

Exodus Chapter 5

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[0 : 00] Afterwards, 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 desert.

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 desert to offer sacrifices to the Lord our God, or he may strike us with plagues or with the sword. 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're stopping them from working. That same day, Pharaoh gave this order to the slave drivers and foremen 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.

[1 : 09] They are lazy. That's why they are crying out, Let us go and make sacrifice to our God. Make the work harder for the men, so they may keep working and pay no attention to lies.

Then the slave drivers and the foremen went out and said to the people, This is what Pharaoh says, I will not give you any more straw. Go and get your own straw wherever you can find it, but your work will not be reduced at all.

So the people scattered all over Egypt to gather stubble to use for straw. The slave drivers kept pressing them, saying, Complete the work required of you for each day, just as when you had straw.

The Israelite foremen appointed by Pharaoh's slave drivers were beaten and were asked, Why didn't you meet your quota of bricks yesterday or today as before?

Then the Israelite foremen went and appealed to Pharaoh, Why have you treated your servants this way? Your servants have given no straw, yet we're told make bricks. Your servants are being beaten, but the fault is with your own people.

[2 : 10] Pharaoh said, Lazy. That's what you are, lazy. That's why you keep saying, Let us go and sacrifice to the Lord. Now get to work. You'll not be given any straw.

Yet you must produce your full quota of bricks. The Israelite foremen realized they were in trouble when they were told, You're not to reduce the number of bricks required of you for each day.

When they left Pharaoh, they found Moses and Aaron waiting to meet them. And they said, May the Lord look upon you and judge you. You've made us a stench to Pharaoh and his officials, and have put a sword in their hand to kill us.

Moses returned to the Lord and said, O Lord, why have you brought trouble upon this people? Is this why you sent me? Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he's brought trouble upon this people, and you've not rescued your people at all.

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.

[3 : 18] Well, if the children in Sunday school would like to go out now today. If you have your Bibles open to Exodus and chapter 5, that will be a help.

And as we read earlier on, chapter 5 and into chapter 6, verse 1. At this time of year, several events around the country, tens of thousands of people are enduring one of the most terrifying experiences of their lives.

And in a couple of months, we'll be able to watch the full horror of it all on telly. Because I'm talking about Britain's Got Talent auditions. Young and old, talented and untalented, will face the scrutiny of four celebrity judges who will decide their fate.

If those judges don't like them, they will get a big X, and they will be removed from the stage. Their judgment is final. Moses is under judgment.

In fact, we have there at the end of chapter 5, verse 21, where the foreman say, May the Lord look upon you and judge you. But Moses has four judges to face.

[4 : 39] The worst of all, the most terrifying of all, makes Simon Cowell look like a pussycat. And that's Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. And all of Moses' life thus far has been preparing for this day.

Forty years, he was brought up in the palace of the king. Forty years, he lived in the desert as a shepherd. And for several days and weeks, he has been meeting with and encountering the living God.

And now, in chapter 5, the day has come. The day that God has been preparing him for. The day that all of his life has been coming up to. This confrontation with Pharaoh.

And so, Moses, along with Aaron, his right-hand man to support him and speak for him, confronts Pharaoh with the message that God has given him.

Let my people go. The meeting is quite short, but very telling. The results of Moses' big test come out.

[5 : 44] How did he fare? What did the judges have to say? How did he do? Like Britain's Got Talent, there are four judges that give their results, as it were.

The evaluation of how Moses does. And each one of them gives him a D. And for three of those judges, that D is a failure.

But for one of them, it is not. Being judged by how we live. The world in which we live is always passing judgment upon itself, upon one another.

We're judged by our success. Judged by our education achievements. Judged by the job we do. The amount we earn.

The size of our house. The expense of our car. The clothes that we wear. Judgment is all around about us. But always, that judgment, more often, is to do with the outwards. Those are the things that really matter, we're told.

[6 : 54] But is that really true? Is somebody's life to be judged by outward appearance, or outward success, or merely external values?

Perhaps when we look at our own lives, we pass judgment too. When we face challenges and tests, which all of us do from time to time, do we look and see failure?

Or success? Do we feel that we are being judged by our Christian life, by those around about us?

Do we feel that they look upon us? They see something worthwhile, a successful Christian, a failing disappointment.

