

## **Exodus 5:10-23**

### *Pharaoh Makes Israel Work Harder*

Two weeks ago, we began looking at this 5<sup>th</sup> chapter of Exodus

- Moses and Aaron finally approach Pharaoh

God has appeared to Moses at the burning bush

- God has told Moses to deliver Israel
- God has told Moses to confront Pharaoh

Furthermore, Moses has gained the acceptance and approval of the elders of Israel

- With a spring in his step, Moses now gets ready to confront the king of Egypt

We saw in Exodus 5:1-9 how Pharaoh's totalitarian leadership had two negative effects on Israel

- Israel's worship was restricted (5:1-5)
- Israel's work was increased (5:6-9)

We remember from the first nine verses of Exodus 5 the reason why Pharaoh took away the straw from the Israelites

- Moses and Aaron had asked Pharaoh to allow Israel to go on a three days' journey in order to worship the LORD
- But Pharaoh would have nothing to do with that idea

Not only did Pharaoh refuse to allow Israel to go and worship Yahweh

- Pharaoh also increased the work load

Israel was given the awful task of making bricks

- This was a laborious job that was very demanding

Mud had to be extracted from the Nile River

- This mud had to be mixed with straw into to help keep the bricks from breaking and to give it some flexibility (to keep it from cracking)

But now Pharaoh takes out his anger on the Israelites

- They would have to find their own straw
- And they would still have to fulfill their daily quota of bricks

Pharaoh commands his Egyptian taskmasters to carry out his regime

- Don't give the people straw (5:7)
- Don't reduce the daily quota (5:8)
- Make the work harder so they don't pay attention to lies (5:9)

Pharaoh's merciless leadership had tremendous consequences for the nation Israel

- He refused (on numerous occasions) to allow his slaveforce to worship the LORD
- He refused to extend grace to Israel in forcing them to work harder

We want to continue that theme this morning

- This morning's message is a continuation of the conversation between Pharaoh and his taskmasters

## Let's read Exodus 5:10-23

In these verses, we see more and more of Pharaoh's style of leadership, displayed especially toward the Israelites

- Pharaoh demands more without reducing the burden of work (5:10-14)
- Pharaoh demands more without allowing the people to worship (5:15-21)

### I. Pharaoh demands more without reducing the burden of work (5:10-14)

10 So the taskmasters of the people and their foremen went out and spoke to the people, saying, "Thus says Pharaoh, 'I am not going to give you *any* straw.'

We remember that the "taskmasters" are Egyptians who are in positions of leadership and oversight over the Israelites

- There are Israelite overseers who are also in positions of limited authority
- But they answer to the Egyptian taskmasters

Now the people are told of the new policy of Pharaoh

- "Thus says Pharaoh, 'I am not going to give you *any* straw'"

This must be discouraging for the Israelites

- You are already working as hard as you can
- But not the task seems almost impossible!

Notice the contrast of authority between "thus says Pharaoh" and "thus says the LORD"

- "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Let My people go that they may celebrate a feast to Me in the wilderness.'" (5:1)
- "Thus says Pharaoh, 'I am not going to give you *any* straw'" (5:10)

We are already seeing a clash between two powers

- Pharaoh thinks that he is sovereign over Egypt
- But God is the One who is ultimately sovereign

11 'You go *and* get straw for yourselves wherever you can find it; but none of your labor will be reduced.'

The Egyptian taskmasters begin barking out commands to the Israelites<sup>1</sup>

- Go!
- Get straw!

There is a not a kind style of leadership

- They are simply commanding the people to do what Pharaoh said

The end result of this is that they come across as being angry

- Of course, carrying out the anger of Pharaoh

This style of leadership never really motivates anyone, though

- Angry tyrants who simply toss out commands don't gain respect

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<sup>1</sup> Cornelis Houtman, *Historical Commentary on the Old Testament, Exodus, Vol 1*, 473.

