

Exodus 5-6
Bricks without straw

Preamble:

Mention Exodus Journals...

Prayer for illumination:

Sermon introduction:

Charles Simeon was appointed pastor of Trinity church in Cambridge England on Nov. 10th, 1782. This is when his troubles began.

Right away, the congregation refused to give him the primary preaching slots. This lasted for twelve years. Simeon tried to start another service where he could preach, and many townspeople came. But the churchwardens locked the doors as the people stood waiting in the street.

Next, they locked the pew doors on Sunday mornings. The pewholders refused to come and refused to let others sit in their personal pews. Simeon set up seats in the aisles at his own expense. But the churchwardens threw the extra chairs into the churchyard.

When he tried to visit his members from house to house, few doors opened to him.

Not only was he rejected by the church, but he was also rejected by the local community. For well over a decade, he was savagely slandered by the local Cambridge faculty.

Things even got violent—on a few occasions, people threw rocks through the windows of the church as he preached. Others planned to physically assault him after church, fortunately, he found out, and chose a different exit. (Piper, 27 servants of Sovereign Joy, 252).

How did Simeon respond to this suffering?

He was probably tempted to think, “Lord, why is my life so hard—I’m slandered, hated, and very lonely. I’m doing your will, I’m obeying your commands, I’m sacrificing, aren’t I pleasing you? If so, why is my life so hard? I thought you took care of your children, especially when they obeyed you.”

Have you ever felt this way? When we obey God, sometimes our life gets worse, not better. Our trials cause us to wonder if God cares, if God knows, if God even exists.

This brings us to Exodus 5-6.

Let me remind us of the context. God appeared to Moses in the desert and told him that he would redeem Israel. A short while later, Moses and Aaron walk into Pharaoh’s court and demand Israel’s freedom. Things don’t go well. Moses life gets really hard.

What should Moses do? What should we do?

We must remember the main point of this story. Here it is-

When obedience leads to suffering, we must trust God.

This story has three acts...

Obeying
Suffering
Trusting

Act one- Obeying!

Moses obeys God by boldly confronting Pharaoh!

Exodus 5:1–5 (ESV) — 1 Afterward Moses and Aaron went and said to Pharaoh, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness.’” **2** But Pharaoh said, “Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and moreover, I will not let Israel go.”

Pharaoh viewed himself as a god. And the Egyptians claimed that Pharaoh could perform feats of amazing strength like shooting arrows that pierced through 2-3 inches of copper plate. (RHSB)

Considering this, Pharaoh arrogantly asks, “Who is the LORD...?”

This whole story is set up to answer this question. God is about to reveal his identity and character to Israel, Egypt, and all the world in a very memorable and violent fashion.

3 Then they said, “The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Please let us go a three days’ journey into the wilderness that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God, lest he fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword.” **4** But the king of Egypt said to them, “Moses and Aaron, why do you take the people away from their work? Get back to your burdens.” **5** And Pharaoh said, “Behold, the people of the land are now many, and you make them rest from their burdens!”

In obedience to God’s command, Moses boldly confronts Pharaoh, but this is when his problems really started, which brings us to the second act.

Act one- Obeying.

Act two- Suffering.

Moses’ obedience leads to lots of suffering. Who suffered specifically?

Israel suffered from his obedience.

Exodus 5:6ff (ESV) — 6 The same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people and their foremen, **7** “You shall no longer give the people straw to make bricks, as in the past; let them go and **gather straw for themselves.** **8** But the number of bricks that they made in the past you shall impose on them, you shall by no means reduce it, for they are idle. Therefore they cry, ‘Let us go and offer sacrifice to our God.’ **9** Let **heavier work be laid on** the men that they may labor at it and pay no regard to lying words.”

12 So the people were scattered throughout all the land of Egypt to gather stubble for straw. 13 The taskmasters were urgent, saying, “Complete your work, your daily task each day, as when there was straw.”

14 And the foremen of the people of Israel, whom Pharaoh’s taskmasters had set over them, were **beaten** and were asked, “Why have you not done all your task of making bricks today and yesterday, as in the past?”

16 No straw is given to your servants, yet they say to us, ‘Make bricks!’ And behold, **your servants are beaten**; but the fault is in your own people.”

The Israelites slaves were in huge trouble. Life was already hard enough being a slave.

They had to work under scorching heat, with temperatures over a hundred degrees. They worked long hours. They had no sunscreen, no hats, no sunglasses, and few water breaks. They were stuck in the muck all day. They were constantly berated and whipped. Surely many died of exhaustion, dehydration, or heat stroke.

Now, thanks to that jerk Moses, to make matters worse, they had to make bricks without straw.

The bricks of the time were much larger than modern bricks; they were molded of Nile mud with straw to increase their strength. (RSB)

In other words, they had to work twice as hard, while filling the same quota. It was impossible and it led to even more suffering.

Side note—is all this true?