So I want to look just for a few moments this morning at the judge's judgment of Moses, and see what we can apply to our own lives. What do we learn here?

Well, as I said, the worst and the first judge that Moses and Aaron have to face, and who gives them his judgment, is Pharaoh, and he gives Moses a D for disbelief.

[8 : 05] Who is the Lord, he says, verse 2, that I should obey him? I don't know the Lord, and will not let Israel go. His reaction to Moses' message is one of disbelief.

He's unimpressed by Moses. He's unbelieving in the God of Moses, and the one who brings the message. He won't obey this God.

He has no time for him. In fact, later on, we see that he considers the very message of God to be but a pack of lies. Verse 9, make them work harder, so they keep working, and pay no attention to lies.

This Moses, this servant of God, this message of God, God himself, he just does not believe. So has Moses failed?

Has he failed in delivering the message that God has given him? No, he hasn't. Yes, Pharaoh may be disbelieving, and he may give him a D as a failure, but Moses has been faithful.

[9 : 14] He hasn't failed. He's spoken the message that God gave him, that message given to him in chapter 3, verse 18. God said to him, go to the king of Egypt and say, the Lord, the God of the Hebrews has met with us, let us take a three-day journey into the desert to offer sacrifice to the Lord our God.

Exactly what Moses said. He didn't miss anything else. He didn't make a great panchime of it, a mistake of it. He didn't waffle on. He did what the Lord instructed.

He did. We often speak to people about the Lord Jesus, don't we? And their response is very much like Pharaoh's disbelief.

And we can feel like we failed as Christians. Perhaps it may well be that when you were a younger Christian or younger in the faith, you often spoke about Jesus. You often witnessed to your family, to your friends, those you met, but again and again you were met with disbelief.

Who is this Jesus? Who is this God? I've got no time for him. I don't believe what you're saying. It's not true and so on. Perhaps you've stopped witnessing. Perhaps you've stopped speaking about your Christian faith and standing up for what God has said in his word because you just can't really cope with discouragement and failure.

[10:34] People have given you a D. But let me say this to you, dear friends, that you haven't failed. See, when the Lord Jesus Christ came into this world, the greatest witness and testimony to God, the greatest proclaimer of the gospel, the most faithful son of God, his preaching, his life, his witness was met more often than not with disbelief.

Even his own family, and it's our family we find hardest to share the gospel with, isn't it? Here in John chapter 7 we're told, even his own brothers did not believe in him.

So was Jesus a failure? No, of course he wasn't. And neither was Moses, and neither are you and I. It wasn't within Moses' power to change Pharaoh's heart and give him faith.

It's not within your power or mine to change people's hearts and to give them faith. It's not up to us. It's not all down to us. Only God can melt the heart.

Only God can give faith. Only God can make people see who are blind. What we need to ask ourselves is this, am I faithful?

[11:50] As much as I can be in passing on the message of the gospel to those I meet with. Am I faithful in living out the Christian life in such a way that when I speak of Jesus people can see the reality in me?

Am I faithful in pointing people to Christ? Whatever people may say of me, whatever judgment they may pass against me, if I'm faithful to Jesus, then I do not and cannot fail.

So Pharaoh gives a D for disbelief like many do to us but he hasn't failed even if Pharaoh thinks he has and neither of you and I. The second people, the second judges really, because there's more than one that pass judgment over Moses are the foremen of the laborers.

And verse 20 they say, when they left Pharaoh they found Moses and Aaron waiting to meet them. They said, may the Lord look upon you and judge you. You've made us a stench to Pharaoh and his officials and have put a sword in their hand to kill us.

They give Moses a D for the distress that they've experienced at the hands of Moses. And you can understand why they're upset, can't you?

[13:08] These are Hebrew foremen. You can understand why they should take it out on Moses. In one sense, they've been put in an impossible situation. They've had to guarantee that the slaves who are under them will meet their daily quota of bricks but they're not provided with any straw.

You see, in Far East and, sorry, in the Middle East and we're in Egypt and in those days and even today, bricks were made with clay mixed with straw. The straw bound the clay together so when it dried out in the sun it was solid and hard.