Under the tyranny of Pharaoh's commands, the Israelites had to go and get straw for themselves "wherever you can find it"

- It would not be easy to find this much straw
- Especially since their daily quota would not be diminished at all

Certainly, part of Pharaoh's plan was to demoralize the people

- To break them down

But another part of his plan was to keep them working

- The Egyptians used bricks for all kinds of buildings<sup>2</sup>
  - o Palaces
  - o Storehouses
  - o Military buildings
  - o Official residences

The work conditions that the Israelites faced were unbearable<sup>3</sup>

- Temperatures over 100 degrees
- No hats to protect their heads
- Their hands were battered, bruised, and torn
- No mandatory break periods were given
- Dehydration, heat strokes, and death were all too common

12 So the people scattered through all the land of Egypt to gather stubble for straw. 13 And the taskmasters pressed them, saying, "Complete your work quota, your daily amount, just as when you had straw."

Now we see the Israelites scattered all over the land of Egypt, trying to find straw

- Remember, they now have to find the straw in addition to making the number of bricks demanded by Pharaoh

Now they have Egyptian taskmasters breathing down their necks

- What was extremely difficult before is now almost unattainable

Notice that the Israelites struggled to find straw

- What they found was "stubble"

These were the leftovers that were left behind in the fields<sup>4</sup>

- It was the remnant left over after harvest<sup>5</sup>

It wasn't nearly as good as straw

- But it would have to suffice

Whatever straw or stubble the Israelites could find had to be grinded<sup>6</sup>

- The result of the grinding would be mixed in with the mud

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<sup>2</sup> Philip Graham Ryken, *Preaching the Word, Exodus*, 151.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>4</sup> C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament, Exodus*, 302.

<sup>5</sup> John D. Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus, Vol 1*, 127.

<sup>6</sup> Douglas K. Stuart, *NAC, Exodus*, 164.

14 Moreover, the foremen of the sons of Israel, whom Pharaoh's taskmasters had set over them, were beaten and were asked, "Why have you not completed your required amount either yesterday or today in making brick as previously?"

What happens when the quota isn't met?

- A slap on the wrist?
- A "do better next time"?

We read in verse 14 what happened

- The Israelite foremen "**were beaten**"

There was no mercy or compassion shown to the Israelites

- When the Israelite people didn't perform as they should, the Egyptians beat their leaders

Again, this is classic manipulation

- If you beat a person who represents you, then you may be motivated to work harder

After their beatings, the Israelite foremen were questioned, "**Why have you not completed your required amount either yesterday or today in making brick as previously?**"

- The answer is obvious to us, isn't it?

This is a whole new level of oppression that the Israelites were facing

- Something they had not faced previously

God had promised deliverance

- But when?
- How much longer would they have to face such abuse, suffering, and persecution?

The workload that Israel was asked to accomplish was staggering

- The emotional toll it was taking was overwhelming
- The physical toll it was taking was crushing

This is the type of leadership that Pharaoh demonstrated

- Not servant leadership
- But a severe, high-handed leadership

What a difference there is between Pharaoh's style of leadership and the style of leadership that Jesus exemplified

- Pharaoh said, "Do more work, but don't cut back on your quota."
- Jesus said, "**Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and YOU SHALL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. For My yoke is easy, and My load is light.**" (Mt 11:28-30)

Jesus has compassion on those who are burdened by the task at hand

- He extends mercy and rest

**The first element of Pharaoh's leadership that we see in this Text is that**

- **Pharaoh demands more without reducing the burden of work (5:10-14)**

## II. Pharaoh demands more without allowing the people to worship (5:15-21)

15 Then the foremen of the sons of Israel came and cried out to Pharaoh, saying, “Why do you deal this way with your servants?”

The Israelite foremen take matters into their own hands

- They can see that they aren't making any headway with the Egyptian taskmasters

So they go up the chain of command

- All the way to Pharaoh himself!

We can observe that the foremen did not go to Moses

- After all, he was supposed to be their representative!

Moses had failed as a leader<sup>7</sup>

- Again!

He had failed 40 years prior

- And now he has failed to deliver

Neither are we told if the Israelite foremen took their concerns to the LORD<sup>8</sup>

- We are not told if they prayed earnestly about their situation

Notice the intensity of their request, they “**cried out**” to Pharaoh

- It is a term of great emotion in a time of distress

Back in Genesis 27:34, Esau had been tricked out of his father's blessing – by his twin brother Jacob!

