sin will tell us that it can give us pleasure and joy that we cannot find in God. And I thank God for His grace in being patient with me, for His grace in removing some of the obstacles to obedience as Pastor Jason mentioned last week, for His grace in empowering me to break the shackles of sin and kill it. The battle isn't over. Perfection in this life may not be attainable, but it is a worthy goal. Jesus said, "You must be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect." If we chase perfection, we might catch

excellence. And like Paul, I press on toward the mark of the high calling of God. But oh--it is a battle! Like Pharaoh, sin does not give up easily or willingly.

Now there are some other applications that we can glean from this passage. The first is that sometimes when we are faithfully obedient to God, things get worse.

2. Obedience does not always yield the results we expect.

Moses did what God had told Him to do. Now I don't know what he expected. God had told him back in chapter 4 that He was going to harden Pharaoh's heart and that Pharaoh would not let Israel go. So maybe Moses anticipated that Pharaoh would say no. But I sincerely doubt that he expected that the result of his obedience would be that things would get worse. But that's what happened. Pharaoh made it impossible for the Hebrews to meet their quota. And since they didn't meet their quota, the Egyptian taskmasters began beating the Hebrew foremen.

And so, as we see in verse 15, the foremen somehow gained an audience with Pharaoh. It must have been like the early days of America when just about anyone off the street could walk into the White House and see the President. Anyway, they complain to Pharaoh and once again, Pharaoh doesn't budge. The quota will remain the same. The restrictions on straw will remain the same. Pharaoh has hardened his heart against his Creator. The battle lines are drawn.

And so then look in verse 20. Moses and Aaron are waiting when the foremen come out of their interview with Pharaoh. And look what the foremen say in verse 21.

**“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.”**

So here's Moses. Not only has the suffering of his people gone from bad to worse, but now the very people he's trying to help are attacking him and accusing him.

Has something like this ever happened to you? Have you ever been faithful to obey God and things got worse instead of better? Maybe you ask God to give you a promotion so you can better provide for your family and you get fired instead. Maybe you pray that your children will be more obedient and instead they become even more rebellious. You pray for a better marriage and you obey Scripture for how to relate to your spouse and your relationship crumbles. You obediently share the gospel with your best friend and not only are you rebuffed but now that person is slandering you. You confess sin and ask forgiveness of a church member for something you've done to them and you get a door slammed in your face. Or maybe, and oh, this has happened to me a bunch of times, we identify idols in our lives and we begin the process of killing them, which is God's will. But then, the desire for those idols intensifies. It becomes harder and harder to put down those idols. Sometimes, there are consequences of obedience that we don't like. But, as Pastor Jason said last week, we are not responsible for the results of our obedience. God is. And we should not attempt to be God and try to control the results of our obedience but rather we should entrust those results to God. And we should do what Moses did--take our sorrows to Him and lament to Him. That's the second application for this passage.

3. When things go from bad to worse, take your troubles to God and leave them there. Look at verses 22-23.

**22 Then Moses turned to the Lord and said, "O Lord, why have you done evil (brought trouble) 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."**

We talked about this in Psalms. There is a right way to lament. First of all you address your lament to God. You lament the injustice in the world because you have faith that God can and will do something about it. Moses is dissatisfied with what he sees. He's saying, "God, I'm having a hard time trusting you right now." Moses wants answers and he does the right thing by going to the One who has the answers. Now, there may be some frustration in Moses' lament and he very well could have, at least in part, been questioning God's wisdom or His power. But overall, I give Moses high marks for taking his troubles to God and I commend that to you as well. When things seem to go from bad to worse, go to God with your laments, trusting in and resting in His wisdom, power, righteousness, justice, mercy, and grace.

The foremen also wanted answers. But what did they do? They first went to Pharaoh for answers. They went to the false god. They were looking to an unjust king for justice. Isn't that what we often do when we're in trouble? I know I do. I often look for answers everywhere else before I go to God in prayer. But notice that they eventually end up bringing their lament to Moses, who is their mediator. And while their choice of words isn't the best, we can at least learn from their example that the very first place we should take our troubles is to OUR mediator, who is Jesus Christ, our High Priest. He says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

To sum up chapter 5, we have seen the beginning of a showdown between the Creator God of the universe and the king of Egypt. Moses has obediently pressed Pharaoh to let the people go into the wilderness to worship Yahweh and Pharaoh has responded by intensifying the suffering of the Hebrew people. Moses has lamented to God, asking in effect, "What's going on? Things didn't turn out like I expected." And if today's passage was just chapter 5, that would be it. But the other pastors graciously allowed me to include the first verse of chapter 6 with my passage this morning so that we could end on a high note. And that verse

gives me my third application which is that God's got the situation right where he wants it.

4. When things go from bad to worse, God's got the situation right where he wants it.

Look at chapter 6 verse 1.

**6 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."**

God's answer to Moses' lament is to watch and see what I will do. I'm going to put on such a spectacular display of power that Pharaoh won't just let My people go, he will drive them out of Egypt. God knew the hardness of Pharaoh's heart. God knew that Pharaoh would not take kindly to the insinuation that the God of Israel was mightier than he, that Yahweh had ultimate authority over Israel and that Pharaoh should let His people leave Egypt. God knew that Pharaoh would cling to the Israelites with everything he had. God knew what it would take to free his people from slavery and God had the power to make it happen.

Moses, despite all of the signs he has seen, is not so sure. He needs reassurance. And so God graciously gives it to him. And Christian, when your faithful obedience seems to make things go from bad to worse in your life, God promises to be with you every step of the way. Sometimes when we ask God for relief from our troubles He gives us rest in the midst of them. Sometimes when we ask God for relief from our troubles, it seems He makes things worse. But if we will just trust in God's promises, it can be such a comfort to know that God has the situation under control. Your situation may look hopeless to you, but God's got it right where He wants it. What you need to do is to trust Him and continue to obey Him and then watch and see what God will do. He is able to do far more abundantly than all you could think or ask. So trust Him. Rest in Him. Wait patiently for Him to act.