It was reinforced in one sense. If it was just clay, it could easily be snapped. It could easily break. So not only do they have to work hard in building the bricks, they've now got to go out and find straw.

Who knows where from to meet the demand. And what happens is, of course, that when they do that they don't meet the demand. They can't keep up the quota. So these poor foremen get beaten. Verse 14, the Israelite foremen appointed by Pharaoh's slave drivers were beaten. Asked, why didn't you meet your quota? So what do they do?

[14:26] They go to Pharaoh. It's not fair, in one sense, is what they're saying. Not fair. How can we be expected to build these bricks without straw? What does Pharaoh say?

He's not what you call sympathetic, is he? He's not one of those nice bosses that you go to and say, look, I've got a bit of a problem and he says, I understand. Lazy! That's what you are, you're lazy, he says.

That's why you won't work hard and that's why you want to go off to the desert and worship your God. No sympathy there. In fact, he lays all the blame upon Moses.

Moses' message was meant to bring them rescue, bring them deliverance from slavery. It was meant to set them free from the Egyptian tyranny, but here, the first result of Moses bringing God's word is they're distressed and suffering and things are harder and things have got worse instead of better.

So has Moses failed? In their eyes, he's failed. He's got a D for the distress he's called, but has he failed them? What's the real reason for their suffering? What's the real reason for their distress?

[15 : 32] Isn't it the sinfulness of Pharaoh? His wicked and cruel oppression of them was unjustified. He didn't need to respond in this way and take it out on them.

All that we see, of course, is the true colors of Pharaoh being revealed. This is what he's really like. He's a very, very unpleasant sort of guy. He's a nasty piece of work.

He has no sympathy. He has no care, no concern for those under his rule. The fault is him, not Moses.

We look at the world around about us, don't we, and we see suffering. We see distress. It's everywhere. It's increasing, maybe. And we look around and say, what have we done as a church for the world?

How has being a Christian in this world really had an effect? Surely, if we were more effective as a church, and I mean that not just locally, but nationally and universally, if we were much more useful as a church, if we were better Christians, surely this world would be better than it is.

[16 : 43] It's not getting any better. It seems to be getting worse. Surely, it's the church's fault. It's Christians' fault. It's my fault that I'm not more godly, successful, useful, faithful.

Maybe even in our own family situations, our own circumstances in which we live, and we've sought to witness and live for Christ, but it seems that those that we share the gospel with are harder than they were before, and their lives are still full of sorrow and struggle and difficulty, and we don't seem to be able to help them.

We feel powerless. We see the problems around about us. Those who work with the street angels see the drunkenness and the debauchery and the immorality week after week, and it doesn't seem to do any good.

Nothing seems to change. Dear friends, does that mean that we've failed as Christians? That the church has failed? Dear friends, we're living in a sinful world, a fallen and corrupted and polluted world, a world which is populated by fallen and corrupted and sinful people, and the cause of their distress and the cause of the distress of many is down to the sinfulness of men and women.

Now the world often likes to ask the question, where is God in Afghanistan? Where is God in Syria? Where is God in Egypt? Where is God? But what they don't answer is, why is this happening?

[18 : 17] The question they don't ask themselves is, who's behind all of this? The sinfulness of wicked and evil men bent on the destruction and the oppression of others.

You see, when our Lord Jesus Christ came into the world, he came as the saviour of the world, didn't he? When he came into this world, he came as God walking amongst the people of this world. He's not a God who stands aloof, he's not a God who stands outside of suffering, he's a God who has got himself in the very midst of suffering and got his hands dirty. It was Jesus who met with the leper and Jesus who met with the outcast and Jesus who met with the prostitute and Jesus who, yes, changed individual lives, but the world's still a mess.

The world's still full of suffering. The world's still full of sin. Has Jesus failed in his mission? Has Jesus failed in his work?

Of course not. In his life, in his death, in his resurrection, Jesus has done something for the world that nothing else could ever do. He has provided for us salvation, he has provided us not only immediate change in our lives now, but he has promised that this world and its suffering and all that it is, is not forever, but he has secured for his people everlasting deliverance, relief, and peace.

[19 : 50] John in chapter 21 of Revelation, hearing what God has to say, God will wipe every tear from their eyes, there will be no more death, or mourning, or crying, or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.