- When Esau discovered this, “**he cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, ‘Bless me, even me also, O my father!’**”

In Genesis 41, the famine was affecting Egypt in a very severe manner

- We are told in Genesis 41:55, “**So when all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried out to Pharaoh for bread**”

The same word is used here of the Israelite foremen crying out to Pharaoh

- Crying out for help
- Crying out for some relief
- Crying out for some understanding

They cry out to Pharaoh and say, “**Why do you deal this way with your servants?**”

- Notice how they identify themselves before Pharaoh, “**your servants**”

Three times, the Israelites identify themselves as “**your servants**”<sup>9</sup>

- They are a people under bondage

They are not trying to be unreasonable

- They understand their position before Pharaoh

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<sup>7</sup> Michael Bentley, *Travelling Homeward*, 86.

<sup>8</sup> John L. Mackay, *A Mentor Commentary, Exodus*, 111.

<sup>9</sup> Houtman, 478.

Nevertheless, the foremen want to let Pharaoh know just how unreasonable his demands are

- Perhaps they believe that they can persuade him to change<sup>10</sup>

We can only guess the situation that these Israelite foremen were in<sup>11</sup>

- They were caught between a rock and a hard place

On the one hand, they were given limited responsibility over the Israelite workforce

- They were supposed to keep the Israelites working and motivated

But on the other hand, they were Israelites

- They didn't like seeing their own people bow under the oppressive burden of work

16 “There is no straw given to your servants, yet they keep saying to us, ‘Make bricks!’ And behold, your servants are being beaten; but it is the fault of your *own* people.”

The Israelite foremen continue their discussion with Pharaoh

- They explain just how unreasonable it is to expect the same quota when straw isn't provided
- They explain just how irrational it is to be beaten for this

But then the Israelite foremen seem to go too far

- They say, “**but it is the fault of your *own* people**”

The Israelites accuse the Egyptians of being guilty for this punishment

- But in reality, this was a back-handed assault against Pharaoh

After all, it was Pharaoh's plan

- Not the Egyptian overseers
- They were just carrying out what he commanded

17 But he said, “You are lazy, *very* lazy; therefore you say, ‘Let us go *and* sacrifice to the LORD.’

Pharaoh wasn't about to tolerate the Israelite foremen accusing him of wrongdoing

- So he chimes in with a rebuke

Pharaoh tells the Israelite foremen, “**You are lazy, *very* lazy; therefore you say, ‘Let us go *and* sacrifice to the LORD.’**”

- The king of Egypt accuses the Israelites of being lazy
- Actually, “***very* lazy**”

The king of Egypt repeats his diagnosis for the sake of emphasis<sup>12</sup>

- We can imagine him shaking his head from side to side

Pharaoh interprets the words of Israel as an excuse for time off<sup>13</sup>

- He thinks the Israelites are just wanting to get away from hard work

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 458.

<sup>11</sup> John I. Durham, *Word Biblical Commentary, Exodus*, 68

<sup>12</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Exodus*, 338.

<sup>13</sup> Houtman, 458.

But is this legitimate?

- Were the Israelites being lazy?
- Were the Israelites trying to use worship as an excuse not to work?

Pharaoh thought so

- But that wasn't the case

The Israelites were laboring under the heavy hand of Pharaoh

- They were being loyal workers
- They weren't trying to complain

The hardness of Pharaoh's heart is once again put on display

- He refuses to allow Israel to worship
- He claims that the real reason Israel won't worship is because they are lazy

18 "So go now *and work*; for you shall be given no straw, yet you must deliver the quota of bricks."

But Pharaoh is finished listening to these Israelite foremen

- He tells them, "*So go now and work*"
- In other words, *get back to work!*
- *Get out of my presence!*

The king of Egypt reinforces his policy

- "*you shall be given no straw, yet you must deliver the quota of bricks*"

There is no change in his plan

- The plea of the Israelites had no effect on the Pharaoh's hard heart

19 And the foremen of the sons of Israel saw that they were in trouble because they were told, "You must not reduce *your* daily amount of bricks."