Yes! Late nineteenth-century excavations at Tell el-Maskhutah (which some consider to be the city of Pithom mentioned in Exodus 1:11) revealed buildings made of bricks without straw, from around this time.

In light of this, one scholar writes,

The story of the exodus is not fantasy but history. It is a true account of God’s saving work in time and space. Like everything else in the Bible, it is accurate down to the last piece of straw. (Ryken, Exodus, 152)

Back to the point, Israel suffered for Moses’s obedience.

Furthermore, Moses suffered for Moses’s obedience.

Exodus 5:20–23 (ESV) — 20 They met Moses and Aaron, who were waiting for them, as they came out from Pharaoh; **21** and they said to them, “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.”

Moses was now despised by his own people. He was public enemy number one. According to some scholars, intensifying their workload was probably a clever ploy to drive a wedge between the Israelites and Moses (v. 19-21). (ZSB)

How does Moses respond? Not very well!

22 Then Moses turned to the LORD and said, “O Lord, why have you done evil 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.”

Wow! These are serious accusations. Moses blames God for his suffering (22b) and Moses accuses God of not keeping his word (23b). These are bold accusations by a mere mortal. Make no mistake, Moses was wrong, and he needed to repent for his false accusations.

If Moses would have only remembered God’s word, he would have remembered that God said in chapter three that pharaoh would resist for a season, and then God would deliver them on his own timetable. When we forget God’s word, it does not end well for us either.

Moses was angry and confused because his obedience led to suffering and pain! He is not the only one.

Illustration:

One author writes,

“Sometimes we do exactly what we think God wants us to do and it turns out to be a complete disaster. For example, a young couple goes on the mission field, taking their small children with them. Despite constant opposition from their parents — who are not believers — they travel overseas to live in a remote village. Not long after they arrive, one of the children contracts a rare, life-threatening disease, and the missionaries are forced to go back home. Upon their return, their parents say, “See, we told you not to go!”

Or consider the employee who discovered corruption at his company. After agonizing over what to do, he decided that it was his duty as a Christian to report one of his coworkers for defrauding their customers. But the management wouldn’t listen. Not only did they allow the corruption to continue, but the man who reported it was branded a troublemaker and was denied his promotion.

A woman refuses a man who is not a Christian; now she is still waiting for the right man, but no one ever calls. An employee refuses to work on Sundays and gets fired three months later. A mother does everything she can to raise her children right and then watches them squander her love by turning away from God. (Ryken, Exodus, 161)

An adoptive couple experiences waves of trouble after adopting children. Some are now dealing with behavioral issues, attachment issues, academic issues, and many other challenges. (Merida, Exodus)

Application:

Can you relate?

You discipline your kids, and they turn against you.

You evangelize your friends and things grow awfully cold.

You take a stand for Christianity at the office, and you get ostracized.

You tell the truth to a building inspector, and it costs you more money.

Yes, it is true, often, obeying Christ’s commands make our lives better, but sometimes life gets worse.

These situations cause us to wonder if God knows, if God cares, if God is loving, if God can help. What is God doing? We may even move into serious doubt, skepticism, or apostasy.

What should Moses do? What should we do? We must trust God! Why? This brings us to the third act...

Act one- Obeying

Act two- Suffering

Act three- Trusting!

Why can we trust God amid suffering? Moses gives us several reasons.

We can trust God because God is sovereign!

Exodus 6:1 (ESV) — 1 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.”

To be clear, “with a strong hand” refers to what the LORD will do to bring Israel out of Egypt (which 3:19–20 and 13:3 make explicit), not to the way in which Pharaoh will send them.

God controls pharaoh because God controls all things.

Proverbs 21:1 (ESV) — 1 The king’s heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will.

Application:

Because God is sovereign, he can work all things for our good and his glory. All things, not some things. All things, even the really bad things (Rom. 8:28-30).

Many Christians understand God’s sovereignty intellectually, but it has not affected their hearts. We must believe what we believe about God’s sovereignty.

If he is sovereign, and he is good, then we can trust him when we suffer for obeying his commands. He has a plan, and he is working that plan. We can and must trust a sovereign God.

We can trust God because God is sovereign! In addition...

We can trust God because God keeps promises!

Exodus 6:2–5 (ESV) — 2 God spoke to Moses and said to him, “I am the LORD. **3** I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by my name the LORD I did not make myself known to them. **4** I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they lived as sojourners. **5** Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the people of Israel whom the Egyptians hold as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant.”

God always keeps his promises.

In verse 5, God says that he remembered his covenant. When used of God, the word “remembered” means that He is prepared to act on His promises, not simply recall them.

What is a covenant? A covenant is simply a promise. God promised Abraham that he would give him land and as many offspring as the stars in the sky. In other words, He promised to make Israel a great nation.

But they will not be a great nation, until they are freed from Egyptian bondage. Because God always does what he says he will do, he will deliver them because he promised to make them a great nation.

