
The Deliverance Begins

Exodus 4:18-6:1

Introduction Often victory begins with great obstructions and difficulties...

God has hidden purposes in our travails and troubles. The disciples struggled with the meaning and the event of the cross. Jesus' death on the cross seemed to be such a terrible disappointment and insurmountable obstacle. Sometimes our struggle against sin meets with surprising and disheartening struggles. Biblical ministry with God-centered aims and wise strategies seems at first to fail.

Deliverance may come with setbacks and struggles. Moses has God's promise that He will deliver His people. God had given him mighty miracles to perform. God would be with him. In growing confidence and courage Moses moves toward launching the deliverance of God's people from slavery.

By the Arrival of Deliverer (4:18-31)

In a series of relationships and meetings, Moses prepares to return to Egypt. God's people have cried out for a deliverer. And now, the deliverer will arrive.

With His Father-in-Law Permission (v.18-20)

Honoring his father-in-law, Moses first requests permission to return. He has been a part of the family for almost 40 years. He has been serving the family as a shepherd. He will be taking his wife, sons and resources with him. He asks to return to visit his family and his people to see if they are still alive. Jethro gives him permission and sends him on his way in peace. Moses may lack the courage or wisdom to tell Jethro his intentions, but at least he is committed to going.

The Lord informs Moses that those who sought his life because of his killing of the Egyptian 40 years ago are now dead. It is safe to take his family and to return. His personal poverty is expressed in his loading his wife and children on a donkey and heading out. As he does so, he takes his staff in his hand. He is going as the prepared and called and obedient deliverer.

With the Lord's Affirmation (v.21-23)

With Moses poised to obey, the Lord affirms His instructions and promises. Moses is told that the Pharaoh will not respond because God will harden his heart. This is a very great surprise. Rather than God causing the Pharaoh to respond favorably, God is going to cause Pharaoh to deny their request and refuse to let the people go. Even in the face of the miracles Moses will perform, their initial confrontation will not be successful. The whole book of Exodus affirms the sovereign will and power of God. God can do anything He wants. For the sake of His purposes and His plan, He can harden hearts. He can harden Pharaoh's heart. The Bible does not really wrestle with this as being a problem. The true God of the universe, the I AM, is sovereign over the hearts of men.

Moses is to respond by declaring that Israel is God's first-born son. Verses 22-23 begin one of the most beautiful and oft-missed themes in the Bible. Israel becomes a type of the God's son, God's first-born son. Hosea 11:1 picks this up as God declares, "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son." [ESV]. Matthew recognizes the connection as highlighting that Jesus is the fulfillment of both of these texts. Jesus' going down into Egypt right after his birth and coming up out of Egypt is part of Matthew's proof that Jesus is both God's first-born son and thus, the new Israel. (See Matthew 2:13-15). This is confirmed when Jesus was baptized and God declares that Jesus is His beloved Son, in whom the Father is well pleased (Matthew 3:17).

When we are born from above by the Word and Spirit, we become the sons of God because we are in Christ (John 1:12-13; Ch 3). Jesus is the firstborn among many brothers (Romans 8:29) because we have all become sons of God through faith in Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:26). Because we are sons, God is our father. He has set us free. He has delivered us from our sins. He lovingly, tenderly and firmly teaches and trains us as sons until we arrive at home.

Moses is further instructed to warn the Pharaoh that if he refuses God's Word and will not let God's loved, first-born son, Israel go, then dire consequence will follow. God will kill the Pharaoh's first-born son. So Moses should know what is going to unfold. Many commentators see in this an intimation of the cross. The death of God's first-born son brings our own deliverance from the land of sin, slavery and misery.

With the Lord's Correction

(v.24-26)

What a startling and unexpected shift this sentence seems to be. They stop on the three day journey at an inn on the road. There, God seeks to kill Moses because he has not circumcised his own sons. Zipporah saves Moses' life by doing what Moses had not done. She takes a flint and circumcises his sons. In a ritual that is obscure to us today, she touches the bloody foreskin to Moses' feet. She then declares that Moses is a "bridegroom of blood". She has done what was required out of faith obedience to God.

Phillip Ryken says, "When Moses refused to go to Egypt, God patiently helped him on his way; but when he failed to circumcise his son, God threatened to take his very life. Peter Enns writes, 'Moses can argue, pout, whine, and hold his breath about going to Egypt and God will deal patiently with him—but circumcision is another matter.' Quite literally, it was a matter of life and death."² Why?

This is written, remember, by Moses for the sake of Israel. It is serving as a warning to them to be faithful to the covenant and to circumcise their sons as God has command. If the deliverer is at risk for this sort of disobedience, what about the ordinary Israelite? If Moses is going to lead the people of Israel and require them to be circumcised at Passover and in the wilderness, he must be obedient himself. When he was disobedient, God was angry with him. God was not

²Philip Graham Ryken and R. Kent Hughes, *Exodus : Saved for God's Glory, Includes Bibliographical References* (P. [1165]-1202) and *Indexes*. (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2005), 132.

going to let it go. Whether it was a disease or an actual wrestling with the Lord, we do not know. But hear this; what God did, accomplished what God intended.