The foremen knew that they were not getting through to Pharaoh

- As a matter of fact, we are told that "*they were in trouble*"

Things seemed like they were getting worse, not better

- Deliverance seemed like a dream at this point

They had been oppressed

- Moses tells them that the LORD will rescue them

Moses and Aaron ask for some time off to worship Yahweh

- Then Pharaoh takes away the straw in the brick-making process

Not only had they not made any impact on Pharaoh

- They could have made things worse

The Israelite foremen were merely representatives of the people

- They were lobbying for the people

But it was of no effect

- Pharaoh wasn't about to change his policy for the sake of the Israelites

He had no concern for them

- To Pharaoh, Israel was just property
- They were not viewed with any type of rights

We have to remind ourselves that the Egyptians were allowed to take time off for religious purposes

- They were allowed to worship their gods

But the rules were different from Israel

- They were not allowed to take time off to worship the LORD
- That was considered off limits

Isn't this the case with discrimination?

- The rules are different for different kinds of people

### 20 When they left Pharaoh's presence, they met Moses and Aaron as they were waiting for them.

The Israelite oversees must have been experiencing a mixture of emotions as they left the presence of Pharaoh

- Anger
- Confusion
- Despair

Shortly after they leave the presence of Pharaoh, we are told that “**they met Moses and Aaron as they were waiting for them**”

- Moses and Aaron had not had success with Pharaoh

Perhaps they thought that the Israelite foremen would fare better

- But clearly they hadn't

### 21 And they said to them, “May the LORD look upon you and judge you, for you have made us odious in Pharaoh's sight and in the sight of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to kill us.”

The Israelite foremen let Moses and Aaron know their true feelings

- They turn against Moses and Aaron

The phrase “**may the LORD look upon you and judge you**” is used of the innocent person who suffers<sup>14</sup>

The foremen told Moses and Aaron that they had made them “**odious in Pharaoh's sight and in the sight of his servants**”

- Perhaps they were viewed with a little bit of respect before
- But now their reputation was like a stench to Pharaoh

In today's language, they might have said something like this, “**Now look what you've done! You come here poking your noses in and making things a lot worse for us. You've given us a bad name with Pharaoh and his officials. Now they are out to kill us – and it's all your fault.**”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> R. Alan Cole, *Tyndale OT Commentary, Exodus*, 83.



Furthermore, Moses and Aaron had “**put a sword in their hand to kill us**”

- This certainly isn't a good thing!

Pharaoh's plan was driving a wedge between the Israelites and their leaders

- The Israelite foremen were openly blaming Moses and Aaron!

This must have demoralized Moses

- He had done what God told him to do
- But it had only caused more problems for the Israelites

To Moses, obedience looked like failure

- But looks can be deceiving, right?

There are times in which we can be obedient, but the results are not what we would expect

- Don't be surprised at this!

The apostles boldly preached Christ

- But some were throw into prison
- Some were killed

**We have looked at two aspects of Pharaoh's ruthless leadership over the Israelites**

- **Pharaoh demands more without reducing the burden of work (5:10-14)**
- **Pharaoh demands more without allowing the people to worship (5:15-21)**

But notice the last two verses of the chapter

- Moses goes to God in prayer

Moses feels the weight and burden of the ongoing oppression of the Israelites

- He feels somewhat responsible for the recent turn of events

Moses came to be the deliverer

- But that hasn't happened yet

**22 Then Moses returned to the LORD and said, “O Lord, why hast Thou brought harm to this people? Why didst Thou ever send me?”**

Note that Moses is by himself when he prays

- Aaron is not mentioned

It seems like Moses just wants to get alone with God

- He pours out his heart to the LORD

He asks two rapid-fire questions

- Questions that show Moses' heart
- Questions that show Moses' true feelings

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<sup>15</sup> Bentley, 88.

The first question is, “O Lord, why hast Thou brought harm to this people?”

- This may be viewed as a complaint
- Or it may be viewed as a sign of compassion

Moses identifies with the oppression of his people

- He feels a connection with them

Moses has voluntarily given up his status as an Egyptian prince

- He has voluntarily chosen to identify himself as an Israelite

There are times in our lives when we ask God the same question

- Why God, did You allow this to harm this person?
- Lord, I don't understand why You allowed this to happen!