Application:

If you are a Christian, you are a member of the new covenant. No matter what happens, no matter how hard life gets, no matter how long the pain lasts, no matter how much you suffer for obeying Christ commands, God will keep his promises to you. What has God promised? Under the new covenant...

God promised to write his law on your heart!

God promised to fill you with his Spirit!

God promised to remember your sin no more!

God promised to usher us into the eternal promised land!

God will keep this promise!!! How do we know? God always keeps his promises.

We can trust God because God is sovereign.

We can trust God because God keeps his promises.

We can trust God because God redeems.

Exodus 6:6 (ESV) — 6 Say therefore to the people of Israel, 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment.'

To redeem means to purchase a slaves freedom with the payment of a ransom price. The Israelites were enslaved to Pharaoh, they needed someone to purchase their freedom. God will redeem them with an outstretched arm and great acts of judgment.

We too need to be redeemed. Maybe you are thinking, "what, I'm not enslaved!!!" Are you sure?

That great theologian Robert Zimmerman, also known as Bob Dylan, sang, "you gotta serve somebody, yes indeed you gotta serve somebody, it may be the devil, or it may be the lord, but you gotta serve somebody."

The angry man is enslaved to his anger. When he gets mad, he loses control. He explodes and then feels awful.

The lustful man is enslaved to his lust. When temptation arises, he gives in, nearly every time. He no longer has control.

The materialist is enslaved to things. He or she can't stop spending money.

Just like God redeemed Israel with a "outstretched arm and mighty acts of judgment." God redeems us with "an outstretched arm and mighty acts of judgment."

On the cross, he judged Christ in our place, breaking the power of sin in us.

One poet writes,

“God’s Son hath set me free from Satan’s tyranny,
from base desire, enslavement dire,
from fear of death and hell’s hot fire.
Lord Christ did intercede, with God for me did plead;
he underwent my punishment, to torture, death, was sent.
I cannot fathom love so great however much I contemplate...
O blessed sign! Christ’s cross doth shine, makes bliss eternal mine.
God’s Son hath set me free!”

(Edvard Grieg, quoted by Ryken, Exodus, 157)

When obedience leads to suffering, we can trust God because we have been redeemed! Someday, our redemption will be complete.

We can trust God because he is sovereign.
We can trust God because he keeps his promises.
We can trust God because he redeems.

We can trust God because he befriends!

Exodus 6:7 (ESV) — 7 I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.

Wow!!! God almighty, the maker of all things, wants to be Israel’s God. And he wants to be your God. In other words, he wants a personal relationship with you. Amazing.

This is the good news of the gospel.
This is the central promise of the Bible.
Christianity is first and foremost relationship with the triune God.

Application:

When obedience leads to suffering, we can trust God because God almighty is our friend. If he is our friend, he will ultimately take care of us.

We can trust God because he is sovereign.
We can trust God because he keeps his promises.
We can trust God because he redeems.
We can trust God because he befriends.

We can trust God because he brings us home!

Exodus 6:8 (ESV) — 8 I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. I will give it to you for a possession. I am the LORD.’ ”

God promises to bring Israel home. In other words, he promises to bring them to the promised land—the land flowing with Milk and Honey.

God makes the same promise to us. He will bring us safely to the eternal promise land. He will bring us to heaven (the antitype of the type).

Heaven is our promised land. Unlike the Israelites, we will inherit far more than a small strip of land in Palestine. We will inherit the earth, the new creation, with all its glory and splendor.

Matthew 5:5 (ESV) — 5 “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

1 Peter 1:3–4 (ESV) — 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, **4** to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you,

Application:

When we suffer for obeying God, we can trust him knowing that life is very short, and soon, very soon, all the suffering will be over.

One scholar writes,

Just 24 hours before Dietrich Bonhoeffer was executed by the Nazis, he gathered some prisoners and held a worship service. Then he read 1 Peter 1:3-12, which speaks of the believer’s “living hope”. (Metaxas, quoted by Merida, Exodus commentary)

We too must meditate on heaven (our living hope) in our darkest hours.

Along similar lines, John Newton, author of the beloved hymn Amazing Grace encouraged Christians to endure trials by considering the doctrine of heaven.

Newton said the Christian should not complain, murmur, or despair in light of all that is coming. He said we should imagine a man who inherited a massive estate, worth billions, but he had to go to travel many miles to New York City to get it. As he journeyed there, his carriage broke down, leaving him to walk the last one mile. Can you imagine this man saying, “My carriage is broken, my carriage is broken,” kicking and complaining in disgust when he has to walk one mile to receive billions? Of course not! (Merida, Exodus commentary).

When suffering for obedience, remember, fellow pilgrims that we only have a few miles to go. We can trust God to get us there.

Conclusion:

Moses obedience led to suffering. When he obeyed God his life got harder, not easier.
Our obedience also occasionally leads to suffering.
When it does, we can trust God.

Why?

We can trust God because God is sovereign.
God keeps his promises.
God redeems.
God befriends.

God will bring us safely home to the eternal promise land.

Let's pray...