Since many misuse this verse as an argument for the importance of baptizing children, let me make a brief comment. Circumcision in the Old Testament is an act in the physical world that represents a reality in the spiritual world. The circumcision of sons points to the circumcision of the heart (Colossians 2:11-12). Circumcision also identified the child as being one of God's people. So does baptism. It is the way someone publicly professes faith in Christ and how they identify themselves with God's people. As such, both circumcision and baptism *are physical representations of spiritual realities that have taken place, that are true of the person*. This means we should only baptize those who have the spiritual reality. In the New Covenant and thus as recorded in the New Testament, only those professing faith should be baptized. Their being baptized is a public display that they have experienced the circumcision of the heart and are now to be identified with the people of God.

With Aaron's Partnership

(v.27-28)

Now that all is well with Moses, God sends Aaron to meet him at the mountain. He leaves Egypt and journeys to Mt. Horeb. He joins Moses there. They greet in familial love and talk about what God has called Moses to do. Moses tells Aaron what God has promised. He tells him about the miracles that God has given him. He then instructs Aaron in what Aaron is to say on Moses' behalf. Then they turn and head up into Egypt.

With Israel's Submission

(v.29-31)

Moses and Aaron meet together with the elders, the leaders of Israel. We do not know who they were or really even how they were appointed. They were a group of men who were appointed over Israel and seem to be able to speak for the people and are expected to guide and govern the people. In an unexpectedly short time and apparently easy way, the elders of Israel and the people of Israel believe Moses' message. Aaron speaks God's words and Moses does God's signs. The people hear and see. They believe that God has now come to deliver His people. They bow and worship.

This is a good word for us. God had promised Moses that the people would believe. God is not only the hardener of hearts like Pharaoh, He is the changer of hearts like Israel. When the good news of God's deliverance comes, let us respond with faith, submission and worship.

In the Confrontation by the Deliverer**(5:1-6:1)**

Not all deliverances begin with what appears to be success. Now that God's people have believed that the deliverance is near, it is time to confront the Pharaoh.

Of the King of Egypt**(v.1-9)**

Moses and Aaron appear before the Pharaoh to declare the instructions from God. They come with courage and confidence. They have received the promises of God. They have seen the power of God. They come with the presence of God. They approach as the prophets from God. They are not speaking on their own behalf. This is what the Lord, the God of Israel says. Pharaoh, let the people of Israel go so that they may celebrate a feast to the Lord.

One commentator says, "Such a request was not without precedent. An ancient manuscript at the Louvre, dating to the time of Rameses II, indicates that Egyptian slaves were sometimes given time off to worship their gods. There is also a limestone tablet from the same period listing the names of slaves, together with reasons for their absence from work, including the phrase, 'has sacrificed to the god.' What this proves is that the Pharaohs sometimes honored the kind of request that Moses and Aaron were making. Asking for three days of religious freedom was a reasonable demand that God used to expose the unbelief in Pharaoh's heart."³

The Pharaoh responds however, by insulting the God of Israel. "Who is the I AM?" Pharaoh is not inquiring about a new god he is not familiar with. The son of Ra, the first-born of gods, the jackal of the night, the one who causes the sun and moon to rise, why should he consider much less do what this I AM says? From his haughty throne he leans over and insults the great and glorious Name of the creator and sustainer of the universe, including this arrogant Egyptian. He will not let them go.

So, Moses and Aaron speak with a more conciliatory tone. They have met with God. God wants them to go the three days journey into the wilderness (to Mt. Horeb). If they do not obey, God may send some pestilence on them all. This request is a test of Pharaoh. Will he submit to the authority of God? But, Pharaoh is distinctly unhappy with this. He sees this great people who have been doing slave work simply packing up and leaving. Do they really think he believes they will just march right back into slavery? They are just looking for an excuse to get away from their work.

The Pharaoh retaliates by increasing the burdens of the people of God. He orders his taskmasters to stop delivering the straw for the bricks the people have been making and using in their work. Now, they have to collect the straw and make the bricks. Their quota of bricks is not to be changed. They are to be loaded down with more labors. They think they have time to go into the wilderness and worship some god of theirs.

³Philip Graham Ryken and R. Kent Hughes, *Exodus : Saved for God's Glory, Includes Bibliographical References* (P. [1165]-1202) and *Indexes*. (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2005), 140.

Of the Taskmasters of Pharaoh

(v.10-14)

Most pyramids built during the Middle Kingdom of Egypt were little more than mountains of mud brick encased in a veneer of polished limestone. Some were built on top of natural hills to further reduce the volume of material needed in their construction. The materials and methods of construction used in the earliest pyramids have ensured their survival in a generally much better state of preservation than is the case with the pyramid monuments of later pharaohs. (See Wikipedia on-line)

So, the taskmasters go out and relay the commands to the unfortunate Israelites. In order to comply, they have to scatter throughout the land. They have to find and gather the straw. They have to bring it to the brickyards and kilns, instead of having it brought to them. The taskmasters were unrelenting in their demands. They have had appointed foremen to oversee the people. When they failed to meet their quotas, the foremen were beaten.