The second question Moses asks is, “Why didst Thou ever send me?”

- Again, it is hard to tell whether this is a complaint or not

Moses could very well be reverting back to his list of reasons why he wasn't qualified

- He certainly tried to get out of being God's choice

Coming on the heels of the first question, though, Moses could be asking, “God, if my coming here has only caused more pain and suffering, why did You send me?”

- In other words, “This doesn't make sense! You told me to come here and deliver Israel. But so far, my coming has only made things worse!”

Later on in Exodus, the people of Israel will complain as they see Pharaoh and his chariots descending upon them

- We are told that they “cried out to the LORD” (14:10)
- But then they turn against Moses, saying, “Is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you dealt with us in this way, bringing us out of Egypt? Is this not the word that we spoke to you in Egypt, saying, ‘Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians’? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.” (Ex 14:11-12)

At this point in Exodus 5, Moses is crying out to God for encouragement and clarification

- He has the wherewithal to go to God in prayer

23 “Ever since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Thy name, he has done harm to this people; and Thou hast not delivered Thy people at all.”

Verse 23 puts Moses' thoughts to words

- They are the words of a man who is totally confused about his mission
- Things just aren't working out the way that he had planned

Although Moses had been forewarned about Pharaoh's refusal to listen, he was still not ready for Pharaoh's bull-headed response

We can note that Moses

- Did not take his frustration out on the foremen
- Did not accuse God of bringing evil on Israel

God doesn't rebuke Moses<sup>16</sup>

- As we will see in chapter 6, God patiently explains matters to Moses

But God would have the last word

- In chapter 6, which we will examine next week, God will once again speak to Moses and reassure him of the Divine plan

Then in chapter 7, we will begin to look at the series of plagues that God will bring upon Egypt

- At the end of these plagues, Israel will leave Egypt

Unlike the Israelite foremen, Moses took the matters straight to God

- He went to God in prayer

How about you?

- Is this your habit?

Do you take matters straight to God in prayer?

- Or do you talk to others about your problems?
- Perhaps you like to get angry first, then go to God

Listen to the words of this familiar hymn

- Let it challenge you

What a Friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear!

What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer!

O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear,  
All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.

Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere?

We should never be discouraged; take it to the Lord in prayer.

Can we find a friend so faithful who will all our sorrows share?

Jesus knows our every weakness; take it to the Lord in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy laden, cumbered with a load of care?

Precious Savior, still our refuge, take it to the Lord in prayer.

Do your friends despise, forsake you? Take it to the Lord in prayer!

In His arms He'll take and shield you; you will find a solace there.

Blessed Savior, Thou hast promised Thou wilt all our burdens bear

May we ever, Lord, be bringing all to Thee in earnest prayer.

Soon in glory bright unclouded there will be no need for prayer

Rapture, praise and endless worship will be our sweet portion there.

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<sup>16</sup> Currid, 134.

What can we learn from this passage?

- Here are a few implications

### **1. God's plans oftentimes are not on schedule with our desires**

Once again, Moses thought that God's Word would be fulfilled quickly

- That God's promised deliverance would be swift

We remind ourselves that Moses wrote the Torah for the generation that wandered in the wilderness for 40 years<sup>17</sup>

- They, too, needed to be reminded that God's Word would not always come about as quickly as we would like

If we are honest, we struggle with impatience

- We are so used to having things now
- That we have a really hard time having to wait

### **2. When we are obedient to God, expect opposition**

In our minds, obedience should always bring about a blessing

- Open doors
- Tremendous opportunities

But that wasn't the case for Jesus

- And that won't be the case for us

Enjoy the blessings when they come

- But don't expect a path of no resistance

### **3. When things don't go our way, turn to God in prayer**

We have to train ourselves to go to God in prayer

- In Philippians 4:6, we are told, "**Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.**"

We know that verse, but we seldom practice it

- We like to be anxious; it gives us something to do
- We pray, but not about everything
- We pray, but aren't thankful about many things

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<sup>17</sup> Stuart, 168-69.