Who accomplished that? But the Lord Jesus Christ. Yes, in the immediate, if we can put it that way, suffering and distress continue. In the immediate, things may even seem to get worse.

But the eternal, the everlasting, the full, the book's not finished yet, is it? The conclusion and the epilogue's not been written yet about the history of this world, and it won't be until Christ comes again.

In this world, dear friends, there will always be suffering and trouble. So we've seen Pharaoh's judgment, and we've seen the judgment of the foreman, and then we come to the judgment, in one sense, of Moses himself.

He judges himself, I can put it that way, verses 22 and 23, for his own work and his own actions, and it seems to me that Moses gives himself a D for his doubts.

[21 : 14] Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he's brought trouble upon this people. He judges his own success by the results, which pretty much are that he's failed, isn't it?

Or he considered that it's all been a failure as far as Pharaoh is concerned, and the people are concerned, and now poor old Moses as well. He's overcome with doubts.

Why, oh Lord, have you brought trouble upon this people? God had told him earlier, if you remember, in chapter 3, chapter 4 rather, that Pharaoh wouldn't listen to him immediately, that Pharaoh would harden his heart against the message.

But as Moses goes that first meeting, as he performs those miracles before the elders, I'm sure there must have been a sense of expectancy. Well, perhaps it won't immediately be in the deliverance of God's people, but surely it's going to get better.

Surely there's going to be some step forward instead of this huge step backwards where things are much worse. There's Moses.

[22 : 23] Why, oh Lord? Isn't it encouraging to know that the great men and women of God were weak and fragile like us and said, why, oh Lord?

Here's Moses, greatest leader of God's people, to the Lord Jesus, of course. And here he is, doubting, crying, distressed.

Things are just getting worse instead of getting better. do you understand? Do you sympathize? Have you felt that way yourself? I'm sure you have.

Because in the Christian life, as we seek to live for Christ, as we seek to pray, as we seek to obey his word, as we seek to be faithful witnesses to him again and again and again, it seems to us that we fail.

Yes, by God's grace, we see some situations where things get better and we see some things happening, but often, more often than not, it's not the case. Things don't change straight away.

[23 : 36] Jesus has said, go and preach the good news. Go and make disciples. So we go, what happens? We're rejected and rebuffed and people don't turn to Christ and they harden their hearts against him. We face challenges in our lives, circumstances, problems, difficulties, and there we hope that we'll have faith and we hope to see things altered and changed and they don't and we cry out, why?

We feel like we failed. What a useless Christian I am. I can honestly say to your dear friends, I've felt that way many, many times and I'm sure you have too.

So the question is really, why? Moses asks the question why and it's not wrong to ask the question why of God. It's not wrong.

God doesn't rebuke Moses here. He doesn't say who are you to say why to me. It seems that we have an answer really to the whys.

God not intercede immediately. Why don't things change straight away? Why does God even allow greater troubles to his people?

[25 : 05] Well the first thing I think here, and we have the answer from the Lord in this situation and it applies to us too, but it's this. First of all the people need to realize that God is their saviour, not Moses.

If Moses had gone and straight away Pharaoh said yes, set them go, Moses would have been carried shoulder high wouldn't he? Oh Moses you're great, you've done this for us, you're a super guy.

Moses would have been hailed as the hero, but God's purpose was that his people should know that it's him who's done it, not they themselves or a man. The second thing is the people needed to really want to leave Egypt.

Remember they'd been born there, their fathers, grandfathers, great grandfathers were born there, it was their home in one sense, it was a horrible place to live, it was a ghetto with slavery, it was their home.

If Pharaoh had responded to the message in a positive way and perhaps slackened off and said oh yeah let them go, they probably would have returned again after three days or that if he'd reduced

their workload they probably wanted to stay, it's not so bad here.

[26 : 16] If we skip forward to later in Exodus when they do actually leave and they get into the desert they keep moaning about wanting to go back to Egypt. Oh we want the cucumber and the garlic of Egypt.

So God had to make even the desert more desirable than staying in Egypt. He had to put in their hearts the desire to leave. And then of course Pharaoh had to get to the point of driving them away didn't he.

The moment he liked having the Israelites there they did all his dirty work for him and he didn't have to pay them anything. But God had to make the Israelites so obnoxious in their nostrils as it were Pharaoh that he'd drive them and get rid of them.