Of the Leaders of Israel

(v.15-21)

The foremen go to the Pharaoh to try to find out why this unreasonable change has come about. Are not their burdens enough and their labor hard? Why bring about all this new misery? What have they done? The Pharaoh tells them what has happened. They want to go out on a holiday jaunt to worship the I AM? They have that kind of free, idle time? Then let's fill it with work. He is hard and cruel and unmerciful.

So, Moses and Aaron have brought this on their heads. They hurry out of Pharaoh's presence to find Moses and Aaron, standing outside the doors, waiting on them. They accost Moses and Aaron. What those two have done has made their situation worse. God may be ready to deliver us, but those two have messed it up. They have not gotten their release. They have made their lot worse.

Of the Lord of Heaven

(v.22-6:1)

Would it not be good to see Moses and Aaron turning humbly to the Lord and seeking wisdom from Him? But no, the misery is spread from the Pharaoh, to the taskmasters to the people. Now, the whining of the leaders spreads to Moses and Aaron.

What a stunning sentence this is. "O Lord, why have you done evil to this people? Why did you ever send me? You have not delivered Your people at all." The man who would become faithful in all God's house as a servant is struggling with what God is doing. Just like most of us, Moses is failing in four significant ways that cause Him to complain.

He misuses the sovereignty of God to blame God for their plight. It is God's fault. God has done this evil because God is in control of Pharaoh. No, God has planned and purpose this misery and Pharaoh is doing the evil.

He questions God's wisdom in sending him to this task. If God is not going to bless the work with success, why was he sent and why should he do it? Don't we talk like that all the time? Something we do in ministry or for the Lord appears to fail. We throw up our hands and wonder why bother.

He challenges the methods God is employing to accomplish His will. God's method is to confront Pharaoh with the His word through His prophet. In essence, God will deliver His people through preaching and through His power. But it isn't working. It has just made it worse.

He accuses God of failing to do what He said. Again, I don't know how you start your tirade with, "O Lord." But it certainly ends on a sharp note. God is not delivering His people.

But God corrects Moses with love and firmness. This is all in God's plan as well. This last cruel decree by Pharaoh is the final provocation of God. He will now move to destroy the pride and power of Pharaoh. He will do so to such a degree that Pharaoh will not just allow them to go, but will drive them out of his land. How good God is to listen to our complaints, to address them with patient firmness and not to destroy us on the spot!

The deliverer has arrived. The deliverance is begun. But it appears to have stalled. Pharaoh is unbending. The misery of the people is unending. The leaders of the people are complaining. Moses sounds ready to quit. Now, God will move to deliver His people exactly as He promised.

All of you who are believers, God has called you and is preparing you to serve in His church. You may be serving in some small way. You may have a prominent place. But God is at work to cause you to become faithful. You may start with stumblings and troubles. But He, by His grace, will bring you to the place of being commended by the words, "Well, done, good and faithful servant." **Conclusion**

Full and complete obedience by faith is required of us. There must be personal and private obedience. There must be public obedience to what you are called to do. Do not shirk your responsibilities. Move forward like Moses towards the ministry God has for you. Get your home in order. Deal with your sins. Order your relationships. Do your work of ministry.

Find courage and confidence in the promises, power and presence of God. Some times our ministries will be full of good and success. Sometimes they will seem to struggle and even be opposed. Do not complain. Do not go easily from worshipping to whining. Press on.

Here is what your complaining is doing. It misuses truths to blame God. It questions God's wisdom. It challenges God's methods. It accuses God of not keeping His promises. This is why the Bible tells us to do all things without murmuring and complaining. All complaining is before the face of God and in the face of God.

(Continued)

Charles Spurgeon, the great Baptist preacher of years gone by, said this when preaching on the life of Moses:

I am persuaded that Moses, after he had got over his first little difficulties ... was strong in faith. There he stood with the wondrous rod, turning waters into blood and slaying all their fish, covering the heavens with blackness, turning the dust into living creatures, bringing hail and ... doing it all as calmly and quietly as he should do who feels that he is the voice of God. How steadily he kept at his work! With what diligence he persevered in it, till at last the tenth plague found Moses unmoved, ready to conduct the people away to the Red Sea and to bring them out into the wilderness. O servants of God, be calm and confident. Go on preaching the gospel. Go on teaching in the Sunday-school. Go on giving away the tracts. Go on with steady perseverance. Be ye sure of this, ye shall not labor in vain or spend your strength for nought. Do you still stutter? Are you still slow of speech? Nevertheless, go on. Have you been rebuked and rebuffed? Have you had little else than defeat? This is the way of success.... Toil on and believe on. Be steadfast in your confidence, for with a high hand and an outstretched arm the Lord will fetch out his own elect, and he will fetch some of them out by you. Only trust in the Lord and hold on the even tenor of your way.⁴

Our deliverer has already come. Our deliverance has been accomplished. We are freed from our sin. One greater than Moses, the Lord Jesus Christ, the beloved son of God, has borne our sins, has poured out His life, has cut away the uncircumcision of our hearts and has given us His own life by the Spirit. For this and in this, be glad.

⁴ Cited by Philip Ryken from the *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, Pilgrim Press, 1972.