See God has a purpose in what he's doing. He never makes a mistake. He never gets it wrong. He knows the way to deal with us and to work in this world. And the difficulties and the challenges and the setbacks that we often have experience are God's pruning instruments.

They are disciplining us. They are changing us. They are helping us to grow, to be more fruitful, to be more faithful, to lean upon him and not upon ourselves. Sometimes for some people when we share the gospel with them and things get worse, it has to get worse before they will realize they need a savior.

[27 : 46] Sometimes for us, dear friends, we do put our trust in our own abilities or in the abilities of the minister or the elders or the children's worker or the Sunday school teacher. We look to people to be the answer to the problems of this world and they are not the answer.

Christ is and God has to reduce us to that place where we are so reliant upon him, that we no longer rely upon ourselves. There's one more judge here, isn't there?

Pharaoh's judged with a D and the task masters, the foreman have judged with a D and Moses himself has judged himself with a D. They've all said, you failed. But of course there is just one judge left, it's the Lord God.

He is the, in the final analysis, it's his judgment that really matters. Whatever men may say of us, whatever we think of ourselves, in the end it's what God thinks of us, how God judges us that matters.

And let me assure you this, we're going to be judged by God. The Lord gives Moses a D, but this time it's not a D which is a failure, but a D for the deliverance that he will accomplish.

[28 : 58] Moses hasn't failed. He promises Moses that this event, difficult though it is for Moses and for the people, far from hindering God's plan, is part of his plan so that he may bring out the people from Egypt and accomplish his purposes and fulfill his promises.

It's now God's turn to act. Look what he says. Twice he says, see what I will do because of my mighty hand, because of my mighty hand he will drive them out.

See what I'm going to do. Pharaoh's spoken, the foreman has spoken, Moses has spoken, now God's spoken. Pharaoh's acted in cruelty and in greater substitutes and oppression.

God's going to act and with his mighty hand he's going to bring the people out. Moses hasn't failed as he stood before these judges and delivered the message of God.

He hasn't failed because the success of his ministry did not depend upon himself in the first place but upon the Lord. If we look for tangible results that our Christian lives and service are successful then we shall find ourselves again and again being discouraged, disappointed and feelings if we failed.

[30 : 21] We are not to look and judge our circumstances as the world judges but we are to look with a heavenly point of view as God judges.

we are not to despair as Moses did or think of ourselves as a failure. God alone will judge your service and your life as he will judge mine not by earthly standards but by heavenly ones.

And our concern is not how others judge us or view us or even how we view ourselves but what do you think Lord? One day we will stand before the judgment seat of God whether we are Christians or not and God will judge us according to how we have lived and how we have walked how we have talked how we have served.

Dear Christian dear brother and sister in Christ we are looking forward to the day when God himself will speak to us and say to us well done good and faithful servant.

Enter into the joy of your Lord. That's for every believer. Whether we've got one talent, five talent or ten talents. Remember the parable that Jesus spoke.

[31 : 37] If we are faithful in the little things we may feel that the things of our lives are little and important but they are important to God. If we are faithful there. We're faithful seeking to live for him.

Faithful in seeking to pray and look to him. Faithful in seeking to be obedient to him. Even when we get it wrong from time to time if in our hearts of hearts we seek to serve the Lord he will say to us well done good and faithful servants enter into the joy of your Lord.

That's what we've got to look forward to. That's our hope. But what about those of you dear friends who have never sought to serve the Lord? What about those of you dear friends who have lived according to your own judgment?

God's judgment of the world who like Pharaoh said I don't know the Lord and I'm not going to obey him. Let me say to you with the deepest sense of seriousness the day of judgment God will say to you I never knew you cast away into darkness and everlasting sorrow.

God will judge you and this world but he has provided forgiveness today, pardon today, life today if we will but seek his face.

[33 : 11] Dear friends let us be faithful knowing that we have one who works in us and through us to accomplish all that is in his heart to do and look forward to that day when our labors rest and finish and we are brought into the everlasting joy of our God.

Let's sing together a hymn of praise to our Lord Jesus Christ. May God himself, the God of peace sanctify you through and through.

May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen. Amen.